widely during the Yuan dynasty, including daola, a "mast dance," and a shaman dance known as andaiwu (peace-spokesman dance). The taipinggu (great-peace drum) dance and mangbiwu (rash dance) were legacies from the Manchu minority. The Tibetans often stood hand in hand in a circle and performed the tiaoguozhuang (dance around the hearth). They also liked the xuanzixiu (string dance), reba, and manjuwu (mask dance). Tibetan palace-feast dances included the naoma and an ardent duixie (tap dance).

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Theater Arts: Drama

The Rise of Drama
The beginning of Chinese drama may be located in the zaju (variety play) of the Song era (960–1279), which evolved over a long period from primitive songs and dances and many ancient palace and folk shows. Theater art of the Song period is generally categorized as Northern variety play or Southern drama.

Origins of the Northern Variety Play. The Northern variety play emphasized comedy and dialogue and inherited characteristics from court- and folk-dance dramas such as tayaoniang (stepping and singing woman), botou (move with head), and damian (big face), as well as the canjunxi (adjutant play), a sort of skit with musical accompaniment, which by the Song era already had many theatrical elements. By the Northern Song dynasty (960–1125) characters in an adjutant play were no longer limited to two, and instrumental and vocal music were incorporated into the plot. A genre known as “multiple palace tunes,” invented by actor Kong Sanchuan during the middle of the Northern Song dynasty, reached its maturity with Xixiangji zhugongdiao (The Western Chamber—Multiple Palace Tunes) by Dong Jieyuan (flourished 1190–1208). Sometimes called the father of the Northern variety play, Dong arranged various palace tunes into several suites and interspersed them with spoken dialogue to tell a story. The plot was structured on a large scale and developed characters in much detail. Meanwhile, the washi (spontaneous market), which also developed during the Song era, provided theater art with a stimulating milieu for its development. The spontaneous market was an outdoor entertainment center that usually had several dozen stages and entertainment tents, some large enough to hold several thousand people. By the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1368) the Northern variety play was strictly systematized. Usually the main play consisted of a single and complete story in four acts or song sequences. Only the protagonist, either male or female, sang the songs. This zhuangyajie (core variety play) was preceded by a yanduan (colorful piece) that included dialogue, martial arts, dance, songs, and various means to attract an audience. It was often, but not always, followed by zaban (variety acts) such as comic patter and dancing. The zhuangyajie included music in the form of palace or Buddhist melodies, as well as humorous dialogue. There were usually five characters: the moni (male protagonist), the jintou (introducer, who also often played the female character), the fujing (the object of teasing), the fumo (teaser), and the zhuanggu (official). Song variety plays were rich and colorful but were more loosely structured than variety plays of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), which were cohesively plotted dramas. The yuanben, a Jin dynasty (1115–1234) version of the variety play, was even more important than the zaju to the development of the Yuan variety play. Nearly seven hundred Jin variety plays were written, as opposed to fewer than three hundred Song variety plays. The Jin plays had more interesting stories than those of the Song, and many—such as Zhuangzhou meng (The Dream of Zhuangzhou), Chi bi aobing (The Fierce Battle at Red Cliff), Du Fu yuansu (Du Fu's Spring Tour), and Zhangsheng zhuai (Mr. Zhang Boils the Ocean)—were adapted for later variety plays.

Yuan Variety Plays. The variety play reached its full development in the Yuan era, during which some two hundred playwrights wrote about seven hundred to eight hundred plays, of which only 530 have survived intact. The subjects of these plays may be divided into several categories: crimes and lawsuits or corrupt versus honest officials; love and marriage; religion and the supernatural; family and ethics; and revenge and the bandit-hero.

The Four Masters of the Yuan Variety Play. Guan Hanqing (circa 1213 – circa 1297), Wang Shifu (flourished late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries), Ma Zhiyuan (circa 1250 – 1324), Ji Junxiang (flourished late fourteenth century) were called the “Four Masters” of Yuan variety plays. The greatest of these playwrights is Guan Hanqing, who wrote about sixty-seven plays, including Dou E yuansu (Snow in Midsummer), an classic Chinese tragedy. Eighteen of Guan’s plays are extant. Wang Shifu wrote fourteen plays, of which only three have survived in complete form. One is his version of Xixiangji (The Western Chamber), based on a well-known marvel tale, "The Story of Yingying (Little Oriole)" by Yuan Zhen (779–831), which was earlier the basis for Dong Jieyuan’s The Western Chamber—Multiple Palace Tunes. The best of the Yuan romantic dramas, Wang’s play is the love story of a beautiful girl, Cui Yingying, and the talented young Zhang Junrui, who falls in love with her in defiance of feudal tradition and values. The play challenged and satirized conventional ethics, extolling the sacred nature of pure love and advocating freedom of choice in marriage. Wang was a master of dramatic language. He employed the vernacular with occasional and sometimes witty recourse to poetic and historical terms. Ma Zhiyuan wrote thirteen plays, of which seven are extant. His best work is Hangangjiu (Autumn in the Han Palace), the story of patriotic princess Wang Zhaojun, who is married to a foreign ruler to make peace with that country and ends up committing suicide after her mission. Ma used graceful, pure language and was a master of expressing feelings. Ji Junxiang wrote six plays, of which only Zhaoshi...
Illumination of a scene from the play *Western Chamber*, Yuan dynasty, 1279–1368
(from Bradley Smith and Wan-go Weng, *China: A History in Art*, 1973)

