



莎士比亞與湯顯祖年
Year of William Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu



展覽【湯顯祖與臨川四夢】Exhibition: Tang Xianzu and The Four Dreams at Linchuan

湯顯祖與臨川四夢

湯顯祖（一五〇一—一六一六年），字義仍，號海若，自署清遠道人，江西撫州臨川人，世稱臨川先生。湯氏生於明世宗嘉靖二十九年，卒於明神宗萬曆四十四年，一生經歷了嘉靖、隆慶、萬曆三個時代。湯氏為唐代殷文圭之後，因避宋太祖之先人諱改殷姓為湯。

湯氏出生書香門第，祖父湯懋昭好老莊之道，父親湯尚賢為學識淵博的儒者。湯顯祖天資聰穎，五歲能屬對聯句，自幼涉獵諸史百家群書，廿一歲時鄉試第八名中舉。廿六歲刊印第一部詩集《紅泉逸草》，翌年刊印詩集《雍藻》（今佚），廿八歲與友人謝九紫、吳拾芝、曾粵祥作第一部傳奇《紫簫記》，未完稿，現存二十四齣。因湯氏剛正不阿，不肯接受當朝首輔張居正拉攏，致使多次春試不第，至三十四歲才以三甲第二百一十一名中進士，曾先後任南京太常寺博士、詹事府主簿和禮部祠祭司主事等。三十八歲改寫《紫簫記》為

《紫釵記》。因其敢言直諫的性格，以致多年仕途不順，至四十九歲毅然辭官。棄官返鄉後，湯氏歸隱於臨川玉茗堂中，寫成《牡丹亭還魂記》、《南柯記》、《邯鄲記》，六十七歲病歿，葬於臨川城東靈芝山祖墳。

湯氏現存劇作有《紫簫記》、《紫釵記》、《牡丹亭》（又名《還魂記》）、《南柯記》、《邯鄲記》。詩文有《紅泉逸草》、《問棘郵草》、《玉茗堂集》等。

解夢

《臨川四夢》是《紫釵記》、《牡丹亭》、《南柯記》及《邯鄲記》四劇的合稱。四劇皆有夢境，又或四劇本身就是作者畢生心血凝聚成的人生之夢，故有《臨川四夢》之說。湯氏的「四夢」蘊含了深邃的思想內涵，以虛幻的紀夢方式，表達了鮮明的價值取向。

當時明代的社會正值是理學盛行的時代，提倡「存天理，去人欲」，尤其對當時女性的行為諸多掣肘。當時廣大的婦女都要受《女鑒》、《內則》和《女訓》所教化，又樹立貞節牌坊，美其名獎勵貞節，實則為當時一座又一座捆綁女性自由的桎梏。故此，當《紫釵記》、《牡丹亭》一面世，肯定真情的價值、歌頌愛情的追求，便激起了社會千千萬萬的迴響。尤以《牡丹亭》對社會影響最大，打着以情反理、個性解放的旗幟，為當時封建社會牽起一層層漣漪，並奠定了湯顯祖作為中國戲曲大家的地位。

《南柯記》及《邯鄲記》亦是針對明代官場黑暗腐敗的批判之作。兩者都是湯氏棄官回鄉後之作，內容反映明代腐敗的封建官僚主義。作者於兩劇中深刻揭露當時上至君主，下至官僚的社會政治實況，而結局與仙佛的出世思想連結，從中反映出作者對於朝政無可救藥的憤恨和失望。



《紫釵記》溫宇航 飾 李益(左)、邢金沙 飾 霍小玉(右)
The Legend of the Purple Hairpin with Wen Yu Hang as Li Yi (left) and Ying Kam-sha as Huo Xiaoyu (right)



《牡丹亭》黎安 飾 柳夢梅
The Peony Pavilion with Li An as Liu Mengmei



《紫釵記》曾杰 飾 李益(左)、胡嫻 飾 霍小玉(右)
The Legend of the Purple Hairpin with Zeng Jie as Li Yi (left) and Hu Ping as Huo Xiaoyu (right)



《紫釵記》邢金沙 飾 霍小玉(左)、溫宇航 飾 李益(右)
The Legend of the Purple Hairpin with Ying Kam-sha as Huo Xiaoyu (left) and Wen Yu Hang as Li Yi (right)



康樂及文化事務署
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臨川四夢

《紫釵記》

《紫釵記》共兩卷五十二齣，演書生李益與霍小玉悲歡離合事。湯顯祖的第一本創作應是《紫蕭記》，但因政壇是非峰起，《紫蕭記》只寫到第三十四齣就輟筆。後來湯顯祖在南京太常寺博士任時，在《紫蕭記》的基礎上加以刪削潤色，並易名為《紫釵記》，全劇初稿於萬曆十五年（一五八七）寫成。故此，《紫釵記》算是湯顯祖第一本創作完整的傳奇。《紫釵記》主要以唐傳奇蔣防的《霍小玉傳》為藍本，並借鑒了《大宋宣和遺事》中的部分情節而寫成。

