

East Meets West: Stereotyping the East-Asian Female  
in Operatic Works from 1885 to 2010

by

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## ABSTRACT

Artistic trends of the mid-nineteenth century demonstrate the popularity of incorporating Asian elements into various artistic media. This paper discusses why the stereotypical Asian female provided an attractive character for operatic librettists, composers and audiences. To support the discussion, six operas from 1885 to 2010 are examined, and the dramatic and musical portrayal of representative female characters is discussed. The familiar character of Cio-cio-san from Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* (1904) provides a foundation to discuss these stereotypical Asian female characteristics, specifically one archetype, that of the naïve, yet sexually desirable female. Prior to Cio-cio-san, Sir W. S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan's Yum-Yum from *The Mikado* (1885), Iris of Pietro Mascagni's *Iris* (1898) exemplify this archetype, as does Liù from Puccini's *Turandot* (1924). At the other extreme is the icy, cold and bloodthirsty archetype found in the title role of Puccini's *Turandot* and Katisha from *The Mikado*. Chiang Ch'ing (also known as Madame Mao) from John Adams's *Nixon in China* (1987), and Madame White Snake from Chinese-American composer Zhou Long's *Madame White Snake* (2010) feature leading characters that demonstrate elements of both of these archetypes, and this combination of the two archetypes yields more complex and richer characters. These two extremes of the female Asian stereotype and the evolution of these characteristics provide an interesting outlook on the incorporation of non-Western musical styles into these operas, and the understanding of a Western perception of foreign peoples, especially foreign females.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

“Crollasse il mondo, voglio Turandot!” [If the world should collapse, I want Turandot!] *Turandot* Act Three.<sup>1</sup>

Prince Calaf calls out to the sole object of his affection, driven by intense desire, while rejecting his family and defying the warnings of almost certain death should he attempt to obtain his desired idol. Why does he do this? What allure does this Asian<sup>2</sup> female have over him? Looking at operatic history Calaf is not the only one with these intense desires for the exotic female. Western opera composers and audiences have been attracted to the combination of the exotic and the feminine for centuries. Musicians and scholars have created a great deal of discourse discovering and defining what is exotic and feminine in music. Opera provides a means to survey the way both the feminine and the exotic have been combined to entice the Western audience. No operatic character is more legendary in this regard than Cio-cio-san from *Madama Butterfly* (1904) by Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924). Cio-cio-san’s treatment in the music and libretto provides a foundation from which to begin the survey.

Within twenty years of Puccini’s foray into Japanese culture, two prior works provide a means to contrast Puccini’s heroine with that of other composers. *Iris* (1898) by Pietro Mascagni (1863-1945) and the operetta *The Mikado* (1885)

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<sup>1</sup> William Weaver, trans., *Puccini Librettos* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 450.

<sup>2</sup> “Asia” in this paper denotes East-Asia in general, China and Japan in particular.

by Sir William Schwenck Gilbert (1836-1911) and Sir Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900) provide a different perspective on the Asian female. Puccini revisits the Asian continent for the final opera of his career with *Turandot* (1926). Here he provides an extreme dichotomy between two Asian females while supplying an interesting perspective on the changing approach to the exotic in opera. John Adams (b. 1947) gives operatic treatment to a living Asian female with the character of Madame Mao (1914-1991) in his opera *Nixon in China* (1987). Finally, Zhou Long (b.1953) presents a contemporary look at the Asian female in *Madame White Snake* (2010) through the eyes of a Chinese composer living in the West.

The term “exotic” has been widely discussed in scholarly discourse. The exotic represents characters, times, places or settings that are distant from the world with which the observer usually interacts. For the purposes of this survey, the observer can include the composer, the audience, other characters within the drama, and even the performer herself. A survey of the Asian female’s representation in opera cannot be complete without a clear view of who is creating this figure, who is watching her, and who is portraying her. In almost all cases, one of these factors creates an observer who is not an Asian female, which creates a distance between observer and character. This distance is used to create an “Other,” someone from outside the observer group. The “Other” is a term advocated by Edward Said (1935-2003) in his pivotal text on Orientalism “which refers to the act of emphasizing the perceived weaknesses of marginalized groups

as a way of stressing the alleged strength of those in positions of power.”<sup>3</sup> Creating others can be done with any racial, ethnic, religious, or geographically defined category of people. “Otherness” is created in opera by varying locale. Because the traditional Western operatic genre generally occurs in a Western locale, by placing the operatic setting in Asia each Asian operatic character becomes an “Other” to the conventional Western operatic audience.

Not only does placing the operatic setting in Asia provide a means to create an “otherness” in the characters, it also provides a means to explore the exotic. The appeal of the exotic, especially to audiences of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was undeniable. “Romanticism discovered that there are peoples whose artistic expressions--even if different in nature and situated upon another level of development from those of central and western Europe, still possess so much that is novel and redolent of the soil that they command careful consideration.”<sup>4</sup> In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European art critics broadly used the terms *japonaiserie* and *chinoiserie*. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, *japonaiserie* is a style in art reflecting Japanese qualities or motifs, also an object or decoration in this style.<sup>5</sup> “*Chinoiserie* is a term denoting a type of European art dominated by Chinese or pseudo-Chinese

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Jones, Rhys Jones, and Michael Woods, *An Introduction to Political Geography: Space, Place and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2004), 174.

<sup>4</sup> Mosco Carner, “The Exotic Element in Puccini,” *The Musical Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (Jan 1936): 46.

<sup>5</sup> *Merriam-Webster OnLine*, s.v. “Japonaiserie,” accessed October 6, 2012, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/japonaiserie>.

ornamental motifs. These terms are most often applied to decorative arts produced from the second half of the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century, when trading contacts between Europe and East Asia were at their height.”<sup>6</sup> The culture became obsessed with what they termed the “exotic” and is now known under the enveloping phrase, Orientalism. Creation of the exotic could exist through vivid description of one’s imagined ideas of other land. “Local color is a literary acquisition of Romanticism.”<sup>7</sup> Western culture became enamored with the idea of the “Other,” specifically the “Asian Other.” Their version of this “Asian Other” came from various images: woodblock prints, bronzes, ceramics, silk screens, fans, and lacquer ware. However, the aesthetic fashion was not entirely accurate in terms of realistic cultural portrayal. Cultural icons Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) and Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) noticed that the Western aesthetic of Asia was just an “invention, an aesthetic fancy.”<sup>8</sup> Feminist scholar Susan McClary writes, “...The identity of the groups was not so important as the fact that it was exotic with respect to Europe. Consequently, there is a significant blurring of racial Others throughout the opera...”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Grove Art Online*, s.v. “Chinoiserie,” by Monique Riccardi-Cubitt, accessed September 18, 2012, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T017240>.

<sup>7</sup> D. C. Parker, “Exoticism in Music in Retrospect.” *The Musical Quarterly* 3, no.1 (Jan 1917): 138.

<sup>8</sup> Alicia Volk, *In Pursuit of Universalism: Yorozu Tetsugorō and Japanese Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 63.

Post-Colonialism is a study and understanding of problems posed by European colonization and its aftermath. It heavily examines construction of the oriental “Other” by European discourses of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> A leading scholar in this field, Edward Said, wrote “We need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate. What it is trying to do...is at one and the same time to characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are for Europe, and only for Europe.”<sup>11</sup> This survey will attempt to understand this relationship with regards to Western operas that are set in the Orient.

Composers have dealt with the exotic in music in many different ways depending on various factors. These include the composer’s own knowledge of the culture, compositional style, and the audience’s knowledge of the musically exotic. The *alla turca* style was especially popular during the era of musical classicism, as seen in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s (1756-1791) *Piano Sonata in A Major, K. 331*. This fashion continued to evolve in the Romantic era, with Scottish, Turkish and Bohemian nuances and titles entering into the musical world of composers such as Johannes Brahms (1833-1897), and Frederic Chopin (1810-

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 130.

<sup>11</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 71-72.

1849). The opera world also embraced this idea of the exotic in works such as *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Lakmé*, and *L'africaine*, and this eventually led to interest in the Asian continent. In fact, it is the operatic genre that would be able to demonstrate exoticism to its fullest, including music, text, dance, stage movement, costume, scenery, and story. Exoticism in music is the “process that exotic places and people are represented in musical works.”<sup>12</sup> Some composers used their notion of the exotic to provide local color to a story. Puccini explained exoticism as a method “to distance those who were observed from the time of the observer,”<sup>13</sup> creating the “Other.” This creates several inconsistencies in the cultural portrayal of the music to a modern global audience. Musicologist Derek Scott points out “One might ask if it is necessary to know anything about Eastern musical practices; for the most part, it seems that only a knowledge of Orientalist signifiers is required. In the case of Orientalist operas, I had at first thought it might be important to understand where they were set geographically. Then I began to realize that, for the most part, all I needed to know was the simple fact that they were set in exotic, foreign places.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ralph P. Locke, “A Broader View of Musical Exoticism,” *The Journal of Musicology* 24, no.4 (Fall 2007): 478.

<sup>13</sup> Ping-hui Liao, “Of Writing Words for Music Which is Already Made: ‘Madama Butterfly, Turandot’, and Orientalism,” *Cultural Critique* 16 (Autumn 1990): 37.

<sup>14</sup> Derek B. Scott, “Orientalism and Musical Style,” *The Musical Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (Summer, 1998): 324.

As musical knowledge of Eastern styles develops and becomes more accessible this relationship to the exotic changes from one of non-specificity as suggested by Scott, to a viewpoint that embraces general knowledge of the culture. Not only will this survey track the dramatic treatment of the Asian female, it will also track the musical treatment of these characters. Today's global community makes the exotic much less mystifying and has effects on the modern observer's perception of the operatic Asian female.

Romantic-era techniques of operatic vocal writing that became associated with the Orient include huge vocal leaps, symmetrical phrases, rich harmony, and liquid woodwind writing.<sup>15</sup> Stereotypical Western Oriental signifiers that will surface throughout the survey of these female characters include the addition to Western harmony of exotic traits such as augmented seconds, various modes, a melody with "exotic" modal attributes tacked into Western harmony, parallel harmonies, and heterophonic vocal writing.<sup>16</sup> In regards to rhythm, meters can change frequently and there is often a fixed ostinato in the accompaniment. Orchestral color can also highlight character and locale with both Western instruments, such as the tamtam, gong, bells, drums, tambourine, xylophone, and Eastern instruments including Chinese flute, samisen, koto, er-hu, and xun.

The discourse concerning Orientalism and the exotic in music has been written about fairly extensively, but has focused primarily on these traditional

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<sup>15</sup> Locke, "Musical Exoticism," 477.

<sup>16</sup> Grove Music Online, s.v. "Exoticism," by Ralph P. Locke, accessed September 18, 2012, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/45644>.

musical signifiers. In the last few decades, with the onset of new theoretical movements, one starts to look at factors outside of the traditional musical signifiers to label “the exotic” or the “Other.” Ralph Locke has written on the topic of Orientalism in music and creates two categories, which he calls his two paradigms. The first is the traditional approach, which he calls the “Exotic Style Only” paradigm. This is looking only in the music for the signifiers that were discussed in the paragraph above. His expanded definition, the redefined definition, he labels the “All the Music in Full Context” paradigm. This definition incorporates both the music and all issues outside of the music including good versus evil, religious implications, the East versus the West, and gender issues that come out in the music. This is clearly found in the operatic genre, dealing with issues of libretto, setting, and character. Locke states that “Musical exoticism is the process of evoking in or through music--whether the latter is ‘exotic sounding’ or not--a place, people, or social milieu that is not entirely imaginary and that differs profoundly from the ‘home’ country or culture in the attitudes, customs, and morals. More precisely, it is the process of evoking a place (people, social milieu) that is perceived as different from home by the people making and receiving the exoticist cultural product.”<sup>17</sup> In taking apart each character, not only can one look at the music surrounding that character, but also the “social milieu” that encompasses them as well.

“For it has been said that the most wonderful aesthetic products of Japan are not its ivories, not its bronzes, not its porcelains, nor its swords, nor any of its

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<sup>17</sup> Locke, “Musical Exoticism,” 483-84.

marvels in metal or lacquer--but its women.”<sup>18</sup> In opera, the role of the *prima donna* reigns supreme as the foremost character in the work. By combining both a look at the “exotic” with the tradition of creating central female characters, operatic composers provide a perspective on how a Western operatic audience views the exotic feminine. Feminism surrounds the idea of championing the identity of women, and the theoretical critique of the heterosexual matrix that organizes identities and cultures in terms of the opposition between man and woman.<sup>19</sup> For the purposes of this survey, the composers and librettists, with two exceptions, provide a male perspective on the Asian female. Exceptions to this include the librettist for the two contemporary works, and this survey will attempt to take this into account.

Now that the concept of the exotic is explored, focus can shift to the second item of “otherness,” the concept of the Asian female as an “Other.” Feminist musical studies have emerged since the 1990s and Susan McClary is one of the founding and prominent voices of this movement. She writes, “Nineteenth-century Europeans habitually projected onto racial ‘Others’ the erotic qualities they denied themselves. The racial ‘Other’ became a favorite ‘feminine’ zone within the narrative, the ‘Other’ was viewed with desire, envy, contempt or

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<sup>18</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, *Japan; An Attempt at Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1904), 393.

<sup>19</sup> Culler, *Literary Theory*, 126.

fear.”<sup>20</sup> In surveying the representation of the Asian female characters in opera, one can look at how the Western composers and audiences viewed the feminine “Other,” and how this relationship evolved. McClary clearly points to the sexual nature of these characters. Yet they have also other qualities, including “Universally acclaimed qualities of the Japanese (or other Asian) female, those of ‘charm, grace, beauty, and femininity,’ combined with Western suspicions of a tolerant, enthusiastic native sexuality.”<sup>21</sup>

As the survey progresses, one can also notice a move away from these attributes to the extreme opposite, one of a cold, man-hating persona. This survey will attempt to analyze the description, both in dramatic and musical manners, of specific Asian females in opera, taking into account their “otherness” as both exotic creatures, and as females. This is not to say that the creation of these characters belittles Asian women or culture. One can explore the counter argument that although the character is imbued with stereotypes that ultimately lead to her tragedy, that her operatic rendering actually deifies the Asian woman by placing her as the central vehicle for the story. By giving the Asian woman a voice, the authors exalt the Asian woman. McClary states that “all the important composers of the European tradition were always already feminists and post colonials in as much as they gave women and ethnic Others the power to sing on

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<sup>20</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 63.

<sup>21</sup> Narrelle Morris, “Innocence to deviance: The Fetishism of Japanese Women in Western Fiction, 1890s-1990s,” *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, Issue 7 (March 2002).  
<http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue7/morris.html>.

the stage--to perform their alternative subjectivities in a world that otherwise insisted on their silence and invisibility.”<sup>22</sup> Though it will be explored to see if this is true, the generalized idea of the Orient begins as one of a “feminized, infantilized and aestheticized construct.”<sup>23</sup>

The goal of this survey is to investigate this construct and how it changed throughout time. This survey will then investigate other operas according to stereotype and country. The first stereotype is that of “submissive Oriental women,”<sup>24</sup> and the foremost example is found in the first example: Puccini’s *Cio-cio-san*.

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<sup>22</sup> Susan McClary, “Mounting Butterflies,” in *A Vision of the Orient: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts of Madame Butterfly*, ed. Jonathan Wisenthal, Sherrill Grace, Melinda Boyd, Brian McIlroy and Vera Micznik (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 26.

