

The Peony Pavilion

A Crossroads of East-West and South-North

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INTRODUCTION

Tang Xianzu 汤显祖 (1550-1616) is considered the most gifted playwright of Ming dynasty China, and one of the greatest dramatists in the history of Chinese literature. Tang was born into a genteel family in Linchuan 临川, Jiangxi 江西 province, and showed extraordinary talent from early childhood: he passed the imperial examination at the county level at the age of fourteen and at the provincial level at twenty-one. However, it was not until he was thirty-four years old, in 1583, that he succeeded in gaining the title of *jinshi* 进士, or advanced scholar, at the national level.¹

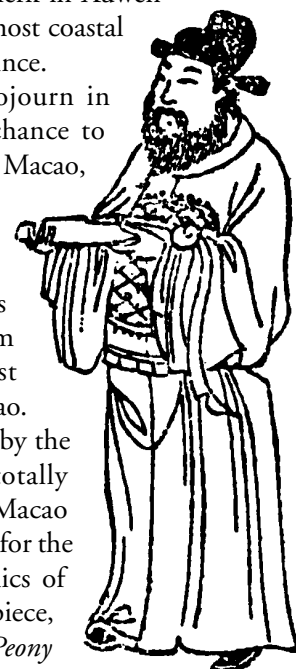
Passing this highest level of imperial examination was the gateway for Tang to obtain a post in the Imperial Sacrifices in Nanjing 南京, Jiangsu 江苏 province, in 1584. During his five years in service, his daily duties were less than all-consuming. The despair and frustration he experienced in his official career, however, worked to the advantage of his pastime—writing. During this period of plentiful leisure hours he completed his first play, *Zichai Ji* 紫钗记, or *The Purple Hairpin*, in 1587.

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In 1589, Tang was appointed Secretary in the Bureau of Sacrifices of the Ministry of Rites, but the year 1591 was a turning point of his career in the imperial bureaucracy. As he had a strong sense of justice and was a man of high moral standards, he submitted a petition entitled “Memorial to Impeach the Ministers and Supervisors” (*Lunfu chen ke chen shu* 论辅臣科臣疏) to Emperor Shenzong 神宗 (who reigned from 1573 to 1620, the era known as Wanli 万历), in which he criticized the court’s misadministration and the prevailing practice of bribery among officials. This outspoken and loyal memorial eventually led to his demotion to the position of clerk in Xuwen 徐闻 county, in the southernmost coastal area of Guangdong 广东 province.

It was during Tang’s sojourn in south China that he had a chance to cross the Barrier Gate² and visit Macao, which had become an overseas settlement of the Portuguese Empire in 1557.³ For the first time in his life, he came across the luxurious merchandise from the West and from Southeast Asia that was for sale in Macao. He must have been impressed by the exquisite objects that were totally foreign to him. His visit to Macao arguably constitutes the source for the east-west, south-north dynamics of his most outstanding literary piece, *Mudan Ting* 牡丹亭, or *The Peony*



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Liu Mengmei and Miao Shunbin in Scene 21, "An Audience with the Envoy". Reproduced from *Tang Xianzu Xiqu Ji* 汤显祖戏曲集 (1978).



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Pavilion, which was completed in 1598 in the regional style of southern opera, *chuanqi* 传奇, or a dramatic romance or marvellous tale.⁴

In Scene 21, “An Audience with the Envoy”, Macao is the setting for the action; but this scene is usually omitted from most performances. Nor was this scene a point of focus in a doctoral thesis on Tang Xianzu’s plays,⁵ or more recently, in two volumes of international conference papers on *The Peony Pavilion*.⁶ The almost forgotten scene, however, serves as a witness to Tang’s encounter with the Portuguese presence in Macao. Notably, the play weaves together a Western enclave and the Eastern “Middle Kingdom” in a holistic way. The questions raised in this paper are: why is this scene crucial to the unfolding of the plot, and how is Macao represented through Tang’s discerning eye?

The play is a fantastically eccentric love story about Du Liniang 杜丽娘 and Liu Mengmei 柳梦梅. The heroine Liniang is the sixteen-year-old daughter of Du Bao 杜宝, a magistrate (or Prefect) in Nan’an 南安, Jiangxi province. The hero Mengmei is a brilliant scholar just over twenty years old in Lingnan 岭南, a generic name for Guangdong province.⁷ Liniang has a dream in which she meets a young scholar, who promises to marry her. When she wakes up, she is haunted by the dream, and pines for love. She soon dies of lovesickness. The lover in her dream is Mengmei, who later meets Liniang’s *hun* 魂 (soul or spirit form) and helps her return to life. Mengmei finally marries Liniang after her miraculous resurrection, although her father does not like this queer fellow from Guangzhou 广州 (the provincial capital of Guangdong province). In this way, Tang Xianzu traverses the geography of China, plotting an exogamic marriage between a southerner and a northerner. One may wonder just how oddly a southerner from Guangzhou is portrayed. Not only does the play focus on an eerie and passionate love, it also depicts a crossroads between east and west, north and south.

THE CULT OF QING

Tang Xianzu was a versatile and prolific writer, leaving behind about 2,200 poems, essays and verse essays, not to mention his four plays that share the theme of dreams.⁸ Unlike many other neglected men of genius who were included in the pantheon of literary immortals only after death, he gained a certain

degree of success in literature and enjoyed popularity as a dramatist during his lifetime. He even personally instructed the actors performing his plays. As one of literature’s enduring love stories and a masterpiece of Ming dynasty drama, *The Peony Pavilion*, also known as *Huanhun Ji* 还魂记, or *The Return of the Soul*, is Tang’s most protracted and profound meditation on the nature of love. Anthony Yu is of the opinion that the play became the most prominent literary antecedent to Cao Xueqin’s 曹雪芹 time-honoured prose fiction on love, *Honglou Meng* 红楼梦, or *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, in the ensuing Qing dynasty.⁹

Among Tang Xianzu’s literary works, *The Peony Pavilion* is by far the best-known and best-liked. Renowned for its beautiful verses and its excellent character portrayals, this fantastic romance also features allusive and ambiguous language, and is riddled with elliptical references. Containing a cavalcade of 55 scenes and 403 arias, it is one of the longest plays in the extant repertoire of traditional southern *chuanqi*. It comprises 160-odd characters, providing a panoramic picture of social life at that time. There are personages from all walks of life, ranging from elite literati and a Buddhist abbot to foreign traders and interpreters; from the Tartar King and his generals to a Daoist nun, a grave digger, ruffians and harlots.

Significantly, the play transcends this world and includes otherworldly characters: the Flower Fairy from “above” and the Judge of Hell from “below.” Successive settings for the action contain a bed-chamber, a study room, a garden, a courtroom in hell, a prison cell, a whore-house, a city wall, a river, a mountain, a military ship, and the imperial court, etc. Tang’s libretto was written before the style of the *kunshan* aria 昆山腔 (a southern singing style) had been prescriptively defined, but this monumental *chuanqi* was adapted to the *kunqu* 昆曲 opera style¹⁰ soon after his death.¹¹

Just after William Shakespeare (1564-1616) finished the romantic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (most probably in 1594 or 1595) on the other side of the world, Tang Xianzu celebrated *qing* 情 (love, passion, desire)¹² to its fullest in *The Peony Pavilion* (completed in 1598). These two contemporaneous plays both illustrate the fire of passion and embrace the motif of the untimely death of their protagonists. *Romeo and Juliet* is one of Shakespeare’s earliest theatrical triumphs, and is considered the most iconic love story

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in the Western canon.¹³ Likewise, *The Peony Pavilion* has long enjoyed tremendous theatrical success, and Tang's abiding interest is *qing*.