《紫釵記》以穠麗見稱，近代戲曲理論家吳梅評「臨川《紫釵》，穠麗已極。」劇中詞藻艷麗、感情色彩濃厚，尤以二十五齣〈折柳陽關〉綺麗至極，如「恨鎖著滿庭花雨，愁籠著蘸水煙蕪。也不管鴛鴦隔南浦，花枝外影踟躕。俺待把釵敲側喚鸚哥語，被疊傭窺素女圖。」作品語言鋪張華麗，故明代祁彪佳於《曲品》中列之為「艷品」。

在《紫釵記題詞》中，湯顯祖讚揚「霍小玉能作有情癡，黃衣客能作無名豪」，歌頌了「真情」和「俠客」思想。在原著《霍小玉傳》中，李益被設置成負心漢，而小玉因愛成恨，發誓死後化為厲鬼報復。

但作者在《紫釵記》中加插

了盧太尉作為奸角，破壞李霍之間的愛情，從而改變了李益負心漢的形象，並將小玉從因愛成恨塑造造成忠貞癡情的形象。而戲曲中亦加強了對黃衫客形象的著墨，並為其行俠仗義的行為作出鋪墊，豐富了整個劇情內容。

劇情

隴西才子李益於元宵夜賞燈，偶遇才貌俱佳的霍王庶女小玉，兩人一見傾心。隨後李益以小玉誤丟的紫玉釵為信物提親，二人喜結良緣。不久李益高中狀元，盧太尉欲強招其為婿，並多番留難李益。盧太尉多次從中作梗，李益先後被派往玉門關外任參軍，後又改任孟門參軍，更在還朝後被盧太尉軟禁於府中。盧太尉假傳小玉已嫁人及李益已贅於盧府之消息，欲使二人夫妻離緣，幸得黃衫客仗義相助，使兩人重逢。於是真相大白，李益與霍小玉和好如初，重諧連理。



《紫釵記》李瓊瑤 飾 鄭六娘
The Legend of the Purple Hairpin with Li Qiongyao as Zheng Lianiang



《紫釵記》湯建華 飾 堂侯妻
The Legend of the Purple Hairpin with Tang Jianhua as the wife of Attending Officer



《紫釵記》毛文霞 飾 韋夏卿
The Legend of the Purple Hairpin with Mao Wensia as Wei Xiaqing



《紫釵記》曾杰 飾 李益(左)、胡婷 飾 霍小玉(右)
The Legend of the Purple Hairpin with Zeng Jie as Li Yi (left) and Hu Ping as Huo Xiaoyu (right)



《紫釵記》溫宇航 飾 李益(左)、邢金沙 飾 霍小玉(右)
The Legend of the Purple Hairpin with Wen Yu Hang as Li Yi (left) and Ying Kam-sha as Huo Xiaoyu (right)



《紫釵記》張世錚 飾 盧太尉
The Legend of the Purple Hairpin with Zhang Shizheng as Grand Commandant Lu

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《牡丹亭》

《牡丹亭》又名《還魂記》，共兩卷五十五齣，完成於萬曆二十六年（一五九八），寫柳夢梅與杜麗娘死生離合的愛情故事。湯顯祖自謂：「一生四夢，得意處惟在《牡丹》。」《牡丹亭》為四夢中最出色的作品，據記載「《牡丹亭》一出，家傳戶誦，幾令《西廂》減價」。

作者在《牡丹亭題詞》中稱該劇以李仲文、馮孝將兒女事作為藍本，

「傳杜太守事者，仿佛晉武都守李仲文、廣州守馮孝將兒女事，予稍為更而演之。」但《牡丹亭》真正的藍本應該是《杜麗娘慕色還魂》話本，劇中有不少情節取自話本《杜麗娘慕色還魂》。《牡丹亭》與話本相比，不僅在情節和描寫上有較大改動，而且在主題和思想上有極大的提昇。

《牡丹亭》並不是單純一部浪漫愛情劇，而是集悲、喜、鬧、趣元素於一身的戲。全劇上半部分以喜襯悲，後半部分則以悲襯喜。杜麗娘身為名門宦族的千金小姐，從小受到嚴格的封建教育規範，僅僅為了爭取愛的權利，便得犧牲生命，這既是個人的悲劇，亦是家庭與社會的悲劇。儘管劇中情節悲涼淒婉，但又穿插了活潑調皮的丫頭春香，與迂腐固執的老學究陳最良，在犯規與學規之間彼此較量，再加插石道姑等人，使整齣劇悲中帶喜、鬧中帶趣。

劇情

南宋時，江西南安太守杜寶有一獨生女，才貌端正，名叫杜麗娘。杜寶邀迂腐老學究陳最良教麗娘《詩經》，豈料麗娘受《詩經·關雎》啟發而青春覺醒。麗娘趁杜寶下鄉勸農私遊後花園，於夢中與一書生幽會，自此春情難耐而香消玉殞。杜麗娘死後葬於後花園梅樹下，並置自畫像於太湖底。後來杜寶出鎮淮陽，於花園中為

