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Singing Punishment and Redemption in the Taiping Civil War: Yu Zhi's Plays

Abstract Among the dramatists who depicted the Taiping Civil War, attempting to find meaning in the carnage and chaos, Yu Zhi (1809–74) is unique. He wrote plays during and after the war, so he considers the chaos from two historical vantage points. As one of the earliest literati to write plays in the newly popular *pihuang* form, he addressed different actual and imagined audiences compared to his peers. Although virtually all extant plays take an absolute anti-Taiping stance, his plays differ from his contemporaries' in their focus on morality rather than sentiment, and on edification rather than commemoration. At the root of these differences is an understanding of the nature of evil, redemption, and belief.

Keywords Taiping Civil War, Yu Zhi, drama, didacticism

Introduction

The moral crusader and social activist Yu Zhi 余治 (1809–74) ends his account of the devastation of the Taiping Civil War and the subsequent restoration of social order, *Jiangnan tielei tu* 江南鐵淚圖 (Tears of iron for Jiangnan, illustrated), with an image of proper plays being performed.[1] With this conclusion he argues that the right kind of drama is both the culmination of the restoration of social order and the hope for its continuation. However, he wrote some of his plays in the midst of the upheaval, portraying and addressing not the residents of this newly orderly and peaceful world but those caught up in the violence and uncertainty of the war, on both sides. Yu Zhi's plays are a unique example of a playwright using

[1] Yu Zhi, *Jiangnan tielei tu*, 86.

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drama not only to memorialize and give meaning to calamity, but to attempt to intervene.

In *What Remains*, Tobie Meyer-Fong has made a masterful portrait of Yu Zhi, placing his words and works in the context of responses to the Taiping war. Katherine Alexander has studied Yu's work in the oral performance form *baojuan* (precious scrolls).[2] This article expands upon those portraits to look at Yu Zhi's plays, while at the same time contributing to an ongoing project about plays depicting the war and its aftermath.

Other dramatists depicting the Taiping wars claimed that plays allowed literati authors to instruct "ignorant men and women" incapable of reading other genres, but the high literary language of their plays and, in most cases, their lack of performance history and limited circulation even in print suggests this was more ideal than reality.[3] An audience of their peers, fellow literati admiring the impulse to educate the masses, was more immediately accessible than the actual masses. In contrast Yu Zhi's took the mission of mass education seriously enough to become a dramatic innovator. He was one of the first literati authors to write and publish large numbers of *pihuang xi* 皮黃戲 (by some accounts more than forty, with twenty-eight still extant), the form of drama better known to us now as Peking Opera. By eschewing the higher-status and less accessible *chuanqi* 傳奇 and *zaju* 雜劇, he placed the goal of reaching his desired audience above his own status as a literary writer.[4]

Every one of Yu's surviving plays has a didactic purpose summed up in a single phrase in the table of contents. Most of these are "timeless" sins or virtues not linked to a specific historical context, but assumed relevant to contemporary society: plays against female infanticide, gambling, the waste of paper, etc. In contrast, four plays are explicitly set during the civil war. *Qian chujie* 前出劫 (Emerging from the ordeal, part one) and *Hou chujie* 後出劫 (Emerging from the ordeal, part two) are concerned with moral actions and their consequences for ordinary citizens of Jiangnan caught up in the chaos. *Yinyang yu* 陰陽獄 (A criminal case of *yin* and *yang*) portrays the rise, fall, and the ultimate punishment of the Taiping leadership. *Jiehai tu* 劫海圖 (Illustration of the sea of calamity)

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[2] Tobie Meyer-Fong, *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in Nineteenth-Century China*, 23–63. Katherine Alexander, "Conservative Confucian Values and the Promotion of Oral Performance Literature in Late Qing Jiangnan: Yu Zhi's Influence on Two Appropriations of *Liu Xiang baojuan*," 89–115.

[3] See for example Xu E's preface to *Lihua xue* (Snow on the pear blossom/The pear blossom rights wrongs).

[4] Yu Zhi is the first author listed in the section on playwrights in *Zhongguo jingju shi*. Beijing shi yishu yanjiusuo and Shanghai yishu yanjiusuo ed., *Zhongguo jingju shi*, 1: 566–70.

combines the two themes, portraying the Taipings as both the instrument of moral justice and the subjects of karmic judgment, in turn.[5] Corresponding with their plausible dates of authorship, the first two plays are set in the midst of the rebellion, ending when an individual or a family, rather than the society, finds resolution, and the last two imagine the war's end.

