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# ENTERTAINING DEITIES AND HUMANS WITH PERFORMANCES OF *PUJU* (PUZHOU OPERA) AT A TEMPLE FAIR IN YANGXIE VILLAGE, SOUTHWESTERN SHANXI, MAY 29–JUNE 2, 2013

ZIYING YOU

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On the evening of the twenty-fourth day of the fourth lunar month (June 2), 2013, the fifth day of the temple fair at the Old Temple Complex of King Tang Yao (Tang Yao guyuan 唐堯故園; for a map of the complex, see Fig. 1) in Yangxie 羊獬 Village, Hongdong County, Shanxi Province, a local *Puju* 蒲劇 (Puzhou opera) troupe was to give their last performance. However, a rainstorm with strong winds came up unexpectedly that afternoon, causing a power outage in the village and at the temple. The once-crowded temple soon became empty, and almost all the vendors and visitors rushed back home. I went backstage to meet the troupe members, and asked them if they would give the performance as scheduled. One actor said, “I will perform even if there is only one person before the stage watching the performance, that is how my master taught me” 台下只有一個看戲的, 我也要演, 這是我師傅教我的. One actress said, “The plays are performed for the *gugu*” 戲是演給姑姑的.<sup>1</sup> *Gugu* 姑姑 (Aunt) is how Yangxie residents call King Yao’s two daughters, Ehuang 娥皇 and Nüying 女英, whom he married to King Shun. Yangxie residents believe that they themselves are the descendants of King Yao, and so they call his two daughters “aunties.”

Every year, on the third day of the third lunar month, Yangxie residents go to neighboring Lishan 歷山, where King Shun’s temple is located, to invite their two “aunts” back to visit the home of their parents, King Yao and his wife, in Yangxie.<sup>2</sup> On the twenty-eighth day of the fourth lunar month—believed to be King Yao’s birthday—Lishan residents come to Yangxie to escort Ehuang and Nüying back to Lishan. The temple fair at the Old Temple Complex of King Yao in Yangxie starts on the twentieth day, and ends on the twenty-ninth day of the fourth lunar month. Two different troupes were invited by the Old Temple Complex of King Yao Reconstruction Association (Tang Yao Guyuan Xiufu

<sup>1</sup> This actor and actress will be introduced below, in the first section on actors.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed account of the activities involved during 2007, see Chen Yongchao 陳泳超 et al., “Yangxie, Lishan sanyuesan ‘jie gugu’ huodong diaocha baogao” 羊獬、歷山三月三“接姑姑”活動調查報告 (A report of a survey of the activities that are part of “inviting the aunties” in Yangxie and Lishan on the third of the third lunar month), *Minjian wenhua luntan* 民間文化論壇 (Forum on folk culture) 2007.3: 59–69.

Weiyuanhui 唐堯故園修復委員會) to perform at the temple fair in 2013; the *Puju* troupe performed the first five days. Their performances were well received, with a large audience for each show, but on the night in question, it was not clear whether the performance would take place at all.

Eventually, however, the power came back on at 9:30 p.m., and the performance started. My host family in Yangxie sponsored the performance in gratitude for the “aunties” help in protecting their 19-year-old son from dying of heart disease. Before the performance started, the whole family burned incense and kowtowed in the main hall of the Temple of King Yao, and then in the main hall of Gugu Temple (Temple of Ehuang and Nüying). They saw to it that two special chairs with two big pieces of red cloth on them given by the Temple Fair Office (Miaohui bangongshi 廟會辦公室) were placed in front of the stage for the “aunties” to sit in and enjoy the performance.

When the show started, fireworks were set off, attracting some villagers to come to the temple to watch the performance. Although it was very cold that evening, a decent number of *Puju* fans sat through the whole show from beginning to end. The *Puju* troupe gave a wonderful performance that evening, and the show did not end until midnight. The troupe left very early the next day.

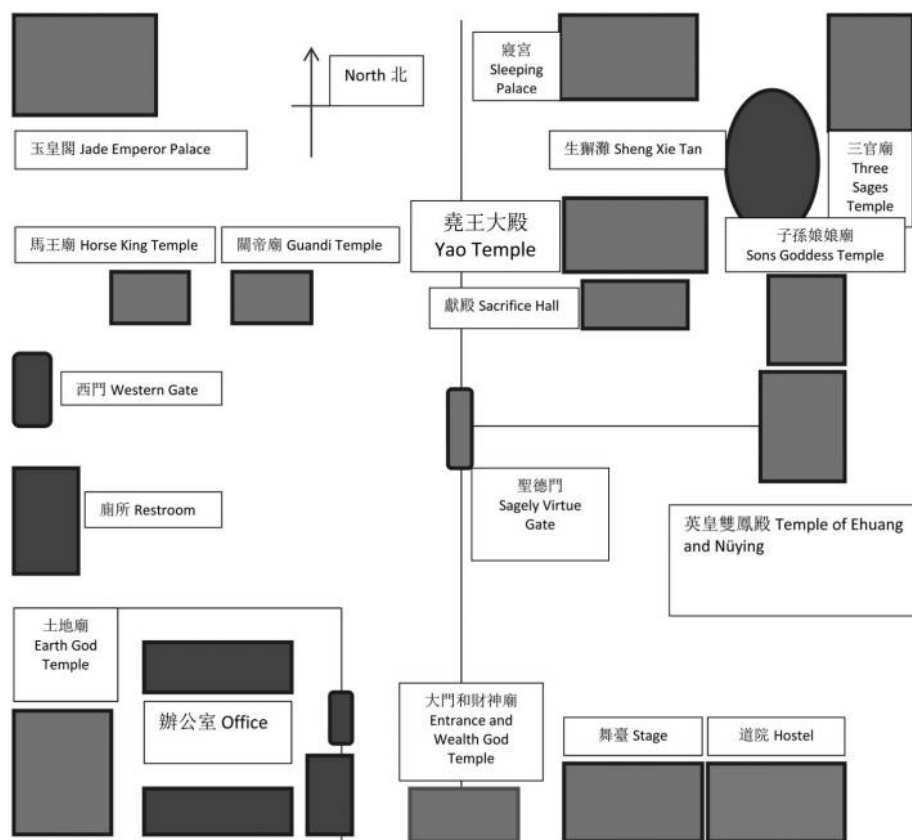


FIG. 1. Schematic Map of the Old Temple Complex of King Yao in Yangxie Village, Shanxi.

I first came to Hongdong not to study *Puju* but rather the intersection of local legends, beliefs, and practices there.<sup>3</sup> But I was unexpectedly deeply moved by *Puju* and its devoted performers and audience. This paper is a report on the *Puju* performances at this temple fair in 2013. With it I intend to provide an example of how *Puju* opera is performed to entertain deities and human beings at a temple fair nowadays, and why *Puju* was, and still is, so important to local village communities and ordinary people.

