

KII-MING LO

ELEMENTS OF EAST ASIAN MUSIC AS EXOTICISM  
IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY EUROPEAN OPERA:  
THE CASE OF ISANG YUN

Ich arbeitete mit westlicher Technik, aber dahinter stand immer  
die ostasiatische Klangvorstellung.

ISANG YUN \*

Born in 1917 in Tongyong (now Chung Mu, South Korea), Isang Yun went to Paris in 1956 in order to study composition and spent the rest of his life in Europe, mainly in Berlin, where he taught as a professor of composition at the Hochschule der Künste and where he died in 1995. In the 1960s Isang Yun won the attention of the public of international avant-garde festivals with instrumental compositions such as *Loyang* (1962), *Gasa* (1963), *Garak* (1963), as with his cantata *Om mani padme bum* (1964). During the years between 1965 and 1972, four operas by Isang Yun were premiered in (Western) Germany: *Der Traum des Liu-Tung* (Akademie der Künste Berlin, 1965), *Die Witwe des Schmetterlings* (Nuremberg Opera, 1969), *Geisterliebe* (Kiel Opera, 1971) and *Sim Tjong* (Bavarian State Opera Munich, 1972). The subjects of the first three operas were derived from German translations of classical Chinese literature, while *Sim Tjong* is based on the famous Korean folk tale «Sim Tjong»<sup>1</sup>. After the world première of *Sim Tjong* Isang Yun, although highly productive until his last years, did not write any further opera. Instead, his creative energy went into the composition of a large amount of instrumental music, comprising five symphonies<sup>2</sup>, which have won world-

\* In L. RINSER and ISANG YUN, *Der verwundete Drache. Dialog über Leben und Werk des Komponisten*, S. Fischer, Frankfurt 1977, p. 85.

<sup>1</sup> For recent research on the subjects of Isang Yun's four operas cf. KII-MING LO, *Die ostasiatischen Quellen von Isang Yuns Opernlibretti*, in W.-W. SPARRER (ed.), *Ssi-ol. Almanach 2002/2003 der Internationalen Isang Yun Gesellschaft e. V.*, Berlin 2004, pp. 89-112.

<sup>2</sup> About the five symphonies cf. I. STEPHAN, *Isang Yun, Die fünf Symphonien. Eine hermeneutische Rekonstruktion*, series Musik-Konzepte, text + kritik, vol. 109-110, München 2000.