

JULIUS ZEYER'S VERSION
OF MA ZHIYUAN'S LADY ZHAOJUN:
A XIONGNU BRIDE IN CZECH ATTIRE

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In memoriam Pavel Poucha at his 100th birthday on
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The aim of this study is to analyse the Czech literary adaptation of the well-known Chinese play *Hangong quim* (Autumn in the Han Palace) by Ma Zhiyuan (13th-14th cent.) in the short story *Zrada v domě Han* (Treachery in the House of Han) by the Czech decadent writer Julius Zeyer (1841-1901). It is the first *chinoiserie* in Czech national literature.

Key words: Wang Zhaojun, Xiongnu-Chinese relations, Sino-Bohemian interliterary process.

The decadent chinoiseries by Julius Zeyer (1841-1901) started with the story entitled *Zrada v domě Han* (*Treachery in the House of Han*). Originally it was published as the first of its kind in the journal *Lumír* in 1881 and later appeared in *Spisy Julia Zeyera* (*The Collected Works of Julius Zeyer*).¹

It is very probable, that similarly to the story entitled *Blaho v zahradě kvetoucích broskví* (*Happiness in the Garden of Blossoming Peaches*), it grew also mostly on the basis of gleaning in the Chinese department of Náprstek Library in Prague.²

It was easy to discover that the original source of Zeyer's story was the famous *zaju* 雜劇 miscellaneous play of the Yuan 元 Dynasty by Ma Zhiyuan 馬致遠 (ca. 1265-ca. 1325) *Hangong qiu* 漢宮秋 *Autumn in the Han Palace*.³ All researchers in the field of the study of interliterary process between Czech and many Oriental literatures are indebted to Professor Pavel Poucha for his findings.

¹ *Spisy Julia Zeyera*, Vol. XXXI, Prague, "Unie" 1906, pp. 69-112. Henceforth only Zeyer.

² Cf. Marián Gálik, Julius Zeyer's Version of Ling Mengchu's Lady Xue Tao: A Chinese Story in Czech Attire. *Archiv orientální*, 72, 2004, 3, p. 298.

³ See *Quan Yuan qu* 全元曲 *The Complete Yuan Dramas*. Vol. 3. Ed. by Xu Zheng 徐征 *et alii*. Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, Shijiazhuang 1998, pp. 1689-1711. Henceforth only *Hangong qiu*.

Pavel Poucha in his seminal study *Orientální náměty v díle Julia Zeyera* (*Oriental Topics in the Work of Julius Zeyer*),⁴ written in 1942, was the first who pointed out to some most important sources providing the materials for the story *Treachery in the House of Han*.

Julius Zeyer was an inquisitive reader of many books and journal connected with China in Náprstek Library. Especially William Frederick Mayer's *The Chinese Reader's Manual. A Handbook of Biographical, Historical, Mythological, and General Literary Reference*,⁵ was his ABC in sinological matters. Zeyer certainly read the information about Lady Zhaojun, named as Chao-kun in Mayer's manual and later transcribed as Čaokiun in Zeyer's story.⁶

In other sources available in Náprstek Library the names of Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 are transcribed in different ways. In the commentaries to two poems by Li Bai 李白 (701-762) and Chang Jian 常健 (8th century), the translator Le Marquis d'Hervey-Saint-Denys uses Tchao-kiun⁷ and in the two treatises concerning the play by Ma Zhiyuan, the critic Sir John Francis Davis in his *Chinese Miscellanies: A Collection of Essays and Notes*,⁸ and in his *China: A General Description of that Empire and its Inhabitants*,⁹ does not mention the name of the Xiongnu 匈奴 bride at all. Sir John Francis Davis is also the first translator of Ma Zhiyuan's play into English. This translation is entitled *The Sorrows of Han*¹⁰ and was published in 1829. It is not (and probably was not) available in Náprstek Library and also not in Prague libraries. In this translation the name of Wang Zhaojun is transcribed as Chaoukeun.¹¹

⁴ Reprinted in *Světla Východu (Lights of the Orient)*. Svobodné slovo-Melantrich. Praha 1958, pp. 538-634. Henceforth only Pavel Poucha.

⁵ Presbyterian Mission Press, Shanghai 1874. Henceforth only Meyers.

⁶ Cf. Meyers, No. 45 and Zeyer, pp. 86 ff.

⁷ In the book by Le Marquis d'Hervey Saint-Denys, *Poésies d' Epoque des Thang (VII^e, VIII^e et IX^e siècles de notre ère)*, Amyot, Paris 1862, we find the translation of Li Bai's poem *Yutian cai hua* 于闐採花 *Quand les femmes de Yu-tian cueillaient des fleurs (When the Women of Khotan Gathered the Flowers)*, pp. 53-54, with a long commentary on pp. 54-56, and the translation of Chang Jian's poem *昭君之墓* *Le tombeau de Tchao-kiun (The Tomb of Zhaojun)*, p. 213 with a short commentary on p. 214. For the original Chinese text see *Li Taibai quanji* 李太白全集 *The Complete Works of Li Bai*. Vol. 1. Zhonghua shuju, Peking 1977, pp. 330-331 and *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 *The Complete Tang Poetry*, Guoji wenhua chubanshe, Peking 1994, p. 419. In the first we find a description of Zhaojun's beauty surpassing that of all Xiongnu girls, and in the second there are mentioned the camels loaded with gold and sent to the Xiongnu Khan to redeem her. See also the text to the notes Nos. 71 and 74.