麗娘造墳墓及建梅花觀。三年後，嶺南書生柳夢梅赴考途中借宿於梅花觀，拾得麗娘畫像，並與畫中人的陰魂幽會。柳夢梅開墳掘棺，使麗娘還魂回生並結為夫婦，二人同往臨安，柳生應試，因金兵南侵以致放榜延期。期間，柳生到淮安拜見杜寶，但杜寶卻視柳生為騙子和盜墓賊，堅拒相信麗娘復活，更不承認女兒的婚事。最終事件鬧至金鑾殿上，幾經考驗，杜麗娘與柳夢梅遂成合法夫妻。



《牡丹亭》張莉 飾 杜麗娘
The Peony Pavilion with Zhang Li as Du Liniang



《牡丹亭》倪泓 飾 春香
The Peony Pavilion with Ni Hong as Chunxiang



《牡丹亭》羅晨雪 飾 杜麗娘
The Peony Pavilion with Luo Chenxue as Du Liniang

《南柯記》

《南柯記》又名《南柯夢》、《南柯夢記》，共兩卷四十四齣，成書於萬曆二十八年（一六〇〇年）夏，取材於唐人李公佐傳奇小說《南柯太守傳》。

《南柯記》中許多情節反映了當時明代黑暗的社會內容，如地方官吏貪贓枉法，統治集團互相傾軋、官場裙帶惡習、「大明律」淪為撈錢工具等，藉以批判明代社會現實的陋習。此劇作寫於湯顯祖棄官返鄉後的第三年，其創作背景流露出作者追求理想政治失敗後沉重的幻滅之感。

劇情

唐代游俠淳于棼精通武藝，因貪酒而丟官。淳于棼年近三十，因功不成婚不就，常招朋飲酒遣悶。一日酒醉，淳于棼夢中進入了大槐安國並被國王招為駙馬，與金枝公主結為連理，封作南柯郡太守。淳于棼於南柯前後二十餘年，政績卓著，並且深得民心。然而公主死後，淳于棼還朝拜相，荒淫縱樂。右相段功嫉妒淳于棼之威勢，借故星象變化上書奏劾，將淳于棼遣歸。淳于棼夢醒覺悟，情盡立地成佛。

《邯鄲記》

《邯鄲記》又名《邯鄲夢記》，共兩卷三十齣，寫於萬曆二十九年（一六〇一年），是根據唐人沈既濟傳奇小說《枕中記》改編而成。《邯鄲記》生動地描繪了封建大官的一生，以盧生從發迹到死亡的經歷，深刻刻畫了在封建社會下貪婪庸碌的官吏、黑暗腐敗的科場、糊塗荒淫的皇帝，反映出統治集團內部的殊死爭鬥，從而批判道貌岸然的假道學及多方面批判了明代的社會現實。

湯顯祖採用喜劇的形式，以《邯鄲記》諷刺明代的社會現實。在劇中描繪盧生夫婦以千兩黃金賄賂宮廷以取得功名爵祿，實則將張居正挾權弄政，為兩個兒子先後竊取榜眼、狀元的醜史暴露無遺，並且託名唐明皇揭示君王的暴戾荒淫。可見《邯鄲記》是作者憤恨朝政、毫不留情的情感發洩。

劇情

八仙之一呂洞賓來到邯鄲欲尋一人充當蓬萊山掃花之役。山東盧生相貌清奇，有半分仙氣，可惜盧生癡念功名，慨嘆自己生不逢時。在邯鄲趙州橋旅店，呂洞賓借磁枕給盧生入睡。盧生跳入枕中，夢見與清河崔氏之女結婚，用錢買通權貴以得中狀元。後來盧生奉命至陝州開河、掛帥西征，建功封侯。然而因得罪權臣宇文融被誣陷而被劾問斬。遇赦後充軍鬼門關，盧生歷盡折磨，終於被召回朝並當了二十年宰相，進封趙國公，兒孫一併封官。皇帝賜女樂二十四名，八十歲的盧生因淫樂無度而一病不起。臨終前，盧生還惦念身後加官贈諡和幼子的蔭封。結果當盧生夢醒覺悟，看破世事人情和物我是非，決定跟隨八仙修道。

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因情成夢，因夢成戲

湯顯祖所開創的寫夢文學，掀起後世仿作者的寫夢潮流。作者以紀夢的形式，反映出現實生活中的善惡是非及複雜的思想感情，藉着夢境道出世間物我的複雜情感，夢從情生，再通過戲劇形式表達出深刻思想。作者在〈耳伯麻姑遊詩序〉中指出「世總為情，情生詩歌」，藝術作品的寄趣在於「情」，故此《臨川四夢》的「夢」雖是虛幻，但更重要的是作品中的「情真」，「夢中之情，何必非真。天下豈少夢中之人耶？」（《牡丹亭題詞》）

《臨川四夢》四劇都以夢境貫穿全套戲劇，夢境本來給人夢幻虛無的感覺，但在四劇的夢境卻比現實還要真切。《紫釵記》中霍小玉思夫之情、《牡丹亭》中杜麗娘懷春之幽怨、《南柯記》中淳于棼有志難伸之鬱悶、《邯鄲記》中盧生尋樂之渴求，正正反映了世間不少真實的情感。