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Wisenthal, “Inventing the Orient,” in *A Vision of The Orient: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts of Madame Butterfly*, ed. Jonathan Wisenthal, Sherrill Grace, Melinda Boyd, Brian McIlroy and Vera Micznik (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Ralph P. Locke, “Reflections on Orientalism in Opera (And Musical Theater),” *Revista De Musicología* 16, no. 6 (1993): 3125.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *MADAMA BUTTERFLY*

One of the most iconic Asian female characters on the operatic stage is Cio-cio-san (usually portrayed by a lyric soprano) from Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. Puccini and his librettist Luigi Illica's (1857-1919) presentation of this story in operatic form, and their dramatic and musical characterizations of the Asian female provide a foundation from which to observe operatic treatment of Asian females. As mentioned earlier, Puccini was not seeking an accurate rendering of the culture, so his treatment of his heroine becomes based on stereotypical ideas of the Oriental woman based on the fashionable arts of the time. Translator Keizo Horiuchi believes that "even Westerners must find it absurd that these characters with chonmage (topknot) appear onstage--One cannot tell whether the setting is supposed to look like Japan or China--in shuffling steps, put their hands on the ground, and bow up and down."<sup>25</sup> Not only are the cultural inaccuracies unsettling, but also the story often provides problematic for contemporary Western audiences because it plays upon many different stereotypes at various levels. Inevitably, the audience is confronted with a middle aged non-Asian woman portraying an Asian teenager who is bought in a marriage, denounces religion and family, gives birth to a child, only to have him taken away to a western society. Once abandoned, Cio-cio-san's shame forces her to commit

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<sup>25</sup> Mari Yoshihara, "The Flight of the Japanese Butterfly: Orientalism, Nationalism, and Performances of Japanese Womanhood," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (Dec 2004): 994.

suicide in the ancient samurai ceremony. “In Western eyes, Japanese women are meant to be sacrificed, and Butterfly sacrifices her husband, her religion, her people, her son, and, ultimately, her very life.”<sup>26</sup> Her sacrificial qualities appear to be a result of the character stereotypes that Puccini and Illica place upon the character, including Cio-cio-san’s treatment in the libretto as a subservient female, the constant references to her youth and delicacy, and her treatment as an object of sexual desire against the insistence on her infallible virginity. It is in Cio-cio-san’s “otherness” that librettist and composer feel free to impose their Western male ideals of the exotic woman: young, virginal and destined to please a man. Puccini’s musical setting then plays upon this idea of the young, delicate and sexually subservient female. Either way, in the case of Cio-cio-san, it is clear that both composer and librettist were not attempting to go for an accurate rendering of the Asian woman. According to musical scholar Arthur Groos, “Madame Butterfly is just a decorative little image, which the author has made up of his own imagination.”<sup>27</sup>

Groos’s “decorative little image” is seen even in the very title of the work. Although the character’s proper name is Cio-cio-san, the title of the opera contains a trope for her stereotypical characteristics. The word “butterfly” brings up several images; Cio-cio-san must be a beautiful, yet delicate creature. The butterfly is also associated with a rebirth, and indeed, this character is set to

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<sup>26</sup> Dorinne K. Kondo, “‘M. Butterfly’: Orientalism, Gender, and a Critique of Essentialist Identity,” *Cultural Critique* 16 (Autumn 1990): 10.

<sup>27</sup> Arthur Groos, “Madame Butterfly: The Story,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3, no. 2 (July 1991): 135.

experience a change in culture, similar to a caterpillar's rebirth as a butterfly. Cio-cio-san addresses this stereotype in the libretto when her western fiancé, Captain Pinkerton (sung by a lyric tenor), refers to her as a "farfalla," the Italian word for butterfly. Cio-cio-san shows a rare moment of apprehension towards Pinkerton; she fears that her fate will be similar to the treatment of the butterfly in Western lands. There, butterflies are pierced by a pin and stuck to a board; "Dicon che oltre mare se cade in man dell'uom, ogni farfalla da uno spillo è trafitta ed in travola infitta!" [They say that across the sea, if it falls into hands of a man, every butterfly is pierced by a pin and stuck on a board!]<sup>28</sup> Puccini sets this outburst as a quick exclamation followed by music that has been associated with the Bonzo (sung by a bass) and the loss of Cio-cio-san's family. Catherine Clément addresses this issue, "The female butterfly is impaled, and the opera draws at the metaphor to its most simplistic application: first a man's sexual member, than a dagger in the body."<sup>29</sup> Sexual aggression and ownership is implied with the very title of the work. Pinkerton, in one of his few moments of non sexual aggression in Act One, agrees by saying "Un po' di vero c'è." He admits to Cio-cio-san that by pinning this little creature, she will escape no more and will no longer flee away from him. He finishes this thought by declaring ownership over Cio-cio-san: "E tu lo sai perché? Perché non fugga più. Io t'ho ghermita, ti serro palpitante. Sei

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<sup>28</sup> All the *Madama Butterfly* texts and English translations come from Nico Castel, trans., Marcie Stapp, ed. "Madama Butterfly," *The Complete Puccini Libretti* (New York: Leyerle Publications, 1994), 361-465.

<sup>29</sup> Catherine Clément, *Opera, the Undoing of Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 45.

mia.” [And you it know why? So that it won’t fly away anymore. I have caught you and I hold trembling in my arms. You’re mine.]

Pinkerton actually has a legal right to declare Cio-cio-san as his property because before she even enters the stage, she is labeled as a commodity. Arranged marriage has always been a typical manner of marriage in Asian societies: in Meiji times,<sup>30</sup> seventy-five percent of the marriages were arranged.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the story starts with Captain Pinkerton already considering his departure as he shows concern over breaking the lease of the house. Cio-cio-san as a commodity that can be bought, sold and then disposed of.

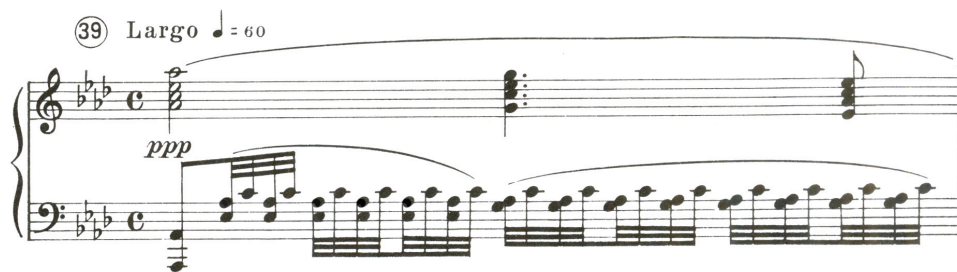
From the moment of Cio-cio-san’s entrance in the middle of Act One, the libretto is littered with references to the physical appearance of Cio-cio-san. When Sharpless (sung by a baritone), the U.S. Consul, asks Pinkerton whether he is only infatuated with Cio-cio-san, Pinkerton answers: “Certo costei n’ha coll’ingenua arti invescato. Lieve qual tenue vetro soffiato...qual farfalletta volatilizza e posa con tal grazietta silenziosa...se pure ingrangerne dovessi l’al.” [Certainly she has ensnared me with her ingenuous art. Light as fragile blown glass...like a little butterfly she flutters and rests.] The diminutive words light (lieve), fragile (tenue), and little butterfly (farfalletta) describe the delicacy and fragility of his bride. Sexual desire is also brought into the scene; Pinkerton murmurs “Con quel fare di bambola, quando parl m’imfiamma...” [With that manner doll-like, when she

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<sup>30</sup> The Meiji period started from September 1868 to July 1912 when Emperor Meiji governed Japan. *Madame Butterfly* is set during this time period.

<sup>31</sup> *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture*, Ed. Sandra Buckley (London: Routledge, 2002), s.v. “Arranged Marriage.”

speaks she sets me aflame...] It seems that her very youth and childlike manner are the cause of Pinkerton's arousal. Her greatest operatic asset, her voice is also commented on; Sharpless refers to Cio-cio-san's actual voice, calling it a "divine mild little voice." "Butterfly captures the quaintness, daintiness, the childlike innocence and humility which the West at one time associated with Japan and its diminutive people."<sup>32</sup> Her delicacy, and this link to her appeal as a sexual commodity, becomes one of the strongest metaphors for the exotic Asian female. Puccini musically depicts this delicacy in Cio-cio-san's entrance, perhaps one of the most glorious soprano entrances in the repertoire. For Cio-cio-san's entrance, it "suggests two different things--her tender and utterly lovable nature, and the wide expanse of sea and sky of which she sings as she climbs up the hills."<sup>33</sup> The strings in the orchestra bring out a motive to be associated with Cio-cio-san, and this motive gradually climbs up in a whole tone scale from A-flat, B-flat, C, E to G-flat. Example 2.1 shows Cio-cio-san's motive.<sup>34</sup>



<sup>32</sup> McClary, "Mounting Butterflies," 27.

<sup>33</sup> Mosco Carner, *Madam Butterfly: A Guide to the Opera* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1979), 50.

<sup>34</sup> All Madama Butterfly piano and vocal examples come from Giacomo Puccini, *Madama Butterfly; Opera in Three Acts*, New York: G. Schirmer, 1963.



Ex. 2.1 Cio-cio-san's Motive, *Madama Butterfly*, Act One, No. 39, mm1-2.

The vocal line does not join the orchestral swell until the third time this motive appears, and Cio-cio-san's entrance is not in a *prima donna's* grand manner, but rather a soft off-stage murmur that comes out of the choral texture. The tessitura of the soprano vocal line is high, and the dynamic is soft, requiring a technical delicacy in introducing this character as she sings of the beauty of Nagasaki's landscape. As her tessitura rises, Puccini demands the singer's dynamic to become even softer and more delicate. She reaches the highest note, B-flat (or the optional D-flat) as she sings the word "amor." Right after this glorious moment of singing, a bell-like Japanese melody reminds the audience of the locale with its pentatonic mode, and accompanies the onstage traditional Japanese bow. Example 2.2 shows the bell theme.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> All *Madama Butterfly* orchestra and vocal examples come from Giacomo Puccini, et al. *Madama Butterfly*, Milan: Ricordi, 1955.

a tempo      rall.      Largo

Fl. I. II.      Ott.      Ob.      Clari I. II.      Fag. I. II.      Timp.      Arpa      Camp. II

(appaiono in scena-hanno tutte grandi ombrelli aperti, a vivi colori)

Opp.      -mor!      folg!

BUTT.      -chia - - mo d'a - mor,      d'a - - mor!  
Lie - - be, ich folg,      ich      folg!

LE AMICHE      co - - se che ti son ca - - - re!  
- trach - - te, was dich rings um - - - giebt!

che - ti son sì ca - - - re!  
- trach - - te, was dich rings um - - - giebt!

che - ti son sì ca - - - re!  
- trach - - te, was dich rings um - - - giebt!

SOLISTI      Viol. I.      V-la I.      Ve. I.      Viol.      V-le      Vc.      Cb.

unite      unite      unite      unite      unite      unite      unite

a tempo      rall.      Largo      pp

Ex. 2.2 Bell theme, *Madama Butterfly*, Act One, No. 41, mm. 1-2.

When Cio-cio-san and Pinkerton compliment each other, the exact same melody is brought back and now played by a solo violin. When the melody recurs,

it is always marked *pp*, establishing a dynamic link to Cio-cio-san's physical stature. Example 2.3 shows the bell theme played by the violin.

The image displays a musical score for Example 2.3, featuring the bell theme. The score is arranged in five staves: Viol. I. solo, Viol., V-le, Vc., and Cb. The music is written in a key signature of one flat and a 2/4 time signature. The dynamics are marked as *pp* (pianissimo) throughout, with some passages marked *p* (piano). Performance instructions include "con sordina" (with mutes), "senza sordina" (without mutes), "dolce" (sweetly), "ma sensibile" (but sensitive), "ancora pizz." (still pizzicato), "divise" (divided), and "unite" (united). The tempo is marked "poco rall. a tempo" (slightly slowing down). The score shows the violin parts playing a melodic line, while the other instruments provide harmonic support.

Ex. 2.3 *Madama Butterfly*, Act One, No. 43, mm. 2-8.

Not only is Cio-cio-san compared to a butterfly; there are increasing references in the score to her delicacy as a flower. Pinkerton comments: “...L’esotico suo odore m’ha il cervello sconvolto, e in fede mia l’ho colto!” [...Her exotic scent has confused my brain, and by my faith, I’ve picked her!] The poetic meanings here are overwhelming; flowers are innocent, feminine, virginal, and delicate. These tropes are not without precedent, as Mascagni’s *Iris* will prove. Pinkerton compares her to a flower, and claims possession of her being. This moment also highlights the idea of Cio-cio-san as having an extra sensory, almost bewitching, connection, and associates her very presence with the

olfactory intoxication of flowers.

Although the typical age of marriage changes according to cultural differences, Cio-cio-san's youth is often highlighted in the libretto. Sharpless asks Cio-cio-san's age: "Quant'anni avete?" She refuses him an answer, and becomes playful and answers: "Indovinate." [Guess.] To her, age is a game, and her naïveté becomes a subject for concern for Sharpless. After Cio-cio-san reveals her age to be fifteen, Sharpless reflects: "L'età del giuochi." [The age for games.] In his Western eyes, fifteen-year-olds are associated more with children than consenting adults. Japanese culture suggests otherwise: during Meiji era, girls were often married at age of sixteen. Though in Japanese culture her age is entirely appropriate, Sharpless points out that she is perhaps too young for any relationship of this type. Pinkerton refers to her extraordinary youth when he comforts her "Bimbo, non piangere..." [Child, don't cry...] Even later in the opera, Cio-cio-san refers to herself and repeats what her husband has called her in her aria *Un bel dì*, she is a "Piccina, mogliettina, olezzo di verbena..." [Little one, little wife, perfume of verbena...] She also reasserts her olfactory association here.

Her naïveté is also present in the tea scene when Sharpless comes to persuade her to give up on hope of Pinkerton's return and marry a traditional Japanese prince. Cio-cio-san refuses to hear any logical arguments, always deflecting the conversation with interruptions and her charming innocence. Her deflection of the truth of the situation proves too much for her naïve persona, she tries to quickly rush Sharpless out of the door in an emotionally agitated state, "Qui, Suzuki, presto, presto, che Sua Grazia se ne va." [Here Suzuki, quickly,

since His Grace is leaving.] Sharpless replies: “Mi scacciate?” [You drive me away?] “Ve ne prego, gia l’insistere non vale” [Please, insisting is of no use], Cio-cio-san says. Her moment of glory comes when she reveals that the product of one night of lovemaking has resulted in a child. She champions this child as a prize, a prize to claim the very man who has forsaken her. This is the act of a naïve, innocent girl who has strangely hidden this child, and is now using him as a token. Puccini sets this revelation in C Major with an almost bombastic, over the top fanfare. This musical and dramatic reaction is almost pathetic to the audience when her age and life experience are considered. Example 2.4 shows the fanfare excerpt.

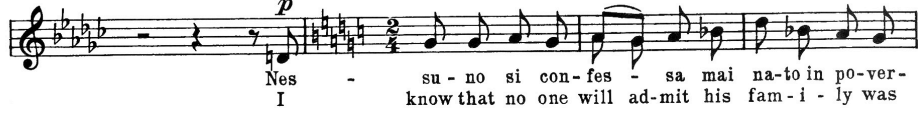
The musical score is for a piano accompaniment in 3/4 time, C Major. It begins with a circled number 50. The tempo and mood are marked 'Allegro moderato, molto vibrato'. The first measure has a forte (ff) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes. The second measure has a 'poco allarg.' marking. The score consists of two systems of staves, each with a treble and bass clef. The music is characterized by a fanfare-like quality with strong accents and a slightly slower tempo towards the end.

Ex. 2.4 *Madama Butterfly*, Act Two, No. 50, mm. 1-6.

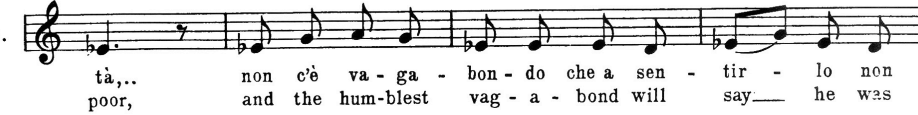
Cio-cio-san’s youth and naïveté is even more disturbing when considering the sexuality illicit in both the music and libretto of Act One. Before the dramatic action of the opera begins, Cio-cio-san admits to having worked as a geisha to

support her ailing family: “e abbiamo fatto la gheschia per sostentarci.” [...and we worked as geishas to support ourselves.] Although geisha culture is not necessarily a sexually charged one, the notion of an occupation where she learns to fulfill a man’s desires links Cio-cio-san with a desire for sexual fulfillment. Puccini sets this confession musically by quoting a Japanese folk song, *Ichigo-Jishi*, at No. 44 once again reminding the audience the locale, and bringing to mind any sexual connotations with the term “geisha.” Example 2.5 shows the Japanese folk song from Act One, No. 44.


(very natural)      Allegretto moderato ♩ = 112

But. 

