

中国戏曲海外传播工程丛书

Pan Jinlian

— A Kunqu Opera

Translation,
Introduction and Annotations
by Yang Xiao-ming (杨孝明)

昆曲
—
潘金莲



The Project for Disseminating Chinese Operatic Dramas Overseas
Sponsored by
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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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Yang Xiao-ming

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Chapter I

Introduction

An uproar has been erupted in China lately over the remarks made by a trainer at a judicial training session, in which the trainer said, “Any Chinese young woman who has been studying in France comes back home a slut, a super Pan Jinlian.” What makes his remarks controversial is, of course, the extremely pejorative term of “slut;” but even more so is the projected image of Pan Jinlian. The pejorative term, although insulting, leaves one with a general impression of a generic character of a person while the image of Pan Jinlian presents a precise and concrete picture of a fallen woman in the Chinese culture. Who is Pan Jinlian? She is a fictional character in two Chinese novels published during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644): *Water Margin* (《水浒传》) by Shi Nai’an (施耐庵) (1296-1372) and *Golden Lotus* (《金瓶梅》) by Lanling Xiao Xiao Sheng (兰陵笑笑生). *Water Margin* is a story of outlaws who rebel against the royal court during the Song Dynasty (960-1279). In *Water Margin*, Pan Jinlian is just one minor character that appears in only three chapters out of 120. She is the wife of a dwarf whose brother is one of the rebels by the name of Wu Song. *Golden Lotus* is written by an author with the pseudonym of “Lanling Xiao Xiao Sheng,” or “The Scoffing Scholar of Lanling.” The novel expands the three chapters borrowed from *Water Margin* into a full-fledged fiction with 100 chapters. In this novel, Pan Jinlian develops an extramarital affair with another married man to start the novel. She then helps her adulterer poison her husband and eventually marries her lover to become one of his concubines. Ever since the publication of the novel, Pan Jinlian has become a cultural icon of a fallen woman, the Chinese Jezebel without religious connotation, and a name synonymous

of a demonized woman who is not only lascivious and lustful but also cruel and Machiavellian. Sifting through the Western literature, one can hardly find an equivalent fictional character that has the equally powerful and lasting image of a fallen woman throughout the cultural history. Jezebel may be the closest match, but she is deeply rooted in the biblical tradition. Pan Jinlian, on the other hand, is completely secular; what is more, she is totally fictional. One must marvel at the tremendous creativity of the author to create such a negative image for the populace to despise and to use it to despise others.

For more than 500 years since the inception of the projected image, Pan Jinlian as a cultural outcast lives at the bottom of the society. Her status as a fallen woman has been permanently engraved in the collective psyche of the Chinese people mainly because her character and social behaviors run head on with the orthodoxy of the social norm, dominated by the Confucian teaching. Confucius, being a great thinker and philosopher, is also a teacher, who envisions and preaches the notion of the great societal harmony. In order to achieve harmony, each member of the society must adhere to the set rules that govern the thinking and behaviors of the populace. Among them are a set of rules designated for women, who constitute half of the population. These rules can be concisely summarized as “Three Obediences and Four Virtues.” The “Three Obediences” include obedience to her father before marriage, obedience to her husband after marriage and obedience to her sons in her widowhood. The “Four Virtues” encompass morality, proper speech, modesty and diligent work ethics. Over the long stretch of the feudalistic society of more than 2000 years in China, women are measured against these rules to determine her virtuousness. Placing Pan Jinlian in such a social context, one does not find it difficult to figure out why she has been a social outcast since all her social behaviors as well as her inherent

character are the direct opposite to what is being prescribed in the society.

