

= Xin Fengxia =

Xin Fengxia (Chinese : 邢凤霞 ; Wade ? Giles : Hsin Feng @-@ hsia ; 1927 ? 12 April 1998) was a Chinese pingju opera performer , known as the " Queen of Pingju " . She was also a film actress , writer , and painter . She starred in the highly popular films Liu Qiao 'er (1956) and Flowers as Matchmakers (1964) , both adapted from her operas .

Xin was married to Wu Zuguang , a prominent playwright and an outspoken critic of government policies . When Wu was denounced as a " rightist " in Mao Zedong 's Anti @-@ Rightist Movement , Xin refused to divorce him and was herself denounced as a result . She was later severely persecuted during the Cultural Revolution , becoming disabled after a beating and was later paralyzed due to a stroke . No longer able to perform , she dedicated the remainder of her life to teaching , writing , and painting . She studied painting with her godfather Qi Baishi , a master of Chinese painting , and studied writing with her husband . She published a two @-@ million @-@ word memoir , which has been translated into English and Urdu .

Xin Fengxia pioneered her own style of pingju , now called the " Xin " (which also means " new ") style . It has become one of the most important styles of the opera . In 2014 , the China Pingju Institute created the new pingju opera Xin Fengxia to commemorate her life .

= = Early life and career = =

Xin Fengxia was born in Suzhou , Jiangsu , China . When she was a toddler she was sold by human smugglers to Tianjin in northern China , and was given the name Yang Shumin (???) . She was trained as an opera performer from a young age . At that time , the theatrical world in China was controlled by gangsters . Actors , even renowned performers , had little personal freedom . She originally trained for Peking opera under her " older sister " Yang Jinxiang , but later changed to pingju . She toured extensively , and by the 1940s , her fame had rivalled well known female stars such as Liu Cuixia , Bai Yushuang , and Fu Ronghua .

After the establishment of the People 's Republic of China in 1949 , Xin moved to Beijing . Her first performance , in the modern pingju Little Erhei 's Marriage , was well liked and attracted the attention of the original novelist Zhao Shuli and the well known writer Lao She . Her next performance , in Liu Qiao 'er , was even more successful , making her a household name in China . In the opera Flowers as Matchmakers (Hua Wei Mei) , she transformed the traditional melancholy tunes of pingju into joyous ones , and enriched the pingju repertoire by creating many new melodies . It is now considered a classic of the Xin style pingju . Liu Qiao 'er was made into a film in 1956 , which was followed by Flowers as Matchmakers in 1964 . Both starred Xin and were extremely popular . Premier Zhou Enlai and his wife Deng Yingchao were both her fans . Zhou once said : " I can live without tea for three days , but not without watching Xin Fengxia . "

= = Marriage and persecution = =

In 1951 , Lao She introduced Xin Fengxia to the famous playwright Wu Zuguang . Like many intellectuals at the time , Wu held high hopes for the new People 's Republic and returned to China from British Hong Kong . Xin , who had acted in one of Wu 's plays , admired his talent . They married that year , despite the fact that they were from differing socioeconomic backgrounds ; she had no formal education and was nearly illiterate , while he was from a prominent family of scholars . Wu helped her to study reading , writing , and calligraphy . She also studied painting with Qi Baishi , one of the most celebrated masters of Chinese painting , who took her as his goddaughter .

Wu Zuguang , an outspoken critic of government cultural policies , was denounced in 1957 as a " rightist " in Mao Zedong 's Anti @-@ Rightist Movement , and was sent to the Great Northern Wilderness in Heilongjiang to be " reformed through labour . " Xin was pressured to divorce her husband , but refused . Citing a legendary love story from one of her operas , she said " Wang Baochuan waited 18 years for Xue Pinggui , and I will wait 28 years for Wu Zuguang . " As a result , she was herself labeled a rightist and went through struggle sessions .

Wu returned to Beijing after three years of hard labour , but six years later , China fell into the even greater turmoil of the Cultural Revolution , which began in 1966 . Xin Fengxia and Wu Zuguang were both denounced at the beginning of the period . She was severely beaten by a junior actor of the China Pingju Institute ; her left knee was broken and she never fully recovered from the injury . The couple 's friend Lao She drowned himself after being similarly tortured . After her beating Xin served seven years of forced labour . In December 1975 , she became paralyzed after suffering a stroke . Wu took care of her for the rest of her life .

= = Post @-@ Cultural Revolution = =

After the Cultural Revolution , Xin Fengxia was politically rehabilitated in 1979 , but was unable to return to the stage because of her disability . Her performance in Flowers as Matchmakers in 1964 proved to be her last . She devoted her energy to writing , painting , and training the younger generation of pingju performers . In 1997 , she published her two @-@ million @-@ word memoir , which has been translated into English and Urdu . Ye Shengtao , the renowned writer and publisher , greatly encouraged her to write . He composed two poems praising her courage and talent . Her paintings , which were decorated with her husband 's calligraphy , were also popular , and an exhibition of them was held at the China Military Museum in 1994 . She was elected as a member of the Chinese People 's Political Consultative Conference .

In April 1998 , while visiting Changzhou , her husband 's hometown , she suffered a cerebral hemorrhage . She was sent to Changzhou No. 1 People 's Hospital , where she died after a week , on 12 April 1998 .

= = Legacy = =

Xin Fengxia and Wu Zuguang had three children . Their son , Wu Huan , is also a writer , painter , and calligrapher . After the deaths of Xin in 1998 and of Wu Zuguang in 2003 , he organized the exhibition " A Hundred Years of the Wu Family " at the Poly Art Museum in Beijing . It was also shown in France , Hong Kong , and Taiwan .

The " Xin " style of pingju pioneered by Xin Fengxia has become one of the most important styles of the opera . In 2014 , the China Pingju Institute created a new opera entitled Xin Fengxia to commemorate her life , with focuses on her reformation of the opera , and the love story of Xin and Wu . It is written by Huang Weiruo (???) , and directed by Guo Xiaonan (???) .