

CANTONESE OPERA: WONG FUI and GWAE-YING

English Translation By Feng Xin-ming 2000

粵劇：王魁與桂英

馮欣明2000年英語譯文

Translator's Note 翻譯者言

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.

“王魁與桂英”一劇，深刻地表現了中國傳統的倫理思想：義不能負。在這劇裡，夫妻之間的恩義，是不能隨意拋棄的：桂英雖身為歌妓，地位低微之極，但婚後堅守節義，所以享有要求其夫亦守義的權利。

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.

中國傳統思想不僅重義，也重情。桂英對王魁，可謂情重，對他仁至義盡，用盡心思，低首下跪，為了救他，讓他顯露一點惻隱之心，以免一死，儘管這樣會使桂英自己變成白白空死，她仍對丈夫海量寬容，仍肯為救丈夫犧牲自己的生命。但王魁既然踏上了背信棄義的道路，也就是貪慕虛榮的道路，就當然不能領一個「低下人」的情了。為了保他的「前途似錦」，就把心腸變成鐵石，對他的救命恩人、妻子，一次又一次地來個無情驅逐。可見，情和義是相連的，背義的人，必會也無情。

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.

有人說，桂英打神，實屬無理，劇情裡面沒有懲罰她，是鼓勵對神明的不敬，是鼓勵自己有不平，就可以拿無辜的第三者出氣。本人反駁說，海神收納了誓言，卻不把誓言執行，向王魁施行報應，是海神的失責，桂英向他問罪，沒有不可，因為中國傳統裡，平民是可以對失責官員問罪的，只是該平民要肯承擔日後的懲罰而已。當然桂英對神明不敬，罪有該罰。但她需要一死，才能使海神執責，這一死，已經是她的懲罰了，何謂沒有懲罰？另外，海神本應老早執法，對王魁施行報應，而不需桂英死去，才能得到公平，所以海神廟遭打，也屬海神應有的報應。總之，天眼恢恢，公道總會實行。

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

這出戲的確把很有中國特點的傳統思想精彩地表演出來。

Feng Xin-ming, Oct. 11, 2006

馮欣明2006年十月十一日