

The Good Person of Szechwan

Texts and authors

The setting of the play has been spelt variously in translations: the town/province of Szechwan/Szechuan/Sichuan/Setzuan

The title in German is *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, which is ambivalent about the gender of the protagonist: *Mensch* meaning a person rather than a specific gender

An influential English translation rendered *Mensch* as *Woman*. This was by Eric and Maya Bentley (1948), and although it had premièred at Hamline University, St Paul, USA, the most significant production is the one that took place at the Royal Court Theatre in 1956, directed by George Devine.

The Good Person of Szechwan was written between 1938 and 1942

First performed in the Zürich Schauspielhaus on 4 February 1943.

Brecht's collaborators in the writing of the play were Ruth Berlau and Margarete Steffin
Music composed by Paul Dessau, although Brecht had also planned incidental music with Kurt Weill.

This text, which is the form in which the play has gained widest acceptance, comprises ten scenes, a prologue, short interludes and a verse epilogue delivered by one of the actors.

The title of an early version of the play, *Die Ware Liebe*, sketched out around 1930, is an aural pun. In German, the words *wahre* and *Ware* sound very similar. *Wahre* means true, and *Ware* means merchandise. So what we have is a tension between a play called *True Love* and a play called *The Merchandise is Love*. This gives us a hint of the complexities of theme that Brecht had set out to tackle in this play.