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RUSSIAN STUDIES OF CHINESE TRADITIONAL DRAMA AND STORYTELLING LITERATURE: AN OVERVIEW

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This article briefly introduces the history of Russian studies of Chinese traditional drama and storytelling literature, including research works and academic translations, as well as some details of the historical and cultural background of these studies. While not especially numerous, Russian studies had special characteristics that make them different from the corresponding contemporary research in other Western languages, so that one can even speak about the formation of a native Russian school of Chinese drama and storytelling studies in the mid-twentieth century. Russian works can be distinguished by methodology (such as those focusing on the interchange between literary and oral/pictorial traditions) and have used rare and unique materials preserved in Russian collections. Unfortunately, these studies remain largely unknown to Western scholars, so this article tries to make the major achievements of Russian scholars more accessible to English readers.

KEYWORDS: Chinese classical drama, Chinese storytelling, Chinese vernacular literature, Russian translations of Chinese drama, Russian research on Chinese literature

INTRODUCTION

To our knowledge, to date there have been no English overviews of Russian studies of Chinese traditional drama and storytelling literature. This is quite understandable as such studies never have been influential in Western countries, even in comparison with those of Chinese classical literature (poetry and prose). Still, because of several special features in terms of approach and materials, these studies deserve the attention of scholars in other countries. Russian intellectuals have long had a deep interest in Chinese literary and dramatic traditions, so publications on Chinese theater (and to a lesser degree on popular literature) have indeed played a significant role in the formation of modern views of China and its culture in Russia and even exercised a certain influence on Russian artistic and literary traditions. While there have been several attempts to summarize the achievements of Russian scholars in this field in Chinese and in Russian, these works are either outdated or incomplete.¹

¹ E.g. Li Fuqing 李福清 (Boris L. Riftin), *Zhongguo gudian wenxue yanjiu zai Sulian: Xiaoshuo, xiqu* 中國古典文學研究在蘇聯: 小說戲曲 (Studies of Chinese Classical Literature in the USSR: Fiction and Drama; Beijing: Shumu wenxian, 1987); Li Mingbin 李明濱, *Zhongguo wenxue Eluosi chuanbo shi* 中國文學俄羅斯傳播史 (The History of Transmission of Chinese

This article aims to present the major achievements of Russian scholars in this field. Because of limitations of space, we cannot enumerate all related Russian works, or adequately describe their scholarly and cultural setting, but would like to present major trends and some specifics of this research.

RUSSIAN STUDIES OF CHINESE DRAMA

First, one should note that the history of transmission of Chinese dramatic subjects to Russia can be traced back to the eighteenth century.² Already in 1759 the famous poet Alexandre P. Sumarokov (1717–1777) published a Russian translation of a monologue from the Yuan-dynasty drama *Orphan of the Zhao Family* (*Zhao shi guer* 趙氏孤兒), originally translated by French Jesuit Prémare (1666–1736), using its German translation.³ In 1788 the complete Russian translation of Voltaire's adaptation of this drama – *L'Orphelin de la Chine* (Orphan of China)—was printed.⁴ The appearance of this subject in Russia had to do with the general trend of “Chinese fashion” (or Chinoiserie, translated as “kitaischina” in Russian), which spread in the upper levels of society in the eighteenth century and was prominently influenced by the Western European fashion of that time. This particular subject of the Zhao family orphan certainly attracted much attention from Russian intellectuals of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries because of its relation to Voltaire.

The process of acquainting general Russian readers with Chinese traditional drama continued in the first half of the nineteenth century, when summaries of several Yuan-dynasty plays appeared in Russian magazines, along with one play

Literature in Russia; Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2010), pp. 184–90, 226–27; idem, *Zhongguo wenhua zai Eluosi* 中國文化在俄羅斯 (Chinese Culture in Russia; Beijing: Zhongguo guoji chuanbo, 2012), pp. 129–31; Rostislav Berezkin, “Zhongguo xiqu zai Eluosi chuanbo yu yingxiang” 中國戲曲在俄羅斯傳播與影響(1788–1990)(The Transmission and Influence of Chinese Drama in Russia, 1788–1990), *Minsu quyì* 民俗曲藝 (Journal of Chinese ritual, theatre and folklore) 191 (March 2016): 109–51. For an attempted overview in Russian, see, for instance, Kirina I. Golygina and Vladislav F. Sorokin, *Izuchenie kitaiskoi literatury v Rossii* (Russian Studies of Chinese Literature; Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 2004); see also related Chinese works: Chen Shixiong 陳世雄, “Eluosi xiju dashi yu Zhongguo xiqu” 俄羅斯戲劇大師與中國戲曲 (Great masters of Russian theater and Chinese drama), *Eluosi wenyi* 俄羅斯文藝 (Russian arts), 2003.1: 35–43; Gao Yuhai 高玉海, “Guan Hanqing ji qi zuopin zai Eluosi de fanyi yu yanjiu” 關漢卿及其作品在俄羅斯的翻譯和研究 (Translations and studies of Guan Hanqing's works in Russia), *Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo xiju yanjiu* 中國古代小說戲劇研究 (Research on Chinese traditional fiction and drama) 12 (2016): 199–204; and idem., “Tang Xianzu ji qi ‘Mudan ting’ zai Eluosi de fanyi yanjiu” 湯顯祖及其《牡丹亭》在俄羅斯的翻譯和研究 (Translations and studies of *The peony pavilion* by Tang Xianzu in Russia), *Xiqu yishu* 戲曲藝術 (Dramatic art) 2018.3: 12–16.

² For more details, see Berezkin, “Zhongguo xiqu zai Eluosi chuanbo yu yingxiang,” pp. 111–16.

³ Barbara W. Maggs, *Russia and “le Rève Chinois”: China in Eighteenth-century Russian Literature* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution, 1984), pp. 93–94.