作者以夢寫情，結合了世間的真實與戲劇的虛幻，在劇中描寫的迂腐封建社會狀況、腐敗官僚制度等，實則是對於當時的社會、朝廷之鞭撻。作者以如此虛幻的戲劇表現方式來表達自己的感情和理想，其實乃是不得已之舉。由於在當時的封建社會下，真情不能寄以真道，若拘泥於現實生活，反而不能道出作者的思想內涵。

東方莎士比亞

莎士比亞是英國文藝復興時期最偉大的戲劇家，而湯顯祖是中國明代劇壇上最優秀的傳奇作家，然而巧合地兩大劇壇巨匠生於東西方同時代的封建社會，並於一六一六年同一年殞落。儘管湯氏的劇作數目遠比莎翁少，但其作品為中國戲劇界帶來奠定性的影響。

湯顯祖被稱為「東方莎士比亞」，除了二人生卒年相近外，兩者更有着兩部相似的經典作品——莎士比亞的《羅密歐與茱麗葉》和湯顯祖的《牡丹亭》。在十六世紀，由於兩國遠隔重洋的地理因素，中英兩國絕少有文化交流的可能，故此二人應是互不影響、互不關連。然而，《羅密歐與茱麗葉》與《牡丹亭》雖然分別描繪當時東西雙方兩對男女於封建社會的愛情故事，但在取材、主題思想、人物形象、戲劇衝突、結構風格等各方面，都有着許多相近之處。兩劇都流露出對崇高愛情的禮讚，並且帶有女性主義的啟蒙思想。故此後世多將兩位東西方的劇壇巨匠相提並論。

後世影響

在《臨川四夢》相繼面世後，在戲曲史上湧現了一大批稱為「臨川派」的劇作家，如張堅、阮大鍼、吳炳等。他們從劇本立意、曲風等，都以推崇、學習湯劇為模本，創作出一系列相仿《臨川四夢》的作品。爾後亦相繼出現了《後牡丹亭》、《後南柯記》、《續邯鄲夢》等劇作。甚至後世著名劇本洪昇的《長生殿》、孔尚任的《桃花扇》以及文學鉅著《紅樓夢》，都可以看到《臨川四夢》的影子。



《牡丹亭》蔡正仁 飾 柳夢梅
The Peony Pavilion with Cai Zhengren as Liu Mengmei



《牡丹亭》張洵澎 飾 杜麗娘
The Peony Pavilion with Zhang Xunpeng as Du Liniang



《牡丹亭》梁谷音 飾 杜麗娘
The Peony Pavilion with Liang Guyin as Du Liniang

Tang Xianzu and *The Four Dreams at Linchuan*

Tang Xianzu (1550-1616), also known by his courtesy name Yireng and secondary name Hairuo, was from Fuzhou Linchuan in Jiangxi Province and was widely known as Mr Linchuan while he signed himself as Taoist Qingyuan. He was born in the 29th year of Emperor Shizong's Jiajing era in Ming Dynasty and died in the 44th year of Emperor Shenjong's Wanli era, having gone through the three eras of Jiajing, Longqing and Wanli. Tang was a descendant of Yan Wengui from Tang Dynasty but the family name was changed from Yan to Tang owing to the naming taboo of Emperor Taizu in Song Dynasty.

Tang was born into a family of scholars; his grandfather Tang Maozhao was fond of the Taoist philosophy while his father Tang Shangxian was a knowledgeable Confucian. Gifted and intelligent, Tang was able to make couplet at the age of five and was well-read since a young age. He was ranked the 8th scholar in the provincial examination at 21 and published his first collected poems *Hongquan Yicao* at 26, followed by another one *Yongzao* (lost) the subsequent year. At 28, together with friends Xie Jiuzi, Wu Shizhi and Ceng Yuxiang, he wrote his first *chuanqi* play *The Legend of the Purple Flute* which was never completed with 34 parts extant. Being upright and impartial, Tang refused to yield to the pressure exerted by the powerful court official Zhang Juzheng and thus failed in the imperial examination repeatedly. Eventually, he was honoured as the 211th scholar in the three grades of degree at 34 and appointed to posts as academic chair at Taichang Temple (The Ministry of ceremonies) in Nanjing, secretary at the Eastern Palace (The Ministry of Royal Affairs) and clerical officer in the Ministry of Rites in succession. At 38, he rewrote *The Legend of the Purple Flute* as *The Legend of the Purple Hairpin*. As he was outspoken in admonishment, he had to face a rugged career path and ended up resigning from his office at 49. Upon return to his homeland in Linchuan, he led a reclusive life in Yuming Tang and wrote *The Peony Pavilion Reincarnation*, *The Dream of Nanke* and *The Story of Handan*. He died at 67 and was buried at the ancestral graveyard at Mount Lingzhi in the eastern Linchuan city.

The extant works include plays *The Legend of the Purple Flute*, *The Legend of the Purple Hairpin*, *The Peony Pavilion* (also known as *The Reincarnation*), *The Dream of Nanke* and *The Story of Handan*, as well as collected poems and essays *Hongquan Yicao*, *Wenji Youcao* and Yumingtang Collection.



erected to honour chaste women but in fact they were shackles binding women's freedom. As such, when *The Legend of the Purple Hairpin* and *The Peony Pavilion* came into being, both of which recognized the value of love and glorified its pursuit, it stirred up immense response in the society. *The Peony Pavilion* was especially influential. Advocating desire over reason and liberation of the individual, it caused ripples to spread across the Ming feudal society. Tang Xianzu was thereby established as the great Chinese playwright.