⁸ John Murray, London 1865.

⁹ John Murray, London 1857.

¹⁰ The whole title of the translation is *Han Koong Tsew, or The Sorrows of Han. A Chinese Tragedy*. It was published for The Oriental Translation Fund by John Murray, London. Henceforth only *The Sorrows of Han*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6ff.

Is it possible that Zeyer wrote the story of Lady Zhaojun and her Xiongnu bridegroom without reading the translated text of Ma Zhiyuan's play? We may answer this question in positive. In two essays by Davis, two poems by Li Bai and Chang Jian, as well as in the manual by W. Fr. Mayers we find enough material for creation of the story *Treachery in the House of Han*. Even in the case if somehow Zeyer was able to come in touch with this translation, he did not pay to it much attention.¹² In Davis' essay from the year 1865 entitled: "The Drama, Novels and Romances" we may read quite detailed analysis of his own translation including the quotations of shorter or longer passages, from which the reader could make a good idea of the play, and the playwright using his own imagination and creative design may create a new work of art. The proper analysis starts with the first verses of the Xiongnu (in the translation Tartar) Khan:

The autumnal gale blows wildly through the grass, amidst our woolen tents,
And the moon of night, shining on the rude huts, hears the lament of the
mournful pipe;
The countless hosts, with their bended bows, obey me as their leader;
Our tribes are the distinguished friends of the family of Han.¹³

In the next quotation Mao Yanshou 毛延壽 (in the translation: Maouyenshow), the villain of the drama, recites his own verses, characterizing his character:

Let a man have the heart of a kite, and the talons of an eagle,
Let him deceive his superiors, and oppress those below him;
Let him enlist flattery, insinuation, profligacy, and avarice on his side,
And he will find them a lasting assistance through life.¹⁴

Further Mao Yanshou presents his plan to persuade the emperor to keep aloof from his wise counsellors, and seek all his pleasures amidst the women of his palace, and in this way to increase Mao Yanshou's power and greatness. Mao Yanshou, who in the original served as *zhong dafu* 中大夫 an official in the Board of Rites,¹⁵ certainly was not as Minister of the State, as indicated in Davis' translation. Having the royal degree to select the young, beautiful girls into Emperor's seraglio and making the portraits of each, he chose those he favoured. He asked the gifts from all selected. Only one Wang Zhaojun, as a daughter of a cultivator of the land, was not able and also did not want to bribe him. He

¹² Problematic is only where did Zeyer find the name Hanchenyu (in Czech transcription Hančenju), when it is not mentioned, with the exception of Davis' translation, in the works he had at the disposal? Did he find it in some another historical source?

¹³ *The Sorrows of Han*, p. 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Hangong qiu*, p. 1691.

disfigured her portrait in such a manner that she was doomed to a neglected seclusion in one of Emperor's palaces.

When later, by chance, the Emperor Yuandi 元帝 (Yuente in Davis' translation) (r. 48-33 B.C.) heard unusually sad sounds of the *piba* 琵琶 lute, he asked the eunuch to bring the playing Lady to him. The Emperor was surprised by her exquisite, perfect beauty and wondered why did he had not occasion to meet her sooner. When he saw her picture, he ordered to have Mao Yanshou arrested and beheaded.

But Mao Yanshou was more sly than the executioners and fled to the Xiongnu Khan Huhanye 呼韓耶¹⁶ (Hanchenyu in Davis' translation), showed him the true portrait of Lady Zhaojun, who in that time was given the title Ming fei 明妃 Imperial Concubine Ming, or a Princess, as rendered by Davis.¹⁷

After Xiongnu Khan's envoy and Xiongnu army invaded the Chinese territory to serve as bride's suite, or to ravage and kill, the Emperor tries to persuade the Khan to take another woman as his future Chinese spouse. He is not successful. He is allowed only to part with her. Then Khan and his army retreat to their territories in the north. On 黑龍江 Black Dragon River (Amur), on the border between the two countries, Lady Zhaojun commits the suicide throwing her into the water. Hu Hanye orders to build a "verdant tomb" over her body.

In his palaces Yuandi cannot forget his most attractive favourite and earns to see her at least in dream. It happens but only for a short moment. When the spirit of Lady Zhaojun's announces her return, Xiongnu soldier prevent her to do so. Both escape his sight. Only melancholy and sorrow, together with the cries of the wild fowl, accompanied the Emperor who died the same year as Lady Zhaojun. At the end the Emperor is "pacified by the death of traitor."¹⁸ This has been done during the visit of the Xiongnu envoy who brought to him the bloody head of Mao Yanshou.

