

千古傳頌—— 戲曲中的 經典愛侶

引子

多情自古傷離別，
更那堪冷落清秋節！
今宵酒醒何處？
楊柳岸，曉風殘月。
此去經年，應是良辰好景虛設。
便縱有千種風情，更與何人說？

宋代詞人柳永筆下那才子佳人戀人絮語的「千種風情」，
八百年來——從元代雜劇南戲到今天繁多的地方戲——都恆常與戲中說。
為觀眾所喜的愛情經典，不只是《西廂記》式的「願天下有情的都成了眷屬」的人月團圓，
其實「多情自古空餘恨」的經典愛侶，也同樣千古傳頌。

唐明皇與楊貴妃：天長地久有時盡，此恨綿綿無絕期

楊玉環與李隆基的經典妃子帝王愛侶故事，應是歷史上最恨綿綿無絕的愛情了。同樣是妃子與大王的愛情，虞姬自主，甘願為西楚霸王項羽自刎，免為負累，去其牽掛，早回江東，日後捲土重來；極盡淒美，突顯女性主體、男子英雄氣短，成就了一忠烈紅顏形象。而楊玉環卻是在她的愛侶皇帝無力挽的政治形勢之下，無奈被殺，落得紅顏禍水之名。然而，其愛情之慘戚怨麗，並不比虞姬遜色。

唐詩《長恨歌》

唐代詩人白居易的《長恨歌》，在八世紀的時候，已經典化了楊妃明皇這雙死別愛侶。「天生麗質難自棄，一朝選在君王側」的楊玉環，令李隆基「春宵苦短日高起，不再早朝。帶來的是藩鎮節度使安祿山「漁陽鼙鼓動地來，驚破霓裳羽衣曲」。李隆基的「重色思傾國」，唐將士不滿之極，六軍不發，就是皇帝也動不了，無奈何。結果是楊玉環這「宛轉蛾眉」，在馬嵬坡下、軍馬之前被粗暴勒死。最後唐江山是暫時保下來了，而李隆基則日夜思念玉人，「七月七日長生殿，夜半無人私語時」，只得夢中相會。

日本文學《源氏物語》

世人何時何地也愛慕苦戀真情，楊貴妃的故事，飄洋過海，落花東瀛，日本文學第一經典長篇故事，紫式部的《源氏物語》成書於十世紀，第一帖〈桐壺〉即引述楊貴妃的愛情故事，並以此作為藍本，撰述桐壺更衣與桐壺帝的哀怨愛情死別。

中國戲曲經典作品

中國戲曲舞台上，自元代白樸《唐明皇秋夜梧桐雨》雜劇，到清代洪昇的《長生殿》傳奇，至1920年代梅蘭芳的著名京劇《太真外傳》（齊如山編寫劇本），以及梅蘭芳根據舊皮黃戲所排的另一梅派經典《貴妃醉酒》，唐明皇與楊貴妃的愛情故事，八百年舞榭歌台、勾欄瓦舍、戲院劇場，一直在唱演真情綿綿，恨也無絕的餘韻。

崑劇《長生殿》

傳統崑曲保存了洪昇《長生殿》的多個折子，常演〈酒樓〉、〈舞盤〉、〈絮閣〉、〈密誓〉、〈小宴〉、〈驚變〉、〈埋玉〉、〈聞鈴〉、〈哭像〉等。上海崑劇團自1980年代起，在原崑曲傳字輩老藝術家傳承的折子戲基礎上，於身段表演、唱腔音樂各方面增補修訂，突顯崑曲的婉轉流利、載歌載舞特色，創排全本《長生殿》，並兼備武場戲，歷年持續改進求精。蔡正仁的「活唐明皇」與張靜嫻的華貴雍容楊妃，成就構築了大型崑劇《長生殿》的典範之作。踏入二十一世紀，上海崑劇團更以「五班三代」老中青藝術家，在舞台上延續經典愛侶傳說中的楊貴妃與唐明皇。

京劇《太真外傳》、《貴妃醉酒》

梅蘭芳在二十世紀二十年代，排出大型連台本戲京劇《太真外傳》，演員陣容集一時名角，王鳳卿飾唐明皇、姜妙香演高力士……，並創制新腔，頓時成為梅派藝術經典劇目之一。時至今日，由國家京劇院薪傳，于魁智和李勝素的名皇與楊妃，是當下京劇舞台的頂尖絕配了。

梅蘭芳另一代表作《貴妃醉酒》，青衣花衫應工，唱做並重，演楊貴妃在百花亭等待唐明皇一起賞花飲酒，豈料皇帝爽約，別幸她宮，懊惱之餘，楊妃只有借酒澆愁。劇中的〈四平調〉，是膾炙人口的京劇唱腔，而表演中的楊妃三次銜杯飲酒的不同身段動作，臥魚、鷄子翻身、下腰等，都是難度極高，而又切合人物哀怨仇恨的女子複雜情緒和心理狀態，充分呈現多情自古空餘恨的人生情狀。



蔡正仁（右）及張靜嫻（左）演活唐明皇及楊貴妃，並成就了大型崑劇《長生殿》的典範之作。

梅蘭芳代表作之一《貴妃醉酒》唱做並重，不同的身段動作充分呈現了楊貴妃當時的複雜情感。



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千古傳頌 戲曲中的 經典愛侶

梁山伯與祝英台：祇怪愚兄太愚蠢，辜負賢弟一片心

沒有戲曲這個表演藝術和文學形式的文化裝載，很可能就不會有梁山伯與祝英台這對經典愛侶在當代日常生活中的燦爛盛放。梁祝故事的民間流傳，歷史也很悠長，簡短的文字記載，早見於唐代的方志和筆記，但未見好像《離魂記》、《鶯鶯傳》等文人傳奇小說文學將這個故事典律化。早期的敘述，主角是祝英台，作為烈女節婦被歌頌，例如晉朝宰相謝安便奏請賜題祝英台墓為「義婦塚」，表揚女子為愛殉死的節義。元代白樸已失傳的雜劇《祝英台死嫁梁山伯》，從標題也見主體是祝英台。現存梁祝的元明戲曲，祇剩殘曲及一些單齣。清代的梁祝說唱鼓詞，有《柳蔭記》為題，指梁祝兩人在柳蔭樹下初相識。