The Dream of Nanke and *The Story of Handan* are also criticisms towards the darkness and corruption of the Ming bureaucracy. Both were composed after Tang resigned from office and returned to his homeland as reflections of the corrupt feudal bureaucracy of the Ming Dynasty. In both plays, the author revealed in depth the social reality from the monarch to the bureaucrats. Through the endings connected to the renouncing thoughts of Buddhism and Taoism, they reflect the author's frustration and despair towards the political situation and the imperial court.



Interpretation of the Dreams

The Four Dreams at Linchuan refer to the four plays; *The Legend of the Purple Hairpin*, *The Peony Pavilion*, *The Dream of Nanke* and *The Story of Handan*. There are dream sequences in all the four plays or rather they are the fruit of painstaking labour of Tang's whole life, referring the dreams of his life, thus collectively known as *The Four Dreams at Linchuan*. The Four Dreams contain profound ideological substance where Tang used the format of illusive dreams to express distinct value orientation.

Neo-Confucianism was prevalent in the Ming society at the time. It advocated the principle of "reason over desire" and imposed numerous restrictions upon women in particular where they were subjected to the teachings of traditional classics like *Nu Jian* (Exemplary Behaviour of Women), *Nei Ze* (Domestic Rules) and *Nu Xun* (Lessons for Women). Chastity memorial arches were

T *The Four Dreams at Linchuan* *The Legend of the Purple Hairpin*

The Legend of the Purple Hairpin includes total 53 parts in 2 volumes, depicts the sadness of parting and the joy of reunion between scholar Li Yi and Huo Xiaoyu. Tang Xianzu's first work should have been *The Legend of the Purple Flute* but due to political troubles, he stopped writing it at the 34th part. Later when he was academic chair at Taichang Temple in Nanjing, he modified *The Legend of the Purple Flute* with deletion and refinement and renamed it *The Legend of the Purple Hairpin*. The entire play was finished in the 15th year of the Wanli era (1587). *The Legend of the Purple Hairpin* is therefore Tang Xianzu's first completed *chuanqi* play. It is mainly based on the Tang *chuanqi* play *The Tale of Huo Xiaoyu* by Jiang Fang with part of the plot referenced on *Taisong Xuanhe Yishi* (Collected Storytelling Script in Song Dynasty Xuanhe era).

The Legend of the Purple Hairpin is famous for its richness and splendour. Modern Chinese opera theorist Wu Mei has once remarked, "Linchuan's *Purple Hairpin* is splendid to the utmost." The lyrics are flamboyant while the emotion is rich and colourful in particular the 25th part; *Farewell at Yang Pass*. "Courtyard of blossomy rain is trapped in regret, the waterside underbrush enveloped in sadness. The loving couple is separated, hesitating beyond branches of flower. Let me tap the hairpin and call upon the parrot. I folded up the bed sheets as I closed my sweet memories of conjugal love." The language used is extravagant and splendid. It has thus been listed as "the flamboyant one" by Ming playwright Qi Biaoja in his work *Qu Pin* (Commentary of operas).

In the essay *The Purple Hairpin Inscription*, Tang Xianzu glorified the ideas of love and chivalry by saying "Huo Xiaoyu is a devoted lover; the man-in-yellow (imperial envoy) is a chivalrous man." In the original work *The Tale of Huo Xiaoyu*, Li Yi has been characterized as heartless and ungrateful while Xiaoyu turned love into hatred and swore to become a spiteful ghost after death to take revenge. However in *The Legend of the Purple Hairpin*, there is the addition of the evil character, Grand Commandant Lu who set on sabotaging the love between Li and Huo. The image of Li Yi as the heartless man has thus been changed while Xiaoyu has also been turned into a faithful and devoted lover. Portrayal of the man-in-yellow is also enhanced and foreshadowing his chivalrous behaviour highlighted to enrich the entire plot.



《紫釵記》溫宇航 飾 李益(左)、邢金沙 飾 霍小玉(右)
The Legend of the Purple Hairpin with Wen Yu Hang as Li Yi (left) and Ying Kam-sha as Huo Xiaoyu (right)



《紫釵記》溫宇航 飾 李益
The Legend of the Purple Hairpin with Wen Yu Hang as Li Yi

The Plot:

Longxi scholar Li Yi goes to admire lanterns at the Lantern Festival and encounters the beautiful and talented Huo Xiaoyu who is the illegitimate daughter of Prince Huo. They fall in love at first sight. Li proposes, using the purple hairpin dropped accidentally by Xiaoyu as the love token, and they get married happily. Soon afterwards Li Yi is awarded the champion in imperial examination. Powerful court official Grand Commandant Lu tries to force Li to become his son-in-law and often spite him. With Lu's sabotaging effort, Li Yi is sent away to the frontier as advisor; first to Yumen Pass and later to Mengmen. After return, Li is put under house arrest by Lu. Meanwhile, Lu spreads the rumour of Xiaoyu being remarried and Li being married into the Lu family in an effort to separate the loving couple. Fortunately with the righteous help of the man-in-yellow (imperial envoy), the couple finally reunites and the truth revealed. Li Yi and Huo Xiaoyu reconcile and retie the marriage knot.