In the study of *xiqu* 戲曲 (Chinese indigenous theater), both in the past and the present, there has been a tendency to privilege urban forms over rural ones. The performance of *xiqu* at temple fairs, religious festivals, and other religious occasions has been the focus of a comparatively small number of scholars and their work has been less visible. Nevertheless, Shanxi, with its rich theatrical heritage of early stages and texts related to theater (inscribed on stone or preserved in manuscripts) has been a center of such research, which has often been oriented toward showing that these forms of theater best preserve ancient traditions fundamental to the origins and growth of Chinese theater. However, these scholars have not paid as much attention to the live performance of *xiqu* at temple fairs in contemporary China.<sup>4</sup> In this report, I use *Puju*, an important regional opera genre, to present an example of how traditional opera is presently performed to entertain deities and humans, and how performances at temple fairs remain important occasions for the survival and even revival of traditional opera in China today.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO *PUJU*

*Puju* is one of the oldest of the class of Chinese theater traditions known as *bangzi qiang* 梆子腔 or *bangzi xi* (tunes/plays accompanied by striking a *bangzi*). For a long time this type of opera has been mistakenly referred to in English as “clapper opera” (this has also recently begun to appear in Chinese publications); the *bangzi* is a wooden sounding block while the “clapper” refers to two pieces of wood clapped together and known as the *ban* 板. In the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), *Puju* was variously known as *bangzi qiang*, *Puzhou bangzi* 蒲州梆子, and *luantan* 亂彈 (wild strumming).<sup>5</sup> It was not until the 1930s that it began to be called *Puju*, which is the most commonly used label for it at present. That name refers to its birthplace,

<sup>3</sup> See You Ziyang, “Competing Traditions: Village Temple Rivalries, Social Actors, and Contested Narratives in Contemporary China,” doctoral thesis, The Ohio State University, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Zhang Yanqin 張艷琴, “Shanxi xiqu shichang yanjiu” 山西戲曲市場研究 (Research on the market for indigenous Chinese theater in Shanxi), doctoral thesis, Shanxi shifan daxue, 2014, in the chapter on performance venues, pp. 53–64, spends more than twice the space on urban venues as rural ones. David G. Johnson, *Spectacle and Sacrifice: The Ritual Foundations of Village Life in North China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), is a clear exception, but he is more interested in pre-contemporary ritual regimes and only interested in present practices for what they might tell us about the past. Sarah Huntington Jessup, “Staging Traditional Chinese Opera in the Reform Era: Conflicting Local Identities in Modernization,” doctoral thesis, University of Michigan, 2001, is based on fieldwork done on two Linfen troupes, one of which was a *Puju* troupe. She traveled with these two troupes in 1997–1999 and pays attention to temple fair performances. Unfortunately, she never revised the dissertation or formally published her research.

<sup>5</sup> According to Liu Wenfeng 劉文峰, *Shan-Shaan shangren yu bangzi xi kaolun* 山陝商人與梆子戲考論 (Research on the relationship between *bangzi* plays and Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants;

Puzhou, in southwestern Shanxi. Scholars trace its origins back to the Song (960–1279) and Jin (1115–1234) dynasties.<sup>6</sup> It became very popular in southern Shanxi in the late Ming (1368–1644) and early Qing (1644–1912) dynasties. It spread beyond Shanxi to Shaanxi and other provinces (traveling merchants were instrumental to this process<sup>7</sup>). It is the use of local dialect and particular musical forms related to that dialect that most clearly distinguishes *Puju* from other local theater traditions in China. It has a rich repertoire of plays that includes military plays as well as plays with modern settings and topics (*xiandai xi* 現代戲).<sup>8</sup> The performance tradition features both full-length plays long enough to fill up an afternoon or an evening's performance (*quanben xi* 全本戲) and shorter pieces that are extracts from longer plays (*zhezi xi* 折子戲). Traditionally *Puju* was not heavily dependent on written scripts and featured a fair amount of improvisation,<sup>9</sup> but the theater policies of the PRC for a long time demanded that scripts be fully written out and followed in performance. However, enforcement of this is no longer as high a priority as it once was.

As opposed to southern styles of Chinese theater such as *Yueju* 越劇 and *Kunqu* 崑曲, in which the pacing tends to be slow and the flowing pentatonic music is very comforting and soothing, *Puju* is a northern tradition that makes much use of the septatonic scale and its half-tones, which creates tension. *Puju* is good at presenting scenes of conflict and high emotion. Outsiders might initially be put off by the general approach of *Puju*, but locals are deeply attached to it.<sup>10</sup>

There are many different community and private occasions for *Puju* performance in rural Shanxi, and one of the most important ones is at temple fairs when villagers

Beijing wenhua yishu, 2011), p. 94, *Puzhou bangzi* was called *Nanlu xi* 南路戲 (Southern route plays) in other parts of Shanxi than its native area, and *Shan-Shaan bangzi* 山陝梆子 or *Shanxi bangzi* 山西梆子 in places such as Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Mo Yiping 墨遺萍, *Puju shihun* 蒲劇史魂 (The historical soul of *Puju*), Taiyuan: Shanxi sheng wenhua ju xiju gongzuo yanjiu shi, 1981), pp. 38–44.

<sup>7</sup> For a brief summary of how these merchants carried *Puju* to such places as Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Henan, Shanghai, and Wuhan, see Li Dou 李斗, “Jinnan diqu *Puju* yishu de minsu wenhua chengyin 晉南地區蒲劇藝術的民俗文化成因 (The cultural contributing factors to the art of *Puju* in Southwestern Shanxi), master's thesis, Dongbei shifan daxue, 2014, pp. 39–46. For a more in-depth study of the relationship of Shanxi merchants and *bangzi* opera in general, see Liu Wenfeng, *Shan-Shaan shangren yu bangzi xi kaolun*.

<sup>8</sup> For a list of nineteen *Puju* modern plays that premiered from 1979 to 2007, see Li Fang 李芳, “Shuli xinshiqi yilai shangyan de xinbian *Puju* xiandai xi” 梳理新時期以來上演的新編蒲劇現代戲 (Sorting out the newly written modern plays for *Puju* of the New Period), *Shanxi meitan guanli ganbu xuexuan xuebao* 山西煤炭管理干部學院學報 (Journal of the College for the Management of Coal and Charcoal) 2013.1: 106–107.

<sup>9</sup> Liu Wenfeng, *Shan-Shaan shangren yu bangzi xi kaolun*, pp. 293–306, constitutes a reprint of an article on early (late Qing–early Republican era) printed copies of *bangzi* plays that he originally published in *Puju yishu* 蒲劇藝術 (The art of *Puju*; a journal devoted to *Puju* that began publication in 1980). He discusses a cache of over fifty woodblock and lithographic editions and notes that they had been neglected and that what scholars were most familiar with were copies of traditional *bangzi* plays in either manuscript or printed versions produced after 1949 based on the oral dictation of actors (see especially p. 295).

<sup>10</sup> Li Dou, “Jinnan diqu *Puju* yishu de minsu wenhua chengyin,” in a section entitled “Jinnan renwu ‘beiguanxing’ xingge yu *Puju* yinyue zhong de ‘kuyin’ xuanze” 晉南人物“悲觀性”性格與蒲劇音樂中的“苦音”選擇 (The choice of “crying sound” in *Puju* music and the tragic outlook character of the people of Southwestern Shanxi), pp. 34–39, argues that there is a match between the inhabitants of the area and the music of *Puju*.

celebrate the birthday of a god or gods who reside in the village temple. An old saying in southern Shanxi goes: “If there is a village, there must be a temple; if there is a temple, there must be a stage” 有村必有廟, 有廟必有台.<sup>11</sup> The stage is generally built opposite the main temple hall in the village temple, facing the statues of the deities, who themselves always face south. The concept is that the deities watching a performance offered up to them by a devotee will grant the wishes of that devotee if they are pleased by it.