Yu Zhi's purpose and his imagined and actual audience set him apart from his contemporaries: moral instruction outweighs commemoration, and performance outweighs reading. Most importantly for didactic plays, Yu Zhi has a different understanding of the Taipings, as well as a different understanding of the nature of evil, compared to many contemporary playwrights.

Textual History

The now extant edition of Yu's collected plays, *Shujitang jinyue* 庶幾堂今樂 (Modern songs from Shujitang, 1880), includes a fairly detailed account of its own messy textual history. After Yu Zhi's death some of the plays were copied from the original printed edition (preface 1860), some were gleaned from complete manuscripts, and others were reassembled from incomplete and damaged manuscripts. Some with extant titles have been lost altogether. The four Taiping plays include examples of each origin: *Qian chujie* and *Hou chujie* were compiled from the original printed edition, *Jiehai tu* from a manuscript, and *Yinyang yu* was recreated from incomplete manuscripts. The first two were thus most likely written in the midst of the civil war. The manuscripts' dates are unknown, but *Yinyang yu*'s reference to events of 1864 makes it clear that Yu wrote this play after the war's end. Yu's plays thus offer views of the war from at least two historical moments.

In addition to the 1880 printed edition, abbreviated performance texts of all but one of Yu Zhi's surviving plays, including all four of the Taiping plays, are included in the manuscript collection of the Chewangfu, Beijing, now available in a 2013 edited edition.[6] I have seen reference to an 1894 or 1895 lithographic edition of four plays, including *Qian chujie* under the title *Xiaozi bao* 孝子報 (Reward of a filial son), *Nan zhong fu* 難中福 (Good fortune in the midst of

[5] For this paper I have primarily relied on the 1880 edition of *Shujitang jinyue* (Suzhou, Yuanmiao guan dejianzhai) available online in the collection of the University of Tokyo. I have also consulted a copy of an edition with the same date but some differences in the arrangement of the front matter held in the library of the Academica Sinica, and another held by the Shanghai Library.

[6] Huang Shizhong et al. eds., *Qing Chewangfu cang xiqu quanbian*, vol. 15.

calamity, apparently an alternative title for *Hou chujie*), and *Jingni ji* 靖逆記 (Record of subduing the rebels, the title of one of the incomplete manuscripts that was incorporated into *Yinyang yu*), as well as *Tie gongji* 鐵公雞 (The iron rooster, a later play depicting the Taipings, inspired in part by Yu Zhi), but I have not yet been able to see it.[7]

The Power of Plays

Yu Zhi wrote extensively about the pernicious values promoted by popular entertainment, as well as its great and largely untapped potential as a moral reform tool. Yu claims that although drama had originated as a vehicle of moral teaching, in the hands of contemporary actors plays had degenerated to promote both debauchery and banditry rather than positive moral values.[8] Drama was an inexpensive and highly effective means of universal moral education. "How is it that any child three feet tall knows of the 108 outlaws of Liangshan, or Zhang, Yingying, and Hongniang from the romance *The Story of the Western Wing*? From plays." His examples are carefully chosen: one play promoting banditry and another illicit love affairs. The same instrument, by his argument, would be equally effective transmitting moral content.[9] Yu Zhi has a vision of propaganda's effectiveness that seems well ahead of his time. He envisions a world in which only morally correct plays will be permitted to be performed, a level of control never achieved by the Qing monarchs to whom he remained loyal, but rather by a new anti-imperial regime that emerged a century after he wrote.

Although in some ways conservative, Yu Zhi's deploring of the values espoused by *xiaoshuo* and drama alongside his conviction of their power seem a forerunner of Liang Qichao's 梁啓超 (1873–1929) famous arguments for remaking the Chinese novel in order to remake the Chinese people.[10] Yu advocates the banning of both improper *xiaoshuo* and plays, and imagines proper works produced in their place, but it is in plays (and one *baojuan* discussed in *What Remains*) that he

[7] Zhao Shanlai dates this edition to 1895, *Zhongguo jindai xiqu biannian*, 163. Deng Shaoji dates it to 1894 and says it is held at the Beijing University Library, *Zhongguo gudai xiqu wenxue cidian*, 727, 504, 832.

