THE FLOWER PRINCESS

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY
LEFT BLANK

帝女花

by Tong Dik Sang

The Flower Princess

A Cantonese Opera

Translated, edited and introduced by Bell Yung

Assisted in translation by Sonia Ng and Katherine Carlitz

The Chinese University Press

The Flower Princess: A Cantonese Opera by Tong Dik Sang
Translated, edited and introduced by Bell Yung
Assisted in translation by Sonia Ng and Katherine Carlitz

ISBN 978–962–996–374–3

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
SHA TIN, N.T., HONG KONG
Fax: +852 2603 6692
+852 2603 7355
E-mail: cup@cuhk.edu.hk
Web-site: www.chineseupress.com

Printed in Hong Kong

CONTENTS

Foreword by Pak Suet Sin vii
Preface ix
Acknowledgements xv
Illustrations xvii

Introduction by Bell Yung 1

Part One. The Translation

The Flower Princess 25
Appendices
Glossary 117
Pronunciation Guide for the Cantonese Dialect (*Yale System*) 120

Part Two. The Original Chinese Text

The Flower Princess 123
A Postscript by the Editor (*in Chinese*) 221

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY
LEFT BLANK

FOREWORD

As one of the interpreters in the original production, I am delighted to learn that the English translation of *The Flower Princess* (*Dae Neui Fa, Dinühua* in Mandarin) will soon be published. This is the masterwork written by Mr. Tong Dik Sang (Tang Disheng in Mandarin) at the peak of his career. Ever since its premiere, it has been a favorite of the Cantonese Opera audience, its theme song has long since become a familiar tune in Hong Kong, which can be fittingly termed a unique monument of its time. I was honored to witness its birth, to nurse it through its infancy, and to help it to reach maturity. The deep emotional link between us is more than words could express. Princess Cheung-ping has very much become a part of me; she lives in the air I breathe, occupying both my waking hours and my dreams.

Watching it crossing the language barrier right before its fiftieth birthday, I send along my most sincere best wishes. May readers who do not understand Chinese appreciate Mr. Tong's wonderful libretto in translation, and, besides, have their curiosity stimulated and discover the vast and colorful world of Cantonese Opera.

Pak Suet Sin
December 2006
(Translated by Michael Lam)

前 言

作為原劇演繹人之一，得聞《帝女花》劇本出版英譯本，自然感到歡喜。這是唐滌生先生全盛期的力作，面世以來廣受粵劇觀眾愛戴，主題曲《香夭》家傳戶曉，堪稱香港普及文化一座獨特的時代紀念碑。我

有幸看著它誕生，協助它成型，扶持它成長，感情的濃郁深厚非言詞所能表達。長平公主的喜怒哀樂，早就滲入我的朝夕晨昏，甚至在夢中縈繞不散。

在《帝女花》五十歲生日前夕，目送它踱進另一個語言國度，我寄上無限祝福。希望不諳中文的讀者，能夠於譯文中管窺唐先生的妙筆，並且對粵劇產生好奇和興趣，讓這個優良的劇種接觸到更廣闊的觀眾。

白雪仙

2006年12月

PREFACE

This book provides an English translation of a complete Cantonese Opera, the first of its kind. As a complement to translations of Kun Opera and Peking Opera already published, the Cantonese Opera adds to the existing corpus of Chinese performing literature for reading pleasure and as a text of Chinese literature in translation for college-level courses.

Just as with other English translations of Chinese operatic scripts, this book informs the Western reader of the history and culture of China through its performing arts. Traditional opera long served an educational role for the largely illiterate masses, offering them a view of the wider world by giving them the notion of a shared history, a common body of myths and legends, and a set of social and ethical mores with which to forge a cultural identity. An English translation of the opera script serves a similar purpose by providing the reader a lens through which China may be perceived. Though not quite the same as a performance, the script nevertheless is a text that many Chinese for centuries have also read for enjoyment and enlightenment; it offers an alternative to the journalistic and scholarly writings that the English reader often turns to when seeking to understand the people and the culture. Cantonese Opera differs from both Kun and Peking Opera in that it serves a relatively more plebian audience than those of the other two, thus offering a slightly different view of Chinese culture. It differs from the two better-known genres also in that it is rooted in Southern China as opposed to the Beijing and Shanghai regions.