⁴ Vasilii Nechaev, trans., *Kitaiskii Sirota* (Orphan of China; Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia Gos. Voennoi kolegii, 1788). On the influence of this subject on the Russian stage of that period, see, for instance, Maggs, *Russia and “le Rève Chinois,”* pp. 93–94; and Olga L. Fishman, *Kitai v Evrope: mif i real'nost'* (China in Europe: myth and reality; Saint Petersburg: Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie, 2003), pp. 388–89.

partially translated directly from the Chinese original.⁵ The subjects of Yuan-dynasty plays often reached Russia through intermediary translations and adaptations. For example, *The Western Chamber* (*Xixiang ji* 西廂記) by Wang Shifu 王實甫 (ca. 1260–1336) appeared in Saint Petersburg in 1835 as an adaptation of its Manchu translation by Hesu 和素 (early eighteenth century), made by Zahar F. Leontievskii (1799–1874), a prominent sinologist of that time (fig. 1).⁶ Still, this apparently was the earliest translated adaptation of this Chinese play in Western languages. In 1847, an abridged and imprecise Russian translation of the *nanxi*-genre drama *Story of the Lute* (*Pipa ji* 琵琶記) by Gao Ming 高明 (Gao Zecheng 高則誠, mid-fourteenth century) was accomplished with the use of its French translation.⁷ According to the title of this book, this translation was made by a person with the initials “V. M.” Presumably, he was Vasily S. Mezhevich (1814–1849), a Russian journalist of Polish origin.⁸

The appearance of Russian translations of Chinese dramas throughout the nineteenth century testifies to the persistent interest in Chinese theater and literature on the part of Russian intellectuals. Some eyewitness accounts of theatrical performances also were made by Russian travelers to China, though they were just superficial. By the end of the nineteenth century, some information on Chinese dramatic performances appeared in the scholarly works of Russian sinologists, notably Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences V. P. Vasiliev (1818–1900), who wrote *An Essay on the History of Chinese Literature* (*Ocherk istorii kitaiskoi literatury*; published in 1880, and usually considered to be the first scholarly history of this subject).⁹ However, despite the growth of interest in Chinese drama on the part of Russian artistic elite in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were still no specialized studies of Chinese theater in Russia in that period. In that era, known as the “silver age” of Russian culture, “Chinese motifs” that can be regarded as a continuation of the Chinoiserie trend in eighteenth century aristocratic culture appeared on the Russian stage in imaginary and exotic forms far removed from authentic Chinese works.¹⁰

The academic field of Chinese drama studies was founded in Russia in the early twentieth century. The earliest serious Russian research in this field was carried out by Academician Vasily M. Alekseev (1881–1951) and his disciples. Alekseev is better known in the West than many Russian scholars because of his publications in Western languages and contacts with Western sinologists.¹¹ Alekseev approached

⁵ See Li Fuqing, *Zhongguo gudian wenxue yanjiu zai Sulian*, pp. 61–62.

⁶ Zahar F. Leontievskii, trans., *Puteshbestvennik* (A traveler; Saint Petersburg: Foreign trade department, 1835). For the Manchu translation, see *Han-Man Xixiang ji* 漢滿西廂記 (Chinese and Manchu *Western chamber*; Beijing: Qichangzhai, 1710).

⁷ Kao Tong-kia, *Istoriia Liutni* (Story of the Lute; Saint Petersburg: Mordvinov Publishing House, 1847).

⁸ The French translation he used is M. Bazin's *Le Pi-paki ou l'histoire de Luth, drama chinois de Kaotongkia* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1841).

⁹ See Li Fuqing, *Zhongguo gudian wenxue yanjiu zai Sulian*, pp. 61–62; Berezkin, “Zhongguo xiqu zai Eluosi chuanbo yu yingxiang,” pp. 119–21.

¹⁰ See Svetlana A. Serova, *Teatral'naia kul'tura Serebriianogo veka v Rossii i hudozhestvennye tradicii Vostoka (Kitai, Iaponiia, Indiiia)* (Theater Culture of the Silver Age in Russia and Artistic Traditions of the Orient [China, India, Japan]; Moscow: IV RAN, 1999), pp. 127–77.

¹¹ See Christoph Harbsmeier, “Vasilii Mikhailovich Alekseev and Russian Sinology,” *T'oung Pao* 97 (2011): 344–70.

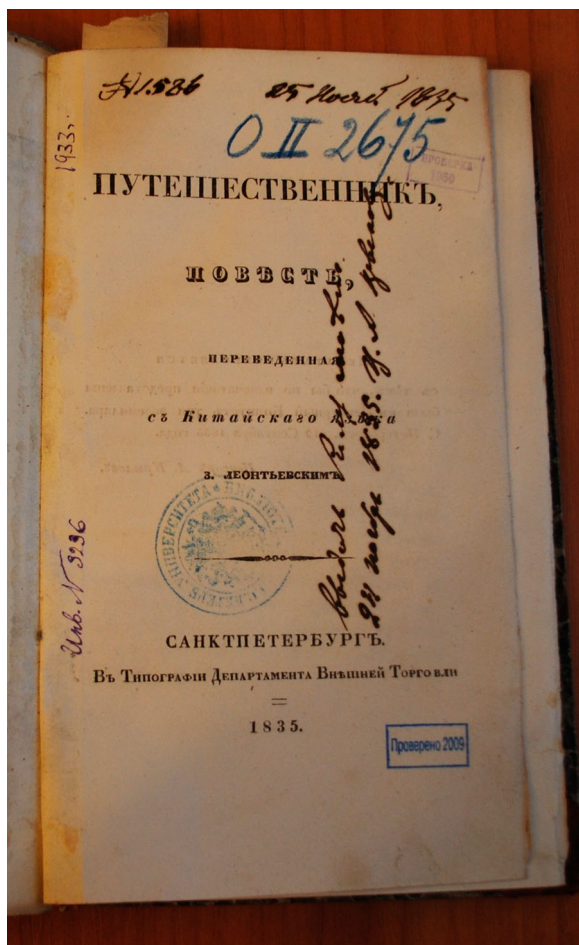


FIG. 1. *Puteshestvennik* (A traveler), the first adaptation of the *Western Chamber* story in Russia, by Zahar F. Leontievskii. Saint Petersburg: Foreign trade department, 1835. Courtesy of the library of the Faculty of Asian and African Studies, Saint Petersburg State University

Chinese theater mainly from the perspective of popular/folk culture, which he started to study during his visit to China in 1907. This was one of his important contributions to the development of Russian sinology; before that the field concentrated primarily on classical literature in archaic language. One should note Alekseev's descriptions of theatrical performances in temples that he witnessed during an expedition with Édouard Chavannes (1865–1918).¹² He was one of first sinologists to collect and study Chinese folk prints (*nianhua* 年畫), and as many of them dealt

¹² Vasily M. Alekseev, *V starom Kitae* (In old China; 2nd revised edition; Moscow: Vostochnaia Literature, 2012), pp. 69–70, 86–97, and 159–60.

with theatrical subjects, he analyzed their connections with theater (mainly *Jingju* 京劇; a.k.a., Peking opera).¹³ In 1935, he also published an article about mimes and jesters in Chinese history, whom he considered to be representatives of proto-dramatic performances in China.¹⁴ Alekseev's approach to Chinese theater was highly innovative and varied, because he studied it through different materials.

