

Madama Butterfly/Madamu Batafurai

Puccini's famous but controversial *Madama Butterfly* reflects a practice of "temporary marriage" between Western men and Japanese women in nineteenth-century treaty ports. Groos's book identifies the plot's origin in an eyewitness account and traces its transmission via John Luther Long's short story and David Belasco's play. Archival sources, many unpublished, reveal how Puccini and his librettists imbued the opera with differing constructions of the action and its heroine. Groos's analysis suggests how they constructed a "contemporary" music-drama with multiple possibilities for interpreting the misalliance between a callous American naval officer and an impoverished fifteen-year-old geisha, providing a more complex understanding of the heroine's presumed "marriage." As an orientaling tragedy with a racially inflected representation of Cio-Cio-san, the opera became a lightning rod for identity politics in Japan, while also stimulating decolonizing transpositions into indigenous theatre traditions such as Bunraku puppet theater and Takarazuka musicals.

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Madama Butterfly/Madamu Batafurai

Transpositions of a “Japanese Tragedy”

ARTHUR GROOS

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In memoriam
Robert J. Smith
Kazu Smith
Kyoko Selden

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Preface

This book began several decades ago as a sequel to the Cambridge Opera Handbook on Puccini's *La bohème*.¹ Two developments changed and expanded its focus. The first involved a series of encounters with a then largely untapped body of primary sources, beginning with the old Ricordi Archive in via degli Omenoni, Milan – Giulio Ricordi's business correspondence, unpublished libretto drafts, and letters to Ricordi from Puccini, Luigi Illica, and Giuseppe Giacosa. Those materials were augmented by Illica's papers at the Biblioteca Passerini-Landi in Piacenza, and later by the Giacosa family archive in Colletterto Giacosa, as well as holdings at the Accademia Filarmonica in Bologna. A few years later I edited a book of sources for *Madama Butterfly* and a conference volume for the opera's centennial, then joined the editorial team for the Edizione nazionale of Puccini's letters. It became clear well before then that there was simply too much material for an opera handbook, and too much of it was unfamiliar or unknown.

The second development, reflected in the Introduction and chapters devoted to the opera's reception in Japan, is more difficult to explain because the underlying motivation is personal as well as academic. I became fascinated with Japan during a brief visit in high school sponsored by the US Navy, but my father (who had fought in the Pacific in World War II) refused to support studying Japanese in college. My interest, though, never abated. Over a sushi lunch one day, Japanese anthropologist Robert J. Smith said, "You might be interested in this," as he handed me a faded mimeographed bibliography. It had an entry for a little-known eyewitness reminiscence by missionary Jennie Long Correll

¹ Portions of both the Introduction and Chapter 1 (Long's Story and His Sister's Reminiscence) are a revised version of "Madame Butterfly: The Story," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3, no. 2 (1991): 125–58; Chapter 3 is a revised and expanded version of "Madama Butterfly between East and West," *Giacomo Puccini and His World*, ed. Arman Schwartz and Emanuele Senici (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 49–84; Chapters 5 and 6 contain revised and expanded sections of "Return of the Native: Japan in *Madama Butterfly/Madama Butterfly* in Japan." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1, no. 2 (1989): 167–94, and a section on "The Takarazuka Concise Madame Butterfly (*Shukusatsu Chōchōsan*)" from the *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 27 (2015).

recounting the “little sensation” in Nagasaki portrayed in her brother’s “Madame Butterfly.” Her granddaughter, Natalie Correll McIntosh, soon provided access to family diaries and personalia, while reference librarian Carolyn Spicer gleefully helped search US Navy records for historical evidence. Colleagues in Japanese studies subsequently expanded the research possibilities by providing documents for the Japanese reception of Puccini’s opera and its transpositions into indigenous theater traditions – another treasure trove of materials begging for attention. Both sets of documents were fundamental in the genesis of this book.

The result is a hybrid of cultural history and musicology rather than an opera handbook. Some changes in focus over the years will be noticeable in a small archaeology of methodological shifts, but the argument as a whole is predicated on their interplay. An early concern of my involvement in musicology was dissatisfaction with approaches to late nineteenth-century music dramas that often seemed to consider music as an autonomous entity, ignoring its setting of a particular text in a particular language on the assumption that such texts were “negligible.”² A subsequent impulse arose from a New Historicist conviction that operas – to flourish in this increasingly presentist era – also need to be understood in their larger context – through their sources, connections to memoirs, eyewitness accounts, travelogues, fictionalizations, and their ensuing reception in recrossings of national borders, languages, and genres.

