

Introduction

Notes for a History of the Translation of Tang Tales

The study of the tale-literature from the Tang dynasty began less than one hundred years ago with May Fourth scholars, especially Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936). His anthology, *Tang Song chuanqi ji* 唐宋傳奇集, prepared in the late 1920s, was the first modern critical edition of the texts and helped to initiate the generic term by which they are now often known: *chuanqi* 傳奇 or “transmissions of the strange.” Glen Dudbridge, the doyen of T’ang-tale studies in the West, has argued that the label *chuanqi* is essentially a creation of May Fourth critics and should not be used to refer to narratives such as those translated in this volume. At the other extreme, Li Jianguo 李劍國, one of the masters of this genre in contemporary China, suggests that several hundred texts deserve to be labeled *chuanqi*.¹ Lu Xun 魯迅 steers a middle course in his *Tang Song chuanqi ji* 唐宋傳奇集,² which includes some thirty tales. Sarah Yim, in one of the earliest Western studies of these tales, based her claim that there were about seventy Tang tales on

¹ See Li Jianguo, *Tang Wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 唐五代志怪傳奇敘錄 (2v.; Tianjin: Nankai Daxue Chubanshe, 1993).

² First published in 1927 by Beixin Shuju 北新書局 in Shanghai and revised several times (our edition was that of Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe published in Beijing in 1954).

Wang Pijiang's anthology.³ However, Wang had carefully avoided the term *chuanqi*, titling his book *Tangren xiaoshuo* 唐人小說,⁴ precipitating a discussion in China over the genre that continues to this day. Whatever generic label one may give to these accounts in Chinese, the term "Tang tale" is widely accepted in the West.⁵

There is something distinctive about what are now considered the major tales, those generally written in the first decades of the ninth century. Many deal with the trials of the literati in the capital, their love lives or political vicissitudes. In addition to the normal conventions of verisimilitude, such as expositions that resemble the 'historical biography,' these tales are often capped by colophons noting the origin of the piece, origins that are often claimed to have been via oral transmission.⁶

Long before Lu Xun, however, Western scholars began to take an interest in classical-language fiction, with translations from the *Soushen ji* 搜神記 (Records of Searching for the Strange)⁷ that date to the 1840s. Several renditions of stories from Pu Songling's 蒲松齡 (1640-1715) *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異 (Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio) then appeared in the 1870s. The first translation of Tang tales seems to have been that of Georges Frederic Leon Wieger (1856-1933) in the early years of the twentieth century.⁸

³ Yim's dissertation, "Structure, Theme, and Narrator in T'ang *Ch'uan-ch'i*," was accepted by Yale University in 1979.

⁴ Preface 1929 (Rpt.; Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1978 [1936]).

⁵ Patrick Hanan was perhaps first to suggest the dichotomy between "classical-language tale" and the "vernacular story" in his studies of the *huaben* genre.

⁶ A variant coda, in imitation of the historian's comments following a biography that first appeared in the *Shiji* 史記, can also be found, especially in the works of the *guwen* 古文 writers like Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819).

⁷ Cf. Martha Davidson, ed., *A List of Published Translations from Chinese into English, French, and German* (2v.; Ann Arbor, Michigan: J. W. Edwards, 1952), 1:85-87.

⁸ These were a few selections from the *Guang yi ji* 廣異記 which appeared in Wieger's *Folk-lore chinoise moderne* (Ho-kien fou: Mission Catholique, 1909).

Arthur Waley's (1889-1966) renditions of "Li Wa zhuan" 李娃傳 ("The Story of Miss Li") and "Yingying zhuan" 鶯鶯傳 ("The Story of Ts'ui Ying-ying") which appeared in Waley's *More Translations from the Chinese*⁹ certainly drew a wider audience.

But the serious study, teaching and translation of these texts began shortly after Lu Xun completed his anthology in the late 1920s. Sung-nien Hsu's 徐松年 (1904-1981) *Contes choisis des T'ang*,¹⁰ the first collection of translations of these texts, was published only a few years thereafter,¹¹ but Hsu based his sixteen renditions on Wang Pijiang's *Tangren xiaoshuo* 唐人小說. A close friend of Wang, Hsu used a translation of Wang's "Tangren xiaoshuo zai Zhongguo wenxue shang zhi diwei" 唐人小說在中國文學上之地位 as his introduction (pp. 1-23).¹²

For English readers, however, it was Evangeline Dora Edwards' (1888-1957)¹³ *Chinese Prose Literature of the T'ang Period*,

⁹ Published in New York by Alfred A. Knopf (1919) on pp. 113-36 and 101-13 respectively.