The story of *The Flower Princess* is particularly relevant because, unlike many operatic scripts that deal with romance and other human relationships, it is set in a critical period of China's history at a specific time and place. Though dramatized, many of the characters and incidents depicted are historically documented and impart an immediacy and reality to the action of the play.

By producing a translation as faithful as possible to the original script used by performers, the English version aims to inform readers interested in the Chinese traditional stage. A script for Cantonese Opera includes not only lyrics, but also stage directions and, more importantly, tune titles. These titles

(and those for speech types) are encoded with complex information on how the lyrics are to be delivered, which render them somewhat equivalent to musical score. The script includes information on the musical structure of the traditional opera. With this in mind, we have included in the Introduction brief explanations of the titles of the tunes and speech types, to enable the reader to comprehend more fully the nature and function of the script in a performance. The original script includes occasional titles of percussion patterns that involve woodblocks, gongs, and cymbals, and the instrumentalists very often play such percussion music even when it is not indicated in the script. This translation will not include information on percussion music.

To produce an English translation of a Cantonese Opera, one needs to first settle on a Chinese script. A Cantonese Opera may have almost as many versions as there are performances because performers may freely change the script in order to suit the performance environment; the issue of establishing a text, therefore, is by no means simple and straightforward. In the case of *The Flower Princess*, the original version by its scriptwriter Tong Dik Sang at its premier in 1957 is the first to be considered. In 1960, the opera was recorded in the studio with most of the original cast. The recording was reissued repeatedly in the last fifty years, from vinyl discs to cassettes to compact discs, with no abatement in popularity. Even though during that period the opera has been staged many times each year by different performers, the recording remains the authoritative interpretation, mainly because of the popularity of the two principal performers. For this reason the script based upon the recorded version has been chosen as the basis for the English translation.

An even more important reason to choose the recorded version is that its easy accessibility offers the reader an opportunity to follow the performance and relate textual meaning and musical expression. Among the different kinds of Chinese traditional operas, Cantonese Opera is particularly rich in musical content; the words on the page will assume new life if the reader also becomes a listener to appreciate how the music enhances the dramatic content. Since the performers in this recording are considered to be among the most celebrated artists in the last half-century, this recording offers the uninitiated listener an opportunity to hear the best of Cantonese Opera performance.[1]

---

[1] The complete recording is available through the Crown Record Company Limited, 7/F, 34F Kennedy Road, Hong Kong (Tel: [+852] 2523-7845/ Fax: [+852] 2868-4162); or 2901 N. Beverly Glen Blvd, Bel Air, CA 90077, U.S.A. (Tel: [+310] 441-1166/ Fax: [+310] 441-0071).

The translation, however, is not intended for theatrical production: no attempt is made to construct the verses to fit the melodic structure of the music for singing. There is also no attempt to shape the verse structure of the text to mirror the original Chinese poetic text, or to give any semblance of the verse structure of English poetry. However, the line structure of the sung lyrics in the translation is made to reflect the original line breaks. For spoken parts, the lines in the translation continue to wrap around to the next line. Thus, the pattern of line breaks offers clues as to whether the passage is being sung or spoken, to assist the correlation between reading and listening. To further highlight the difference, boldface will be used for sung passages.

The major consideration in the translation is to convey the meaning of the original text as closely as possible, so that the reader can appreciate it as literature and follow the drama. Even with this modest goal, the translation still poses many challenges; these vary depending upon whether the text to be translated consists of spoken lines and sung lyrics or directives for the performers and producers.[2] The latter include the names of speech types and tunes, and brief descriptions of scenery and stage actions.

The difficulties of translation have been discussed in the scholarly literature both in philosophical and practical terms;[3] translation from the Chinese into English poses special difficulties because of the peculiar nature of the two languages.[4] For example, a problem intrinsic to the Chinese language is that sentences often dispense with a subject. The ambiguity, often exploited in poetry, is long appreciated by readers of the original language, but poses difficulties when translating to a target language that expects a specific subject. Thus the translation demands a subjective interpretation that may not be explicit in the original. One example is a couplet in Act 1(p. 129, p. 33). The original Chinese reads:

---

2 An excellent discussion is given in Mei-shu Huang, "Peking Opera: A Study on the Art of Translating the Scripts with Special Reference to Structure and Conventions" (Ph.D. diss., The Florida State University, 1976).