The offering of performances to entertain deities actually has a long written history in southern Shanxi. The stele text, “Xiyang Caogongli chongxiu Yao Shun Yu Tang zhi miao ji” 西閭曹公里重修堯舜禹湯之廟記 (A record of the restoration of the temple to the sage emperors Yao, Shun, Yu, and Tang in the town of Xiyang and the village of Caogong), inscribed at Sisheng Gong 四聖宮 (Temple of the Four Sages) in Caogong Village, Yicheng County, Linfen, Shanxi, and dated 1559, describes quite colorful activities held at the temple that involve as many as a hundred performers (the “one hundred” in the text is probably either an exaggeration or a round number) and includes a sentence about how the costs for drink, food, and music (which would include theater) were apportioned.<sup>12</sup>

Nowadays, the performance of *Puju* at temple fairs is a common phenomenon all over southern Shanxi, especially in the spring and autumn seasons. Even though lots of old temples were ruined during the fighting between communists and nationalists, especially from 1946 to 1949, or dismantled or repurposed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when they were stigmatized as connected to “feudalistic superstitions” (*fengjian mixin* 封建迷信), a large number of temples and temple stages have been rebuilt in rural villages since the 1990s to accompany the revival of folk religion. In this report, I draw on my fieldwork at the Old Temple of King Yao in Yangxie village to illustrate how ordinary people choose to sponsor *Puju* performances at temple fairs to ask for protection and blessings from the deities, how they select certain plays from the list of plays proffered by the troupe, and how ordinary audiences received the *Puju* performances at this temple fair.

## YANGXIE VILLAGE

Yangxie is a very old village in Hongdong County, in the southwestern part of Shanxi. According to local legends, it was named after the *xie* 獬 (a.k.a., *xiezhi* 獬豸), a sacred goat with one horn believed to have been born in the village during King Yao’s time, more than 4,000 years ago.<sup>13</sup> According to traditional accounts, King Yao’s minister of justice, Gao Yao 皋陶 (his memorial temple is in his birthplace, Shishi 仕師 Village, which is very close to Yangxie), reported the birth of the *xie* to King Yao, who took his wife to go see it. When they arrived, King Yao’s wife, who was pregnant, gave birth to a baby. The baby was brilliantly beautiful, and she could speak after only three days and walked several days later.

<sup>11</sup> Shen Weichen 申維辰 et al., eds., *Puzhou bangzi zhi* 蒲州梆子志 (A record of Puzhou bangzi; Taiyuan: Shanxi jiaoyu, 2007), p. 500.

<sup>12</sup> For the relevant text of the stele, see Shen Weichen et al., eds., *Puzhou bangzi zhi*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, the account in Sun Huanlun 孫煥倫 et al. eds., *Hongdong xianzhi* 洪洞縣志 (Gazetteer for Hongdong County; Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1917), *juan* 7, pp. 6–7.

Because of these auspicious events, King Yao renamed the village Yangxie (*yang* means goat), called his new-born daughter Nüying, and moved his whole family to Yangxie.

Because of old legends such as this, Yao's two daughters Ehuang and Nüying are worshipped as "aunts" in Yangxie. Temples for King Yao and his two daughters were built near the place where the *xie* was supposed to have been born. According to a county gazetteer for Hongtong, the Temple of Yao in Yangxie was originally built in 1354.<sup>14</sup> The old temple was ruined and rebuilt many times. More recently, it was dismantled in 1948 and then a primary school was built on the site in the 1950s. The current Old Temple of Tang Yao was rebuilt in 1989.

Although Yangxie is very old, its population is not stable and fixed. At least two-thirds of its older inhabitants immigrated there from Henan, Hebei, Shandong, and other provinces in the early decades of the twentieth century. When the warlord Yan Xishan 閻錫山 (1883–1960) ruled Shanxi from 1911 to 1949, he carried out a policy of "protecting the borders and giving people peace" (*baojing anmin* 保境安民).<sup>15</sup> This policy helped keep Shanxi relatively prosperous in terms of agricultural production and the development of the economy and education, which attracted many immigrants, especially from bordering provinces such as Hebei and Henan. In the 1960s, many people from bordering provinces also chose to move to Shanxi.

Because of big water conservancy projects in the 1950s and 1960s, the site of the original Yangxie Village became saturated with saline and alkaline and was no longer suitable for habitation. From 1958 on, local residents began to move toward the south and north, relocating to higher and dryer locations.<sup>16</sup> This trend, along with the fast expansion of the population in general, led to the division of the village, in 1963, into a northern and southern village, with the northern one retaining the name of Yangxie and the southern one becoming known as South Yangxie. Nowadays, 2,585 residents live in Yangxie, and more than 1,800 live in South Yangxie.<sup>17</sup>

In order to celebrate King Yao's birthday, which is believed to be the 28th day of the fourth lunar month, a big temple fair is held in the Old Temple of King Yao every year. The temple fair is managed by the Temple Fair Office. This office operates in collaboration with the *she* 社 (a traditional organization of devotees of the temple in charge of mounting the plays) and the village committee. Yangxie Village used to include just one *she*, but when the village divided in two the *she* was also divided into a southern and northern *she*. In order to oversee the reconstruction of the temple and the management of the incense donation money and coordinate other activities, a "General *She*" (Zongshe 總社) was established in 2005. With regard to taking the lead over activities at the old temple, the two *she* alternate annually, with the transition happening at Chinese New Year.

<sup>14</sup> Sun Huanlun et al., eds., *Hongdong xianzhi*, *juan* 8, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> See Jing Zhankui 景占魁, *Yan Xishan zhuan* 閻錫山傳 (Biography of Yan Xishan; Beijing: Zhongguo shehui, 2008), pp. 78–87.

<sup>16</sup> Yan Zhenghong 閻正紅, ed., *Huangying yishi* 皇英軼事 (Anecdotes of Ehuang and Nüying; privately published, 2012), p. 140.

<sup>17</sup> These figures come from <http://baike.baidu.com/view/10522050.htm> and <http://baike.baidu.com/view/10521817.htm>, accessed 9/13/15.

SELECTION OF THE *PUJU* TROUPE AND PLAYS FOR THE TEMPLE FAIR

Before the General *She* was formed, the local *she* used to invite opera troupes to perform at the temple fairs, but the larger unit now has the power to decide which opera troupes will be invited. In 2013, the General *She* invited the Xiangfen County Experimental *Puju* Troupe (Xiangfen xian shiyan *Puju* tuan 襄汾縣實驗蒲劇團), located on the other side of Linfen from Yangxie,<sup>18</sup> to perform from the twentieth to the twenty-fourth day of the fourth lunar month and invited the Linyi Youth *Meihu* Opera Troupe (Linyi qingnian meihu jutuan 臨猗青年眉戶劇團)<sup>19</sup> to perform during the remaining days of the fair. After the opera troupes were decided, the “Literature, Arts, and Performance Team” (Wenyi diaoyan zu 文藝調演組) in the Temple Fair Office then negotiated with local sponsors, and asked them which performance (*chang* 場) on which day they would like to sponsor. Here, a “performance” (*chang*) is a complete unit with beginning and end that may consist of the performance of one longer play or two to three *zhezi xi*. There were two performances each day, a daytime one (*baichang* 白場) that started at 11 a.m. and an evening performance (*wanchang* 晚場) that started at 8 p.m. The sponsors of a performance ordinarily submit a fee of 2,000 RMB, out of which the troupe is supposed to be paid. In 2013, a total of fifty-four individuals (some of them ran local businesses, restaurants, companies, etc.) sponsored the opera performances at this temple fair, and 94,700 RMB was collected. The *Puju* opera troupe performed ten performances over five days and received a total of 19,000 RMB. The *meihu* opera troupe performed the same number of performances but were offered 26,000 RMB but eventually paid 25,500 RMB (see below). The temple made a profit of 50,200 RMB from the opera performances, money that could be used for temple reconstruction and other temple affairs. If there had been a shortage of opera sponsors, incense money collected in the temple could have been used to help pay the opera troupes.