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From that what has been said so far, and what follow in this analysis, we may see that Julius Zeyer changed the literary genre: on the basis of Chinese drama he wrote a modern European story or a short novella. The same he has done one year later with the drama *Bratři (Brothers)*.¹⁹ The main incentive for writing the last were the short stories from the well-known collection *Jin gu qi guan* 今古奇觀 *Marvellous Tales, New and Old*, translated and published by Stanislas Julien in 1860 and by his pupil Theodore Pavie in 1839.²⁰

¹⁶ *Hangong qiu*, pp. 1689 and 1695-1696 and *The Sorrows of Han*, pp. 3 and 9-10.

¹⁷ *Hangong qiu*, p. 1694 and *The Sorrows of Han*, p. 8.

¹⁸ John Francis Davis, *China: A General Description of that Empire and its Inhabitants*, p. 154.

¹⁹ Originally published in *Lumír*, X, Nov.-Dec. 1882, Nos. 33-36.

²⁰ Pavel Poucha, pp. 619-621.

Zeyer in the drama analysed here proceeded to some extent in the manner as with the short story *Happiness in the Garden of Blossoming Peaches*. He named the main character, the traitor – Kutaju, and not Mao Yanshou, or something like that. Kutaju is very probably a linguistic modification of old name for China Cathay, or Kitai with a suffix “ju”, or “yu” which he used when naming masculine personality Panju in the *Happiness in the Garden of Blossoming Peaches*.²¹ He also invented a new woman character, a counterpart, an antagonist to Wang Zhaojun – Zjandy. It seems to me that Zjandy is a Zeyerian modification of Davisian Seunte, the Emperor Xuandi 宣帝 (r. 73-47 B.C.).²²

The Treachery in the House of Han begins nearly at the end of Ma Zhiyuan's masterpiece or Davis' translation. The *qing zhong* 青冢 verdant tomb²³ is a place where in the yellow sand a group of expellees sitting under the shadow of pistachios and pines hear to the voice of the narrator the story of the Lady Zhaojun.

The narrator of the story starts as follows:

“The eyes of the mandarin Kutaju were like the leaves of the tree called *hoai* (*huai* 槐 *sophora japonica*, M.G.). They were equally dark, closing themselves during the day when tired and they opened in the night, when Kutaju left the City and swam on the boat upon the blue waves of the river to his gardens.”²⁴ On the way he met an envoy of the Emperor sending him his decree ordering Kutaju to find the one most beautiful and the one who is “not worthy of his glance and of the flame of his passion.”²⁵ The Emperor needed from him, as soon as possible, to receive a short message, and not the pictures, as in the original by Ma Zhiyuan, or in Davis' translation. Emperor's decree is full of flowery sentences extolling Love and Beauty as a virtue of his grandfather who allegedly using the so-called “butterfly judgment”, sought for the most attractive girls in his harem in order to drink with them wine mixed with morning dew.²⁶ In this way the old Emperor tried to overcome his spleen and inevitable meeting with Hančenju²⁷ (Hanchenyu in Davis' translation, as we mentioned above) and his armies.

Kutaju could not comprehend why the “young Emperor” could reflect on the state about things around him and his own personality in this way. In Kutaju's reasoning there is a story about Meixi 妹喜, the favourite concubine of Jie 桀, the last King of Xia 夏 Dynasty (traditionally reigned 1837-1818 B.C.) who “indulged in extraordinary forms of sensual gratification for her enjoyment” Zeyer read here

²¹ Marián Gálik, op. cit., p. 303.

²² *The Sorrows of Han*, p. 4 and Mayers, p. 391. Mayers used this method of naming ordinary citizen after the legendary Emperor Huangdi 黃帝 (traditionally reigned B.C. 2697-2597) in the story *The Happiness in the Garden of Blossoming Peaches*, see Marián Gálik, op. cit., p. 300.

²³ *Hangong qiu*, p. 1705 and *The Sorrows of Han*, p. 16.

²⁴ Zeyer, p. 70.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 73.