Cyril Birch says, "For Tang Xianzu, *qing* in its highest development, as true love between man and woman, embraces [not only] sexual attraction and physical passion, but also sentiment, empathy, devotion—the virtues of that broader love that exists also outside the sexual relationship."¹⁴ Although *qing* is translated as "love", a more inclusive equivalent would be "feelings". In other words, joy and sorrow, fear and anger, desire and hate are all part of the "feelings" side of the dichotomy between *qing* and *li* 理 (moral principles). While *qing* stands for the spontaneous affects of *xin* 心 (the human heart or mind),¹⁵ *li* represents the powers of reason. In contrast to the advocacy of the rigidly rational *li*, the extolling of *qing* was part of the new, humane currents of thought in the later years of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). An outburst of *qing* (sentiments and emotions), as the Neo-Confucians believed, espoused a subversive gesture that may violate the confines of *li*.

The two main schools of thoughts in Neo-Confucianism¹⁶ were *lixue* 理学 (The School of Principle), whose founder was Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), and *xinxue* 心学 (The School of the Heart/Mind), whose most influential proponent was Wang Yangming 王阳明 (1472-1529). Wang's philosophy of the heart/mind is markedly different from Zhu Xi's philosophy of principle. Tang Xianzu lived at the time when Wang Yangming's philosophy was at the peak of its influence and popularity. In particular, the *Taizhou Xuepai* 泰州学派 (the Taizhou School of Philosophy), which embraced a new wave of free thinking and free interpretation of Confucian ideas, was flourishing in Jiangsu. The Taizhou School (named after the founder's home town in Jiangsu) was founded by Wang Gen 王艮 (1483-1541), who was Wang Yangming's most distinguished follower, and the leader of *Zuopai Wangxue* 左派王学 (The Left Branch of the Wang Yangming School).¹⁷ Tang's scholarly teacher, Luo Rufang 罗汝芳 (1515-1588) was a second-generation disciple of Wang Gen. In this way, Tang was nurtured by a "revolutionary" stance against Zhu Xi's *li*.

In defiance of the prevailing mainstream thought, Tang lauded the cult of *qing* in the Preface to *The Peony Pavilion*. Here is an excerpt of his valorisation of, if not obsession with, *qing* (translated by Cyril Birch):

Love is of source unknown, yet it grows ever deeper. The living may die of it, by its power the dead live again. Love is not love at its fullest if one who lives is unwilling to die for it, or if it cannot restore to life one who has so died. And must the love that comes in dream necessarily be unreal? For there is no lack of dream lovers in this world. Only for those whose love must be fulfilled on the pillow and for whom affection deepens only after retirement from office, is it entirely a corporeal matter...¹⁸

For Tang, *qing* could even abolish the boundary between life and death. Despite the antagonism of his opponents and the pressure of orthodoxy, Tang showed an adamant will to assert his personal vision and staged a valiant confrontation with Neo-Confucian dogmas. As Zhou Zuyan has pointed out, "In his adherence to *qing*, particularly in his dramatic affirmation of free love and self-arranged marriage, Tang poses an unequivocally heretical posture against orthodox norms."¹⁹

Tang's dauntless rebellion against the grip of Neo-Confucian ideology is evident in Scene 10, "The Interrupted Dream" and Scene 28, "Union with the Ghost". While the dream scene is an erotic depiction of the consummation of the two protagonists in the Peony Pavilion at the back garden of Liniang's family home, the ghost scene boldly portrays Liniang, in spirit form, flirtatiously seducing Mengmei in the Plum Blossom Nunnery. These two scenes are narrated with great audacity, breaking all the codes of Confucian ethics and didactic moralism. *Qing* and passionate abandon are explored beyond reality and official sanction in dreams and in the netherworld. To quote Anthony Yu, "Imaginative literature, in sum, proves itself to be the most puissant means to record, transmit, and glorify the private interests begotten of passion."²⁰

TANG XIANZU'S SOJOURN
IN GUANGDONG

Tang Xianzu was a native of Jiangxi²¹ province (often abbreviated as Gan 赣), and spent about one year (1591-2) in Guangdong province. Jiangxi is located to the north of Guangdong. Though Jiangxi and Guangdong are adjacent provinces, they have distinctive cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences. These two provinces are connected by the Meiling Pass 梅关, which for centuries has been China's main north-

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south corridor for migration and communication.²² People in Jiangxi are often dubbed *waijiang lao* 外江佬 (folks from beyond the Yangzi River) by the people in Guangdong.

Guangdong (often abbreviated as Yue 粤) is the southernmost coastal province of China. People there have long been called *nanman* 南蛮 (southern barbarians),²³ a derogatory term to differentiate them from other ethnic groups in the “Middle Kingdom”. Its provincial capital is Guangzhou (also called Canton in English),²⁴ which lies close to Macao. Since Guangzhou is the capital city in southern China, it is regarded as China’s “South Gate”.

The 19th year of Wanli (1591) was a turbulent time for the 42-year-old Tang Xianzu. After his submission of the “Memorial to Impeach the Ministers and Supervisors” in the third lunar month of that year, he was banished from Nanjing (the political centre) in the 5th lunar month. He returned to his home in Linchuan, where he lay ill for four months; then, in the 9th lunar month, he began his journey to Guangdong. He first passed Meiling 梅岭 (Plum Ridge), travelled to Nanxiong 南雄 and reached Guangzhou by the middle of the 10th lunar month. He took this chance to visit some nearby places, and returned to Guangzhou. He then moved to Xiangshan 香山 county—today’s Zhongshan 中山—from whence he visited Macao. Finally he reached Xuwen county at some point after the 11th lunar month to take up his new, demoted post as a clerk.²⁵ Xuwen is a remote tropical area in the southernmost part of the Chinese mainland, facing Hainan Island 海南岛. Tang’s picaresque detour in the land of the “southern barbarians” was an unusual experience, and he composed a collection of poems to chronicle what he saw and felt.

Of all the places Tang visited on his southern sojourn, he must have found Macao exceptionally fascinating. Through his poetic creations, he left some vivid images of this Portuguese settlement. The East-West encounter was dextrously woven into the following two poems (my translation):²⁶

“THE ENCOUNTER OF FOREIGN TRADERS
IN XIANGSHAN AO (MACAO)”

They neither stay in fields and gardens nor grow
mulberry trees,
Handsomely attired, they arrive here by the great
carracks.

Pearls from the sea glitter like twinkling stars,
White jades by the riverbank shine like the
mellow moonlight.²⁷

“Xiangshan Ao” 香山澳 (in which “Ao” can also be written as 岙 or 澳), which literally means “Bay of the Fragrant Hill,” refers to Macao. Linked to Zhongshan county by a narrow isthmus, Macao stands on the western shore of the Pearl River, not far from Guangzhou prefecture. The poem clearly suggests that Tang met the adventurous Portuguese merchants who were selling precious jewels in Macao. His encounter with these seafaring Westerners was also skilfully incorporated into *The Peony Pavilion* (Scene 21).

In another poem, Tang learns more about Macao through an interpreter and presents to us a charming Western (perhaps Portuguese) lady:

Liu Mengmei and Du Liniang in Scene 10, “The Interrupted Dream”. Reproduced from Tang Xianzu, *Mudan Ting*.



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"FROM AN INTERPRETER IN XIANGSHAN"²⁸
 A pretty foreign lass just over fifteen,²⁹
 Sprays herself with fragrant rosewater in the
 morning.
 The jewels in her hair gleam like the crescent
 moon over the west ocean,
 And her perfumed breath is like a brightly
 coloured bird from Java.³⁰

During the Ming dynasty, interpreters from Xiangshan county were active in Macao. They were also known as *galala* 伽喇喇. In *The Peony Pavilion* (Scene 21) the *galala* plays a crucial role in grafting the East and the West in Macao.

Not only did Tang bear witness to the Western presence in Macao, he also encountered two zealous evangelists from the West in Duanzhou 端州, a synonym for Zhaoqing 肇庆 county. At the time, Zhaoqing was the administrative capital of Guangdong and Guangxi 广西 provinces. His encounter with foreign missionaries was mentioned in the following poem (my translation):

"IN DUANZHOU, ENCOUNTERING TWO WESTERN
 SCHOLARS WHO ARGUE AGAINST BUDDHISM"³¹
 These two men from the West prove to be so
 strange,
 Can there be any doubt that they come with
 money to give away?³²
 They claim there was no Buddha in India,
 And convince the Buddhist abbot of their
 teaching.