During my fieldwork in Yangxie in 2013, I worked as a volunteer in the “Literature, Arts, and Performance Team,” and one of my main responsibilities was to communicate with the opera troupes. The Xiangfen County Experimental *Puju* Troupe was a private troupe of 40 to 50 members. In southern Shanxi, there are about forty county-level *Puju* troupes, but they are privately run and rarely receive government funding, something that the top city-level *Puju* opera troupes enjoy; instead, these troupes have to support themselves by performing at temple fairs and other

<sup>18</sup> For a time line of the state-supported Xiangfen troupe, see “Xiangfen *Puju* tuan” 襄汾蒲劇團, <http://www.0359puju.com/jtjg/xianji/20140308/521.html>. That troupe disbanded in 1998. The troupe that came in 2013 was a non-state troupe first established in 2012. It has only a very light web presence. On the past of *Puju* in Xiangfen, see Liang Lijun 梁麗君, “Minguo zhi Wenge Xiangfen *Puju* banshe fazhan gaikuang” 民國至文革襄汾蒲劇班社發展概況 (The development of *Puju* troupes in Xiangfen from the Republican period to the Cultural Revolution), *Huanghe zhi sheng* 黃河之聲 (The voice of the Yellow River) 2011.3: 88–89.

<sup>19</sup> *Meihu xi* 眉戶戲 is a local theater tradition that first developed in Shaanxi. In Shanxi it was influenced by *Puju* and has at times rivaled it in terms of popularity. See Cui Fengming 崔鳳鳴 and Jiao Xingsu 焦醒俗, “Jinnan *Meihu*” 晉南眉戶 (Meihu of southwest Shanxi), in *Zhongguo xiqu juzhong da cidian* 中國戲曲劇種大辭典 (Dictionary of theater types of Chinese indigenous theater; Shanghai: Shanghai cishu, 1995), p. 224. The other Linfen troupe focused on in Jessup, “Staging Traditional Chinese Opera in the Reform Era: Conflicting Local Identities in Modernization,” was a *meihu xi* troupe. She introduces that form of theater on p. 44.



venues. The Xiangfen County Experimental *Puju* Opera Troupe travels widely to perform at temple fairs in the spring and autumn, moving every three to five days to the next temple fair. The *Puju* troupe arrived at the Old Temple of Tang Yao on the afternoon of the nineteenth day of the fourth lunar month. The previous day, the head of the troupe had sent their liaison agent (*tongxun yuan* 通訊員), Jia Xiaobo 賈小波, a performer of *xusheng* 鬚生 (dignified, bearded male) roles. Jia investigated where the troupe would stay and where they would prepare their meals. Formerly, visiting opera troupe members would be lodged with local residents in their households. However, it has become more and more difficult to find families willing to do such hosting, since a lot of younger adults are working and living away from Yangxie in big cities and such hosting is difficult for the elderly to do. The General *She*, in 2007, built a hostel for hosting visiting opera troupes that is located to one side of the stage.

After checking out the accommodations for the troupe, Jia Xiaobo provided the troupe's playlist to the Temple Fair Office so that the sponsors could select the plays they wanted to sponsor. The playlist offered up by the troupe contained these plays:

#### Full-Length Traditional Plays:

*Golden Qilin* (*Jin qilin* 金麒麟)  
*Three Top Degree Holders* (*San jinsi* 三進士)  
*Grand Mounting of the Palace* (*Da deng dian* 大登殿)  
*The Fiery Stallion* (*Huoyan ju* 火焰駒)  
*Fifth Sister Zhao* (*Zhao Wuniang* 趙五娘)  
*Hitting the Golden Bough* (*Da jinzhi* 打金枝)  
*Moon on the Spring River* (*Chunjiang yue* 春江月)  
*Judgment by a Perceptive Judge* (*Minggong duan* 明公斷)

#### Full-Length Modern Plays:

*A Mother from a Mountain Village* (*Shancun muqin* 山村母親)

#### Traditional Zhezi xi:

*Third Maid Educates the Son* (*Sanniang jiaozi* 三娘教子)  
*Cursing the Emperor* (*Ma dian* 罵殿)  
*Broken Bridge* (*Duanqiao* 斷橋)  
*Dispensing Rice Porridge* (*Shefan* 舍飯)  
*Lifting a Knife* (*Ti dao* 提刀)  
*Killing the Dog* (*Sha gou* 殺狗)  
*Killing in the Mansion* (*Sha fu* 殺府)  
*Hitting the God and Laying a Complaint at the Temple* (*Dashen gaomiao* 打神告廟)  
*Xu Ce Runs through the City* (*Xu Ce paocheng* 徐策跑城)<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Plot summaries for many of these plays are available in *Zhongguo bangzi xi jumu da cidian* 中國梆子戲劇目大辭典 (Big dictionary of the repertoire of *bangzi* plays of China; Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin, 1991). However, the index and table of contents are rather poorly arranged and not all titles appear in the index (*Da jinzhi* and *Minggong duan*, for instance, are not to be found in the index, although there are entries for these plays in the dictionary under alternate names).

The office then contacted sponsors and asked them to select from this list the performance they wished to sponsor. The selections for a particular day were usually finalized one day ahead of time, and opera posters (*xibao* 戲報), which announced the names of sponsors and their sponsored plays, were posted on the walls both inside the main gate of the temple and in front of the stage early on the morning of the performance day.<sup>21</sup> Some sponsors left the play selection up to the Temple Fair Office, which would then leave the decision to the troupe. Summary information on the performances by the *Puju* troupe, according to the information on the posters, is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Performances by the Xiangfen *Puju* Troupe at the Temple Fair

Date <sup>22</sup> and (Time)	Play Title	Sponsor Name	Sponsors' Residence or Affiliation
20 <sup>th</sup> (day)	<i>Hitting the Golden Bough</i>	Mr. Yan Chunliang	Yangxie Village
20 <sup>th</sup> (evening)	<i>The Fiery Stallion</i>	Mr. Zhai Hongping	Yangxie Village
21 <sup>st</sup> (day)	<i>Judgment by a Perceptive Judge</i>	Mr. An Junjie	Shubu 塾堡 Village
21 <sup>st</sup> (evening)	<i>Three Top Degree Holders</i>	Mr. Yan Hucheng Mr. Wang Fukui Ms. Kong Zhiyan and Ms. Kong Chunyan	Yangxie Village Route 309 <sup>23</sup> Dongkong 東孔 Village
22 <sup>nd</sup> (day)	<i>Hitting the Golden Bough</i>	Mr. Wang Xiaohe Mr. Zhang Qinying Mr. Kong Fanqi	Shubu Village Nanying 南營 Village Director of Ganting 甘亭 Health Center
22 <sup>nd</sup> (evening)	<i>Golden Qilin</i>	Mr. Wang Hongsheng Mr. Yang Zhangyun Mr. Ji Hai'ou  Mr. Yan Hucheng	Taiyuan 太原 City Yangqu 楊曲 Village Manager of the Huang Ying 皇英 Road Project Yangxie Village
23 <sup>rd</sup> (day)	<i>Three Face-to-Face</i> 三對面 <sup>24</sup> <i>Cursing the Emperor</i> <i>Killing the Dog</i>	Mr. Shi Jingyu  Mr. Wang Sulin Mr. Li Jianguo and Mr. Li Jianping	Houma 侯馬 City  Hongdong 洪洞 City Xiao Ganting 小甘亭
23 <sup>rd</sup> (evening)	<i>A Mother from a Mountain Village</i>	Mr. Yang Xusheng	Nanyang 南羊 Village, Qiaoli 喬李 Town
24 <sup>th</sup> (day)	<i>Third Maid Educates the Son</i>	Mr. Du Jianhong	Beiyang 北羊 Village
	<i>Dispensing Rice Porridge</i>	Mr. Du Jianhong	Beiyang Village
24 <sup>th</sup> (evening)	<i>Moon on the Spring River</i>	Mr. Wang Wei	South Yangxie Village

<sup>21</sup> The posters for the 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> days of the fourth lunar month also indicate that there will be performances by different local organizations that begin at 9 a.m. the following day.