[8] Yu Zhi, "Jiaohualiang da di lun" (On the two great enemies of moral education) in *Zunxiaoxuezhai shiwen ji*, 1.5–11. "Shang Dangshi shu" (A letter to those managing affairs) appears in that collection as well as in, in an abbreviated version, the front matter of *Shujitang jinyue*, 1.22a–25a.

[9] "Shang Dangshi shu," 1.23b.

[10] Liang Qichao, "Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi."

actually puts his ideas into practice.[11]

Yu Zhi and Performance

Yu Zhi's production of texts reflects his practical experience with performance, training a group of orphaned boys to sing his plays, thus combining his efforts at charity and public education. This theatrical context is neither that of the professional theater or the private salon, but a new model of public engagement in both the identity of the actors and the subject of their performances. According to his own account and that of his disciples producing a posthumous printed edition, the first printed edition (no longer extant) was produced for the use of actors learning their parts. In the frontmatter of the collected plays, Yu Zhi's self-justification is to an imagined interlocutor who had been part of the audience performances of plays, rather than to a reader of a text.[12]

Yu Zhi's engagement with playwriting and performance spanned the mid-war and postwar periods. According to the chronological biography by one of his students, Yu Zhi ascended the stage where villagers had been putting on plays to plea for support for orphanages in 1849, well before the outbreak of the civil war.[13] This interruption suggests the kernel of the idea to make his moral message itself a play. In 1859, in the midst of the rebellion, he was performing his plays in Changshu and Jiangyin.[14] The preface to the plays was written 1860, the year the war overtook him personally. His plays experienced a renaissance during the post-war restoration, as he was summoned by Yan Chen 嚴辰 (1822–93) to perform them in various places in 1873, and Yang Changjun 楊昌濬 (1825–97) praised them, saying they should be performed throughout the provinces.[15] Yu died before he could complete his intended revised edition, but on his deathbed he urged his disciples to publish and transmit his plays.

Reception history seems mixed. Only a single play, *Zhusha zhi* 硃砂痣 (The cinnabar mark), which was not about the war, appears to have enjoyed a long run on the stage that lasted beyond Yu and his students' efforts.[16] According to reports in the *Shenbao*, his plays, republished through the charitable efforts of his students, were distributed to theaters in Shanghai as alternatives to the pernicious plays the

[11] "Shan ding gou yinshu xiaoshuo yi" (Argument for expurgating, revising, and limiting the sale of lascivious books and novels), in *Zunxiaoxuezhai shiwenji*.

[12] "Da ke wen" (Answering a guest's questions), in the frontmatter of *Shujitang jinyue*, 17a.

[13] Wu Shicheng, *Yu Xiaohui xiansheng nianpu*, printed with *Zunxiaoxuezhai shiwenji*, 311.

[14] Ibid., 319.

[15] Ibid., 326.

[16] Deng Shaoji ed., *Zhongguo gudai xiqu wenxue cidian*, 646.

government was trying to forbid in the 1880s. In 1880, another one of his non-war plays was successfully staged in a teahouse.[17] Later reports on this campaign to clean up theater repeatedly refer to this distribution of his plays, but they primarily reveal the campaign's long-term ineffectiveness. No further details of actual performances are supplied.[18] A commentator writing around 1883 remarked that these efforts attracted scant attention, and that further attempts perform them had faded.[19] The title of his collection instead became a symbol of the attempt to promote morally edifying plays, still cited in an article as late as 1941.[20] In contrast, Michelle King quotes Qi Rushan as saying that sixteen of Yu Zhi's plays were still being performed at the turn of the twentieth century.[21] A later (1893) and ultimately much more successful play in which the Taipings were the antagonists, *Tie gongji*, originally bore a title page advertising it as a new version of Yu Zhi's plays.[22] Despite the attention he gave to performance, his efforts to reach a mass audience, and a period of recognition as a brand name for an ideal of edifying drama, Yu and his plays ultimately had the same fate as his peers' closet dramas.

The Problem of Evil and the Possibility of Redemption

As part of Yu Zhi's earnest attempt to address a mass audience, he argues playgoers must be presented with moral problems relevant to their situation. Using the metaphor of medicine, he contends staging of the loyalties and betrayals of powerful ministers and princes are the wrong prescription for the moral ailments of ordinary people. Both nature of the moral dilemmas, Yu writes, and the degree of moral failure must be adjusted to the audience. Too exaggerated an idea of evil would make ordinary evil people take comfort rather than warning from the

[17] *Zhongguo jindai wenxue daxi: Xiju juan*, introduction, 4. "Ji yan xin xi qingxing" (Recording the circumstances of ordering new plays), *Shenbao*, June 30, 1880. Zhao Shanlai, *Zhongguo jindai xiqu biannian*, cites *Zhongguo xiqu zhi* to list *Yinyang yu* among the plays that had an 1880 performance, 112.

