

# Research on the Premiere of Chinese Drama "Peony Pavilion"

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## ABSTRACT

The Chinese drama "Peony Pavilion", created more than 400 years ago, is the representative work of Tang Xianzu, the great dramatist of the Ming Dynasty. "Peony Pavilion" describes the touching story of the spoony Du Liniang and the intellectual Liu Mengmei, who knows each other and die because of being awakened and unable to see the each other in the dream, and then get together forever. This great creation has been sung for more than 400 years. Various versions of the opera vocals have been presented on the stage again and again, but the first vocal of premiere has never been restored. This article mainly discusses the textual research and characteristics of the premiere version of Tang Xianzu's "Peony Pavilion".

*Keywords: Peony Pavilion, premiere, opera version, characteristics*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Linchuan District, Fuzhou City, Jiangxi Province, the hometown of Tang Xianzu, is located in the east of Jiangxi Province. Linchuan, known as the hometown of talented people, has bred Tang Xianzu, a world-class dramatist as famous as Shakespeare. Tang Xianzu has been proficient in poetry and music since he was a child. His four drama works of "four dreams in Linchuan" have been popular for more than 400 years and are still sparkling. "Peony Pavilion" is the most satisfactory masterpiece, which depicts a love story that transcends life and death. The touching story of the heroine Du Liniang who died of love and revived for love is full of romantic drama color.

During the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty, the creation of legends reached a climax, and the turbulent social environment provided a broad source for the creation of legends. With the influence of Yiyang tune and Haiyan tune, the dramatists of Linchuan School headed by Tang Xianzu, created dramas that reflected reality, expressed nature and were not bound by tunes. Tang Xianzu created a dream in the maze of "Peony Pavilion". The theme of "sincere love" in the drama depicts something that human beings can never reach but yearn for forever, and tells the world that love can be so noble.

## II. HISTORICAL RESEARCH ON HAIYAN TUNE OF YIHUANG ARTISTS IN THE PREMIERE OF "PEONY PAVILION"

The 49-year-old Tang Xianzu abandoned his official position and returned to his hometown in 1598. He created a dream in his writing, became an envoy for his feelings, and started his writing career of opera — The Peony Pavilion. "Peony Pavilion" was published in 1617, the 45th year of Wanli period in Ming Dynasty. There were 55 scripts in total. The premiere of "Peony Pavilion" with Haiyan tune of Yihuang County came out.

In the thirtieth year (1602) of the Wanli reign of the Ming Dynasty, Yihuang artists began to build the temple of Qingyuanshi. Tang Xianzu was invited to write the inscription on temple building, namely, "Inscription on the temple of Qingyuanshi, the God of opera in Yihuang County" (hereinafter referred to as the "Inscription"). "Inscription" originally wrote about temple construction, but Tang Xianzu wrote a special treatise on opera of less than a thousand words, which was unconventional. At the beginning of the "Inscription", it said: "love comes from life. There is thinking, cheering, anger and sorrow. That is so wonderful! Master Qingyuan!" It not only talked about the origin of opera, but also summed up the occurrence of opera. It expressed the opera view of "real sentiments" that people had feelings in life and songs and dances could express feelings. There were no actresses in Yihuang opera troupes in Ming Dynasty, and men acted as female heroine. "Inscription" also put forward the requirements of "always thinking of being a woman"

for opera actors. Tang Xianzu's view of opera in "Peony Pavilion" is the same as that in "Inscription". He also expressed the view of "real sentiments" in the inscription of "Peony Pavilion". Tang Xianzu had a deep friendship with the opera artists. He not only compiled plays, but also arranged and directed them. He even arranged plays and performance affairs for the troupe. He kept close contact with the artists. His concern for the performance and life of the artists also enriched the experience of Tang Xianzu's opera art practice.