It also became increasingly clear that *Madama Butterfly* (1904) occupies a singular position among the most frequently performed operas as being explicitly situated in its “current era”³ – the period straddling the colonial and postcolonial worlds. An Orientalizing opera about sexual exploitation in Japanese treaty-port culture, it was conceived and completed just after the dissolution of those treaty ports (1899), by which time Japan had already become a major military-industrial power – a development often ignored in the West. In a revealing coincidence, the premiere of *Madama Butterfly* in February 1904 at La Scala took place only a few days after Japan shocked the world with its initial victory in the Russo-Japanese war. While the disconnect between Orientalized and modern perceptions of the country lingered in the West, the opera’s reception in a westernized Japan inevitably became a stimulus for attempts to correct or reimagine the opera’s “exotic” or insulting misrepresentation of its culture and people.

² See Arthur Groos and Roger Parker, eds., *Reading Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 1–11.

³ Explicitly designated as “EPOCA PRESENTE” below the *dramatis personae*.

The challenge thus posed by the opera can be epitomized by the title page of the initial libretto and vocal score:

Madama Butterfly
 (da John L. Long e David Belasco)
 TRAGEDIA GIAPPONESE
 di
L. Illica e G. Giacosa
 MUSICA DI
 GIACOMO PUCCINI

This seems to present a straightforward genealogy, proceeding from two American literary sources to a coauthored Italian libretto and its ensuing musical setting by the composer. In addition, however, there is also a curious phrase identifying *Madama Butterfly* as a “Japanese tragedy.” To be sure, Puccini’s operas usually have a subtitle indicating the genre and the number of acts or scenes: *Edgar: dramma lirico in tre atti*; *Manon Lescaut: dramma lirico in quattro atti*; *La bohème (Scene de la Vie de Bohème di Henri Murger): 4 quadri*; *Tosca: melodramma in tre atti*; *La fanciulla del West: opera in tre atti*; *Turandot: dramma lirico in tre atti e cinque quadri*. The subtitle of *Madama Butterfly*, however, is unique: it specifies no class of *dramma*, and mentions no acts or scenes. What, then, is this “tragedia giapponese”?

The evidence points in several possible directions. A puzzling one is presented by the Italian translation of Belasco’s play made for Puccini and his librettists. The original typescript in the Ricordi archives translates the title simply as “*Madama Butterfly*,” while a typeset revision presents a bilingual hybrid of the play’s title and the opera’s subtitle: “*Madame Butterfly: una tragedia giapponese*.”⁴ The inclusion of blocking directions suggests it may have been prepared for performance with the already finished opera’s title in mind. However, if our phrase is a genre reference, the most widely known form of “Japanese tragedy” in Europe at the *fin-de-siècle* would have been Kabuki, owing to extensive tours by a troupe featuring Sada Yacco that Puccini saw perform in Milan in 1902.⁵ This is quite plausible, as the discussion in Chapter 2 suggests. More intriguingly, the title page of the first German version of the opera (1907) disambiguates it as “*Tragödie einer Japanerin*” (tragedy of a Japanese woman),⁶ placing a contemporary emphasis – legitimized by the publisher – on the heroine’s

⁴ The texts have not been digitized. The first version was completed in June 1901 (see p. 53).

⁵ See pp. 65–66. ⁶ Schickling, 277 (74.E.7a).

race/ethnicity and gender. What constitutes Illica's, Giacosa's, and Puccini's "Japanese tragedy" will in fact be a recurring question in the following study of the opera, which – with its antecedent texts – shares the era's orientalizing and racist perception of the Japanese as a less civilized culture, susceptible in intercourse with the West to misunderstandings that have potentially tragic as well as comic outcomes.

The following chapters suggest how *Madama Butterfly* and its sources are imbricated in a largely forgotten sexual practice of "temporary marriage" between Western men and Japanese women that began in treaty ports such as Nagasaki soon after the opening of Japan in the 1850s. In a lengthy and contentious genesis, Illica, Giacosa, and Puccini, while reconciling John Luther Long's narrative with David Belasco's dramatization, also imbued the opera with their own constructions of the action and its enigmatic title character. Their joint effort produced a modern music drama with multiple possibilities for interpreting the misalliance between a callous American naval officer and a naïve, fifteen-year-old Japanese geisha. As an orientalizing tragedy with a racially inflected representation of the heroine that is both empathetic and sadistic, *Madama Butterfly* became a lightning rod for issues of sovereignty and identity politics in Japan, generating controversy around productions by foreign and domestic opera companies, while also stimulating decolonizing transpositions into indigenous theater traditions.

The Introduction surveys the historical traces of contractual sexual liaisons between Westerners and Japanese women that emerged in the treaty ports of Japan after 1858, a practice that became known as "monthly," "temporary," or "Japanese" marriage. Contemporary accounts, diaries, and reminiscences suggest that the outlines of such liaisons and even their contractual terminology would eventually underlie Lieutenant Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton's duplicitous relationship with Cio-Cio-san. Although this practice became widely known in the West largely through Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* (1888), its connection to John Luther Long's "Madame Butterfly" and the dramatic adaptation by David Belasco, and by extension to Puccini's opera, is substantially more complicated than generally assumed.