[18] See for example "Ju shuo" (On plays), *Shenbao*, February 15, 1881; "Lun shen jin xinxi zhi fa" (On the method of prohibiting lascivious plays), *Shenbao*, November 12, 1881.

[19] Huang Shiquan, *Songnan mengying lu*, *juan* 3, reprinted in Fu Jin et al. ed., *Jingju lishi wenxian huibian*, 8:143.

[20] "Xiju" (Plays), *Shenbao*, February 16, 1941.

[21] Michelle T. King, *Between Birth and Death: Female Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century China*, 63.

[22] Zhao Shanlai, *Zhongguo jindai xiqu biannian*, 162–63.

punishment meted out to extreme villains ("At least I am not as bad as him"). It could also lead them to forgive themselves too easily.[23] While the dramatists of the past portrayed strange maladies, Yu describes the moral equivalent of endemic contagious diseases. By introducing a more commonplace vision of evil, he leaves room for reform.

The different role type structures of *chuanqi* and *pihuang* affect the balance of good and evil characters, as well as major and minor characters in Yu's plays as compared to those of his contemporaries. The central refugee in *Qian chujie* and *Hou chujie* is a *sheng* 生 (male lead), thus having the same moral center as some *chuanqi* portraying the Taiping wars.[24] In contrast with others' plays his protagonists are not officials or educated men. Although there are female roles in the plays, none of them are central, as opposed to *chuanqi*'s attempt to balance *sheng* and *dan* 旦 (female lead). Whereas in *chuanqi* the Taiping villains are played by *jing* 淨 (painted face), *fujing* 副淨 (secondary painted face) or *chou* (clown), for the latter two roles often a mix of evil and crude comedy, for Yu Zhi both redeemable and irredeemable Taiping leaders are played by the *jing* role type. In the attempt to portray multiple rebel leaders in *Yinyang yu* all possible role types are deployed, with Li Xiucheng 李秀成 (1823–64) as a *sheng*. Morality adheres to individual choice, rather than to role type.

Yu Zhi treats the Taipings differently than his peers do because he takes seriously the possibility that ordinary "good" citizens might follow them. The Taipings are the forces of moral judgment for ordinary citizens in some plays, but in others they are moral actors, with a potential for redemption. Yu writes about the possibility of reform for any Taipings except the rebel leaders in "An Argument on Dispersing the Rebel Faction" 解散賊黨說.[25] He imagines reformable Taipings among his audience, at least for the plays written during the rebellion; this is different from those playwrights writing to condemn what had already occurred. He compares his plays to the songs of Chu sung to undermine the morale of Xiang Yu's soldiers.[26] The homeland to which he would call the wayward souls back is the Qing state. An audience of active Taiping followers is probably imagined rather than actual, but in the messy world of shifting territorial control Yu Zhi considers it plausible.

Because of Yu Zhi's understanding of the participants on both sides, each of the

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[23] "Da ke wen" in the frontmatter of *Shujitang jinyue*, 17a–18b.

[24] The refugee protagonist of Zheng Youxi, *Wu zhong ren* 霧中人 (written 1876, printed 1890) is a *xiaosheng* 小生; the protagonist of his other Taiping play *Muxi xiang* 木樨香 is a *sheng*. Xu Shanchang's *Yiyun yan* 瘞雲礹 focuses on a *sheng/dan* pair. Xu E's *Lihua xue* centers on a *dan*.

[25] *Zunxiaoxuezhai shiwenji*, 1.39–41.

[26] Interlinear commentary on the *Tici*, *Shujitang jinyue*, 10a.

plays has a different moral focus between the Taipings and the Jiangnan citizens in their path. In *Qian chujie*, the refugee Yang Nianqu is clearly the protagonist, spared from disaster for his virtue; his Taiping antagonist is abandoned by his followers and ends as a suicide. In *Hou chujie*, the protagonist Zhang Wenhuan's good deeds lead him to be spared by the man destined to kill him. But that rebel, the would-be killer given the chance to reform, seems to become the protagonist at the end. *Jiehai tu* depicts irredeemable sinners among the Jiangnan citizens and examples of both rebels who reform and those who do not. *Yinyang yu* traces the entire course of the rebellion, without any central sympathetic victim of the rebels as a protagonist. Chen Yucheng 陳玉成 (c.1837–62), one of the historical Taiping leaders, is the center of focus for the beginning of the play, but in the play's later sections the focus shifts to others, and then to Li Xiucheng at the very end. Despite their position at the center of attention, they are granted no mercy.