Alekseev encouraged his disciples to continue in-depth research of Chinese theatrical traditions. His disciple Boris A. Vasiliev (1899–1937) published a detailed article on the organization and aesthetics of Chinese opera, and appended a Russian translation of the *Jingju* play “The Empty Fortress Trick” (*Kong cheng ji* 空城計).¹⁵ This was an important contribution, since few monographs on Chinese theater existed in Western scholarship at that time.

The intensified political and cultural connections between Soviet Union and China in the first half of the twentieth century also contributed considerably to the further development of interest in Chinese theater, especially as performances of famous Chinese actors in the Soviet Union became possible. This period of Russo-Chinese cultural exchange is especially noteworthy since it also coincided with the flourishing of Beijing drama (formerly known as “Peking opera”) in China. The performance tour of Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 (1899–1967) in the Soviet Union in 1935 inspired a fascination with Beijing drama on the part of Russian artistic elite,¹⁶ but this cultural development was seriously impeded owing to the wave of terrorizing repressions among the artistic and intellectual circles at that time. These repressions also damaged Russian sinology. For example, B. A. Vasiliev was executed on a false charge in 1937, and with this serious research on Chinese drama in Russia stopped for a long time.

Close relations in various spheres between the Soviet Union and the PRC in the 1950s stimulated development of Chinese studies in Russia, including those on theater. New studies on Chinese dramatic traditions were completed by the new generation of Soviet scholars in the 1950s–1970s. The major centers of Chinese drama studies (and of storytelling-type literature) were the Chinese language and literature divisions of Moscow and Leningrad State Universities, and also the Institutes of Oriental Studies (both Moscow and Leningrad branches) and Institute of Far-Eastern Studies in Moscow (belonging to the Russian Academy of Sciences, founded in 1966). One can even speak about a special Russian school of Chinese drama studies, as most of the scholars had a background in Chinese classical

¹³ Vasily M. Alekseev, *Kitaiskaia narodnaia kartina* (Chinese Popular Pictures; Moscow: Nauka, 1966).

¹⁴ Vasily M. Alekseev, “Aktery-geroi na stranitsah kitaiskoi istorii” (Actor-heroes in Chinese history), in *Trudy po kitaiskoi literature* (Works on Chinese Literature, vol. 1; Moscow: Vostochnaia Literature, 2002), pp. 495–505.

¹⁵ Boris A. Vasiliev, “Kitaiskii teatr” (Chinese theater), in *Vostochnyi teatr, sbornik statei* (Oriental Theater: Collection of Articles), ed. A. M. Mervart (Leningrad: Academia, 1929), pp. 196–267. The play dramatizes an episode that appears in chapter 95 of *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms).

¹⁶ See Chen Shixiong, “Eluosi xiju dashi yu Zhongguo xiqu;” Ye Kejia 葉可嘉 (E. A. Zavidovskaia), “Sulian Hanxuejia Wang Xili, wenxuejia Telijiyakefu lun Zhongguo xiqu yu Mei Lanfang” 蘇聯漢學家王希禮、文學家特列季亞科夫論中國戲曲與梅蘭芳 (Soviet sinologist B. A. Vasiliev and writer Tretiakov on Chinese drama and Mei Lanfang), *Xiqu yanjiu* 戲曲研究 (Drama studies) 91 (2014): 64–80.

literature studies, which influenced their research methodology. Though there were projects that organized the labor of groups of scholars of Chinese vernacular literature,¹⁷ major works were mainly results of individual research by prominent scholars.

For example, Lev N. Menshikov (1926–2005) from the Institute of Oriental Studies (Leningrad Branch) wrote a book on the reform of traditional drama in the PRC, and though he was very limited in materials, this topic was significant and innovative at that time.¹⁸ A monograph on the Yuan-dynasty *zaju* 雜劇 playwright Guan Hanqing 關漢卿 also appeared in that period.¹⁹ However, the most formidable achievement among the studies of Yuan drama was the monograph by Vladislav F. Sorokin (1927–2015) from the Institute of Far-Eastern Studies, which analyzed the development and transformation of the *zaju* form and classified its character types and story patterns based on a thorough study of original texts.²⁰ This work was in accord with the general trend of the time, when significant English research on Chinese theater and *zaju* in particular was accomplished.

These new achievements were accompanied by general overviews of the history of Chinese drama and Peking opera in particular.²¹ In addition, more than thirty articles about Chinese drama, mainly by sinologists from academic institutions in Moscow and Leningrad, were published in periodicals and article collections during the 1950–1980s. They were devoted to the problem of the origins of Chinese drama, sources and ideas of major plays, and biographies of their authors.²² Still, they hardly can be characterized as surpassing the relevant Western and Chinese works. Drama of the Ming and Qing dynasties received less attention from Russian scholars, which was generally characteristic of Western research on Chinese theater at that time, though there were also significant works on the later period in the 1960s–1980s.²³

¹⁷ Examples of publications that came out of large projects housed in research institutions are *Istoriia Vsemirnnoi Literatury* (History of world literature; Moscow: Nauka, 1983–1994), in 8 vols.; and, more recently, M. L. Titarenko, ed., *Dubovnaia kul'tura Kitaia: entsiklopediia* (Spiritual Culture of China: Encyclopedia), vol. 3 (Moscow: Vost. Lit., 2006).

¹⁸ Lev N. Menshikov, *Reforma kitaiskoy klassicheskoi dramy* (The Reform of Chinese Traditional Theater; Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 1959).

¹⁹ Nikolai T. Fedorenko, *Guan' Han'-tsin—velikii dramaturg Kitaia* (Guan Hanqing—A Great Chinese Playwright; Moscow: Znanie, 1958). A special interest in Yuan *zaju* and in Guan Hanqing appeared after 1958, when the World Peace Council (an international organization established in 1950) proclaimed him to be an outstanding person of world culture.

