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PROFESSOR NOVELIZES OPERATIC MASTERPIECE

→ A LaGuardia Community College professor has tried to interest young people in "The Peony Pavilion" by writing the famous 16th century Chinese opera as an English language novel.

Xiaoping Yen, an associate professor of English at the college, said his motivation for writing the novel was to inspire his 15-year-old daughter to learn about the 18-hour, 55-scene opera.

"I tried to novelize it," Yen said, "because we know that young people, both in China and the U.S., are more willing to read a novel of an excellent story than a play or an opera. If you tell people it's an opera, they reject it without knowing that it's a good story. In China, this operatic form is going to die very quickly because the Chinese are more interested in American pop culture."

The opera, an intricate love story and acknowledged masterpiece, was performed over several days on three different occasions this month as a Lincoln Center Festival 99 production at the LaGuardia Theater Concert Hall.

Yen hopes his retelling of the opera as a 240-page novel will one day be reprinted in China.

"My wife and I believe that our children should not forget our cultural heritage," he said. "It's important that we learn Shakespeare and American writers, but it's equally important that we know important cultural writers

and stories from China and other countries as well."

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