

汉英对照 Chinese-English

Autumn in the Han Palace

【中國古代悲劇故事】

汉宫秋

Ma Zhiyuan

马致远 (元)

Adapted by Xia Lianbao

夏连保 / 改编

Revised by Liu Yousheng

刘幼生 / 审订

New World Press
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Classical Chinese Tragedies (Chinese-English)

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Foreword

The earliest account of Wang Zhaojun journeying beyond the Great Wall is in the form of fragmentary references in the chapters *Annals of Emperor Yuan* and *Account of the Huns* in Ban Gu's *History of the Han Dynasty*. The gist of these is as follows: In the first month of the first year of the Jingning reign period (33 B. C.) of the Western Han Dynasty, following the defeat of Zhizhi, khan of the Huns, his successor Khan Huhanye went to Chang'an to offer tribute to Emperor Yuan. The emperor gave him one of his own concubines, Wang Qiang, to be his wife. Wang Qiang's given name was Zhaojun, but this was changed to Mingjun during the Jin Dynasty (265-420) to avoid a clash with the tabooed name of Sima Zhao (211-265, general of the Wei Dynasty). Later, she was called the Shining Consort. Huhanye was delighted and undertook to guard the frontier of the Han empire. After Wang Qiang became Huhanye's wife, she was known as Lady Ninghu, and gave birth to a child. In the second year (31 A. D.) of the Jianshi reign period of Emperor Cheng, Huhanye died, and was succeeded by his son. Out of respect for Hun customs, Emperor Cheng allowed Wang Qiang to become Huhanye's son's wife. Wang Qiang bore two children to her second husband. If these accounts are to be trusted, we can conclude that at this time the Han Empire was strong and the Huns were weak. The episode of Wang Qiang becoming the wife of the khan of the Huns is a concrete expression of the policy of Em-

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peror Cheng to take the initiative in promoting harmony between nationalities, and was not forced upon him by pressure from Hun incursions. Writers of essays, novels and poems in following dynasties often took the story of Zhaojun's journey beyond the Great Wall as a theme for novels and poems. Ge Hong of the Jin Dynasty includes the story in his *Random Notes of the Western Capital*. But he has several painters besides Mao Yanshou, including Chen Chang and Liu Bai, who take bribes and commit wicked deeds, and they all come to a sticky end together. But, as the *History of the Later Han Dynasty*, which appeared somewhat after *Random Notes of the Western Capital*, does not contain such details, it seems that Ge Hong's work relied heavily on legends or was written in a fictional style. Nevertheless, the fictional quality of the work was widely copied by later men of letters, and Mao Yanshou emerged as the archetypal villainous artist. Subsequent dramatizations of the historical facts transformed the story of Wang Qiang's journey beyond the Great Wall into stock tale of fantasy with a definite niche in Chinese literature.

By the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the story had wandered a long way from the historical facts. We can see from the *Story of Wang Zhaojun*, which dates from the Tang Dynasty and was found in the Dunhuang Grottoes, that the story had developed greatly in the course of being transmitted as a folk tale. This version reverses the historical facts, presenting the Huns as powerful in the time of Emperor Yuan and the Han Dynasty as weak, and the handing over of Wang Qiang to the khan of the Huns as a shameful act of tribute. The plot also includes details such as the painter, the khan demanding Wang Qiang after seeing her portrait, and Wang Qiang dying of homesickness. *Autumn in the Han Palace*, a *zaju* (poetic drama with sung parts) play written by Ma Zhiyuan of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), was based on the *Story of Wang Zhaojun*, and incor-

porates elements from the essay, novel, poetry and folk traditions in a new creative achievement.

Ma Zhiyuan adopts the unusual approach of making Emperor Yuan the hero throughout the play. He also highlights the ruthlessness of the Huns. When the Hun envoy arrogantly demands that the emperor surrender Wang Qiang, accompanying his demand with threats, Prime Minister Wulu Chongzong can come up with no plan to thwart the khan's evil designs, but urges Emperor Yuan to hand Wang Qiang over "for the sake of the country." The emperor complies, "relying on a beauty to bring peace to the world." The effect is a revelation of the rottenness and helplessness of feudal monarchy, exposing the root of the love tragedy involving Emperor Yuan and Wang Qiang.

The way Ma Zhiyuan treats the contradictions and tensions in his play is closely connected with his own social background. He lived through the period in which the Jin Dynasty was overthrown by the Mongols, who then set up the Yuan Dynasty. It was a time when class and national antagonisms were particularly sharp. Genghis Khan, the leader of the Mongols, besieged Emperor Xuanzong of Jin in his capital, and forced him to send an imperial princess to make a marriage alliance. Bo Yan, prime minister of the first Yuan emperor, forced the Southern Song court to hand over a large number of the palace ladies when he besieged Lin'an. Even more were carried off to the north when the Mongols annihilated Southern Song Dynasty. With a knowledge of the social and historical background of the playwright, it is not difficult to understand Ma Zhiyuan's treatment of the dramatic tensions. It seems that his intention was to awaken the Han people of his time, who were living under alien rule, hearkening back to the sufferings they underwent at the time of the destruction of Southern Song Dynasty, as a sort of catharsis. By making this aspect prominent, and making people

think deeply about the historical transformation of the conflict between nationalities which occurred at the time of the replacement of the Jin by the Yuan Dynasty, there is no doubt that *Autumn in the Han Palace* has a great significance.