Xu Shuofang 徐朔方 believes that the two Westerners were Francesco de Petris (1562-1593) and Matteo Ricci (1552-1610).³³

Under the Portuguese *Padroado* (Ecclesiastical Patronage),³⁴ Ricci, an Italian Jesuit, arrived at Macao in 1582 from Goa in India. His arrival marked an historic moment for the introduction of Christianity into China and, for the first time, Macao served as a bridgehead.³⁵ In 1583 he left Macao for Zhaoqing to launch the *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission). In light of the monotheism of Christianity, Indian Buddhism, which entered China from Central Asia in 67 A.D., was flatly denied.

The two missionaries, full of proselytizing fervour, were expelled from Zhaoqing in 1589. They

then moved to Shaozhou 韶州 (present-day Shaoguan 韶关, a city in northern Guangdong, adjacent to Jiangxi), and founded a new residence there. After the death of Francesco de Petris in November 1593, Ricci stayed on in Shaoguan until 1594.³⁶

How could Tang Xianzu have met them in 1592 in Zhaoqing?³⁷ Sometime in late 1592 Tang left Xuwen for a home-bound journey back to Linchuan, and passed through Zhaoqing.³⁸ It may be surmised that he returned home before taking up his new post as a minor magistrate in Suichang 遂昌 county, Zhejiang 浙江 province, in the 3rd lunar month of 1593. According to the journals of Matteo Ricci, their Mission House in Shaozhou was attacked and robbed "one night in July 1592". Ricci and de Petris were slightly injured—"Father Francisco received a slight cut on the head from a hatchet" and "Father Ricci received a wound on the hand".³⁹ Both evangelists were requested to return to Zhaoqing during the latter part of 1592 in order to review the court case against the robbers. It was most probably at this juncture of time and space that Tang happened to meet these two "Western scholars" in Zhaoqing. What is special about the poem is that it testifies to the early East-West religious repercussions in Guangdong prior to the infamous Rites Controversy in Beijing.⁴⁰

A QUEER PARASITE IN GUANGZHOU

Like some of the great novels of the Ming dynasty,⁴¹ Tang Xianzu's *The Peony Pavilion* is based on existing sources. He expanded, reshaped, recounted, and extrapolated from an earlier storyteller's *huaben* 话本 (prompt-book),⁴² dating from the Song dynasty, called "Du Liniang mu se huan hun" 杜丽娘慕色还魂, or "Du Liniang, Longing for Love, Returns in Spirit Form".⁴³ In this *huaben*, Liu Mengmei is a native of Chengdu 成都 in Sichuan 四川 province. One distinct difference in *The Peony Pavilion* is that Mengmei's native place is changed to Guangzhou. Tang clearly embellished this earlier crude tale with his experiences in Guangdong and created a masterpiece that is enshrined in the Chinese literary pantheon.

The mysterious medium of premonitory dreams provides a skeleton for the development of the plot. At the outset, Mengmei comes on stage and introduces himself in a melancholy manner (Scene 2). He tells the audience that half a month ago he took a nap during

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the day, and had a strange dream. He dreamed of a slim beauty standing under a plum tree in a garden. This young lady shyly told him that after meeting her he would have a happy marriage and a bright future in his chosen career. As the plot unfolds, this dream of love becomes a driving force in his quest for status. After having this dream, he changes his name to Mengmei, but keeps the name Chunqing 春卿 (meaning “spring lord”) as his *hao* 号 (style name). The name Liu Mengmei provides readers with a botanical image: *liu* 柳 means willow, and *mei* 梅 means plum. Zhou Zuyan has observed that the name suggests a dual-gender association in an androgynous union.⁴⁴

Liniang is always already the centre-stage heroine; and her stirring passion has been a frequent subject of discussion, but the character of Mengmei receives scant attention for analysis. While Liniang is a pampered daughter and lives in a dignified household in Nan'an, and with no worries about the necessities of life, Mengmei was orphaned in early childhood and lives in cold and hunger in a vegetable garden in Guangzhou. Although he is an accomplished scholar and passes the county-level imperial examinations, he cannot get a government post. He relies on his faithful servant, Hunchback Guo 郭驼, for a living. His gardener-servant supports him by planting trees and growing flowers. Mengmei is thus not only a sheer bookworm, but also a queer parasite.

IN SEARCH OF PATRONAGE

One day Mengmei visits his friend, Han Zicai 韩子才, at the Terrace of Prince Zhao Tuo 赵佗王台 in the town of Chaoyang 潮阳, north of Guangzhou (Scene 6). Just as Mengmei is the twenty-eighth generation descendant of Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819), Zicai is a descendant of Han Yu 韩愈 (768-824). Both Liu and Han were eminent scholars and upright officials serving the Tang court. Because they offended the emperor, they were demoted to take up positions in southern China—Han Yu to Chaozhou 潮州 in eastern Guangdong, and Liu Zhongyuan to Liuzhou 柳州 in north-central Guangxi. By making the characters Mengmei and Zicai the descendants of these two well-known personages, and by revealing Zicai's exact address in Guangzhou, the playwright enhances a sense of realism in the play, alongside the eeriness of the plot.

The visit to Zicai is a transitional episode, but in this scene Guangdong and Guangxi provinces are portrayed wretchedly in order to make a clear contradistinction to Macao. When the two friends meet, Mengmei mourns the fact that their ill-starred ancestors were banished to such peripheral districts in south China. The Chinese phrase for expulsion to border areas far away from the capital is *biancuan yanfang* 贬窜烟方. The term *yanfang* connotes coastal regions that are full of fogs, plagues, and noxious vapors (*bianhai yanzhang difang* 边海烟瘴地方). As such, south China is represented as an inhospitable area; it is foggy and susceptible to various kinds of tropical diseases. Particularly, it is a destination for punishment and banishment, and a receptacle for officials who have fallen out of favour in the imperial court. In reality, Tang Xianzu was expelled from Nanjing in Jiangsu

Liu Mengmei in Scene 2, “A Scholar's Ambition”.
Reproduced from Tang Xianzu, *Mudan Ting*.





JIANGSU
(KIANGSU)

Nanjing
(Nanking)

Hangzhou
(Hangchow)

ZHEJIANG
(CHEKIANG)

Suichang

JIANGXI
(KIANGSI)

GUANGDONG
(KWANGTUNG)

Guangzhou

Zhaoqing

MACAU
(Aomen)

HONG KONG
(Xianggang)

TAIWAN
(FORMOSA STRAIT)

Kao-hsiung
(Caoxiang)

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(NAN HAI)

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to Xuwen in Guangdong, that is, from the “civilized centre” to the “barbaric south.” His demotion provides a ready parallel with the two gifted yet unlucky scholar-officials of the Tang dynasty (618-907).

In a different tone, Zicai describes Macao favourably. It is a place full of exquisite treasures and frequented by foreign traders and interpreters. Zicai advises Mengmei to look for a patron to help him out of his predicament:

Haven't you heard that Miao Shunbin, Imperial Envoy for treasure appraisal, cares for men of learning? Before his term of office ends this autumn, he will go as usual to assess the treasure in the Treasure Temple near Xiangshan Bay in Macao. Shall we go and try to see him at that time?⁴⁵

Mengmei makes up his mind to venture to Macao. Before leaving he shows immense gratitude to his gardener-servant, and sings (Scene 13):

All these years I have relied on you;
Such faithful men like you are very few.
The life is hard and food is plain,
But I should owe all this to you.
What am I like in your eyes?
I sit and daydream like a fool all day,
And never give you help in any way.
My very daydream is a shame;
Who else am I to blame?
I'll leave the garden trees to you;
That is all I can do.⁴⁶

Mengmei intends to leave home and to “play the autumn wind” (*da qiufeng* 打秋风). The term *da qiufeng* refers to soliciting funds from friends, or seeking favour from the rich. Hunchback Guo earnestly reminds him to concentrate on his studies for the imperial examination, rather than “going with the autumn wind,” that is, travelling in search of a patron. It seems that Tang Xianzu voiced his dislike of the practice of *da qiufeng* through the steadfast servant's admonishment.

