

A Study on Structural Changes of Chinese Local Plays in  
Chiang-nan 江南 during the 15th and 16th Centuries (IV)

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In the first three chapters the author made clear the division of the *Shê-miao* 社廟 plays into two kinds: (i) the clan plays of landowners and (ii) the market plays of peasants and merchants. In Chapter IV he studies both actors and dramas of these plays, and the conclusions are as follows.

1. As local plays had been performed separately under the patronage of different social classes, there were grown three classes of actors:

(a) upper class actors, who exclusively performed the clan plays under the patronage of big landowners.

(b) middle class actors, who, usually living within local cities, performed at the residences of landowners, while they went to nearby villages for the *Shê-miao* plays held during spring and autumn festivals.

(c) lower class actors, who, without urban homes, made a tour at local market places. The landowners patroned the actors of upper and middle classes, but lower class actors began to gain an advantage over them.

2. As the actors had been divided, local dramas were divided into three types, each of which had the following distinct features in content.

(a) The programs of the *Shê-miao* plays were ordinarily decided by landowners in consideration of maintaining social order. There-

fore, the selected dramas had classical and conservative themes such as *Chung-hsiao* 忠孝 (loyalty and filial piety) and *Chie-i* 節義 (fidelity to one's principle) as well as successful heroes within the established order.

(b) The programs of the formal clan plays at the big landlords' residences were almost the same as the above-mentioned type (a), while the plays in informal banquets or feasts held by small and middle landowners were characterized by a new kind of dramas, which emphasized their sentimentalism in sad tune. This seems to reflect the uncertainty of their social position in this period.

(c) The programs in the market plays were usually determined in favor of poor peasants or little merchants who were not satisfied with the stereotyped dramas. Generally speaking, the peasants preferred the dramas depicting brave riots such as the heroes of the *Shui-hu-ch'uan* 水滸傳. These dramas inspired their hearts to resist the landlords. On the other hand, the merchants inclined to favor the dramas of love affair (*In-hsi* 淫戲 licentious play). In spite of low value in literature, the dramas in market places freed from the classical themes and made fresh stimulus in the development of Chinese vulgar dramas.