



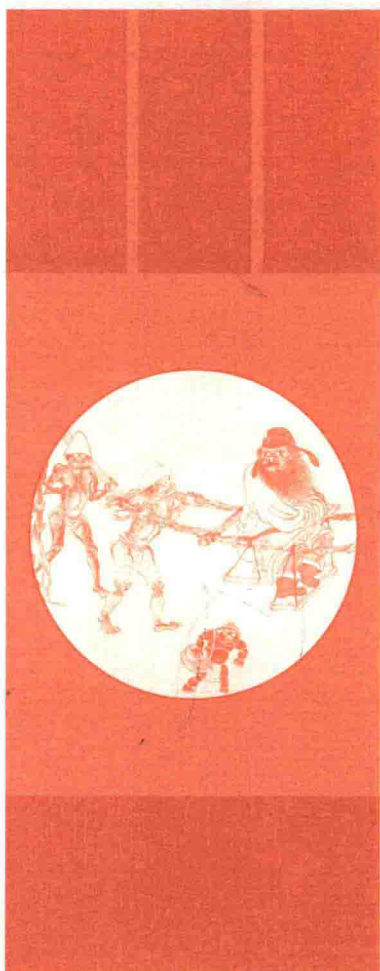
中国戏曲海外传播工程丛书

# Zhong Kui

-A Hebei Bangzi Opera

Translation,  
Introduction and Annotations  
by Sunny Jiang Schultz (姜晓阳)

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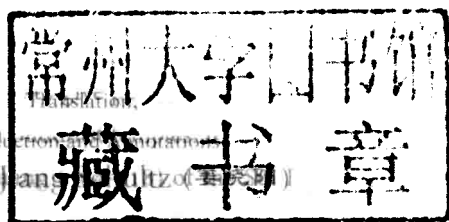
The Project for Disseminating Chinese Operatic Dramas Overseas  
Sponsored by  
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中国戏曲海外传播工程丛书

■ 河北梆子 — 钟馗嫁妹 ■

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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

## Acknowledgements

My appreciation goes to Dr. He Qixin for his initiative to introduce the Chinese classic operas, a little known art form overseas but prevalent in Chinese culture, to the English audience, an effort that builds cross-cultural understanding worldwide. My gratitude also goes to my college and colleagues for their encouragement. Many thanks go to my husband, John Schultz, who has proofread the manuscript with interest and input.

Sunny Jiang Schultz

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## Chapter I

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### Cultural Context

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## 1. The mythology of Zhong Kui

Who is Zhong Kui? He is a man. He is a ghost. He is a god: the God of Justice. He has been metamorphic with the pulses of the Chinese cultural evolution. Stories about

him have been told in school textbooks, popular movies, daily TV shows, stylish theatres, fine arts and folklore in contemporary Chinese culture. He is known to the old and the young, to city slickers and country dwellers, and to the highly learned and the illiterate. While the average Chinese believe in him, the scholars debate over him. Controversies have continued for years about where he came from, how his image has been sustained over thousands of years, and why he remains in the imaginations and hearts of so many people in China today.

The origin of Zhong Kui generates the most arguments. Evidence from archaeological digs is usually open-ended in its interpretations. However, there is enough evidence in both the excavated artifacts and the later written records to help us understand his origin and explain the reasons of his man-ghost-god-man image that has survived in the culture from pre-historical times till now.

One of the most telling evidence of Zhong Kui's origin is found among the tribal totems of the pre-historical Liangzhu Culture (良渚文化).<sup>1</sup> Its excavation discovered many jade artifacts such as scepters, staff, rings, and *cong* (琮). These jade objects were the original totems of the tribes. Their sorcerers used them for religious purposes. They were thus granted with supernatural power. In a study by Wang Zhengshu (王正书), he pointed out that "Zhong Kui and stories about his power to rid the

world of evils can be traced back to the pre-historical times of sorcery. His image evolved from Zhong Li (重黎), who was a Chief of Fire Fighting.”<sup>2</sup> Zhong Li’s image was often carved on the jade *cong* excavated from the Fanshan (反山) and Yaoshan (瑶山) pits of the Liangzhu Culture. His image is likely to be the origin of Zhong Kui, as Wang’s article identifies.