3 See, for example, Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964); and Theodore Savory, *The Art of Translation* (Boston: The Writer, 1968).

4 See, for example, Cyril Birch, "Translating and Transmuting Yuan and Ming Plays: Problems and Possibilities," *Literature East and West* 14, no. 4 (1970): 491–509; and Yuan Ren Chao, "Dimensions of Fidelity in Translation with Special Reference to Chinese," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 29 (1969): 109–130.

Upper line of couplet:

彩鳳有翠擁紅遮，
經已蘭麝微聞，
我未接葡萄香先透。

Lower line of couplet:

翹首望瑤池，
天上有金童玉女，
人間亦有鳳侶鶯儔。

The translation is as follows:

The splendid phoenix is wrapped in green and shrouded in red,
Yet I smell the musk before I see the deer,
And I sense the fragrance before I accept the wine.

Gazing upward, we see by the Jade Pool:
There in Heaven are the Golden Boy and the Jade Girl.
Here on Earth the phoenixes mate and orioles pair.

Note that the subject in the upper half is *wo*, or "I." However, the lower half does not have a subject, but the English translation interprets it as "we."

More complicated are idioms, allusions, and plays on words, where no easy solutions can be found. The challenge is in trying to reach a balance between literal translation, which risks non-comprehension by the English reader, and using parallel English idioms and allusions, which not only are difficult to find, but often may alter the tone of the line. In the former case, one can provide a footnote to explain the idiom or allusion. We have opted to translate literally as much as possible, but not to use footnotes. Though the reader may not know the thorough meaning of the allusion, we assume that the sense is clear from the context. An example is in Act 1 (p. 127, p. 31):

敏捷當如曹子健，
瀟灑當如秦少游。

Our translation is simply:

I am as quick as the poet Cao Zijian,
And as dashing as the poet Qin Shaoyou!

Without explaining who the historical figures Cao and Qin were, we assume the reader would deduce the meaning of the lines.

The large number of literary and historical references in almost every line of the script, as the above two examples show, demands an enormous amount of research. Copious footnotes do not necessarily serve the primary purposes of this publication. It was a conscious and difficult decision to forego annotation.

We have pondered over the representation of titles and names, considering the fact that this is a Cantonese Opera, in which the pronunciation of names in performance and on the recording is according to Cantonese. Thus the main characters are represented by names Romanized in Cantonese rather than in Mandarin. However, we use Mandarin Romanization for historically well-known figures such as Chongzhen, the last emperor of the Ming dynasty, the rebel Li Zicheng, and the poets Cao Zijian and Qin Shaoyou referred to earlier. Nevertheless, the name of the main character is rendered as Princess Cheungping even though she is a real historical character. We represent her name in Cantonese not only because her name is often invoked in the recording, but also for consistency between her name and that of her betrothed, Saihin. Unavoidably, there are inconsistencies from section to section and sometimes from line to line between the Mandarin and Cantonese Romanization. But since these are not noticeable to non-Chinese speakers, we let them stand. The same principle is applied when translating well-known place names inside the Forbidden City such as Qianqing Palace, Cishou Palace, and Fengtian Gate, etc.

B.Y.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY
LEFT BLANK

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the course of working on this project, from its inception ten years ago to its fruition today, I received help and support from many friends and colleagues, in Hong Kong and in the United States. First and foremost is my heartfelt gratitude to Ms. Pak Suet Sin, the pre-eminent performer of Cantonese Opera who created the title role of *The Flower Princess* over fifty years ago. Without her endorsement this project could never have been completed, and I am greatly humbled by the Foreword that she has written for this volume. I also owe an enormous debt to Mr. Yuen Siu Fai, the leading performer of today, whom I have known for thirty-five years, and by whom I am honored to be considered a close friend and colleague. Mr. Yuen is an incredible treasure trove of information, and he is always generous and gracious in answering my innumerable questions.

