

CHINESE CLASSICS

# THE PALACE OF Eternal Youth

Hong Sheng © Retold by Teng Jianmin



CHINA INTERCONTINENT

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Hong Sheng



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# CONTENTS

CHAPTER I .....	5
CHAPTER II .....	11
CHAPTER III .....	15
CHAPTER IV .....	21
CHAPTER V .....	25
CHAPTER VI .....	33
CHAPTER VII .....	37
CHAPTER VIII .....	45
CHAPTER IX .....	51
CHAPTER X .....	57
CHAPTER XI .....	65
CHAPTER XII .....	73
CHAPTER XIII .....	81
CHAPTER XIV .....	87
CHAPTER XV .....	91

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CHAPTER IX .....	51
CHAPTER X .....	57
CHAPTER XI .....	65
CHAPTER XII .....	73
CHAPTER XIII .....	81
CHAPTER XIV .....	87
CHAPTER XV .....	91





# CHAPTER I





The Tang Dynasty ruled China from AD 618 to AD 907. In collusion with her daughter, Princess of Happiness, the Empress Wei poisoned her husband, Li Xian, in 709 and took over the throne, bringing chaos to the court. Despite complaints in and out of the royal court she squandered wantonly by ordering towers and pavilions to be built for her daughter and Buddhist temples and Taoist abbeys for herself. She also indulged her daughter in selling ranks and titles.

The 25 year-old Li Longji, third son of Li Dan, the Lord of the Xiang Prefecture, grew concerned about Empress Wei's wrongdoings and the chaos in the dynasty. Upon hearing that the Empress was planning to murder both his father and aunt, the powerful Princess of Peace, Li Longji made up his mind to act preemptively and stage a coup to overthrow Lady Wei.

Li was advised to tell his father about his decision but he was determined to protect him. "I'm willing to sacrifice my life for this sacred cause. If I succeed my father will take the credit. If I fail, I will fall for my country and my father will not get into any trouble. But if he is informed of my actions he'll be in danger if we fail." Li Longji contemplated the outcomes. "And what if he opposes our plan?"

That same night Li Longji and his followers stormed the court and killed the Empress. They found Princess Happiness gazing intently at her reflection while she painted on her eyebrows and they killed her as well.

Taking the place of Empress Wei, Li Longji's father was crowned as Emperor Rui. He was grateful for his son's heroic deed and decided to make Li Longji heir to the throne instead of his eldest son despite the country's customs.

Three years later Li Longji replaced his father on the throne and was deemed Emperor Ming Huang. As a competent ruler he

selected a number of talented officials for himself, and dedicated himself to helping his country thrive. He promoted the best workers, helped to develop a strong economy and fought for education. Meanwhile, his aunt, Princess of Peace, grew more and more powerful and a year after Li Longji became the Emperor he had her killed to secure his title.

His 28-year reign (AD 713-741) was titled “Kaiyuan” or “The Creation of a New Era.” During this time China became the most powerful nation in the world.

However, as the years progressed Emperor Ming Huang abandoned his political ambitions and began to indulge himself. He grew more and more stubborn and began to remove upright officials from office, among them Prime Minister Zhang Jiuling. The Emperor began to admire men like Li Linfu, a snob who “spoke like honey but hid daggers up his sleeve,” and soon allowed such people to help govern the country. That same year, during his birthday celebration, he became infatuated with the beautiful Yang Yuhuan, a concubine of Li Mao, Lord of the Shou Prefecture.





## CHAPTER II







The daughter of the Secretary for Households in Shuzhong Prefecture, Yang Yuhuan was more than just beautiful. She was gifted in both music and dance, and had a sweet disposition. Though she had been a concubine of Li Mao's since she was 16, she never thought she could catch the eye of the Emperor. But she left Emperor Ming Huang speechless. He could not take his eyes off her. He had to find out who she was.

He ordered one of his trusted henchmen, a eunuch named Gao Lishi, to announce that Yang Yuhuan had been decreed a nun in the Taizhen Palace. One year later, Ming Huang made her the highest imperial concubine. He then ordered her to bathe in the Huaqing Pool, and sent two maids, Yongxin and Niannu, to wait on her. When she was done bathing she put on the beautiful dresses that had been prepared for her and Gao Lishi escorted her to the Palace of Eternal Youth.

The Emperor, sitting in this throne, gazed at her intently as she slowly entered the grand palace hall. She could feel her heart pounding violently in her chest as she blushed deeply.

"Yang Yuhuan presents herself to Your Majesty. Long live my lord." She spoke the words as she knelt down in a courtesy. Once again the Emperor was awed by her beauty and grace. He was at a loss for words.

"I am from a petty family, and am quite plain-looking," Yang Yuhuan continued, still kneeling and too afraid to stand up. "It's a great honor to be chosen as your highest concubine. How can I repay the favor?"

"You are of noble blood, and you are both dazzling and virtuous. I want nothing more than for you to be the highest concubine," replied the Emperor.

Dinner was ordered and before long maids brought out wines and exquisite dishes. Musicians began playing joyful songs