<sup>22</sup> All dates are in the fourth lunar month (these are the only dates given on the posters).

*Hitting the Golden Bough* was probably the most popular play at the temple fair. Although the troupe is not known for their performance of this play (its signature work is *The Fiery Stallion*), it was selected for both the first and the third days. This is a play that has been heavily promoted in the PRC because in it a stuck-up member of the imperial house gets chastised, and the family involved, although put in danger, is not, in the end, punished. It is also an auspicious play because the patriarch of the family, Guo Ziyi 郭子儀 (697–781), was credited with restoring the Tang dynasty (618–907), and his seven sons and eight sons-in-law all became officials. Audiences liked to vicariously enjoy his success and use his example to wish success to friends and patrons.<sup>25</sup> Because Guo Ziyi was granted the title of Prince of Fenyang (Fenyang wang 汾陽王), a place not that far from Yangxie, a story about his family would also be attractive in Yangxie for that reason.

In the play, the “golden bough”<sup>26</sup> is Princess Shengping 昇平 (see Fig. 2), daughter of Emperor Daizong (r. 762–779). To reward the contributions of Guo Ziyi to the state, she was married to Guo Ai 郭曖, his sixth son. In the play, Guo Ziyi’s family has gathered to celebrate his sixtieth birthday, but the princess has refused to attend and pay her respects, because she is a member of the royal family and feels that she should not have to yield to a commoner. Angered at her disrespect to his father, Guo Ai hits her, and she goes to the palace to complain. Guo Ziyi is so angry (and scared) that his son would beat the princess that he ties up his son and offers him for punishment to the emperor. The princess, out of regret for what she did and love for Guo Ai, entreats Guo Ziyi to forgive his son, but with no success. The impasse is finally broken when the emperor intervenes, forgives Guo Ai, and chastises the princess. The emperor grants Guo Ai a new title and the young couple returns home happily. Besides making the audience laugh, the play also offered, through its happy ending, wishes for wealth, honor, and happiness. By selecting this play, the sponsors were hoping to bring good fortune to themselves, friends, and the community.

The other story that appeared twice did so once in a full-length version under the title of *Judgment by a Perceptive Judge* and once as a *zhezi xi* under the title of *Three Face-to-Face*. The judge involved is the most famous judge in Chinese history and literature, Judge Bao (Baogong 包公). The case that he handles is that brought by Qin Xianglian 秦香蓮 against her husband, Chen Shimei 陳世美. This is a very famous story performed under a variety of names in many Chinese theater traditions. Chen Shimei leaves his family to take the metropolitan civil service exam and comes in first. He agrees to marry the emperor’s sister, keeping his first wife and children a secret. Qin Xianglian eventually takes her two children to the capital to search for him, but they are first turned away by him and then almost killed by the assassin

<sup>23</sup> Route 309 Line is a national highway in China, starting from Rongcheng in Shandong Province, and ending in Lanzhou, Gansu Province. This national highway is 2,208 km long, and passes through Shandong, Hebei, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Ningxia and Gansu provinces. Wang Fukui’s village is close to this national highway.

<sup>24</sup> *Zhezi xi* from *Judgment by a Perceptive Judge*.

<sup>25</sup> The play has many alternate titles. The one it is listed under in *Zhongguo bangzi xi jumu da cidian*, p. 241, is *Hu man chuang* 笏滿床 (Tablets of office fill the dais). In the banquet at the beginning of the play for Guo Ziyi, the many tablets of office of the family are supposed to be piled up on a dais to show how the family has flourished. That title and images of the family and the dais in woodblock prints circulated very widely.

<sup>26</sup> “Golden bough” is one way to refer to a member of the imperial family.



FIG. 2. Wu Shuqin 吳淑琴 as the Princess in *Hitting the Golden Bough*, 22nd day of the fourth lunar month (May 31, 2013). Photo by author.

that Chen Shimei sends after them (the assassin, after he hears her story, commits suicide instead of killing them). Qin Xianglian turns to Judge Bao to get justice. He manages to trick Chen Shimei into leaving the sanctuary of the palace and come to his court. Hearing this news, the empress and the princess go there to exert all the pressure they can muster on Judge Bao to let Chen Shimei go, but he resists and eventually has Chen, at Qin Xianglian's request, executed, regardless of how that might affect his career (*Three Face-to-Face* treats the confrontation between Bao, the empress, and the princess, and ends with the execution). Judge Bao is popular because he represents a hope for justice for the powerless. This story is striking precisely because it avoids the kind of final compromises found in many (perhaps most) classical treatments of scholar-husbands who pick up second wives after examination success and abandon the wives of their youth and poverty.

*Three Top Degree Holders* is also about a woman and her children who are left on their own when her husband goes off to the capital to take the metropolitan exams for the highest degree, but in this case the reason that the husband does not return is not that he has remarried. The woman, Sun Shuling 孫淑玲, has to sell off her two sons to cancel her husband's debts; the names of both sons are changed and they grow up to become officials. Their mother is eventually forced to sell herself as a servant and ends up working for the household of one of her sons, where she is mistreated by her daughter-in-law. When Sun's husband reappears, it turns out that he passed the exams and is now a high official. The family is reunited and the emperor gives them a plaque with the words of the title of the play.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> According to *Zhongguo bangzi xi jumu da cidian*, p. 497, alternate names for the play include *Yijia san jinshi* 一家三進士 (Three top degree holders in the same family) and *Bazhen tang* 八珍湯 (Soup with eight precious things; Sun is bought by her daughter-in-law to make this soup).

In *The Fiery Stallion* a general is forced to surrender to the enemy because of a lack of provisions. His father is thrown in jail and his brother has to support himself selling water. The brother's father-in-law-to-be wants to reject this future son-in-law, but his daughter and her maid secretly arrange a meeting with the brother in the family flower garden in order to help him out. The girl's father finds out, has the maid killed and frames the brother for the murder. The general, after getting the news from someone who rides the stallion of the title, leads troops to save his brother from execution. This is a story particularly associated with *bangzi* opera.<sup>28</sup>

*Golden Qilin* is another play centered around a court case. The title sounds very auspicious, since fine sons were called *qilin* 麒麟 (a mythical animal often called "unicorn" in English because it is frequently depicted with one horn), but in this play it is the name of a sword used by a local bully to kill the husband of a woman he has taken for his own. The mother of the bully asks her brother, the local district magistrate, to make sure the case is handled in the bully's favor, but an underling in the yamen who is mad at the magistrate forces the woman to confess to the murder. A high official come to review recent court cases establishes the truth and punishes the guilty. The play is set in Shaanxi.<sup>29</sup>

The person who does the cursing in *Cursing the Emperor* is Empress He 賀, wife of the founding emperor of the Song dynasty (960–1279). She is mad that the emperor's younger brother has taken the throne and refuses to establish her eldest son as emperor; she believes he was involved in the first emperor's death and usurped the throne. She has her eldest son go and accuse the second emperor but the latter orders his execution and the eldest son commits suicide. In the scene performed in this *zhezi xi*, Empress He takes her second son with her to go upbraid the second emperor. The second emperor realizes that he is vulnerable and tries to placate the empress by proclaiming her empress dowager, giving her a sword of power, and giving the second son a special title, but refuses to consider yielding the throne. Although Empress He is not successful in getting what she wants, the audience can enjoy someone cursing an emperor to his face.

