THE COSTUMER IS THE BOSS.

Behind the Scenes Upon a Chinese Stage Harmonious Companies.

With the exception of those of the one or two stars, all the costumes of a Chinese theatrical troupe belong to a stock company of speculators. The actors pay for the use of them, usually giving up a certain percentage of their fees. The stars having their own costumes can make their own terms. The stars of the "Swintien Loh" company that recently played in New York got a certain share of the gross receipts, as well as a salary, as follows:

Moo Sung Jee, $100 per month and 15 per cent. of gross receipts; Taka Wing, $75 per month and 7 per cent. of gross receipts; Sean Sung Hong, $50 per month and 3 per cent. of gross receipts. The balance of the company got only their salaries of on an average $55 per month and board.

The real boss of the troupe is the property man, the one that owns or manages the costumes. He hires his agents and sub-managers, and is responsible to the stock company in all his transactions. This individual is usually in the dark. During the entire two weeks' performance at the Windsor, although the boss was in the city, he did not show himself among the actors except once or twice, when he stole quietly into the theatre and took a seat in a rear corner of a box. This mysterious individual was Li On. It is said that his company had invested nearly $100,000 to organize the Swintien Loh dramatic company. There is no doubt the costumes cost a big sum of money, as every piece of the gorgeous costumes was intricately hand wrought work and bore the closest inspection of artists.

A long row of big fireproof boxes, each weighing probably about 200 pounds, lined against the back wall, stood convenient for the different articles of dress to be pulled out by the three attendants; there are two rows of temporarily put up clothes racks on either end of the room, upon which are hung the costumes to be used by the next batch of actors; immediately above these are the nails for the various and fantastical headgear and false whiskers and masks. Each actor as he comes in from the stage takes off his "togs," folds them up carefully, and lays them upon a separate stand, to be put back into the box by the care taker.

Chinese actors don't waste much time in dressing, as all the garments are made in such a manner that the most fastidious actor could be rigged up from head to foot in less than five minutes. Only the female impersonator, Mr. Taka Wing, takes a longer time, and that's because of his hair and the outlandish painting of the face. Even he does not take more than twenty minutes. There is nothing like "stage fright" or "nervousness" among Chinese actors, at least in the Swintien Loh company. They go from behind the scenes to the stage in some of their most trying parts as unconcernedly as if they were going to play fantan.

The only individuals that take their tasks to heart are the supes, or those fellows that usually act as pages or soldiers to the gladiators. They generally go through the motions just before they get out on the stage. All Chinese actors are drilled from early childhood. Chinese actors have the best of harmony among themselves. There is hardly ever a scandal or an elopement. They may be jealous of each other as to women outside of their own circle, or as to the relative slickness and brightness of the opium pipes which each actor owns, but jealousy of members of their own company is out of the question. Mr. Taka Wing is the only pretty girl among them. Even she is nine-tenths of the time a pure and unadulterated man like the rest of the company. So there is no chance of a theatrical scandal. They can truly be said to be the only happy troupe in America.
—Wong Chin Foo.