²⁶ Loc. cit.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 92 and 96.

that “treasures were lavished in providing her with a splendid palace, and in the park that surrounded it a lake of wine was formed, at which ‘three thousand men drank at the sound of drum, “while the trees were hung with dried meats, and ‘hills of flesh’ were piled up.”²⁸

This story is not included in Ma Zhiyuan's play and it was put into Zeyer's narrative as a result of his musing and understanding of the message in Mayers' *Manual* elaborating the original story from the *Shujing* 書經 *The Book of Documents*.²⁹

In Zeyer's version we read Meixi's story as follows:

“What a woman can make from a man brought under her control? Once in this land, a Queen did not want to smile, unless the King fulfilling her desire let to dig a lake of wine, where three thousand men at the sound of drums should drink like the pigs. If the fate of the country will be in one woman's hand, she will be in my trap. If she will become an Empress, I shall be an Emperor myself.”³⁰

“Butterfly judgment” consisted of putting the garland of flowers upon the head of a young girl and waiting for the butterflies that allegedly should sit upon the flowers and to suck their sweet sap. Foxy Kutaju used this occasion and put the garland upon the head of the beautiful but equally cunning Zjandy who promised him rich rewards after having been selected an Emperor's main favourite, and even his main wife. He put likewise a garland upon the head of Zhaojun, but with poisoned flowers, and as a result all butterflies died after coming in touch with it.

On the basis of historical study, Kutaju was aware that if the Emperor is weak, the Empress and the people, usually close relatives or high official, reign over the Middle Kingdom. Empress-Dowager Lü, the wife of the founder of the Han Dynasty Liu Bang 劉邦 Han Gaozu 漢高祖 (r. 206-193), was a good example. She is mentioned in the *xiezi* 楔子 prologue to Ma Zhiyuan's play and she is also mentioned in Mayers' manual.³¹

Kutaju did not try persuading for his schemes only charming Zjandy, who accepted quickly his tempting proposal. With Wang Zhaojun it was different. She did not pay the attention to his wooing:

“You are one of those ladies who with her first glance overthrow the cities and with the second the states. This is the voice of a poet.”³²

Zeyer had in mind the words of Li Yannian 李延年 about his sister, a concubine of the Emperor Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 140-86), and not the *locus classicus* from *Shijing* 詩經 *The Book of Poetry*, where it is expressed in a

²⁸ Mayers, p. 259.

²⁹ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 3, pp. 173-176.

³⁰ Zeyer, p. 75.

³¹ *Hangong qiu*, p. 1689 and Mayers' No. 458.

³² Zeyer, p. 83.

different way.³³ Wang Zhaojun did not mind Kutaju's words. Even the vision of the Dragon throne could not wake up her from a dream.

Kutaju's hope was not realized. The Emperor did not fall in love with Zjandy. On the other hand he offered to Hu Hanye a girl "without charm, beauty and spirit".³⁴ Later he repented his promise. If in the moment of his decision, Wang Zhaojun was comparable to the sound of the wind in the top of the pines, the overall situation and the *état d'âme* of the Emperor changed completely. But not in the next moment. The bride was presented to the Xiongnu Khan covered with veil similar to the opal mist. In the time of meeting and parting, nobody from those who participated at the ceremony, saw her face. Only the Emperor hypocritically underlined her purity comparable to the fresh snow on the top of the mountain and her value to the pink pearl and priceless jewel. Khan called her his "golden treasure" and the future queen of the broad and open wilderness, where the wind is howling, the horses belching and jackals baying at the moon. Hopeless vision of the young girl from the seraglio of the Chinese Son of Heaven!

Being completely broken-hearted Wang Zhaojun sighed for her lost luck and began to complain.

3

Zhaojun's voice "sweet and mild as breeze"³⁵ did not enter the ears and the souls of the audience. The sentences presented by Zhaojun and Yuandi in Zeyer's story are their interior monologues in the form of dreams.

In the gardens of the Emperor there did not sound the songs eulogizing Zhaojun as his bride.³⁶ Either in Ma Zhiyuan's play, or in Davis' translation, or in Davis' essays that Zeyer certainly read. It is true that her heart was immersed in deep melancholy, at least in Zeyer's story. In the play there were the moments of the declaration of love, or even of its consummation. Even in Davis' essay we read after the first *rendez-vous* that "the unfortunate emperor's fondness"³⁷ continued to increase. In the translation there are two soliloquies in one of the palaces proving this assertion:

Prin. (Lady Zhaojun) – A long period has elapsed since I had to thank his Majesty for his choice. The Emperor's fondness for me is so great, that he has long

³³ Cf. Mayers, Nos. 314, 342 and 337. For 詩經 see James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 4, p. 561. Li Yannian wrote about his sister Li Furen 李夫人 that she was qing guo qing cheng 傾國傾城 overthrowing the states and cities and in *The Book of Poetry* it sounds as follows: 哲夫成城, 哲婦傾成 A wise man builds up the wall, / But a wise woman overthrows it.

³⁴ Zeyer, p. 93.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³⁶ *Loc. cit.*

³⁷ John Francis Davis, *Chinese Miscellanies: A Collection of Essays and Notes*, p. 98.

neglected to hold a court. I heard he is now gone to the hall of audience, and will therefore ornament myself at my toilet, and be adorned and prepared to wait on him at his return. (*Stands opposite to a mirror.*)

Enter Emperor.