Nes - su - no si con - fes - sa mai na-to in po-ver-  
I know that no one will ad-mit his fam-i - ly was

But. 

tà,.. non c'è va - ga - bon - do che a sen - tir - lo non  
poor, and the hum-blest vag - a - bond will say — he was

But. 

sia  
born

Ex. 2.5 *Madama Butterfly*, Act One, No. 44, mm. 1-8.

With Cio-cio-san’s entrance one can observe that she is overly excited to marry this American lieutenant, whom she has never met. She says “Io sono la fanciulla piu lieta del Giappone, anzi del mondo.” [I am the happiest girl of Japan, even of the world.] Pinkerton asks her if the hills have exhausted her. She responds: “A una sposa costumata piu penosa e l’impazienza...Dei più belli ancor ne so...” [To a bride well bred more painful is the impatience...I know other compliments, still more beautiful...] She is not ashamed of showing her

excitement for her future, both the immediate, which “l’impazienza” suggests, and the long term. Pinkerton takes her response as a compliment. Pinkerton wants to rush the ceremonial portion of the evening, so that he may enjoy the consummation portion of the evening. “Sbringhiamovi al piu presto...in modo onesto.” [Let’s get it over with as quickly as possible...in a decent way.] Pinkerton cannot wait for the guests to leave and the wedding night to begin.

Musically, Puccini highlights the sexual excitement in various ways, first by reiterating her virginity throughout the story. Though the audience has no idea if Cio-cio-san’s geisha duties involved sexual practices, one can only surmise that she has had experience in entertaining men. In Act Two, after their wedding consummation, and her abandonment of three years, Cio-cio-san still wants to be presented to her husband as virginal, “L’obi ch’io vestii da sposa. Qua...ch’io lo vesta.” [The obi that I wore as bride. Here...I want to wear it.] Previously in Act One, her virginity and sexual nature are brought to the fore when Cio-cio-san changes clothes behind an on stage soji screen, highlighting her desirability and sexuality even more. At this moment, Cio-cio-san has her maid, Suzuki, helps her put on her night gown “...si vesta la sposa di puro candor. Tra motti sommessi sorride e mi guarda. Celarmi potessi, ne ho tanto rossor!” [...Let the bride be dressed in pure whiteness. If only I could hide, he makes me blush so, with his smiles, words, and the way he looks at me!] The white robe highlights Cio-cio-san’s supposed innocence and virginity. This is particularly ironic because the audience is being asked to participate in Cio-cio-san’s assumed virginity, knowing nothing of her experience as a geisha. The onstage presence of someone

changing clothes is sexually charged, not just for Pinkerton, but also for the entire audience. Pinkerton comments on this moment and says “Con moti di scojattolo i nodi allenta e scioglie!...Pensar che quel giocattolo è mia moglie!...Bimba dagl’occhi pieni di malia, ora sei tutta mia. Sei tutta vestita di giglio. Mi piace la treccia tua bruna fra candidi veli.” [With movements of a squirrel the knots she loosens and unties!...To think that that toy is my wife!...Child of the eyes full of magic, now you’re all mine. You’re all dressed in lily-white. I like the hair yours dark amid white veils.] Her graceful movements, her undressing and her appearance as a toy and child fuel his sexual desire. Cio-cio-san even compares herself to another worldly being when she says, “Somiglio la Dea della luna, la piccola Dea della luna...e li prende e li avvolge in un bianoco mantel.” [I resemble the Goddess of the moon, the little Goddess of the moon...and them (the hearts) takes and them (the hearts) folds in a white cloak. (Takes and folds the hearts in a white cloak)] She is not preparing Pinkerton for any ordinary wedding night; she is comparing herself to the power of the moon and the metaphors of feminine power that are associated with the moon. Pinkerton’s insatiable sexuality comes out again: “Le sa quella Dea le parole che appagna gli ardenti desir?” He questions whether this Goddess knows the words to satisfy ardent desires.

Puccini vividly depicts the sexual excitement of this scene. At Act One No. 118, syncopation in the orchestra is linked to her excitement. Puccini creates an exotic orchestral color featuring muted horn with ornamented oboe and clarinet. Example 2.6 shows the orchestration of Act One, No. 118.

118

Fl. *ppp* *rit.* *pp*

Ott. *ppp*

Ob. *pp*

Clari *pp* *p*

Clarinetto *pp*

Corni *con sordina* *pp* *rit.* *ppp il più piano possibile* *p*

Arpa *p* *p*

Tam-Tam giapp. *p*

SUZ. (Pinkerton batte le mani: i servi corrono via.) (Butterfly entra nella casa ed aiutata da Suzuki fa cautelosamente la sua toiletta da notte, levandosi la veste nuziale ed in -  
*not-te.*  
*Nacht!*

Viol. *Sul Tasto* *pp* *rit.*

Viola *Sul Tasto* *pp* *rit.*

V.le *Sul Tasto* *pp* *rit.*

Vc. *pizz.* *p*

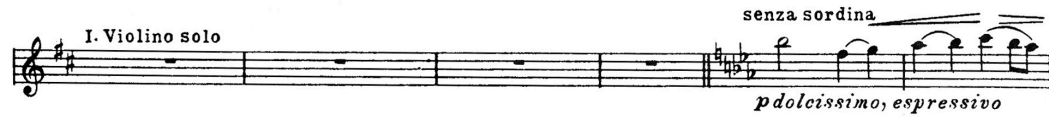
Cb. *pp* *p*

118

Example 2.6 *Madama Butterfly*, Act One, No. 118, mm. 1-2.

Cio-cio-san's entrance motive reappears again at Act One, No. 128 on a muted solo violin; innocently portraying Cio-cio-san is alone with her husband for the

first time. Example 2.7 shows the solo violin entrance motive.



Ex. 2.7 *Madame Butterfly*, Act One, No. 128, mm. 1-2.

The motive gradually moves up from E-flat Major, G-flat Major (No. 129), to B-flat Major (four measures before No. 130), intensifying the moment. At No. 134, Pinkerton answers Cio-cio-san’s pleading with his sexual call of “Vieni, vieni!” [come, come!] Meanwhile, Cio-cio-san’s vocal line starts in her low register with a C4-sharp and later moves up to F-sharp, then A-flat and C. This musical ascent mirrors the dramatic intensity of their union. At No. 135, Puccini extends the previous section but incorporating a delicate and soft dynamic. Example 2.8 shows No. 135 of Act One.

The image shows a musical score for Act One, No. 135. It features three staves: Butterfly's vocal line (But.), Pinkerton's vocal line (Pink.), and piano accompaniment. Butterfly's line starts with a half note C4-sharp, followed by quarter notes D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, and B4. Pinkerton's line starts with a half note C4-sharp, followed by quarter notes D4, E4, and F4. The piano accompaniment starts with a half note C4-sharp, followed by quarter notes D4, E4, and F4. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *sost.*, *a tempo*, *cresc.*, and *pp*. The lyrics are: "Ah! quan-ti oc-chi fi-si, at-ten-ti! Quan-ti Ah! the sil-vry moon is shin-ing! Gold-en vien! mine!"

Ex. 2.8 *Madama Butterfly*, Act One, No. 135, mm. 1-2.

Then he starts to build the dynamics from *pp* to *ff* and ends one of the most standard, but effective operatic metaphors, the high C6. The orchestra recalls the

bell theme, now associated with Cio-cio-san’s acceptance of, not only her husband’s sexual advances, but the acceptance of Western culture as her own.

The bell theme that closes the act takes on this association with acceptance of Western culture in the middle of Act One. Though the story contains many layers of complexity, at the heart of the drama lies the basic conflict between religion and family versus true love. Cio-cio-san’s reaction to the situation is one, which supports that idea that an Asian woman must be subservient to a man, taking on her husband’s religion and his very views on love and marriage. “Ieri son salita tutta sola in secreto alla Missione. Colla nuova mia vita posso adottare nuova religione...” Cio-cio-san tells her fiancé that she had previously visited the religious mission to convert to a Western religion, indeed, a Western lifestyle. She decides that she should pray for his god in her new life. The orchestra starts with oboe and English horn playing sustained chords, which speak of her determination, and bring an exotic color to the moment.

Example 2.9 shows the orchestration of No. 79 in Act One.

79 Andante

Ob. *pp dolce*

C. Ing. *pp dolce*

Cl. Bb. Cambiano in La *pp dolce*

Cl. Eb.

Fag.

BUTT. (con rispettosa confidenza a Pinkerton)

PINK. *pp*

Ie - ri son sa - li - ta tut - ta  
Hört nur: im Ge - hei - men ging ich

-spet - to.  
Ach - tung!

so - la in se - gre - to al - la Mis - sio - ne,      Col - la nuo - va mia vi - ta pos - so a - dot -  
 ge - stern ins Haus der Mis - si - o - nen.      Nun mein Le - ben ein neu - es, darf auch ein

Ex. 2.9 *Madama Butterfly*, Act One, No. 79, mm. 1-6.

The orchestra then erupts when the first statement of the bell theme returns. Although starting a soft dynamic, the melody is broadened by string unison and supported harmonically by harp and wind instruments. Example 2.10 shows the orchestration and dynamics of Act One, No. 80.

Ex. 2.10 *Madama Butterfly*, Act One, No. 80, mm. 1-3.

She reaffirms this change at the wedding, when friends and relatives greet Cio-cio-san “Madama Butterfly,” she gently corrects them that she is now “Madame B. F. Pinkerton.” Her subservience and desire to please Pinkerton is highlighted later, when Cio-cio-san kneels down and pleads with the man “Siete alto, forte... Vogliatemi bene, un ben piccolino... Vogliatemi bene.” (You are tall, strong... Love me, love me a little... Love me.)<sup>36</sup> Cio-cio-san herself is playing upon the metaphors of diminutiveness by asking Pinkerton to love her, to please this man, whom she compliments with descriptions of his male stature.

Her subservience is musically demonstrated when the eastern side and

<sup>36</sup> Translation by the author.

western side of her personalities emerge in the music. Puccini’s setting of the aria “*Che tua madre*” provides some interesting analysis in regards to Puccini’s setting of this character. At No. 55, the composer uses an unusual key, A-flat minor, at the moment when Cio-cio-san comforts her son after a particularly startling moment for when she is confronted with the truth that her husband will not return. Puccini combines several authentic Japanese melodies throughout “*Che tua madre*” including *Juzuki-Uta* and *Suiryo-Bushi*.<sup>37</sup> According to Carner, the music here is “one of the opera’s noblest invention... permeated by a feeling of unrelieved sadness.” He continues to point out that it has both funeral and dance characters, with a Western sarabande-like stress on the second beat.<sup>38</sup> The mixture of Eastern Japanese melodies and Western Sarabande speaks the mixture of Cio-cio-san’s identity. Example 2.11 shows the score of Act Two, No. 55.

Andante molto mosso ♩ = 112

But. *p*

55

*ppp*

Che tua ma - dre do - vrà pren - der - ti in brac - cio  
He has asked her to fold your arms a - round her

Ex. 2.11 *Madama Butterfly*, Act Two, No. 55, mm. 1-4.

At No. 56, *Suiryo-Bushi* is recognized in the orchestra when Cio-cio-san realizes

<sup>37</sup> Tom Potter, “Japanese Songs in Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*,” *Daisy Field*, last modified November 18, 2006, <http://daisyfield.com/music/jpm/Puccini.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> Carner, *Madam Butterfly*, 60.

that her fate will be to become a geisha again, reiterating her need to please men with her singing and dancing. Example 2.12 shows the dancing gesture in the score of Act Two, No. 56.

un poco agitato

But. ma-dre la ca-ri-tà, muo-ve-te-vi a pie-tà!" E But-ter-  
moth-er do not de-ny the char-i-ty she craves!" And But-ter-

56

pp un poco agitato

But. fly, or-ri-bi-le de-sti-no, dan-ze-rà per te! E co-me  
fly, con-demmed by cru-el fate, will start to dance a-gain,-- as in the

Ex. 2.12 *Madama Butterfly*, Act Two, No. 56, mm. 1-5.

At No. 59, when the vocal line hangs on a high G5 and A5, the French horn plays the theme of the previous aria, “*Un bel dì*” triumphantly in an ironic manner. “*Un bel dì*” was her moment of hope, highlighting the word “*aspetta*” in its vocal climax. Here, the reminder of this hope becomes bitter, as the realization of her loneliness is implicit. Example 2.13 shows the preparation for high notes in Act Two, No. 59.

The image shows a musical score for a scene from *Madama Butterfly*. It consists of two systems of music. The first system is for the soprano (But.) and piano accompaniment. The soprano part has the lyrics: "di - te al bab - bo, scri - ven - do - gli, che il gior - no del suo ri - write my fa - ther and say to him: the mo - ment that he re -". The piano accompaniment is marked "a tempo" and "p". The second system is also for the soprano and piano. The soprano part has the lyrics: "tor - no, turns here Gio - ia, Hap - py, Gio - ia, mi chia - me - Hap - py shall be my". The piano accompaniment is marked "f". The score includes tempo markings "allarg." and "a tempo", and dynamic markings "p" and "f".

Ex. 2.13 *Madama Butterfly*, Act Two, No. 59, mm. 7-11.

Finally, Cio-cio-san's loyalty to her husband supersedes even the worth of her own life. Act Three concludes with her giving up her child so that he may live, a supposedly better life, in the West. Her life ends tragically when she sacrifices her life to maintain some sense of honor in Japanese tradition. Hara-kiri was considered by the Samurai the most honorable way to end life. For Cio-cio-san, this act is confusing. She has fought the entire opera to attempt a Westernized lifestyle of marriage and religion. Yet, at the end she is left to perform a traditional Japanese suicide and reconnect with her heritage. In a manner she is unable to succumb to the West, and ends her life by ridding Pinkerton of any real responsibility. Her final act places her back in Eastern culture, and Pinkerton ends with his desired goal: an American wife and child. In Cio-cio-san's suicidal scene, after she finishes her last word to her child "play, play," Puccini uses the least

playful music one can think to compose: a funeral march. Timpani are added to the funeral march, creating a mysterious texture. The rhythm here is obscured with timpani and orchestra playing in different rhythmic gestures. Example 2.14 shows the mixture of rhythmic figures in the orchestra.

The musical score for Example 2.14, Act Three, No. 50 of *Madama Butterfly*, is presented in a multi-staff format. It includes parts for Fag. I and II, Corni, and Timp. The score begins with a *Moderato* tempo and a dynamic of *fp*. The Fag. parts are marked *ff* and feature triplet figures. The Corni parts are marked *ff* and *senza sordina*, with the right staff marked *a due*. The Timp. part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The score transitions to *Largamente* at measure 50, marked with a box around the number 50. The dynamics remain *ff*.

Example 2.14 *Madama Butterfly*, Act Three, No. 50, mm. 1-3.

Cio-cio-san's final aria contains pentatonic scales to highlight the Japanese style of her death. Puccini reminds the audience of her original culture before she goes through with the deed. The orchestra has increased its dynamics to *ff* and she falls on the third beat while the tamtam plays a single note. Example 2.15 shows the orchestration at the moment Cio-cio-san commits suicide.

I. II. Fl. I. II. Fl. III. Ob. C. Ing. Cl. fti Cl. ne Fag. Corni Tr. be Tr. ni Tr. ni B. Timp. G. C. Tam-Tam

a due *cresc.* poco rit. *ff* animando

a due *cresc.* *ff* a due *p*

a due *cresc.* *ff* via sordina *p* a due *p*

I. *ff* *dim.* *ff*

*ff* *pp*

sulla scena *ff*

*cresc.* *ff* *pp* animando

(qui si ode cadere a terra il coltello, e il gran velo bianco scompare dietro al paravento, IV. corda... *pp* IV. corda... *p*)

*ff* arco *pp* animando

Ex. 2.15 *Madama Butterfly*, Act Three, No. 56, mm. 2-5.

