

THE COMPLETE DRAMATIC
WORKS OF TANG XIANZU



Wang Rongpei & Zhang Ling

汤显祖戏剧全集

(英文版)

汪榕培 张玲 主编



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Works of Tang Xianzu



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Edited by Wang Rongpei & Zhang Ling

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Foreword

Tang Xianzu (1550–1616), alias Yiren, was a dramatist, poet, essayist and a profound thinker. He lived a legendary life at the end of the Ming Dynasty, styling himself Ruoshi, Hairuo, Qingyuan Taoist and Hermit of the Jade Tea Studio. He was born into an intellectual family in Linchuan (in present-day Fuzhou of Jiangxi Province) on September 24, 1550. At the age of 12, he was a well-known poet; when he was 14, he passed the imperial examination at the county level; when he was 21, he passed the imperial examination at the provincial level, but not until he was 34 did he pass the imperial examination at the national level. He served in Nanjing successively as adviser in the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, as secretary to the Office of Imperial Affairs and as administrative aide in the Sacrifice Bureau of the Ministry of Rites. In 1591, he wrote the famous “Memorial to Impeach the Ministers and Supervisors”, criticizing the court for its misadministration since the ascendance of Emperor Shenzong and impeaching prime ministers Zhang Juzheng and Shen Shixing. As a result, he was demoted to the position of clerk in Xuwen County, Guangdong Province. A Year later, he was transferred to be the magistrate of Suichang County, Zhejiang Province, where he took some enlightened measures for social development. After five years in office, he returned to his hometown, giving up all ideas of an official career and devoting himself to writing. On July 29, 1616, he died in the Jade Tea Studio in Linchuan.

Tang Xianzu has left behind more than 2,000 poems, essays and rhymed essays, besides his chief achievement, dramatic works. His masterpieces *The Peony Pavilion* (also entitled *The Return of the Soul*), *The Handan Dream*, *The Nanke Dream* and *The Purple Hairpins* are known as the “Four Dreams of Linchuan” or the “Four Dreams of the Jade Tea Studio”. His plays, including the “Four Dreams” and *The Purple Flute*, have passed down through numerous printings in the Ming and Qing dynasties, together with his *Leisurely Poems from the Red Spring Studio*, *Collected Poems by Tang Xianzu* and *The Complete Works of the Jade Tea Studio*. In contemporary China, *The Collected Works of Tang Xianzu* edited by Qian Nanyang and Xu Shuofang was published in 1962, and *The Complete Works of Tang Xianzu* annotated by Xu Shuofang was published in 1999.

Although Tang Xianzu was highly esteemed in the literary drama circles, “Tang Xianzu Studies” gradually came into being in the 20th century. The studies on Tang Xianzu, especially on his dramatic works, can be roughly divided into two stages – the first half and the second half of the 20th century. The studies in the first half of the 20th century inherited the tradition of the Ming and Qing dynasties in tracing the origin of the stories, composing the music for them, singing the arias and appreciating the verse, but lacked new ideas and elucidation. The researchers were confined to certain experts in drama and literary circles, including Wang Guowei, Wu Mei, Wang Jilie and Lu Qian in the early period, and Yu Pingbo, Zheng Zhenduo, Zhao Jingshen, Zhang Youlan, Jiang Jiping and Wu Zhonghan in the later period. The studies in the second half of the 20th century, in spite of the interference of vulgar sociology and ultra-left ideology, saw a small high tide around 1957 in commemorating the 340th anniversary of Tang Xianzu’s death. Since the end of the 1970s, Tang Xianzu Studies has developed in depth. In commemorating the 366th anniversary of Tang Xianzu’s death, China’s academic circles held grand ceremonies in his native

town and published a number of theses and other works, thus bringing Tang Xianzu Studies into a new era. The international symposium and the commemorative meeting held respectively in Dalian and Linchuan in 2000, with large numbers of participants and research papers, marked a new height in Tang Xianzu Studies. The conference of the China Association for Tang Xianzu Studies was held in Suichang, Zhejiang Province, for the first time in August 2001, and has been held for several times in the following years, with its *Journal of Tang Xianzu Studies* published biannually since 2004.