《牡丹亭》羅晨雪 飾 杜麗娘
The Peony Pavilion with Luo Chenxue as Du Liniang

The Peony Pavilion is not simply a romantic love story, it is a drama filled with the elements of sadness, happiness, farce and fun. The first half sees happiness amid sadness whereas the latter half the other way round. Du Liniang is the darling daughter of a noble family who has been submitted to the strict rules of the feudal society. Just for seeking the freedom to love, she has to sacrifice her life. It is a personal tragedy and also a family and social tragedy. Despite the sad and distressful plot, there is the insertion of the fight between the vivacious naughty maid Chunxiang and the pedantic old scholar Chen Zuiliang. Coupled with side characters like Taoist Nun Shi, it makes the play sad and happy, farcical and funny at the same time.

The Plot:

The story takes place in the Southern Song Dynasty. Du Bao, the Prefect of Jiangxi Nanan, has an only daughter Du Liniang who is both beautiful and talented. Du Bao invites the pedantic old scholar Chen Zuiliang to teach Liniang the classic, *Book of Odes* but Liniang is inspired by the ode *Guanju (Cry of Osprey)* which awakened her youthful yearning. While her father is away on business, Liniang sneaks out to tour the back garden and dreams of a secret encounter with a young scholar. Since then she yearns for love and eventually dies. She is buried beneath a plum tree in the garden with a self-portrait stored under the Taihu stone. When Du Bao is transferred to Huaiyang later, he builds a tomb and the Plum Blossom Temple for Liniang in the garden. Three years later, Lingnan scholar Liu Mengmei stays at the temple for the night on his way to attend the imperial examination and finds the self-portrait of Liniang. He then has a secret encounter with the spirit of the girl in the portrait. Liu digs up the tomb and Liniang is reincarnated and brought back to life. The two get married and go to Linan together for Liu to attend the imperial examination. Due to the invasion of Jin troops, announcement of the examination result is delayed. Meanwhile, Liu goes to Huaiyang to meet Du Bao but is treated as a swindler and tomb-raider. Du Bao refuses adamantly to admit Liniang's resurrection and denies their marriage. The matter is brought before the imperial court. After multiple test and trial, Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei finally becomes a couple legally.

The Peony Pavilion

The Peony Pavilion (also known as *The Reincarnation*), total 55 parts in 2 volumes, was completed in the 26th year of the Wanli era (1598). It depicts the tragic departure and love story of Liu Mengmei and Du Liniang. Tang Xianzu has once said, “Among the four dreams, I am most proud of *The Peony Pavilion*”. *The Peony Pavilion* is the most outstanding among the four works. It has been recorded that once *The Peony Pavilion* was published, it became a household name and almost made *Tale of the West Chamber* go on sale.

In the essay *The Peony Pavilion Inscription*, the author has declared that the play was based on the story of Li Zhongwen and Feng Xiaojiang's children. “Prefect Du's story is a modification of the story about the children of Jin Wudou Prefect Li Zhongwen and Guangzhou Prefect Feng Xiaojiang.” However, the real reference should be from the storytelling script *Du Liniang Returning from Death* as a substantial part of the plot is adopted from it. Compared with the storytelling script, *The Peony Pavilion* not only has major changes in plot and description, the theme and ideology are also immensely upgraded.



《牡丹亭》胡維露 飾 柳夢梅
The Peony Pavilion with Hu Weila as Liu Mengmei



《牡丹亭》沈映麗 飾 杜麗娘
The Peony Pavilion with Shen Yili as Du Liniang



T *The Dream of Nanke*

The Dream of Nanke, also known as *The Nanke Dream* or *Tale of the Nanke Dream*, is in two volumes and 44 parts and written in the summer of the 28th year in the Wanli era (1600). It is based on the *chuanqi* play *Legend of the Nanke Prefect* by Li Gongzuo in Tang Dynasty.

The plot of *The Dream of Nanke* is a reflection of the dark side in the society at the time, like corruption of local officials, rivalry within ruling parties, nepotism in official circles, abuse of the laws as money tools and a harsh criticism on the evil practices of the Ming society. It is written in the third year after Tang Xianzu resigned from his office and returned home. The background reveals the author's profound disillusionment after his failure in the quest for political ideals.

The Plot:

The story takes place in the Tang Dynasty. Ranger Chunyu Fen is skillful in martial arts but he loses his official post due to his fondness of drinking. At almost 30 with neither wife nor career, he often calls upon friends to drink to relieve the boredom. One day, he is drunk and has a dream. He dreams of entering the Dahuaian Kingdom and is invited to become the king's son-in-law. He marries the princess Jinzhi and is granted the post as Prefect of Nanke County. Chunyu rules in Nanke for over 20 years and scores remarkable achievement earning deep respect from the masses. After the princess's death, Chunyu returns to the imperial court and is appointed as the Prime Minister and indulges in debauchery. Jealous of Chunyu's power, the Vice Minister Duan Gong uses astrological sign as pretext and submits a petition to impeach Chunyu. As a result, Chunyu is dismissed from court and forced to return home. Chunyu wakes up from the dream and comes to a realization. He sheds all ties with the world and becomes a Buddhist.