“Did Cio-Cio-san’s fragility turn her into an exotic victim--and, more specifically a victim of imperialism--and thereby turn all Asian women

into victims?”<sup>39</sup> Cio-cio-san’s suicide is not included in the original source for the story, John Luther Long’s story. The suicide is added to dramatically heighten the story, and the Asian female symbol of fragility, sexuality and innocence lead to her downfall. McClary generalizes that “in most tonal music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nothing less will suffice for purposes of concluding pieces than complete resolution of the triad.”<sup>40</sup> Puccini’s ending for this particular opera is anything but a complete resolution of the triad. Though Puccini has prepared a final cadence on b minor, the sudden clash of an added 6<sup>th</sup> to this harmony brings the opera to an abrupt and unsettling conclusion. Example 2.16 shows the postlude of *Madama Butterfly*.

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<sup>39</sup> Ralph P. Locke, “Musical Exoticism,” 511.

<sup>40</sup> McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 62.

(The door at the right is opened violently; Pinkerton and Sharpless enter and rush to Butterfly who, with a feeble gesture, points to the child and dies. Pinkerton falls on his knees, while Sharpless, sobbing, takes the child and kisses him.)

58  
Andante energico ♩-ss  
*tutta forza*

terfly who, with a feeble gesture, points to the child and dies. Pinkerton falls on his knees, while Sharpless, sobbing, takes the child and kisses him.)

*Rapid curtain*  
*allarg.*      *stentato*      *molto allargando*

Ex. 2.16 *Madama Butterfly*, Act Three, No. 58, mm. 1-11.

Perhaps this chord is Puccini's way to make the audience reassess the stereotypes that played out into a tragedy just witnessed on stage. His lack of a traditional cadential figure forces the audience to question the composer's motives and think on the actions of the opera in a different light. This is not just a run-of-the-mill operatic tragedy that ends in the tonic minor; this tragedy contains something more, a deeper injustice perhaps. His creation of the Asian female as a delicate, childlike, fragile, innocent, virginal and sexually charged being leads eventually to her tragic fate. In creating this popular operatic character, Puccini

highlights cultural norms of his time that were associated with Orientalism and preserves them for modern audiences to witness. Although he preserves this character in a legendary manner, and in doing so he gives the Asian female a voice, it is clearly a female seen through the eyes of a Western male composer and librettist. Although his representation is the most iconic, he is not without precedent. Six years prior to *Madama Butterfly's* first production, Pietro Mascagni had used his *verismo* writing style to try to capture the persona of an Asian female.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *IRIS*

Although Puccini's Asian heroine has endured with time, Pietro Mascagni "was the first composer to deal seriously, and even reverently, with a Japanese theme."<sup>41</sup> With a libretto by Luigi Illica, who continues his fascination with Orientalism by later writing the libretto for *Madame Butterfly*, *Iris* was finished and premiered in Rome in November 1898. "Illica had an idea for a libretto on an unusual Japanese subject, and he was eager to find a composer who would share his fascination with the exotic Japanese."<sup>42</sup> Mascagni accepted Illica's offer in 1896 and worked on the score for two years. In doing so, he created an Asian female character from his imagination, playing upon the common Orientalist stereotypes of the day. As mentioned before, Japan offered an exoticism that was just beginning to capture the attention of an audience. Allen Mallach argues the reason for Illica's Japanese locale was because "Japan to *fin de siècle* Europe was still more an imaginary land than part of the modern world, a mysterious land of kimono-clad maidens and sword-bearing samurai occupying a picturesque landscape presided over by Mount Fuji."<sup>43</sup> This distance and lack of concrete knowledge of the culture allowed the creative team a distance of "otherness" between the characters and the audience. The character names Osaka (a tenor) and

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<sup>41</sup> J. W. Klein, "Verdi's Italian Contemporaries & Successors," *Music & Letters* 15, no. 1 (January 1934): 44.

<sup>42</sup> Alan Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni and His Operas* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 106.

<sup>43</sup> Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni*, 125.

Kyoto (a baritone) are not proper names, but rather two major cities in Japan, an indication that Illica never bothered to research authentic Japanese names for characters. Moreover, the title character “Iris” (sung by a dramatic soprano) is also another example of a symbol of Japan. The iris flower is often used in decorative arts in Japanese households.<sup>44</sup> With the distant setting, the creative team is free to create unconventional and bizarre characters and incidents in the plot. They build the “distance that Illica needs to create an abstract, symbolic world for the opera, in which the story would be free of realistic associations and in which his fantasies could bloom unhindered.”<sup>45</sup> Musically, Mascagni wrote to Illica: “I have studied that type (Japanese) of music a great deal, and I believe I’ve caught its spirit.”<sup>46</sup> In fact, the only Japanese musical elements we see in the score are not authentic Japanese melodies, but instrumental colors: gongs, samisen and Japanese bells abound to adjoin the exotic color.<sup>47</sup> It is interesting to see the lengths the creative team went to in portraying Iris as a supreme contrast between an innocent, childlike figure, and as a being of intense sexual worth who is coveted by the male figures of the opera.

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<sup>44</sup> Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni*, 125.

<sup>45</sup> Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni*, 116.

<sup>46</sup> Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni*, 112.

<sup>47</sup> Arthur Groos, “Return of the Native: Japan in ‘Madama Butterfly / Madama Butterfly’ in Japan.” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1, no. 2 (July 1989): 168.

Iris is a young, beautiful and innocent girl who lives with her blind elderly father, Il Cieco (sung by a bass). As with Cio-cio-san, her very name provides a set of stereotypes based on the image of the flower. An iris is one of the most delicate flowers, often white in color, a metaphor for the delicacy and innocence of the main character. Her innocence is highlighted immediately when she wakes up from a nightmare full of dragons and monsters. The monsters have gathered in her garden and have threatened her doll “amica bambola.” The audience witnesses the naïveté and innocence of this character and situation, associating her with toys and dreams. Childlike neediness is demonstrated through the relationship between Iris and her father. Their relationship not only highlights her youth, it also plays upon the stereotype that Asian women serve men in this patriarchal society. The conflict begins when a rich young nobleman, Osaka, notices Iris’s beauty and eagerly demands ownership of the girl by singing “La voglio.” [I want her.]<sup>48</sup> Like Cio-cio-san, Iris can be owned by a man. The scene that follows involves a plan to kidnap Iris that is unbelievably ridiculous and plays upon Iris’s absolute innocence and childlike nature of trust. Kyoto, a public housekeeper from the Yoshiwara district in Tokyo, plans a puppet show to capture Iris’s attention. The puppet show features her favorite character, the Sun God, and in becoming part of the puppet’s action, she is kidnapped.

Although Mascagni’s compositional skills produce beautiful pieces, he doesn’t seem to approach the level of detail that Puccini found in the vocal

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<sup>48</sup> All the *Iris* English translations come from the author. Texts are from Pietro Mascagni, *Iris*, Milan: Ricordi, 1898.

writing for Cio-cio-san. Mascagni comes from a traditional *verismo* style of vocal writing with the need for a dramatic tessitura. The delicacy found in Cio-cio-san's vocal writing is not common with this dramatic approach to the voice. The tessitura makes this role of Iris extremely challenging, and could never be attempted by an actual Japanese teenager. It takes a skilled and older woman to be able to sing the role. Mascagni was not trying to use the sound of Iris to bring about these stereotypes of childlike innocence.

Iris is shown as a sexual commodity in the second act when she is taken to a brothel in Yoshiwara. Sexuality abounds when Osaka attempts to seduce Iris and tells her that his real name is Pleasure. (“Il mi chiamo: Il Piacere.”) This sexually charged incident causes a flood of memories for Iris and triggers the greatest stereotype here, the innocent girl suddenly sexually charged. She remembers a picture she saw in a temple when she was younger of two huge octopuses coiling their tentacles around the body of a slim young woman on the beach. A monk told Iris that these octopuses represent both pleasure and death. (“Quella piovra è Piacere! Quella piovra è morte.”) Mascagni sets this as an operatic aria for Iris. This aria is associated with an actual erotic Japanese woodblock print titled “*The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*” by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). Figure 3.1 shows the woodblock print “*The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*.”



Figure 3.1 “*The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife.*”

The sexual references here abound here as Iris’s innocence is melded into sexuality; here the metaphor of bestiality is combined with the union of the ideas of sexual contact, consummation of the female and orgasm. Orgasm here is compared to death. This poetic symbol is not a new one, but the vivid depiction of the octopus devouring the girl heightens the comparison and plays upon the theme of loss of virginity, sexual pleasure and sexual pain. Illica is creating his own exotic illusion here, portraying this young innocent girl as a sexually charged being. Musically, Mascagni sets this aria in 2/4 at a fast paced tempo. The fast moving harmonic rhythm and long phrases highlight a vocalist’s use of breath. He writes to make the aria agitated and breathy. The breathless feeling reflects both the terror of remembering the picture and the breathlessness of a sexually charged incident. Example 3.1 shows the beginning of the “*Aria della Piovra*” (Octopus Aria).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> All *Iris* vocal and piano musical examples come from Pietro Mascagni, *Iris*, Milan: Ricordi, 1898.

IRIS (ricordando con accento di terrore) *pp*

Un

*cominciando ad affrett. poco a poco senza cres. legg. più sentito*

*pp sempre* *affrett. sempre fino al.....*

(quasi mormorato mentalmente)

$\text{♩} = 126$

1

dì (e-ro pic-ci - na) al tempio vi - di un bonzo a un pa-ra-ven-to

(35)  $\text{♩} = 126$

*pp semplice e senza colore*

*legg. appogg. la 1<sup>a</sup>*

1

tut-to fatto a sim-bo-li, scio-ri - na-re il ve - la-me d'un Mi -

Ex. 3.1 *Iris*, Aria della Piovra, Act Two, No. 35, mm. 1-10.

The text is set rapidly at first highlighting a constant sighing motive of a step, a sound resembling the feeling of stress and release. Example 3.2 shows the ascending step excerpt.

Ex. 3.2 *Iris*, Aria della Piovera, Act Two, No. 35, mm. 11-19.

The first lyrical phrase occurs on the words “con un estremo spasimo” [with an extreme spasm] highlighting even more her sexual energy. The assumed female’s pleasure is given a special musical treatment. “Essa sorride ognor” [she always smiles], which highlights the female pleasure, of which Iris has no firsthand knowledge, is set in a rare moment of lyricism in this turbulent aria. Perhaps she is resisting having sexual contact with Osaka because she learned from the monk that sexuality brings pleasure and ultimately leads to death. The musical climax falls when she quotes the monk as saying “Quella piovera è Piacere... è morte.” Iris quickly goes from sexual being to innocent girl, Osaka continues to seduce her but is stopped by Iris; “Penso a mio padre... casa... giardino...” [I miss my father...house...garden...] Osaka is disgusted with her naïveté and leaves. Kyoto seizes on the opportunity to use Iris as a commodity.

He dresses Iris in “una vesta ancor più trasparente” [a outfit rather transparent] and places her in the balcony for everyone to see.

The tragedy of the story is finalized when Il Cieco arrives in anger, having discovered Iris at a brothel and believing her being there of her own consent. Without hearing Iris’s explanation of why she is in Yoshiwara, Il Cieco tosses mud into Iris’s face and curses her. Her childlike nature cannot handle the shame and she throws herself into the sewer. Act Three takes place as Iris dies in the gutter, hallucinating and thinking back on her life. As Mascagni writes to Ricordi regarding the last act of *Iris*, he wanted the audience to “think back on her innocence, her childhood happiness, and just might make one reflect on this illusions and deceptions of this world.”<sup>50</sup> She recalls “il piccolo mondo della mia casetta.” [The small world with my little house.] Mascagni is making an effort to remind the audience that Iris is indeed a child, and that her childlike innocence, the very thing which made her sexually desirable, ultimately leads to her downfall.

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<sup>50</sup> Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni*, 116.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *THE MIKADO*

It is said that *The Mikado (or The Town of Titipu)* by Sir William Schwenck Gilbert (1836-1911) and Sir Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900) was inspired by a falling Japanese executioner's sword in Gilbert's library.<sup>51</sup> Completed in 1885, although this comic operetta is set in Japan, it is actually a "work about the English--a comedy on British manners, a commentary on English humor, and even a satire of capital punishment."<sup>52</sup> The audience should not dwell on the authenticity of its setting, language, choreography or etiquette. Gilbert chose character names that "sound like Japanese," such as Ko-Ko and Nanki-Poo.<sup>53</sup> Although this survey is focusing on opera, the operetta *The Mikado* deserves a slight mention for several reasons. It remains popular as one of the greatest symbols of Orientalism on the concert stage even today, and specifically for the purposes of this study because it deals with the stereotypes of the Asian female in a comedic manner. In addition, the piece was written twenty years prior to *Madama Butterfly*, which testifies to the long-term fascination Western culture

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Beckerman, "The Mikado" in *The Cambridge Companion to Gilbert and Sullivan*, ed. David Eden and Meinhard Saremba, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 303.

<sup>52</sup> Beckerman, "The Mikado," 317.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas F. Dunhill, *Sullivan's Comic Operas: A Critical Appreciation* (1928; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), 125. Citations are to the 1981 edition.

had with the East. A satire on the cultural infatuation and a comedic view of inaccuracies of cultural representation only demonstrate how these inaccuracies and stereotypes were woven into the public consciousness. On these cultural representations of the East, Carolyn Williams writes, “some of them were appreciative, viewing Japan as a peaceable, intelligent, and civilized ancient culture with dignified ceremonial manners and behavior. But the popular image was complex and contradictory, for some stereotypes were trivializing or denigrating, imagining the Japanese as diminutive, puppet-like, quaint, and jolly, on the one hand, but proud and cruel, on the other.”<sup>54</sup> A brief look at two female characters will present a contrast in Asian female stereotypes of the time and establish the extreme difference from the innocence of Cio-cio-san and Iris.

There are two major female characters in *The Mikado*. Yum-Yum (sung by a soprano) poses as a beautiful and innocent female figure. She first appears as a giggling “school girl” with two other girls singing the trio “*Three Little Maids from School*.” The music appears to be silly and happy with a simple “omm-paa” accompaniment in the orchestra, highlighting the youth and energetic characteristics of Yum-Yum and her schoolmates. It stays in C major with occasionally decorative key changes throughout the entire trio. Example 4.1 shows the excerpt from “*Three Little Maids from School*.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Carolyn Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 267.

<sup>55</sup> All *The Mikado* vocal and piano musical examples come from Arthur Sullivan and W. S. Gilbert. *The Mikado, or, The Town of Titipu*. New York: G. Schirmer, 1885.

**Yum-Yum**

Peep-Bo Three lit-tle maids from school are we, Pert as a

Pitti-Sing Three lit-tle maids from school are we, Pert as a

Three lit-tle maids from school are we, Pert as a

school-girl well can be, Filled to the brim with girl-ish glee,—

school-girl well can be, Filled to the brim with girl-ish glee,—

school-girl well can be, Filled to the brim with girl-ish glee,—

Ex. 4.1 *The Mikado*, “Three Little Maids from School,” Act One, No. 7, mm. 9-16.

Her character demonstrates the qualities that have been explored in the previous operas: she is diminutive, beautiful, innocent and sexually desirable. Her name pokes fun at the idea of desire as “yum” is often used when referring to delicious food. Perhaps this character is a delectable treat to be eaten. As she says: “Yes, I am indeed beautiful!” Her innocence and almost childlike confidence comes out in the text: “Sometimes I sit and wonder, in my artless Japanese way, why it is that I am so much more attractive than anybody else in the whole world?” For her, Japan, specifically the town of Titipu, encompasses her entire

worldly experience. This innocence is also told in her later aria “*The Sun, Whose Rays Are All Blaze.*” She sings: “I mean to rule the earth...” In Yum-Yum’s trio and aria, Sullivan’s signature musical style emerges; no complicated rhythms or harmonies are used. A flute and clarinet introduction gently suggests her sweet and pure qualities. Everything that relates to Yum-Yum suggests innocence and desirability. Example 4.2 shows the orchestral score of “*The Sun, Whose Rays Are All Blaze.*”<sup>56</sup>

“I am a child of Nature, and take after my mother.”

**N<sup>o</sup>. 2. Song. (Yum-Yum.)**

*Andante comodo. ♩ = 69.*

The score is for Act Two, No. 2, "The Sun, Whose Rays Are All Blaze." It features an orchestral introduction and a vocal entry by Yum-Yum. The instruments listed are Flauto I., Oboe., Clarinetto I., Violino I. & II., Viola., Yum-Yum (vocal), Violoncello, and Contrabasso. The tempo is marked "Andante comodo" with a quarter note equal to 69 beats per minute. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, *con sordini*, and *sost.*. The vocal line has two verses of lyrics:

1. The sun, whose rays are all a-blaze, With e- ver
2. Observe his flame, that placid flame, The moon's co-

Ex. 4.2 *The Mikado*, “The Sun, Whose Rays Are All Blaze,” Act Two, No. 2, mm. 1-3.