To readers outside China, Tang Xianzu's name is inseparable from his magna opus *The Peony Pavilion*, which reached Japan at the beginning of the 17th century. According to *The Catalogue of the Royal Library* in Japan, six copies of *The Peony Pavilion* (Zang Maoxun's adapted version) published in the Ming Dynasty were kept in the the Royal Library as early as 1636. *The Return of the Soul* or *The Peony Pavilion* translated into Japanese by Kishi Shunpulo was published by the Culture and Education Press in 1916. *The Return of the Soul* translated by Miyahara Minpei was published by the Tokyo National Library Publishing Association, and contained in Volume 10 of *Collection of Chinese Works Translated into Japanese* (1920-1924). Yiwashiro Shideo also translated *The Return of the Soul* into Japanese.

The Peony Pavilion also has various full-length and abridged English versions by Harold Acton, Cyril Birch, Zhang Guangqian, Wang Rongpei, Lindy Mark, Ben Wang, Xu Yuanchong and Xu Ming. The numerous translation and performances in the West have brought high acclaim to this play. According to *The Drama 100, A Ranking of the Greatest of All Times* (Daniel S. Burt, Facts on File, Inc. 2007), "In world drama there is no more extensive and beautiful exploration of love than Tang Xianzu's *Mudanting* (*The Peony Pavilion*). In 55 scenes and a performance time of 18 hours, *The Peony Pavilion* merits the designation of epic. Its central character, the young woman Du Liniang, embarks on a journey of discovery to reach her heart's desire, facing down life-and-death obstacles in this world and the next. Along the way an entire culture's values and traditions are displayed. In a western context *The Peony Pavilion* combines elements of Homer's *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Moreover, arguably it is the first great epic with a complex, believable woman protagonist. Despite its vast scope, *The Peony Pavilion* is anchored by a remarkable psychological depth and earthy realism. It turns lyrical, philosophical, satirical, fantastical, and bawdy, interweaving sentiment and humor. *The Peony Pavilion* provides one of the great entry points for an understanding of Chinese culture and Chinese classical dramatic traditions."

Tang Xianzu has been long acclaimed as the Shakespeare in China, but has not reached the Western readers in his entirety. With the approaching of the 400th anniversary of the death of these two great dramatists in 2016, we offer *The Complete Dramatic Works of Tang Xianzu* to commemorate the historic occasion. We are relieved to have completed this endeavor after an effort of nearly two decades, yet we are also nervous for this English edition might has not presented the full grandeur of these plays. We shall be eagerly awaiting the comments from the international reading public.

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紫箫记

The Purple Flute

汪榕培、张玲、顾薇译

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Scene One

Prelude

(Enter the narrator)

NARRATOR (To the tune of *Xiaochongshan*):

When the auspicious sun bestows a new look on the earth,
The young lady invites a man of worth
To take a stroll to enjoy the grass and blooms.
They glow with life when they pick the peaches and plums,
Where the people go happy and gay
And the mansion detains their returning way.
When bright candles illuminate the lady's red dress,
The moon and the flowers do impress
The man at this hour and this place.
Elegantly she would dance with grace
And sweetly she would sing
And play the music of "Warm Spring".

Dear audience, please keep quiet! Now please watch our performers playing *Li Yi's Story of the Purple Jade Flute*, but first of all I'd like to introduce the main plot to you.

(To the tune of *Fenghuangtaishangyichuixiao*)

The gifted scholar Li Yi
And Princess Huo Xiaoyu
Are brought together by a poem.
The story concerns a purple jade flute
That was picked up on the Lantern Festival.
After a successful palace test,
Li serves in the troops, separated with his wife.
When he comes back,
A peace-making marriage with Tubo is arranged,
But successive wars bring him into trouble.
Pretty as a blossom,
Princess Xu from the palace
Is married to Li as a concubine,
Going through thick and thin.
Trapped in the groundless slander,
Princess Huo sells the jade flute.
With the help of his bosom friend,
Li escapes death and becomes a high official at court.
Princess Huo resumes marriage with him
When all the previous suspicions
Are thrown into the wind.