In the Chinese performing arts, Pan Jinlian remains, for a very long time, a taboo because not only is it impossible for such a negative character to pass the scrutiny of the official censorship of all forms of government, it is also very hard for both the directors and the performing artists to win the hearts of the audience with a lascivious female as the protagonist. Even the most grass-root performing troupe will not tarnish its reputation by putting such a fallen woman on stage. However, owing to the rapid development of commercialism in the mainland of China in the past 30 years, and along with it the flux or invasion of the popular culture, Pan Jinlian, a fictional character that has been suppressed by the traditional culture for several centuries, has all of a sudden become one of the favorites to be adapted by both the performing arts and the cinematic production. The following is a partial list of the cinematic presentation of Pan Jinlian from early 1950s all the way up to present:

Year of release	Title	Producer/director	Starring
1955 Movie	<i>The Golden Lotus</i>	Director: Wang Yin	Li Xianglan
1964 Movie	<i>The Amorous Lotus Pan</i>	Shaw Brothers Studio Hong Kong	Diana Chang
1973 Movie	<i>The Golden Lotus</i>	Shaw Brothers Studio Hong Kong	Ching Hu
1989 Movie	<i>The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus</i>	Director: Clara Law Hong Kong	Joey Wong
1991 Movie	<i>The Golden Lotus "Love and Desire"</i>	Director: Han Hsiang Li Hong Kong	Yuk-Ting Fong
1993 Movie	<i>Laughter of the Water Margins</i>	Director: Clifton Chi-Sum Ko Hong Kong	Teresa Mo

(to be continued)

(continued)

Year of release	Title	Producer/director	Starring
1994 Movie	<i>The Amorous Lotus Pan</i>	Director: Han Hsiang Li Hong Kong	Lap-Man Sinn
2000 TV series— 20 episodes	<i>Wu Song: the Hero</i>	Three-Champion Cinema and Television Corporation of Shandong Province	Fu Yiwei
2008 Movie	<i>The Forbidden Legend Sex & Chopsticks</i>	Director: Man Kei Chin Hong Kong	Serina Hayakawa
2011 TV series— 80 episodes	<i>New Water Margin</i>	Bona Film Group	Gan Tingting

Table 1: A partial list of the cinematic productions of Pan Jinlian

It is noted from the above list that the early movies with Pan Jinlian as the protagonist are all produced in Hong Kong. At the time, Hong Kong was not subject to the strict scrutiny of the government censorship nor was entertainment industry under the constraint of Confucianism. In the meantime, the invasion of commercialism and popular culture was on the rise. To entertain the audience with the sole purpose of making profits and without any burden of didacticism had made it possible for the movie industry to explore the formerly restricted areas for new “spicy stuff.” Pan Jinlian, the number one fallen woman in the entire history of China was naturally to become a favorite subject for the movie production. The artistic values of all these movies are hard to assess, but it is fair to say that some of the early productions of Pan Jinlian’s movies are of certain artistic value. For instance, *The Amorous Lotus Pan*, produced by Shaw Brothers in 1964, is a movie of operatic drama. Using arias from the tunes of Huangmei opera, an indigenous opera based in Anhui Province, as the

major ways of communication, the movie basically follows the storyline of the original novel of *Water Margin* with the background and costumes all set in a small town of the Song Dynasty. Starring Diana Chang as Pan Jinlian, the protagonist is portrayed as the victim of the feudalistic society who has a strong desire to pursue her own happiness, but her pursuit ends in tragedy as she commits suicide at the end of the movie. In a way, the character deviates from the traditional image of Pan Jinlian as she begins to win the sympathy not only from other characters of the drama, but also from the audience. If Pan Jinlian in Shaw Brothers movie is tinged with the feminist viewpoint, the Pan Jinlian in 1989's *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* is vengeful. Set in the late 1960s against the background of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in Shanghai, the protagonist named Shan Yulian, starring Joey Wang, vows to address the wrong wrought on her 500 years ago. Incarnated as an innocent girl of only 15 years old, she, like her predecessor, is sexually assaulted by a local leader and encounters humiliation and suffering at her tender age, an experience similar to Pan Jinlian of the original novel. She then marries to a dwarf from Hong Kong, and moves from the mainland of China to Hong Kong with her husband. Unsatisfied with her married life, she moves to seduce her husband's cousin, who flatly refuses her advance owing mainly to the socially prescribed ethics. Furious at being rejected, she begins new "adventures" with other men, only to find that she has been used as a sex tool. She ends up murdering her male partner and accidentally kills her husband's cousin. Compared with the Shaw Brothers version, this film is action-packed. It tailors to the taste of the contemporary entertainment-oriented audience with violence, sensuality, and nudity coupled with comic effects as it completely abandons the traditional flavor of the Chinese culture and severs the historical linkage. Pan Jinlian has become no more than a "bait" for sensuality and sensation catcher. This trend of using a traditional