<sup>56</sup> All *The Mikado* orchestra and vocal musical examples come from Arthur Sullivan and W. S. Gilbert. *The Mikado, or, The Town of Titipu*. New York: Edwin F. Kalmus, 1979.

The opposite extreme is presented with the character of Katisha, who acts nothing like the previously discussed Asian female characters. According to Carolyn Williams, she is a typical “*Dame Figure*,” a character who is “often played by a huge diva...a massive, female power and a protest against namby-pamby femininity.”<sup>57</sup> This figure is a popular stock character in operetta, and Gilbert and Sullivan use her to create the opposite Asian stereotype: that of the aggressive, icy and confrontational monster of a woman. She is “supernaturally powerful...assumed to be a grossly misogynistic representation of the middle-aged, unmarried, vain, desiring woman.”<sup>58</sup> The libretto casts her as an “Elderly Lady,” taking out any notion of innocence or youth. Her vocal tessitura is also much different; she is cast as a “contralto,” an opposite to Yum-Yum’s light lyric soprano. Concerning love, she aggressively pursues the man she desires and is not ashamed to lay claim to a man. She is no commodity to be bought or kidnapped. The creative team delays her entrance until late in the action of the drama right before the close of Act One. As the stage direction indicates, Katisha enters “melodramatically” when she disrupts the supposed happy ending. Sullivan uses the unsettling diminished seventh chord to introduce her to the audience. Example 4.3 shows the entrance of Katisha.

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<sup>57</sup> Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan*, 212.

<sup>58</sup> Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan*, 204.

Allegro agitato  $\text{♩} = 76$

*ff*

*(Enter Katisha, melodramatically)*

Recit. Katisha

Your rev-els cease! As-sist me, all of you!

*f a tempo*

Why, who is

*f*

Why, who is

*f a tempo*

Ex. 4.3 *The Mikado*, Finale, Act One, No. 11, mm. 201-206.

The introduction creates tension to represent her wrath at being abandoned by the Nanki-Poo, now engaged to the heroine Yum-Yum. The two extreme representations of the female must fight over the leading man. In a recitative section, she screams: “Your revels cease!... I claim my perjured lover, Nanki-Poo!...Come back to joy...No! You shall not go, these arms shall thus enfold you!” Her determination and strength defies the male driven stereotype of the diminutive Asian female. Katisha’s music is dramatic and agitated: a tempestuous string part and constant key changes. Example 4.4 shows the tempest gesture in the orchestra.

Allegro agitato      Katisha (*addressing Nanki-Poo*)

Oh fool, that flee-st My hal - lowed

joys! Oh blind, that see-st No e - qui-poise!

Example 4.4 *The Mikado*, Finale, Act One.

In her aria and recitative, “*Alone and Yet Alive*,” she is granted one moment of lyricism as a broken hearted woman. The lament starts in C-sharp minor then switches to D-flat major while she comforts herself. Example 4.5 shows Katisha’s lyricism.

Andante moderato ♩ = 84

Hearts do not break! They sting and ache For  
 old - love's sake, But do not die, Tho' with each breath They

Ex. 4.5 *The Mikado*, “Alone, and Yet Alive!” Act Two, No. 21, mm. 15-20.

Even this is done in a comedic way as she sings to the mysterious and somewhat humorous image of the “living I.” This play on word attests to her strong self-confidence, for although the libretto states that she calls to the “living I,” the audience could easily hear this as the “living EYE,” putting the emphasis some exotic supernatural power. This moment of lyricism is quick, for her love of pain and torture emerge when she publicly declares that she is strong-minded and admits she is “a little teeny weeny wee bit bloodthirsty.” Example 4.6 shows the continues lyrical moment in “*Alone, and Yet Alive!*”

Although Sullivan is a gifted composer, he suggests very little exotic color or any of the typical Asian musical signifiers. It is with the two extreme archetypes and the comedic manner with which he introduces the character stereotypes that warrant mention of *The Mikado*. Asian females are not just

innocent, virginal and sacrificial beings. They are also portrayed as powerful, domineering, vengeful figures with the power to control and kill. These opposite viewpoints of the Asian female do not exist solely in operetta, as Puccini revisits both of these extremes in his final opera, *Turandot*.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *TURANDOT*

Puccini revisits Asia in his final opera, *Turandot*, based on an eighteenth century play by Carlo Gozzi (1720-1806). He chooses an irregular, but not unheard of, musical tradition by creating two traditional *prima donna* roles. These two females then play upon the discourse between extreme personas of the perceived Asian female that has already been seen in works like *The Mikado*. Liù (sung by a lyric soprano) is firmly rooted in the innocent and subservient stereotyped tradition of the Asian female, comparable to Cio-cio-san, Iris and Yum-Yum. Turandot (sung by a dramatic soprano), however, becomes an interesting study in the opposite spectrum of the Asian female, and undergoes a dramatic alteration through the course of the opera. The story is originally Persian, inspired by the thirteenth century collection of stories, *The Thousand and One Nights*. In 1804, Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805) readopted Gozzi's play and turned it into a serious work *Turandot: The Chinese Sphinx*, highlighting the mystery of Turandot's personality. Puccini picked up on this shroud of mystery, and with his team of librettists, Renato Simoni (1875-1952) and Giuseppe Adami (1878-1946), composes his final work. The piece remained unfinished at his death, and was completed by his pupil, Franco Alfano (1875-1954) in 1926. The libretto specifies that the opera is set in a "legendary time" in Peking. Puccini's goal was to create a sense of "otherness" in the story by using an undetermined, remote time and an exotic location. In Puccini's letter to Adami, he told his librettist "to find a Chinese element to enrich the drama and relieve the

artificiality of it (the story).”<sup>59</sup> Puccini was leaning on the “otherness” to distract the audience from dramatic inconsistencies in the plot. The drama deals with the contrast between the conquering power of love and the tragedy of this same power.<sup>60</sup>

Liù and Turandot represent two different extremes: Liù is humble while Turandot is proud; Liù is born into slavery and Turandot is born with authority; Liù is merciful and Turandot is cruel. Liù is one type of stereotypical Asian female: diminutive, kind, unwavering loyal and, in the end, sacrificial. Liù first appears on stage in the most diminutive of ways: she is assisting her master, the exiled king Timur (sung by a bass), who had been dethroned in a revolution. From the beginning, the audience sees her as caring and somewhat weak. When Timur falls, she begs for help, “Il mio vecchio è caduto.....Chi m’ aiuta?” [My old one has fallen. Who will help me?]<sup>61</sup> The first impression of Liù is that she is a sympathetic person who remains loyal to her dispatched former ruler while searching for his lost, exiled son, Prince Calaf (sung by a tenor). Stereotypes abound here as the female, Liù, longs to serve only the man. When father and son reunite, Calaf inquires after the girl’s identity. Liù answers “Nulla sono...mio Signore.” [I am nothing...my Lord.] The Asian woman is claiming herself

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<sup>59</sup> Sean Metzger, “Ice Queens, Rice Queens, and Intercultural Investments in Zhang Yimou's *Turandot*,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 20, no. 2 (Autumn, 2003): 210.

<sup>60</sup> Ping-hui Liao, “Hope, Recollection, Repetition: ‘Turandot’ Revisited,” *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (1993): 69.

<sup>61</sup> All the *Turandot* English translations come from William Weaver, trans., *Puccini Librettos* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 383-471.

worthless, a mere commodity. Her extreme submission arouses Calaf's curiosity, and he asks why she has stayed with the rejected king in a foreign land. "Perche un di...nella Reggia, mi hai sorriso." [Because one day...in the Palace, you smiled at me.] Liù has harbored a secret love of Calaf since he smiled at her years ago. Liù is portrayed as a helpless victim of love, longing to serve men with no obligation, just to be near to a man who was once nice to her. She does this in spite of the social class barriers between servant and Prince, which would prevent any substantive relationship between the two characters.

Liù's giving persona is contrasted with Turandot's coldness. Puccini adds the Chinese gong and xylophone to the orchestra "in order to portray the Chinese as a cruel and savage race," and Turandot captures these adjectives vividly. Her blood lust is seen in Act One when she objectively and coldly witnesses the execution of a potential suitor who tries to win her hand by answering the challenge of three riddles.<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, Puccini mutes his title character for the entire first half of the opera to make her even more heartless and inhuman and creating a sense of mystery around this character. Alexandria Wilson discusses that this silence is a representation of "her obscure and immovable states of mind."<sup>63</sup> Before the execution scene, which the audience learns is the twenty-sixth execution of a potential suitor; a boy's choir sings a traditional Chinese folk song "Mo-lee-hua" (Jasmine). The text set here translates as "Princess, come down to

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<sup>62</sup> Liao, "Writing Words for Music," 54.

<sup>63</sup> Alexandria Wilson, "Modernism and the Machine Woman in Puccini's 'Turandot,'" *Music and Letters* 86, no. 3 (August 2005): 437.

me! Everything will bloom, everything will shine!” This creates a fabric of irony as the text suggests rebirth and life, while the orchestra accompaniment suggests death with a funeral procession in a slow duple meter. Turandot’s entrance to the execution highlights this irony; “*Mo-lee-hua*” is heard again. Puccini orchestrates it for brass with dynamics of *fff* as chorus hails “Principessa” to portray her power and highlight the irony of the text of the song.

Example 5.1 shows “*Mo-lee-hua*” played by brass as Turandot enters the stage.<sup>64</sup>



Ex. 5.1 *Turandot*, Act One, No. 23, mm. 5-9.

As has been discussed, Asian female characters are often associated with flowers in operas, and Turandot now becomes associated with jasmine. Jasmine is white, only blossoms at a specific time of a year, and has poetic associations with strong attachment and sensuality. Perhaps this melody suggests Turandot’s present, if cold, virginity, her potential to change at a specific time and the allure of her sexual power.

Even with her aggressive desire for blood, it is Turandot who appears to have sexual power over men. Calaf praises her beauty from afar: “O divina bellezza, o meraviglia! O sogno...” [Oh divine beauty, oh wonder! Oh dream...] And “vincere...nella sua bellezza.” [To conquered...in her beauty.] Turandot’s

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<sup>64</sup> All *Turandot* orchestra and vocal musical examples come from Giacomo Puccini, *Turandot: Dramma Lirico in Tre Atti e Cinque Quadri*, Milan: Ricordi, 1958.

desirability and sexuality are on display even before she has spoken. Calaf is deluded by this mysterious, beautiful, bloodthirsty and virginal princess. Turandot goes beyond sexual desire; she appears to be a challenge to men to control that which cannot be controlled. The introductory quote of the paper “If the world should collapse, I want Turandot!” demonstrates Calaf’s unwavering need to have that which no man has had. Even in this extreme of an aggressive Asian woman, the appeal of virginity exists. Calaf’s passion of love urges him to partake in Turandot’s challenge of three riddles, ignoring warnings of both his father and the monumental chorus who warn him that all previous attempts to answer the riddles have proved fatal.

Liù, in a moment uncharacteristic of her stereotype, actually steps forwards and pleads with her former master not to enter the challenge. In her aria, she pleads “Signore, ascolta!...Si spezza il cuor...quanto cammino col tuo nome nell’anima, col nome tuo sulle labbra!...io l’ombra d’un sorriso!...” [Lord, listen!...Her (Liù’s) heart is breaking...What a long way with your name in my soul, with your name on my lips!...I, the shadow of a smile!...] Puccini sets this aria using the musical signifiers that have become associated with Asian females. Long vocal lines, the pentatonic mode, a high tessitura and parallel moving harmonies abound as she pleads with her master not to attempt the challenge. Example 5.2 shows the beginning of Liù’s aria “*Signore, ascolta!*”

The image displays a page of a musical score for Act One, No. 42 of Puccini's opera *Turandot*. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes parts for Oboe (Ott.), Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in B-flat (Cl. in Sib), and Cello (Cel.). The vocal line for Liù is written in the bass clef, with lyrics in Italian: "Liù (avvicinandosi al Principe, supplichevole, piangente) Signore, ascolta! Ah, signore, ascolta! Liù non". The second system includes parts for Violin (Vni), Viola (Vle), Violoncello (Ve.), and Contrabasso (Cb.). The vocal line for Calaf is written in the bass clef, with lyrics: "ma - na che muo - va il tuo cuo - re fe - ro - ce?". The score is marked with a tempo of Adagio and includes performance instructions such as "rall:", "con Sordina div.", "ritenuto", and "a tempo".

Ex. 5.2 *Turandot*, “Signore, ascolta!” Act One, No. 42, mm. 1-7.

Calaf notices her loyalty, “o mia povera Liù, al tuo piccolo cuore che non cade...” [My poor Liù, of your little heart that doesn’t fail...] He also uses diminutive references to her heart, “piccolo cuore.” Turandot’s very presence pulls Calaf out of this moment and he rings the gong, associated with the icy, cold Turandot, to begin the questioning ceremony in an attempt to win the princess’s

hand. “The heroine so loved by him is of an icy, perfidious nature, quite beyond redemption.”<sup>65</sup>

Puccini has dramatically held back the first vocal entrance of his title character until the second act aria, “*In questa Reggia*.” The tessitura of this role is one of the most extreme in all of operatic writing. It takes a dramatic soprano with a generous low register and powerful high notes to carry this role. Nothing of Cio-cio-san’s daintiness or even Iris’s *verismo* lyrical phrasing is implied in this role. Antonio Capri writes “In short Turandot should resemble Salome, Phaedra, Elektra; should be all framing passion; have in her an implacable power of domination and destruction; be the centre and motive for the drama. Instead she occupies only a relatively quite small part of the opera; remains a background figure, who presents herself only halfway through the second act, with rigid and cold features.”<sup>66</sup> This is a comment on the dramatic choice to delay her vocal entrance. Although Capri would have the title character become an even strong domineering figure in the tradition of the Strauss heroines, Puccini’s delay of this moment creates an even stronger sense of “icy, perfidious” nature of the character. He uses her aria as an explanation of this coldness that she has exuded throughout the first act. Turandot has been haunted by a story of her ancestress, Princess Lou-Ling, who was kidnapped, raped and murdered by a foreign man much like Calaf. The relationship to this story and the plot of Iris is strong.

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<sup>65</sup> Wilson, “Modernism and the Machine Woman,” 434.

<sup>66</sup> Wilson, “Modernism and the Machine Woman,” 436-437.

Although not discussed, the audience can infer that Princess Lou-Ling’s innocence, beauty and virginity led to her tragedy. Turandot continues to describe the qualities of Princess Luo-Ling as serene and sweet. She sings that the defied, unyielding and confident spirit still lives within her. Generations later, Turandot fights this by choosing to live as an opposite. The story has left her “both terrified of sexual experience and yet fearfully attracted to it.”<sup>67</sup> She refuses any man who approaches her and she swears to avenge the hatred on the suitors by beheading them. Musically, this aria is divided into a traditional two sections. In the first section, she tells the story. Puccini purposely scores this moment with a bare accompaniment in the orchestra; the vocal line first is accompanied by a sustained chromatic chord which is played by the woodwinds. Example 5.3 shows the beginning chords of “*In questa Reggia.*”

Ex. 5.3 *Turandot*, “In questa Reggia,” Act Two, No. 43, mm. 1-6.

Puccini leaves the vocal line “E quel grido, traverso stirpe e stirpe” [And that cry, through descendant and descendant] alone with no orchestra to portray how

<sup>67</sup> Giacomo Puccini, Giuseppe Adami, Renato Simoni, and Carlo Gozzi, *Turandot: Opera Guide, Vol. 27* (New York: Riverrun Press, 1984), 60.

helpless the cry of Princess Luo-Ling. Example 5.4 shows the orchestration when Turandot sings “E quel grido, traverso stirpe e stirpe.”

Ex. 5.4 *Turandot*, “In questa Reggia,” Act Two, No. 43, mm. 7-13.