Securing permissions to use various materials can be a complicated and time-consuming process. Fortunately I had the help of Ms. Lo Wai Luen, Ms. Cheung Man Wai, Dr. David Chan, Mr. Michael Lam, Dr. Sonia Ng, Prof. Yu Siu Wah, Yam Pak Collection at the University Library System of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Yam Kim Fai and Pak Suet Sin Charitable Foundation Limited, and especially Ms. Pak; all permissions are in place. I want to extend special thanks to Mr. David Lau of the Crown Record Company, who gave me permission to publish the Chinese script and its English translation, and in the process became a friend.

To my two collaborators in the early drafts of the translation, Dr. Sonia Ng and Prof. Katherine Carlitz, I want to say that it was a joy working together and a great learning experience for me. Your contributions were invaluable. I thank Prof. Catherine Swatek for cleaning up the final draft of the text considerably. Ms. Ciris Leung Lai-yue and Ms. Lin Da, a former student and a current student respectively, have provided assistance at various stages of the preparation of the manuscript. Illustrations reproduced in the book are from the original production in 1957, archived in the Yam Pak Collection at the University Library System at The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

I would like to thank both the former director of The Chinese University Press, Dr. Steven Luk, and the current director, Ms. Gan Qi, for their support

of the project, and the two anonymous reviewers whose positive comments propelled the project along. The editorial staff of The Chinese University Press, in particular Ms. Flo Chan Lai-on, worked tirelessly and patiently as I made endless revisions of both the Chinese script and the English translation. The book is also in better shape because of Ms. Chan's meticulous copy-editing.

The project began with a grant from the Research Grants Council of the University Grant Committee (Hong Kong). It also benefited from a part-time Graduate Student Assistantship provided by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of the University of Pittsburgh.

Finally, my life partner, Prof. Andrew Miller of the Classics Department at the University of Pittsburgh, provided sage words and practical advice at the last stage of the revision, as well as encouragement and quiet support throughout the whole long process.

B.Y.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Act 1. Pledge by the Tree
CHEUNGPING. Jau Saihin, it is said that "Heaven sends unpredictable winds and clouds."
What is your interpretation of this violent wind?

Act 2. The Calamity
EMPEROR. Oh! My daughter! Force your way from life to death. I send you now through the Gate of the Underworld!

Act 4. Meeting at the Nunnery
SAIHIN. For a year I have been storing up my tears,
Three hundred days I have kept them all within, …

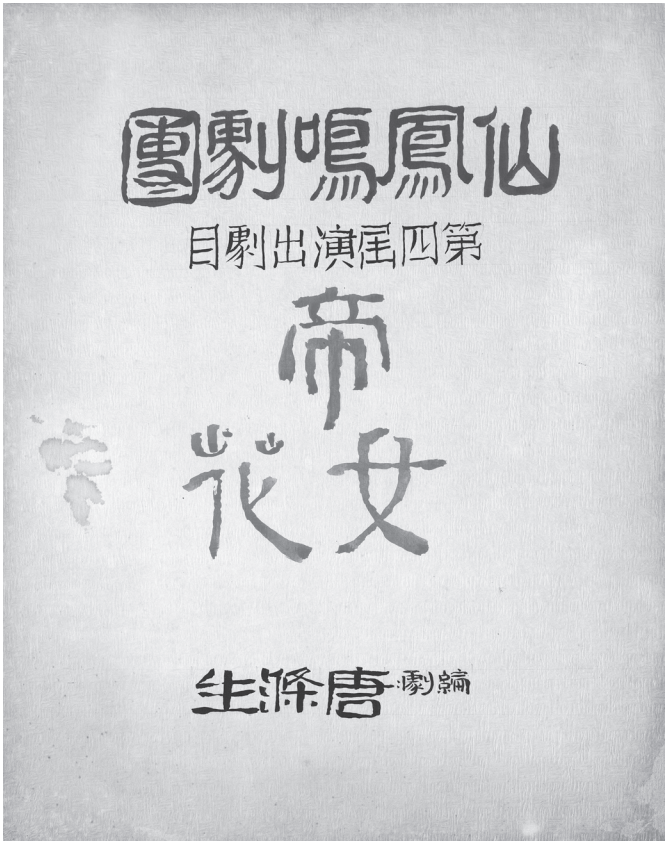
Act 6. Presenting the Petition

EMPEROR. I shall grant your wish. Let the music begin.