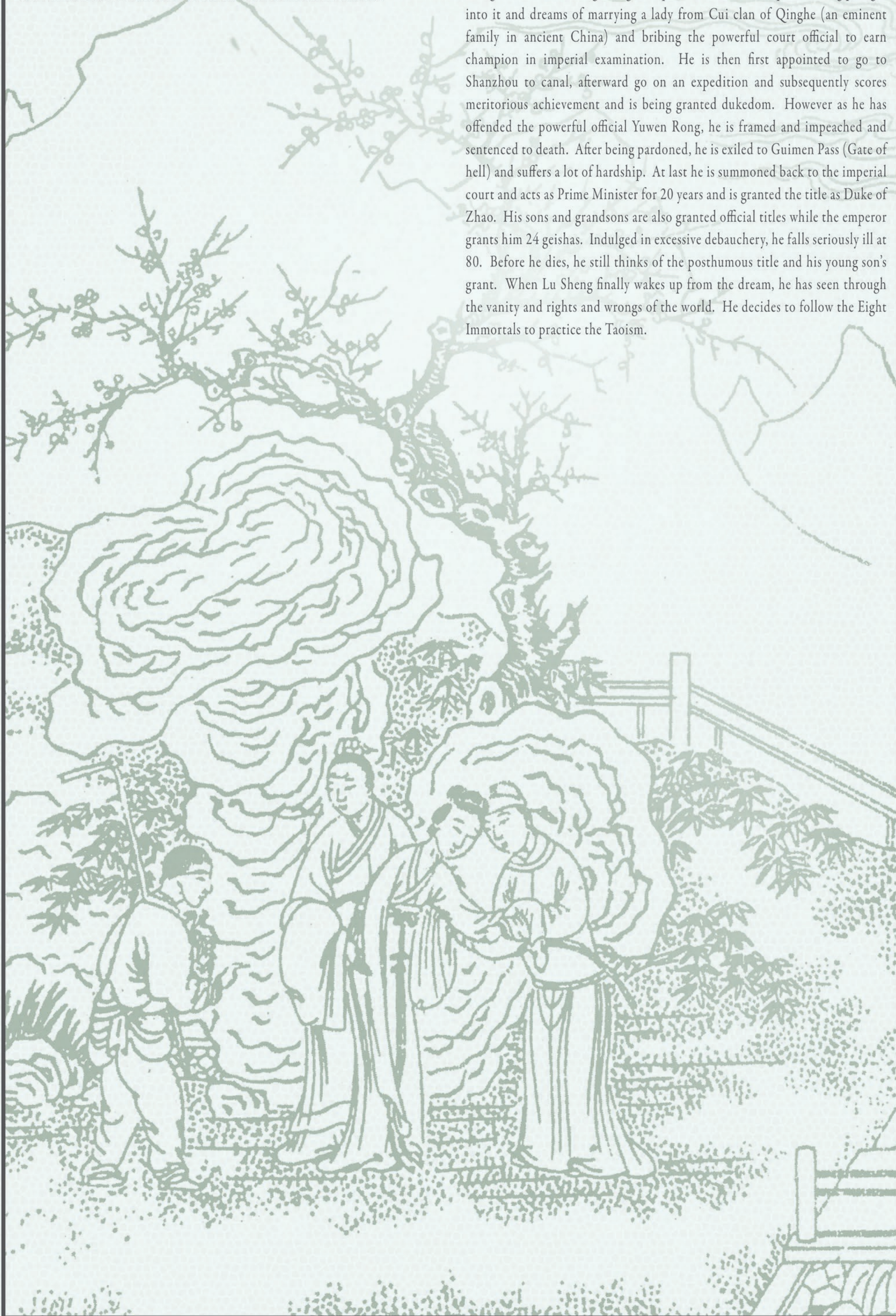
T *The Story of Handan*

The Story of Handan, also known as *The Dream of Handan*, includes total 30 parts in two volumes. According to the author's preface, it was written in the 29th year of the Wanli era (1601) and based on the *chuanqi* play *The World inside a Pillow* by Shen Jiji, Tang Dynasty. *The Story of Handan* depicts vividly the life of a major feudal official. Through Lu Sheng's experience of coming into fame and fortune all the way to his death, it portrays in depth the greedy and useless officials in the feudal society, the dark and corrupted examination system as well as the fatuous and debauched emperor, so as to reflect the intense struggle within the ruling parties and criticize the sanctimonious hypocrisy and the social reality in the Ming Dynasty.

Tang adopted the format of comedy to satirize the social reality of Ming Dynasty in *The Story of Handan*. It depicts how Lu Sheng and his wife bribe the imperial court with thousand taels of gold in order to obtain an official title while in fact it exposes the scandalous act of court official Zhang Juzheng's abuse of power by grabbing the championship in imperial examination for his two sons and reveals the ruler's tyranny and debauchery through Emperor Xuanzong of Tang Dynasty. *The Story of Handan* is the author's relentless emotional release of his frustration and hatred towards the political situation and power of an imperial court.