guer (The Orphan of Zhao) has survived. The play is based on a classic story about people who sacrifice themselves and their child to rescue the orphan of the Zhao family. The play is a pioneering tragedy and was one of the first Chinese plays to be translated into a European language. Another well-known Yuan playwright was Bai Pu (1226–1306), who wrote sixteen plays, of which only two survive. His *Wutongyu* (Rain on the Plantain Tree) is a dramatic version of Tang poet Bai Juyi’s “The Song of Everlasting Sorrow,” about the fatal love between Tang emperor Xuanzong (ruled 712–756), also known as Minghuang, and his concubine Yang Yuhuan. Bai’s *Qiangtou mashang* (Over the Wall and on Horseback) is a comedy about the elopement of a young couple who fell in love at first sight. Playwrights of the late Yuan era include Zhen Guangzu, Qin Jianfu, Qiao Jie, and Gong Tianxiang. Yuan playwrights produced many plays that employed stories from the novel *Water Margins*, of which more than thirty survive, including eight by Gao Wenxiu, who took Li Kui from *Water Margins* as his protagonist.

**The Rise of Southern Drama.** A famine in the North, the shift of the economic center from the North to the South, and the restoration of the civil-examination system that attracted literati away from dramatic activities—as well as an ossification of the Northern variety play—all contributed to its decline in the early fourteenth century, after it had prospered for a century. It was gradually replaced by Southern drama. Originally called “the variety play of Wenzhou” or “the variety play of Yongjia,” the Southern drama or variety play developed from traditional folk song and folk dance and absorbed elements of Song music and lyrics. One of the few surviving early Southern Song dramas, the anonymous *Zhangxie Zhuangyuan* (Top Graduate Zhangxie), does not have separate sections like those of Song-era Northern variety plays. Rather, all parts of *Top Graduate Zhangxie* are smoothly interconnected with dances.
and songs. These Southern plays synthesize various performing arts and stage methods, and give all the characters, not just the protagonist, a chance to sing, solo, in duets, or in the chorus. The appearance of Pipaji (The Lute Song) by Gao Zecheng (circa 1301 – 1370, also known as Gao Ming) marked the maturity of the Southern drama. The play is about Cai Boxie, whose father forces him to leave his parents and wife to take the civil examination. After he gets the highest score, he is forced to take an official position and to marry the daughter of the prime minister. Eventually, the wrong is corrected by the prime minister after he witnesses the filial piety of Cai and his former wife toward his now-deceased parents. The Lute Song successfully unfolds two twisted and contrasting plotlines, exhibiting none of the disorder and monotony of previous Southern dramas. It also led to the reorganization of song sets. As a result of such reforms, Southern drama became characterized by intriguing plots, humorous and intelligent dialogue, resonant arias, penetrating music, appropriate and graceful dancing, colorful costumes, and exquisite stage design—offering its audiences an exciting experience. Yet, Southern drama received less attention than Northern drama and was even suppressed because it was folk drama and often exposed and criticized the injustice and corruption of the ruling class. The total number of Southern plays was perhaps 150, but most of them are lost.

Four Chuanqi Masterpieces. The term chuanqi originally referred to the marvel tales of Tang-era fiction, but it was later used in reference to a dramatic form that reached its peak during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Differing from Southern drama, the marvel-tale play was long, and had a complicated plot and a fixed structure. It followed stricter rules than the Southern drama and—unlike the Southern drama, which has no internal divisions—it was divided into scenes. Four anonymous plays are considered the greatest marvel tales. Jingchai ji (The Thorn Hairpin) and Baiyue ting (The Moon Prayer Pavilion) are about a man who has to leave behind his loyal wife, who suffers maltreatment rather than betray him during his absence. Baitu ji (The White Rabbit) portrays the unconditional and eternal love between mother and son. In Shaguai ji (Killing a Dog) a wife kills a dog to persuade her husband to leave fox-like and dog-like "friends" and restore harmony with his brother. Unlike previous, tragic Southern dramas that portray the male protagonist as a greedy and ungrateful betrayer of his wife, all these plays have happy endings in which virtuous women are rewarded. These plays reflected the changing morality of the Ming era, which was influenced by neo-Confucianism and reinforced the dominant role of the man and the subordinate role of the woman in the family and society.

