

significance is unfortunately lacking. This is perhaps due to the wide range of questions that this study touches upon – an abundance which, though commendable, might be slightly overburdening; also, the very structure of the book may not have been especially functional for an in-depth analysis.

That said, the nuanced fashion in which Zeitlin employs ghost literature as a lens to explore society in its complexities and contradictions, her ability to cross the boundaries between disciplines, and the many noteworthy points she brings to light, thus stimulating further research, all contribute to render this study very valuable to anyone interested in the history and culture of late Ming and early Qing China.

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FAN PAN LI CHEN:

Chinese Shadow Theatre, History, Popular Religion, and Women Warriors.

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Chinese shadow theatre was hidden behind the bamboo curtain until the early 1980s and only in the past two decades have Chinese researchers undertaken in-depth fieldwork on this important and uniquely Asian form of theatre. The Chinese shadow theatre is much richer in diversity than its Indonesian or other Asian counterparts, yet academic interest has been negligible. Fan Pan Li Chen's new book presents us with an overview of the importance of Chinese shadow theatre within the Chinese performing arts, as well as its essential connection to religious ritual. This informative book, which presents abundant source material combined with field research, is divided in three parts: a discussion of the history and religious importance of the shadow theatre; an introduction to the important women warriors in the shadow theatre; and the translation of three plays.

The author presents us with a detailed treatment of the history of the shadow theatre in China and the related myths of its origin. The translation of historical sources provides interesting new material for non-Chinese scholars. Chen also discusses the possible relationship with other Asian shadow traditions, as well as the relationship between European and Chinese shadows. Although there is no conclusive evidence about the relationships between these traditions, it is important that they are mentioned here as an inspiration for future research.

It is refreshing that the author firmly places the shadow theatre within its religious context and links the Chinese traditions to the other Asian shadow traditions which all perform as part of religious worship. These essential aspects of the shadow theatre were (and often still are) ignored by Chinese scholars for ideological reasons, while researchers from outside China had, until recently, little access to performances in a religious context. In the segment "The role of religion", Chen not only discusses the function of shadow theatre, and Chinese theatre in general, in religious ritual, she also mentions its secular function as a form of entertainment. An overview is given of the wide variety of different celebrations where shadow theatre is performed. These important notes provide us with more insight in the functioning of (shadow) theatre at the grass-roots level in China. However, to state that the Chinese government started to support performing art troupes after 1949 (pp. 89, 102),

is a negation of the fact that all non-state controlled companies were forced to stop performing in what would be the most rigid repression of the performing arts in Chinese history; the word “support” seems rather out of place here.

The section on the “Women warriors” discusses the unique role of females in the shadow theatre as violent heroines who save males in duress (often after marrying them). The author charts the role of these women in literature and how shadow performances were inspired by this literature, but also the specific developments in the shadow theatre plays. The female warriors are mainly from marginal groups (apart from generals’ daughters) and many are indeed from non-Chinese tribes, which places these women conveniently outside the realm of Confucian morality. All these women, from different Chinese or non-Chinese backgrounds, basically play a positive role in the stories and performances. This is in stark contrast to the traditional role of women in Chinese society. The subversive role of these women and their popularity reflects the tension between national orthodoxy and grass-roots public opinion. Yet it is interesting to note that the women warrior aspect of the females is the only subversive aspect of these females, apart from this they are firmly placed within the confines of Confucian orthodoxy and patriarchal hierarchy. This is described in the section on the “Reunion of the Five Swords” plays, which discusses a specific set of plays and their heroines. We find fascinating descriptions of the different strong female characters in these plays, their amazing exploits, yet after leading armies and going into battle (and being braver than their spouses) they have to return to the fold of patriarchal society.

The three translations of the scripts at the end of the book are in the same lively style as that adopted in Chen’s earlier book, which make the plays very readable. The *Three Opening Blessings* is a ritual prelude performed before the main play and is introduced by the author with an interesting description of the religious context of this performance. The next translation, *The Eighteen Levels of Hell*, is the graphic representation of hell on stage and an important subject of the shadow theatre, as 10 per cent of all puppet sets of a company used to consist of shadows related to this subject matter. The original Chinese text is based on an oral communication. The last play translated is *The Yellow River Magic Formation*, an orally transmitted shadow play from Shanxi province, a fascinating supernatural story, introduced with a discussion of different versions of the play.

Chinese Shadow Theatre presents the reader with new insights into the development and importance of this performing art in China. The translation offers a lively addition, bringing to life the dramatic tension and religious function of the performances and giving the reader a greater understanding of what this form of theatre must have meant for millions of people. *Chinese Shadow Theatre* is one of the finest books on this topic in the English language and a useful source of information for scholars and students of different disciplines and backgrounds.

Robin Ruizendaal

CHRISTOPHER HANCOCK:

Robert Morrison and the Birth of Chinese Protestantism.

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More than a half century has passed since the last substantial work on Robert Morrison was published by Lindsay Ride in Hong Kong, and two hundred years