The Plot:

Lu Dongbin, one of the Eight Immortals, arrives at Handan to look for someone to serve as flower sweeper at Mount Penglai. Lu Sheng from Shantung has a distinguished look and a bit celestial flair but he is obsessed with official title and laments his untimely birth. At the Handan Zhaozhou Bridge Inn, Lu Dongbin lends Lu Sheng a magnetic pillow for him to sleep. Lu Sheng plunges into it and dreams of marrying a lady from Cui clan of Qinghe (an eminent family in ancient China) and bribing the powerful court official to earn champion in imperial examination. He is then first appointed to go to Shanzhou to canal, afterward go on an expedition and subsequently scores meritorious achievement and is being granted dukedom. However as he has offended the powerful official Yuwen Rong, he is framed and impeached and sentenced to death. After being pardoned, he is exiled to Guimen Pass (Gate of hell) and suffers a lot of hardship. At last he is summoned back to the imperial court and acts as Prime Minister for 20 years and is granted the title as Duke of Zhao. His sons and grandsons are also granted official titles while the emperor grants him 24 geishas. Indulged in excessive debauchery, he falls seriously ill at 80. Before he dies, he still thinks of the posthumous title and his young son's grant. When Lu Sheng finally wakes up from the dream, he has seen through the vanity and rights and wrongs of the world. He decides to follow the Eight Immortals to practice the Taoism.



Love in Dreams, Dreams in Play

“Love in dreams, dreams in play” describes aptly the literature of dream founded by Tang Xianzu, which set off a trend of dream replication in later generations. Written in the format of dream literature, the plays reflect the rights and wrongs as well as complicated thoughts and feelings in real life. Through the dreams, the author depicts the complicated emotions of men in the world and expresses in a dramatic way the deep thoughts behind. The author has pointed out in *Erbo Magu Youshi Xu* (Poem Preface) that “Love is the eternal pursuit of humanity, from love come poetry.” Works of art should be placed interest in love (or feeling). *The Four Dreams at Linchuan* may depict illusive dreams, more importantly they express genuine love. “Feelings in dreams may not necessarily be unreal. There are not a few dreamers in the world.” (From *The Peony Pavilion Inscription*).

There are dream sequences throughout the four plays. Dreams normally give people the feeling of illusion but the dreams in these plays are realer than reality. In *The Legend of the Purple Hairpin*, it is Huo Xiaoyu’s thoughts of love for her husband; in *The Peony Pavilion*, it is Du Liniang’s yearning for youthful desire; in *The Dream of Nanke*, it depicts Chunyu Fen’s unrealized ambition while in *The Story of Handan*, Lu Sheng’s desire for pleasure. All of them reflect true feelings in the world.

The author used dreams to portray feelings and merged the real world with fictional drama. The depiction of the pedantic feudal society and corrupt bureaucracy are actually reflection of the author’s harsh criticism on the social reality and imperial court at the time. The author was in fact forced to use the medium of fictional drama to express his emotions and ideals as the feudal society at that time did not allow any expression of true feelings. Restrictions of real life also fail to express his concrete ideas and thoughts freely.



cross-influence between the two playwrights. Notwithstanding this, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Peony Pavilion* are both depict the love stories respectively in western and eastern feudal societies and they have shared many similarities such as subject, theme, characters, dramatic conflict, structure and style. Both plays express the glorification of sublime love with a hint of enlightenment on feminism. People in later generations therefore tend to bring the two great playwrights together.

Influence on later generations

After *The Four Dreams at Linchuan* came into being one after another, there emerged a large batch of so-called Linchuan School of playwrights such as Zhang Jian, Ruan Dacheng, Wu Bing and so on. They held Tang’s works in high regard and used them as model in script concept, lyric style and other aspects. As a result a series of works imitating *The Four Dreams at Linchuan* appeared. Works like *Post-The Peony Pavilion*, *Post-The Dream of Nanke*, *The Story of Handan Sequel* came into being later on too. Even in famous plays of later generations such as Hong Sheng’s *The Palace of Eternal Life*, Kong Shangren’s *The Peach Blossom Fan* and the literary classic *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, one can still discern the influence of *The Four Dreams at Linchuan*.

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Shakespeare of the Orient

William Shakespeare is the greatest dramatist in England during the Renaissance while Tang Xianzu is the most remarkable *chuanqi* playwright in Ming Dynasty. Both were born in feudal society of the same era, one in the West while the other in the East and coincidentally both died in the same year, 1616. Despite Tang has completed far less plays than Shakespeare, his works have brought about significant influence upon the Chinese opera circle.

Tang Xianzu has been acclaimed as “Shakespeare of the Orient”. Apart from the fact that they were born around the same time and died in the same year, they also possessed two similar classic works; Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and Tang Xianzu’s *The Peony Pavilion*. Way back in the 16th century with the great geographical distance apart, there was scarcely any cultural exchange between China and England. As such there should not be any interaction or