

of ritual and a related interpretation of the *Analects*” (p. xiii) is singled out for critical redressing, focusing on his account of ritual as handshaking. “His account of an essential connection in the *Analects* between ritual and mutual respect is not borne out by the text” (p. 221). In particular, Fingarette is criticized for ascribing to Confucius “a theory about our *nature* as human beings” (p. 233), when in fact, according to Peterman, Confucius “makes no substantive claims about human nature” (p. 234)—despite evidence to the contrary in 17.2/3 (see also 16.9). Drawing on the work of Erving Goffman, chapter 9 aims to throw light on how contemporary Western forms of ritual can help clarify the role of ritual in our everyday lives.

This volume is often intellectually engaging and original in approach but the sustained and extensive misrepresentation of the published views of Daniel Gardner and myself throws a pall over the scholarly integrity of the work as a whole. The author’s proclivity for denunciation also sits uncomfortably with his professed advocacy of Wittgenstein’s principle of charity.

JOHN MAKEHAM

The Australian National University

The Metamorphosis of Tianxian pei: Local Opera under the Revolution (1949–1956). By Wilt L. Idema. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2015. Pp. x + 344. \$52.00.

Wilt Idema presents this book as a sequel to his earlier one on stories about Dong Yong 董永,¹ a filial son who sells himself in order to be able to bury his father and who is helped out by and marries Seventh Sister, daughter of the Jade Emperor (“Preface,” pp. vii–viii); and as a return to an early focus of interest in his long sinological career (“Acknowledgments,” p. x). The most famous version of the story is the 1956 “blockbuster” Huangmei 黃梅 opera film, *Tianxian pei* 天仙配 (Married to an Immortal), which was based on the newly-revised stage versions of 1953–1955 of the same name. In this book, Idema presents translations from pre-revised Huangmei opera play scripts of the story (Chapter 3; the translation of a version produced by collating two different woodblock printings is supplemented by additional scenes found in a play script produced by dictation by an old actor that do not seem to have

¹ *Filial Piety and Its Divine Rewards: The Legend of Dong Yong and Weaving Maiden with Related Texts* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2009).

been modified in the light of the collated version), a complete translation of the revised version of the play published in 1955 (Chapter 4), a full discussion of the revisions of the play and the production of the film (Chapters 1 and 2),² and a final, lengthy chapter full of translations of Chinese material on the play and film, most of which date to the 1950s, but some of which constitute reminiscences about the production of the revised play and/or the film that were published later. The reader who purchases this book ends up with a quite fat “case-book” on a very influential film and the play it was based on.³

Idema justifies the project that produced the book by claiming that there are a lot of resources available,⁴ the revision of the play involved a “complete rethinking” of the material; and the details of the revision of the play and the production of the film “inform us, in great detail,” of “many of the issues involved in the refashioning of local opera . . . in the early years of the People’s Republic” (“Preface,” p. vii). He speaks of the material as “a unique window” on “the cultural history of China in the twentieth century” (“Preface,” p. vii) and on “the history of Chinese theater and cinema in the early years of the PRC” (“Introduction,” p. 2). He relates that he was surprised at how little attention the material has received in Western scholarship on China, despite the popularity of the film (which ushered in a craze for films that used Huangmei opera music),⁵ and the availability of the material (Idema makes clear that he made no attempt to track down people involved in the productions surveyed in the book or use local archives; the only resource he regrets not having access to is Sang Hu’s original film script [“Preface,” p. viii]).

One of the chapters that does not present translations (i.e., Chapter 2) does end with a short (three-page) conclusion, but the book itself does not end with a conclusion and it is likely that most readers will not come away from the book with the idea that it presents any particular argument about either the particular material

² A reader might perhaps have expected such a volume to also include a translation of the film. While it is true that the original film script does not seem to have been preserved (see below), I don’t think it would have been too difficult to provide a translation of the dialogue supplemented with enough description of settings and character movement to produce a written version of the film for readers of the book. This would have greatly facilitated comparison between the revised play versions and the film.

³ While it is convenient to speak of the play as having reached a fixed form in 1954 and forming the basis for the film, as Idema makes abundantly clear, the play continued to be revised after the film came out (pp.18, 62–65).

⁴ The one resource that Idema specifically expresses regret over not having access to is Sang Hu’s 桑弧 (1916–2004) script for the movie (“Preface,” p. viii).

⁵ Claiming not to be competent in the subject, Idema carefully points out that the project does not cover the musical elements of the plays and film (“Preface,” p. viii).

that the book focuses on or on the enormous project of the reform of Chinese theatre (*xigai* 戲改) in the first decade of the PRC in general. Looking at the process of the revision of the Dong Yong story, perhaps most striking is the transformation of Dong Yong from a poor student to a poor “peasant,” and Seventh Sister from an obedient daughter sent by her father to help Dong Yong to a woman brave enough to reject the false pleasures of heaven (portrayed as a kind of dungeon) in favour of the marriage object of her choice. The wealthy Fu 傅 family whom Dong Yong sells himself to are made to show their true “class character” (a clear line is always drawn between Dong Yong and the Fuses in the revised material, whereas in earlier versions of the story the patriarch of the family treats Dong Yong well and even adopts him). The familiar debate over what constitutes “superstition” (bad) versus “myth” (good; Idema prefers to translate *shenhua* 神話 as “fairy tale” rather than “myth,” the more common choice in writings about this debate in English) is prominent in the revision process of the Dong Yong story in the first decade of the PRC and its various products, which try to achieve a balance between the contemporary demand for “realism” in the arts and the basically unrealistic subject matter of the story. Finally, the happy ending found in some pre-revision versions of the story is rejected in the PRC ones: Dong Yong and Seventh Sister end up separated from each other at the end of the revised play versions and the film (in essence, Seventh Sister is recalled to her “prison”; to do otherwise would imperil her chosen husband, the mortal and vulnerable Dong Yong).

Some readers will regret the lack of a final conclusion to the volume, others would have liked a fuller treatment of the film version (Idema is a scholar primarily of texts; he has not written much on film in the past and was perhaps not fully comfortable working on this film). But this should not obscure the fact that in this volume Idema has conveniently made available in English a large quantity of primary and secondary sources on the fate of this story in the early years of the PRC, and has very efficiently narrated the history of their production. The book is well-produced⁶ and can be recommended to all who are interested either in different treatments of the story of Dong Yong or the larger question of how traditional material was revised for contemporary use in the early decades of the PRC.

DAVID L. ROLSTON
University of Michigan

⁶ This reviewer found very few errors in the book. Perhaps the biggest complaint that could be made is that the production editor seems unfamiliar with the convention of using hanging indent when a line of an aria or poem “wraps” to the next line because of its length.