The Problem of Belief

Is evil a personal failing or a matter of ideology? The Taipings are the negative mirror image of Yu Zhi's own religious beliefs and concern with propaganda: He is alarmed by how their stories entice others to follow them, and he takes their religious convictions seriously. While literati playwrights depict the Taipings as opportunists for whom ideology is merely a façade, Yu sees them as true believers.[27] He includes details of Taiping prayers and religious vocabulary, finding these terms significant. In *Jiehai tu,* when the commander Chen Dajin is finally surrounded, he believes in the efficacy of the Taiping prayer (*zanmei* 贊美) to save him. When it fails, he exclaims, "I have been tricked by the Heavenly Father!" revealing that the idea of the deity endures even his disillusionment. His confession of how he came to follow the Taipings focuses on belief in their promises of the heavenly kingdom and the power of Taiping prayer.[28] It is precisely because Yu himself believes in the power of faith that misguided faith is threatening. True belief is also not forgiven. Those who followed the Taipings because they saw no other practical choice may be redeemed, but not those who became fervent converts.

In Yu's plays the Taipings are convinced that their license to kill comes from the Heavenly Father. In Yu Zhi's vision they are only half wrong: He believes that Heaven has given them a role to kill evildoers, but not their Heavenly Father, and that their use as an instrument of punishment does not preclude their own

[27] See Xu E, *Lihua xue*, scene 4; Zheng Youxi, *Wu zhong ren*, scene 14; *Muxi xiang*, scene 5.

[28] *Jiehai tu*,12a.

punishment in turn.

A Good Man Spared

Qian chujie contains the simplest plot among the four plays, relating how the family of Yang Nianqu from Zhenjiang is spared from violence because of their filial piety and loyalty. The first figure to appear on the stage is a nameless Taiping leader, reciting that he has been commanded by the Heavenly Father to kill. Then Yang Nianqu appears, lamenting the difficulty of caring for his old mother as the rebels approach.

Yu's civil war plays share a swift succession of exits and entrances by the Taiping forces and the Jiangnan civilians fleeing before them, simulating the chaos of lived experience in an area where some cities changed hands several times. Counteracting this chaos is Yu Zhi's staging of inevitable moral consequences.

The play's immediate instrument of divine justice is a local earth god who reappears at several turning points in the plot. Early in the play he places a flag on Yang's back to mark him. Divinities marking good and evil characters with inscribed banners, unknown to them but legible to both the human audience and to the forces of fate, are shared with some of the Ming/Qing adaptations of the story of Mulian rescuing his mother from hell.[29] In mid-play he appears again, declaring that although Yang was originally destined to die in the chaos, filial behavior can exempt people from such calamitous fates. Although his old mother insists that her family abandon her so she is not a burden while they flee, Yang and his wife refuse, and abandon their three-year-old (two by modern reckoning) son instead. At this the local god takes the child and removes the flags from their backs.

Each family member is willing to sacrifice his or her own life to save the next person up in the familial hierarchy: the son for his mother and the wife for her husband. The wife deceives the Taiping leader, saying she will submit to him sexually in exchange for her husband's life. Once her husband and mother-in-law are safely away, she curses him as a bandit. When he tries to kill her, the local god blocks his blow and whisks her offstage. When the Taiping leader rebukes his men for her disappearance, they abandon him. Surrounded by government forces and again foiled by unearthly interference in attempts to fight them, he ends up slitting his own throat. The family of five is reunited, with their loyal servant Yang Fu finding both their lost property and their abandoned child. It is Yang Fu who sings the final song about the rewards of filial behavior.

Qian chujie has some similarities to Zheng Youxi's 鄭由熙 autobiographical *chuanqi Wu zhong ren* 霧中人 (The person in the fog), in which a refugee family

[29] "Sheling cha qi," in Zheng Zhizhen, *Mulian jiumu quanshan xiwen*.

hiding in a temple is spared from rebel capture by divine intervention. The white-robed Guanyin commands the local god and gods of fog to hide and save the multi-generational family. In both plays there is no resolution given to the rebellion as a whole, only the reassurance that good people had been spared, with divine intervention visible on stage.

