



中国戏曲海外传播工程丛书

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# Du Shiniang

- A Beijing Opera

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Translation,  
Introduction and Annotations  
by Gao Xiongya (高雄亚)

京剧——杜十娘



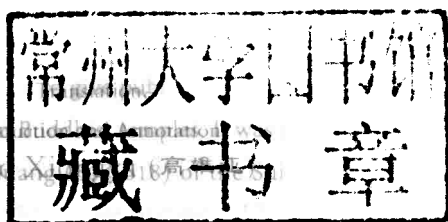
The Project for Disseminating Chinese Operatic Dramas Overseas  
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中国戏曲海外传播工程丛书

京剧 一 杜十娘

Du Shiniang

- A Beijing Opera



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## Preface to the Project

There are two Chinese terms that describe the dramatic performance on the stage in China: *xiju* and *xiqu*. The former is equivalent to the dramas in the West while the latter, frequently referred to as the Chinese national operas or Chinese local operas, is a native Chinese invention. *Xiju*, an imported art form from the Western literature, was introduced into China during the second half of the 19th century. *Xiqu*, on the other hand, has a much longer history.

As one of the three ancient dramatic forms in the world, Chinese national operas, together with ancient Greek tragedy and ancient Indian drama, have a long history of over two thousand years. It can be traced back to three types of primitive entertainment in China: exorcising dance, storytelling and ballad singing and comic dialogues. As early as the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE), an art form began to emerge with all the three types of entertainment combined to give public shows, sometimes in the royal palaces and sometimes in Buddhist temples. It was recorded during the reign of Emperor Yang Guang (604-618) of the Sui Dynasty (581-618) that performers all over China were summoned by the emperor to provide entertainment from January 1st to 15th annually according to the Chinese lunar calendar. To prepare for the performance, stages were erected and lined up, stretching sometimes as long as four kilometers outside the imperial palace, a scene with a scale and grandeur that can hardly be imagined even in the 21st century. Gradually, other elements were added to the art form, encompassing acrobatics, martial arts, dancing, puppet shows and leather-silhouette shows. It was not until the 13th century that the prototype of Chinese national operas finally began to take shape. Right now, there are as many as three hundred different types of Chinese national operas active on the Chinese stage, attracting

millions of theater-goers, both men and women, old and young. *Xiqu* is definitely one of the crown jewels in Chinese culture.

The idea of introducing Chinese *xiqu* to the audience outside China has been brewing in my mind for quite some time, commencing in the mid-1980s when I was working on my Ph.D. dissertation in the United States. Since my dissertation, with the title of *Shakespeare Through Chinese Eyes*, is a comparative study of Shakespeare scholarship in China with that in the West, I reviewed more than three hundred introductory and critical essays of Shakespeare written by the Chinese scholars in the course of eighty years. While browsing these scholarly works, I suddenly felt an irresistible urge to introduce Chinese theatrical dramas to the audience of the West by translating and publishing a collection of *xiqu* in the United States. However, my first attempt was not successful since my proposal was declined by some American publishers on the ground that such a book would be too scholarly to attract local readers. I only managed to have a part of my first chapter published in *Shakespeare Quarterly* as the leading essay in the Summer issue of the journal in 1986 with a note from the editor. But my initial idea has never wavered as I firmly believe that there is definitely an interest in the West in this area and I will wait for the “right time” to offer the “right” contents in a “right” way for the “right” audience.

Now, the moment I have been waiting for has finally come. After two years of preparation, “The Project for Disseminating Chinese Operatic Dramas Overseas” was eventually launched in October 2008 at Renmin University of China. The Project, which I am in charge of, is joined by a dozen of scholars who are proficient in both Chinese and English languages to work under my direct supervision. With the secured funding, the participation of the well-established scholars and the guaranteed publisher, I am enabled to expand my initial plan of simply

translating a score of Chinese dramas into a more ambitious project with the following characteristics.