The muted strings play eighth-note chords to represent the steps that Princess Luo-Ling walked before the foreign man commits the ultimate tragedy. Wilson analyzes this music as a lullaby, highlighting the childlike innocence of Luo-Ling.<sup>68</sup> Example 5.5 shows the walking string part in the orchestra.

Ex. 5.5 *Turandot*, “In questa Reggia,” Act Two, No. 44, mm. 3-8.

<sup>68</sup> Wilson, “Modernism and the Machine Woman,” 444.

The range of the vocal line remains static; these short, two-measure phrases only reach an interval of a fourth or fifth. Not until Turandot sings “oggi rivivi in me,” [you relive in me today] does the register expend to the wider interval of a seventh. Example 5.6 shows the expended interval of a seventh in the orchestra part.<sup>69</sup>

TURANDOT

...fy - ing with firm unyielding will the rule of \_\_\_ man, thou liv - est still in  
 - da - sti in fles - si - bi - le e si - cu - ra l' a - spro dominio, og - gi ri - vi - vi in  
 poco rit.:..... a tempo poco rit.

Ex. 5.6 *Turandot*, “In questa Reggia,” Act Two, No. 44, mm. 10-12.

However, when the vocal line lands on the word “me,” the orchestra alternates F-sharp and G-sharp on the top notes, suggesting that Turandot is captured within this tragic moment of betrayal. Example 5.7 shows the narrow register in the orchestra.

a tempo sostenendo sempre

*p*

Ex. 5.7 *Turandot*, “In questa Reggia,” Act Two, No. 44, mm. 13-14.

<sup>69</sup> All *Turandot* piano and vocal musical examples come from Giacomo Puccini, *Turandot; Lyric Drama in Three Acts and Five Scenes* (Milan: Ricordi, 1929).

She continues these two-measure phrases with three sequences. First, “Pure, nel tempo che ciascun ricorda” [Still, in the time that everyone remembers], the vocal line starts on an A and only has a small phrasal arch within the interval of a third. In the second phrase, she says “Fu sgomento e terrore e rombo d’armi!” [There was alarm, and terror and the rumble of arms.] The vocal line is sequenced a third higher on a D. The third phrase starts on F when she speaks “Il regno vinto! Il regno vinto!” [The kingdom defeated! The kingdom defeated!] Example 5.8 shows the ascending sequences in the vocal line.

TURANDOT (evoking distant memories)  
*p* (come cosa lontana)

Yet in those days as ev'ry one rem-em-bers, war broke out with the  
 Pu-re nel tem-po che ciascun ri-cor-da, fu sgo-men-to e ter-

TURANDOT

clash of arms and ter-ror! Her realm was conquer'd! Her realm was conquer'd!  
 -ro-re e rom-bo d'ar-mi! Il re-gno vin-to! Il re-gno vin-to!

Ex. 5.8 *Turandot*, “In questa Reggia,” Act Two, No. 45, mm. 1-6.

When Turandot speaks of Luo-Ling’s cold voice, the vocal line lands on a low D. The word “voce” [voice] is also cut off abruptly in a very heartless way. As the story of Princess Luo-Ling’s tragedy continues, Puccini switches from eighth-note chords to sixteenth-note chords in the accompaniment to build intensity, along with adding density to the orchestral color and the raising the vocal tessitura.

Example 5.9 shows the orchestration and rhythmic changes in the orchestra part.



Ex. 5.9 *Turandot*, “In questa Reggia,” Act Two, No. 46, mm. 3-5.

The vocal line climaxes with “quella purezza, quell grido e quella morte!” [That purity, that cry and that death!] Turandot stresses three things here: purity (virginity), cry (lost of virginity) and death. Again, death and orgasm are paralleled, as in the Octopus aria from *Iris*. Turandot repeats the terms “grido” and “morte” accompanied by very harsh chords. Example 5.10 shows the accompaniment of “grido” and “morte.”

TURANDOT

you, — on you who broke that lil - y, that ag - on - iz - ing cry! — That  
 voi, — su voi quel - la pu - rez - za, quel gri - do e quel - la mor - te! Quel

sostenendo

TURANDOT

cry that dy - ing cry! — Ne'er shall I be  
 grido e quel - la mor - te! Mai nes - sun m'a -

(resolutely)  
 (con energia)

Largamente ♩ = 56

allarg. molto..... 47

ff p cresc.

\*

Ex. 5.10 *Turandot*, “In questa Reggia,” Act Two, No. 46, mm. 9-12.

Not only is she angry, she is also mortified. On the word “morte,” the audience expects a cadence on an f-sharp minor chord. Instead, Puccini chromatically alters the key to G-flat major with sudden dynamic change to *p*, suggesting the potential for change in this character. Although the orchestral texture creates a luxurious atmosphere, the vocal line, “Mai nessun m’avrà” [No one will ever possess me], remains heartless and is marked “con energia.” The orchestra starts the lyrical phrase from G-flat major; sequences up a third to B-flat major. The third time when Turandot repeats “mai nessun m’avrà,” the orchestra

doubles the vocal line adding intensity. Example 5.11 shows the doubling of vocal and orchestra.

TURANDOT

no! Never mortal man! Ah! I ne'er will betray the  
no! *Maines sun m'avrà!* Ah, ri - na - sce in me l'or.

Più sostenuto

*mf* *cresc.* *ff* *mf*

Ex. 5.11 *Turandot*, “In questa Reggia,” Act Two, No. 47, mm. 9-10.

When the sequence rises up to F-sharp major, Calaf interrupts Turandot’s building aria and replies, “the riddles are three, but there is only one life.” Finally, these two voices join together with the orchestra and both vocal lines reach that great operatic trope of the high C. This moment is an actual challenge between soprano and tenor, who can sustain this powerful note the longest? Puccini has created an actual challenge to Turandot’s crowning moment, while also implying that she is musically unfulfilled without Calaf’s musical addition to her aria.

Example 5.12 shows the high C of both vocal lines.

TURANDOT

THE PRINCE *cresc.*..... *ten.* No! No! The en -  
 IL PRINCIPE *ten.* No! No! Gli e -

-ig - mas I shall solve, and life will follow!  
 -nig - mi so - no tre, una è la vi - ta! The en -  
 Gli e -

Allargando

*cresc.* *p* *ff*

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TURANDOT

-ig - mas none can solve, and death will fol - low!  
 -nig - mi so - no tre, la mor - te è u - na!

THE PRINCE  
 IL PRINCIPE

-ig - mas I shall solve, and life will fol - low!  
 Sop. -nig - mi so - no tre, la mor - te è u - na!

Ten. Now must the valiant stranger  
 Al Princi - pestranie - ro

Basses  
 Bassi Now must the valiant stranger  
 Al Princi - pestranie - ro

(Trumpets & Trombones off stage)  
 (Trombe e Tromboni interni)

Now must the valiant stranger  
 Al Princi - pestranie - ro

Ex. 5.12 *Turandot*, “In questa Reggia,” Act Two, No. 48, mm. 2-5.

The music remains heartless and cruel during the first riddle, especially when the timpani, bass and bassoon strike the chord. Moments of silence occur in

the music to show the emptiness of her heart and to build dramatic intensity.

Example 5.13 shows the chords and the emptiness in the orchestra.

The image displays a musical score for Example 5.13, featuring orchestral parts and a vocal line. The orchestral parts include Fg. (Flute), C. Fg. (Clarinet), T.p. (Trumpet), G. C. (Guitar/Contra), Ve. (Violin), and Cb. (Cello). The vocal line is for TUR. (Turandot). The score is marked with a first ending bracket (I.) and includes the lyrics: "- seen - te. Sa.lee dispie.ga l'a.le sul . la ne.ra in fi.nita uma - ni - ta!". The music is in a key with one flat and a 4/4 time signature.

Ex. 5.13 *Turandot*, Act Two, No. 50, mm. 7-12.

Turandot uses the third riddle of the challenge to address her own personality by asking what is “il gelo che dà foco.” [The frost that gives fire.] This seemingly monster-like character suggests there is something deeper within her. After Calaf solves all three riddles and effectively wins the challenge for Turandot’s hand, she wants to break agreement. She starts every phrase with “non” to show her determination: “Non gettar...No, non dire...non puoi...non guardarmi...No, non sarò tua...Non voglio...” The music changes from harsh to warm with expensive string playing as she pleads. Suddenly she becomes a lyrical figure, pleading with her father in the tradition of Iris and Cio-cio-san. This is the most musically lyrical moment for Turandot. “*Mo-lee-hua*” is heard again in the orchestra and the chorus as the music builds to a climax. She seems to portray herself as an innocent and childlike victim, “Mi vuoi nelle tue braccia a forza?”

Riluttante, fremente!” [Do you want me in your arms by force, reluctant, shuddering?] Example 5.14 shows the lyricism as Turandot pleads.

(filled with anguish, mounts the stairs again, close to the Emperor's throne.)  
 TURANDOT (*ch'è risalita affannosamente presso il trono dell'Imperatore.*)

Hear me, my father! Son of Heaven!  
*Fi - glio del cie - lo! Pa - dre au - gu - sto!*

63 ♩ = 88  
*pp*

TURANDOT

Thou can'st not throw thy daughter in the arms of this unknown  
*No! Non get - tar tua fi - glia nel - le brac - cia del - lo stra -*

*p espressivo*

TURANDOT (rebelliously) (*con ribellione*)

strang - er! No, thou  
*- nie - ro! No, non*

THE EMPEROR (solemnly) (*solenne*)  
 L'IMPERATORE

My sac - red oath is bind - ing!  
*E sa - cro il giu - ra - men - to!*

*Red. \**

Ex. 5.14 *Turandot*, Act Two, No. 63, mm. 1-8.

It is not Turandot that supplies the tragedy to this story, but the other soprano, Liù. Liao argues, “It is Liù who stands in the problematic and ambivalent intersection between hope and recollection, love and sacrifice, victory and defeat.”<sup>70</sup> She is caught in an uncompromising position because Calaf has allowed Turandot a means to dissolve their marriage agreement by discovering his true identity. It is discovered that Liù knows the truth, and she must choose between sacrificing herself, and allowing the man she loves to attain his goal. Liù refuses to reveal Calaf’s name by saying “M’è suprema delizia tenerlo segreto e possederlo io sola!” [It is a supreme delight for me to keep it a secret and to possess it, alone!] Liù, ever loyal and subservient, does not reveal Calaf’s identity; instead she labels him as “l’amore” before ending her own life out of love for him. This love is not just ordinary love; she describes it as “Tanto amore, segreto e inconfessato, grande così che questi strazi son dolcezze per me.” In her suicide aria, she says: “Tu che di gel sei cinta, da tanta fiamma vinta. L’amorerai anche tu!” [You who are girded with frost, overcome by such flame. You also will love him!] Patricia Juliana Smith argues that Liù’s suicide is “for a self-described nothing, the shining moment has come—the opportunity to be someone, to be an agent of Destiny, to throw a wrench into the plot.”<sup>71</sup> The tragedy is, in affect, her own choosing. It is her choice to be a sacrificial item so that Calaf can attain what

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<sup>70</sup> Liao, “Recollection,” 70.

<sup>71</sup> Patricia Juliana Smith, “Gli Enigma Sono Tre: The [D]evolution of Turandot, Lesbian Monster,” in *En Travesti : Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, ed. Corinne E. Blackmer et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 267.

he desires. Her death is “the self-sacrificial martyr of unrequited love.”<sup>72</sup>

Musically, Liù’s last aria is in e-flat minor and demonstrates great sorrow. The lyricism associated with her character remains in the vocal line, even as the orchestra suggests otherwise with the aggressive offbeat suggested in the first bar. Musically signifiers abound as Puccini reminds the audience of the Chinese locale with modal writing, woodwind textures, and parallel harmonies. The orchestra constantly doubles her vocal line adding a weighted feeling to the moment of ultimate sacrifice. Liù’s death seems to represent the death not only of the character, but also of the innocence, loyalty, and lyricism that has pervaded the stereotypes of this type of Asian female. Example 5.15 shows the beginning of “*Tu che di gel sei cinta.*”

27 *And<sup>no</sup> mosso* ♩ = 69  
*con un poco d'agitazione*

Fl. *I.*  
*con dolorosa espress. pp*

Ob. *p*

Cl. in Si b *pp*  
*con dolorosa espress.*

Fg. *I.*  
*p*

Liù *con dolorosa espress.*  
Tu che di gel sei cin\_ta, da tanta fiamma vin\_ta, l'amera anche

27 *And<sup>no</sup> mosso* ♩ = 69  
*con Sord. 2 Sole. div. con un poco d'agitazione*

Vle *pp*

Vc.

Cb.

Ex. 5.15 *Turandot*, Act Three, No. 27, mm. 1-6.

<sup>72</sup> Smith, “Gli Enigma Sono Tre,” 270.

Liù's death is a transformation for Turandot. Calaf immediately reminds Turandot that she is a "Principessa di morte! Principessa di gela." [Princess of death! Princess of frost!] He calls the princess to come down to the earth from her tragic heaven. [Dal tuo tragico cielo scendi giù sulla terra!...] Turandot reflects on her life, "Cosa umana non sono... Son la figlia del Cielo, libera e pura...! Tu stringi il mio freddo velo, ma l'anima è lassù!" [I am no human thing... I am the daughter of heaven, free and pure...! You clasp my cold veil, but my soul is on high!] Calaf reminds her that her body is on earth, by delivering a life-altering kiss for Turandot. She asks herself "Che è mai di me? Perduta!" [What has become of me? Lost!] Calaf compares her to a morning flower. Turandot suddenly becomes a character like Iris--diminutive, sexual aroused and ashamed. Now she is willing to give herself to him completely, in a complete reversal of her personality. According to Alexandra Wilson, the music at end of this opera does not capture Turandot's transformation from disdain to passion.<sup>73</sup> The audience expects something more than the "cold and dry" music associated with the Princess. The love duet should have "warmed up, sparked, taken flame."<sup>74</sup> But something leaves the audience wanting more. Her transformation seems to be incomplete. Perhaps this is due to the sudden death of the master composer Puccini in the composition of the finale. Regardless, the end leaves many unsettled. Music critic Raffaello de Rensis wrote of the complete work that

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<sup>73</sup> Wilson, "Modernism and the Machine Woman," 437.

<sup>74</sup> Wilson, "Modernism and the Machine Woman," 437.

“Turandot with her regal mantles, her tiaras, her beauty was forgotten. Not one member of the public, in our view, wanted to see her again.”<sup>75</sup> Some have attempted an explanation of why this transformation does not satisfy: “Turandot, after all, is herself a sort of ‘mechanical idol,’ physically remote, a guardian of enigmas, an object of cultic and erotic veneration.”<sup>76</sup> Even though Puccini seems to suggest her redemption, her strong persona seems unchangeable and irredeemable, especially in the light of Liù’s suicide. On the contrary, Liù creates an “emotional directness, bond of trust with the listeners.”<sup>77</sup> The audiences remember the sacrificial victim, Liù, of this love story. Overall, Liù is the “most Puccinian character in opera.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Wilson, “Modernism and the Machine Woman,” 432.

<sup>76</sup> Arman Schwartz, “Mechanism and Tradition in Puccini's Turandot,” *The Opera Quarterly* 25, no. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 2009): 45.

<sup>77</sup> Wilson, “Modernism and the Machine Woman,” 433.

<sup>78</sup> Wilson, “Modernism and the Machine Woman,” 446.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *NIXON IN CHINA*

After creating such a strong foundation in feminine Asian operatic tropes during the turn of the twentieth century, operatic composers placed relatively little emphasis on the Asian female following World War II. Examining the works of major opera composers following the war shows relatively little “othering” of the exotic East. Japan’s inclusion in the war suddenly changed a Western audience’s perspective on the East, and postwar composers looked for new dramatic and musical inspiration. In 1982, theater director Peter Sellars (b.1957) approached composer John Adams and later in 1984 to the librettist Alice Goodman (b. 1958) about writing an opera based on a contemporary news story: President Richard Nixon’s visit to China in February of 1972. Their collaboration produced *Nixon in China* and with it a take on an actual Asian female in the character of Madam Mao (sung by a coloratura soprano).