「梁祝」故事的興起

自元雜劇始，到民國時的京劇和地方戲，在戲曲舞台上和文學裏，梁祝並不是最常被搬上戲台和書寫的才子佳人愛情故事，跟崔鶯鶯與張生、杜麗娘與柳夢梅、楊貴妃與唐明皇、林黛玉與賈寶玉等有戲曲與文學傑作傳誦的愛侶比較，就「經典」位置而言，不可同日而語。梁祝故事的大盛，實始於二十世紀五十年代初，由越劇、川劇等地方戲帶動，京劇又移植川劇版，彩色越劇電影1953年推出，海內外大受歡迎，把梁祝故事推上高峰。1963年香港邵氏公司黃梅調電影《梁山伯與祝英台》風靡一時，造就了凌波「永遠的梁哥哥」。不同年代不同類型的電影、電視劇接力，戲曲舞台上不斷搬演，長期延續到今天的日常文化領域，成就了梁山伯與祝英台那不可動搖的經典愛侶位置。

越劇《梁山伯與祝英台》

越劇自早期的男班落地唱書階段，已有梁祝故事的個別單折演出。過渡到女子越劇後，1930年代末，已有演全本《梁祝哀史》，袁雪芬演祝英台、馬樟花演梁山伯。四十年代後期，袁雪芬夥拍范瑞娟（梁山伯），增補全劇為上、下兩本，並創「弦下調」唱腔。又有范瑞娟和傅傳香（祝英台）合演的版本。1952年，越劇和川劇的《梁山伯與祝英台》同在全國戲曲觀摩會上，大放異彩，翌年1953年推出的越劇電影版，袁雪芬和范瑞娟主演，是中華人民共和國成立後生產的第一部彩色電影，在海內外大受歡迎。越劇劇種年青，表演優雅淑媛而淺易懂懂，唱腔悠揚婉轉，以女生扮男角梁山伯，以女旦演女扮男裝的祝英台，以深情呼喚心上人的戲曲表演，無出其右，淋漓盡致地呈現梁祝故事的哀怨纏綿，無論戲曲舞台或電影銀幕上，最成功的「梁山伯」，都是由女演員扮演的。袁雪芬袁派越劇表演中著名的「三哭」中的「英台哭靈」，唱詞字字泣血，聲情哀絕，極盡生離死別之苦，更令越劇《梁祝》成為各戲曲劇種中的絕世經典。

川劇《柳蔭記》

川劇在1950年代初，整理舊本、參考其他劇種和曲藝的梁祝相關本字，推出《柳蔭記》，也在1952年的全國戲曲觀摩大會大獲成功，並被京劇和其他劇種的梁祝借鑑移植。川劇《梁祝》的一大特點是以化鳥結尾而不是化蝶。有說蝴蝶燦爛但脆弱而命促，鳥則長久堅實多。「叛逆得瑰麗而驚人」（余秋雨語）的川人，在川劇裏以這個譬喻來呈示梁祝生死愛侶的感情，也許頗能體現川人性格。

京劇《柳蔭記》

京劇《柳蔭記》1953年由中國京劇團移植自川劇，基本上保留川劇的風格。名角葉盛蘭和杜近芳分飾梁山伯、祝英台，「通天教主」王瑤卿唱腔設計。沿襲自川劇版路子的唱詞：「祇怪愚兄太愚蠢，辜負賢弟一片心」，盡道這對愛侶的宿命。1954年，「四大名旦」之一程硯秋排了《英台抗婚》，是他藝術生涯最後的作品，唱詞唱腔多突破。京劇今天仍常演梁祝故事，張火丁2014年的新編名為《梁祝》；2016年，國家京劇院復排《柳蔭記》，杜近芳、葉少蘭（葉盛蘭之子）親授八十、九十後年輕演員。

粵劇《梁祝恨史》

香港粵劇最重要的「梁祝」，非芳艷芬、任劍輝1955年開山的《梁祝恨史》莫屬。與浙江越劇的《梁祝哀史》一字之異。《梁祝恨史》除了優美雅致的曲文，一唱三嘆迂迴婉麗的唱腔，還有「啟用旋轉舞台、七幅立體布景、服裝瑰麗豪華」的舞台景觀。



1953年推出越劇電影版《梁山伯與祝英台》，由袁雪芬（左）及范瑞娟（右）主演，在海內外大受歡迎。



由任劍輝（左）及芳艷芬（右）開山的《梁祝恨史》可謂香港粵劇最重要的「梁祝」。



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千古傳頌 戲曲中的 經典愛侶

許仙與白素貞：縱然是異類我待你的恩情非淺 你縱是蛇仙我心不變

家傳戶曉的《白蛇傳》故事，流傳民間久遠，初源於江南一帶。明代刊行的《清平山堂話本》，結集了宋元明三代的話本小說，其中的白蛇故事〈西湖三塔記〉約為宋末元初之作，這是最早可見白蛇故事的文字記載。晚明馮夢龍的筆記小說《警世通言》，有〈白娘子永鎮雷峰塔〉一卷。明代陳六龍的《雷峰塔傳奇》是最早可考的白蛇戲曲，但已失傳。清乾隆年間黃圖必、方成培先後有《雷峰塔傳奇》，而方的版本對後來舞台改編影響較大。清代陳遇乾有彈詞《義妖全傳》。

白蛇的故事

各地方戲曲劇種，大多有白蛇劇目。故事講蛇妖白素貞與書生許仙相戀故事，被自恃正義的僧人法海屢次破壞，謂人、妖異類，不可結合，且蛇妖以害人為目的，情必非真。白蛇對許書生一往情深，一生不悔：「縱然是異類我待你的恩情非淺」（田漢京劇本）。書生則意志不堅，屢次動搖，但最終仍能大徹大悟：「你縱是蛇仙我心不變」（田漢京劇本）。白素貞先與青兒盜仙草，將許仙起死回生。後為尋許仙，水鬥法海，身懷有孕，不敵，斷橋產子，被壓雷峰塔下。