Chapter 1 accordingly begins by contrasting the representation of a "Japanese marriage" in Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* and John Luther Long's "Madame Butterfly." Loti's fictitious autobiography imbeds a whimsical ménage within an evocative and exotic – but pervasively racist – representation of Japan and the Japanese. Long focuses instead on the private tragedy of an American naval officer's capricious

“westernization” of a naïve “temporary wife” and her ensuing cultural alienation. Far from “plagiarizing” Loti’s novel, as reductive generalizations often assert, Long engages in an intertextual critique. Equally important, however, Long’s story is *also* based on a real-life incident in Nagasaki witnessed by his missionary sister, Jennie Long Correll. Largely ignored at the time, reminiscences by her in 1931 make it possible to reconstruct elements of the historical event and even suggest a probable model for the American protagonist.

Chapter 2 traces the convoluted genesis of *Madama Butterfly*, using a variety of sources, many of them unpublished. Illica’s and Giacosa’s construction of the libretto (with input from Puccini and publisher Giulio Ricordi) required reconciling Long’s story and Belasco’s play while also accommodating different approaches to the “Japanese tragedy” in Illica’s anticolonial perspective and Giacosa’s focus on Butterfly’s domestic alienation. Consensus was made even more difficult by Puccini’s decision to eliminate an entire scene/act set at the American consulate. The dialogic libretto that resulted incorporated much contemporary knowledge of Japan, but was also deliberately “orientalized,” to the extent that Puccini’s setting appropriated Japanese popular melodies as well as Chinese songs from a souvenir music box. Genre ambiguity, especially scenes with Butterfly’s relatives that resembled comic opera, and the libretto-driven score’s impression of musical formlessness contributed to the opera’s catastrophic premiere at La Scala on February 17, 1904, and it arguably remains open-ended even after a successful revision for Brescia a few months later and the publication of a temporary “standard” score in 1907.

Chapter 3 examines Luigi Illica’s draft libretto and its comic opposition of West and East. The opening scene occidentalizes the hero as Sir Francis Blummy Pinkerton, using details from Pierre Loti’s novel to express his unsympathetic views of Japan and his “marriage” as a joke, while a later scene/act, set at the American consulate, foregrounds the “comedy” of Butterfly’s failed acculturation, climaxing in her disillusioning encounter with Pinkerton’s New American Wife. Orientalizing Cio-Cio-san from a prevalently racist European perspective as naïve and inscrutable, however, also prevented Illica from investing her with the interiority necessary for the emotional high points of a tragic opera. His concluding scenes rely on narrative intermezzi to evoke the heroine’s state of mind, using images from ukiyo-e artist Hokusai to create a bleak ambience for the almost wordless suicide of a culturally alienated subject.

Chapter 4 considers the opera from a postcolonial perspective, including details from scores published before the elimination of “offensive” passages in the more reductive 1907 version commonly used today. It emphasizes the close relationship between the libretto and its musical setting, pursuing the implications of its “Japanese tragedy,” in which Pinkerton’s deceitful temporary “marriage” leaves the fifteen-year-old Cio-Cio-san trapped between her Japanese ethnicity and her desired identity as Mrs. Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton. The implicit West-East hierarchy at the beginning of act 1, with the hero’s plans for his “pseudo-wedding” dictating the action, followed by the heroine’s entrance and exchanges that ground her in a Japanese milieu, culminates in an extended seduction/love duet fraught with cultural difference. Act 2 foregrounds a dialogic construction of Cio-Cio-san’s dilemma that is both sadistic and empathetic. While Illica followed Long and Belasco in endowing her with infantilizing preconceptions of Japanese identity, Giacosa added the agency of a geisha and the interiority characteristic of an operatic heroine. As a result, Puccini’s orientaling “comedy” of Cio-Cio-san’s failed acculturation as “Madama B. F. Pinkerton” coexists with the intense emotion of arias performing her delusion and subsequent disillusion, which is complicated by the unusual presence of a mixed-race child as the focus of her suicide.