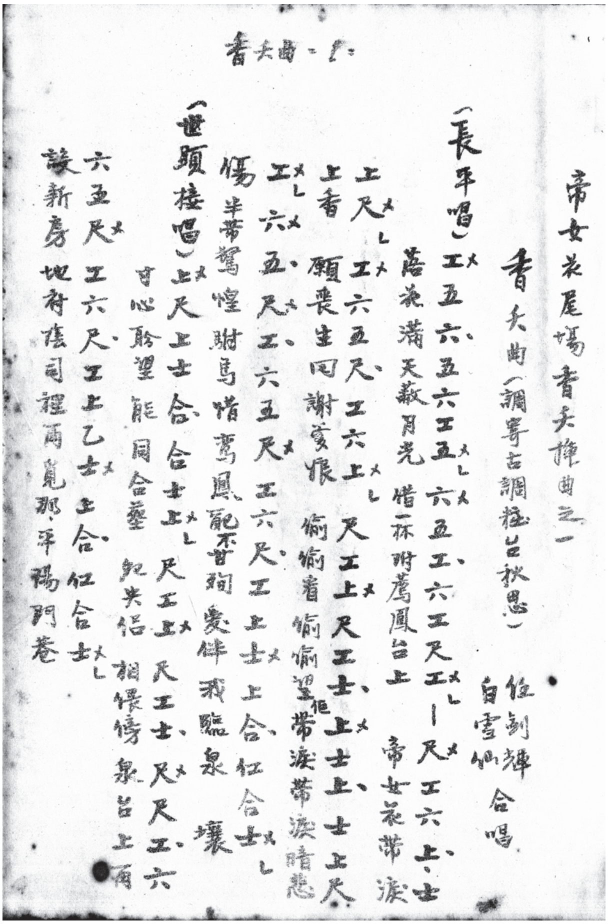
(SAIHIN *and* CHEUNGPING *perform their wedding ceremony by holding each end of the wedding sash*.)

Act 7. Double Suicide

SAIHIN. I grieve for the tragedy that has befallen our land;
I am moved by the Late Emperor's ten-thousandfold favor.
My wife and I together pray for your well-being.



Cover page of the original script, which reads:
"The Sin Fung Ming Opera Company
Repertory for the Fourth Season
The Flower Princess
Scripted by Tong Dik Sang"



The first page of the song "Autumnal Thoughts by the Dressing Table" sung at the beginning of Act 7, with text and musical notation.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY
LEFT BLANK

INTRODUCTION

Traditional Opera of China

Theatrical performances telling a story through acting, singing and dancing have a long history in China, whose diverse regional languages and cultures produced a large number of traditional forms and styles. According to a survey conducted in 1957, China has over 350 different styles of such theater based upon their places of origin or their centers of activity, each identified with a particular province, district, or regional language or dialect.[1] A few of these are popular over a wide area, but most are performed in only a small region.

Traditional theater is an amalgamation of literary, visual, and performing arts. At their best, its operatic texts have been studied as fine poetry and its movements as exquisite dance; its singing is regarded as the apex of vocal art, and its musical instruments constitute a repository of the most important samples of material culture. Its costumes, facial make-up, martial arts, and slapstick are all media of creative energy that have been greatly appreciated for centuries. Known as *xi* or *ju*, the operas date to at least the twelfth century, when a form of entertainment called *zaju*, translated in the literature as "variety play" or "miscellany play," was first documented, through the preservation of fragmentary scripts. This type of performance was soon documented in many parts of the country, using local languages and diverse musical styles that were influenced by regional culture, local folk music, and the phonetics of the local language. These performance types are identified as "traditional" because they developed during the last several hundred years as an integral part of the Chinese cultural fabric and shared much with one another in content, structure and performance practice. Nevertheless, each developed its distinctiveness owing mainly to language and music. Because these theatrical forms are all sung, they are often referred to in the West as "operas," and the many different

---

[1] See Su Yi, "Quanguo juzhong chubu tongji" [A preliminary listing of operatic genres in China], *Xiju luncong* 1 (1957): 215–223.