京劇《白蛇傳》

京劇著名劇目《白蛇傳》，1950年代初創作，田漢編劇，前此名《金鉢記》，據京崑舊本改編。定本刪掉〈盜銀錢〉，增加最後青兒救出白素貞。唱腔設計王瑤卿；劉秀榮、杜近芳飾白素貞；張春孝、葉盛蘭飾許仙。文武開打，唱做兼備，京劇《白蛇傳》自有其特色。六十多年過去，經已成為京劇的經典劇目之一。梅蘭芳拍朱桂芳、程硯秋拍宋德珠所演的《金山寺》，素享盛譽。梅蘭芳與崑生余振飛合演的崑劇劇目〈斷橋〉，早成絕唱典範。

越劇《白蛇傳》

浙江越劇的《白蛇傳》，在二十世紀初的男班時期，已經作為端午時節戲上演。五十年代初重新改編，袁雪芬飾白娘子、范瑞娟飾許仙、傅全香飾小青、吳小樓飾法海；並加強舞美、服裝、燈光、舞蹈等劇場藝術元素，備受歡迎。戚雅仙（白素貞）、畢春芳（許仙）的搬演，也自成一派。越劇《白蛇傳》，過去六十多年來，歷久不衰。2015年末，更拍成電影，全國放映。

婺劇《白蛇傳》

婺劇的「白蛇」，在今天各戲曲劇種的搬演之中，最為大眾喝彩。多腔調的婺劇在1950年代始定名，其《白蛇傳》文戲委婉，武戲凌厲，更被譽為「文戲武做」。許仙在〈斷橋〉中最受談論的表演，例如出場跪步、吊毛、搶背、撲虎；白素貞和小青的蛇步和蛇形，融合妖精與人的身段舞蹈，都是婺劇《白蛇傳》獨有表演的繁多例子中的一隅。1960年代初，〈斷橋〉在北京演出，總理周恩來讚譽為「天下第一橋」，聲價百倍。

粵劇《仕林祭塔》

廣東粵劇的白蛇劇目，也獨特創造，更曾在上海頗受歡迎。二十世紀的頭二十年，粵劇花旦李雪芳擅演白蛇劇目，為觀眾喝彩，上台就幾乎必演。她在《仕林祭塔》中的創腔，被譽為「祭塔腔」，成為著名專腔，獨步「反絃二黃慢板」，盡道劇中白素貞被壓雷峰塔下十八年後，和兒子相聚的悲喜淒酸。李雪芳1920年代在上海演出，引起梨園和士林很大的注目。「祭塔腔」在當下的香港粵劇，備受重視，新一代正嘗試承傳再創。



五十年代初，越劇《白蛇傳》重新改編成女班劇目，由袁雪芬（左）飾白娘子、范瑞娟（右）飾許仙，備受歡迎。



婺劇《白蛇傳》中的〈斷橋〉曾被周恩來總理讚譽為「天下第一橋」。楊霞雲飾小青（上）、巫文玲飾白素貞（中）、樓勝飾許仙（下）



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千古傳頌一 戲曲中的 經典愛侶

賈寶玉與林黛玉：儂今葬花人笑痴，他朝葬儂知是誰

黛玉喜散不喜聚，寶玉喜聚不喜散——應該就是這雙經典傷別離愛侶的最好寫照了，落葉聚還散，最終是黛玉魂歸離恨天、寶玉出家悟道終結。清代曹雪芹成書於十八世紀上半期的長篇巨構《紅樓夢》（又作《石頭記》）一百二十回，主題實在是一塊石頭從天上到人間，歷練悲歡離合，而領悟佛道人生真在。

崑劇《紅樓夢》

清乾隆嘉慶時，江蘇文人仲振奎首度改編《紅樓夢》小說為戲曲，編成崑曲折子戲〈葬花〉一折，後來又寫了五十多齣的長劇《紅樓夢傳奇》，仲振奎是將曹雪芹巨著改編為戲曲搬上舞台的第一人，當時已是十八世紀最後十年。到了二十一世紀，北京的北方崑曲劇院創排了上、下兩本的大舞台包裝、大投資、大製作「豪華青春版」崑劇《紅樓夢》，分兩晚演出。演員陣容龐大、大型樂隊伴奏、增添國樂式的過場音樂設計；以名演員魏春榮、史紅梅、袁慧琴擔任王熙鳳、王夫人及賈母等角色，以青春演員擔演寶玉（翁佳慧〔女小生〕、施夏明）、黛玉（朱冰貞、張媛媛）、寶釵（邵天帥、王麗媛），其中女小生應工寶玉給予觀眾深刻的印象。北崑這個劇目自2010年首演，持續在海內外上演到今天，並屢獲國家大獎。

越劇《紅樓夢》

如果說有一些地方劇種因種種文化、歷史、社會和藝術家的因素，產生了幾乎是屬於該劇種「藝術身份認同」的代表性劇目的話；那麼，浙江越劇的《紅樓夢》和《梁山伯與祝英台》，就庶幾和越劇畫上等號的了。1958年首演的越劇《紅樓夢》，徐玉蘭（寶玉）、王文娟（黛玉）、陳蘭芳（寶釵）、唐月英（王熙鳳）、周寶奎（賈母）、徐慧琴（賈政）、孟莉莉（紫鵲）等名角主演，有連滿五十五場的驕人紀錄。率直反叛的寶玉、多愁善感的黛玉，在文辭優美、雅俗共賞的相對年輕劇種越劇的戲曲藝術深情塑造之下，在國內外公演，大受各地觀眾歡迎。上、下兩集的彩色電影版，1962年攝製，同樣深受歡迎。1978年時在國內重映，還創了當時最高電影觀眾人次的紀錄。