The Height of Ming Drama. After the middle of the Ming era, when drama critic Li Zhi (1527–1602) denounced neo-Confucianism and advocated human rights and individual freedom, Southern drama reached its high point. Meanwhile, the Northern variety play became more like the Southern play. More than five hundred plays by more than one hundred playwrights were written during the Ming dynasty. Of these, some 180 plays have survived. The overall quality of Ming plays is far below that of Yuan plays. Notable late-Ming plays included Du Fu youchun (Du Fu's Spring Tour) by Wang Jiusi (1468–1551), Zhongshanlang (The Wolf of Mount Zhong) by Kang Hai (1475–1540), the 4-play cycle Sixbengyu (Four Shrieks of a Monkey) by Xu Wei (1521–1593), Baojianji (The Story of a Sword) by Li Kaixian (1502–1568), Huanshajiai (Washing Gauze) by Liang Chenyu (circa 1521 – circa 1594), Yuzanjin (The Story of a Jade Hairpin) by Gao Lian (late sixteenth century), Yuxianqian (One Penny) by Xu Fuzhuo (1560–?), Yueyang sanmeng (Three Plays of Yueyang) by Shen Zizhi (1591–1641), and the anonymous Mengfengji (The Story of a Singing Phoenix).

Tang Xianzu and the "Linchuan School." The greatest Ming playwright was Tang Xianzu (1550–1616) from Linchuan in Jiangxi Province, who was renowned for a group of plays known as "The Four Dreams of Linchuan." One of Tang’s "Four Dreams," Mutanding (The Peony Pavilion), has fifty-five scenes and focuses on the love story of Liu Mengmei, a young scholar, and Du Liniang, the daughter of a high official. Du falls asleep in her family’s garden and dreams that she has an affair with an ideal lover in the Peony Pavilion. After awakening, she becomes lovesick and dies from a broken heart. Before she dies she draws a self-portrait. Having discovered the self-portrait near Du’s grave, Liu begins longing for Du, whose soul has been freed by the sympathetic judge of the underworld. After she appears in Liu’s dream, Liu exhumes her body, brings her back to life, and marries her. Later Du sends Liu to find her parents, who were lost during the Tartar invasion. Du’s father cannot believe that his daughter has been resurrected nor can he forgive her for marrying without his permission. Eventually, however, an imperial intervention brings reconciliation and reunion. Tang never established a dramatic school or movement, but his influence on his contemporaries was so profound that many playwrights from different regions claimed to belong to the "School of Linchuan."

Shen Jing and the School of Wujiang. Shen Jing (1553–1610) of Wujiang in Jiangsu Province challenged Tang’s dramatic style, stimulating the development of theories on drama and marvel tales. Shen criticized Tang’s stress on lyric sentiments and his characters’ passions to the extent that he neglected rhyme and versification. A master of metrical rules, Shen angered Tang by revising his Peony Pavilion. Except for Yi-xiaji (The Righteous Chivalry), which was fairly popular, Shen’s seventeen plays lack imagination and passion. He was most respected for his Nanjiugong shisandiao qupu (Thirteen Tables of Southern Prosody) and became the leader of the School of Wujiang. It included many well-known playwrights, including Peng Menglong (1574–1646), Ruan Dacheng (1587–1646), Wu Bing (died 1646), and Meng Chengshun (flourished 1600–1640).

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THEATER ARTS: THE GENRE SHOW

The Tang and Song Genre Show. The quyi (genre show) is a folk-art performance including elements such as ballad singing, storytelling, comic dialogues, and clapper talks. The genre show originated during the Tang dynasty (618–907) when Buddhists discovered that they were more successful with the masses when they sang Buddhist texts, using music to attract audiences. This earliest form of genre show is called zhuankan, which means "singing Buddhist texts"; bian refers to the murals in Buddhist temples, and bianwen (Buddhist scripts) initially referred to the all-genre shows from Dunhuang literature in Gansu Province. A thorough study of Dunhuang literature, however, revealed that another form of folk drama, the shuobua (storytelling show), existed during the Tang era and was already quite advanced. It differed from the early zhuankan mostly in having secular rather than religious content. In the early zhuankan the singer used Buddhist paintings to illustrate his subject. Later, there emerged subian (secularized Buddhist texts)—mainly telling historical, folk, and contemporary tales—and improved acting skills made the use of Buddhist paintings unnecessary. King Geshaer is a Tibetan epic without written text that has been told and passed on by genre-show actors from generation to generation. It includes more than sixty stories and more than a million lines of song lyrics, which is the longest among the world’s epics. All its song tunes are derived from one melody.

Song Genre Shows. During the Song dynasty (960–1279), genre shows gradually moved from the court to urban areas, following the development of the spontaneous market, an urban amusement area with stages and entertainment tents. The subjects of Song genre shows could be secular, military, religious, or historic. Several forms of genre-show performances developed during the Song era. Guzici (poetic drum) was singing with or without spoken