²⁰ Vladislav F. Sorokin, *Kitaiskaia klassicheskaia drama 13–14 vv.: genesis, obrazy, struktura, siuzhety* (Chinese Classical Drama of the 13–14th Centuries: Origins, Characters, Structure, Storylines; Moscow: Nauka, 1979).

²¹ Irina V. Gaida, *Kitaiskii traditsionnyi teatr sitiui* (Chinese Traditional Theater *xiqu*; Moscow: Nauka, 1971); Svetlana A. Serova, *Pekinskaia muzikal'naia drama (Seredina 19–40-ye gg. 20 v.)* (Musical Drama of Peking: mid 19th c.–1940s; Moscow: Nauka, 1979).

²² See, e.g. Irina V. Gaida, “O narodnyh istokah kitaiskogo teatra” (About the Folk Origins of Chinese Theater), in *Problemy vostokovedeniia* (Problems of Oriental Studies), 1959.1: 105–12; Lev N. Menshikov, “K voprosu ob avtore ‘Zapadnogo fligelia’” (On the question of authorship of *The western chamber*), *Problemy Vostokovedeniia*, 1961.1: 149–51; Evgenii A. Serebriakov, “O piese yuanskogo dramaturga Ma Zhiyuana ‘Osen’ v han'skom dvortse” (About the Yuan drama *Autumn in the Han palace* by Ma Zhiyuan), in *Filologia stran Vostoka* (Philology of Oriental countries; Leningrad, 1963), pp. 110–25.

²³ L. N. Guseva, “Geroi dramy Kun Shanzhenia ‘Veer s tsvetami persika’” (1699) (A Character of *The Peach Blossom Fan* by Kong Shangren [1699]), *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta* (Moscow

In the same period the first complete and professional translations of Yuan-dynasty drama appeared. In this regard one should especially note a very precise rhymed translation of the *Western Chamber* by Menshikov (now available in a Chinese bilingual edition).²⁴ This subject had quite prolonged influence in Russia. As a part of Soviet-Chinese friendship there was an attempt to stage the Russian adapted translation of this drama, which predated Menshikov's professional translation. A musical drama using the subject of *The Western Chamber* based on the Russian translation of the play (adapted by the playwright A.P. Globa) was staged at The Moscow Theatre of Satire in 1952 (fig. 2), which contemporary reviews by professional critics did not characterize as successful.²⁵ Overall, the attempts to perform Chinese classical theater for Russian audiences in the Soviet period did not do very well, so traditional drama was mainly introduced to Russian readers through published translations.

By the 1990s numerous Russian translations of Chinese dramatic works had been published. The first anthology of Russian translations of Yuan drama, edited by Viktor V. Petrov (1929–1987) in 1966, consisted of eleven texts of the Jin and Yuan dynasties including *Qiu Hu Tries to Seduce His Own Wife* (*Qiu Hu xi qi* 秋胡戲妻) by Shi Junbao 石君寶 (1191–1276); *Injustice to Dou E* (*Dou E yuan* 竇娥冤), *Pavilion of River Gazing* (*Wang jiang ting* 望江亭), *Saving a Prostitute* (*Jiu fengchen* 救風塵), and *The Single Sword Meeting* (*Dandao hui* 單刀會) by Guan Hanqing 關漢卿 (ca. 1210–ca. 1280); *Rain in the Wutong Trees* (*Wutong yu* 梧桐雨) and *Over the Wall* (*Qiangtou mashang* 牆頭馬上) by Bai Pu 白樸 (1226–1306); *Autumn in Han Palace* (*Han gong qiu* 漢宮秋) by Ma Zhiyuan 馬致遠 (1250–1321); and *Reunion of the Sundered Undershirt* (*He hanshan* 合汗衫) by Zhang Guobin 張國賓 (dates unknown).²⁶ Translations of other Yuan-dynasty dramas such as *The Story of the Character "Patience"* (*Ren zi ji* 忍字記) by Zheng Tingyu 鄭廷玉 (dates unknown) and *Killing a Dog to Admonish the Husband* (*Sha gou quan fu* 殺狗勸夫) were published in 1976 in an anthology of Asian

University Journal) 14.2 (1972): 52–57; L. D. Pozdneeva, V. S. Manuhin, and L. N. Guseva, "Dramaturgiia: Hun Shen i Kun Shan-zhen" (Drama: Hong Sheng and Kong Shangren), in *Literatura Vostoka v Novee vremia* (Oriental Literature of Modern Times; Moscow: Izdatelstvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 1975), pp. 430–48; Tatiana A. Malinovskaia, "Dramy Zhu Iudunia (1379–1439)" (Plays by Zhu Youdun [1379–1439]), *Vostokovedenie* (Oriental studies) 5 (1977): 145–157; idem, "Razvitie suzheta dramy 'Zapadnyi fligel' v kitaiskoi dramaturgii 15–17 vv." (The Development of *The western chamber* plot in Chinese drama of the 15th–17th centuries), in *XIII Teoreticheskie problemy izucheniia literatur Dalnego Vostoka* (The 13th Issue of Theoretical problems of Studies of the Literature of Far East), vol. 2 (Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies, 1988), pp. 193–200.

²⁴ First printed: Lev N. Menshikov, trans. and intro., *Zapadnyi fligel' (Western chamber)*, Leningrad: Goslitizdat, 1960; reprinted in idem, trans., ed. and intro., *Kitaiskaia klassicheskaia drama* (Chinese Classical Drama; Saint Petersburg: Severo-Zapad Press, 2003), pp. 117–375. The second book also contains translations of two other Yuan dramas: *Scholar Zhang Boiling the Sea* (*Zhang sheng zhu hai* 張生煮海) by Li Haogu 李好古 (?–1300) and *Qiannü's Soul Goes Wandering* (*Qian nü li hun* 倩女離魂) by Zheng Guangzu 鄭光祖 (1260–1320), both completed by Menshikov in the 1960s.

²⁵ See Berezkin, "Zhongguo xiqu zai Eluosi chuanbo yu yingxiang," pp. 135–141.

²⁶ Viktor V. Petrov, ed., *Yuan'skaia drama* (Yuan Drama; Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966).