We may recall that Tang himself only passed the imperial examination at the national level on his fifth attempt. His repeated failures were not due to his

poor intellect; rather, it is believed that his despising of the popular practice of *da qiufeng* led him to refuse the patronage offered by the Senior Grand Secretary, Zhang Juzheng 张居正 (1525-1582). In his portrayal of Mengmei, Tang appeared to cast a mild mockery on the southerner's earnest attempt to advance his career by searching for a benefactor.

SANBA SI IN MACAO

Macao was a barely inhabited territory during the early Ming dynasty before it became an overseas settlement of the Portuguese Empire in 1557. In light of Tang Xianzu's demotion to Guangdong, it is perhaps a blessing in disguise that he witnessed the historic encounter of East and West in Macao and in Zhaoqing. Specifically, he must have seen the formative years of Portuguese Macao as a new Christian world, where Catholic proselytizing missionaries built many new yet simple churches.

There are a variety of scene types in *The Peony Pavilion*. Among major scenes and transitional episodes, the play is richly laced with comic interludes. From time to time, the reader is entertained with splendid, light-hearted vignettes. After the untimely death of Linjiang and her parents' mourning in Nan'an, Scene 21, “An Audience with the Envoy”, moves to Macao and provides some comic relief. The Abbot of the Treasure Temple comes on stage with an aria:

In a ragged sakaya here and now,
I am a Buddhist monk in Macao.
With bodhisattvas of abundant wealth
Live many monks of soundest health.⁴⁷

In the English translation, the reader cannot appreciate the beautiful rhymes of the first two lines in Chinese: “Yiling po jiasha, Xiangshan Ao li ba” 一领破袈裟，香山嶼里巴 (translated as “In a ragged sakaya here and now, I am a Buddhist monk in Macao”). In Cyril Birch's translation of *The Peony Pavilion*, the geographical meaning of the second line is totally missed.⁴⁸ As we have seen, Xiangshan Ao 香山嶼 (Xiangshan Bay) is one of Macao's poetic literary names.⁴⁹ The elliptical character *ba* 巴 stands for *sanba* 三巴, which is the Chinese transliteration of São Paulo (Saint Paul). Since the Chinese used to call churches *si* 寺 (temple), the second line tells us that in Macao

Key places mentioned in this paper are underlined. The extracted illustration is reproduced from *Map of China & Mongolia* (London: Times Books, 1996).

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there is a place called Sanba Si 三巴寺, that is, the Temple of São Paulo—a sinicized name for the Church of St. Paul.⁵⁰

In 1563 three Jesuits⁵¹ arrived in Macao, and in 1565 they established their first residence and a simple church as a bridgehead for Christianity in the Far East, with their main interest in China. The church was made of wood and stone in the form of a large barn—a technique often adopted by the Portuguese in their early settlements. In 1572 the College of St. Paul's was constructed. These buildings occupied a large area on the side of a hill, almost in the centre of the city, where the Church of St. Anthony stands today.⁵² This was the “primordial” Church of St. Paul, or Sanba Si, that Tang Xianzu came across in Macao in 1591.

By 1594 the original building complex became inadequate, and some new buildings were erected. These buildings stood within the area of the present-day Ruins of St. Paul's. After two fires, in 1595 and 1601 respectively, the Collegiate Church of St. Paul's (college and church) was rebuilt in 1602. Its ornate façade was completed in 1640. Still today, the Church is known locally as Da Sanba 大三巴 (“Big São Paulo”), so as to distinguish it from St. Joseph's Seminary Church, which is dubbed Sanbazai 三巴仔 (“Little São Paulo”).⁵³ Unfortunately, a disastrous fire in 1835 turned the whole building complex, except the façade and walls, into rubble. The fire-baptized façade, nowadays better known as the Ruins of St. Paul's, has long been endorsed as a distinctive symbol of Macao, and is one of Macao's most famous cultural relics.⁵⁴

Following his aria, the Abbot tells the audience:

I'm the head monk of the Treasure Temple near the Xiangshan Bay, Guangzhou Prefecture. This temple was built by the foreign merchants to receive the officials of treasure appraisal.⁵⁵

The Treasure Temple is actually the Church of St. Paul, built in 1565 in the city centre, not the “newer” one that was erected in 1594.

The Abbot receives notice that the Imperial Envoy for Treasure Appraisal, Miao Shunbin 苗舜賓, has just completed his three-year term of office, and plans to make an offering of jewels as his last tribute to the Treasure Bodhisattva. The Abbot walks out of the temple to greet Miao, while a foreign merchant and a *galala* (interpreter) help prepare the treasures for Miao's inspection. Miao proclaims:

What rare treasures! They are as crystal as mountain torrents and as brilliant as the sun and the moon. This Treasure Temple indeed deserves its name! Offer incense to the Bodhisattva.⁵⁶

Wishing to protect the coastal areas, the Envoy requests the Abbot to pray to the Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva (known as Guan Yin 观音 in Chinese) and to chant a blessing for the Arab Muslim sea traders. The Abbot sings:

The sea abounds in treasures of all kinds,
But waves may toss the ships and minds.
The merchants with their treasure hoard
Fear to brave the wind and waves abroad.
Bodhisattva Guanyin,
Your name brings bliss through thick and thin.⁵⁷

The foreign merchants have brought “treasures of all kinds” to Macao as the imperial court offers a high price for them. On the one hand, this scene points to the great demand for exotic merchandise; and on the other, it depicts Macao as a supply base. Notably, the *galala* is an indispensable agent bridging foreign traders and the Chinese. Through the playwright's discerning eye, Macao is arguably a rendezvous for East and West.

Tang Xianzu was a pioneer to have incorporated Macao in his poems and used it as the *mise-en-scène* for *The Peony Pavilion*. It was not until ninety years later that Macao again appeared in Chinese literature, when Wu Li 吴历 (1632–1718), an acclaimed painter, poet and calligrapher from Changshu 常熟, Jiangsu province, came to Macao. He composed a collection of thirty poems, entitled “Aozhong Zayong” 澳中杂咏 (“Rambling Songs on Macao”).⁵⁸ Tang visited Macao in 1591, whereas Wu Li entered this Christian city in 1681. The latter joined the Society of Jesus as a novice in 1682, and stayed in the seminary of the Collegiate Church of St. Paul's (the newer one). As Tang perceived an embryonic Portuguese Macao, Wu Li witnessed its Golden Age as the head of Christendom in the East and its heyday as a prosperous commercial centre.

A GENUINE TREASURE

As soon as Mengmei arrives at the gate of the Treasure Temple, he yearns to see the Imperial Envoy, Miao Shunbin, and to have a look at the treasures.

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When the Envoy learns that he is a student of the Confucian Academy in the Prefecture of Guangzhou, he considers him “a pearl of man from the South” (*nan tu zhi zhen* 南土之珍). Making an exception, Miao agrees to show Mengmei the treasures, and sings:

The Divine Pebbles of the Milky Way,
The Pills of Gold, the Iron Tree Bloom,
The Cat's-eyes that emit the brilliant ray,
And Emeralds that dispel the gloom.
Look, there you see
The Rubies from the foreign land,
The Magic Goblet from the west,
The Toad of Jade that sucks moon-sand
The Sun-flint Pearls and Ice-place blest.⁵⁹

Mengmei is hugely impressed after seeing these valuable treasures, and on a whim he asks how far away these treasures come from. Miao tells him that the farthest is thirty thousand *li* 里 (or 15,000 kilometres) away, and the nearest over ten thousand *li* (5,000 kilometres) away. With a sigh, Mengmei makes a comic analogy:

Your Excellency, these insensible and footless treasures can reach the emperor from thirty thousand *li* away, while a competent scholar like me cannot reach the emperor from three thousand *li* away. I have feet but I cannot fly!⁶⁰

Mengmei continues in this vein, asking wittily if these treasures flew or walked to Macao. Miao cannot help laughing at such a ridiculous question. At this stage, Mengmei loses no time in proclaiming that he himself is “a genuine treasure” (*xian shi bao* 献世宝), and will prove at court that he is the rarest treasure on earth. Although Mengmei sounds boastful, Miao is impressed by his forthright and polemic expressions.