¹⁰ Peking: Imprimerie de la politique de Peking, 1935 (128 pages). Hsu's original name was Zhongnian 仲年 (Songnian was his penname). He published half a dozen works in French on Chinese literature, including the well-known *Anthologie de la littérature chinoise* (Paris: Delgrave, 1933), and a number of works in Chinese. Among numerous posts in China, Hsu served at the Shanghai Waiyu Xueyuan 上海外国语学院 for twenty years (1956-1976).

¹¹ Hsu was the first to translate Lu Xun's story collection "Nan han" 呐喊 into French.

¹² The idea of such a collection had come from a conversation between Henri Maspero (1882-1945) and Hsu in May 1930. It seems Hsu was also able to consult Wang Pijiang as he translated the tales. Although the resulting translations generally hold up well in comparison to other early renditions, some errors are readily apparent, such as Hsu's romanization of the protagonist of "Nanke Taishou zhuan", 淳于棼, as "Tch'oen-yu Wen."

¹³ After spending six years in China from 1913-1919, Edwards returned to the University of London where she studied and then taught in the School of Oriental and African Studies, serving as Acting Head of the Far East Department in 1939 (See Walter Simon, "Obituary: Evangeline Dora Edwards," *BSOAS* 21 [1958]: 220-4).

A.D. 618-906 in the late 1930s that provided the first widely read collection of Tang tales.¹⁴ Edwards notes her indebtedness to Lu Xun in her preface, but she chose the *Tangdai congshu* 唐代叢書 as her base text. Edwards translated (or paraphrased) and analyzed a great number of Tang tales. Although she has been criticized for errors in translation and for the selection of the original base text,¹⁵ her work contributed immensely to the early study of Tang tales.

A few years later, the noted translator Chi-Chen Wang (1899-2001), who had given Western readers the first (abridged) English version of the *Honglou meng* in 1929, published his *Traditional Chinese Tales*.¹⁶ Although Wang appends a bibliographic note, he gives no information on which base text he used for his translations.

Yang Xianyi 楊憲益 (1915-2009) and his wife Gladys B. Tayler (Dai Naidie 戴乃迭, 1919-1999) offered the next collection of Tang tales, ten works titled *The Dragon King's Daughter* (Beijing: Waiwen Chubanshe, 1954).¹⁷ Their short introduction, while introducing some ideas similar to those that Lu Xun had offered in his *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* 中國小說史略 in the early 1920s,¹⁸

¹⁴ London: Arthur Probsthain, 1937 and 1938 (2 vols.).

¹⁵ Review of Edwards by Lü Hsiang in *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu huikan* 中國文化研究彙刊 (Bulletin of Chinese Studies) 1 (September 1941), pp. 291-301.

¹⁶ Containing fourteen Tang tales and five *huaben* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944).

¹⁷ Yang was in England for the period 1936-1940 and met his Beijing-born wife while studying French at Oxford (in 1940 she became the first graduate in Chinese at that university). Whether Yang or his wife had any contact with E. D. Edwards is not known, but it is likely either Yang or his noted friends of the time—including S. I. Hsiung, Xiao Qian, and Qian Zhongshu—were well aware of her work.

¹⁸ Lu Xun's history was first published in two volumes in 1923 and 1924, and later revised; many modern reprints are available. On the evolution of the text of this famous history, see John C. Y. Wang, "Lu Xun as a Scholar of Traditional Chinese Literature," in *Lu Xun and His Legacy*, Leo Ou-fan Lee, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 93-94.

does not specify which texts they used. The translations, although free, often offer a clearer rendition than those of other translators.¹⁹

The favorable reception of the Yangs' translation led Foreign Languages Press to issue a second, similar anthology of twenty-two stories titled *Stories of Old China* (1958). These texts, including six Tang tales (four not previously available in English) had been translated in 1942 by the scholar-official W. W. Yen (Yan Huiqing 顏惠慶, 1877-1950) during house arrest in Hong Kong. There is no indication of what texts Yen used.²⁰

