

CANTONESE OPERA: WONG FUI and GWAE-YING

English Translation By Feng Xin-ming 2000

粤剧：王魁与桂英

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Translator's Note 翻译者言

The opera “Wong Fui and Gwae Ying” profoundly demonstrates the traditional Chinese thinking on the Cardinal Relationships: Cardinal Obligations are not to be shirked. In this opera, the kindness and obligation due between husband and wife must not be discarded at will: even though Gwae Ying is a singer courtesan and her social status is extremely low, because she has remained chaste and true to her husband since marriage she enjoys the right to demand that her husband also remain true to her.

“王魁与桂英”一剧，深刻地表现了中国传统的伦理思想：义不能负。在这剧里，夫妻之间的恩义，是不能随意抛弃的：桂英虽身为歌妓，地位低微之极，但婚后坚守节义，所以享有要求其夫亦守义的权利。

Traditional Chinese thought not only values the Cardinal Obligations, but also values feelings. Gwae Ying nurses the deepest feelings for Wong Fui, and shows him the utmost kindness. She musters all her efforts, bows down and kneels, all to save him, to give him a chance to show some compassion, so that he could escape death, even though then Gwae Ying's own death would become futile—she is still ready to forgive her husband and to sacrifice her life to save him. Wong Fui, however, has embarked on a road of betraying his Cardinal Obligations, a road of avarice for empty riches and honor, and so of course cannot appreciate the kindness coming from a “lowly person”. To protect his “fine future”, he turns his heart into stone, and repeatedly tries to evict the person who has saved his life, who is his wife. It is indeed true that feelings are linked to the Cardinal Obligations; those who betray their Cardinal Obligations inevitably will also lack feelings.

中国传统思想不仅重义，也重情。桂英对王魁，可谓情重，对他仁至义尽，用尽心思，低首下跪，为了救他，让他显露一点恻隐之心，以免一死，尽管这样会使桂英自己变成白白空死，她仍对丈夫海量宽容，仍肯为救丈夫牺牲自己的生命。但王魁既然踏上了背信弃义的道路，也就是贪慕虚荣的道路，就当然不能领一个「低下人」的情了。为了保他的「前途似锦」，就把心肠变成铁石，对他的救命恩人、妻子，一次又一次地来个无情驱逐。可见，情和义是相连的，背义的人，必会也无情。

Some people have said that Gwae Ying's beating the gods is unreasonable, and the fact that the opera does not have her punished not only encourages disrespect to the divine, but also encourages taking it out on innocent third parties when one has been wronged.

In rebuttal I say that the Sea God has received an oath sworn in his temple, but does not administer terms of the oath and mete out retribution to Wong Fui, and thus has been negligent. For Gwae Ying to make the Sea God answerable is not unreasonable, as in traditional China ordinary people calling negligent officials to account is considered acceptable, as long as those ordinary people accept the punishment to themselves that later follows. Of course Gwae Ying's disrespect to the divine deserves punishment, but she has to die to make the Sea God take up his duties, and her dying already constitutes her punishment. One cannot say that the opera does not have her punished. Also, the Sea God should have administered the law and retribution to Wong Fui long ago, without Gwae Ying needing to die first, and so the assault on his temple is fair retribution to the Sea God. In the end, Heaven's eye is all encompassing; justice eventually prevails.

有人说，桂英打神，实属无理，剧情里面没有惩罚她，是鼓励对神明的不敬，是鼓励自己有不平，就可以拿无辜的第三者出气。本人反驳说，海神收纳了誓言，却不把誓言执行，向王魁施行报应，是海神的失责，桂英向他问罪，没有不可，因为中国传统里，平民是可以对失责官员问罪的，只是该平民要肯承担日后的惩罚而已。当然桂英对神明不敬，罪有该罚。但她需要一死，才能使海神执责，这一死，已经是她的惩罚了，何谓没有惩罚？另外，海神本应老早执法，对王魁施行报应，而不需桂英死去，才能得到公平，所以海神庙遭打，也属海神应有的报应。总之，天眼恢恢，公道总会实行。

Indeed this opera does vividly bring to life traditional thought with unique Chinese characteristics.

这出戏的确把很有中国特点的传统思想精彩地表演出来。

Feng Xin-ming, Oct. 11, 2006

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