*When Li Yi wins reputation in the court,
Princess Huo picks up a jade flute by chance.
Shang Zipi saves Li out of the siege on the fort;
Princess Xu went to Tubo and returns in advance.*

Scene Two

Friends' Get-Together

(Enter Li Yi)

LI YI (*To the tune of **Zhenzhulian***):

When the Spring God in the east is auspicious at dawn,
I look eastward
To see the sun rising from behind the colorful clouds.
When the sun shines over the capital city,
People watch the weathercock by the Divine Terrace.
The juniors toast to the seniors in the family
To wish them a happy New Year
And a long life.
Paper flowers are cut by the palace maids
To rival with the blue robes and willow trees.
*"To welcome the advent of New Year,
The palace gates are open at twilight.
From the treasure tripod coils the incense smoke,
Spreading its fragrance over the Divine Terrace.
Each family pastes paper-cuts on the windows
While ministers toast to the long life of the emperor.
The court abounds in literary talents,
Who are excellent in drafting documents."*

I am Li Yi from Longxi, styled Junyu. My departed father Li Kui was Prime Minister for the late emperor. My departed mother, surnamed Xin, was entitled Lady Didao. We have marten coats, golden seals, ten carriages with horses, and a thousand imperial decrees. We boast valuable books like the calligrapher Wang Zijing, who held bestowed books of rarity, and paintings from Emperor Taizu of Liang, who collected famous paintings of great value. I have been keen on probing into metaphysics and the theory of being hard and white. My youthful talent shines like the rising sun, and radiates like the precious jade. Like the swords flying to the azure sky, I wish to soar to the dragon's height. I read widely when I was a kid like Huang Xiang from Jiangxia at the age of nine, and showed interest in astronomy like Guan Luo from Qinghe at the age of eight. As I am the youngest of ten brothers, I am also called Shilang, the tenth brother. It is just like what happens in a story,

*“Among Jias’ three brothers in the Han Dynasty,
Weijie is the best;
Among Xun Shu’s eight sons in the Han Dynasty,
Ciming is to not to be equaled.”*

I am as assiduous as Zhu Mu, who studied so hard as to forget to have meals. I am also as profound as Qiao Zhou, who was so lost in reading as to smile to himself. I can write good essays in refined diction, and produce beautiful handwritings in elegant styles and with natural grace. On the spacious ground for ritual ceremonies, among the grass and trees, and in the grand courtyard with mansions, I give vent to my incomparable talent and emotion without restraint. I make two hundred annotations to *The Smaller Prajnaparamita Sutra*, and write a verse-essay entitled “The Famous Capital”, briefly describing eighty scenic spots. I consider Guo Xiang’s commentaries and annotations on “Wandering in Absolute Freedom” by Zhuangzi inferior to Xiang Xiu’s. I am confirmed that He Pingshu’s commentaries and annotations on *Book of Tao and Virtue* by Laozi not equal to Wang Bi’s. When I chant the poem “Requiem” by Qu Yuan, I call to mind the mystical excursions of immortals by Li Bai. I sneer at the celebrities nowadays who attach more importance to daily trifles than to morals and ethics; I despise the Confucian scholars whose intelligence is lower than sunflowers. I grieve over Kuai Tong, whose repeated farsighted advice was rejected by Han Xin; I marvel at Mozi, who resisted nine offensives by Gongshu Ban and had six more tactics in reserve. I am very satisfied with the life in the garden and by the pond without any thought of an official career. However, my friends come to congratulate me while the county magistrates and city governors come to persuade me to assume an official post. Zhao Yi in the Eastern Han Dynasty visited an honest official Yang Zhi in Henan, while Zhang Changzong in the Tang Dynasty was elected as a distinguished scholar in Danyang. I feel myself unworthy of being recommended to be a high official, just like an ordinary branch among the cassia-bark trees in the imperial garden. As I was about to sit for the imperial examination in the palace, it was reported that the Tubos had captured several counties in the Longxi area and was pushing up to the city of Xianyang. The war fire spread to the Ganquan prefecture, and the imperial armies were stationed in Xiliu. So the imperial examination was postponed and everyone escaped for a safe place. The Longxi area falls into Tubo’s hands to become part of their territory. There are but weak willows in Yang Zude’s home while there are but withered pagoda trees in Yin Zhongwen’s yard. The Sanchuan region serves as the fountain to drink horses while the Luhun area is disturbed by wars. The cities and towns there are frequented by the soldiers. No trees are seen beside the wells, but weapons are scattered everywhere. What a pity it is that the prosperous life is ruined! How regrettable it is that the cultural relics and classical works are destroyed! Tears are shed when people look at the ancestral graves and hometowns are forsaken for faraway places. I am detained in the imperial capital from the spring to the autumn, by staying in a hotel with my health damaged. However, it is fortunate that things are turning for the better and spring is at hand. Today is New Year’s Day in the fourteenth year under the Yuanhe Reign, and it happens to be the day of Beginning of Spring. All the court officials and the imperial examination candidates enter