First, each drama is introduced as a book-length work. Instead of a simple translation project, the rendition of the opera script only takes up a small fraction, one third or one fourth, of the book. The focus of the book is on the cultural elements embodied in this particular form of the opera, which include but are not limited to narrative and dramatic sources of the opera, the authorship of the literary work, the dissemination of the literary work, the theatrical performance, the historical evolution of the opera and its various characteristics, stage practice and cultural interpretation of the story or the legend. In other words, the translated drama serves as a springboard of introducing Chinese culture. To achieve this goal, efforts have been made by a team of researchers to prepare sufficient raw materials for each perspective writer/translator before he or she embarks on a book.

Second, I make sure that each play script chosen for the book is of the authoritative version. The authorship of a Chinese operatic drama is quite different from that of a Western opera. In the West, the authorship has been a non-issue. The fact that *La Traviata* was composed by Verdi or *La Bohème* by Puccini has never been put to question. In China, however, it is often the case that both the libretto and the music of an opera were composed by an anonymous author, and subsequent performers are free to adapt the original version into a new one. For most of the theatergoers in China, they come to the theater not to watch the gradual unfolding of the plot or the theatrical conflict of the drama; rather they are only interested in the performance of the leading actor or actress. A particular drama becomes famous due, in most part, to the particular performing style of a leading opera singer. As a result, one opera may end up, in the course of its evolution, with various versions with different

librettos, different performing styles and different musical tunes. To present the most authoritative version of an opera, we have selected the script written by the well-known literati and the drama performed by the most prestigious actors and actresses. The selection is made by the distinguished scholars and specialists in the field of Chinese national operas.

Finally, we have designed the Project for what both Samuel Johnson and Virginia Woolf called “the common reader.” Our targeted audience is the general public outside China, people who have a genuine interest in the Chinese culture. It is a prerequisite for all the authors to increase their “audience awareness,” a catch phrase in the US college writing class, which emphasizes the analysis of audience in terms of how much information is necessary to get one’s message across. Specially, authors are required to select the materials that appeal to the targeted audience and present them in a way that can be easily understood by the people who have no prior knowledge of Chinese national operas and culture. As a result, instead of a simple translation of the opera script, each work of the Project is a creative writing loaded with background information and explanation to help “the common reader” to better understand and appreciate the opera introduced in the book.

It is our intention that our readers will find the works intelligible, interesting and entertaining. I also hope that the Project offers a clearer sense of the cultural elements embodied in the selected Chinese national operas and stimulates the readers’ greater interest in Chinese national operas and Chinese culture.

He Qixin

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## Chapter I

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### Origins of the Story and the Script

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The Beijing opera (京剧), *Du Shiniang* (《杜十娘》), is adapted from the famous Chinese novel, *Du Shiniang Angrily Sinks the Jewel Box* (*Du Shiniang Nu Chen Bai Bao Xiang* 《杜十娘怒沉百宝箱》), by Feng Menglong (冯

梦龙, 1574-1646), a Ming Dynasty novelist. According to research, Feng Menglong based his novel on *Story of Betrayal* (*Fu Qing Nong Zhuan* 《负情侬传》), written by his contemporary writer Song Maocheng (宋懋澄, 1570-1622). The artistic achievement of this novel represents the apex of short story art in ancient China.

The story of *Du Shiniang* is set during the period of Emperor Wanli in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). It is based on a true story, and caused a great societal stir at the time. There existed a real woman by the name of *Du Shiniang* who, heartbroken over a lover who betrayed her for money, was believed to have actually thrown her valuable jewelry into a river and killed herself by jumping into the river. The scholar, Song Maocheng, heard of this incident from a friend and was the first to base a story on it in *Story of Betrayal*, which was included in Volume Five of his *Nine Yue Collection* (《九籥集》). However, because of stylistic and social limitations, *Story of Betrayal* was not widely read until the late Ming Dynasty, when Feng Menglong adapted and modified it into *Du Shiniang Angrily Sinks the Jewel Box*. Following this modification, Feng Menglong's work became one of the most popular novels of his time. It became the leader of the vernacular novels and was later widely spread.

The novel tells the story of the famous courtesan, *Du Shiniang*, who bought herself out of a brothel to seek true love with a student named Li

Jia (Li Ganxian in the opera). Unfortunately, Li Jia was a selfish person with a very weak disposition. Even though he loved Du Shiniang, he was tempted by a local scoundrel, Sun Fu, who tricked Li Jia into selling him his love, Du Shiniang. In a furious and broken-hearted rage, Du Shiniang flung her treasure box into the river and committed suicide. Gradually this story was reproduced and adapted by other writers. Feng Menglong's version of the story has been widely circulated, elaborated on, and adapted into many other art forms, such as Beijing opera, Sichuan opera (川剧), Shaoxing opera (越剧), and Ping opera (评剧). In modern times, it has been repeatedly brought to the film screen.