The Hand of Fate

Hou chujie shares the device of the potential victims of the chaos being labeled with their fates. A local god marks Zhang Wenhuan, a once wealthy refugee, as having killed a man named Wang Sanmazi fifty years ago in a previous life. Hiding among corpses to avoid the rebels, Zhang overhears an earth god assisting in recording the dead stating that this is not his place to die, as he is destined to die at noon the following day at the hands of his reincarnated victim.[30] The next day, anticipating the fatal encounter, Zhang spends his money to help the other refugees he meets: a woman almost forced to abandon her child, and a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law on the point of committing suicide.

When Zhang finally encounters Wang Sanmazi, Wang is baffled by Zhang's knowledge of his name and declaration that he is fated to die at Wang's hand. Wang decides not to kill him in order to avoid being entangled in an unending sequence of revenge. Zhang takes advantage of this opportunity to persuade Wang to give up the rebellion and return to the Qing side. Men like him had been deceived by the bewitching words (*yaoyan* 妖言) of the leadership. Wang is swayed, and in turn persuades all his men to discard their weapons, dress as refugees, donate their ill-gotten gains to the aid of refugees, and return to their respective homes.

Yu Zhi claims in his prefaces to base his plays on historical events, but this is the only one (other than the much more historical *Yinyang yu*) for which I have found a possible source, in the historical record *Pingding Yuefei jilüe* 平定粤匪纪略 (A summary of pacifying the southern bandits).[31] The man in this anecdote is named Zhou, not Zhang; he is from Zhenjiang, not Jinling. But the situation of hiding among the corpses and the name of Wang Sanmazi remain the same. Wang Sanmazi not only spares his would-be victim but also gives him travelling funds. But there is no mention of his own reform. Yu Zhi's particular interest in the rescue of not one but two men in this encounter is clear.

[30] By odd coincidence, Sanmazi is the stage name of the actor Wang Hongshou 王鴻壽 (1850–1925), who as a young man was an actor in a troupe following the Taiping army and later created the Taiping-related play *Tie gongji*.

[31] Du Wenlan, *Pingding Yuefei jilüe*, *Fulu*, 4.8b–9a.

Yu's views on the possibility of a reformed Taiping rebel differ from his contemporaries. In *Lihua xue* 梨花雪 (Snow on the pear blossom), a later play about a female martyr abducted by a government-side soldier in the retaking of Nanjing, the villain is a former Taiping rebel who had surrendered to the government side. This mixed Taiping/non Taiping identity allows Xu to address the messy historical problem of blame in the story of a woman who became a victim when her troubles were supposed to be over, but it casts doubts on the sincerity of any such conversions. Yu Zhi, however, accepts Wang Sanmazi's conversion back into a good Qing citizen as genuine.

Although the god on stage stops Wang from killing Zhang before their conversation, once Zhang makes the choice to submit and reveal their karmic enmity, all of the changes, from victim to survivor, rebel to loyal citizen, are based on human decisions rather than divine intervention. Yang in *Qian chujie* is the relatively passive recipient of his moral reward; both Zhang and Wang, refugee and reformable Taiping, but especially the latter, are empowered to knowingly rewrite fate.

Judgment Days

Qian chujie and *Hou chujie* begin by focusing on refugees, with local gods moving among the displaced to mete out moral consequences. Both *Jiehai tu* and *Yinyang yu* open instead on the divine plane, as the gods are making provisions for the mass judgments of the chaos. In *Jiehai tu* the Chenghuang (city god) of Jiangnan looks through the ledger that separates the good and evil, and commands the local god to label the evil-doers with flags, as seen in the openings of the two earlier plays. "Chenghuang of Jiangnan" is an unusual formulation; as the title suggests a city god usually has jurisdiction over a particular urban area, such as Suzhou or Zhenjiang. This large governance area reinforces the play's geographic vagueness in comparison to the two already discussed, both of which place their protagonists as men from particular Jiangnan cities.