*Killing the Dog* is an extract from *Killing the Dog to Admonish His Wife* (*Shagou quanqi* 殺狗勸妻). The person who kills the dog is Cao Zhuang 曹莊, a very filial man who lives with his wife and his widowed mother. His wife is notoriously bad tempered and dislikes her mother-in-law. One day, Cao Zhuang goes to go cut firewood and leaves his mother-in-law in the care of his wife. The latter prepares a big bowl of noodles for her mother-in-law, but tastes it before serving it and ends up eating all the noodles and drinking all the broth they were in. She then offers her mother-in-law a steamed bun that is several days old and too stale to chew. The mother-in-law refuses it, and so Cao's wife gives it to the dog. The mother-in-law tries to hit her daughter-in-law to reprimand her, but the latter fights back and beats the mother-in-law to the ground. When Cao Zhuang returns home, his mother tells him what happened, but his wife denies everything and angrily tells Cao Zhuang that unless he sends his mother away, he will have to divorce or kill her. Cao Zhuang gets so angry that he grabs a sword and tries to kill her (it is her

<sup>28</sup> *Zhongguo bangzi xi jumu da cidian*, p. 350, lists six different early written versions of this play.

<sup>29</sup> *Zhongguo bangzi xi jumu da cidian*, p. 848, notes that the play was written in 1980 and published in the journal *Shaanxi xiju* 陝西戲劇 (Shaanxi theater) in 1981.

mother-in-law that prevents that from happening), but ends up killing the dog (an actor in a dog suit) instead. His frightened wife begs forgiveness from him and her mother-in-law and will supposedly mend her ways in the future. Historically, of course, it was mother-in-laws who tended to mistreat their daughters-in-law, leading to a high rate of suicides for new brides.<sup>30</sup>

*Third Maid Educates the Son* is an extract from a longer play, *Shuangguan gao* 雙官誥 (Double imperial announcement of official success). It is yet another story of what happens to a family when the husband leaves home, although this time the husband leaves to go make money (it should be remembered that Shanxi was known for its traveling merchants, while today many young people leave the countryside to go to the cities to find employment). A false report of the husband's death arrives and his wife and concubine are not willing to maintain their chastity for him but instead remarry, leaving only an old servant and a maid (the maid of the title) to raise the husband's one son. In the extract, the son has not been paying attention to his studies and objects to Third Maid scolding him for that. With the help of the servant, Third Maid eventually succeeds in getting the son to change his attitude. The longer play ends with both the son and his father returning home as officials.

*Dispensing Rice Porridge* is a scene from *Zhuben ji* 朱痕記 (The purple birthmark). It also involves the false news of the death of a husband, in this case named Zhu Chundeng 朱春登. Zhu goes off to war and relatives take advantage of that to plot against his wife and take over his family property. The relatives claim that Zhu is dead and do their best to make his wife marry one of them but are unsuccessful. Instead, they end up making her and her mother-in-law herd sheep. It turns out that Zhu is not dead, but has established merit on the battlefield. He returns and is told by his relatives that his wife and mother are dead. As part of his mourning for them he dispenses rice porridge to the poor. His wife and mother-in-law come to get some of the porridge and her identity is eventually proven by the birthmark on her hand. The extract treats the last part of the story.

*Moon on the Spring River* is an adaptation for *Puju* of a play written for a different theatrical tradition in the 1980s. It tells the story of betrothed girl who finds the infant of a loyal and good family that has been slandered and is in danger of being wiped out. She decides to raise the infant, claiming that she had it out of wedlock, at the cost of being rejected by her fiancé and his family and causing the death of her own father (due to shame at the news). After the infant has grown up, his family is restored to power and she delivers him to them, but rejects any reward. Her name is Liu Mingyue 柳明月 (lit.: Liu Bright Moon); the idea is that despite the suspicion about her, she is as bright and clear as the moon shining on the river in the spring.

The sole modern play, *A Mother from a Mountain Village*, was created by a *Puju* troupe based in local Yuncheng 運城 City in 2004 and in the following ten years performed 1,400 times by the troupe.<sup>31</sup> The mother of the title is a widow who wishes a

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Lloyd E. Eastman, *Family, Fields, and Ancestor: Continuity and Change in China's Social and Economic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 26–27.

<sup>31</sup> See Li Xiaohong 李小紅, "Xiandai xi *Shancun muqin* yishu lun—Jin yi ciwen zhube *Shancun muqin* lianxu yanchu 1400 chang" 戲曲現代戲山村母親藝術論—謹以此文祝賀山村母親連續演出 1400 場 (On the artistry of the modern play *A Mother from a Mountain Village*—Respectfully offering up this article in celebration of the 1,400<sup>th</sup> consecutive performance of *A Mother from a Mountain Village*), *Xiju zhi jia* 戲劇之家 (Home of theater) 2014.18: 53–54.

better life for her only son and so sends him to the city for schooling, where he gets a college degree but is unable to find work. His unemployment problems and trouble finding a wife are solved when he meets a city girl whose mother finds him a job but insists that her daughter only marry a man with no family burden. His own mother forces him to lie that she is dead and that he has no family. After the young couple has a baby, the son's wife sends him to the mountains to find a nurse and he ends up bringing his mother back. Eventually, the identity of this nurse is revealed and the in-laws live together harmoniously.

What is striking about these plays is that they are really about family matters (whether at the highest or the lowest levels of society) and how often they are about families that get divided. Only in one case, the Judge Bao play, is no way found to at least partially repair the damage done to the family. This would seem to reflect anxiety about lack of parity among family members (it was once the case, publicly at least, that the key to success in a marriage was thought to be that the two families were a good match for each other [*mendang hudui* 門當戶對], an idea that co-existed with the idea that beautiful daughters could marry above their "station") and concern about pressures that cause family members to leave their hometown to find career and economic opportunities. Among the sponsored plays, there are no mythological or purely military plays. The main characters tend to be older, and there are no plays about falling in love. The overall tone was didactic, and the plays did seem designed to exhort people to treat each other better and to live in peace. If anyone really thought hard about what the deities would like to see performed, perhaps they might think that they would like plays that would foster filiality, loyalty to spouse and community, and forbearance, as these qualities among devotees would help ensure the continuance of offerings to them.

## THE SPONSORS

I interviewed some of the sponsors and asked them why they chose to sponsor *Puju* performances at the temple fair. Some had prayed for sons or grandsons to the "aunties," and at that time had vowed to offer an opera performance as a reward if their wishes came true. Some prayed for the health of their sick family members and then sponsored plays to reward the deities for their protection. Some had lived a very happy and healthy life, and they wished that the "aunties" would continue to protect them. The process of making such a vow is called *xuyuan* 許願 and fulfilling the promises made when the vow was made is called *huanyuan* 還願, and the plays performed are called *huanyuan xi* 還願戲. But there were also some sponsors who clearly used sponsorship of plays to promote themselves and their enterprises. As sponsors, not only were their names prominently listed on the posters, but they were also invited by the Temple Fair Office to go on stage and give a short talk before their sponsored performances. The village heads would announce their names and drape a band of red silk over their shoulders. Not all of the sponsors went up onto the stage, but a number of them did, and some used the opportunity to advertise their businesses.