In a different exchange, Mengmei reveals to Miao that he has no way to finance the journey to take the imperial examination in the capital Lin'an 临安 (today's Hangzhou 杭州, in Zhejiang province). Miao is fond of this poor yet quick-witted man from the south. Just as the gentry gave pieces of gold to valiant men in ancient times, Miao readily sponsors him by giving him some silver from the official revenue to cover his travel expenses to the capital.

Miao asks his attendant to fetch some silver for Mengmei, and offers him a cup of wine that is

fermented from the litchi 荔枝 fruit.⁶¹ The attendant cheerily recites a couplet:

The Guangzhou folk prefer the litchi wine;
The north-bound scholar meets a patron benign.⁶²

Guangzhou folk and litchi wine are hence knitted together to suggest a kind of ethnicity specific to south China.

Scene 21 seems a minor episode and does not contribute to the main stream of the action; for this reason, it is often omitted in performances and in literary discussions. Yet, it is of pivotal importance in testifying to an East-West encounter among the Chinese and foreigners in Macao during the late 16th century. Tang Xianzu made concerted efforts to write this scene. He deftly incorporated Macao as the locale for the grand display of foreign treasures in order to advance the plot

Liu Mengmei and Chen Zuiliang in Scene 22, “A Hard Journey”.
Reproduced from *Tang Xianzu Xiqu Ji*.



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in which Mengmei's talent is finally appreciated. In the words of Cyril Birch, "It is some time before we realize that the jewels of which he [Tang Xianzu] prates at such length are all an elaborate metaphor for the 'hidden jewel', the as yet unrecognized scholarly talent of the hero."⁶³ The "hidden jewel" is luckily discovered by the kind-hearted Imperial Envoy. Although transitional, Scene 21 is an important prologue to Scene 41, "Late for the Examination".

THE MAN IN DREAM

Leaving Macao, Mengmei first goes to Sanshui 三水, a city west of Guangzhou, near the Xi River 西江, and then to Wuyang Cheng 五羊城 (the City of Five Rams, another name for Guangzhou), from whence he takes a boat to Nanshao 南韶 in Shaoguan 韶关, passes through Meiling and arrives at Nan'an in Jiangxi province (Scene 22). This north-bound route is clearly and accurately described. The accuracy is reminiscent of Tang Xianzu's travel experience in Guangdong, and his itinerary is interwoven into Mengmei's journey.

Mengmei's "journey" to success is full of thorns and brambles. There are distinct weather changes in Guangdong and Jiangxi provinces. It is warm in the south of Meiling, but turns cold in the north. When Mengmei takes his leave from Macao it is already autumn. After he passes Meiling he encounters freezing winter weather in Nan'an. As he crosses a broken bridge with the help of a nearby willow tree, he falls into the icy river. Even though he is promptly rescued by Chen Zuiliang 陈最良, a pedantic scholar and Liniang's former tutor, he catches a cold. This scene makes it obvious that the swot is not just physically too frail to withstand the frosty weather, but also harebrained enough to try to cross a broken bridge. In this way, the fragility and stupidity of the southerner are ridiculed.

In order to impress Chen, Mengmei boasts that he is an extraordinarily talented scholar, like "a jade pillar that holds up the sky and a gold bridge that spans the sea".⁶⁴ Chen immediately derides him with a satirical remark, "How come the pillar cracks in cold weather and the bridge collapses in the middle?"⁶⁵ Despite his overweening manner, Chen takes him to the Plum Blossom Nunnery (where the tablet bearing the deceased Liniang's name is enshrined) in the Du

family garden, gives him medicine, and allows him to stay there till spring comes.

Mengmei gradually recovers under Chen's care. Before long, winter passes and spring arrives. One day, Mengmei goes out to the garden to enjoy the scenery and accidentally comes across Liniang's portrait (Scene 26). He is stunned by the beautiful maiden in the picture, and wonders if she is Guan Yin (the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy) or Chang E (the fairy in the moon). He gazes at it every day and becomes infatuated with the beauty of the portrait. Immersed in sexual fantasies, he sings, "I seem to draw a cake to ease my greed; /She seems to look at plums to quench her need."⁶⁶ The more he looks at it, the keener he wants to hold the maiden in his arms. He sings in an anguished tone again:

Liu Mengmei in Scene 26, "Cherishing the Portrait".
Reproduced from Tang Xianzu, *Mudan Ting*.



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Let me call out: "Fair lady, fair lady! My dear,
my dear!"
Have you heard me call you?
I'll call out till you call back.
You seem to move your feet anew
And walk out of the scroll,
But you are still out of view.
Well, in my solitude, I'll cherish, revere, call
and praise her portrait from morning till
night.⁶⁷

In his room alone, Mengmei becomes ecstatic and seems to suffer from delusions, if not from erotic mania,⁶⁸ in yearning for the maiden in the portrait.

Soon Liniang's *hun* visits him and offers herself to the man in her dream (Scene 28). Without knowing who the girl is, Mengmei begins an affair with her spirit form. After many nocturnal trysts, Liniang eventually discloses that she is the maiden in the portrait. Mengmei is naïve enough that he could not identify the beauty in the picture with Liniang.

Meanwhile, Liniang entreats him to bring her back to life. Mengmei, in turn, seeks help in opening the coffin from Nun Shi 石道姑, the nun in charge of Plum Blossom Nunnery, and her nephew, a grave-digger. Miraculously, Liniang is restored to life after being entombed for three years. Her energy gradually returns and her health recovers. Mengmei hastily urges Liniang to marry him that night, but she insists that their marriage should be approved by her parents and arranged by a go-between (Scene 36). When he complains that she has already visited him many nights and has already engaged in marital relations with him, she explains that before she was in spirit form and could ignore ethical codes, but now, as a living maiden from a good family, she must follow human traditions. She tactfully refuses him:

Du Liniang: What's the hurry, Mr Liu? I've
waited upon you night by night.
Liu Mengmei: But what special night is this?
Du Liniang: You're [eagerly] lustful, right?
Liu Mengmei: You are being naughty!
Du Liniang: (*Smiles*) You are being naughty!
Not that I make a pretentious show,
Liu Mengmei: But what?
Du Liniang: (*Abashed*) But I'm just back to
life,

Not fit to make love, you know.
Here I stand before you,
Give me time to rest;
(*Aside*) Of course I love you best.⁶⁹

Let us recall that in Scene 10, "The Interrupted Dream", Mengmei is carried away with desire for Liniang when he meets her in the dream: he forcibly carries her into the Peony Pavilion to consummate their love. Likewise, in the real world, the scholar in her dream is beside himself with lustful desire (*ji she xiu cai* 急色秀才).

"The man in dream" affirms his role as a passionate lover, but is indecisive and oblivious to his career as a scholar. Fearing that Chen Zuiliang will report the grave-robbing to the local officials, Mengmei, Liniang and Nun Shi are very worried. It is Nun Shi, not the irresolute Mengmei, who finds a solution to the predicament. Moreover, in the wake of Liniang's return to life, he forgets all about the examination. At this stage, Nun Shi advises them to get married right away, and reminds Mengmei to take the highest level of imperial examination. The three of them then leave Nan'an for the capital Lin'an by boat.

When Chen Zuiliang goes to make offerings to Liniang's tomb on the anniversary of her death, he is shocked to find the tomb empty (Scene 37). In view of the exhumation, he exclaims, "That's it. Liu Mengmei is from Lingnan, and grave-robbing must be something common there. He must have hidden the coffin in a nearby place and cut off a corner as a demand for ransom money..."⁷⁰ For Chen, a graduate of the Confucian Academy at Nan'an, Lingnan is an uncivilized place. He indiscriminately assumes that all southerners must be villains who habitually rob graves.