"Peony Pavilion" was written by Tang Xianzu for Luo Zhanger, an Yihuang artist. In his writing "To Luo Zhanger", "Is Zhanger happy or not? How is your physiology recently? 'Peony Pavilion' should be based on my original story. It must not be changed by Lv. It shouldn't beg for money and wine." According to the letter, people can see Xianzu's concern for Luo Zhanger, and his arrangement for the performance that artists should use the original "Peony Pavilion" and not ask for too much food and wine. Tang Xianzu found comrades and regarded them as confidants not among the literati, but among the artists. It can be seen that he is the spiritual pillar of thousands of artists in the local opera circle, and the "Inscription" has become the guiding document pursued by the local opera circle. Tang Xianzu personally tutored Yihuang artists in music. He not only wrote plays, but also presented and directed them.

"Peony Pavilion" caused the "Debate between Tang and Lv" in the field of opera at that time. Tang Xianzu expressed his objection and dissatisfaction to LV Yusheng's modification of the Peony Pavilion for the convenience of singing in Kunqu Opera more than once. For this reason, Tang Xianzu wrote a letter to actors to reiterate that opera should be based on the "interest and charm", and it mustn't destroy the "interest and charm" of the work for the sake of harmonizing the tune. Tang Xianzu earnestly told the artists to perform according to the original "Peony Pavilion", and other versions must not be followed, such as adding one or two words for popular singing, which would be quite different from the original interest and charm. It can be seen that Tang Xianzu is very opposed to the adaptation of "Peony Pavilion" into other vocals, and "Peony Pavilion" was what he wrote for Haiyan tune of Yihuang artist. The poem "knowing that it's Qingyuan to keep tanqu, and using Tang's lyrics to sing Yihuang on the stage" is used by later generations to describe Tang Xianzu's dramatic works for Yihuang artists to sing in Haiyan tune. Haiyan tune of Yihuang artists sung in the premiere of "Peony Pavilion" was the Yihuang local opera tune, which was introduced into Yihuang by Tan Lun, a Yihuang native, from Zhejiang Province because of his father's death. Within three years, Haiyan tune took root in Yihuang and combined with the local Yiyang tune (Huizhou,

Qingyang and other tunes) to form a variety. It is not the Erhuang tune of Yihuang. This Haiyan tune was also called "Yihuang tune" at that time. Tang Xianzu's "four dreams of Linchuan" are all sung with this kind of variant Yihuang local opera tune.

### **III. VOCAL FEATURES OF THE PREMIERE OF "PEONY PAVILION"**

In "Inscription", Tang Xianzu mentioned that there were two kinds of operas: northern zaju and southern zaju. There was no detailed discussion on northern zaju. He made some comparisons on the accompaniment instruments and singing styles of three kinds of southern zaju. South zaju spread to Kunshan County, Jiangsu Province, and evolved into Kunshan opera, singing with "Wu sound". Southern zaju spread to Haiyan County, Zhejiang Province, and evolved into Haiyan tune, singing with "Zhejiang sound". Kunshan tune and Haiyan tune both beat rhythm with clapping, and the singing style must be "quiet and good", "gentle and elegant". South zaju spread to Yiyang County in Jiangxi Province and evolved into Yiyang tune. It was accompanied by gongs and drums, and its singing was noisy. Haiyan tune and Yiyang tune are all sung in Gaoqiang (a kind of rhyme scheme of Chinese opera), and the premiere of "Peony Pavilion" is sung in Gaoqiang and elegant tune without accompaniment.

The singing style of the premiere of "Peony Pavilion" is the style enjoyed by the upper social circles. Tang Xianzu had a close relationship with Zhu Quan, the king of Ningxian in Nanchang at that time. The later generations of Ningxian were good at Haiyan tune. In the premiere of "Peony Pavilion", the drumbeats of Yihuang artists resounded. They clapped and sang along with the accompaniment: "when calling and taking the teapot, the cuckoo is chirping. people can watch it for a few days. Don't have the first step, and please be quiet and not to arouse other people in the forest." The melody was elegant and melodious, among which there were many people singing, and there were rules but not limited by them. Actors sometimes sang in a free tone. The whole play was only accompanied by gongs and drums without any strings, which made the melody with a strong flavor of Kunqu Opera but totally different from Kunqu Opera. The actors used their mellow voice to sing the high tune and elegant tune, some of which were similar to Japanese plosive, which was the legacy of Yiyang local tune. Du Liniang sang, "Bright the morn, lovely the scene...listless and lost the heart...where is the garden gay with joyous cries?" The melodious melody and varied rhythm combined with Du Liniang's delicate and smooth singing can't help but make people intoxicated in the "Peony Pavilion". The rich and mellow Haiyan tune of Yihuang artists bring the audience into the aesthetic environment of the "Peony Pavilion".