008 the Cloud and Dragon Gate and come to the Taiji Palace for a greeting audience. As people peep at the sun through the morning glow, so the officials have an audience with the emperor on New Year's Day. The carriages and horses jingle with bells while the nine grand golden tripods stand in the courtyard. An audience is given to the ministers in the Yuzhang Palace while variety shows provide entertainment before the Flower and Calyx Building. When the Emperor ascends the throne, showering his grace over all the families and households, the people look up to him and cheer loudly, "Long live the Emperor!" After the audience is over, meals are granted in the Imperial Kitchen. Showered with the emperor's kindness, the ministers get intoxicated, in a harmonious atmosphere and in full vitality. Who would say that the country is in turmoil and upheaval? The music is always echoing in peace and tranquility. There is only one thing I am concerned about. I am nineteen years old but still single and have not carved out an official career by this festival. I am like the pepper flower that is worth lauding but has not yet met Mrs. Liu who wrote "Ode to the Pepper Flower"; I am also like the cypress leaf in the wine cup that is passed in vain but has not reached the seat of Dai Ping who expounded the classics. So I can only sigh deeply at that on New Year's Day. But it is a relief that many people of valor and gifts know about me, and many people of noble birth and superior positions come to visit me. An old friend of mine named Hua Qing, styled Jingding, used to be governor of the Xichuan area and has been promoted to the position of the Grand General. A candidate of the martial arts examinations named Shi Xiong, styled Ziyong, is both intelligent and brave beyond comparison. Shang Zipi, son of the king of Tubo's Yangtong tribe in the Kunlun Mountains, is now studying in the Imperial Academy. The three of them are of different ages but are all valiant men. When we gathered at the palace gate for the New Year celebrations, we made the appointment to meet in my house. I have told my servant Qing'er to prepare the meal and wine, but I wonder whether everything is ready.

(Enter Qing'er)

QING'ER:

*"Before plum flowers bloom to the music,
Orchid fragrance has permeated the wine."*

Master, the cypress-leaf wine and the five-spice vegetable plate are ready.

LI YI:

Wait at the door! Inform me immediately when the three masters arrive!

QING'ER:

Yes, I see.

(Enter Hua Qing, Shi Xiong and Shang Zipi)

HUA QING, SHI XIONG, SHANG ZIPI *(To the tune of Heshengchao):*

The weather grows mild in the capital as seasons change,
With stars and candles illuminating the sky and the earth.
New Year is celebrated outside the Cloud and Dragon Gate;
In pleasant warmth the spring brings.

(Greet and pay respect to each other)

*"On New Year's Day,
Auspice radiates from the sun.*

*All the deities bring us blessings
When spring is welcomed in all places.”*

(Chat)

HUA QING:

Mr. Li, you talented scholars compose poems on the first day of every year. Have you produced a new piece this year?

LI YI:

On my way back from the audience granted by the emperor in the palace, I looked and made several bows in the direction of my hometown to express my homesickness. As soon as I reached home, I have been busy preparing for food and drinks to serve you as my honorable guests and have not got time yet to write a poem.

HUA QING:

We can improvise some quatrains today, but not repeat the former poems on New Year's Day. Let's adopt a new style. The first line should mention our full name, style name or pen name. The next three lines should mention our aspirations in this coming year.

LI YI:

Will you start first, please?

HUA QING (*Chants a poem*):

*“Hua Qing is a remarkable general,
Once feasted at the Terrace of Heavenly Gods.
In the celebration at the Cloud and Dragon Gate,
Auspicious birds encircle the sky.”*

LI YI:

This poem shows the aspiration of the Grand General. The next will be Shi Xiong's turn.