FIG. 2. Russian adaptation of the *Western Chamber*, staged in the Moscow Theater of Satire in 1952. V. K. Vasilieva as Cui Yingying, O. A. Aroseva as Hongniang

drama translations.²⁷ The same anthology included partial translations of *chuanqi* 傳奇 dramas of the Ming and Qing dynasties, notably *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting* 牡丹亭) by Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616), *Peach Blossom Fan* (*Taohua shan* 桃花扇) by Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648–1718), and *Palace of Long Life* (*Changsheng dian* 長生殿) by Hong Sheng 洪升 (1645–1704).²⁸ A translation of a *zaju* drama of the Qing dynasty, *A Canceled Banquet* (*Si qin ba yan* 思親罷宴) by Yang Chaoguan 楊潮觀 (1712–1791) was published in the same anthology.²⁹ In continuation of his early work on the reform of Chinese drama, Menshikov published a translation of the modern Peking opera script *Xie Yaohuan* 謝瑤環 by Tian Han 田漢 (1898–1968).³⁰

²⁷ *Klassicheskaia drama Vostoka* (Classical Drama of the Orient; Moscow: Hudozhestvennaia literatura, 1976), pp. 347–448. See also a recent reprint of the old Russian translations of *The Western Chamber* and *Injustice to Dou E*: Vladislav F. Sorokin, et al., *Iuan'skaia drama* (Yuan dynasty drama; Moscow: Shans, 2019).

²⁸ *Klassicheskaia drama Vostoka*, pp. 449–523. Unfortunately, Menshikov was not able to finish his translation of *The Peony Pavilion*.

²⁹ *Klassicheskaia drama Vostoka*, pp. 524–536.

³⁰ Viola S. Adzhimamudova and Nikolai A. Speshnev, eds., *Sovremennaia kitaiskaia drama* (Modern Chinese Drama; Moscow: Raduga, 1990), pp. 3–94.

The technical aspects and aesthetics of Chinese theater also attracted Russian scholars, especially beginning in the 1960s.³¹ In this connection we must mention the complete translation of Huang Fanchuo's 黃旛綽 theatrical treatise *Mirror of the Enlightened Mind* (*Ming xin jian* 明心鑒, late eighteenth century) by Svetlana A. Serova (b. 1933; Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow).³² The achievements of Russian sinology in this field were summarized in Serova's later book on the esthetics of Chinese traditional theater.³³ These Russian works constitute an important contribution to this little-researched topic in Western studies of Chinese drama.

The 1990s can be treated as the beginning of a new period of development of Russian studies on Chinese theater, which continues to the present. It can be characterized by increased attention to the works of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. Histories of *chuanqi* 傳奇 as well as *zaju* drama in the Ming period appeared, including the analysis of social and cultural meaning of the famous works by Tang Xianzu.³⁴ The growing interest in Ming drama, and its cultural and social impact, corresponded to a strong general trend in Western scholarship on Chinese theatre.

The new tendency in Russian studies of this period concerns studies of ritual aspects of Chinese drama, which were generally neglected during the Soviet period. Though "fantastic" (religious) subjects in Yuan and Ming-dynasty dramas were discussed in works by Sorokin and Tatiana A. Malinovskaia (1922–2014; Saint Petersburg State University), these scholars did not focus on the ritual uses of traditional drama. In 2012 Svetlana A. Serova published a monograph on the connections between religious ritual and folk drama.³⁵ However, she did not carry out fieldwork in the rural areas of China herself; the work is primarily based on materials collected by Chinese scholars such as Hu Tiancheng 胡天成.³⁶ Recently, new Russian works based on fieldwork in China have appeared: for example, Ekaterina A. Zavidovskaia describes the role of dramatic performances during temple festivals in Shanxi province.³⁷

A particular area of Russian studies is devoted to the influence of traditional Chinese theater on the Russian stage, especially obvious in the reformist theater

³¹ Boris L. Riftin, "Teoriia kitaiskoi dramy (12-nachalo 17 v.)" (The Theory of Chinese drama [12th–17th c.]), in *Problemy literatury i estetiki v stranah Vostoka* (Problems of Literature and Aesthetics in the Countries of Orient; Moscow, 1964), pp. 131–60. This was a review of a 10-volume set of traditional Chinese writings on drama: *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中國古典戲曲論著集成 (Collection of Writings on Chinese Classical Drama; Beijing: Zhongguo xiju, 1959–60).

³² Svetlana A. Serova, *Zerkalo prosvetlennogo duha. Huan Fan'-cho i estetika kitaiskogo klassicheskogo teatra* (Mirror of an Enlightened Mind: Huang Fanchuo's aesthetics of Chinese classical theatre; Moscow: Nauka, 1979).

³³ Svetlana A. Serova, *Kitaiskii teatr – estetieskii obraz mira* (Chinese theater: an aesthetic view of the world; Moscow: Vostochnaia literature, 2005).

³⁴ Svetlana A. Serova, *Kitaiskii teatr i kitaiskoe traditsionnoe obshchestvo* (Chinese Theater and Traditional Chinese Society; Moscow: Nauka, 1990); and Tatiana A. Malinovskaia, *Ocherki po istorii kitaiskoi klassicheskoi dramy v zhanre tszatsziui, 14–17 vv.* (Outline of the History of Chinese Classical Drama *zaju*, 14th–17th centuries; Saint Petersburg: Saint Petersburg State University, 1996).

³⁵ Svetlana A. Serova, *Religiozni ritual i kitaiskii teatr* (Religious Ritual and Chinese Theater; Moscow: Vostochnaia Literature, 2012).

³⁶ Hu Tiancheng 胡天成, ed., *Minjian jili yu yishi xiju* 民間祭禮與儀式戲劇 (Folk Sacrifice and Ritual Drama; Guiyang: Guizhou minzu, 1999).

³⁷ Ekaterina A. Zavidovskaia, *Hramovye ob'edineniia i religioznaia zhizn' krest'ian sovremenogo Kitaia* (Temple Associations and Religious life of Peasants in Modern China; Saint Petersburg:

of the late nineteenth-early twentieth century, including exchange between Russian and Chinese artists (see above). Several important works on this topic were published in the 1990s.³⁸

Russian studies of *nianhua* having theatrical subjects are a particularly well developed field. Many “theatrical” prints collected by V. M. Alekseev and other early collectors have been published with extensive annotation by Academician Boris L. Riftin (1932–2012) in cooperation with Chinese scholars.³⁹ A recent monograph on illustrations of vernacular literature in late imperial China by Tatiana I. Vinogradova (Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg) devotes considerable space to *nianhua* with theatrical subjects, which is still an understudied field in Western as well as Chinese scholarship.⁴⁰

Among recent works in the field of Chinese drama, especially noteworthy is the annotated translation of the *The Story of the Lute* by Dmitrii I. Maiatskii (Saint Petersburg State University).⁴¹ This is the first full scholarly translation of a southern-type drama script into Russian. The substantial introduction constitutes a specialized study of the characteristic features of content and form of *nanxi* drama in the middle of the fourteenth century.

