

Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies

<http://journals.cambridge.org/BSO>

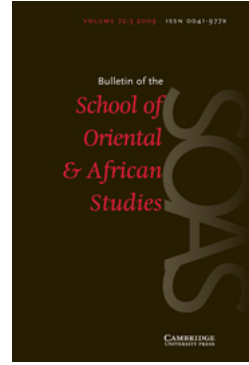
Additional services for *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



Qingyun Wu: *A Dream of Glory (Fanhua meng): A Chuanqi Play by Wang Yun*. xxi, 279 pp. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2008. \$39. ISBN: 978 962 996 309 5.

Tian Yuan Tan

Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies / Volume 72 / Issue 03 / October 2009, pp 581 - 582

DOI: 10.1017/S0041977X09990206, Published online: 21 October 2009

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0041977X09990206

How to cite this article:

Tian Yuan Tan (2009). Review of Qingyun Wu 'A Dream of Glory (' Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 72, pp 581-582 doi:10.1017/S0041977X09990206

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

QINGYUN WU:

A Dream of Glory (Fanhua meng): A Chuanqi Play by Wang Yun.
 xxi, 279 pp. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2008. \$39.
 ISBN: 978 962 996 309 5.
 doi:10.1017/S0041977X09990206

The study of Chinese women playwrights in late imperial China has been a burgeoning field in the last few years. In the book under review Qingyun Wu presents a complete translation of a *chuanqi* play by Wang Yun (1749–1819), a significant female playwright and poet who has attracted considerable critical attention both in Chinese and Western scholarship.

A Dream of Glory (Fanhua meng) is the first play by Wang Yun, who composed a total of three *chuanqi*. The play tells an extraordinary story about a woman who fulfills her wish to be a man in a dream, where “he” not only succeeds in the civil service examination, but also falls in love with three beautiful women and marries all of them.

In her introduction, Wu provides the reader with a general background to “Women playwrights and the eighteenth-century milieu for women’s writing”. She also compares the play with *Zaisheng yuan* (The Destiny of the Next Life), a contemporaneous *tanci* novel and a significant work of women’s literature. The introduction also explores the themes and issues in *A Dream of Glory*. Wu makes a distinction between “Cross-dressing and cross-gender” and explores the theme of lesbian desire in the play. The dream genre, a popular device among women playwrights of the Ming and Qing periods, is also discussed in relation to the playwrights’ quest for self-identity. On textual matters, Wu introduces the reader to “*Fanhua meng* as a stage script” and also to its “Publication history and commentators’ response”. The introduction concludes with an assessment of “The value and influence of *Fanhua meng*”.

It is clear from the above summary that the thirty-five page introduction is packed with information. My one caveat is that in some instances one wishes for a fuller elaboration from the translator. For example, Wu refutes the opinion that Chinese women playwrights preferred drama to prose fiction because of the higher status of drama, stating that this “does not really apply to Wang Yun” (p. 3). However, no explanation is given for why Wang chose the dramatic form over the *tanci* novel (a popular genre for many women writers) for her self-representation, and it remains unclear what writing drama meant to a female playwright like Wang. The section on “Lesbian desire and women-centered polygamy” is provocative, and it would be interesting to consider the contrast between this interpretation and the more conventional reading of the play presented in its postfaces written by the playwright’s father and son.

The introduction is followed by two main parts. Part 1 is the full translation of the play. It includes not only a translation of all the twenty-five scenes of the play, but also its preface, two commentary poems, and two postfaces. This allows the reader to understand how the play was transmitted and read in the playwright’s immediate social circle. Appended to the translation is a bibliography which includes a useful list of “Women playwrights of the Ming and Qing dynasties” (pp. 193–5). Part 2 is the original Chinese text edited by the translator, which makes available the full text of the rare edition kept in the National Library of China. This is a major contribution because for a long time, scholars were under the impression that only fragmentary excerpts of the play have survived. The Chinese text also includes marginal commentaries written by Wang Yun’s father, which are not translated in Part 1.

Based on the Chinese text provided in Part 2 of the book, below are my comments on a few points where my understanding of the text differs from that of the translator:

p. 40: The lines 按紅牙則換羽移宮，自然合度 are translated as “Following the beats of *hongya*, the performers change their cloaks and move from scene to scene; the stage action seems to be quite proper”. I think *huan yu yi gong* 換羽移宮 refers to the change of musical modes, and *ziran hedu* 自然合度 describes how such changes are achieved smoothly and in compliance with the musical requirements.

p. 68: the words 明妃西子 are translated as “Xizi, a Ming imperial consort”. I believe it should be referring to Wang Zhaojun (Mingfei) and Xi Shi (Xizi).

p. 93: the line 風流誰道白司馬 is translated as “Who says Sima is daring and romantic?” with a footnote explaining that “Sima” refers to Sima Xiangru. I think “Bai Sima” refers to Bai Juyi.

p. 110: the four lines starting from “The jade cups are filled with shimmering agate light” are translated as a *ci* poem written to the tune of *Ji tang*. (See the “Index of *ci* tunes” on p. 200.) The term *Ji tang* 集唐 is not a tune title and it means a pastiche of lines from Tang poems.

p. 173: The footnote for “Chunyu” in line 1 points the reader to the ancient Chunyu capital or the paragon daughter Chunyu Tiying. I think “Chunyu” here refers to Chunyu Fen from the Tang classical tale “Nanke taishou zhuan” (An Account of the Governor of the Southern Branch).

I should emphasize that the above comments are not intended to detract in any way from the value of this work. *A Dream of Glory* is a most welcome addition to the translations of Classical Chinese drama and is a pleasure to read. It provides a lively and readable translation of a fascinating story about a woman’s self-representation and reflection on one’s gender in eighteenth-century China. This book will be of interest not only to specialists in Chinese drama and gender studies, but also to any reader who wishes to learn more about women writers in late imperial China.

Tian Yuan Tan

DANIEL BRYANT:

The Great Recreation: Ho Ching-ming (1483–1521) and His World.

(Sinica Leidensia.) xxxii, 720 pp. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008. €179. ISBN 978 90 04 16817 6.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X09990218

A monograph on Chinese poetry of the Ming dynasty is long overdue. Professor Bryant’s new book finally fills this gap, and also redresses the balance in the current scholarship on Ming literature. He reminds us that, contrary to the dominant May Fourth interpretation which overemphasized the rise of vernacular literature in late imperial China, “the dominant forms of writing in Chinese, right down to the beginning of the twentieth century, were poetry and prose in the Classical language” (p. 561). By focusing on the life and the world of the mid-Ming Archaist poet Ho Ching-ming (He Jingming, 1483–1521), Bryant also aims to depart from the usual emphases given to the first and last few decades of the dynasty and on what happened in southern China. The resulting book is a scrupulous effort that greatly extends our understanding of the literary world of China in the north and in the mid Ming.