Just two years after W. W. Yen's translations appeared, Elizabeth Te-chen Wang presented free renditions of twenty-two tales in her *Ladies of the Tang* (Taipei: Heritage Press, 1961). Although the accuracy of these versions was widely criticized, the collection was important (1) because it reached so many Western scholars during the 1960s and 1970s and (2) because it contained the only English-language translation of several tales. Wang apparently based her renditions on the *Taiping guangji*.²¹

¹⁹ The translations of a number of tales in Bruno Belpaire's *T'ang kien went se, Florilege de littérature des T'ang* (2v. Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1959), renditions based on the *Tangren shuohui* 唐人說薈 (alternatively titled *Tangdai congshu*) are not significant; Belpaire translated the same texts that Edwards had, but seems genuinely unaware of her renditions—see James R. Hightower's review in *HJAS* 21 (1958): 187-90.

²⁰ Yen, a graduate of the University of Virginia, had served for a little over a month as President of the Republic of China in 1926. His translation of "Zhenzhong ji" 枕中記 seems to follow the text of the *Taiping guangji*, but his attribution of the tale to a certain, unspecified Li Mi [did he mean the well known scholar-official Li Mi 李密 who lived from 722-789??] is puzzling.

²¹ Zhang Youhe's 張友鶴 annotated versions of nearly forty tales (*Tang Song chuanqi ji* 唐宋傳奇集, first published in 1963; rpt. Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1998) had an impact on scholarship within China, but because it was published shortly before the start of the Cultural Revolution, and was eclipsed by the work of Wang Meng'ou and Li Jianguo after that decade, exerted little influence on Western translations.

The next important collection of translations—nine tales from the Tang²²—resulted from the cooperation of two major figures of twentieth-century German Sinology, Herbert Franke and Wolfgang Bauer (1930-1997) and was titled *Die goldene Truhe*.²³ The volume, which contains many of the same stories Chi-Chen Wang included, was translated into English by Christopher Levenson and published by Penguin Classics in 1964. In the following two decades, it enjoyed a wide readership in both the German original and the English translation.

Just a year later, Ch'u Chai (1906-1986) and Winberg Chai, who had made their reputation in studies of Confucianism, presented five of their own tale translations in their *A Treasury of Chinese Literature; A New Prose Anthology including Fiction and Drama* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1965).²⁴ Thus by the late 1960s a number of versions of the major Tang tales were available in English, French and German. But there was little scholarship on either the original texts of these tales or of their translations.

The situation was to change significantly with the publication of James R. Hightower's "Yüan Chen and the 'The Story of Ying-ying'" in 1973. Although this article was intended to be a thorough study of the relationship between Yuan Zhen the author and Yuan Zhen the protagonist of the tale, it contains (pp. 93-103) a careful, heavily annotated translation of "Yingying zhuan" 鶯鶯傳, and is therefore the first scholarly rendition of a Tang tale. Published in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*,²⁵ Hightower's translation continues to have a broad impact on students and scholars even today.

²² In all Bauer and Franke included nearly fifty tales, ranging from excerpts from the *Shiji* 史記 to the Ming *chuanqi* 傳奇 by Qu Yu 瞿佑 (1341-1433) and others to *Liaozhao zhiyi* 聊齋誌異.

²³ Munich: Carl Hanser, 1959.

²⁴ "Huo Xiaoyu," "Renshi zhuan," "Wushuang zhuan," "Nanke Taishou zhuan," and "Qiuran ke zhuan."

²⁵ *HJAS* 33 (1977): 93-123.

Three years later, William H. Nienhauser's "An Allegorical Reading of Han Yü's 'Mao Ying chuan' 毛穎傳 (Biography of Fur Point)," *Oriens Extremus*, 23.2 (1976): 153-174 attempted, without the grace and style of Hightower's translation, to explore the subgenre of Tang pseudo-biographies²⁶ through a complete translation and close reading of Han Yu's "Mao Ying zhuan."²⁷