RUSSIAN STUDIES OF CHINESE STORYTELLING LITERATURE

Studies of Chinese storytelling in Russian are not as numerous as those of Chinese drama, but have been more influential in international sinology. In this field another school of Russian sinologists formed that also emphasized the study of the exchange between classical and popular, and written and oral traditions.⁴² The interest in popular literature and folklore, though it can be traced back to Alekseev’s time (early twentieth century), was also supported by the general ideology of the Soviet period, which paid special attention to folk and mass literature and culture.

Saint Petersburg State University, 2009), pp. 70–78; see also her “Social and Cultural Role of Rural Drama Performance,” in Proceedings of the Conference “*Far Eastern Philosophy and Modern Society*,” vol. 2 (Moscow: Institute of Far Eastern Studies, 2008), pp. 130–138.

³⁸ E.g., Elena V. Shahmatova, *Iskaniia evropeiskoi rezhissury i traditsii Vostoka* (In search of European stage direction and Oriental traditions; Moscow: URSS, 2013 [1st edition, 1997]); V. F. Sorokin, “Iz istorii rossiisko-kitaiskih teatral’nyh svyazei (pervaia polovina XX v.)” (From the history of Russo-Chinese theater exchange [first half of the 20th century]), in *Vostokovedenie i mirovaia kultura* (Oriental Studies and World Culture; Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 1998), pp. 345–52; and Serova, *Teatral’naia kultura Serebrianogo veka v Rossii*.

³⁹ Li Fuqing 李福清, Wang Shucun 王樹村, and Liu Yushan 劉玉山, eds., *Sulian cang Zhongguo minjian nianhua zhenpin ji* 蘇聯藏中國民間年畫珍品集 (Rare Chinese Popular Prints in Soviet Collections; Beijing: Renmin meishu, 1990; Russian version: Leningrad: Avrora Publishers, 1991) and Li Fuqing 李福清, ed., *Zhongguo muban nianhua jicheng: Eluosi cangpin juan* 中國木版年畫集成: 俄羅斯藏品卷 (Collection of Chinese Woodblock Prints: Volume on Russian collections; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009).

⁴⁰ Tatiana I. Vinogradova, *Mir kak predstavlenie: kitaiskaia literaturnaia illiustraciia* (World as imagery: Chinese literary illustration; Saint Petersburg: Al’faret, 2012).

⁴¹ Dmitrii I. Maiatskii, *Gao Tzsechen i ego p’esa ‘Pipa tszi’* (Gao Zecheng and his play *Pipa ji*; Saint Petersburg: Saint Petersburg State University, 2015), pp. 153–450. The translator consulted English translations while using the methodology of translation worked out by the scholars of older generation, such as Menshikov.

⁴² This overview is focused on the studies of Han-nationality literature and does not include Russian research on the folk (oral) literature of the ethnic minorities of China.

Boris L. Riftin made an important contribution to the development of Russian research on Chinese folklore and vernacular literature; his work already has been outlined in an obituary published in *CHINOPERL*.⁴³ Here it is sufficient to mention his early classification of storytelling genres, outlined in an analysis of the special features of the Meng Jiangnü story in various literary forms, as well as his ground-breaking research on the interaction of oral and written versions of the Three Kingdoms story cycle (centered on the phenomena of the formation and later transmission of the novel *Romance of Three Kingdoms*).⁴⁴ These works specially dealt with Chinese storytelling genres. Riftin is also noteworthy for several bibliographies of dramatic and storytelling pieces preserved in foreign collections and photo-reprint editions of such texts. His research greatly contributed to the study of Chinese popular literature in terms of methodology (such as his meticulous philological approach) and discovery of important new materials. Many works by Riftin were translated and published in Chinese (and some in English), which is not typical of Russian sinologists. Still, several of his works in Russian remain unpublished, notably a collection of articles on the interaction of written vernacular literature and folklore (including popular prints) that he was working on just before his death.

Russian works on Chinese popular literature greatly profited from the rare materials preserved in the libraries of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, as well as the excellent linguistic abilities of several scholars who grew up in China or studied there for a long time. The most outstanding figure among those scholars was Nikolai A. Speshnev (1931–2011), who grew up in Beijing and acquired semi-native proficiency in Mandarin. He compiled a comprehensive history of Chinese storytelling (mainly its northern genres), in which he analyzed the special features of such forms as *dagushu* 大鼓書 (big drum ballads), *guci* 鼓詞 (drum ballads), *pinghua* 評話 (expository tales), *kuaishu* 快書 (fast tales), and *zidishu* 子弟書 (bannermen tales), which he classified according to their formal (musical, poetic, and prosaic) aspects.⁴⁵ Speshnev also mainly analyzed them from the point of view of the interaction of written and oral traditions in Chinese vernacular literature, thus continuing the discussion started by Riftin. Speshnev's research on the modern genre of "crosstalk" (*xiangsheng* 相聲) should be especially noted; he approached this genre from a linguistic (phonetic) perspective, facilitated by his near-native proficiency in Beijing dialect. Speshnev's research was very innovative, and his 1986 monograph on the history of popular literature was unprecedented in Western studies.

⁴³ Rostislav Berezkin, "Academician Boris L. Riftin (1932–2012): the Extraordinary Life of a Brilliant Scholar," *CHINOPERL Papers* 31 (2012): 260–72.

⁴⁴ Boris L. Riftin, *Skazanie o Velikoi stene i problema zhanra v kitaiskom fol'klоре* (Legends about the Great Wall and the Problem of Genre in Chinese folklore; Moscow: GRVL, 1961); idem, *Istoricheskaia epopeia i folklornaia tradiciia v Kitae (Ustnye i knizhnye versii 'Troetsarstviia')* (Historical epic and the folklore tradition in China: Oral and written versions of the 'Three Kingdoms'; Moscow: Nauka, 1970).