1958年首演的越劇《紅樓夢》由徐玉蘭（左）及王文娟（右）主演，當時創下了連演五十五場的驕人紀錄。

粵劇《情僧偷到瀟湘館》

二次大戰後、四十年代末，粵劇大老倌何非凡以「非凡響劇團」的班牌，夥拍名旦楚岫雲，上演他的首本名劇《情僧偷到瀟湘館》，以其獨創的「凡腔」，風流瀟灑，溫柔優雅，特別在瀟湘館憑弔黛玉的一場戲裏，替粵劇塑造了獨特的寶玉形象。加上楚岫雲在〈荷鋤葬花〉、〈焚稿歸天〉等場的精湛表演，再增添刻意營造的布景燈光，令《情僧偷到瀟湘館》有連滿三百場的佳話。後來由秦劍導演在1956年拍成電影，黛玉改由鄭碧影飾演。

京劇《黛玉葬花》

1790年四大徽班晉京賀乾隆八十「萬壽」，京劇在此之後漸次形成，但「紅樓」戲一直沒有怎麼見到，大概由於「紅樓」戲並不像「三國」、「水滸」等高亢火

熱，容易融合於京劇的表演風格特色。到十九世紀後期，光緒年間，才有伶人排演《黛玉葬花》和《捧玉》等戲，以傳統戲曲裝扮和穿戴上場，梳大頭穿帔的黛玉，往往引來觀眾哄堂大笑，似乎已經與當時人所想象的黛玉形象，格格不入。二十世紀初，梅蘭芳在北京吉祥戲院搬演由齊如山主力改編的京劇《黛玉葬花》，加上姜妙香的寶玉、姚玉芙的紫鵲。頭飾服裝都仿效古畫中仕女造型，這樣的創新概念和實踐，大獲好評：「黛玉的扮相是精心設計的，葬花時，穿玫瑰紫的軟綢對襟小襖和白色長裙，腰繫軟紗短圍裙，繫絲帶，兩邊掛玉……。」從那一刻，始有日後戲曲舞台上黛玉葬花的婉約秀麗淒美形象，直到今天。儂今葬花，他朝葬儂，瀟湘憑弔，情侶經典，已然陰陽相隔。



二十世紀初，梅蘭芳搬演由齊如山主力改編的京劇《黛玉葬花》，扮相經過精心設計，塑造出黛玉婉約秀麗的形象。

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Eternal Love Story- Couples in Chinese Opera Classics

Introduction

*Parting has always been such heart-breaking sorrow,
More so on a crisp, forlorn autumn day.
Where shall I be when I wake from my drunken sleep tonight?
By the willow bank, in the morning breeze, under the sickle moon.
I shall be gone for a long time, good times and beautiful sceneries are now meaningless.
Despite a thousand feelings and thoughts, to whom can I tell?*

This is one of the poems by Song dynasty poet, Liu Yong (circa 984 – circa 1053) that have 'hundreds and thousands of nuanced feelings of love' embedded in them. For the last eight hundred years, these nuances have created classic stories of love in Chinese opera, from the *zaju* (Za Opera) and *nanxi* (Southern Opera) of the Yuan period to the numerous regional operas of today. They may have 'happy endings' like *The Story of the West Chamber*, or 'bad endings' as in many other classics with lovers forced to take the bane of love, but they have gone down in history and been celebrated by time.

Emperor Xuanzong of Tang and the Imperial Concubine Lady Yang: even the sky and earth may end, yet this regret shall forever remain

The love story of Yang Yuhuan (Lady Yang) and Li Longji (Emperor Xuanzong of Tang) must be the most exemplary 'love of everlasting regret' in Chinese history. A similar king-and-consort type of love story, that of the overlord of Western Chu, Xiang Yu, and his concubine Yu Ji, has a different overtone. Yu Ji chooses to sacrifice her life for Xiang Yu - she would not be her lover's burden, so he can go back to his home country without worries and return for his vengeance in the future. This beautiful and touching love story focuses on the strongly proactive portrayal of the female versus the hero with a frustrating dilemma. Because of this, Yu Ji is remembered as a woman of dignity and loyalty. Yet in the 'Yang and Emperor' story, Yang Yuhuan is killed in a political crisis which her lover the Emperor is helpless to resolve. She ends up being regarded as the face that only brings bad fortune to her lover and calamities to others. Despite this, her tragic love story is no less touching than that of Yu Ji.

Tang dynasty poem *Song of Everlasting Regret*

The unfulfilled love between Lady Yang and Emperor Xuanzong is canonized in the long poem, *Song of Everlasting Regret*, by Tang poet, Bai Juyi, of the 8th century. In it there are these lines, '(Yang's) natural beauty could not be concealed, and she became the chosen companion of the Emperor'. They were so passionately in love that 'romantic nights were too short, even though the sun was already high in the sky'. The Emperor no longer wanted to hold the early court. What followed was that 'one day the war drums from Yuyang came thundering and shook the earth, interrupting the tune of the *Rainbow and Feather Garments*'. It was an uprising led by General An Lushan. The Emperor's 'indulgence in a beautiful face led to the fall of the empire', and caused extreme grievance in the army. The soldiers refused to go into battle, and even the Emperor could not move them. At the end, Yang, the 'beauty with such frail charm' was brutally strangled to death before the army at the Mawei Slope. The country was saved – at least for a while. The Emperor continued mourning and missing his beauty day and night. 'On the seventh day of the seventh moon, in the Palace of Eternal Life, they shared sweet whisperings in the quiet of the night'. But that only took place in a dream.

Japanese literature *The Tale of Genji*

The penchant for tragic love stories seems to be universal, and the story of Lady Yang crossed the ocean and landed in Japan. In *The Tale of Genji*, the earliest classical narrative in Japanese literature written by Murasaki Shikibu in the 10th century, opens in Chapter 1, *The Paulonia Court*, with the story of Lady Yang as the reference, and points the direction for the heart-breaking love story of Kiritsubono Koui and Kiritsubo Tei.