In the next scene, an unnamed rebel appears declaring his heaven-sent mission to kill, as in *Qian chujie*. Following him, a gallery of evil-doers appear as refugees: an unfilial son and daughter-in-law; a couple beginning an illicit affair; a man killing birds excessively; another man preparing to execute his plow-ox; and two men who steal from the refugees. Each enters, displays his or her sin, and exits fleeing. For all but the thieves, the war interrupts the sins of ordinary days. When the throng of refugees is driven onto the stage together, the local god labels others with sins written only on the banners but not performed on stage. Many sins are the subjects of Yu Zhi's other plays (wasting food and written paper; killing oxen and striking dogs; flirting with others' wives; cheating and harming people;

bringing lawsuits; causing abortions and drowning girls; discussing people's women; seeming to comply but disobeying in private; and complaining to heaven and earth). The presence of this written catalog of unspoken sins suggests inconsistency in Yu Zhi's determination to reach an illiterate audience; these stage directions are omitted in the Chewangfu manuscript.

The rebel then carries out punishment of each sinner: the unfilial couple have their stomachs cut open, the male lover is castrated, and the woman has her hands cut off. These gruesome stage instructions raise the question of performability; was there established stage business for the pantomime of these violent acts?

Once the rebel exits, a male lead dressed in official robes and in command of Qing forces enters. He is not explicitly named, but two generals in his service later identify themselves as "in the service of Lord Li," perhaps referring to Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1921). At first the commander's forces are unable to defeat the Taipings, so he goes to a nearby Guandi temple to pray for guidance. Guan appears on stage declaring that the time of the karmic ordeal is ending, and the moment to wipe out the rebels has come. But he is concerned that among the throngs following the Taipings, most have been conscripted by force, and Guan wants to give them a chance to repent and take part in the restoration. When the male lead prays for divine help to defeat the rebels, Guan lectures him about the importance of conquering their hearts and minds, and that if given the chance to repent most will quickly do so, causing the rebel strength to dissolve. These arguments, both moral and pragmatic, concur with points Yu Zhi made in his own essays. Here they are given the most authoritative spokesman possible.[32]

Upon waking, the male lead immediately puts this policy into practice. Two Taiping leaders surrender, change to Qing uniforms, and are placed in the vanguard to fight their former brothers. They broadcast the amnesty opportunity, and many more surrender in turn. When the painted face, the executioner from earlier in the play, is finally surrounded, his confession of his belief in the Taiping religious cause, which he only now realizes was delusion, is met with derision that he has realized too late. He is executed, and the gleeful population feeds his corpse to the dogs.

Only when captured is this character given a name and title, Baowang (Protective King) Chen Dajin 保王陳大金. This name appears to be a pastiche: There was a *baowang* but he did not have this name, which matches none of the recorded Taiping leadership. This suggests that this situation, with the two Taipings who accept amnesty and the one who does not, is like the vague setting in Jiangnan meant to create a generalizable situation, not tied to one historical

[32] "Jiesan zeidang shuo" (On dissolving and scattering the bandit factions), in *Zunxiaoxuezhai wenji.*

battle.

As the play includes both positive and negative examples of Taipings confronted with amnesty offers, it addresses both the rebels and those in charge of punishing them, with the same moral pivot as *Hou chujie*. Although the date cannot be proven, I suspect it is still before the war's end, when both of these audiences still existed to persuade. Yet this play addresses group experience on both the rebel and civilian side, rather than a single encounter as was the center of his earlier play. The two earlier plays depicted individuals or individual families emerging from the war; this one is meant, as the title suggests, to illustrate the vast scale of the chaos.

Rise and Fall

Yinyang yu is the most expansive of all the plays in scope, and the longest, tracing a history of the Taipings from their origins to the subduing of the rebellion. It is also the messiest textually; some of its shifts in focus (from Chen Yucheng to Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 [1814–64] to Li Xiucheng) may be the result of its reconstruction from three different plays in manuscript. The play opens and ends with divine judgment of the rebel leaders, first anticipating and planning their punishment and then carrying it out. Within human history, the play traces the conversion of Chen Yucheng to the Taiping cause, the rebels' first confrontation with Qing authorities, their taking titles as kings and reveling in the conquest of Nanjing, the infighting that results in the death of Yang Xiuqing楊秀清 (1821–56), the fall of Nanjing and the death of Hong Xiuquan, and finally Li Xiucheng's capture and execution.