Emp. – Since we first met with Chaoukeun, in the western palace, we have been as it were deranged and intoxicated: a long interval has elapsed since we held a court; and on entering the hall of audience this day, we waited not until the assembly had dispersed, but returned hither to obtain a sight of her. (*Perceiving the princess.*) Let us not alarm her, but observe in secret what she is doing. (*Comes close behind, and looks over her.*) “Reflected in that round mirror, she resembles the Lady in the Moon.”³⁸

In the original we find the words of the Emperor after naming Zhaojun the Imperial Concubine Mingfei, which are not translated by Davis:

And now we shall do what is done in the night 且尽此宵情
And not to ask what shall be tomorrow! 休問明朝話³⁹

Emperor's monologue is a different version of his dream from the end of the original play, very succinctly rendered by Davis, where only a few words are reproduced for the readers. In the dream depicted in the play, the Emperor meets late Zhaojun in a fleeting moment, which disappears after saying:

Sir, behold me again restored 階下,妾身來了也。⁴⁰

In the night before parting the Emperor dreamed about the boat with white sail and lonely girl upon it and white birds around. She sang a melancholic song and her voice was the voice of Zhaojun. White colour is in China the symbol of death.

Zhaojun answered to Emperor with her own dream which has nothing to do with drama under analysis. She dreamed about the boat floating over the dark lake with many trees on its banks and the birds singing their sad melodies around the trees-girls. One of them – a nightingale with his melancholic song moved about the tree and plucked a blue flower from its bough. She knew that the tree symbolized her and blue flower him – the Emperor. She suspected that their love will be

³⁸ *The Sorrows of Han*, p. 10.

³⁹ *Hangong qiu*, p. 1694.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1707 and *The Sorrows of Han*, p. 17.

fatal.⁴¹ Blue flower is in European romantic poetry a symbol of pure poetry and of poetic desires.⁴² Here it is a symbol of pure, romantic love.

Treachery, treachery, treachery, exclaimed Emperor Yuandi in Zeyer's story:

"Let them to snatch the heart out of my breast and to throw it in front of the hoofs of Tartar horses. I shall never give you up."⁴³

Treachery, treachery, treachery, exclaimed the Xiongnu Khan, in front of his hordes. He also unsheathed his huge sword:

"The words coming out of the mouths of Chinese Emperors are deceits and lies. Their promises are like puff. This one put a woman into my hands and now he wants to snatch her out of my authority. All to arms! All Chinese towns should be demolished. Open the coffins of the fathers of these liars, burn their temples, make ruins out of their palaces!"⁴⁴

Zhaojun put her hand on her future husband's sword and said:

"I shall go with you to wilderness, my Lord. I shall fulfil what Yuandi promised... Yuandi, your heart will not be thrown in front of the hoofs of wild horses. There was a man who himself tore his breast with a knife and when dying he embowelled his heart to cure his mother. His glory is praised by the people. Upon the doorstep of its temple I want to offer my heart... I shall die in the wilderness, but my tomb will be verdant forever."⁴⁵

Xiongnu Khan took Lady Zhaojun and "dragged her along"⁴⁶ to his horse. Yuandi plumped down upon his dragon throne and bemoaned:

"Death is bitter, but even bitter is not to live and not descend into the tomb. I am only a shadow without a sign of life. I love her and she is lost for me."⁴⁷

⁴¹ Zeyer, p. 101.

⁴² Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. In: *Heinrich von Ofterdingen und andere dichterische Schriften*. Koneman, Köln 1996.

⁴³ Zeyer, p. 102.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴⁵ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁴⁷ *Loc. cit.*

In the original version and in the translation Lady Zhaojun did not reach the border of Xiongnu territory and committed the suicide on the Chinese side of the river Amur. Julius Zeyer let her to transcend the border. According to him she yearned there after the dark forests, golden palaces and cosy herds of Chinese houses. She wept under the purple tent of her husband and her face withered away under the yellow clouds of flying sand. She could not forget her Love. Her only companions were the young girls who sat down on the slope of a green hillock singing there their sad songs.

Once in the early morning she observed a caravan of the camels coming from the south. In that very moment she identified their costumes and after a while the sounds of the dialect spoken in the Emperor's City. The girls in her suite rejoiced and Yuandi's envoy knelt down before the Khan and asked him to return Zhaojun back to his sovereign. He brought with him the presents equal to annual taxes of the rich country Čink-čeu (probably the town Quanzhou 泉州, alias Zaitun, famous for its sea trade in the Middle Ages).

Xiongnu Khan remained steadfast. The Chinese delegation should return to its land without success. It seems that Zhaojun did not want to return. Although she still loved him, more as a Christian woman than a Chinese wife, she was aware of being given by him to the Xiongnu ruler just as a thing never seen before. According to her, it was the treachery in the House of Han responsible for their fate and for her end. She even said: "Our fate was fulfilled and I do not want to see your face anymore."⁴⁸ She did not regard herself a whore who could change the "purple tent" for the "kiosk in the shadow of blossoming peaches".⁴⁹ Zeyer returned to the "garden of blossoming peaches" one year later,⁵⁰ and Zhaojun's girls brought back the white and cold dead body of their mistress to the purple tent.