Classics in Chinese Opera

On the Chinese opera stage, Lady Yang's story has inspired many versions. From Bai Pu's *zaju* (Za Opera) entitled *The Firmiana Rain* of the Yuan period, Hong Sheng's *The Palace of Eternal Life* of the Qing period, to Mei Lanfang's renowned Peking Opera *The Unofficial Biography of Taizhen* (written by Qi Rushan) of the 1920s, and Mei's signature playlet, *The Drunken Imperial Concubine*, which was adapted from the old *pihuangxi* – the love story of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang and The Imperial Concubine Lady Yang has been performed over and again on theatre stages, and at various private and public entertainment venues where their everlasting love, sorrow and regret stay on.

Kunqu Opera *The Palace of Eternal Life*

Traditional Kunqu has preserved many excerpts from Hong Sheng's *The Palace of Eternal Life*. The frequently performed ones include *The Tavern*, *The Dance*, *Complaints in the Pavilion*, *The Secret Vow*, *The Small Feast*, *Shocked*, *Burying the Beauty*, *Hearing the Bell*, and *Lamenting the Statue*. Since the 1980s, using the excerpts passed down from the 'Chuan' generation of veteran Kunqu artists as basis, the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe has supplemented and revised various aspects like the stylised movements, vocal styles and music of the play, so as to highlight the exquisite presentation flow, singing and dancing characteristics

of Kunqu. The final outcome was a full-version of *The Palace of Eternal Life* with martial arts included as well. Yet improvement to the staging continues to this day. One of the remarkable pairings of stars was Cai Zhengren and Zhang Jingxian, and together they created an exemplary masterpiece of Kunqu Opera on *The Palace of Eternal Life*. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe has been able to groom three generations of consummate performers to continue with the staging of the legend.

Peking Opera *The Unofficial Biography of Taizhen* and *The Drunken Imperial Concubine*

But the legacy already began forming a century before. In the 1920s, Mei Lanfang put together the serialized Peking Opera performance of *The Unofficial Biography of Taizhen* with a star-studded cast, such as casting Wang Fengqing as Emperor Xuanzong of Tang and Jiang Miaoqi as Gao Lishi. A new vocal style was also created. The play instantly became one of the classics in the stock repertory of the Mei school of Peking Opera. To this day, the performing system has been passed down by the China National Peking Opera Company. The star pairing of Yu Kuizhi as Emperor Xuanzong and Li Shengsu as Lady Yang is considered as the most exemplary for the Peking Opera stage today.

Another signature play of Mei Lanfang was *The Drunken Imperial Concubine*. It calls for the stylised acting of two different genres of female roles, *qingyi* (virtuous female) and *huashan* (a virtuous, vivacious and unmarried woman), with emphasis on both the singing and the acting. The episode describes Lady Yang's mounting jealousy as she waits for the Emperor at the Hundred Blossoms Pavilion to enjoy the flowers and drinking together. As he fails to keep the appointment and favours another concubine instead, Lady Yang can only drown her frustration with wine. The play uses *sipingdiao*, a vocal style of Peking Opera that mesmerizes many audiences. The three times she drinks from the cup are delivered in three different stylised movements, a twisting of the waist, a flip and a backward bend. The acrobatic-like movements give vivid externalization of the pent-up feelings of the jealous woman, and give an effective visual presentation of the pains of unfulfilled love.

Cai Zhengren (Right) and Zhang Jingxian (Left) are one of the remarkable pairings of stars in playing Emperor Xuanzong and Lady Yang. Together they created an exemplary masterpiece of Kunqu Opera on *The Palace of Eternal Life*.



The Drunken Imperial Concubine, one of the signature plays of Mei Lanfang, give an effective visual presentation of the pains of unfulfilled love of Lady Yang.



The star pairing of Yu Kuizhi (Right) as Emperor Xuanzong and Li Shengsu (Left) as Lady Yang is considered as the most exemplary for the Peking Opera stage today.



Eternal Love Story- Couples in Chinese Opera Classics

The Butterfly Lovers: unfulfilled 'brotherly' love

Without the performing art of Chinese opera and literature as cultural vehicles, most probably the love story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai – better known to the English reader as 'the butterfly lovers' – would not have become part of the colourful tapestry of contemporary everyday life. The story of the Liang-Zhu lovers has quite a long history in Chinese folklore. A simple account of the story can be found in local histories and notes as early as the Tang period, but it has not been canonized like *The Departed Soul* and *The Story of Ying Ying*. The early narratives featured Zhu Yingtai as the protagonist and lauded her as a virtuous woman. One example was the designation of Zhu's tomb as 'The Tomb of the Virtuous Woman', a move initiated by Xie An, Prime Minister of the Jin dynasty, in praise of her sacrificing her life for her lover. From the title of the *zaju* (Za Opera) play by the Yuan dynasty playwright, Bai Pu, *Zhu Yingtai's Marriage in Death to Liang Shanbo*, now lost to time, one can see that the story's protagonist is Zhu Yingtai. Only fragments of libretto and playlets on the Liang-Zhu theme from the Yuan and Ming periods survive today. One reference came from the lyrics of a narrative singing with drum accompaniment, which existed in the Qing period, called *The Tale Under the Willow Shade*, so named because in the story, that is where the lovers meet for the first time.