Yinyang yu's supernatural framework establishes that for eighteen generations the ancestors of those who convert to the Taiping cause will be condemned to hell. This counters but mirrors Hong Xiuqian's argument to Chen that once he converts his parents will go to heaven, and have no need for the spirit tablets Hong insists that he burn. It is the anti-Taiping vision that is demonstrated on stage, with the ghosts of the convert Chen's parents protesting his act and then hauled off to hell. Chen is reluctant to burn the tablets; he does so only after Hong gives him a drug, a *dingxin dan* 定心丹 (heart-settling elixir). Does this reduce Chen's moral culpability, while increasing Hong's? It also changes the appeal of the Taiping religion to something artificial and outside of the human self. Unlike the transparency of Wang Sanmazi's reformation in the previous play, the decision to follow the Taiping path is ultimately veiled by this pharmaceutical coercion.

Lacking a sympathetic character as a sustained object of focus, *Yinyang yu* directs the audience's attention to the rebels themselves. Many literati plays, like *Lihua xue*, make celebration of male or female martyrs the emotional center of writing about the rebellion. Although *Yinyang yu* includes a few martyrs, including women who refuse to sexually serve the Taipings ascending to heaven,

Yu focuses on the retribution for the rebels rather than eliciting sympathy for the righteous victims. Although the rebels' helplessness as they finally lose everything, particularly the lone last warrior Li Xiucheng, evokes pathos, the play's delight in rebels' earthly and internal punishment quickly overwhelms it.

This play struggles even more with the performance feasibility problems raised for *Jiehai tu*. It necessitates displaying the full range of tortures in hell while also requiring a large cast of major leaders and their entourages, probably beyond the size of Yu Zhi's orphan boy troupe. In writing this history, Yu Zhi may be getting closer to the closet dramas of his fellow literati.

Alone among Yu Zhi's four civil war plays, *Yinyang yu* portrays the score settling after the war ended. After the defeat rebels can no longer be persuaded to switch sides, so the focus is entirely on punishment, perhaps to frighten any potential future sectarian rebels, perhaps to satisfy the vengeful bloodlust of the living. Whether this represents Yu Zhi's own post-civil war vision or that of his students trying to piece the play together in the 1870s is unclear. Some of its excesses of violence recall the imagined punishments heaped on Qin Hui 秦檜 (1091–1155), reviled as the betrayer of the Northern Song, in late Ming popular fiction.[33] In any event the Taipings have become history, and by the end of the play the timeframe of hell replaces even human hisotry.

In his criticism of popular plays Yu had rejected unrealistic and exaggerated portrayals of evil, not so much for their inaccuracy but for their ineffectiveness as moral persuasion. In this play, his retrospective dread and revulsion facing the persuasive powers of "evil cults" make him violate his own principles. As with *Jiehai tu*, the title suggests that he is thinking on a cosmic scope, but the word *yu* reveals the role he has taken for himself judging a criminal case.

Conclusion

Qian chujie and *Hou chujie* end with reward and escape, the former with the virtuous servant commenting on the reward of the filial son, the later with the former rebel Wang Sanmazi declaring that he and his men are going home. In contrast, *Jiehai tu* and *Yinyang yu* end with punishment and the laughter of those inflicting the punishment. In *Jiehai tu*, the corpse of the unreformed Taiping commander is fed to the dogs while the crowd laughs, and in *Yinyang yu* the souls of the Taiping leadership have been incinerated and converted to meat-paste. One of the divinities overseeing their punishment looks at the results, saying, "We've

[33] See Feng Menglong, "You Fengdu Humu Di yinshi" (Traveling in Hell Humu Di recites a poem), in *Gujin xiaoshuo*, 32. *Xiyou bu* (A supplement to the Journey to the West), chap. 9.

destroyed all the demons! Haha!"[34] Andrea Goldman has written about the violent restoration of moral order in post-Taiping *pihuang* plays about transgressive women.[35] Although Yu Zhi abhors the vigilante justice of the heroes in those plays, his relishing of the grisly consequences of moral violation seems similar.

In the midst of the uncertainty of the war, Yu Zhi presents a hopeful picture of individual survival. When he regards the civil war from the perspective of a larger frame of reference and after it has ended, his emphasis shifts to punishment as spectacle. Yu Zhi is overall not concerned with drama as an attempt to convert traumatic memory into meaningful memorial. Rather drama is a tool that should be looking forward to future moral action. Only when the war is safely over he too cannot prevent himself from looking back.

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[34] *Yinyang yu*, 20b.

[35] Andrea Goldman, *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770–1900*, 217–33.

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