After receiving the news about the death of the beloved concubine, the Emperor left his palaces, roamed through the forests, hoping to meet Zhaojun's shadow or to see her in his dreams.

Not far from the City he met an old poor and wise man, a kind of *shengren* 聖人 sage, and to him expressed his inner desire. The sage did not answer to his question about the possibility to see her shadow. When Yuandi told to him that she died and asked what death is, the old man answered in a low voice: "Death? Who disclosed her mysteries? The greatest among the sages of your people said, 'I do not understand life, how can I understand death?'"⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 108.

⁴⁹ Loc. cit.

⁵⁰ Zeyer's story *The Happiness in the Garden of Blossoming Peaches* appeared in 1882.

⁵¹ Confucius' words about life and death *Lunyu* 論語 *Confucian Analects* are as follows: 未知生，焉知死? While you do not know life, how can you know about death? (James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 1, p. 241.

According to Zeyer, not “verdant tomb” should be the place of Zhaojun's last place of repose, but a magnificent mausoleum in the valley among the high mountains over the rippling waves of the lake. The Emperor asked the Xiongnu Khan for the mortal remains of the late Zhaojun. Khan this time even more resolutely rejected his request. Deep grief was the cause of Yuandi's death.

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“She moulders here, in this tomb, in the middle of the wilderness,” ended the narrator his story. “Here, where the wind weeps over her and the Moon on her way along the firmament stops for a moment sobbing over the verdant tomb. Sweet dreams, you with death-beat heart!”⁵²

Julius Zeyer in his *Treachery in the House of Han* presents his vision of an angelic woman. Angelic women were not spread among the writers and artists of the 19th century. The Decadents often created horrid and morbid *femmes fatales* and *les belles dames sans merci*. Angelic women were the literary “descendants” of the Eternal Feminine from Goethe's *Faust*. Maybe that was the influence of his Catholic education and in the last years of his life his conversion to Catholicism once again, or in the 1880s, when his chinoiseries were written, the impact of Oriental literatures where he found some examples of ideal women, as Shulamite from the *Song of Songs*,⁵³ Azezeh from *The Thousand and One Nights*,⁵⁴ and the idealized woman poet Ono no Komachi that he delineated in the japonerie entitled *Přiseň za vlahé noci* (*A Balmy Night's Song*).⁵⁵ Angelic women we find in European Decadence, too, but it seems that mostly they were created later than two chinoiseries analyzed so far in this journal.⁵⁶

Beauty, Love and Death are put together here in a most ideal form. Lady Zhaojun waits patiently for the call of Fate. She complies where is the possibility to make a choice. Not hers, as a Chinese woman she was without possibility to follow her own desires. The melody of her lute brings her to the Emperor who falls in love and makes out of her one of his favourites. Very soon she is given as a “thing” to the Xiongnu Khan and becomes one of his wives.⁵⁷ Her dream brings her a message and the vision that her Fate will be fatal. In the symbol of the “blue flower” brought for the readers of the 19th century clear message, that pure Poetry

⁵² Zeyer, p. 112.

⁵³ Pavel Poucha, pp. 591-595.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 581-585.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 600-603 and Anthony V. Liman, “The Authenticity of Japanese Themes in Julius Zeyer's Work.” In: Karel Fiala (ed.), *The Japanese Traditional Thought and the Present*, Japan Center in Prague, Prague 1996, pp. 108-118.

⁵⁶ Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination 1880-1900*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1981, pp. 129-130 and 282-283.

⁵⁷ Zeyer, p. 107.

and Love are incompatible with ordinary Life and social reality. She remained in love with Yuandi, but she wanted be faithful to Huhanye. She did not want to return back, and accepted death.

No trace of *paradis artificielles* we find in Zeyer's story.⁵⁸ The dreams are one exception. The dreams presented in Zeyer's works were similar to that of Gustave Flaubert according to him the aim of art was "to depict not so much reality as mental images, dreams and hallucinations."⁵⁹ In one of his next works, concretely in the story *Happiness in the Garden of Blossoming Peaches*, Zeyer discovered the famous dream by the Taoist philosopher Zhuangzi 莊子 (3rd cent. B. C.) about dreaming that he was a butterfly, and also a poem by Li Bai about the awakening from the dream after drinking on a spring morning. At that time he became aware of an equation between life and dream.⁶⁰ Later in another story *Sen životem* (*Dream as a Life*), following the example of the Chinese writer of the Tang 唐 dynasty Shen Jiji 沈既濟 (fl. ca. 780), he wrote a story about a young man who dreamed a long dream of the whole of his life during some short moments even not so long as are required for the millet to be cooked.⁶¹

Zeyer was against artificial settings of Huysmansian or Wildean kind, against the rejection of nature. He would completely agree with Kant's idea *des Erhabenen* (the Sublime)⁶² and his descriptions of natural sceneries, especially mountains, steppes and even of sandy wilderness have its own grandeur.