*Du Shiniang* in Beijing opera is the basic repertoire of the Xun art style. It was first adapted by Mr. Feng Zihe (冯子和, also named Chunhang) and performed on stage by Mr. Feng Zihe and Mr. Sun Juxian (孙菊仙). The Southern Society poet, Lin Baiju (林百举), wrote the following preface for *Song of Du Shiniang* (《杜十娘曲》) to describe the show: "I have been in Shanghai for more than a month and heard that Feng Chunhang's *Du Shiniang* opera has been performed three times; however, I avoided watching it. Feng Chunhang's acting displays such raw grief that every performance brings the audience to tears. As for me, I've always enjoyed reading, and every time I read *Du Shiniang*, I shed tears; therefore, I could not bear to go to the theater and hear those sad words spoken in real life. Yet, because I will return to Guangdong soon, I had to force myself to finally go see the opera's fourth performance. I wept in grief while watching" (quoted in Zhang 1). Mr. Feng Zihe's adaption of the novel to the Beijing opera, *Du Shiniang*, was very successful, as the opera was exquisitely performed, deeply touching, and tremendously impressive.

In the late 19th century, one of the four play writers of the Republic of China, Chen Moxiang (陈墨香), revised and adapted the play script

for the famous Beijing opera actor, Xun Huisheng (荀慧生). According to Xun Huisheng, “More than 30 years ago, the Beijing opera veteran Sun Juxian (nicknamed Old Folk) and I (Xun Huisheng) had a very close friendship. It was Mr. Sun who presented me the script of *Du Shiniang*. He believed that the play was significant in condemning the evil and encouraging the good, and was also in accord with the style of my performance. Therefore he urged me to perform it. I loved the idea and was eager to do it. However, even though the plot was good, the structure of the opera was loose, with too many interludes and a lack of focus. So, immediately, we revised it based on *Du Shiniang Angrily Sinks the Jewel Box* in *Jing Shi Tong Yan* (《警世通言》) and debuted in Beijing Zhonghe Theater on November 29, 1929. I played Du Shiniang, Jin Zhongren played Li Ganxian, Ma Fulu played Sun Fu, and Zhang Chunyan played Liu Yuchun.

“After the liberation in 1949, I again rearranged and revised the script that had been performed for decades. I believed that the opera was a little too skeletal on the treatment of the characters of Li Ganxian and Sun Fu by simply attacking their shameless greed. I highlighted their malice by placing them in the context of ancient China’s feudal system as a whole, bringing to light the darkness and evil of the old society so that the audience would be grateful for the new society in which we lived. The newly adapted script was revealed in Beijing Jixiang Theater in 1961, with Xu Hecai as Li Ganxian, Zhu Binxian as Sun Fu, and Chen Xixing as Liu Yuchun. Small amendments were made in subsequent performances. Before this printing, the script had been edited again.” Among the actors who played in this opera were Jin Yuemei, Jia Biyun, and Sun Yumei.

In the late 1920s, the famous playwright Zou Yiqing (邹忆青) and Dai Yinglu (戴英禄) created the play, *Morning Bells Awaken the Dream* (*Chen Zhong Jing Meng* 《晨钟惊梦》), based on the plot of “Sinking the

Treasure Box on the Returning Boat” (*Gui Zhou Nu Chen* 归舟怒沉). In 2000, *Du Shiniang* was created based on this plot, and enjoyed huge success and critical acclaim in the “Third Opera Festival” of Nanjing in 2001.

