



Chinese Opera: Stories and Images

By Peter Lovrick

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In *Chinese Opera* brilliant photographs by Sui Wang-Ngai introduce the reader to a unique theatrical form. Dramatic, full-color stage photographs of individual actors and dynamic action shots, taken in natural light at live performances in Hong Kong, capture gestures and facial expression to convey the theatrical moment while simultaneously pointing to the differences in costuming and presentation that distinguish each regional style and character.

Chinese opera is a blend of song, speech, mime, dance, and acrobatics held together by a language of theatrical conventions entirely new to the Westerner. It is based on a rich repertoire of stories drawn from the history, legends, myths, folk tales, and classic novels of the country, here engagingly retold by Peter Lovrick. Full of colorful characters and surprising events born of the imagination of ancient culture, these stories live on as part of the Chinese theatrical tradition.

The plays are organized in groups to give an idea of the Chinese “chain of being” or social structure--from heavenly beings to emperors, common folk to ghosts. A short preface to each section provides important insights into traditional society. A brief anecdotal history of the development of Chinese opera is also included, as is a list of English-and Chinese-language references. *Chinese Opera* offers an evocative and fascinating glimpse of Chinese cultural life.

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Chinese Opera looks at Chinese society through an exciting series of photographs of operatic performances from many regions of the country. The book introduces the reader to this unique theatrical form and tells the traditional stories that are its narrative foundation. Siu Wang-Ngai's extraordinary images, taken in natural light during performances, lovingly reveal the visual excitement of Chinese opera and point to the differences in costuming and presentation that distinguish each regional style and character type.

Through Peter Lovrick's engaging text, *Chinese Opera* provides a brief anecdotal history of the development of Chinese opera and introduces a language of theatrical convention entirely new to the Westerner. It also identifies the hallmarks of the dozen or so regional opera styles found in this collection. As well, the book arranges the stories in a rough chain of being, from heaven, through the whole social structure on earth from emperor to outlaw, to ghosts in the nether world, offering a revealing view of Chinese social tradition and experience. Chinese opera has a rich repertoire drawn from history, legends, folk tales, and classic novels.

Chinese Opera opens a door onto the wealth of Chinese traditional drama in a way that will interest drama aficionados, admirers of theatrical photography, students of Chinese drama, those interested in the culture of China, and everyone who enjoys a lively story. Siu Wang-Ngai's photographic record of opera performances makes these stories come alive.

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