*Nixon in China* provides an effective vehicle for exploring the audience perception of an Asian woman because it presents Madame Mao in contrast with a woman of the West, Pat Nixon (sung by a lyric soprano). Pat Nixon is the epitome of Western life, while Chiang Ch’ing, also known as Madame Mao, was a revolutionary historic character who displays both extremes of the stereotypical Asian woman. It is important to note that these characters are based on actual human beings. Chiang Ch’ing, a former actress, was Chairman Mao’s last and fourth wife. According to Timothy Johnson, in the 1930’s, actors and actresses

“were looked down on socially.”<sup>79</sup> Before marrying Chairman Mao in 1940, it was during the governance of Kuomintang when “she spent a great deal of her time and energy on underground political activities.”<sup>80</sup> Coming from a poor family and a disgraced acting background, Chang Ch’ing slowly worked her way up the political ladder and then in 1949 she became the first lady of the People’s Republic of China as the Communist Party took over the government. The Cultural Revolution in China from 1965 to 1968 provided the best atmosphere for a former movie actress to enter the traditionally male dominated political scene and began to change any perception one might have of the Asian female. “Chiang subscribes to the male hegemony by staking out her authority through her marriage to Mao Tse-tung.”<sup>81</sup> Her role in his regime was so powerful and in the spotlight that according to composer John Adams, she “represents a clear and present threat to any desire for male hegemony.”<sup>82</sup> Richard Nixon thought that she was “unpleasantly abrasive and aggressive” when he first met her.<sup>83</sup> Clearly this woman was a fundamental figure as the contemporary face of the Asian female

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<sup>79</sup> Timothy A. Johnson, *John Adams’s “Nixon in China”: Musical Analysis, Historical and Political Perspectives* (Farnham, Sures: Ashgate, 2011), 133.

<sup>80</sup> Johnson, *John Adams’s Nixon*, 133.

<sup>81</sup> Johnson, *John Adams’s Nixon*, 199.

<sup>82</sup> Matthew N. Daines, “*Telling the Truth about Nixon: Parody, Cultural Representation, and Gender Politics in John Adams’s Opera Nixon in China*” (PhD diss., University of California-Davis, 1995), 190.

<sup>83</sup> Richard Nixon, *Memoir of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1975), 571.

for the world, and ideal for an operatic treatment in this already established lineage of “Other,” exotic characters. It is this historicized character that attracted Sellars and Adams to portray her and add to the persona of the Asian operatic female character. Although her life has inspired other operatic renderings, namely in Bright Sheng’s *Madame Mao*, it is Sellars and Adams’s treatment that has endured in the operatic repertoire.<sup>84</sup>

Goodman’s libretto establishes an opera about “perception, appearance and illusion” and this is explored in the contrast between the two principle female characters. Goodman delays Madam Mao’s entrance in the opera until Act Two, perhaps drawing influence from *Turandot*, and presents Pat Nixon as the first female character of the opera. She is described as “...the ideal American businessman’s archetype of a wife. She is the woman who stands in the background...always has that smile no matter how bitter life may be to her,” according to the composer’s description.<sup>85</sup> In fact, this sweet, sincere and thoughtful American woman reveals her strong side as the opera develops. The second act begins with Pat Nixon’s tour around the city, and Goodman’s libretto describes that the First Lady “is loving every minute of it.”<sup>86</sup> Pat Nixon’s opening statement of this scene describes her experience: “I don’t daydream and don’t

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<sup>84</sup> Daines, “*Telling the Truth*,” 190.

<sup>85</sup> Daines, “*Telling the Truth*,” 109.

<sup>86</sup> Texts of *Nixon in China* are quoted from John Adams and Alice Goodman, *Nixon in China: Opera in Three Acts* (Amsterdam: De Nederlandse Opera, 1988).

look back, in this world you can't count on luck. I think what is to be will be in spite of us; I treat each day like Christmas. Never have I cared for trivialities..."

She appears to be a kind of woman who is "trying to live in the moment as well as her belief in fate." This positive, seemingly upright figure puts her best face forward in public: she feels sorry and rude to visit the People's Clinic; she recalls that she used to have a red-ribbon boar when she visits the pig farm; and she brings greetings from the children in the United States to the school she visits. All these thoughtful and sympathetic gestures are used to describe the primary female figure of the opera.

Goodman highlights Chiang Ch'ing's aggression and power hungry attitude. In public, Chiang Ch'ing is seen as a dominating political figure. Act Two Scene Two opens with the ballet "*The Red Detachment Women*," which was based on a true story and scripted by Chiang Ch'ing during the Cultural Revolution. It is the story of female revenge after being both physically and sexually oppressed by a tyrant landlord (Lao Szu). The character Lao Szu (sung by a bass) sings: "...that luscious thigh, that swelling breast scented and greased...She was so hot. I was hard-put...Come on you slut...I started in, Man upon hen." These insults remind one of the society from which Iris and Cio-cio-san emerge, ruled primarily by men. Not only does Lao Szu insult the females, he gathers a group of men to "whip her to death." Later in the scene, these female victims are encouraged to join "Red Detachment of Women." It is a message of the awakening of feminine consciousness. The ballet mirrors Chang Ch'ing's transformation from an actress to her present position of political power. In the

opera, the performance of this ballet is interrupted by Pat Nixon, who can't bear to watch the brutality any more. Chiang Ch'ing's aria "*I am the wife of Mao Tse-tung*" portrays her offense at the interruption.

Johnson addresses this by stating this "This aria displays her role in history as both a liberator and an equalizer."<sup>87</sup> In addition, she "could be said to be the ultimate embodiment of feminism and the ultimate champion of women's rights; without doubt she was the most powerful woman in the world."<sup>88</sup> With her interruption of the ballet, she encourages the women to destroy the evil power. Her personality appears abrupt, demanding and rude. Adams matches this with a dotted, march-like rhythm played by prominent brass to create a "loud, uncontrollable, and strong aria...and a representation of philosophical and artistic bankruptcy of Cultural Revolution."<sup>89</sup> Example 6.1 shows the beginning of "*I am the wife of Mao Tse-tung*."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Johnson, *John Adams's Nixon*, 135.

<sup>88</sup> Daines, "Telling the Truth," 192.

<sup>89</sup> Daines, "Telling the Truth," 199.

<sup>90</sup> All *Nixon in China* piano and vocal musical examples come from John Adams and Alice Goodman, and John McGinn. *Nixon in China: An Opera in Three Acts* (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, Hendon Music, 1999).

781

CHANG CHING

I AM THE WIFE OF MAO-TSE TUNG

785

CHANG CHING

I AM THE WIFE OF MAO-TSE TUNG WHO RAISED THE WEAK ABOVE THE

789

CHANG CHING

STRONG WHEN I APPEAR THE PEOPLE

793

Ex. 6.1 *Nixon in China*, Act Two, mm. 781-796. *Nixon in China* by John Adams and Alice Goodman © Copyright 1987 by Alice Goodman and Hendon Music, Inc., a Boosey & Hawkes company. Copyright for all countries. All rights reserved. Reprinted by Permission.

The entrance of this aria is built on a B-flat Major chord and in the two bar interludes, there appears an offbeat accented A-flat. This dissonant tone suggests a rudeness and bluntness to Chiang Ch'ing. Additionally, her aggression is represented in word repetition and register. The first time she sings: "I speak according to the Book," Adams emphasizes the word "book" seven times and sets the word on a high B-flat. The word "Book" is repeated for over thirty-five times throughout the entire aria. There is not a prominent lyrical vocal line in this aria. Most of the melody is built on broken chords and tritones. Example 6.2 shows the example of the tritones.

CHIANG CHING

AND FOR HIS SAKE WHOSE WREATHS ARE HEAVY ROUND MY NECK

806

meno f

f

B $\flat$  B $\flat$ 7

Ex. 6.2 *Nixon in China*, Act Two, mm. 806-809. *Nixon in China* by John Adams and Alice Goodman © Copyright 1987 by Alice Goodman and Hendon Music, Inc., a Boosey & Hawkes company. Copyright for all countries. All rights reserved. Reprinted by Permission.

The tessitura is extremely high and demanding. The vocal line goes up to high D6 twice, highlighting the words revolution and book. Contrast this high tessitura, use of repeated text, and rhythmically driving orchestral texture with the music associated with Pat Nixon. In Pat's first aria "*I don't daydream*," Adams sets the introduction in a simple C Major tonality. As the vocal line enters, words are set in sustained notes accompanied by strings and winds. Pat Nixon's music

suggests a more comfortable tessitura, between B2 to A4, and a lyricism that one does not encounter with Madame Mao. Example 6.3 shows the example of the lyricism of Pat Nixon's aria.

Ex. 6.3 *Nixon in China*, Act Two, mm. 63-75. *Nixon in China* by John Adams and Alice Goodman © Copyright 1987 by Alice Goodman and Hendon Music, Inc., a Boosey & Hawkes company. Copyright for all countries. All rights reserved. Reprinted by Permission.

Chiang Ch'ing is offered a lyrical moment in the final act of the opera.

Chairman Mao (sung by a tenor) and Chiang Ch'ing begin to dance and recall their past. Mao recalls Chiang Ch'ing's stage name, "Lang P'ing," in a moment of nostalgia. Chiang Ch'ing answers: "you named me. I was very young." Mao

continues to say: “You were a little fool.” The creative team offers a different, domestic perspective on both Chairman Mao and Chiang Ch’ing. They suddenly appear softer and more realistic than the extreme figures of the previous act. The libretto depicts Chiang Ch’ing “as a serious, stern and powerful leader and as the vibrant and saucy young communist who first attracted Mao’s attention.”<sup>91</sup> In Act Three, Chiang Ch’ing’s aggression has been taken out by the composer and her vocal line demonstrates with long and floating high notes. In mm. 473 to 484, Chiang Ch’ing has twelve measures of tender melisma where the vocal line demonstrates a lyricism in that high tessitura. This is the moment when Chairman Mao and Chiang Ch’ing recall their youth and how they started the Chinese Communist Party. Example 6.4 shows the melisma in Madame Mao’s part in Act Three.



Ex. 6.4 *Nixon in China*, Act Three, mm. 473-482. *Nixon in China* by John Adams and Alice Goodman © Copyright 1987 by Alice Goodman and Hendon Music, Inc., a Boosey & Hawkes company. Copyright for all countries. All rights reserved. Reprinted by Permission.

<sup>91</sup> Johnson, *John Adams’s Nixon*, 133.

Later in this act, Chiang Ch'ing's arioso "*I can keep still*" contrasts her previous aria. This is the most lyrical moment for this character. Example 6.5 shows the long lyrical line in "*I can keep still*."

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Chiang Ch'ing's arioso. The first system, starting at measure 603, features a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics "I CAN KEEP STILL, I CAN SAY" and a piano accompaniment in bass clef with a circled measure number "603". The second system, starting at measure 606, features a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics "NOTH - ING FOR A WHILE WHILE THE" and a piano accompaniment in bass clef with a circled measure number "606". Both systems include a grand staff with treble and bass clefs, and a dynamic marking of "ff" (fortissimo) in the piano part.

Ex. 6.5 *Nixon in China*, Act Three, mm. 603-608. *Nixon in China* by John Adams and Alice Goodman © Copyright 1987 by Alice Goodman and Hendon Music, Inc., a Boosey & Hawkes company. Copyright for all countries. All rights reserved. Reprinted by Permission.

Although the vocal line is more conventionally melodic with long phrases, the words she sings still represent her strength: "...Nothing I fear has ever harmed me, why should you?" In this icy figure of extreme passion and drive, one can witness a softening at the end, much like *Turandot*, through greater lyricism and a more conventional register in her vocal line.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *MADAME WHITE SNAKE*

Madame White Snake is a centuries-old Chinese myth<sup>92</sup> that has been adapted into many different forms including traditional Chinese storytelling, Peking opera, ballet, stage play, film and most recently an opera. According to the librettist Cerise Lim Jacobs, this opera was originally a short libretto, given as a birthday present to her husband in 2006 and then eventually turned into a four-act opera with music by composer Zhou Long.<sup>93</sup> *Madame White Snake* was premiered by Opera Boston in February 2010 and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in music the following year. It provides a look at the treatment of an Asian female through an eastern composer's unique perspective, while composing in the west. The protagonist female he creates offers an interesting study because she is actually an ancient demi-god in the form of a snake that longs to experience human love at such a cost that she defies the tenants of the gods, becomes human, and falls in love, but with tragic consequences. Her sheer nature as a demi-god being recalls the stereotypes of Asian woman having a connection with other worldly power, such as the Cio-cio-san's relationship to the moon. The Greek chorus foretells the outcome of her love, which cannot be blessed because "nature can never sanction

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<sup>92</sup> The story of *Madame White Snake* first existed in the Song Dynasty (A.C. 960-A.C. 1279).

<sup>93</sup> "The Birth of Madame White Snake," accessed September 24, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LU7-AM3AF2c&feature=related>.

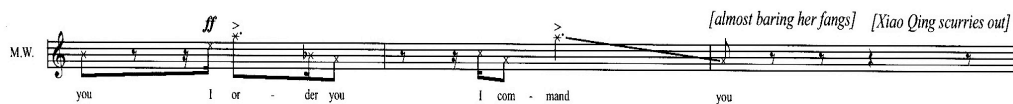
it and it overthrows the structured order. And defies the mandate of heaven.”<sup>94</sup> As in many of the other operatic plots, the main conflict is the story of one woman and her desire for love, which is in conflict with the social order. Her portrayal in the opera is an interesting one, with contrasts between the stereotypical qualities of the Asian seductress versus the domineering female.

Starting with the title of the work and the character, portrayed by a coloratura soprano, the audience is bombarded with contrasts. The name “white” implies innocence, delicacy and pureness, yet at the same time there are many basic negative implications that come with the idea of a snake. According to the librettist, she has both “alienness” and a human quality. She is not from the normal sphere of life. She speaks of her past in her first moments on stage, “For one thousand years, I have been asleep... Am I still dreaming in a sleep so deep that I cannot tell the real from dream?” Clearly she is not a mortal, human spirit; she possesses magical abilities and lives in a delusional dream world of her thoughts. Her morality is also not clear; she is neither good nor evil, demon nor angel. The character’s questionable motives and morality become part of the dramatic sweep of the story. Her characteristics change rapidly from one to another with the transformation. As a human woman, she “...rose from being a heartless beast to being an ideal mate. She was a loving wife, a caring mother...a

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<sup>94</sup> The texts of *Madame White Snake* are quoted from Long Zhou and Cerise Lim Jacobs, *Madame White Snake: Opera in Four Acts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

general benefactor or men.”<sup>95</sup> The alternation between the faces of Madame White<sup>96</sup> is clear musically as well. When Madame White gets furious with her maid for not following her orders, the demonic portion of her personality appears, and her irritation is reflected in the music. As Madame White shouts: “I order you. I command you” to Xiao Qing, the score is marked *ff* and the vocal line is written in a contemporary notation as a non-pitched scream in the score. Example 7.1 shows the non-pitched vocal line of Madame White.<sup>97</sup>



Ex. 7.1 *Madame White Snake*, Act Two, Scene One, mm. 87-89.

The character description is that she is “Almost baring her fangs.” This is in stark contrast to the moment immediately prior to this, one of the most vulnerable moments for Madame White. She sings: “I am a woman, I am of the earth and the sky...and I love this man.” The combination of vibraphone, string harmonics and oboe doubling the vocal line create a dreamy and surreal atmosphere in mm 55 to mm 58. The composer has purposefully shown us the two faces of Madame White in stark contrast. Example 7.2 shows the orchestration and the lyrical vocal line.

<sup>95</sup> Whalen Lai, “From Folklore to Literate Theater: Unpacking ‘Madame White Snake,’” *Asian Folklore Studies* 51, no. 1 (1992): 53.

<sup>96</sup> When transformed as a human figure, the title role is called Madame White.

<sup>97</sup> All *Madame White Snake* musical examples come from Long Zhou and Cerise Lim Jacobs, *Madame White Snake: Opera in Four Acts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

7/8  $\text{♩} = 126$

Ob.  $p$

Perc. I **Vibraphone**  $ppp$

Hp.  $ppp$

M.W.  $p$   
I am a wo-man, I am of the earth and the sky

Vln. I  $ppp$   $div.$

Vln. II  $ppp$   $on G$   $div.$

Vla.  $ppp$   $on D$   $div.$

Vc.  $ppp$   $on \Delta$   $div.$

Cb.  $ppp$   $on A$   $div.$

Ex. 7.2 *Madame White Snake*, Act Two, Scene One, mm. 55-58.