As tribal villages gave way to a feudal system, those jade totems fell into the hands of the rulers of kingdoms. In their employment, the jade objects became symbols for social stratification. Gradually, they were regarded as the ultimate political power of the royal court, borrowed from the superpower traditionally invested in them. As well described by the Secretary of the Etiquettes Administration in the Zhou Dynasty<sup>3</sup>, “Jade objects are best used to signify the different classes of lords so that there is no misunderstanding. A king wears the Jade Scepter of Defense; a duke keeps the Jade Staff of Administration; a marquis holds the Jade Staff of Trust; a count carries the Jade Staff of Military; a viscount uses the Jade Ring of Agriculture; and a baron bears the Jade Ring of Vegetations.”<sup>4</sup> The Scepter of Defense empowered a king to protect his people as well as to manage them. Such messages were inherited from the original carving designs on the jade pieces the tribal people used. There is no doubt that the research in archaeology offers us a new perspective and insight about Zhong Kui’s origin.

## 2. Historical development

These carved images on the jade scepters were used as powerful agents to combat any evils in human life. Based on the centaur images on the upper part of the numerous jade scepters from the previously mentioned digs, it is no wonder that the first written record in the book *Zhou Li* depicts “the big scepters a meter long. On the pointed top part

is carved the head of Zhong Kui.<sup>5</sup> This is what a king wears.”<sup>6</sup> From the relationship between the jade objects and the initial written record, we can determine the origin of the Zhong Kui that we know today. The inference that the carved centaur-like images on the scepters are the initial images of Zhong Kui is not outlandish. This conclusion may not be definitive since the inference is drawn only from the evidence of two names that have the same pronunciation but different characters. However, the name of Zhong Kui on the artifacts and Zhong Kui in the written documents do share the same family name in the spoken Chinese language. Before a new interpretation rises as future scholars discover further evidence, we can certainly confirm the possibility of it being the source of where Zhong Kui and his stories come from. Be that as it may, we find it necessary to continue exploring the written records for clues about the early formation and evolvement of the cultural belief in Zhong Kui.

Several scholars, both from Japan and China,<sup>7</sup> have debated over the publishing date of an important document entitled *Tai Shang's*<sup>8</sup> *Incantations of the Dong Yuan* (《太上洞渊神咒经》).<sup>9</sup> Similar to the two Japanese scholars' claim, the Chinese scholar Li Fengzhu (李丰楙) stated that this Daoist bible kept the earliest written record of the current name characters for Zhong Kui. In it, there is a passage (664 CE) that Tang Gaozong, a Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) emperor, had the paragraph composed for the health of the newly appointed crown prince. However, Ren Jiyu (任继愈) refuted Li's statement and concluded that the first ten volumes of the bible were finished at the end of the Jin Dynasty (265 CE-420). The passage mentioned above is found in the records excavated from the Dunhuang Caves that preserved materials spanning from 400 to 1000 CE. In addition, the pioneer Tai Shang (or Li Zuan, 李纂), who decided to include the *Tai Shang's Incantations* in the bible of the Dong

Yuan school of Daoism, lived around 400 CE. Other Chinese scholars confirm this theory, clarifying that this means the initial stories about Zhong Kui were recorded more than 250 years earlier than what was believed before (664 CE). Zhong Kui was already popularized in the folklores of the 5th century.

Additional evidence from research, done on the Dunhuang Caves, underscores Ren's conclusion. In Dunhuang Book 2444 with the title of *The Seventh Time to Eradicate Ghosts*<sup>10</sup>, Zhong Kui was placed side by side with the most important historical names. The passage goes like this: "Which ghost is visiting today? My patient is very sick. Tai Shang sends strong men wearing red robes to defeat evil ghosts. Confucius uses a knife to hack them. The kings of the Zhou Dynasty employ ropes to tie them down. Zhong Kui mutilates them."<sup>11</sup> *The Collected Daoist Scriptures*<sup>12</sup> (《道藏》) left out the last three sentences that were in the Dunhuang book, however. This absence made it obvious that these messages were suggesting practices of ghost eradication earlier than the Tang Dynasty. Therefore, the first record of Zhong Kui is earlier than what was widely believed. Although the passage does not give us a detailed description of Zhong Kui, his role as a ghost fighter is clear. What's interesting is that he is as equally important as Confucius and kings in keeping evil ghosts at bay. The parallel of the three personalities indicates that Zhong Kui is not an imagined figure or just a tool to drive away evils. He was as respected as much as the kings and Confucius among common folks at the time.