In Peony Pavilion, the melody of Haiyan tune of Yihuang artists is mostly in the altos. After adding the voice of the people, the melody turns to the high-key tune, and has the elegant sound cavity. The vocal accompaniment avoids gongs and drums and changes the accompaniment of the singing to small gongs and small drums, which reduces the noise of the vocal accompaniment and gongs and drums and adds the elegance for Haiyan tune. The melody often appears in the second half of the next sentence. At the end rhyme, there would have vocal accompaniment or member chorus. Every time the last sentence is finished, the band members will sing again. The combination of Haiyan tune and Huizhou and Qingyang tune changed from local Yiyang tune not only maintains the local characteristics, but also highlights the style of "elegant tune". The melodic lines in the alto voice are sometimes true voices. When encountering high tunes, they use fake voices to turn over high tunes. The melody has a complete form and pays attention to the rhythm change. The elegant and graceful combination of Haiyan tune and the beautiful lyrics of "Peony Pavilion" makes the "West Chamber" reduce its value at that time.

#### **IV. THE PROFESSION CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PREMIERE OF "PEONY PAVILION"**

Tang Xianzu was well aware of the importance of the basic procedure of the system. When describing the history of opera development, he closely grasped the evolution of the business system and discussed it. Yihuang tune inherits the system of Haiyan tune. Xiaosheng is included in the Shenghang, which is obviously different from Kunqiang tune. "初止爨弄参鹞, 后稍为末泥、三姑旦等杀剧传奇." The basic outline of the development history of drama in Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties was sketched out in 19 words. Tang Xianzu believed that from the two roles of "canjun" and "canghu" in the drama "joining the army" to the three roles of "suan", "gu" and "dan" in Song zaju and sangudan (suan acting as comedian, gu acting as old man, and dan acting as woman), thus the northern Zaju and southern opera were produced. The six professions mentioned in "Inscription", namely, canjun, canghu, moni, suan, gu and dan, evolved into the basic professions of northern zaju and southern opera. However, their titles have changed a little. Finally, the system of Haiyan tune of Yihuang artists basically followed the eight professions of Haiyan tune at that time: Sheng, Dan, Jing, Mo, Chou, Wai, Tie and Laodan. There is no such profession as Xiaosheng. Xiaosheng is included in Shenghang, which is obviously different from Kunqiang.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

"Peony Pavilion" represents the highest level of drama creation in the Ming Dynasty. Tang Xianzu used

the form of "song" to express his feelings. He is the only "drama master" in China who is praised by scholars in China and foreign countries as comparable to Shakespeare. Tang Xianzu attached great importance to the political role of opera in stabilizing the society, and hoped that the whole country would advocate the art of opera, there was once a sentence that "filial piety should serve its relatives, and this should be the great sinus of human feelings and the great happiness of the music." Secondly, Tang Xianzu advocated the freedom of love with emotions. It told a touching story of Du Liniang, a great official, who died and revived for love, finally being with Liu Mengmei. It played a spring breeze for the women who were persecuted by feudalism at that time and advocated the freedom of emotion and human rights for the women of the times. In the end, Tang Xianzu publicized the liberation of personality in the drama, dispelled the fog of Wang, Cheng and Zhu's Neo Confucianism, and opened up a new battlefield of ideological emancipation and personality publicity for the rising trend of thought at that time.

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