THE ODDITY OF ODDITIES

After arriving in Lin'an, Mengmei proves to be unbelievably absent-minded. All his hopes for an official career are pinned to the imperial examination, held every three years, but he arrives too late to attend it: the examination papers have already been sealed by the Imperial Academy. He pleads to be allowed to sit the examination, but is rejected. At this point, he weeps and becomes emotional, and even threatens to commit suicide (Scene 41):

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I've come all the way from Lingnan with my family. As I have no way out, I'll knock my head against the steps and die in front of you at once.⁷¹

As soon as he mentions that he is from Lingnan, Miao Shunbin, now appointed chief examiner, recognizes him. It was in Macao that Miao first met him and sponsored him financially to come to the capital. The Macao episode (Scene 21) is thus crucial to the unfolding of the plot.

Miao remembers that Mengmei is "a pearl of man from the South", and makes an exception to allow him to sit for the make-up examination. In view of his outstanding results, Miao grants him first place in the imperial examination. Although Miao is a benign examiner, perhaps he epitomizes the incompetence and nepotism that prevailed among high officials in Tang

The Grand Finale in Scene 55, "Happy Reunion at Court".
Reproduced from *Tang Xianzu Xiqu Ji*.



Xianzu's time. While the play explicitly ridicules the examinee, it also implicitly mocks the examiner. As a twist in the plot, the announcement of the results is delayed due to an urgent and critical border conflict.

Later Liniang learns that her father, Du Bao, is under siege in Huaiyang 淮扬, and she asks Mengmei to go find him. At this juncture, the play is intersected by another comic episode (Scene 49). Mengmei reaches Yangzhou 扬州 but finds that Liniang's father has already been transferred to defend the city of Huai'an 淮安. He has to stay in an inn before continuing his journey. The inn-keeper easily squanders all his scraps of silver, and then accuses him of using quicksilver which vanishes into the floor cracks like tiny drops. Mengmei says in a soliloquy:

It conforms to the natural course of events that these things [scraps of silver] are gone with the wind. When my love died, the quicksilver was dead; when my love came to life again the quicksilver becomes alive. It's a pity that the common people do not understand these miraculous things.⁷²

The gullible Mengmei even offers his books and writing brush in exchange for food and lodging. When Mengmei tells the inn-keeper of his relationship with Du Bao, he is instantly thrown out of the inn, since Du Bao has already put up a "wanted" poster denouncing Mengmei as an impostor, but not his real son-in-law. Hungry and shelterless as he is, Mengmei seeks refuge in a nearby memorial temple.

In ragged clothes, and carrying nothing but a worn-out bundle, a broken umbrella and Liniang's picture, the dejected Mengmei reaches Du Bao's office in Huai'an. When he tells Du Bao that Liniang is restored to life and that he is his son-in-law, Du Bao is infuriated at the canard. He commands an officer to arrest him and put him in jail, and then escort him to the capital Lin'an for further interrogation when he returns to court.

In Lin'an, the emperor holds a banquet in the Garnet Grove to congratulate all the scholars who have passed the imperial examination. Mengmei was the top candidate and was named Number-One Scholar, but he is absent. The official in charge of the ceremony immediately sends out two sergeants to look for him everywhere in the capital—alleys, main streets, entertainment houses, and even brothels (Scene 52). One of the sergeants indignantly exclaims:

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How funny it is! How funny it is! Something strange has happened in our country. Isn't it unbelievable that the Number-One Scholar makes light of his career! Isn't it incredible that the Number-One Scholar brings so much trouble! Isn't it unthinkable that the Number-One Scholar walks away without notice! Isn't it inconceivable that the Number-One Scholar disappears like a coil of smoke! **Men from Lingnan are the oddity of oddities** [my emphasis]. Just look at the placard. It reads, "Wanted: Liu Mengmei, aged twenty-seven, of middling height, with a pale face." The descriptions are clear, but the man is nowhere to be found! Has he gone home, or passed away, or gone to sleep? He'll miss the palace banquet for him.⁷³

This sarcastic, derisive comment—"Men from Lingnan are the oddity of oddities" (*tian xia ren guguai, bu xizng liangnan ren* 天下人古怪，不像岭南人)—is embedded in the sergeant's exasperated monologue. This northerner makes the generalization that, of all the weird people in China, there are none to match the southerners from Guangdong province.

EXOGENY SANCTIONED

After Du Bao returns to Lin'an, he sends a runner to bring the impostor to be interrogated. The more Mengmei insists that he is Du Bao's son-in-law, the more Du Bao is enraged at this southerner. He is convinced that Mengmei is a mere grave-robber and orders the court officials to torture a confession out of him. While Mengmei is being beaten, the sergeants and Hunchback Guo come to the rescue. Miao Shunbin also arrives holding the robes and footwear that the emperor has granted to the Number-One Scholar.

In the grand finale (Scene 55), Du Bao still refuses to accept Mengmei as his son-in-law. There is a sharp altercation between them. When Du Bao accuses him of being a criminal, Mengmei argues that Du himself is also guilty—of not completely vanquishing the henpecked traitor Li Quan 李全, but only tricking his greedy wife into withdrawing the rebel troops. In addition, he bitterly points out that Du Bao has committed three parental errors concerning his daughter. By now, Mengmei shows his "southern barbarian character" by squabbling with Du Bao.

Du Bao irately denounces their marriage as an illicit affair, and there is an even more acrimonious dialogue:

Du Bao: Who was your matchmaker?

Du Liniang: Our matchmaker was the Funeral Star above.

Du Bao: Who were your wedding attendants?

Du Liniang: They were the nether-world sprites.

Du Bao: Sheer nonsense!

Liu Mengmei: It's a perfect match of man and a woman.

Du Bao: Perfect! Perfect lies from your scarlet lips!

Liu Mengmei: Sir, you are mocking at southerners chewing betel nuts, but I was born with scarlet lips and white teeth.

Du Liniang: No arguments! A daughter alive and kicking is ignored by her father while a ghost for three years was married by Liu Mengmei.

You cannot revive daughter;

Why are you reviling at my man [for chewing betel nuts]?⁷⁴

At long last, the audience realizes the main reason for Du Bao's rejection of a southerner to be his son-in-law. The bitter quarrel plainly reveals that Du Bao does not like the habit of betel-nut chewing.⁷⁵ During the Ming and Qing periods, it was not unusual for people in Fujian and Guangdong provinces to chew betel nut. When Tang Xianzu was in Guangdong, he came to know this cultural practice and wrote a five-character poem entitled "The Betel Nut Garden" (*Bin lang yuan* 槟榔园).⁷⁶ Regular betel chewing causes the teeth and gums to be stained red. That is why Du Bao jeers at Mengmei's "scarlet lips". In the play, this habit becomes a source of discrimination against, and revulsion towards, southerners.⁷⁷

An imperial decree eventually comes to sanction the exogamic marriage between a southerner and a northerner. Liniang concludes the play by singing, "Owing greatly to you, a southern twig for hugging a northern flower warm" (*kui sha ni nanzhi ai nuan an beizhi hua* 亏杀你南枝挨暖俺北枝花). This utterance is enigmatic, but brings to mind the overtly sexual dialogue in Scene 32, "Spectral Vows". In

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retrospect, when Liniang tells Mengmei to dig up the grave and bring her back to life, the hero asks if she is cold in the nether world and whether her soul will be disturbed in terror. The heroine sings, "Beneath roots of flowering tree/Lies a cavern which leads to the mortal world/And my cold, fragrant flesh you have already caressed half warm" (*an leng xian ji zao wei de ban re* 俺冷香肌早偎的半热). The playwright repeatedly uses the sexual metaphor of "warming": could he be hinting that this queer southerner is also a necrophiliac?!