As his image evolved after the Jin Dynasty, other Dunhuang books also contain chapters about Zhong Kui. The French Dunhuang Caves researcher, Danielle Eliasberg, concluded that Zhong Kui is the number one character among all warriors against ghosts. Book 2055 entitled *Verses Against Evils on the Eve of a New Year* has the following:

The beginning of spring,  
Brings the cheerful festival,  
Appealing to all in nature and men.  
The dragon wants to swim in the ocean,  
Men pay respect with their talisman,  
To the glory of the king, and  
To the happiness of each household.  
The ritual starts in the air  
Floating the dragon and phoenix.  
Present are the chiefs of villages, and  
Officers of the five Daoist worlds.<sup>13</sup>  
Thousands of them masked  
As bears, clothed in leopard skin,  
As tin men,  
Called themselves Zhong Kui.  
For I catch the roaming ghosts, and  
Drive them from the villages and counties.  
Not learned nor talented,  
I appreciate your invitation.<sup>14</sup>

In this prayer written in the late Tang Dynasty (around 850 CE), there is some change in the character of Zhong Kui. Unlike a simple act in the Dunhuang Book 2444, Zhong Kui in Book 2055 takes on rich details. First of all, many warriors put on the masks of Zhong Kui; they have copper heads and steel foreheads, and wear leopard skins and red makeup on their faces. Secondly, Zhong Kui's participation in the New Year's rituals is, therefore, connected to a time of the year when the new replaces the old. Professor Hu Wanchuan (胡万川) once commented on this particular prayer, "What's unique of Zhong Kui is that he is always

associated with festivals and is present especially during the Nuo ritual<sup>15</sup> on the eve of the Spring Festival.” This reminds us of the Nuo ritual that was practiced routinely during the early dynasties from Shang (1600-1046 BCE) till Han (206 BCE-220 CE). The mascot used in those eighteen hundred years was Fang Xiang Shi (方相氏)<sup>16</sup> who was dressed in the same fashion. He “wrapped his hands with leopard skin, had shining eyes, wore a red color robe and carried arrows.”<sup>17</sup> As the image of Fang Xiang Shi lost its appeal, the image of Zhong Kui replaced him. The new image was not just to help people with their diseases; he took the job of guarding them against all roaming ghosts. Another longer verse confirms Zhong Kui’s role replacing Fang Xiang Shi’s.

Farewell to last year’s mystery,  
Welcome the New Year’s Spring Festival.

The chill from the north remains,  
Spring breezes ease the atmosphere.

All evils are gone with the passing year,  
A Nuo ritual is a must for the new.

Whichever ghost wanders around,  
Zhong Kui will keep it far and away.

Plans for the Nuo ritual are already made,  
So that citizens are assured and calmed.

Invitations are sent for the heavenly forces,  
To protect every corner of the homeland.

Because of our king's wisdom,  
In the West<sup>18</sup>, peace is maintained.

Homes are filled with songs and dances,  
Households with all crops and grains.

The battle fields cleared of fire and smoke,  
Soldiers lay down their knives and arrows.

People everywhere become generous,  
Travel to pay dues to Dunhuang.

If kindness is practiced every day,  
It brings praises from every man.

As common folks have Dao in their heart,  
Those who make everyone benevolent will see the essence.

If one continues with this faith,  
He will be supported by all in the heaven.

Next to the king of the day,  
Ten ways<sup>19</sup> reach all walks and beyond.

A heart with kindness is boundless,  
A place to be is any temples.

The river moved to make room for the Caves,<sup>20</sup>  
So will be expanded the lifespan of the faith.



Be faithful to the three principles<sup>21</sup>,  
Protection prevails everywhere.

If a woman is peaceful at heart,  
Life can be as long as rocks.

All officials follow Confucius,<sup>22</sup>  
And become well educated.

Surpass Han Xin (韩信)<sup>23</sup> in letters and martial arts,  
Excel Zhang Liang (张良)<sup>24</sup> in wisdom and strategies.

The young are excellent and the kings and princes wise,  
No evils will invade.

All the lords respect and follow,  
All invaders run away and fall apart.

Generals are happy to defend the country,  
Walking extra miles and doing their best.

After the Nuo ritual tonight,  
Everything will be well and fine.<sup>25</sup>

The couplets are prayer verses. The seventh and eighth couplets tell us that this was composed in the year of 851 CE<sup>26</sup>. They were recited during the Nuo ritual. It's not a stretch to believe that Zhong Kui grew more and more important in the formal stately rituals. If he was only a hero to heal people from ghost transgressions in the early *Tai Shang's*