Treachery in the House of Han starts with the following description of natural scenery of the imaginary desert:

"There was a yellow wilderness without an end on all sides. It was hot under the gleaming sun. From the great deposits of the sand a tomb planted by pines and pistachios was protruding like a verdant miracle."⁶³

Or at another place when Kutaju started to search for the ladies who could be selected for the "butterfly judgment":

"Deep stillness ruled over the country. Only the brooks gently rippled and the trees in the gardens murmured together with the languid cries of the birds. The sounds of *jong-lings* 鐘鈴 (?) – wind bells, which hanged at all corners and jumps of golden roofs, mixed themselves together with the increasing or decreasing whisper of the trees, wind and torrents."⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Cf. Jean Pierrot, op. cit., 166-190.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶⁰ Marián Gálik, op. cit., p. 301.

⁶¹ Julius Zeyer, *Večer u Idalie* (*An Evening at Idalia*). In: *The Collected Works. Vol. XIII*. "Unie", Praha 1903, pp. 312-358.

⁶² Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*. In: Robert Maynard Hutchins (Editor in Chief), *Great Books of the Western World. 42. Kant*. William Benton, Publisher, Chicago-London-Toronto 1952, pp. 495-511.

⁶³ Zeyer, p. 69.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 78.

We may observe that Zeyer could not resist the temptation of the elemental reveries, very typical for European Decadents. Once again we may quote, this time a long passage describing Kutaju on his walk through the imperial garden.

Kutaju “slowly took to his lips the small black agate flute. His fingers were pale but the sound of flute was strong. It pierced the air and interrupted the deep silence of the magic garden and of silent palace. The silence was broken. The doors leading to the galleries opened their gate-leaves incrustated by turquoises. Inside the palace it sounded as buzzing of the innumerable bees, or as twittering of the flying birds from far away. In a few moments on the galleries were possible to see many beautiful maidens similar to the white clouds. Slowly and gracefully they moved along the blossoming hydrangeas decorating the balustrades on the polished marble staircase. Rustling of their silky attires was like the rain falling among the trees. Its perfume was like that of bunches of flowers. The air was full of their white, fluttering veils. They descended to the garden now and were like the roses between the real roses or the flower beds between the real flower beds. It seemed that the spirits of the most exquisite flowers revealed themselves to the mortal eyes.

As in dream, or under magic of the vision, Kutaju likewise came up to the trees. He walked slowly and with long strides along the rows of the ladies of the palace. He walked slowly and with long strides along the rows of the ladies of the seraglio. When he reached the porphyrian bank of the lake, he again rose with his pale fingers black agate lute and its tones sounded in the heavy atmosphere of the expectation. In that very moment azure water of the lake began to move and small boats from surrounding islands left their stands under the boughs of the trees. Dark blue water foamed and rocked the pearl junks with the crimson silky sails. The whole lake, now stirring and wrinkled, was like a huge satin overcoat of sapphire colour interweaved with silver and set with precious stones. On every boat stood a woman slave, dressed in white folded costumes, with an oar in her hand and with black, flaunting hair. The junks were overweighed by the wreaths of bedewed flowers. They slowly approached the shore.”⁶⁵

Agate flute is one of the products of elemental reverie. Zeyer discovered it in the story from the collection *Marvellous Tales, New and Old* entitled “Mai you lang du zhan hua kui” 賣油郎獨佔花魁 “The Oil Vendor Who Alone Possessed the Flower Queen”, accessible for him in Náprstek Library in the book translated by Gustave Schlegel: *Le Vendeur d’huile qui seul possède la reine-de-beauté ou splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, Brill-Maisonnette, Paris 1877, p. XVI. Yaoqin 瑤琴 Agate Flute was another name of the courtesan Flower Queen of the story just mentioned.

The works by European Decadents were shimmering with gold, precious stones of most different kinds, exotic flowers, bushes, birds and extravagant colours. Gate-leaves incrustated by turquoises, overcoats of sapphire color interweaved with silver and set with precious stones, are the proofs of it. Crimson silky sails and

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 78-79.

pearl junks, azure water, porphyrian bank are only extension for this inebriation with things extravagant, rare, precious and exotic. And this all is to be found in the passage just quoted. The female slaves with black, flaunting hairs, well-known *houris* from *Koran* and from Arabian literature remind the critic of the *Thousand and One Nights*, the book Julius Zeyer owned in his library.⁶⁶

The same kind of description we may find also in Zeyer's portrait of Lady Zhaojun. She lived in a pavilion "with silky veils hanging between the blue columns, embraced by the silver serpents crowned by rubies. The wind played with veils, embroidered with gold and glittering with all colors of the rainbow. On the silver floor, enameled lizards glistened in the sunny rays. There was a girl fair as a lily."⁶⁷

Recreation of the famous legends was also typical for the European Decadents. Flaubert's *La Tentation de saint Antoine* from the year 1874 or *Salammbô* from the year 1877 were in his personal library and he probably knew Leconte de Lisle's *Poèmes antiques* and *Poèmes barbares*. The latter from the year 1862 exploited legends even from Oriental countries.⁶⁸ *Treachery in the House of Han* and *Srdce Pikangovo (Bigan's Heart)*⁶⁹ were the products of his imagination and creative talent and made on the basis of ancient Chinese sources.

