



心中戲園 藝術聲音 學天風華南通五種



Mai-liao Gongle Opera
Troupe (麥寮拱樂社歌
劇團)

Producer: Chen Cheng-
san (陳澄三)

Director: He Jiming (何基
明)

Cast:

Xue Pinggui – Liu
Meiying (劉梅英)

Wang Baochuan –
Wu Biyu (吳碧玉)

Rediscovery: Miaoli,
2013

Restoration:
Tainan National
University of the Arts
Multi-Media Center
(TNNUA)

1955
Black and White
94 minutes
English Subtitles.



Xue Pinggui and Wang Baochuan

薛平貴與王寶釧

Synopsis

Set in the Tang dynasty, the story follows Xue Pinggui, a destitute but dignified young man living on the margins of Chang'an. By chance, he encounters Baochuan, the youngest daughter of the Prime Minister Wang Yun. Defying her father's insistence on status and wealth, Baochuan chooses Xue as her husband. The couple sticks together through thick and thin, but court politics intervene. Manipulated by hostile forces, Xue is reassigned to the distant frontier as a soldier. The couple part reluctantly. Baochuan, unwavering in her loyalty, sends him off with blessings, hoping for his triumph in battle and eventual return.

Commentary

Xue Pinggui and Wang Baochuan was the megahit film that launched the *taiyupian* (Taiwanese-language film) craze in 1956. But it was long thought to be lost. Of the approximately 1,200 Taiwanese-language films produced between the 1950s and 1970s, only around 200 are known to survive. For decades, this scarcity meant that scholars relied heavily on textual records and fragmentary evidence. The re-emergence of *Xue Pinggui and Wang Baochuan* transforms this situation. Its recovery not only fills a crucial gap in Taiwan's film history but also invites a broader rethinking of cinema as a site where memory, language, and cultural identity intersect.

At the level of form, the film captures a transitional moment in Taiwanese cinema. Deeply rooted in operatic conventions, it retains theatrical staging, stylised performance, and episodic storytelling. But it also experiments with cinematic techniques such as framing, editing, and location shooting. This hybridity is central to its historical significance: rather than representing a fully developed film language, it documents a process of

adaptation, as filmmakers translated familiar theatrical traditions into a new visual medium.

The film's narrative also reflects the social imagination of 1950s Taiwan. The story of Xue Pinggui—a poor but resilient man who rises through perseverance—and Wang Baochuan—a woman who defies paternal authority to choose her own partner—resonated strongly in a period marked by social transformation, political tension, and shifting class structures. As a popular cultural form, the film articulates aspirations for mobility, dignity, and emotional autonomy, embedding these themes within a familiar operatic framework.

Produced by Chen Cheng-san and directed by He Jiming, *Xue Pinggui and Wang Baochuan* was performed by the Mai-liao Gongle Opera Troupe and released in 1955 to become a breakthrough in Taiwan's emerging commercial cinema culture. The film features leading performers from the troupe, with the central roles of Xue Pinggui and Wang Baochuan drawn from the well-known operatic repertoire. As an adaptation of a popular historical-romantic tale, it exemplifies the close relationship between early Taiwanese cinema and traditional performance forms, particularly *gezaixi* (Taiwanese opera).

However, perhaps the most striking dimension of the rediscovered materials is dubbing in the language of the Hakka ethnic minority rather than Taiwanese/*taiyu*. This version, featuring Sixian-accented Hakka dialogue and incorporating Hakka musical elements such as mountain songs and *bayin* (meaning 'eight notes') traditions, challenges the assumption that Taiwanese-language cinema was confined to *taiyu*-speaking audiences. Instead, it reveals a more fluid and interconnected media ecology, in which films circulated across linguistic communities through dubbing and adaptation.

The Hakka version underscores the porous boundaries between cultural traditions in mid-twentieth-century Taiwan. Rather than belonging to a single linguistic or ethnic group, *Xue Pinggui and Wang Baochuan* emerges as a product of overlapping cultural practices. The interplay between *taiyu* and Hakka elements—both in language and in musical form—suggests a shared performative vocabulary that complicates rigid distinctions between communities. In this context, dubbing is not merely a technical process but a form of cultural transformation, reshaping the film's sonic texture and expanding its audience.

Restoration by the Graduate Institute of Documentary & Film Archiving at Tainan National University of the Arts (TNNUA) has involved both physical repair and digital restoration with the aim of preserving historical integrity while making films accessible to contemporary audiences. Ultimately, the rediscovery of *Xue Pinggui and Wang Baochuan* reveals early Taiwanese cinema as a dynamic field shaped by the interaction of performance traditions, linguistic diversity, and social change. It challenges us to rethink film history not as a linear progression, but as a complex process of negotiation, adaptation, and rediscovery.