Yet if it was Hightower who prepared the foundation for the scholarly study of Tang tales in the West, Glen Dudbridge was the scholar who established the first edifice on that foundation. Dudbridge's *The Tale of Li Wa* (London: Ithaca Press, 1983) set all the norms: from the first line of its "Introduction" to the last sentence of the appendix on "Musical contests in Ch'ang-an," *The Tale of Li Wa* is a model of textual criticism, annotated translation, and organization. Dudbridge's careful attention to the details of the history of the "Li Wa zhuan" 李娃傳 tale, to its author, and to its dating, are juxtaposed to his inspired reading of the work as a veiled attack on the three sons of Zheng Hu 鄭晷 (708-777).²⁸ The book also adumbrates future study, its fifth chapter including a discussion of "Renshi zhuan" 任氏傳, pointing to the *you wu* 尤物 (beautiful creatures) of these tales as women who often lead the male protagonists to the "dangerous edge" of life. All this serves as background for Dudbridge's translation and analysis of two versions of "Li Wa zhuan" (the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 and of the *Lei shuo* 類說) that complete the volume. The two original texts are printed on the verso pages facing his English translation. By

²⁶ Cf. Franke, Herbert. "Literary Parody in Traditional Chinese Literature: Descriptive Pseudo-Biographies," *OE*, 21 (1974): 23-31.

²⁷ Two more recent translations of this pseudo-biography are in Hightower, "Han Yü as Humorist," *HJAS* 44 (1984), and in Elling O. Eide, "Another Go at the *Mao Ying chuan*," *T'ang Studies*, 8/9 (1990-1): 107-11.

²⁸ Dudbridge published a reconsideration of his approach to allusions in "A Second Look at *Li Wa chuan*," in Eugene Eoyang and Lin Yao-fu, eds. *Translating Chinese Literature* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 67-76.

comparing these texts, Dudbridge shows that the *Lei shuo* version preserves elements of an alternative, no-longer extant, version of “Li Wa.” Modeled on the Arden Shakespeare editions (in particular on Frank Kermode’s edition of *The Tempest* [1954]), Dudbridge believed that his book would inspire other monographs on other Tang tales, a hope that has not been fulfilled.²⁹

Instead, translations of the tales continued to be aimed at a general audience. The next important collection was that selected and prepared by H. C. Chang in his *Chinese Literature 3: Tales of the Supernatural* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), which presented several tales that had not been previously translated. His extensive introduction to the genre (pp. 14-27) also contributed to a burgeoning interest in these tales among Western students.

That interest was recognized by Y. W. Ma and Joseph S. M. Lau, who for the first time assembled a team of translators—including James R. Hightower, Jeanne Kelly, Peter Rushton, Donald Gjertson, and the present author—to render twelve tales (in addition to a number of vernacular stories and some *zhiguai*) in their *Traditional Chinese Stories, Themes and Variations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978). Although they appended a still useful set of “Biobibliographic Notes” (pp. 575-85) in which they took note of Wang Meng’ou’s early annotations of these stories (in his *Tangren xiaoshuo yanjiu, erji* 唐人小說研究，二集 [Taipei: Yiwen Yinshuguan, 1978]), these translations relied primarily on versions found in the *Taiping guangji*. The renditions are lightly annotated and, despite the considerable editorial efforts of the two editors, vary in reliability.

²⁹ Perhaps the only publication since 1983 of a Tang-tale translation that attempted to match the standards of *The Tale of Li Wa* can be found in Dudbridge’s own “A Question of Classification in Tang Narrative: The Story of Ding Yue,” in Alfredo Cadonna, ed. *India, Tibet, China: Genesis and Aspects of Traditional Narrative* (Florence: L. S. Loschki, 1999), pp. 151-80.

Karl S. Y. Kao, following the model and suggestion of his teacher Joseph Lau, also organized a team of translators to help him gather the next important group of translations of Tang tales in his *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). This collection contained thirty-six Tang tales and sixty *zhiguai*, making it the single most important source of translations of this genre even today. The translations were done by colleagues at the University of Wisconsin (where Kao did his graduate work) and Yale University (where Kao was teaching). Major contributors included Pedro Acosta, Paula Varsano, Laurie Scheffler, Douglas Wilkerson, and Cordell Yee. Kao also provides useful bio-bibliographic notes and an bibliography that reaches beyond his model. A major contribution, however, is the excellent, lengthy "Introduction" (pp. 1-51) which endeavors to apply modern narrative theory to Chinese tales.