The Rise of the Liang-Zhu Story

But from the *zaju* (Za Opera) of the Yuan period to the Peking Operas and regional operas of the early 20th century, Liang-Zhu had never been one of the love stories frequently performed on the opera stage or told in literature. Compared with other love stories that had become 'classics', such as Cui Yingying and Scholar Zhang (*The Story of the West Chamber*), Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei (*Peony Pavilion*), Yang Yuhuan and Emperor Xuanzong of Tang (*The Palace of Eternal Life*), and Lin Daiyu and Jia Baoyu (*The Dream of the Red Chamber*), the Liang-Zhu couple was never regarded as being on the same par. The story only grew in popularity in the 1950's, when it was performed on stage as Yue Opera and Sichuan Opera, with the latter giving rise to an adaptation in Peking Opera. In 1953, a colour film version of the story titled *The Butterfly Lovers* was a hit in China and other Chinese communities all over the world. The heat wave culminated in the 1963 *huangmeidiao* film, *The Love Eterne*, produced by the Shaw Brothers Pictures, which took the box office everywhere by storm. The actress, Ivy Ling Po, who played the transvestite role as Liang Shanbo, rose to idol status and was dubbed by her fans as 'the eternal Brother Liang'. Since then, the Liang-Zhu legacy has continued in different genres: films, television drama series, Chinese opera performances, etc. It has extended into the fabric of everyday life to this day. As a result, the Liang-Zhu story has finally found its pedestal as a classic among love stories.

Yue Opera *The Butterfly Lovers*

In the early days of Yue Opera, the performing practice involved a small group of male actors travelling to different villages and visiting houses to sing and perform. There were already self-contained playlets of the Liang-Zhu story. After the system changed to an all-female cast, a complete version, *The Sad Story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, was in place by the end of 1930's, with Yuan Xuefen as Zhu and Ma Zhanhua as Liang. In the late 1940's, Yuan and Fan Ruijuan (as Liang Shanbo) formed a new partnership on stage, and the script was expanded into two parts. They also created the vocal style of *xianxiadiao*. There is also another version with Fan Ruijuan and Fu Chuanxiang (as Zhu Yingtai) playing the two main characters. In 1952, both the Yue Opera and Sichuan Opera versions were presented at the National Chinese Traditional Theatre Demonstration Show and were a phenomenal success. The following year, when the film version of the Yue Opera featuring Yuan Xuefen and Fan Ruijuan was launched, it was a milestone event because it was the first colour film made since the establishment of the People's Republic of China. It was a hit both at home and abroad as well. As a young operatic genre, Yue Opera distinguishes itself with its elegant style of performance, accessibility to the masses, and a flowing vocal style. All of these come together as elements of success in mass entertainment. By using a female actor to play the male role of Liang Shanbo, and a female actor to play the female Zhu Yingtai disguised as a male, this exemplary operatic performance vividly illustrates the strong power of hearts calling for love and portends the devastation to follow. Whether it is stage performance or on the cinema screen, all successful 'Liang Shanbos' were played by female actors. In *Yingtai Mourning*, which is one of the 'three famous crying scenes' in the repertoire of the Yuan Xuefen stylistic school, the singing and the lyrics seem to tear from a heart dripping with blood as Yingtai bids the last farewell to her love. The artistic rendering makes the Yue Opera version of the Liang-Zhu story the ultimate classic among all genres of Chinese opera.

Sichuan Opera *The Tale Under the Willow Shade*

In the early 1950's, artists in the Sichuan Opera circle revised the old script by referencing relevant scripts in the other Chinese opera genres, narrative singing etc., and came up with *The Tale Under the Willow Shade*. It was a great success at the National Chinese Traditional Theatre Demonstration Show and later became, in turn, a reference for other Liang-Zhu stories in Peking Opera and other operatic genres. The most prominent feature of this Sichuan Opera version is that it ends with the lovers transforming into birds rather than butterflies. It is said that though butterflies are gorgeous in looks, they are fragile and short-lived, while birds live longer and are stronger. As writer Yu Qiuyu describes, Sichuan people are 'rebellious with stunning glamour'. Using the image of birds to represent the ill-fated lovers is perhaps an effective reflection of the character of the Sichuan people.

Peking Opera *The Tale Under the Willow Shade*

The Peking Opera *The Tale Under the Willow Shade* was adapted from Sichuan Opera in 1953 by the China National Peking Opera Company, and the style of the original source was maintained to a large extent. Renowned actors Ye Shenglan and Du Jinfang played Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai respectively; the vocal style was devised by Wang Yaoqing. The lyrics also followed that of the Sichuan Opera, and Liang's lines: 'As the older brother, I blame myself for being so dumb to the realise the loving intention of my younger brother', a premonition of the fate of the two lovers in the end. In 1954, Cheng Yanqiu, one of the 'Four Greats in Female Roles', created the new playlet, *Zhu Yingtai Refuses to be Married*. It was also the last work of his illustrious artistic career. In it, there were many breakthroughs whether in terms of lyrics or vocal style. To this day, the story of Liang-Zhu is still often performed in Peking Opera – the more recent being the 2014 version of *Liang-Zhu*, and the 2016 re-staging of *The Tale Under the Willow Shade* by the China National Peking Opera Company, with Du Jinfang and Ye Xiaolan (son of Ye Shenglan) giving personal training of young actors born in the 1980's and 1990's.

Cantonese Opera *The Lamentable Story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*

In Cantonese Opera, the most representative interpretation of the Liang-Zhu story may be *The Lamentable Story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, an original production starring Fong Yim-fun and Yam Kim-fai in 1955. The Chinese title was only different from that of the Yue Opera by one character, *The Sad Story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*. The Cantonese Opera production impressed the audience with its beautiful and elegant lyrics, the touching and lilting vocal style, and the stage design which was complete with 'a revolving stage, seven three-dimensional settings, and glamorous costumes'.



Cheng Yanqiu (Left) one of the 'Four Greats in Female Roles', created *Zhu Yingtai Refuses to be Married*. He has made many breakthroughs in this repertoire.



Eternal Love Story- Couples in Chinese Opera Classics

Xu Xian and Bai Suzhen: love between a mortal and a spirit

The Legend of the White Snake was first told in Jiangnan, the area south of the Yangtze River, and became popular in Chinese folklore over time. The earliest documented version can be found in *The Story of the Three Pagodas of the West Lake*, in the collection entitled *Tales of Qingpingshan Hall*. Written during the transition years of the Song and Yuan regimes, the book contained tales from the Song, Yuan and Ming periods, and was published during the Ming dynasty. There was also *Madam White Trapped Forever under the Leifeng Pagoda* in *Stories to Caution the World* by Feng Menglong (1574-1646). *The Legend of the Leifeng Pagoda*, a *chuangqi* play by another Ming dynasty writer, Chen Liulong, is said to be the earliest Chinese opera on this story although the text has already been lost. During the Qianlong period of the Qing dynasty, both Huang Tubi (1700 – ?) and Fang Chengpei (1713 – ?) had written *The Legend of the Leifeng Pagoda*, and it was Fang's version that had the stronger influence on the stage adaptations that followed. Chen Yuqian of the Qing dynasty had written the *tanxi* piece, *The Full Legend of the Righteous Demon*, for narrative singing performance.

