



The Flower Princess

A Cantonese Opera in an English Edition

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“Reading *The Flower Princess* to Understand Hong Kong and China”

Professor Bell Yung

Professor of Music, University of Pittsburgh

“Love and Loyalty in *The Flower Princess*”

Professor Katherine Carlitz

Adjunct Professor of Chinese Literature, University of Pittsburgh



Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (incorporating the Centre of Asian Studies)

The University of Hong Kong, Tang Chi Ngong Building, Pokfulam Road, Hong Kong

E-mail: casgen@hku.hk

Website: <http://www.hku.hk/cas>

Tel.: (852) 2859 2460

Fax: (852) 2559 3185





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“Reading The Flower Princess to Understand Hong Kong and China”

— Bell Yung



For centuries the illiterate and semi-literate in China flocked to traditional opera performances not only as entertainment but also as an important source of information about their past and their society. The operas offered them a larger world and forged a cultural identity and a sense of shared heritage. Cantonese Opera is the heart and soul of Hong Kong's Cantonese people, and *The Flower Princess* is the most popular opera of them all, embraced by all segments of society, from wealthy tai-tai's to lowly amahs. An English translation cannot match a live performance in Cantonese, but it does offer a glimpse of the Chinese ethos for those not versed in the Chinese language and Cantonese music.



“Love and Loyalty in The Flower Princess”

— Katherine Carlitz

Chastity, loyalty, pathos and passion! *The Flower Princess* has them all, not to mention corrupt betrayals and self-serving schemes that make the hero and heroine shine even more brightly. Dramatizing the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644, this opera portrays dynastic fall through the lens of love and loyalty. *The Flower Princess* is firmly in the tradition of earlier masterpieces like *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (*Peony Pavilion*), where the value of loyalty is made deeply personal as well as political. Can we call these values “Confucian”? Why were they invoked during the tumultuous 1950s in Hong Kong?

Bios

Bell Yung is Professor of Music at the University of Pittsburgh and an Honorary Research Fellow at HKU's Centre of Asian Studies (now incorporated into the Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences). His most recent books are: *The Last of China's Literati: The Music, Poetry and Life of Tsar Teh-yun* (2008), *Music and Cultural Rights* (2009), and *The Flower Princess, A Cantonese Opera* (2010, co-translated with Sonia Ng and Katherine Carlitz). He has also published in Chinese academic journals, and edited and/or produced a DVD, several CDs, and museum catalogues. Born in Shanghai and grew up in Hong Kong, he received his higher education in the U.S. He is a recipient of numerous honors and research grants, including the Guggenheim, Mellon, Ford, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, Fulbright, and Chiang Ching Kuo.

Katherine Carlitz is Adjunct Professor of Chinese Literature at the University of Pittsburgh. Her recent publications include *Writing and Law in Late Imperial China* (with Robert Hegel, 2007); “Lovers, Talkers, Monsters, and Good Women: Competing Images in Mid-Ming Epitaphs and Fiction,” in *Beyond Exemplar Tales: New Approaches to Chinese Women's Lives*, ed. Joan Judge and Hu Ying (2010); “Passion and Chastity: Meng Chengshun and the Fall of the Ming,” in *Text, Performance and Gender in Chinese Literature and Music: Essays in Honor of Wilt Idema* (2009); and “Printing as Performance: Literati Playwright-Publishers of the Late Ming,” in *Publishing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. Cynthia Brokaw and Kao-wing Chow (2005). She has received research grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Center for Chinese Studies (Taiwan), and the American Academy of Religion.

The Flower Princess by Tong Dik Sang, *A Cantonese Opera*, was translated, edited and introduced by Bell Yung, assisted in translation by Sonia Ng and Katherine Carlitz, with a Foreword by Pak Suet Sin (The Chinese University Press, 2010).