Chapter 5 surveys the initial decades of *Madama Butterfly*’s reception in Japan. Because the opera represented a Japan that had been subjected to unequal and humiliating colonizing treaties, identity politics soon motivated de-orientalizing productions that changed or deleted passages considered comically inaccurate or insulting, often reimagining the heroine as an exemplar of pure-hearted Japanese womanhood. The discussion concentrates on three landmark productions. (1) The first partial staging at Tokyo’s Imperial Theatre in 1914, featuring soprano Takaori Sumiko and her conductor husband Shūichi, who created a scandal with an encore medley that included a celebration of striptease dances in treaty-port tea houses. (2) A spectacular example of director’s theater in 1930 by composer Yamada Kōsaku and translator Horiuchi Keizō. The score and libretto were drastically altered by having European principals sing in English and the Japanese in Japanese, changing Puccini’s borrowings from Japanese music, and deleting the entire wedding scene as well as other offensive passages, thus suppressing the opera’s location in late nineteenth-century treaty-port culture. (3) A 1936 production of the opera by Miura Tamaki, the most famous Japanese soprano of the period, celebrating her return to Japan from a career abroad with her purported

2001st and 2002nd performances in the title role. It legitimized the heroine's marriage by adding a Shinto priest and emphasizing the tragedy of her maternal sacrifice.

Chapter 6 is devoted to three transpositions of *Madama Butterfly* into Japanese theater genres: a Takarazuka *Condensed Madama Butterfly* (1931), which updates the opera's bicultural tragedy in the increasingly xenophobic atmosphere of Shōwa cultural politics; a Bunraku puppet play recuperating the heroine in the tradition of a Japanese lovers' tragedy (1956); and a haunting Takarazuka *Three Generation Cho-Cho-san* (1953), tracing the fates of Butterfly's son (and US Naval Officer) Joey and his beloved Kiyō across three generations of Japanese-American history to their eventual happy reunion in post-A-bomb Nagasaki.

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Note on the Text

The score of *Madama Butterfly* will generally be cited according to the most commonly used edition, *Madama Butterfly: tragedia giapponese* (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1907), except in instances where it alters or deletes important passages in earlier versions. References will be to act, rehearsal number, and measure: for example, I/2 m.3 = act 1, performance number 2, measure 3.

The libretto will be quoted according to my synoptic edition in *Fonti* (see the Abbreviations section), 195–294. Bracketing symbols in quotations refer to the following stages of the text:

// not set to music in the 1904 piano-vocal score (La Scala)

≤ ≥ deleted in the 1904 Nuova edizione (Brescia)

< > addition or replacement in the 1904 Nuova edizione

{ } deletion/addition after the 1904 Nuova edizione

For personal names the discussion follows Japanese usage (family name + given name) for writers in Japanese and historical Japanese figures, westernized usage for authors writing in European languages or persons of Japanese origin living in the West.

Abbreviations

Belasco	David Belasco, <i>Six Plays. Madame Butterfly, Du Barry, The Darling of the Gods, Adrea, The Girl of the Golden West, The Return of Peter Grimm</i> (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1928)
Budden	Julian Budden, <i>Puccini: His Life and Works</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)
CL/CLET	Giulio Ricordi's business correspondence (<i>copialettere</i>), Archivio Storico Ricordi, Milan, was organized annually beginning in July, usually with two volumes per month. References without cited material are identified as CL, with date, volume, and page number; those with citations also include the current Ricordi digital identification (CLET).
Ep 1	<i>Giacomo Puccini: Epistolario</i> , 1 (1877–1896), ed. Gabriella Biagi Ravenni and Dieter Schickling (Florence: Olschki, 2015)
Ep 2	<i>Giacomo Puccini: Epistolario</i> , 2 (1897–1901), ed. Gabriella Biagi Ravenni and Dieter Schickling (Florence: Olschki, 2018)
Ep 3	<i>Giacomo Puccini: Epistolario</i> , 3 (1902–1904), ed. Francesco Cesari and Matteo Giuggioli, forthcoming 2022
E	unpublished Puccini letters in the <i>Epistolario</i> database
Fonti	<i>Madama Butterfly: Fonti e documenti della genesi</i> , ed. Arthur Groos et al. (Lucca: Centro studi Giacomo Puccini and Maria Pacini Fazzi, 2005)
Gara	Eugenio Gara, ed., <i>Carteggi pucciniani</i> (Milan: Ricordi, 1958)
Girardi	Michele Girardi, <i>Puccini: His International Art</i> , trans. Laura Basini (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
Illica	“Luigi Illica’s Libretto for <i>Madama Butterfly</i> ,” ed. Arthur Groos, <i>Studi pucciniani</i> 2 (2000): 91–204
LLET	Unpublished letters in the Archivio Storico Ricordi, Milan

- Long John Luther Long, *Madame Butterfly, Purple Eyes, A Gentleman of Japan and a Lady, Kito, Glory* (New York: Century, 1903)
- Orientalismo* *Madama Butterfly: l'orientalismo di fine secolo, l'approccio pucciniano, la ricezione*, ed. Arthur Groos and Virgilio Bernardoni (Florence: Olschki, 2008)
- Schickling Dieter Schickling, *Giacomo Puccini: Catalogue of the Works* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2003)