Story about the White Snake

As theatrical performances, most genres of regional Chinese opera have the White Snake story in their repertory. The story is about the love between the white snake demon, Bai Suzhen, and the scholar Xu Xian. But their love is condemned by Monk Fahai, a self-proclaimed upholder of righteousness who regards the relationship as being in violation with the Laws of Nature. Fahai believes that the snake demon is set out to harm the human, and her love cannot be true. But the truth is otherwise. The White Snake is wholeheartedly in love with Xu Xian: 'though I'm a spirit, I love you dearly' (line from Tian Han's play). Although the scholar is not as steadfast in his love for her, he realizes in the end that 'although you're a snake, my heart will never change' (ditto). In order to save Xu Xian, the White Snake joins hands with the Green Snake to steal the celestial herb, and later, in order to find Xu Xian, she fights against Fahai despite being pregnant. She loses the fight, and after giving birth to a baby on the Broken Bridge, she is trapped under the Leifeng Pagoda by Fahai's magic.

Peking Opera *The Legend of the White Snake*

The Legend of the White Snake is in the repertory of many genres of Chinese traditional theatre. The script in the Peking Opera repertory was written in the early 1950's by Tian Han, initially entitled *The Story of the Gold Alms Bowl*. The play was adapted from an old version in the Peking Opera and *Kunju* repertories. The episode of *Stealing from the Treasury* was taken out from the final version, and the rescue of the White Snake by the Green Snake was added. The vocal style of this Peking Opera was devised by Wang Yaoqing. Liu Xiurong and Du Jinfang played the White Snake, and Zhang Chunxiao and Ye Shenglan played Xu Xian. With elements of traditional theatre all deployed - martial art, acting and singing in the 'civil' category - this Peking Opera version has its own unique characteristics. Now sixty years on, it has become one of the classics in the Peking Opera repertory. The spin-off playlet, *Jinshan Temple*, featuring two pairs of stars - Mei Lanfang with Zhu Guifang, and Cheng Yanqiu with Song Dezhong - was also highly acclaimed. Another spin-off, *The Broken Bridge*, performed by Mei Lanfang and *Kunju* actor Yu Zhenfei, has long been regarded as 'the best there was' in the *Kunju* repertory.

Yue Opera *The Legend of the White Snake*

The Yue Opera version popularly found in Zhejiang used to be performed during the Dragon Boat Festival in the early 20th century. At that time, the troupes had an all male cast. But in the early 1950's, it was adapted to contain a mixed gender cast, with female actors in transvestite roles. The new version cast Yuan Xuefan as the White Snake, Fan Ruijuan as Xu Xian, and Wu Xiaolou as Fahai. A lot of attention was given to creating the aesthetic appeal of this production, such as scenography, costume, lighting and choreography, and it was a huge success. Later Qi Yaxian (as Bai Suzhen) and Bi Chunfang (as Xu Xian) re-staged it and it was recognized for its unique presentation. For the past six decades, *The Legend of the White Snake* has always been popular on the Yue Opera stage. There was a film version made in late 2015 for nationwide screening.

Wu Opera *The Legend of the White Snake*

Among the many stage productions of the 'White Snake', the Wu Opera version is perhaps the most lauded. As a theatrical genre that uses many vocal styles of singing, Wu Opera only came into its own in the early 1950s. Its presentation of *The Legend of the White Snake* is exemplary of how Wu Opera crosses the line between the 'martial' and the 'civil' categorisation, with the 'civil' part showing a soft, feminine charm, and the 'martial' part, filled with crisp, fast action. In it, the actor playing Xu Xian needs to deliver acrobatic stunts like the 'crouching stance', 'headlong flip', 'rolling off the back' and 'tiger pouncing'. As for the actors playing the White Snake and Green Snake, they need to dance and execute stylised movements such as 'the snake slither', 'the serpentine body' etc. to portray their original beastly form. When the playlet *Broken Bridge* was performed in Beijing during the early 1960s, Premier Zhou Enlai praised it as 'the number one Bridge' in Chinese Opera, and this catapulted the playlet to nationwide fame.

Cantonese Opera *Shilin Paying Respects to His Mother Trapped Under the Pagoda*

The Cantonese Opera versions about the White Snake legend also have their unique appeal, which made them quite popular in Shanghai at one time. During the first two decades of the 20th century, Cantonese Opera *huadan* actress (in female lead role), Lee Suet-fong was renowned for her portrayal of the White Snake and was so popular that every time she appeared in a performance, she was expected to include this. She was recognized for her innovative vocal style in *Shilin Paying Respects to His Mother Trapped Under the Pagoda*, which is dubbed the 'pagoda vocal style'. The delivery is in *fanxian erhuang* and in slow tempo, which vividly expresses the mixed emotions of the White Snake on her reunion with her son after having been trapped under the Leifeng Pagoda for eighteen years. In 1920, Lee performed it in Shanghai and drew a lot of attention from the Chinese opera circles as well as the academia. The 'pagoda vocal style' is a highly regarded legacy in contemporary Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong, with new generations of artists working hard to inherit it and reproduce its uniqueness on stage today.

Premier Zhou Enlai has praised the *Broken Bridge* from *The Legend of the White Snake* of Wu Opera as 'the number one Bridge' in Chinese opera, and this catapulted the playlet to nationwide fame.