⁴⁵ Nikolai A. Speshnev, *Kitaiskaia prostonarodnaia literatura: pesenno-povestvovatel'nye zhanry* (Chinese Popular Literature: Prosimetric Genres; Moscow: Nauka, 1986); see also idem, "Pesenno-povestvovatel'naia literatura" (Prosimetric literature), in *Dukhovnaia kul'tura Kitaia* (Spiritual Culture of China), vol. 5 (Language and Literature; Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 2006), pp. 110–19.

Special studies of separate old forms of storytelling-type literature used unique and rare materials kept in Russian collections. Menshikov especially researched forms of popular literature preserved among Dunhuang manuscripts kept at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Leningrad branch (now the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in Saint Petersburg).⁴⁶ His work resulted in publication of manuscripts of four “sutra-explanation texts” (*jiangjingwen* 講經文) of the late Tang–Five Dynasties period (eighth-tenth centuries) and related poetic pieces (hymns and *yazuowen* 押座文, “introits”), all preserved in Saint Petersburg and previously unknown to foreign scholars.⁴⁷ In his publications of these materials photo-reprints were accompanied by Russian translations with extensive annotation.⁴⁸ Menshikov revealed the influence of these texts, which he labeled *bianwen* 變文 (transformation texts) following classifications of Chinese scholars,⁴⁹ on later storytelling genres and on the novel and drama as well (in which he also was a specialist). Several of his publications were accompanied by linguistic analysis (e.g., *Jiangjingwen on Repaying of Mercies*, done in collaboration with I. T. Zograf) and even explanations of rare words in them (e.g., *Jiangjingwen on The Lotus Sutra*), which contributed to research on later drama, novels, and storytelling literature. His publication of these unique texts from Dunhuang with related linguistic research was an important contribution to Dunhuang studies internationally.

Liudmila K. Pavlovskaja (1926–2002) from the Institute of Oriental Studies worked on the *pinghua* 平話 (plain tales) genre of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. She regarded these texts as important antecedents of traditional novels and also analyzed their use and adaptation of written historical materials. She published a complete translation of the *Newly Compiled Pinghua on The History of Five Dynasties* (*Xinbian Wudai shi pinghua* 新編五代史平話; ca. thirteenth century).⁵⁰ Pavlovskaja also studied other *pinghua* texts, such as those devoted to the history of the Qin dynasty and Three Kingdoms. Her complete translation of the *Story with Verse about Monk Tripitaka of the Great Tang Fetching Sūtras* (*Da Tang Sanzang qu jing shihua* 大唐三藏取經詩話; alternative title: *Da Tang Sanzang fashi qu jing ji* 大唐三藏法師取經記, ca. thirteenth century) demonstrated the continued

⁴⁶ For a general catalogue of the Saint Petersburg collection, see Lev N. Men’shikov et al., eds., *Opisanie kitaiskikh rukopisei Dun’huanskogo fonda Institutov Narodov Azii* (Description of Chinese manuscripts of the Dunhuang collection of the Institute of Peoples of the Orient), 2 vols. (Moscow: Nauka, 1963–67).

⁴⁷ Lev N. Men’shikov, ed. and intro., *Kitaiskie rukopisi iz Dunhuana: pamiatniki buddiiskoi literatury suven’siue* (Chinese manuscripts from Dunhuang: Texts of Popular Buddhist Literature, *suwenxue*; Moscow: Nauka, 1963).

⁴⁸ Lev N. Men’shikov, ed. and trans., *Bian’ven’ o Veimotsze. Bian’ven’ “Desiat’ blagikh znamenii”* (*Neizvestnye rukopisi bian’ven’ iz dun’khuanskogo fonda Instituta narodov Azii*) (*Bianwen* on Vimalakīrti. *Bianwen* on Ten auspicious signs. Unknown manuscripts of *bianwen* from the Dunhuang collection of the Institute of the Asian Peoples; Moscow: Nauka, 1963); idem, ed. and trans., *Bian’ven’ o vozdaianii za milosti* (*Bianwen* on Repaying of mercies. A manuscript from the Dunhuang collection of the Institute of the Asian Peoples; Moscow: Nauka, 1972); idem, ed. and trans., *Bian’ven’ po Lotosovoi sutre* (*Bianwen* on *The lotus sūtra*; Moscow: Nauka, 1984).

⁴⁹ For another classification, see Victor H. Mair, *T’ang Transformation Texts: A Study of the Buddhist Contribution to the Rise of Vernacular Fiction and Drama in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 29–30.

⁵⁰ Liudmila K. Pavlovskaja, ed. and trans., *Zanovo sostavlennoe Pinhua po istorii Piati dinastii* (Newly compiled *pinghua* on The history of the Five Dynasties; Moscow: Nauka, 1984).

influence of Buddhist motifs in the later prosimetric literature of China, thus continuing Menshikov's work on the Dunhuang narratives.⁵¹

Elvira S. Stulova (1934–1993), who worked at the same institute as Menshikov and Pavlovskaja, carried out research on *baojuan* 寶卷 (precious scrolls) of the sixteenth to early twentieth centuries, mainly using rare editions of these texts kept at the Institute of Oriental Studies. This collection, though not very large, includes several unique editions of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries that were apparently purchased by the members of Russian Orthodox mission in Beijing in the eighteenth or nineteenth century.⁵² Stulova published an annotated translation of the *Baojuan of Rulai Puming, Who Perceived the Meaning of Non-interference (Puming rulai wuwei liao yi baojuan* 普明如來無為了意寶卷; abbreviated title *Puming Baojuan*), a woodcut edition of 1599, which at that time was considered to be unique.⁵³ It belonged to the tradition of Yellow Heaven Teaching (Huangtian dao 黃天道), one of the prominent syncretic religious teachings in late imperial China. Later another well-preserved Ming-dynasty edition of this text was discovered in China; but to this day Chinese scholars use the photo-reprint of the Russian copy of this text. In her long introduction in this book, Stulova discussed the literary, historical, and social characteristics of Ming-dynasty *baojuan*, and other issues such as the inner alchemy/elixir (*nei dan* 內丹) practice described in the *Puming Baojuan*. Stulova also published articles on other *baojuan* preserved in Saint Petersburg, especially the *Baojuan of Three Rebirths of Mulian (Mulian san shi baojuan* 目蓮三世寶卷, first printed in 1876) and *Baojuan of the Chongzhen's Emperor Ascension to Heaven and Ten Loyal Officials, Spoken by the Buddha (Fo shuo Chongzhen sheng tian shi zhong baojuan* 佛說崇禎昇天十忠寶卷, abbreviated title *Chongzhen baojuan*; ca. early eighteenth century). The latter text is unique as it was preserved only in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in Saint Petersburg. Stulova's complete translation of *Chongzhen baojuan*, kept as a manuscript in the archives of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in Saint Petersburg, unfortunately remains unpublished.