fallen woman to make a box office hit culminates in the new millennium when *The Forbidden Legend Sex & Chopsticks*, directed by Hong Kong director Man Kei Chin in 2008, hits the market. The entire plot focuses on Ximen Qing, Pan Jinlian's adulterer, whose life is completely wrapped in the pleasure seeking among women. There is hardly any artistic value in the film; one glimpse of the cast can provide clues of what the movie is all about. The actress who plays the role of Pan Jinlian is a Japanese AV star—Serina Hayakawa. AV is an abbreviation of “Adult Video,” a term coined in Japan to refer to the movies with exclusive adult content. Driven entirely by the market consumption, the AV industry in Japan has become the major source of pornographic movies which have not only proliferated in Japan, but also been exported to other countries and regions in Asia. With a Japanese porn star as Pan Jinlian, it is not hard to imagine what the content of the movie is.

The portrayal of Pan Jinlian in the cinematic production in the mainland of China, however, does not begin until the beginning of the new century. The earliest appearance of the character on the Chinese screen occurred in the 43-episode television series bearing the same title as the traditional novel — *Water Margin*. Produced by China Central Television, the TV series faithfully follows the storyline of the original novel. Pan Jinlian, starring Wang Siyi (王思懿, Brenda) from Taiwan, appears only in three episodes (Episodes 16, 17 and 18). Her portrayal of the character is, according to the critics, faithful and authentic, and the character appears “innocent” and “pure,” not at all seductive or sensual. She has become, according to the media report, one of the most sought-after actresses in the Chinese cinematic industry after she portrays Pan Jinlian. In a way, the tight restriction on the number one fallen woman in the Chinese culture has gradually been lifted. The same character is once again portrayed in 2011's new version of the television series, 80 episodes

in total, by a young Chinese actress—Gan Tingting, who appears in six episodes. Out of over 100 characters portrayed in the new version, the character of Pan Jinlian seems to top all the other major characters when one conducts a search on the websites. A Google search on Gan Tingting produces 365000 entries, most of which talk about her portrayal of Pan Jinlian in the new TV series. In one of the commentaries on the web, the commentator briefs the readers of the process of selecting actresses to play the character of Pan Jinlian. The character is, according to the commentator, definitely the number one female role of the entire TV series. To choose a relatively new actress such as Gan Tingting instead of more established ones in the industry certainly gives a big boost to her reputation. Like Wang Siyi, her predecessor who portrays Pan Jinlian in the first TV series of *Water Margin*, Gan Tingting becomes a cinematic sensation almost overnight after the new series is released. Why is it, one may ask, that so many established movie stars vie to portray the character of a notorious fallen women? What accounts for the fact that a relatively unknown actress rises to the star status by portraying such a negative character? There may be many answers to these questions. One is for sure, that is, China, which used to be a puritanical society with regard to the female behaviors, is much more tolerant than before. Furthermore, the movie and television have shed their didactic role and become a more entertainment-oriented channel. This fictional character, that has been dormant for hundreds of years, is catching up with the newest development of commercialism in China.

By comparison, the theatrical production of Pan Jinlian is much more conservative and much less sensational than its cinematic counterpart. There are mainly two reasons for this phenomenon. The first one is the aura. Unlike movies or television series in which the actors or actresses do not face the audience directly, the artists in operatic