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Eternal Love Story- Couples in Chinese Opera Classics

The young lovers from *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu –

**‘People laugh at me for being sentimental in burying the fallen blossoms,
but who knows who would be the one to bury me when I pass away?’**

Daiyu prefers separation to being together, while Baoyu prefers being together to separation – this is the best summing up of the fate of these two young lovers who remain apart in the end. Like fallen leaves that gather on the ground and then go their separate ways, their love ends with Daiyu passing away in lonesome sadness, while Baoyu takes the tonsure to pursue spiritual awakening. Qing Dynasty writer Cao Xueqin (1715 – 1763) finished his 120-chapter masterpiece *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, also known as *The Story of the Stone*, in the first half of the 18th century. It tells of a stone falling from heaven to the human world, and is fated to go through the joys and sorrows of life until it comes to be enlightened, as depicted in Buddhist thoughts.

Kunqu Opera *The Dream of the Red Chamber*

During the Qianlong-Jiaqing period of the Qing dynasty (or the turn of the 19th century), Jiangsu writer Zhong Zhenkui made the first opera adaptation of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, and produced the Kunqu playlet *Burying Flowers*. He went on to complete *Legend of the Dream of the Red Chamber*, an opera of over 50 acts. Zhong was the first to adapt Cao Xueqin's magnum opus, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* into operatic work on stage, and it was already the last decade of the 18th century when he did that. By the 21st century, the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre created a two-part grand production of extravagance and mega investment, the ‘extravagant youth version’ of *The Dream of the Red Mansions*, performed on two nights. The production has a brilliant cast accompanied by a full-scale orchestra, with added intermezzo written in Chinese music style. The strong cast includes Wei Chunrong as Wang Xifeng, Shi Hongmei as Lady Wang, and Yuan Huiqin as Dowager Jia. The young actors Weng Jiahui (the female actor in transvestite role) and Shi Xiaming as Baoyu, Zhu Bingzhen and Zhang Yuanyuan as Daiyu, and Shao Tianshuai and Wang Liyuan as Baochai. Among the young actors, Weng's transvestite performance of Baoyu has cast deep impressions on the audience. Since its premiere in 2010 by the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre, the play has received numerous national awards and continues to be performed in China as well as abroad.

Yue Opera *The Dream of the Red Chamber*

If there is a certain genre of regional opera that can create a repertory of ‘artistic identity’ vis-à-vis cultural, historical and social factors as well as their artists, the two Yue Opera versions of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and *The Butterfly Lovers* may fit the bill. Mentioning of the titles seems to be invariably associated with Yue Opera. Premiered in 1958, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* has a star-studded cast that features Xu Yulan (Baoyu), Wang Wenjuan (Daiyu), Chen Lanfang (Baochai), Tang Yueying (Wang Xifeng), Zhou Baokui (Grandmother Jia), Xu Huiqin (Jia Zheng), Meng Liying (Zijuan) and more. It has achieved an impressive record of 55 full-house performances non-stop. The successful portrayals of the young protagonists – the candid and rebellious Baoyu and the sentimental Daiyu – and the beautiful elegant lyrics attracted audiences of all backgrounds. As a relatively young genre in Chinese opera, this Yue Opera production won a wide following everywhere it went. The 1962 two-part colour film version of the play was equally well received. When the film was released again in China in 1978, it hit the highest box-office record of the time.

Cantonese Opera *The Romantic Monk*

A Cantonese Opera counterpart enjoyed similar success in another part of China. After World War II, at the end of the 1940s, Cantonese Opera superstar Ho Fei-fan and his Fei Fan Heung Opera Troupe teamed up with renowned Cantonese Opera actress Chor Chuk-wan, to stage his signature play, *The Romantic Monk*. With his one-of-a-kind vocal style, his debonair persona and gentlemanly mien, Ho created a uniquely different image of Jia Baoyu. Together with the brilliant acting of his co-star in the scenes of *Burying Flowers* and *Burning the Manuscripts before Death*, the ingenious stage and lighting design, *The Romantic Monk* made a record 300 full-house performances. In 1956, the play was made into a film with Chun Kim as director, but the female lead was changed to Cheng Bik-ying as Daiyu.

Peking Opera *Daiyu Buries Fallen Flowers*

Peking Opera came into its own as a genre after 1790, the year when the four major Anhui opera troupes went to Beijing to perform in honour of Emperor Qianlong's 80th birthday. However, plays derived from *The Dream of the Red Chamber* story did not seem to thrive. This probably had something to do with its acting, which was very different from other action plays like *Three Kingdoms*, *The Water Margin* etc., which could easily synergize with a Peking Opera performance. It was not until the latter half of the 19th century that actors started performing playlets like *Daiyu Buries Fallen Flowers* and *Baoyu Discards His Jade*. But the traditional costumes and images, such as Daiyu donning a huge hairdo and a cape, were often ridiculed for not conforming with the popular imagination of Daiyu at the time. In the early 20th century, Mei Lanfang staged the Peking Opera version of *Daiyu Buries Fallen Flowers*, adapted by Qi Rushan, at the Jixiang Theatre in Beijing. The cast included Jiang Miaoqi as Baoyu and Yao Yufu as Zijuan. The hairdo and costumes followed the image of the ladies in ancient Chinese paintings, and this innovative change received great reviews. A critic wrote, ‘The image of Daiyu is thoughtfully designed. When she buries the flowers, she wears a rose coloured jacket of soft silk that opens at the front and a long white skirt, a short organza apron around the waist, ribbons on both sides with jade pieces dangling...’ From that moment on, the frail beauty and melancholy image of Daiyu were all depicted along these lines, even to this day. Her lamentable love is also captured in these famous lines, ‘I bury the flowers today, who will bury me tomorrow?’ The scene of Baoyu mourning at her chamber follows, but the lovers are forever separated by death.



Premiered in 1958, Yue Opera *The Dream of the Red Chamber* has a star-studded cast that features Xu Yulan (Left) as Baoyu, Wang Wenjuan (Right) as Daiyu. The 1962 two-part colour film version of the play was equally well received.

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