CONCLUSION

In literary and dramatic circles, Tang Xianzu has been hailed as "an unprecedented genius with unsurpassed knowledge".⁷⁸ Remarkably, the rubric *Tang Xue* 汤学 (Tang Xianzu Studies) came into being during the first half of the 20th century. Some of his plays were even rewritten as *yueju* 粤剧 (Guangdong opera) in the mid-20th century. In 1999, when the People's Republic of China celebrated its fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the new regime, *The Peony Pavilion* in the *kunqu* form was performed. The choice of Tang's drama for such a momentous occasion speaks for the significance of his literary creation. In 2000, an international symposium was held in Tang's birthplace, Linchuan, commemorating his 450th birthday. His works have been translated into Japanese, German, French, Russian, and English. Regardless of a rocky and unfulfilled road to an official career in the Ming court, this man of letters has been declared one of 100 International Cultural Celebrities by UNESCO. Posthumously, Tang has been crowned with national and international fame.

The later years of the Ming dynasty simultaneously saw blossoming creativity in literature and undaunted defiance against the established thoughts consecrated by tradition. Just as the contemporaneous works *Fengshen Yanyi* 封神演义, or *Creation of the Gods*, (first published around 1567-1619) and *Xiyou Ji* 西游记, or *Journey to the West*, (first published in 1592) embody an unrealistic and fantastical mode of expression to subvert Confucian orthodoxy,⁷⁹ *The Peony Pavilion*, likewise, espouses the cult of *qing* to scoff at the ideological spectrum of Zhu Xi's coldly rational *li*. By manipulating the dream imagery, Tang Xianzu is an iconoclast, satirizing the prevailing traditional values and social

mores. The dream thus constitutes a major vehicle for the playwright to explore the freedom of thought, and to narrate the fantastic beyond the confines of bleak and grisly reality. His indomitable courage in illustrating the magnitude of *qing* is described by Anthony Yu as "utmost daring" in literary representation.⁸⁰

As Liniang faces her adolescent crisis in a cloistered world, Mengmei is a swot in an open world (for he can travel freely). This Guangzhou character is portrayed as a daydreaming parasite, being pompous, physically weak, psychologically perverse, lustful, irresolute, gullible, absent-minded, and emotional, though brilliant in his scholarly achievements. Does this "man from Lingnan" deserve to be loved? The sergeant's cynical remark, "Men from Lingnan are the oddity of oddities" may well express the playwright's own inductive impression of southerners.

Tang Xianzu's demotion to Guangdong is perhaps a blessing in disguise. His "southern" experience is his muse and his source for creative writing. In contrast to the image of south China as an unwholesome coastal area and an undesirable destination for banishment, Portuguese Macao is extolled as a trading port and a new Christian city. Above all, it is an exotic place where "East meets West". These are invaluable images of early Macao as a foreign enclave and the bridgehead for the Jesuits' proselytizing mission in Asia.

The Peony Pavilion provides a wide range of perspectives for interpretation and appreciation. It is not simply a lyrical work about furtive romance that defies orthodox boundaries; it is also a paean to the encounter of a Western enclave and the Eastern "Middle Kingdom". In addition, it applauds the exogamy of a southerner from Guangdong and a northerner from Jiangxi. Indeed, the play transcends geographical limitations, celebrating the dynamics of a crossroads between east and west, south and north, in late 16th century China. **RC**

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LITERATURE

NOTES

- 1 Tang Xianzu only passed the imperial examination at the national level on his fifth attempt. It is believed that his repeated failures might have been due to his rejection of an offer of patronage from the Senior Grand Secretary, Zhang Juzheng 张居正. For Tang Xianzu's biography in English, see Shang Tang 1974, Chapter 1.
- 2 The Ming government built the Barrier Gate in 1573 in order to isolate Macao from Chinese territories. In 1587 a civil magistracy was established to rule the Chinese in Macao.
- 3 Although the Portuguese landed on Macao in 1553 under the pretext of drying out their water-soaked cargo, they only succeeded in settling there in 1557 by paying tribute. So the year 1557 is generally considered the foundation year of Macao as a Portuguese settlement. See Roberts et al., 1992: 277-282.
- 4 The southern genre called *chuanqi* is a form of traditional Chinese operatic drama that developed from *nanxi* 南戏, or "southern opera", in the late 14th century. Beginning in the 13th century, the Mongol conquerors patronized a northern form of opera called *zaju* 杂剧, or "multi-act play". While *zaju* enjoyed popularity in the capital in the north, *chuanqi* flourished in the south, particularly in the provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangsu. *Chuanqi* alternated with *zaju* as the major form of Chinese drama until the mid-16th century, when *kunqu* 昆曲 opera began to dominate the Chinese theatrical arena.
- 5 Shang Tang, 1974.
- 6 Hua, 2005.
- 7 Lingnan 岭南 literally means "South of the Ridges". It denotes the region south of five mountain ridges that separate the Yangzi and Pearl River basins.
- 8 The four plays are: *Zichai Ji* 紫钗记 (*The Purple Hairpin*, 1587), *Mudan Ting* 牡丹亭 (*The Peony Pavilion*, 1598), *Nanke Ji* 南柯记 (*Record of the Southern Bough*, 1600), and *Handan Ji* 邯郸记 (*Record of Handan*, 1601). These plays are collectively known as *The Four Dreams at Linchuan* 临川, after Tang's birthplace, or *The Four Dreams at Yuming Tang* 玉茗堂, after the name of Tang's studio.
- 9 Yu, 1997:129. Scene 10, "The Interrupted Dream", was incorporated into Chapter 23 of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* as a rehearsal episode. Tang Xianzu's poem on *qing* was also quoted in Chapter 32. On the subject of *qing* in these two works, see Liu, 2005: 655-669.
- 10 *Kunqu* opera, also known as *kunju* 昆剧, originated in the 14th century in Kunshan 昆山, Zhejiang province. Not until the 1570's did *kunqu* opera achieve a pre-eminence beyond its locality, and in the 17th and 18th centuries it rose to the status of national opera. *Kunqu* opera soon became the most established operatic style with a thoroughly codified repertoire of melodies. The charms of the *kunqu* style were characterized by a smooth and mellow manner of singing and minimal orchestral accompaniment, typically the clapper or drum and a bamboo flute.
- 11 Sometime after 1623, the libretto of *The Peony Pavilion* was carefully edited and annotated by Feng Menglong 冯梦龙 (1574-1646). He gave his adaptation a different title—*Fengliu Meng* 风流梦, or *A Romantic Dream*—and made this play performable in the *Kunshan* style. See Swatek, 1998, Introduction, and Swatek, 2002, Chapter 1.
- 12 On the definition of *qing* in the Neo-Confucian context, see Yu, 1997: 56-66.
- 13 See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romeo_and_Juliet. Although *Romeo and Juliet* is thought to be the archetypal tragic love story, when compared with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, it appears to lack the psychological depth and the structural complexity of these four great tragedies.
- 14 Birch, 2002: x.
- 15 To the ancient Egyptians and Aztecs, the heart, rather than the brain, was seen as the organ that held one's mind and soul, because it was symbolically situated at the centre of the body.
- 16 The rationalistic revival of Confucianism in the 11th century has been commonly dubbed "Neo-Confucianism".
- 17 The essence of Wang Yangming's thinking focused on the notion of *liang zhi* 良知 (conscience, or the innate knowledge of good). The cultivation of *liang zhi* was a way to attain sagehood. Wang Gen shared with Wang Yangming the view that anyone could become a sage. Moreover, he emphasized the idea of *an shen* 安身, making the self or body secure.
- 18 Birch, 2002: ix.
- 19 Zhou, 2003: 87.
- 20 Yu, 1997: 192.
- 21 Jiangxi designates "west of the south of the Yangzi River" (Jiangnan Xi 江南西, or West Jiangnan), not "west of the Yangzi River". The name of this province was coined when the circuit of Jiangnan 江南, literally "south of the Yangzi River", was split into western and eastern halves during the Tang dynasty.
- 22 At the beginning of Scene 10, Du Liniang can see the Meiling Pass in the distance at dawn from her boudoir in Nan'an.
- 23 Since the Spring and Autumn Period (8th-5th centuries B.C.E.), people from the east, south, west, and north have been classified as barbarian tribes: the *Yi* 夷, *Man* 蛮, *Rong* 戎, and *Di* 狄, respectively.
- 24 "Canton" was the Portuguese or French romanization of Guangdong province, and its inhabitants were called Cantonese. Guangzhou is the pinyin romanization of the Mandarin name for the city.
- 25 Huang & Wu, 1986: 89-90
- 26 The Chinese versions of these two poems are quoted from Xu, 1999: Vol. 1, pp. 455-6.
- 27 <香山香逢贾胡>
不住田园不树桑，
玳珂衣锦下云樯。
明珠海上传星气，
白玉河边看月光
- 28 This is one of the two poems with the same title.
<听香山译者>
花面蛮姬十五强，
蔷薇露水拂朝妆。
尽头西海新生月，
口出东林倒挂香
- 29 At the beginning of Scene 9, the pert maid, Chunxiang, introduces herself in an aria, and quotes a poem beginning with the line: "A pretty lass in her early teens" 花面丫头十三四 (Wang, 2000:105). The poem was in fact borrowed, with slight changes, from one entitled "A Tribute to Xiao Fan" 寄赠小樊, in which Xiao Fan is the name of an entertainer, by Tang dynasty poet Liu Yuxi 刘禹锡 (772-842). See Liu, 1975: 305. In the poem on Macao, moreover, Tang changed some words to portray a foreign lady.
- 30 The *daogua* 倒挂, or, more precisely, *daogua niao*, 倒挂鸟 is a kind of tropical bird with feathers of five colours. At night it hangs upside down, and emits a fragrant smell.
- 31 This is one of the two poems with the same title. It is quoted from Xu 1999: Vol. 1, p. 469.
<端州逢西域两生破佛立义>
二子西来迹已奇，
黄金作使更何疑？
自言天竺原无佛，
说与莲花教主知。
- 32 It is believed that missionaries won new recruits by attracting them with money and presents. Chinese converts were mostly poor and

