More Early Chinese Theatre

The Song Dynasty, The Yuan Dynasty, The Ming Dynasty
The Song Dynasty (960-1279) preceded the coming of the Mongols

- court entertainments leading to variety plays
- traveling theatrical troupes
- permanent playhouses
- other theatrical activities - dance, acrobatics, actors, singers, shadow puppets, marionettes
- low comedy - a form possibly similar to vaudeville
Nanxi (early 12th century)

* southern drama
* a form developed in the province of Zhejiang
* 4 types of characters
  * 1- the sheng- male character
  * 2- the dan- female character
  * 3- the jing- painted face
  * 4- chou- the clown
* staples of Chinese Theatre in subsequent work
Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368)

Synthesizing art and popular tradition-dramas of the Yuan Period

* Marco Polo the Italian explorer wrote about China during this period.

* The ruler at the time was a Mongol- Kubla Khan- the grandson of Ghengis Khan
Zaju (northern Song Dynasty)

* The drama of The Yuan period – referred to as “zaju”

* four acts – or four song sequences

* playwrights composed the text to fit the music rhythms and meters of popular music
Zaju

* the protagonist sang all the music in any act (sequence)
* poetic content
* lyrical nature
* few characters
* avoided subplots/complications
* over 500 playwrights/dramatists practiced during this period
* over 700 play titles are known – 168 survive
Wang Shifu (late 13th century)

- *The Romance of the Western Chamber* (cycle of plays that chronicle the trials of two lovers)

- *The Orphan of Chao* — a version translated into French in 1735 and adapted for the stage by Voltaire

- *The Circle of Chalk* — a lawsuit and trial genre— a judge frees an innocent person accused of a crime— Bertolt Brecht wrote an adaptation of it with *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

- Little is know about how plays were performed

- Contemporary spectators.. left few records or descriptions of the performances
Professional actors and actresses performed both played male and female parts
organized into troupes and run by women
the stages — bare with two doors on each side
the rear — a painted cloth hanging between the doors-
stages built for outdoor use.. not necessarily with a roof (over stage and audience)
curtains, swords, fans were used
elaborate costumes- similar to what is used in Beijing Opera (Peking Opera)
highly stylized (heavily applied) makeup
The Ming Dynasty
(1368-1644)

- Theatre more ornate
- Created for the elite
- Mongols overthrown
- Chinese emperor restored
The Ming Dynasty
(1368-1644)

- Theatre even more “literary” poetic..
- Sustained dramatic action
- More complex plots
- Several actors sing in the Ming plays
The Lute Song by Gao Ming (c. 1301-1370)

- questions of family loyalty in a woman whose husband leaves her for political reasons
- A contemporary musical-theatre version/adaptation appeared on Broadway 1946 written by Mary Martin
Li Yu (1611-c. -1685 C.E.)

* a scholar turned playwright
* He had 40 wives and concubines-
* both a playwright, performer, and dramatic critic-
* Created situation comedies
* Created original plots about ordinary people
* Wrote strong “parts” for female characters