Through a longitudinal study, we can see that the origins of Du Shiniang’s story have developed from the original classical Chinese novels into popular fiction, from the legends of Ming and Qing dynasties to modern operas, while a horizontal comparison shows Du Shiniang’s story represented in various forms of literature and art including opera, film, television, and even music. Many researchers have studied and analyzed *Du Shiniang* from different angles. Among these studies, Mr. Zhang Zhong’s “On Du Shiniang” (1994, 3rd Issue of *The Novels of Ming and Qing Dynasties*) explores the phenomenal longevity of the story and discusses the possibility of Du Shiniang’s tale as a tragedy, from the perspectives of the three main characters: Du shiniang, Li Jia, and Sun Fu. He points out that every character has a unique personality and life circumstance. Xu Xuping and Li Yali’s “The Evolution and Significance of the Image of Du Shiniang” (2005, 2nd Issue of Wenshan Normal College School Newspaper) compares Song Maocheng’s *Story of Betrayal* with Feng Menglong’s *Du Shiniang Angrily Sinks the Jewel Box*. Adopting the perspective of sociology, which takes into consideration the social background of the late Ming Dynasty and the then scholars’ state of existence and mentality, it explores the causes of the tragedy of Du Shiniang as having roots in the era’s political and socioeconomic absolutism.

## **1. Song Maocheng and *Story of Betrayal***

The version of Du Shiniang’s story that had far-reaching influence and was widely circulated is “*Du Shiniang Angrily Sinks the Jewel Box*”

which is in Volume 32 of *Jing Shi Tong Yan*, the vernacular short story series of Feng Menglong, and also *Du Shiniang* in Volume 14 of *Brief History of Love Affairs* (《情史类略》) by Jiangnan Zhan Zhan Waishi (Some say that Zhan Zhan Waishi was also Feng Menglong). However, according to Mr. Hu Shiyong's (胡士莹) *Introduction to the Vernacular Novel* (《话本小说概论》), "At the end of *Du Shiniang* in Volume 14 of *Brief History of Love Affairs*, it mentions: 'A Zhejiang person wrote *Story of Betrayal*.'" Here, the "Zhejiang person" is actually the Ming Dynasty literatus, Song Maocheng. Feng Menglong's *Du Shiniang Angrily Sinks the Jewel Box* comes from Song Maocheng's *Story of Betrayal* in Volume Five of his *Nine Yue Collection*.

Song Maocheng wrote *Story of Betrayal*, which became the blueprint of Feng Menglong's *Du Shiniang Angrily Sinks the Jewel Box*. It is based on social sensationalisms of the time and is a careful creation of artistic design and processing. As the first written version of *Du Shiniang*'s tale, *Story of Betrayal* undoubtedly is the most valuable, for it laid the foundation for future stories based on *Du Shiniang*, set its tragic tone, and left enough space for artistic modification.

However, as a writer of the late Ming Dynasty, Song Maocheng received far less attention than his contemporaries. His *Nine Yue Collection* was discovered only in modern times, when his name as a literatus was mentioned in a few history books of literature. Song Maocheng (also named Youqing), was born in Huating (now Songjiang, Shanghai). He passed the provincial examination in the 40th year of Wanli (1612), but failed to earn the title of *jinshi* (进士) in the imperial examination three times, so he remained a commoner for life. In his early years, he "loved outing, imitated the style of ancient martyrs, studied war craft in private, spread wealth to take live-in friends in his residence, and wished to build a name in the world." After the age of 30,

he traveled to northern China to Beijing, and studied literature modestly with an open mind. He liked to discuss current issues and political affairs, but was ostracized and shunned for his beliefs. Thus, he returned to his hometown, and wrote poetry and classical Chinese novels. He was diligent in his works and published *Nine Yue Collection* and *Nine Yue Anthology* (《九籀别集》), in which *Story of Betrayal* and *Bead Shirt* (Zhu Shan 《珠衫》), among others, are well known with prototype significance in the history of novels and dramas in Ming and Qing (1616-1911) dynasties. He was a very influential classical Chinese novelist in the late Ming Dynasty, but because of his “extreme ideas” related to social reality shown in many of his works, his *Nine Yue Collection* was banned after the mid-Qing Dynasty. There was never a printed edition of the *Nine Yue Collection*. The current print was edited by Wang Liqi from a hand-copied version in his private collection, and published by the China Social Sciences Press.