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In the *Treachery of the House Han* as well as in the *Happiness in the Garden of Blossoming Peaches* Zeyer tried successfully to imitate, but also to develop the technique of the Chinese medieval storytellers. He even made a story from the drama in the case of the first. The genological metamorphose is nothing extraordinary in the interliterary process.

At the end of the story under analysis somehow both Chinese and Czech storyteller met together. The Chinese bard finished his narrative and the Czech writer recollected, among others, the words from Chang Jian's poem mentioned above:

"Thus spoke the bard. During his narrative the hot weather of the day passed, golden rays of the evening ruled over the step and the white stars began to rise over Zhaojun's tomb. They were reflected in the tears of those who rose from the ground left their country and set off for the journey. Many times the expellees looked behind after the tumulus under the trees. It disappeared in the evening mist. The wind blew up long ago their steps in the sand of the wilderness, but the storm of the ages will not blow up your name. Zhaojun, you unhappy daughter of China.

⁶⁶ Two different editions before 1881 are in Zeyer's library: *The Arabian Nights Entertainments Cinswisting of One Thousand and One Stories*, London 1827 and *Abdallah ou Le Trèfle à quatre feuilles. Contes des Mille et une Nuits*, Paris 1874.

⁶⁷ Zeyer, p. 82.

⁶⁸ Cf. Jean Pierrot, pp. 191-192.

⁶⁹ *The Collected Works of Julius Zeyer*. Vol. IX. "Unie", Praha 1903, pp. 157-172.

Even the enormous freight of gold and pearls carried by a hundred camels could not redeem you."⁷⁰

Chang Jian's line 萬里駝黃金 the freight of gold carried ten thousand miles, rendered by Marquis d' Hervey Saint-Denys as "cent chameaux chargés d'or" (a hundred camels loaded with gold) in the poem, or "a dix mille li, chameaux chargés d'or" (ten thousand miles the camels loaded with gold) in the commentary,⁷¹ was used by Zeyer to some extent, even due to the French translator. Zeyer changed also the meaning of the original poem, when he wrote about the "long rows of camels" coming to the Khan's silky tents.⁷² The pilgrims to Lady Zhaojun's "verdant tomb" were not expellees, as has been pointed out long ago also by Pavel Poucha.⁷³ They were Zhaojun's admirers. On the other hand Zeyer highlighted Zhaojun's beauty as depicted in Li Bai's poem. According to one of the greatest Chinese poets Li Bai, Lady Zhaojun was more beautiful than all Xiongnu girls: 胡中無花可方比 il en est auxquelles nulle fleur de Tartarie ne saurait se comparer (there was no flower in Tartary to compare with her) in the translation d'Hervey Saint-Denys.⁷⁴ Zeyer did not pay any attention to Wu Yan 無鹽, a repulsive woman who in the age of forty was not able to find a husband. Because of her mental qualities, she became wife of Qi Xuanwang 齊宣王 Prince Xuan of Qi in B.C. 342. Zeyer could read it in Mayers' *Manual*, No. 877.

Renditions. A Chinese-English Translation Magazine, Nos. 59 & 60 (2003) undertitled *The Faces of a Chinese Beauty: Wang Zhaojun*. Eva Hung, the editor of this meritorious commemorative double issue, selected 56 Chinese poets, short story writers, essayists and dramatists from the 3rd cent. B.C. up to the 1970s. Ma Zhiyuan is also among them, not with his play, but with one of his poems.⁷⁵ Interest for Wang Zhaojun did not end after 1970s.⁷⁶ Her allegedly "native village" in 柘臼 Zigui District, originally in 四川 Sichuan Province, was submerged after the 三峽 Three Gorges Dam was completed. But with the end of the tourist attraction there, there will be no end of interest for this woman in Chinese literature and art. In the story by Julius Zeyer she entered into European literature.

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⁷⁰ Zeyer, p. 112.

⁷¹ Marquis d' Hervey Saint-Denys, p. 213.

⁷² Zeyer, p. 105.

⁷³ Pavel Poucha, pp. 616-617.

⁷⁴ Marquis d' Hervey Saint-Denys, p. 53.

⁷⁵ Ma Zhiyuan (David E. Pollard trans.), *Zizhi lu 紫芝路 To the Tune "Purple Fungus Route"*, p. 82.

⁷⁶ Eva Hung, "From History to Legend." *Renditions*, 59 & 60, 2003, p. 26.