

# The Many Faces of Chinese Opera

EAST 1950Y, Spring 2014  
Wednesdays, 3-5:20, Sayles Hall 305

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## Course Description:

“Chinese opera” denotes several hundred regional variations of a performance art form that comprises sung arias with musical accompaniment, spoken dialogue, stylized movements, and elaborate costumes and make-up. Originating in the elite leisure spaces of early modern China, the best known versions of this art form are Peking opera (*jingju*), which coalesced in Beijing in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and *Kun* opera, which originated near Suzhou in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In this course, we will examine literary dramatic texts from the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) to the present, learn about the aesthetics and politics of these textual and performance traditions, and consider theater culture within its social, economic, and historical contexts.

The course begins in the present, examining the forms and politics of global experiments with “traditional Chinese opera” in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. We will explore audio and visual recordings of stage performances of traditional opera, considering how these traditional art forms have been modernized. We then turn to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, considering how traditional Chinese theater culture develops its print practices, performance priorities, gender protocols, and political import.

The course will culminate in a research paper in which you will further explore one of the topics we have discussed in class. All readings will be in English, and all films will be screened with subtitles or other accommodations. However, students who read Chinese are encouraged to engage Chinese primary and secondary materials in the course of their research.

**Prerequisite:** Previous study of literature or theater at the college level or consent of instructor.

## Learning Goals:

This course will:

- Investigate the dramatic literary forms from the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) to the present day through careful close readings of primary texts (in translation)
- Situate those texts within the cultural history of Chinese theater from the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) to the present, taking into consideration social and economic factors relevant to theater culture.
- Introduce the major concepts relevant to theatrical composition, performance, spectatorship, and criticism

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Appreciate and evaluate Chinese operatic performance
- Critically analyze the aesthetics, politics, and history of Chinese opera
- Apply what you've learned about theater, performance, and critical cultural analysis in other contexts
- Formulate a research question, evaluate sources, and explore that question through a process of writing and revision

### **Course Materials:**

The following books are required for purchase. All of these are available at the Brown bookstore. There are multiple translations of some of these works; make sure that you purchase the edition listed here (e-books of the same edition with the same pagination are fine):

- Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Touchstone, 1996 [1968])
- Faye Chunfang Fei, *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance from Confucius to the Present* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002)
- Shiamin Kwa, *Strange Eventful Histories: Identity, Performance, and Xu Wei's Four Cries of a Gibbon*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013)
- Colin Mackerras. *Chinese Theater: From its origins to the present day*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1983)
- Jonathon Spence, *Return to Dragon Mountain: Memories of a Late Ming Man* (New York: Viking, 2007)
- Tang Xianzu, and Cyril Birch, *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002)
- Wang Yun. *Dream of Glory (Fanhua meng): A Chuanqi Play by Wang Yun*, trans. and ed. Qingyun Wu (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2008)
- Wang Shifu, *The Story of the Western Wing*, edited and translated with an introduction by Stephen H. West and Wilt L. Idema (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991)
- Stephen H. West and Wilt L. Idema, ed. and trans. *Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals: Eleven Early Chinese Plays* (Indianapolis and Cambridge, Mass.: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010)

The following books are recommended for purchase and will be on reserve at the library:

- Wayne Booth et al., *The Craft of Research* (2003)
- Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (1996)

Digital copies of all other readings will be available on Canvas or in Brown's online course reserves system (OCRA), which can be accessed through the class Canvas site.

**In addition to these readings, we will be watching weekly film recordings. These will be made available on OCRA.**

### **Statement on Academic Integrity:**

To ensure that all students are aware of Brown's policy on academic honesty, all students should read Brown University's Academic and Student Conduct Codes, available here: [www.brown.edu/Administration/Dean\\_of\\_the\\_College/curriculum/documents/principles.pdf](http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Dean_of_the_College/curriculum/documents/principles.pdf)

**Statement for Students with Disabilities:**

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me if you have a disability or other condition that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. For more information contact the Student and Employee Accessibility Services (SEAS). They are located at 20 Benevolent Street and can be reached at (401) 863-9588 or DDS@Brown.edu.

**Evaluation:**

Your grade for the course will be based on the following criteria (A=90%-100%, B=80%-90%, C=70%-80%). Below you will find my expectations for each described in greater detail.

<b>Preparation and Engagement</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Weekly Informal Writing</b>	<b>20% (Ten assignments, 2% each)</b>
<b>Performance Reviews</b>	<b>10% (Two assignments, 5% each)</b>
<b>Research Assignments</b>	<b>25% (Five assignments, 5% each)</b>
<b>Final Research Paper</b>	<b>25%</b>

**Attendance** **-4% for each unexcused absence**

**Attendance Policy**

I will expect your attendance at every meeting unless you have contacted me by email *beforehand* explaining why you must be absent. Generally, for each unexcused absence, your final grade will be lowered by four percentage points (4%).