Russian historians of Chinese religions also studied *baojuan* as sources of the beliefs and practices of popular syncretic religious movements (sects) in different periods of their development,⁵⁴ though they have paid little attention to the literary characteristics of these texts designed for recitation. Research in Russian on late period narrative *baojuan* texts was continued by Rostislav Berezkin, who published a monograph on the special features of the *Baojuan of Three Rebirths of Mulian* in

⁵¹ Liudmila K. Pavlovskaja, ed. and trans., *Shibua o tom, kak Tripitaka Velikoi Tan dobyl sviaschennye knigi* (Story with verse about Monk Tripitaka of the Great Tang Fetching Sūtras; Moscow: Nauka, 1987).

⁵² For detailed description of this collection, see Elvira S. Stulova, "Annotirovanoe opisanie sochinenii zhanra baotszuan' v sobranii LO IV AN SSSR" (Annotated description of texts of the *baojuan* genre in the collection of LO IV AN SSSR), in *Pis'mennye pamyatniki Vostoka: 1976–1977* (Written monuments of the Orient: 1976–1977; Moscow: Nauka, 1984), pp. 271–312.

⁵³ Elvira S. Stulova, ed., trans. and intro., *Baotszuan' o Pu-mine (Puming baojuan)*; Moscow: Nauka, 1979).

⁵⁴ Ekaterina B. Porshneva, *Religioznye ucheniia pozdnesrednevekovogo Kitaia: problemy ideologii* (Religious Movements of Late Imperial China: Problems of Ideology; Moscow: Nauka, 1991); K.M. Tertitskii, *Kitaiskie sinkreticheskie religii v XX veke* (Chinese Syncretic Religions in the 20th Century; Moscow: "Vostochnaia literatura" RAN, 2000).

connection with the development of the Mulian subject matter in Chinese popular literature and *baojuan* genre in particular.⁵⁵ Unlike earlier studies of *baojuan* in Russian, which were mainly based on written sources, Berezkin has used the results of his fieldwork in Jiangsu province (mainly the Jingjiang, Zhangjiagang, and Changshu areas), where *baojuan* texts including the *Baojuan of Mulian* are still performed by folk storytellers. The functions of these *baojuan* used in folk rituals are compared with those of Chinese ritual drama.

A young scholar, Iuliia A. Ershova (Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow), studies Chinese storytelling literature of the twentieth century, continuing the work of Riftin and Speshnev. In 2014 she completed her thesis for the “candidate of sciences” degree at the Institute of World Literature with the title of “Kitaiskii pozdnii prozaicheskii skaz i knizhnaia novella” (Chinese late prosaic storytelling and the novel), thus continuing the older tradition of studying the interplay of oral and written forms in popular literature.

CONCLUSION

Despite long-standing interest on the part of the Russian intellectual elite, Russian academic studies of Chinese traditional drama did not mature until the middle of the twentieth century. Only at that time did monographs in this field and high-quality professional translations appear. However, even in this period Russian studies of Chinese literature were still oriented towards the study of early classical poetry and prose. This trend is comparable to the situation in Western European sinology in the twentieth century.⁵⁶ In Russian scholarship of the twentieth century, one can see a tendency to privilege the study of early dramatic works (Yuan and partly Ming) to the comparative neglect of Qing dynasty drama, especially its folk forms. This was also true of Western studies of Chinese drama, which for a long time were dominated by the study of Yuan *zaju*.⁵⁷

Only recently have Russian scholars turned towards the study of folk drama of the Qing and later. Still, Russian studies of traditional drama are still generally limited to textual research: few scholars travel to China to observe the modern state of Chinese theater. In this sphere Russian studies lag behind Western research, which has produced a considerable number of recent works on local folk dramatic forms.

The study of folk prints illustrating theatrical subjects can be considered a strong field in Russian studies. It takes advantage of the numerous rare prints preserved in Russian museums, most of them collected by Russian scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century. Still, because of dispersed location of these images (some of them are stored in provincial museums and not easily accessible), these materials have not yet been thoroughly studied and made known.

⁵⁵ Rostislav V. Berezkin, *Dragocennnye svitki (Baotsiuan') v duhovnoi kul'ture Kitaia: na primere Baotsiuan' o Treh Voplosheniyah Muliania* (Precious scrolls [*baojuan*] functioning in the culture of China, with the *Baojuan of three rebirths of Mulian* as an example; Saint Petersburg: Saint Petersburg Center for Oriental Studies, 2012).

⁵⁶ See Wilt L. Idema, “Ming and Qing Literature,” in Haihui Zhang et al., eds., *A Scholarly Review of Chinese Studies in North America* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2013), p. 330.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

Russian studies of Chinese storytelling literature developed even later than those of drama, though there have been significant achievements in this area as well, because Russian scholars have used rare and unique materials preserved in Russian collections. In addition, studies of prosimetric literature related to oral storytelling were encouraged by general interest towards folklore and popular literature, which started before 1917, but developed even more strongly in the Soviet period. Still, as with theatrical prints, many rare texts of storytelling literature of the Ming and Qing dynasties in Russian collections remain unpublished and even uncatalogued.

Russian studies in this field can be characterized by a general interest in the interaction of storytelling and written literature (primarily the novel), which is similar to related research in Western Europe and North America. However, a specific feature of Russian scholarship is the prevailing interest in the northern storytelling forms of the Han people, while southern forms (including those of the Yangzi valley, such as *tanci* 彈詞 or Suzhou chantefable) generally remain neglected. This is different than modern Western research, where special studies of southern genres have appeared.

Russian studies of Chinese drama and storytelling genres have for a long time been generally neglected by Western and Chinese scholars, mostly because of the language barrier. Recently, Russian studies of Chinese drama and storytelling genres have become more integrated into international research in this field, as the younger generation of scholars increasingly publishes in English and/or Chinese.

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