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- illiterate and they would receive financial aid every year after they converted, while literate converts were given even more money. See Zhang, 1995: 121-22.
- 33 Xu, 1999: 469.
- 34 The Portuguese monopoly over the evangelization of the East was consolidated by a Papal Bull in 1514. Almost all missionaries were Portuguese and those from other European countries who took part in the mission practically lost their national identity and became part of the entourage of the King of Portugal.
- 35 The second time Macao served as a bridgehead for Christianity was marked by the arrival of Robert Morrison, a Protestant missionary, in Macao in 1807. See Cheng, 1999: 66-72.
- 36 Ricci soon settled in Nanchang 南昌, the capital of Jiangxi province, in 1595, and left for Nanjing in 1599. He reached Beijing in 1601 and successfully gained favour at the imperial court. There followed a period of high hopes for evangelization.
- 37 In *Tang Xianzu nian pu* 汤显祖年谱, Xu Shuofang fails to explain how Tang and the two missionaries could have met in 1592, and the date of Tang's departure from Xuwen is incorrectly given as "spring" 1592. Given Xu's confusion in date, some Chinese scholars, without trying to look for other references, simply quote "spring" instead of "autumn" for discussion. See Luo, 2000: 52-53; Tang, 2001: 65-71. Following the wrong chronology, some even maintain that Tang Xianzu never met the two "Western scholars". See Luo, 2006: 13-26; Gong & Fan, 2008: 186-200 (previously published in *Zhongguo Suichang Tang Xianzu Guoji Xueshu Yantaohui Lunwen Ji* 中国遂昌汤显祖国际学术研讨会论文集, 2006: 271-287).
- 38 Huang & Wu, 1986: 91.
- 39 Ricci, 1953: 248-9.
- 40 The Rites Controversy began shortly after Matteo Ricci's death in 1610 and ended when Pope Benedict XIV issued the famous Bull *Ex Quo Singulari* in 1742. The controversy was mainly an internal and inter-missionary dispute over concepts of philosophy, theology, and eschatology, but later turned into an open political and religious power struggle between China and Rome.
- 41 For instance, the contemporaneous work *Fengshen Yanyi* 封神演义 (*Creation of the Gods*) was an outgrowth of *Wuwang Fa Zhou Pinghua* 武王伐纣平话 (King Wu's Expedition against the tyrant King Zhou). Also, *Xiyou Ji* 西游记 (*Journey to the West*) was predicated on the historical sources in *Datang Xiyu Ji* 大唐西域记 (*The Great Tang Record of the Western Territories*).
- 42 Presumably, prompt-books were used by professional storytellers as summaries or notes for the live performances on the street or in the marketplace.
- 43 The text of this *huaben* can be found in Xu, 1980: 239-247.
- 44 Zhou, 2003: 77-86. The willow is a symbol of femininity because of its pliable twigs and supple leaves. Given its defiance of wintry cold and ice, it is also taken as an emblem of masculine fortitude. Similarly, the plum imagery embodies the elegant beauty of a legendary plum-blossom fairy, but it also represents endurance and fortitude as its blossoms bursts into bloom despite the frozen chill of early spring.
- 45 Wang, 2000: 59.
- 46 Wang, 2000: 177-8.
- 47 Wang, 2000: 303.
- 48 Birch, 1980: 110.
- 49 Macao is also poetically known as Haijing Ao 海镜澳 (Sea-Mirror Bay); Lianhua Dao 莲花岛 (the Island of Lotus Flowers), and Lianyang 莲洋 (the Ocean of Lotus-Blooms).
- 50 St. Paul is considered the first great Christian missionary and is a favourite patron saint of Macao and Goa. On the history of the Church of St. Paul, see Teixeira, 1979.
- 51 The Jesuits, who were often called "Paulists" in the East, were members of the Society of Jesus, founded by Ignatius Loyola in 1534. The first Jesuit, Father Belchior Nunes Barreto, arrived in Macao in August 1555, but it was not until 1563 that three Jesuits founded the branch of the Society of Jesus there. See *Pursuing the Dream: Jesuits in Macau*, 1990.
- 52 Hugo-Brunt, 1954: 329.
- 53 St. Joseph's Seminary was founded by the Jesuits in 1728 and the Church was opened in 1758. Together with the Collegiate of St. Paul's, they formed the principal base for the Society of Jesus.
- 54 On the Ruins of St. Paul's, see Cheng, 1999: 83-100.
- 55 Wang, 2000: 303.
- 56 Wang, 2000: 305.
- 57 Wang, 2000: 307.
- 58 On Wu Li in Macao, see Cheng 2006.
- 59 Wang, 2000: 310.
- 60 Wang, 2000: 313.
- 61 Litchi (variant spellings: lychee; laichi) is a tropical fruit native to southern China.
- 62 Wang, 2000: 317.
- 63 Birch, 1980: xiii.
- 64 Wang, 2000: 327.
- 65 Wang, 2000: 327.
- 66 Wang, 2000: 405.
- 67 Wang, 2000: 407.
- 68 "Erotic mania" is the name given to a morbid activity of sexual propensity. It is a disease or morbid affliction of the mind, and impels its victims to acts of the grossest licentiousness.
- 69 Wang, 2000: 575-7.
- 70 Wang, 2000: 601.
- 71 Wang, 2000: 649.
- 72 Wang, 2000: 813.
- 73 Revised from Wang, 2000: 867.
- 74 Wang, 2000: 961.
- 75 Betel nuts can be chewed for their effects as a mildly euphoric stimulant, attributed to the presence of relatively high levels of psychoactive alkaloids. Chewing betel nuts has been an important and popular cultural activity, which dates back thousands of years in many Asian countries. Betel chewing is addictive and increases mouth ulcers and gum deterioration.
- 76 On "The Betel-Nut Garden" 檳榔園, see Xu, 1999: Vol. 1, pp. 465-66.
- 77 On the discussion of the Guangdong character in *The Peony Pavilion*, see Lei, 2006a and 2006b.
- 78 Wang, 2000: 18.
- 79 Confucianism used to react with hostility to supernatural elements and the fantasies, and occultism of mythology.
- 80 Yu, 1997: 105.

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