**Preparation and Engagement (20%)**

This portion of your grade will evaluate your commitment to the class on a meeting-to-meeting basis. Specifically, it includes:

- careful reading of assigned texts
- active listening
- ongoing contribution to the conversation

I expect you to come to each class having actively engaged with the assigned readings. I will introduce most texts briefly in class before you begin reading, and I ask that you read each text closely and thoughtfully, with the broader themes of our class in mind. Good reading habits you should cultivate include:

- attempting to summarize the main points of the passage or chapter
- formulating questions about the text as you read
- thinking about the author's agenda

Active listening and ongoing participation in our classroom discussions are essential in that they enable you to bring the texts you have read into constructive conversation with others. If you do not feel comfortable speaking up in the classroom for whatever reason, please see me as soon as possible.

**Weekly Informal Writing (20%)**

Weekly informal writing is your written contribution to our weekly discussion forums. These brief posts (no more than 300 words) will be part of an online conversation about the texts and audiovisual materials we cover that particular week. I will post questions to guide you,

but feel free to include any comments or questions related to the readings as well. Your first post should be submitted by 10:00 PM each Sunday, and you may continue to post until noon on Wednesday. Late responses receive half credit, and responses posted after class has been held will receive no credit. There will be a total of twelve forums; please contribute to any ten of them. Informal writing will be given credit or no credit; I will notify you if the latter.

### **Performance Reviews (10%)**

During the semester, you will complete two three-page performance reviews of recorded kunqu performances, available through OCRA. There is no specific deadline for either review, though I would advise you to complete at least one of them by the end of Unit Two, as there are many more writing assignments later in the semester. I will provide more information about the performance review assignments in class.

### **Final Research Paper (50%)**

During the course of the semester, you will complete five assignments leading up to a final research paper. These include:

- a detailed proposed topic, with a rationale and a research plan
- an annotated bibliography
- a 5-page analysis of your primary source or sources
- a 5-page analysis of secondary sources
- a peer review

Each of these assignments is designed to aid you in the completion of the final research paper. Each assignment will be worth 5% of your final grade. Except in case of emergency, I will lower assignment grades 10% per day for late submissions.

The final research paper will be 15-18 pp. (double-spaced, 1-inch margins, Times New Roman 12-point font), excluding the bibliography, and will be worth 25% of your final grade. I will provide more details about the research process and requirements for the final paper in class.

### **Email and Office Hours:**

I encourage all of you to meet with me during my office hours at least once during the term. I also encourage you to check the Canvas site regularly. I will use it to post announcements, relevant websites, and other supplementary materials. I will respond to all emails within 24 to 48 hours of receiving them. Please do not expect an instantaneous reply.

The Writing Center ([http://www.brown.edu/Student\\_Services/Writing\\_Center/](http://www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Writing_Center/)) provides individual writing consultations, including ESL support. I will also be happy to meet with you to discuss your work at any point during the writing process, either during my office hours or by appointment.

## Course Schedule

All readings should be completed for the day on which they are listed.

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### UNIT ONE: What is “Chinese Opera”?

#### WEEK 1      1/22      Introduction to Chinese opera

Read the following two books at your own pace, and complete them by March 2<sup>nd</sup>:

Colin MacKerras, *Chinese Theater: From Its Origins to the Present Day* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983).

Jonathan Spence, *Return to Dragon Mountain: Memories of a Late Ming Man* (New York: Viking, 2007)

#### WEEK 2      1/29      Traditional opera in contemporary China

Primary reading:

Li Xingdao. “Rescriptor-in-Waiting Bao’s Clever Trick: The Record of the Chalk Circle.” In West and Idema, *Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals*. 237-281.

Brecht, Bertolt, John Willett, and Ralph Manheim. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. New York: Arcade Pub, 1994. In course files.

Faye Chunfang Fei, *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance from Confucius to the Present* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002). 124-9, 154-8, 166-78, and 184-91.

Secondary reading:

Du Wenwei. “Historicity and Contemporaneity: Adaptations of Yuan Plays in the 1990s” *Asian Theater Journal*, 19.2 Fall 2001, 222-237.

Opera recording:

*Record of the Chalk Circle*, Shaoxing opera version, adapted by Jin Song from the Yuan play in 1956: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDTVuS7W-Rw> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHLX0b-FZcs>

Bertolt Brecht’s *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, excerpt performed by students at Purchase College, SUNY: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8L3A3BrDP8>

#### WEEK 3      2/5      Watching and listening to opera

Primary reading:

Faye Chunfang Fei, *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance from Confucius to the Present* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002). 3-32, 39-40, 48-60, 75-87, 97-99.

Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Touchstone, 1996 [1968]). 9-41.

Secondary reading:

Cyril Birch, *Scenes for Mandarins: The Elite Theater of the Ming* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995), 1-19.

Elizabeth Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre: The Aural Dimension of Peking Opera* (Honolulu: U of Hawai’i Press, 1991), 1-24.

Swatek, Catherine. "Boundary Crossings: Peter Sellars's Production of Peony Pavilion"  
*Asian Theater Journal*, 19.1 Spring 2002, 147-158.

Opera recording:

Zhang Jiqing as Du Liniang in Peony Pavilion (there are nine clips in all):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnUj3WNhQgA&list=PLB223A07B3DCF623E>

Young lover's version Peony Pavilion, garden scene with English subtitles:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AV1JMA1Cwrl&feature=rellist&playnext=1&list=PLEEF205A62D2C968C>

Young lover's version Peony Pavilion with Chinese subtitles:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MViWJPjz0QA>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2uOvYfGvmo>

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=3U\\_ZstBEGUE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3U_ZstBEGUE)

Sound recording:

Tan, Dun, et al. *Bitter Love*. New York: Sony Classical, 1999. Tan Dun's score for the Peter Sellars production of *Peony Pavilion*. Available through OCRA.

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## UNIT TWO: Print and Performance

### WEEK 4      2/12    Origin stories

Primary reading:

Guan Hanqing. *Moving Heaven and Shaking Earth: The Injustice to Dou E*, in West and Idema, *Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals*. 1-36.

Faye Chunfang Fei, *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance from Confucius to the Present* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002). 103-108.

Secondary reading:

West and Idema, *Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals*. "Introduction," ix-xxxvi.

Sieber, Patricia Angela. 2003. *Theaters of desire authors, readers, and the reproduction of early Chinese song-drama, 1300-2000*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Available online at <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10135584>. (Prologue pp. xiii-xxi; Introduction 1-44, and Chapter One)

Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Touchstone, 1996 [1968]). 42-64.

Opera recordings:

Dou E yuan Kunqu version: [http://v.youku.com/v\\_show/id\\_XMTQ0MTQ3Njg=.html](http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMTQ0MTQ3Njg=.html)

Jingju version: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lCYvj3mBLSE&feature=related>

### WEEK 5      2/19    Illusory illustrations

Primary reading:

Wang Shifu, *The Story of the Western Wing*. Edited and Translated with an Introduction by Stephen H. West and Wilt L. Idema. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Secondary reading:

Wu, Hung (1996). "The Painted Screen." *Critical Inquiry* 23 (1).

Hsiao, Li-ling. *The Eternal Present of the Past: Performance, Illustration, and Reading in the Wanli Period (1573-1619)* Leiden: Brill, 2007. *Selections*

Opera recording: *Xixiang ji* excerpts

## **WEEK 6      2/26    Obscenity**

Primary reading:

Review *The Story of the Western Wing*

Secondary reading:

Sieber, Patricia Angela. 2003. *Theaters of desire authors, readers, and the reproduction of early Chinese song-drama, 1300-2000*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Available online at <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10135584>. (Chapters 2-3).

Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Touchstone, 1996 [1968]), 65-97.

Opera recording: *Xixiang ji* excerpts

**SUNDAY, 3/2, 10PM: PROPOSED RESEARCH TOPIC DUE**

## **WEEK 7      3/5      Fictional performances**

Primary reading:

Xiaoxiaosheng, and David Tod Roy. 1993. *The plum in the golden vase, or, Chin P'ing Mei*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. *Selections*. In course files.

Cao Xueqin. Trans. David Hawkes. *The Story of the Stone*. Penguin. *Selections*. In course files.

Li Yu, "An Actress Scorns Wealth and Honor," trans. Hanan, Patrick. In course files.

Secondary reading:

Ling Hon Lam, "The Matriarch's Private Ear: Performance, Reading, Censorship, and Interiority in "The Story of the Stone" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 65:2 (Dec. 2005), 357-415.

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## **UNIT THREE: Gender and the Stage**

## **WEEK 8      3/12    Cross-dressing onstage**

Primary reading:

Xu Wei. *Four Cries of a Gibbon*. In Kwa Shiamin, *Strange Eventful Histories: Identity, Performance, and Xu Wei's Four Cries of a Gibbon*.

Wang Jide. *Male Queen*, trans. Sophie Volpp in *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Cambridge: Harvard U Asia Center, 2011). In course files.

Secondary reading:

Siu Leung Li, *Cross-dressing in Chinese Opera*, *Selections*.