SHI XIONG (*Chants a poem*):

*“I'm Shi Xiong from Huainan,
I'll display my martial arts before the emperor.
I wish that warfare will end this spring,
But my name will be honored in the Qiling Pavilion.”*

LI YI:

Good! This poem displays the aspiration of the Number-One Martial-Arts Candidate. The next will be Shang Zipi's turn.

SHANG ZIPI (*Chants a poem*):

*“I am Shang Zipi from the Kunlun Mountains,
Paying homage to the emperor as the son of the Tubo King.
I make the wish to the Heavenly Queen Mother in the west,
That the western tribes be blessed by spring wind.”*

LI YI:

This poem displays the aspiration of a Tubo prince.

HUA QING, SHI XIONG, SHANG ZIPI:

The next will be Li Yi's turn.

LI YI (*Chants a poem in smiles*):



"I am Li Yi endowed with well-known talent,
With the Heavenly Gate opening for me in spring.
Like the pepper flower in the wine, I'll meet the noble lady today;
Like the cypress leaf in the wine, I'll serve the emperor this year."

HUA QING, SHI XIONG, SHANG ZIPI:

Li's aspiration to be listed at the top in the imperial examinations will surely come true.

(Enter Qing'er holding wine)

QING'ER (Kneels):

Please let me improvise a few lines too on New Year's Day!

HUA QING, SHI XIONG, SHANG ZIPI (Laugh):

Fine! You have also learned to chant poems.

QING'ER:

My master has a large number of precious books, among which many are rare ones. The books are classified into different types. My master can recite from memory what he reads at first sight. And I frequently jot down his comments on what he reads.

HUA QING:

You are really the one who stays near ink and gets stained black. Now you chant a poem!

QING'ER (Chants a poem):

"I am Qing'er, a page boy
Preparing a seasonal dish on New Year's Day.
When I am old and weak,
I'll tell my son to fetch paper for me to write a poem."

HUA QING (Laughs):

Wonderful! Du Fu is my old friend. His poems have been copied by page boys like you so often that you are familiar with them, too.

QING'ER:

I have only copied *Du Fu's Poems with Annotations by Yu Ji* in the Yuan Dynasty.

LI YI:

Stop your nonsense! Serve the wine!

(Makes a toast)

(To the tune of *Yufurong*)

The pepper flowers in the wine usher in the spring

While the cypress leaves in the wine emit fragrance.

I wish that the Floral God would take actions

To hasten the blooming of flowers.

Now that valiant scholars go outing in a group,

Shang Zipi will return home when the weather warms up.

ALL:

The advent of spring

Is marked by the gentle caress of the east wind

And the budding of flowers in the New Year,

With each spring fairer than the last.

HUA QING (*To the previous tune*):

With auspicious clouds in the sky,
The brilliant sun shines over Chang'an.
We celebrate the New Year together
In one toast after another.
Seasons are reckoned according to three calendars
While dishes are loaded with five vegetables.

ALL:

Gently fondling the temples,
The vernal breeze greens the willows
Before it greens the woods
While youngsters drink the Tusu wine to their hearts' content.
(*Enter a messenger from the Imperial Academy*)

MESSENGER (*Reports*):

*"The scenic spots suitable for young people
Take on a new look in the spring season."*

By His Majesty's decree, "All the students of letters and martial arts in the capital city as well as all the sons of ethnic-group kings studying in the Imperial Academy and waiting upon the emperor are to study music in the academy." So Master Shi and Master Shang have to take leave now.

SHI XIONG, SHANG ZIPI (*Take leave*):

Respectable general Hua, please drink a few more cups before you leave.

*"We admire plum flowers in leisure
And appreciate willows together.
We now leave but will come back,
To commit our emotions to the wine cups."
(Exeunt Shi Xiong and Shang Zipi)
(Songs within, accompanied by flutes and drums)
"It is a delight to see spring
Come back at the year's beginning."*

LI YI (*Asks*):

Who is singing outside?

HUA QING:

I suppose that the performers from the palace troupe are returning from the New Year celebrations.

LI YI:

Qing'er, tell the singers outside to come in and propose a toast to General Hua.

(*Enter the chief of the palace troupe*)

CHIEF OF THE PALACE TROUPE (*Kowtows*):

We have heard of Master Li for a long time. We are passing by your house on our way back from the New Year celebrations. Let's present a song for you with all our respect!

(*Sings*)

