SHIH CHÜN-PAO'S
AND CHU YU-TUN'S CH'Ü-CHIANG-CH'IH
THE VARIETY OF MODE WITHIN FORM
BY
W. L. IDEMA

Chu Yu-tun’s adaptation of the story of Li Wa 李娃 as Ch'ü-chiang-ch'ih 曲江池, which he wrote in 1409, is one of his better known ts'a-chü. It certainly is one of his most ambitious plays. However, Chu Yu-tun’s work was not the first dramatization of this famous tale. Two well-known Yuan playwrights, Kao Wen-hsiu 高文秀 and Shih Chün-pao 什君寭 had already treated the subject, and the ts'a-chü by the latter, also entitled Ch'ü-chiang-ch'ih, has been preserved. Nor was this play Chu Yu-tun’s first attempt to deal with the subject of love between a scholar and a courtesan, as in 1406 he had composed a ts'a-chü entitled Ch'ing-shuo-t'ang 慶朔堂 that recounts the love-affair of Fan Chung-yen and Chen Yüeh-o. These three plays treat their similar subject-matter in a strikingly different manner. Whereas Shih Chün-pao’s Ch’ü-chiang-ch’ih approaches tragedy, Chu Yu-tun’s Ch’ing-shuo-t’ang belongs to comedy and his Ch’ü-chiang-ch’ih may be characterized as melodrama. In this way they exemplify how the rigid form of ts'a-chü allows a surprisingly great freedom of mode 1).

I. The two versions of the Li Wa chuan

The earliest version of the story of Li Wa is Li Wa chuan 李娃傳 by Pai Hsing-chien 白行簡 (775-826) 2). This is one of the most

1) In this respect this paper is modelled after Cyril Birch, “Tragedy and Melodrama in Early Ming Ch’uan-ch’i Plays: ‘Lute Song’ and ‘Thorn Hairpin’ Compared”, in BSOAS XXXVI (1973), pp. 228-247.

2) For a critical edition of the text of Li Wa chuan, see e.g. Wang Pichiang 汪辟疆, T’ang-jen hsiao-shuo 唐人小說, Hong Kong 1966, pp. 100-107, or Wang Meng-ou 王夢鴨, T’ang-jen hsiao-shuo yen-chiu erh-chi 唐人小說研究二集, Taipei 1973, pp. 238-246. Chang Yu-ho 張友鶴 has provided extensive annotations to the text in his T’ang Sung ch’uan-ch’i hsüan 唐宋傳奇選, Peking 1979, pp. 7-85. The Li Wa chuan has been the subject of a number of studies, e.g. Chang Cheng-lang 張政烺, “I-chih-hua hua” 一枝花話, in CYYY XXB (1949) (which I was unable to consult); Tai Wang-shu 戴望舒, “Tu Li wa chuan” 讀李娃傳, in his Hsiao-shuo hsi-ch’ü lun-chi 小說戲曲論集, Peking 1958, pp. 7-26; Wang Meng-ou, “Li Wa
popular T'ang dynasty ch'uan-ch'i, and as it has been repeatedly translated into Western languages 3), a short summary will here suffice. The son of a certain high provincial official goes to the capital Ch'ang-an to take part in the examinations. In Ch'ang-an he passes by the house of the rich courtesan Li Wa, and he falls in love with her at first sight. Having obtained information about her from a knowledgeable friend, he goes next day to visit Li Wa, stays for the night, and the following day moves in with her. After a year all his money is spent and Li Wa and her mother get rid of him by the "house-moving scheme": the young man and Li Wa go on a pilgrimage to a temple outside the city and when they return after a few days, Li Wa proposes they visit an aunt on the way; while there, a servant rushes in who announces that Li Wa's mother has become seriously ill and asks her to come back with him immediately; the aunt retains the young man "in order to prepare for the funeral", and when he eventually goes over to Li Wa's place, he finds that she and her whole family have moved away. And when he returns next day to her aunt's place, it turns out she had only rented it for one day. The young man, completely destitute, becomes a hired member of funeral processions to earn a living, but soon becomes an expert singer of dirges. He is even hired by one of the two competing undertakers' guilds to perform in a contest of the two guilds, in which he brings them victory. Now it so happens that his father is also in Ch'ang-an at the same time. One of his father's servants recognizes him and takes him to

chuan chih lai-li chi chi' hsieh-ch'eng nien-tai" 李娃傳之來歷及其寫成年代, in Wang Meng-ou 1973, pp. 87-97; and Uchiyama Chinari 内山知也 "Haku Kōkan to Ri Wa den ni tsuite" 白行簡と李娃傳について in his Sui Tō shōsetsu hōkō 隋唐小説研究, Tokyo 1977, pp. 447-486. One point of contention is the year in which Pai wrote this tale. No modern scholar accepts the date mentioned in the text (795), and various other suggestions have been made (e.g. 805). A further point for discussion is the reference in a poem written in 810 by Yuán Chen 元稹 to having heard the story of I-chih-hua --枝花 (another name for Li Wa), told to him once in the house of Pai Chū-i 白居易, the elder brother of Pai Hsin-ch'ien. This remark has sometimes on insufficient grounds been interpreted as a reference to professional story-telling.