The full text of *Story of Betrayal* is about 2,100 words, set in the years of Emperor Wanli, in a village in eastern Zhejiang. A military governor’s son, Li Sheng (Li Jia) went to visit Beijing and fell in love with the famous courtesan Du Shiniang during his visit. Eventually, Li Sheng squandered away all his money on brothels, and the brothel’s owner, Bao Er<sup>1</sup>, became fed up with him. Du Shiniang, however, innocently thought that Li Sheng was trustworthy, and became determined to gather enough money to allow Li Sheng to buy her freedom from the brothel. Upon leaving the brothel, Du Shiniang’s friends, the brothel sisters, gave her parting gifts of expensive jewels, which is the foreshadowing for the treasure box that later Du Shiniang sank into the river. Then, Du Shiniang and her lover, Li Sheng, boarded a boat heading for Li Sheng’s hometown. Halfway into their journey, their boat ride was delayed by bad weather. During their layover that night at Guazhou, the couple met a salt merchant who,

drawn by Du Shiniang's exceeding beauty, convinced Li Sheng against marrying Du Shiniang on the grounds that his family would never accept her because of her background as a prostitute. Persuaded by the salt merchant's scheme, Li Sheng was afraid that his strict father would be enraged because he not only spent all the money but also brought back a prostitute, so Li Sheng willingly sold Du Shiniang to the salt merchant. When Du Shiniang heard of the arrangement, she pretended to succumb to the circumstances, but brewed internally with anger and sorrow. The following day, she gathered her priceless treasure box filled with gems and rare treasures and flung it into the river after passionately rebuking Li Sheng and the salt merchant. Then, she committed suicide by throwing herself into the river, completing the tragedy of "Angrily Sinking the Treasure Box."

The narrative of *Story of Betrayal* is complete, compact, and well organized with clear development and a tightly knit structure. Its plot, complicated and unusual, laid the basic story structure. In a series of multifaceted events including falling in love in the brothel, endeavoring to redeem herself from her unfortunate life as a prostitute, faking a solicitous goodbye, becoming abandoned, and her final heroic suicide, Du Shiniang's character emerges not only as a beautiful face, but a smart, strong, sentimental, and unwaveringly upright woman. The theme of the novel is reflected in Du Shiniang's tragedy, as Li Sheng's betrayal is condemned as immoral and Du Shiniang's love and integrity are depicted as honorable. This is illustrated in its vehemently remarks on Du Shiniang: "Well! Even though a girl from the brothel, she is not less moral than the so-called 'chaste woman'! Although a girl from the boudoir, her loyal and steadfast character should really be commended!"

The language of *Story of Betrayal* is beautiful and elegant. The writing style is subtle, but very expressive. The author uses precise and



vivid words, especially action verbs, to depict the inner world of the characters. Their emotions are acutely reflected through the characters' words and actions. The latent feelings of the characters naturally surface as the story progresses, and turn into somewhat unique expressions. After Du Shiniang persuaded Bao Er into letting her redeem herself out of the brothel to get married, "the woman cried into midnight," touching Li Sheng's heart with her true love. Du Shiniang also cleverly tested Li Sheng's feelings, and advised him to borrow money from friends and relatives. When Li Sheng failed to borrow any money, coming back empty-handed, the "woman sighed at night, saying: 'Is it true that Master cannot get a single cent?'" revealing her feeling of disappointment to Li Sheng. When Li Sheng amassed a hundred of money, "The woman jumped for joy, saying: 'No more worries!'" This feeling of joy shows even between the lines. Song Maocheng reveals the waves of Du Shiniang's sentiments by using verbs such as "cried," "sighed," and "jumped for joy" to demonstrate Du Shiniang's inner emotional activity of sadness, frustration, and joy.

*Story of Betrayal* also pays close attention to creating the proper atmosphere for each setting in the story, reflecting its unique ingenuity. Du Shiniang had already succeeded in a careful and meticulous plan to redeem herself out of the brothel to get married, but on their way home, "the snow storm held them up at dawn," and "the snow was very dense." It is because of this snow that Du Shiniang and Li Sheng were stranded at the ferry crossing in Guazhou. The salt merchant from Xin'an took advantage of this situation and poisoned Li Sheng's mind against his love for Du Shiniang, destroying his loyalty overnight. This is an example of how the author moves from one crisis to another, creating tension and anticipation for the story's climax.

The final scene regarding Du Shiniang's river suicide occupies