

his personal contribution to the founding of this regional grouping. His counterpart from Singapore, S. Rajaratnam, emphasizes the importance of this organization for stability in the future.

The book is divided into ten main sections preceded by a brief introduction written by the compiler of each section. It has a total of 94 contributions from leading ASEAN scholars from within and outside of the region. The first and second sections provide an overview of the history of regionalism in Southeast Asia as well as of the origin, formation and organization of ASEAN. The third and eighth sections deal with politics of ASEAN including such sensitive topics as security, political and military cooperation. Section four covers social and cultural issues including education, press, religion and urbanization. Sections five, six and seven deal with economic aspects of this regional grouping, covering wide areas such as intra-ASEAN economic cooperation as well as external economic relations. Section nine concentrates on external political relations, especially with the USA, China, Japan, Australia and Vietnam. In the last section eight prominent Asian and Western scholars speculate on the future of regionalism in Asia Pacific and the future development of ASEAN.

*The ASEAN Reader* contains a comprehensive and carefully selected bibliography on ASEAN. This will be extremely useful for students of ASEAN. In short, this book is more than a reader but a reference book on ASEAN as well as on the region. It provides a balanced account of ASEAN's performance and progress in political, social, economic, cultural and security fields in the past 25 years. This book is most highly recommended to anyone interested in ASEAN.

Mark B.M. Suh

RUDOLF G. WAGNER, *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama. Four Studies*. Berkeley, New York, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1990. XIV + 362 pages, \$ 45.00. ISBN 0-520-05954-9

The publication comprises four studies, the first three of which each deal with a historical drama written and performed between 1958 and 1963. The dramas analysed are Tian Han's "Guan Hanqing" (pp. 1-79), Tian Han's Peking opera "Xie Yaohuan" (pp. 80-138), and "Monkey King Subdues the White Bone Demon" (pp. 139-235). In his analysis of the

respective plays Wagner refers to other dramas which he then treats from a broader perspective in his fourth study (pp. 236-323).

The genre of historical drama has a long tradition in China and was used in a particularly blunt manner in crucial times to reflect contemporary problems with the help of historical examples. The late fifties and early sixties in the People's Republic of China abounded in "new historical plays", which reflect a substantial interest in topical contemporary problems (increasingly also in the field of foreign policy). During the Cultural Revolution plays like "Hai Rui Dismissed from Office" (see p. 289) or "Xie Yaohuan" were said to be attacks by innuendo on the Party and socialism in general. So far as I know the criticism against these plays did not include Tian Han's "Guan Hanqing" (or only in Red Guard materials). For this reason Wagner's analysis of this drama is of special interest.

Tian Han wrote the play about Guan Hanqing for the celebrations of the 750th anniversary of the work of this great 13th century dramatist. (The celebration was initiated by the World Peace Council.) Historical sources about Guan Hanqing are very rare, so Tian Han develops his conceptions about Guan's life and work from his plays, especially from "Dou E yuan" ("Injustice done to Dou E"). He makes the process of sketching, writing and staging the play the subject of his literary creation. "Injustice Done to Dou E" itself is a historical play (the plot was dated back by Guan Hanqing to the Han dynasty), so it is "a historical play about a playwright writing a historical play" (p. 2). Analysing the various versions of Tian Han's play in detail Wagner concludes that it is "A Guide for the Perplexed and a Call to the Wavering" ... "to educate the knowing in the secrets of reading historical plays" (p. 3), thus initiating "both his colleagues and the public in the arts of crafting and deciphering such texts" (ibid).

According to Wagner this play "belongs to a select group of texts from socialist countries that explore the secrets of their craft through this kind of device" (see p. 42; so that Stefan Heym's "King David Report" is only seen as a "parody on Stalin's History of the Communist Party/Bolsheviks, Short Course", p. 43), because "the historical drama in socialism flouts the fundamental assumptions built into the definitions of the modern genres in socialist states" (p. 240).

Wagner interprets the text in the manner of Leo Strauss' study of Machiavelli (or Maimonides' "Guide for the Perplexed"), indicating that the author used ketman language, i.e. wrote "a two-layered text, the surface of which would satisfy the common spirit but small contradictions ...


would alert the initiated to the deeper message ..." (p. 1). As Wagner has it, direct parallels to the present can be found in the portrayal of each historical event and, above all, of each historical character (so the highest ruler is always to be taken for Mao, the tactical chancellor for Zhou Enlai, an influential, rogisish imperial relative for Kang Sheng etc.) Such a "decodification" may be justified as regards the Monkey King episodes where there is sufficient evidence of such direct implications having been intended, mainly from the time of the Cultural Revolution. During that period it was indeed usual for the factions to fight and disparage each other in the name of or with reference to historical personalities. Literature had of course already been used for political innuendos ("*yingshe wenxue*" as it was later called in China) before the Cultural Revolution (where this was carried to excess), yet as regards "Guan Hanqing" I can not accept this kind of "decodification" and read it as a drame-à-clef.

As a matter of fact, no Chinese politologist or literary scholar to date, has, as far as I know, pointed out these underlying parallels in the play. Even during the Cultural Revolution this play was mentioned in only three articles (twice in June 1967 and once in March 1971, as recorded in the bibliography). Written in the complicated situation of 1958, it is, of course, not a mere reminiscence about the great thirteenth century dramatist, nor is it pure chance that Tian Han was fascinated by the dramatist as a person showing the courage of his convictions. The similarities between the fate of Guan and that of Tian Han, who lost his life in prison ten years later, are indeed depressing. There may, of course, be reasons why Chinese literary criticism has been ignorant of these underlying meanings. Was one ashamed about this "lapsus" (Tian Han was a leading Communist Party politician in the field of culture) or is this way of interpretation perhaps reminiscent of the extreme practices before and during the Cultural Revolution when it was possible - without any necessity of proof - to denigrate the political enemy by such allegations?

In the 80s, on the other hand, there was a heated discussion for the historical drama as a piece of art, demanding an end to regarding it merely as a historical or contemporary document or, worse, as a sociologically primitive drame-à-clef. While, for example, Guo Moruo, did not mind the equation of his historical characters with contemporary persons (as in his plays "Cai Wenji", see p. 247, and "Wu Zetian", p. 282), other authors (such as Chen Baichen in the discussion about his "Dafengge" in 1979) protested against this practice of merely "decoding" their plays.

Wagner's highly sophisticated decoding of a piece of art, as adopted for Tian Han's "Guan Hanqing", remains, in my opinion, an exception. In this respect the title of the book is too generalised.

*Irmtraud Fessen-Henjes*



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