One of the sponsors gave a very interesting performance of his own before *Three Top Degree Holders* (he was one of three sponsors for that play). He even prepared a

written text to read from, which I was allowed to take a photo of. The text was as follows:

Dear Leaders, Elders, and Fellow Countrymen, I wish you all well! I am called Wang Fukui, and am a native of Hanlüe Village in Ganting Town; I was born in Hanlüe, and grew up in Xiangfen and Ganting.

The reform policy has been in place for thirty years,  
Every enterprise is prospering.  
I have exerted myself for several decades,  
And every year I have been able increase my financial resources.  
My house in Hanlüe is very spacious,  
My apartment in Ganting is in an apartment building.  
Combining real estate and other property,  
My immovable assets approach one million *yuan*.  
I do not have to worry about food or clothing,  
My life is blessed and satisfying.

Wife, son, and daughter-in-law,  
Have lived together for many years in harmony and closeness.  
My two grandchildren are also capable,  
They go to school in Pingyang Prefecture.  
My son is Wang Guizeng,  
He was born rather smart.  
Two years ago the term of the village committee ran out,  
And he became village head.  
He has been at it for more than one year,  
And there are results in the village.  
By the time he finishes his term,  
He will have made good on his promises.

Yangxie and Lishan have been joined for thousands of years,  
There has been hardly a break from year to year.  
Yangxie people are very heroic,  
Both the big and little temples are impressive.  
The “Weifeng Percussion”<sup>32</sup> is well-played,  
Year after year it is this way.  
There is singing, dancing, and acrobatics,  
And also *meihu* and Puzhou opera.  
It is really exciting, so very exciting,  
People all over the country know this.

<sup>32</sup> For an introduction to this form of percussion performance, see Liang Weiqing 梁維卿 et al., “Feiwuzhi wenhua yichan xiangmu Jinnan weifeng luogu de tiyu wenhua jiazhi” 非物質文化遺產項目晉南威風鑼鼓的體育文化價值 (The physical education and cultural value of the listed intangible cultural heritage item *weifeng* percussion), *Tiyu wenhua daokan* 體育文化導刊 (Journal of physical education culture) 2008.3: 41–43.



The temple fair will be maintained until the very end,  
From generation to generation it will be passed on.

Finally, I wish the Temple Fair at the Aunties' Temple complete success, and wish you comrades good health, joy in life, the realization of all of your wishes, and success in all your endeavors! Thank you all!

各位領導及在座的父老鄉親們，你們好。我叫王富奎，曲亭鎮韓略村人，本人生在韓略，長在襄汾和甘亭。政策開放三十年，各項事業都能干。自己奮鬥幾十年，每年都能進財財源。韓略房屋寬又敞，甘亭住的是樓房。連房屋帶家產，固定資產近百萬。不愁吃來不愁穿，生活幸福又美滿。婆婆子加兒戲，生活多年很和密。兩個孫子也精干，平陽府裡把書念。兒子王貴增，生的較聰明。前年村換屆，村長他來干。干了一年多，村裡有效果。干完這一屆，承諾定實現。羊癩歷山幾千年，幾乎年年沒中斷，羊癩人民真英雄，大廟小廟好威風。威風鑼鼓打得好，年年都是這樣搞。有歌舞有雜技，還有眉戶和蒲劇。真熱鬧，好熱鬧，全國人民都知道。廟會堅持逢到底，世世代代傳下去。最後祝姑姑廟會圓滿成功，祝同志們身體健康、生活愉快、心想事成、萬事如意。謝謝大家！

The audience enjoyed his poem very much, and they were sometimes amused at the sincere forthrightness of expression involved. They applauded several times during his speech, and were clearly impressed with his personal achievements, especially when he mentioned that he was almost a “millionaire.” The interaction between Wang and the audience was very warm and positive.

After Wang Fukui's speech, the two female sponsors gave very brief talks. One wished that her grandfather would stay healthy, and the other just asked the audience to enjoy the performance. After all three had finished speaking, the village heads put bands of red silk on their shoulders. This kind of red silk is usually used to make the top covering of a quilt. At the temple, it symbolizes a gift from the deities, and it is believed to be able to protect the sponsors from bad luck and misfortune.<sup>33</sup>

The play sponsored by Wang Fukui and the others was *Three Top Degree Holders*. None of the sponsors said anything specifically about the play. It has been briefly summarized above, but it is worthwhile to point out here that it is set in the very Pingyang that Mr. Wang mentioned. He probably did not hope that his son and two grandsons would all become top degree holders like the father and two sons in the play, but certainly wished equivalent success for them.

## THE AUDIENCE

The *Puju* performances at the temple fair attracted a variety of people. Some traveled from faraway villages, but most were locals. Most of the audience was at least sixty years old (see Fig. 3). As one old lady joked with me, “Those watching the plays are all white haired. If there is someone with black hair, they just dyed it” 看戲的都是白頭髮的，如果有黑頭髮的，也是染的。Some younger people took their children to watch the opera in the evening after work.

The *Puju* performances at the temple fair provided a good occasion for social interaction. Old men and women went to watch the performances with their close

<sup>33</sup> Locally the process of putting the bands of red silk on the devotees is called *pibong* 披紅.



FIG. 3. The audience for the *Puju* daytime performance on the 22nd day of the fourth month (May 31, 2013). Photo by author.

friends, and would comment on the performances with each other. But because the temple is a little distant from either North Yangxie or South Yangxie, only those old people who have filial sons to drop them off at the temple before the evening performance starts and pick them up after the show could get there in comfort. Some of the old people who lived far away came to stay with their relatives in Yangxie in order to watch the performances.

Some of the opera-goers are big fans of *Puju* and have watched it since they were young. They understand what good performance is, and who acts well. They rarely applaud, only doing so when a performer exhibits really impressive skill in singing, acting, fighting, or acrobatics. They are very straightforward in criticizing poor performers. For instance, many said that the actress who played the princess in *Hitting the Golden Bough* was very pretty, but her singing was not good. Some even told me directly that Jia Xiaobo, the liaison agent of the troupe, always sang out of tune. Some are in the habit of giving their feedback to the Temple Fair Office, asking that their suggestions be sent to the opera troupe. Because the audience at the temple fair is quite demanding, *Puju* troupes that play there have to offer their best performance, but if they do their best, they are likely to be rewarded with applause.

#### ACTORS 1: HANDLING THE UNEXPECTED

On the second day of the temple fair, when the troupe was playing *Judgment by a Perceptive Judge*, it suddenly became known that the Governor of Shanxi Province was coming to visit the temple. A Temple Fair Office representative asked the actors

to stop the performance, and soon the curtain dropped.<sup>34</sup> Yangxie had suffered from a flood earlier in the year that had destroyed at least sixteen houses. The flood was caused by the collapse of the Quting Reservoir in Hongdong on February 15, 2013, and it caused tremendous loss and trauma for local residents. The governor probably came to show his concern about the flood and its aftermath, but almost no one in the audience seemed to care about that. The performance was interrupted twice for him, and that was what concerned the audience.