In the *zaju* drama *Autumn in the Han Palace*, the tragic story of the love between Emperor Yuan of Han and his concubine is set against a "historical" background which emphasizes the weakness of the House of Han and the strength of the Huns, thus giving the work a strong tinge of inter-nationality conflict and marks it with the stamp of the period when the Jin Dynasty was replaced by that of the Yuan. But the root of the tragedy as unveiled by the plot was in the last analysis the degeneracy of the feudal ruling class. In the play, when Emperor Yuan introduces himself, he boasts, "Since I came to the throne, all within the Four Seas and the Eight Directions has been tranquil. If it were not for my outstanding virtues, I would have to rely entirely on my ministers." The emperor, the supreme representative of feudal rule, is oblivious of the situation of class contradictions and ethnic antagonism, but is self-satisfied and complacent. His only source of sadness is the fact that "Since my father passed away, the ladies of my harem have all been sent away. The palace is a lonely place now. What pleasure is there for me?" In the meantime, one of the most powerful of his ministers, Mao Yan-shou, in his self-introduction, says, "I have the heart of a vulture and the claws of a hawk. I hoodwink the strong and bully the weak. I rely entirely on flattery, treachery and greed. I am forever restless." He goes on, "With my many tricks and wiles, and flattering tongue, I have the emperor completely in my power. Both in the court and in the street, who does not hold me in awe, who does not fear my wrath? This is my scheme: By getting the emperor to despise the upright Confucian ministers and spend all his time sporting with his harem beauties, I am in a secure position to bestow patron-

age." Emperor Yuan of Han finds himself among the ranks of those emperors who abandoned themselves to luxury and dissolute ways when their reigns were times of peace and order. As soon as he sets eyes on Wang Qiang, it is as if he is "insane or intoxicated, heedless of my duties at court." He "cannot bear to part from her," and in consequence the affairs of state are neglected. Only when Mao Yanshou defects to the Huns, and the latter sends an envoy to demand that Wang Qiang be sent to marry their khan does the emperor wake up to what has been happening around him, and realizes that not one of his ministers is brave enough or capable enough of repulsing the Hun offensive, all of them "terrified of swords and flinching from arrows." Wulu Chongzong, the prime minister, even uses the words of the Hun messenger to pressure the emperor into giving up Wang Qiang: "It is said among the alien tribes that government has been undermined and the empire greatly harmed as a result of Your Majesty's doting on Wang Qiang. Only when Your Majesty is rid of her will we be able to mount a military campaign once more." He puts all the blame for the wretched state of the country on one weak woman: "I venture to advise Your Majesty to take a warning from the case of King Zhou of the Shang Dynasty, who lost his domain and his life as a result of his infatuation with Lady Daji." Ma Zhiyuan's handling of the plot and characterization in this way gives us a deep insight into the corrupt nature of the inner circles of the feudal ruling class, and gives the Wang Qiang's historical journey beyond the Great Wall its classic tragic significance.

The episode in which Wang Qiang volunteers to marry the khan of the Huns is a creation of the author of *Autumn in the Han Palace*, and a breakaway from the traditional account. It illustrates the girl's selfless devotion to the emperor and her people. It makes the theme of the drama more meaningful. In addition, it leads logi-

cally to the later developments of the reconciliation between the Han empire and the Huns, and to the sending back of Mao Yanshou for execution. There is a striking contrast, too, between the noble self-sacrifice of Wang Qiang and the base cringing of the Han court, with the emperor at its head, before the demands of the Huns, and especially shows up the cowardice of the ministers, who try to hide their own shortcomings by resorting to the hoary old theory that "beauties topple thrones."

The text of the *zaju* play *Autumn in the Han Palace* consists of a little more than 8,000 words. The plot is fairly straightforward, and there are no more than six characters — Emperor Yuan of Han, Wang Qiang, Mao Yanshou, Khan Huhanye, Wulu Chongzong and the Hun envoy. Ma Zhiyuan clearly succeeded in adapting the tragic story of Wang Qiang's journey beyond the Great Wall to the *zaju* artistic form. However, the limitations of the genre, such as the rigid structure of the scenes and the restrictions of time and space on the stage, are reflected in the way the author has shaped the characters and presented some of the historical background. As a result, the play does not adequately or in detail deal with the rich social and political materials offered in the spheres of contemporary class and ethnic contradictions and power struggles within the imperial palace. In taking an ancient *zaju* drama text away from the stage and attempting to present it in a format suitable for modern readers, there is of necessity a problem of the barrier of historical time and space to understanding how the events unfold. Therefore, it has been a rewarding challenge to transform the *zaju* drama *Autumn in the Han Palace* in the form most welcome to modern tastes, that of the novel, and carrying forward the Chinese literary tradition by "weeding through the old and bringing forth the new."