Sophie Volpp, *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Cambridge: Harvard U Asia Center, 2011), Chapter 4.

Opera recording: Mei Lanfang, *selection*  
Cantonese opera, *selection*

**WEEK 9      3/19      Sex and the Stage**

*Primary reading:*

Pinhua Baojian, excerpts from Faye Chunfang Fei, *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance from Confucius to the Present*.

*Secondary reading:*

Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, Stanford 2000. Chapters 6-7 "Sexual Behavior as Status Performance: The Regulation of Prostitution Before 1723" and "The Extension of Commoner Standards: Yongzheng Reforms and the Criminalization of Prostitution" 210-304.

Stevenson, Mark and Wu Cuncun (2010). Speaking of Flowers: Theater, Public culture, and homoerotic writing in Nineteenth-Century Beijing. *Asian Theater Journal* 27 1:100-129.

Sophie Volpp. *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Cambridge: Harvard U Asia Center, 2011), chapter 4.

**3/26 Spring recess, no class**

**SUNDAY, 3/30, 10PM: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**

**WEEK 10      4/2      Women Readers and Commentators**

*Primary reading:*

Tang Xianzu, and Cyril Birch. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

*Secondary reading:*

Catherine Swatek, *The Peony Pavilion Onstage: Four Centuries in the Career of a Chinese Drama* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2003).

Ko, Dorothy. *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*. Stanford UP, 1994, Chapter 1.

Hua Wei, "How Dangerous Can the Peony Be? Textual Space, *Caizi Mudan Ting*, and Naturalizing the Erotic," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 65, no. 4 (Nov. 2006): 741-762.

Judith Zeitlin, "Shared Dreams: The Story of the Three Wives' Commentary on *The Peony Pavilion*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 54, no. 1 (July 1994): 127-179.

Ellen Widmer, "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy and the Place of the Woman Writer in Late Imperial China," *Late Imperial China* 13, no. 1 (June 1992): 111-55.

Opera recording: *Young Lovers' version Peony Pavilion*

**SUNDAY, 4/6, 10PM: PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS DUE**



**WEEK 11      4/9      Women Playwrights**

*Primary reading:*

Wu Zao's *Shadow of Disguise*.

Wang Yun. *Dream of Glory (Fanhua meng): A Chuanqi Play by Wang Yun*, trans. and ed. Qingyun Wu (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2008)

*Secondary reading:*

Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, "Cross-Dressing Heroines: Wang Yun and He Peizhu," in *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004). 677-685.

Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, "Playwright and Lyricist: Wu Zao" and "Moral Fables and Special Effects: Liu Qingyun," in *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004). 685-716.

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**UNIT FOUR: Theater and Politics**

**WEEK 12      4/16      The Politics of Theater**

*Primary reading:*

Zhu Youdun, "A Leopard Monk Returns to the Laity of His Own Accord"  
"Black Whirlwind Li Spurns Riches out of Righteousness." West and Idema, *Monks, Lovers, Bandits, and Immortals*, 314-388.

*Secondary reading:*

Idema, Wilt. *The Dramatic Oeuvre of Chu Yu-tun (1379-1439)*, 1985. *Selections*.

Liana Chen, "The Social and Aesthetic Foundations of Qing Court Theater."

In *Ritual into Play: The Aesthetic Transformations of Qing Court Theatre*. Ph. D. dissertation, Stanford University, June 2009. Pp. 1-15, 32-67.

Andrea Goldman. *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770-1900*. Stanford University Press, 2012. *Selections*. In course files.

**SUNDAY, 4/20, 10PM: SECONDARY SOURCE ANALYSIS DUE**

**WEEK 13      4/23      Dynastic Change**

*Primary reading:*

Kong Shangren, *Peach Blossom Fan*

*Secondary reading:*

Tina Lu, *Persons, Roles, and Minds: Identities in Peony Pavilion and Peach Blossom Fan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). Part II. In course files.

Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* (Berkeley: U of C Press, 2007). *Selections*. In course files.

**SUNDAY, 4/27, 10PM: PEER REVIEW DUE**

**WEEK 14      4/30      Revolution**

*Primary reading:* The Hegemon King bids farewell to his concubine

*Secondary reading:*

Barbara Mittler, "'Eight Stage Works for 800 Million People': The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in Music — A View from Revolutionary Opera." *The Opera Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2010).

Chiara Lark Terzuolo, "Opera and Politics" 1-12. In course files.

*Film, to be screened in class: Farewell my Concubine* (dir. Chen Kaige 1993)

*Opera recording: Bawang bieji*

**RESEARCH PAPER DUE: MAY 9<sup>TH</sup>, 2014, 10 PM**