A few years later and several thousand miles away, André Lévy, who had made a name in his work on vernacular stories, was preparing a two-volume collection of Tang tales in translation to rival Kao's: *Histoires d'amour et de mort de la Chine ancienne, Chefs-d'oeuvre de la nouvelle (Dynastie des Tang. 618-907)* and the subsequent *Histoires extraordinaires et récits fantastiques de la Chine ancienne*.³⁰ Following lengthy introductions to both volumes, Lévy offers renditions of twenty-four tales with notes, a list of previous translations, and commentaries that include textual notes, introductions to the authors, parallel texts (some translated in full), and Lévy's own insights.

The early 1990s Madeline Spring gave us another careful study and translation of the fictional biographies and fables, found primarily in the writings of members of the *Guwen* 古文

³⁰ Paris: Aubier, 1992 and 1993. If there is a drawback to these volumes it is the lack of Chinese characters.

Movement, in her *Animal Allegories in T'ang China* (1993).³¹ That same year Victor H. Mair included several similar works (including “Mao Ying zhuan”), as well as five classical-language tales (by Hightower, Dudbridge, and Nienhauser), in his *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*. Pauline Bentley Koffler’s heavily annotated rendition of “Gujing ji” 古鏡記, also appeared in 1993.³²

Since 1993 translations of Tang tales have appeared in various anthologies. Stephen Owen published his own translations of four Tang tales in his *Anthology of Chinese Literature, Beginnings to 1911* (1996).³³ This was followed by nine translations John Minford and Joseph Lau included in their *Classical Chinese Literature, Volume 1: From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty*.³⁴ Although several are older translations (from Cyril Birch, E. D. Edwards, James R. Hightower, and Chi-chen Wang), there are new translations by Hightower (“The Alchemist”), Robert Joe Cutter (“The Betrothal Inn”), John Minford (“Liu Yi”) and Nienhauser (“Mid-River”). Monika Motsch’s study of Tang tales (“Tang-Dynastie: Vom Mythos zur Literatur,” 2003) does not contain full translations of tales, but the extensive excerpts and commentary she provides still merit

³¹ Published by the American Oriental Society (New Haven, Connecticut). See also Spring’s “Roosters, Horses, and Phoenixes: A Look at Three Fables by Li Ao,” *MS 39* (1990-1): 199-208.

³² Koffler’s “The Story of the Magic Mirror (*Gujingji*) by Wang Du” was published in *Hommage à Kwong Hing Foon, Études d’histoire culturelle de la Chine*, Jean-Pierre Diény, ed. (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études, 1993), pp. 165-214.

³³ “New York and London” W. W. Norton, pp. 518-49; two of these translations (“Yingying’s Story” and “Huo Xiaoyu’s Story”) were also included in Owen’s *End of the Chinese ‘Middle Ages,’ Essays in Mid-Tang Literary Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 178-204.

³⁴ Published as “Chapter 28: The World in a Pillow,” by Columbia University Press (pp. 1019-1076).

mention.³⁵ Finally, in 2004, Jacques Pimpaneau gave us four tales into French in his *Anthologie de la littérature chinoise classique*.³⁶

The translations included in this volume have benefitted from many of the above renditions. They have evolved over the past fifteen years in seminars, Saturday morning meetings in my dining room, and several workshops. Although they may not match all of the high standards set by Glen Dudbridge, they attempt to provide the first annotated versions, relying heavily on Wang Meng'ou's *Tangren xiaoshuo jiaoshi* 唐人小說校釋 (2v.; Taipei: Zhengzhong 正中 Shuju, 1983), of six tales. Moreover, through the translators' note, they will allow students of Tang tales a closer look into the meanings, both within and beyond the texts, of these wondrous narratives.

William H. Nienhauser, Jr.
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³⁵ In her *Die chinesische Erzählung vom Altertum bis zur Neuzeit* (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2003), pp. 80-131. Volume 3 of Wolfgang Kubin, ed., *Geschichte der chinesischen Literatur*.

³⁶ Arles: Philippe Picquier, 2004. The tales are: "Kunlun nu" (pp. 478-482), "Changhen ge zhuan" (pp. 482-89); "Yingying zhuan" (pp. 489-98); "Li Wa zhuan" (pp. 499-511); and "Qiuran ke zhuan" (pp. 511-18; all with light annotation).