One could also divide the music into two parts: human and demon. In the human part, the music usually contains lyrical melodic lines and expansive string and harp accompaniment. On the other hand, the demonic part of the music involves more rhythmic activity in the orchestra and the vocal line is much more speech driven.

As with *Cio-cio-san*, *Madame White* feels the need to betray the traditional religious society of which she belongs for love. Lai discusses that “the modern feminist would even see in her an advocate of the individual's freedom to love, an advocate who, by boldly defying the feudal, patriarchal authorities,

brought the whole system of their sexist injustice down upon her.” The Greek chorus is constantly reminding both the audience and Madame White that her fate will end in tragedy. In the first scene of Act Two, both the maid Xiao Qing (sung by a male soprano) and the chorus try to convince Madame White not fall in love with Xu Xian: he seems to be “...preferring to dedicate himself to healing. He had no room to love a woman...His heart was close...Madame White, I beg you please do not take this any further...Your union cannot be blessed. Nature can never sanction it. It overthrows the structured order. And defies the mandate of heaven.” Fast thirty-second notes in both the winds and the strings appear with sudden dynamic change to make the curse sound like eternal murmuring in the background. The central conflict becomes clear; it is between the structured order of the gods and Madame White’s love. But Madame White exudes confidence and aggression by ordering her maid to bring a man to her house, while falling in love with him. Example 7.3 shows the repeated thirty-second notes in the orchestra.



She exults the great transformation that she has undergone in the *Awakening Aria*: “Touch my hair so long and silken, touch my face so smooth and fair...I rejoice in caressing skin so bare. I feel the warm blood rushing through me. Pulsing and throbbing...A woman on the threshold of her wedding bed.” The sexual implications here are explicit: she is describing her first experience in her human body. The “bare skin” and “pulsing and throbbing” body captures her sexual excitement at the very notion of love. Musically, Zhou links this opening moment closely to the texts by using a lyrical melodic vocal line double by a Qudi, or Chinese song flute. The Qudi is often associated with slow and lyrical melodies, and adds an exotic timbre to the score.<sup>98</sup> The tessitura lies comfortably between D4 and G# 3. According to the review in *Opera News*, the composer is actively “Giving voice to sweeping melodies worthy of Puccini without sounding imitative, and employing such vocal and freestanding musical world of his own.”<sup>99</sup> Between phrases, the vocal part is connected with triplets that resemble the character’s own heartbeat. The triplets provide accompaniment and texture through out the entire aria. Soprano Ying Huang, the original Madame White Snake, says in an interview: “This aria shows the good side of the character: kind,

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<sup>98</sup> *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Di,” by Alan R. Thrasher, accessed October 9, 2012, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/45368>.

<sup>99</sup> “Zhou Long’s *Madame White Snake* Awarded 2011 Pulitzer Prize for Music,” *Opera News*, accessed October 9, 2012, [http://www.operanews.com/Opera\\_News\\_Magazine/2011/4/News/Zhou\\_Long\\_s\\_Madame\\_White\\_Snake\\_Awarded\\_2011\\_Pulitzer\\_Prize\\_for\\_Music.html](http://www.operanews.com/Opera_News_Magazine/2011/4/News/Zhou_Long_s_Madame_White_Snake_Awarded_2011_Pulitzer_Prize_for_Music.html).

loyal and longing for true love.”<sup>100</sup> Not only does the audience observe her longing for true love here, they observe her extra-sexual state, and her need for sexual fulfillment that she can only achieve by being subservient to a man.

Example 7.4 shows the excerpt from the aria.

Ex. 7.4 *Madame White Snake*, Act One, mm. 50-52.

When she meets the herbalist, Xu Xian, she questions herself “What is this strange passion that overcomes me?” Madame White continues to expose her excitement for love, “I have yearned forever for such unfathomable passion...” She plans to meet her undiscovered love, the herbalist Xu Xian in the rain. She is going to be caught without an umbrella, and he will provide her with one. In this

<sup>100</sup> “Madame White Snake,” accessed September 24, 2012, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_aDR1IUabBA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aDR1IUabBA).

very act of matchmaking, Madame White takes on the persona of an innocent and helpless figure, who needs to be rescued by a man. Zhou uses tempo changes and orchestral colors to portray the raining scene and the inner feelings of the two characters. As Xu Xian starts the conversation with Madame White, the tempo becomes twice as slow as from the rain scene and the orchestra texture changes from percussive to warm and lyrical. In another common trope, her innocence and virginity become an issue of sexual excitement for the man. Xu, as excited as Madame White, says “Conjuring up an image of white beauty lying sinuously in my hands then gliding away in darkness.” Not only is he infatuated with her beauty; her virginal pureness also draws him into this tragedy of lust. In his vocal line, “White” is stressed purposely on a B5 for four beats. This musical setting highlights not only his longing for her innocence, but also the irony of the title characters name and the entirety of her polar extremes. The musical climax of this duet happens when these two vocal lines become unison with and joined by the orchestra in mm. 228. Example 7.5 shows the climax of the duet of Madame White and Xu Xian in Act Two Scene One.

228 **2**  $\text{♩} = 66$  **3**

4 4

Bangi

Fl.

Ob.

B.Cl. 1

B.Cl. 2

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

C.Tpt. 2

B.Tbn.

Timp.

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Hp.

M.W.

Xu

Erhu

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

half re - mem - bered mel - o - dy A wist - ful wish - ful glance

half re - mem - bered mel - o - dy A wist - ful wish - ful glance

228 **2**  $\text{♩} = 66$  **3**

4 4

div. smb. div. div.

Ex. 7.5 *Madame White Snake*, Act Two, Scene One, mm. 228-232.

As the tragedy of their relationship becomes clearer, Madame White realizes her need to love. “...I was born for this...No longer do I crawl the early; I fly...This is my destiny, to love, to be loved, or to die.” The composer combines previous two elements, dreaming vibraphone and repeated fast cursing music when she speaks of believing in that she is transformed to be in love and to love this man. No matter how the love is cursed or forbidden, she is going to pursue it.

Madame White’s goddess persona is also highly sexualized. As shown in other operatic libretti, there is a tendency to align the Asian female with the moon and with goddess powers, making her even more exotic and unimaginably desirable: in mm 59 to mm 61, the strings play a tremolo and the vocal line descends as she is pleading and trembling while saying “I wash the moon with the tears I cry.” Example 7.6 shows the descending vocal line with the string tremolo.

The image displays a musical score for Example 7.6, covering measures 59 to 61. The score is written in 6/8 time with a tempo marking of 10♩ = 132. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The score includes parts for Oboe (Ob.), Vibraphone (Hp.), Mezzo-soprano (M.W.), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.).

The vocal line (M.W.) features a descending melodic line with the lyrics: "I wash the moon with the tears I cry I am a wo-man." The instrumental parts include a tremolo in the strings (Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., Cb.) and a rhythmic pattern in the vibraphone (Hp.).

Ex. 7.6 *Madame White Snake*, Act Two, Scene One, mm. 59-61.

The character also creates a bewitching pot of tea to lure the man of her desire. “Madame White creates her own teas which enchanted the drinker with its secret leaves. Many are lost gazing into its deep, dark color. Swooning as they inhale its steamy ardor?” “But beware the bitter brew beneath the beauty...” murmured by Madame White’s maid. Madame White continues to speak as she prepares for the tea: “My tea is wondrous blend of spring’s first buds of tender green leaves...now boiling brewing for your pleasure.” Here is this character’s supernatural, intoxicating element. This is the most angelic and romantic moment musically that happens in the entire opera. The vocal line is accompanied by harp, clarinet arpeggios chords and the violin. Zhou sets the music to portray Madame White as kind and lovely, even though she has other motives in mind.

Although Madame White and Xu Xian marry to each other, the story ends in tragedy. The gods have a spokesman in the form of an Abbot, Fahai (sung by a bass). The opera ends by sharply contrasting the lyrical music of the woman longing for love with the emerging snake victim. When the Abbot pays a visit to Madame White and discovers her true identity, she tries to convince him that she has changed and she only wants to love Xian; “... you are face to face with the face of love. The miracle you’ve sought for one thousand years...” The Abbot answers, “If your fangs buried deep in his heart, you snake dripping venom and poisoning his will? Your flame red eyes glare at me but wait, do I see a tear?” Madame White continues to say: “Can I destroy you?...Sink my fangs deep in your neck?...rip out your throat and crush your voice...to save nirvana?” This is

the first time that the audience hears Madame White to use demonic words. As she is seen as a snake here, she acts like one. The music in this moment lacks lyricism and romanticism, but contains a great deal of accented speaking in the vocal line. Imitating the hiss of a snake, using an extreme low register for a soprano (G3) and a high-pitched speaking voice facilitate the depiction of these supernatural characteristics. During this confrontation, Madame White changes back and forth from demon to human. The music also changes drastically from quickly patterned speech like rhythms to lyrical melodic writing. This is especially prevalent when Madame White expresses she longs to have more time and question whether this is what it means to be mortal. Musically, Zhou combines the previously used vibraphone and the music of the angelic tea making moment effect to portray her helplessness. Madame White believes that Xu Xian is the reason for her transformation. After the Abbot Fahai reveals to Xu Xian his wife's true identity, Xu Xian demands to hear the truth from his wife. Madame White cannot reveal her true nature, but answers: "I was born to be with you..." Xu Xian believes that her mysterious monthly outings are really plans for a secretive affair with her "phantom lover." He suspects that the child who Madame White carries is her secret lover's child. Madame White chooses to try to live in the illusion as a human and hope that no one will ever find out the truth.

In the second scene of Act Four, Madame White begins with a lullaby to her unborn son. As she questions her true nature, she answers: "...my true self standing here...head bowed...hands open...eyes wet...heart broken waiting for you..." As a demon, she might be cold and heartless, but as a human figure, she is

vulnerable and hopeless. In this scene when she speaks of love, luxurious string writing accompanies the vocal line, especially when the moment she tells Xu Xian: "...Look, I catch each tear in your cup..." Without her husband's trust, she knows that death is the only choice she has now. The only thing that is left is "the memory of blue ice in the galaxy. It cuts my throat and sends me into spasms of ecstasy." Again, there is a link between death at the cutting of the throat and sex, with the spasms of ecstasy.

Without Xu Xian's trust, the love story ends disastrously in an epic god-like battle between the Abbot and Madame White. Thousands of people die because of their battle, and Madame White is suddenly transformed back into a snake. Madame White speaks in her raging voices "I am a raging storm. My foes wish they were never born, as their loved ones from their arms are torn. Like my lover who's now gone." At the same time, Madame White sinks to the ground. The composer sets this scene with an orchestral tutti to create the sound of chaos during the flood. Madame White hisses "Aiii Yeee..." as a snake, and screams out of wrath before descend into the ground. The dichotomy of personality between human female and snake cannot triumph and she dies. Example 7.7 shows the hiss of Madame White.



Ex. 7.7 *Madame White Snake*, Epilogue, mm. 31-38.

Madame White is a character that shows much strength, "If forbearance was the virtue of submissive womanhood, Madame White, being no common

woman, would show an independence of will that would endear her to the feminist.”<sup>101</sup> Yet, she is also exhibits moments of delicacy, sexuality and longing. These moments are especially dominant when she attempts to seduce a husband. It would seem that the Asian male, both composer and operatic character, find the same qualities attractive in an Asian female as Puccini and Pinkerton.

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<sup>101</sup> Lai, “From Folklore to Literate Theater,” 53.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION

Over the last one hundred and twenty five years of operatic history, the Asian female character has been an allure for composers, librettists and audiences. Gilbert and Sullivan are able to satire the Orientalist fashion of the time before conventional operatic composers had even attempted to create an Asian “Other.” Mascagni then uses the locale to place the childlike innocence of Iris, and Puccini creates one of the most iconic of operatic characters with Cio-cio-san. Finally, he provides a great contrast between two different extremes in his opera *Turandot*. Not only is the innocent, loyal Liù presented, she stands in stark contrast to the monstrous *Turandot*. John Adams brings theatrical life to an actual Asian female with *Madam Mao*, highlighting her public display of aggression, and her private display of tenderness. Finally Zhou Long provides operatic treatment of an ancient Chinese tale, creating a god-like character who chooses to take the form of an Asian woman. The inclusion of the latter two characters demonstrates a union of the extremes found earlier in the century. Although the Asian female still has attributes found in previous works, her representation becomes much less stereotypical. Understandably, there are works that contain Asian female characters outside of the spectrum of this survey, notably in Sidney Jones’s operetta, *The Geisha*, in Bright Sheng’s opera, *Madame Mao*, and in Tan Dun’s operas *The First Emperor* and *Tea: A Mirror of the Soul*. The works chosen were based on their enduring popularity and stylistic differences. They also fulfill the goal of highlighting various observers when creating “otherness” in the

characters. Though the majority of the creators are white males, the two contemporary works include female librettists, and finally an Asian male composer.

One can only speculate as to why the evolution of these characters has taken place. Perhaps the inclusion of the previously excluded groups, woman and Asian men, into the creative dialogue has influenced the discourse concerning the portrayal of the Asian females. Japan's participation in World War Two and China's turbulent revolutionary history in the middle of the twentieth century brought a new consciousness to the world concerning the people of Asia. Orientalism is now a word that is linked with a previous time period, and the ignorance the West had concerning Asian culture is no longer possible. The modern world suddenly becomes globally aware, and the effect of "otherness" and the "exotic" is now limited. Asian culture no longer has the same sense of mystery and exoticism to a contemporary audience. In a recent Japanese production of *Madama Butterfly*, the director aimed to make the situation as realistic as possible. The goal was to make every character as "realistic both in their costume and in their acting, so that the exotic flavor of the original is almost entirely eliminated."<sup>102</sup> The exoticism of these pieces is only achieved through a sense of disbelief.

This shift in global awareness has changed not only how the audience perceives these characters, it also has influenced who is actually portraying these characters. Asian operatic roles that had previously been portrayed by Western

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<sup>102</sup> Yoshihara, "The Flight of the Japanese Butterfly," 995.

operatic divas are now being played by Asian females in opera houses worldwide. Audiences are expecting a more authentic approach, even in works that were born in turn of the century Orientalism; even *Madam Mao* was premiered by a Western operatic singer Trudy Ellen Craney in 1987. This trend is shifting as more Asian singers entered the operatic world after China began its open door policy in 1978. The visual element of opera also has risen in importance. No longer is the sound of Cio-cio-san's voice, and an operatic design suggesting locale enough to convince an audience that they are observing Japan. The female singer should be Asian herself. This trend only highlights how Asia has lost its "otherness" and "exotic" flavor now that the world is working on such a globally aware level.

Finally, although it may seem that the stereotypes created belay a false sense of male ownership over the Asian female, it may in fact be just the opposite. Though in the case of Cio-cio-san, Iris, and Liù, their appearance, appeal and innocence leads to their eventual tragedies, the composers make them the focal point in these works. As Susan McClary stated in the introduction, these composers have given a voice to the previously unheard Asian female. While it is a voice shrouded in stereotypes of the West, nevertheless that does not discount the fact that these characters have made the Asian female visible, and memorable to the West. John Adams and Zhou Long continue this tradition in their works, bringing representations of an actual person and a cultural legend to the stage. Even characters that represent the harshest extreme, such as the icy and monstrous personalities that are presented in characters like Turandot, Katisha, Madame Mao, and Madame White are imbued with a sense of lyricism. Turandot's cold

demeanor is, after all, only a result of her ancestor's loss of innocence and abuse. She undergoes the greatest change among these characters. And in creating a capacity for change among these stereotypes, the composers have added a sense of realism to these exotic "Others." An audience no longer observes these figures as something distant from themselves; the characters change and grow. By giving an operatic voice to the Asian female, composers and librettists have actually participated in the discourse in creating the persona of an Asian female. With time, their works have inspired the very "otherness" that made these characters so appealing to become obsolete and in doing so created some of opera's most interesting characters.

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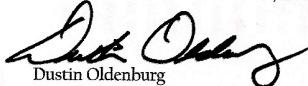
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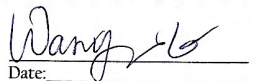
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