In the course of rewriting the play, the first difficulty the writer came across was how to describe the "love" between Emperor Yuan

and Wang Qiang. In the words of Hong Sheng, author of *The Palace of Eternal Youth*, "Love is rare in a monarch's palace." Indeed, it is difficult to equate what feudal emperors called "favor" for a woman with "love." It is hard to imagine a man with 3,000 concubines actually falling in love. But without genuine love between the emperor and Wang Qiang, the resultant novel could hardly be called a love tragedy. To make the novel fit into that category, the character and career of Emperor Yuan have been extensively reworked. His love for Wang Qiang is essentially a continuation of his love for Lady Sima, who comforted him in his youth, when he had lost his mother and was in a very precarious position due to palace intrigues against him. Lady Sima and Wang Qiang were two very different people, but they both suffered tragic fates, both being victims of contradictions within the feudal ruling class. In this aspect of social comment, the writer has gone beyond the bounds of the original play. But he felt that the rewriting was a form of creation too, and therefore could not and should not be merely a stiff translation.

Here it is necessary to say a word about "authenticity." A novel or other work which draws its materials from history must have both historical authenticity and artistic authenticity. A work of art is a summing up and a reflection of social life. Therefore, historical authenticity and artistic authenticity should not be confused. As Lu Xun once said, "We have heard that artistic authenticity is not just historical accuracy. This is because later times have their own reality, and creation demands that composition and description be life-like, but not a complete reconstruction of reality." However, this is not equivalent to saying that a novel can divorce itself from its historical background at the author's whim; only when artistic authenticity is matched with historical authenticity can the development of the characters of "typical people in a typical environment" come

close to matching the logic of life. As for historical authenticity, the episode of Wang Qiang journeying beyond the Great Wall occurred towards the end of the reign of Emperor Yuan of the Western Han Dynasty. This was a time when the central authority of the state had begun to collapse, and members of the imperial family, relatives of the emperor on the distaff side and the court officials were emerging as the new tyrannical class, and thrusting into inferior positions the people who had made up the old tyrannical class — the landlords and merchants, whose political influence had been weakened. Although these two strata were at loggerheads over the acquisition of land and the exploitation of slaves and commoners, they both exerted pressure on the crippled central government. Moreover, Emperor Yuan relied heavily on eunuchs. All of these factors combined to precipitate a crisis at court. The writer has focused on this historical background in the development of the plot, molding the characters within this typical environment, striving to harmonize artistic authenticity with the social and political conditions of that time. This is different from the approach of Ma Zhiyuan, who emphasized the ethnic antagonism aspect. Besides, although there is some discrepancy between the relations between the protagonists and historical authenticity, yet they are historical figures, and the plot is sourced entirely from history. In this treatment of his subject, the writer did not want merely to reconstruct history by means of a literary medium, but hoped to bring the literary authenticity of the novel more into line with historical authenticity. The writer hopes that readers will extend guidance concerning shortcomings in this work.

前 言

关于王昭君出塞的事件，最早见于班固《汉书》的《元帝纪》和《匈奴传》中一些零星记载，其大致内容是：西汉竟宁元年（公元前33年）春正月，匈奴郅支单于败后，呼韩邪单于且喜且惧，入京朝贡，汉元帝以待诏掖庭王嫱赐呼韩邪为阏氏。王嫱字昭君，晋朝时为避司马昭讳，改称明君，后人亦称为明妃。呼韩邪得赐欢喜，上书愿保塞上谷以西至敦煌。王嫱入匈奴后，号宁胡阏氏，生一子。至汉成帝建始二年（公元前31年），呼韩邪死，其子雕陶莫皋继立，号复株鞬若鞮单于。汉成帝尊重匈奴习俗，复令王嫱为复株鞬若鞮单于阏氏，生二女。这是最可信的史实，据此我们知道当时的形势是汉朝强大，匈奴卑弱，昭君出塞是汉元帝主动实行民族和睦政策的具体表现，而不是强兵压境下做出的被迫选择。汉代以后，笔记小说和文人诗词，都经常提到昭君出塞一事。其中，晋代葛洪的《西京杂记》（一作西汉刘歆撰）记载这一事件时，增加了画工图形及毛延寿、陈敞、刘白等画工多人因受贿作弊同日弃市等情节，但比《西京杂记》稍后的《后汉书》却并未采用这一说法，可见《西京杂记》的记载或许只是出于传说，或许只是“小说家言”，并不一定可靠。然而，这种传说却被后来的笔记小说和文人诗词广泛采用，而且还把受贿作弊的画工典型化为毛延寿一个人。于是，昭君出塞的历史事件逐渐演变成了一个颇具传奇色彩的故事，具有了一定的文学意