The troupe's response amazed me. The first time the performance was stopped, Qin Xianglian was trying to tell Judge Bao what happened to her. After about five or ten minutes, the performance resumed, the curtain rose up again, and the actors were in the same position they had been in when it had fallen. It was as if the performers had stood frozen behind the curtain, and only unfroze when the curtain rose and the lights were turned on them. They picked up from where they had left off. After another two minutes, and Qin Xianglian had moved to the front of stage the better to sing about her tragic experience to the audience, the troupe was asked to stop again, the curtain started to drop again, but this time Qin Xianglian was standing in front of it. She was right in the midst of expressing very strong emotion, but managed to stop, turn around, and go backstage. After the governor had left, the show started again.<sup>35</sup> The orchestra played some incidental music, the curtain rose up, and Judge Bao and Qin Xianglian again picked up where they had left off.

That evening I talked with the actress who played Qin Xianglian in the performance, Pan Caihong 潘彩虹 (Fig. 4). I asked her how she could be so calm on stage under such circumstances. She said that she had encountered all kinds of emergencies during her performance career and was used to it.

As mentioned at the beginning of this report, there was a power outage at the temple on the evening of the fifth day of the temple fair, the last day that the *Puju* troupe was performing. An unexpected storm took down the electrical lines to the temple, and it was not until 9:30 p.m. that power was restored. The troupe used candles backstage, and performers waited there, in their makeup. As I have already indicated, Pan Caihong said that they would perform no matter what; even if there was no audience, they would perform for the "aunties." I also talked to Pan Caihong's husband, Di Anmin 諦安民, a famous *Puju* actor of male roles (*xusheng* 鬚生). He said that his master once taught him that he should perform with all his heart even if there was only one person watching.<sup>36</sup> It was then that I really started to understand some of the significance of the practice of offering up theater performances to the deities. As an old lady in Yangxie once told me, "The plays are performed for the *gugu* to watch, the rest of the audience is just there to be supportive" 戲是演給姑姑看的, 其他人都是捧場的. Local people believed in the miraculous power of the *gugu*, as another old lady told me: "Whatever you ask for, they respond. [They are really] efficacious!" 你求啥, 她都應, 靈. In order to reward the protection provided by the *gugu*, local people actively support the troupes' performances, which, of course, is greatly appreciated by the performers.

<sup>34</sup> The curtain, along with some other "modern" stage equipment, was brought by the troupe.

<sup>35</sup> The governor, despite the fact that the performance was stopped, did not mount the stage to make his speech.

<sup>36</sup> Verbatim quotations of what the two actors said are given at the beginning of this report.



FIG. 4. The author (left) and the actress Pai Caihong (right), in the quarters provided for the actors, 21<sup>st</sup> day of the fourth month (May 30, 2013). *Photo by author.*

Di Anmin and Pan Caihong were born in rural villages, and they both attended local *Puju* training schools (*xixiao* 戲校) when they were very young. After graduation, they became members of a state-owned and run (*guoying* 國營) *Puju* troupe. Di Anmin became locally well known when he was young, but his troupe disbanded in the late 1990s, and he had to look for a new living. He changed occupations and quit performing. But he eventually figured out that what he was best at was singing and acting, and so he returned to his old career when his troupe was revived in the early 2010s as a private (*minyong* 民營) troupe (this is the troupe that came to perform at the temple fair). After the dismantlement of her troupe, Pan Caihong did not give up her career; she started to perform at weddings, birthday celebrations, and funerals in the countryside. Now this couple performs together on many occasions with the newly reconstructed troupe. At the 2013 temple fair in Yangxie, they performed as husband and wife in *Judgment by a Perceptive Judge* and in *Killing the Dog*. The fact that they are a couple offstage as well as onstage increased the interest in their performances among the audience for the temple fair.

Even though this couple is devoted to *Puju*, they still think it is very hard (*ku* 苦) to live as *Puju* performers. Their income is low, and they have to travel a lot. They have a son in his early twenties who is very talented at singing *Puju*, but Pan Caihong did not want her son to live such a hard life as hers and her husband's, so she did not allow him to study *Puju* formally or choose it as his career. Her son attended college and became a naval officer. I talked to a member of my host family about the example of this couple of actors, and she said, "When you work in a profession, [sometimes] you are harmed by it" 干一行, 傷一行。

No matter how she feels about the prospects of her chosen career, Pan Caihong likes to perform *Puju*. This is perhaps one of the reasons why, when she played

Qin Xianglian in *Judgment by a Perceptive Judge*, the audience warmly applauded her singing and acting. She made such an impression that some members of the audience called her “Qin Xianglian” instead of her real name. After all her performances, she returned home to Linfen to look after her aged mother, whom she brought one day to attend the temple fair. Together with her mother, she became a member of the audience, in front of the stage, instead of on it.

## ACTORS 2: “SUPERSTARS ARE COMING!”

On the third day of the temple fair (May 31, 2013), two superstars came to perform. That afternoon, a poster was posted near the entrance to the temple compound:

At 7:30 p.m. tonight, Mr. Yan Hucheng from Yangxie and Mr. Ji Hai'ou from Hou Village have especially invited Guo Zemin, Director of the Linfen *Puju* Company, national top-level actor, and the winner of the Plum Flower Theatrical Performance Award, to perform *Xu Ce Runs through the City*, and Pan Guoliang, Director of the Linfen City *Meihu* Opera Troupe, national top-level actor, and winner of the Plum Flower Theatrical Performance Award, to perform highlights from *Village Official* and *Father*. Everyone is welcome to come and enjoy [the performances]!

今晚七點半由羊獮村閆胡成先生和侯村吉海鷗先生特邀臨汾市蒲劇院院長、國家一級演員、梅花獎獲得者郭澤民先生演出《徐策跑城》；臨汾市眉戶劇團團長、國家一級演員、梅花獎獲得者潘國良演出《村官》、《父親》精彩選段。歡迎廣大群眾前來觀賞！

I was curious how such superstars (within the circles of *Puju* and *meihu xi*) were asked and agreed to perform at the temple fair. One man from the Temple Fair Office said that an important official called the two actors and asked them to come, and each sponsor provided about 6,000 *yuan* each to pay for their performances. Their performances lasted only about one half hour, since the regular evening performance of the *Puju* troupe still began at 8 p.m. Pan Guoliang sang two arias, and Guo Zemin performed a ten-minute extract from *Xu Ce Running Runs through the City*.

The performance that evening was very successful. People from everywhere came to watch and it was unprecedentedly crowded around the stage. The two superstars performed very well, and audiences applauded passionately. Afterward, they came out on stage again to acknowledge the applause. The village heads then put the same kinds of bands of red silk on their shoulders to express the villagers' gratitude.

*Xu Ce Runs through the City* is one of Guo Zemin's representative works. It is a highlight from the full play *Xue Gang Rebels Against the Court* (*Xue Gang fan chao* 薛剛反朝), in which Xue Gang drunkenly kicks the lawless son of a wicked minister to death. The evil minister tries to exterminate the entire Xue family, and almost succeeds, but Xue Gang gets away and a brave old minister, Xu Ce, saves a young member of the clan, Xue Jiao, by letting his own son be executed in Xue Jiao's place and raising him as his son. In the mountains, Xue Gang gathers an army to take revenge on the evil minister. After Xue Jiao has grown up, Xu Ce reveals to him his true identity and what happened to his family, and sends him to make contact with Xue Gang. Xu Ce finds out that Xue Gang plans to take the capital as part of his revenge, but persuades him to wait until they know the response of



FIG. 5. Guo Zeming performing as Xu Ce in *Xu Ce Runs through the City*, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of the fourth lunar month (May 31, 2013). Photo by author.

the emperor to a memorial asking for justice that Xu Ce intends to submit. *Xu Ce Runs through the City* highlights Xu Ce, who is very old by this point, hurrying through the capital on foot to submit the memorial in time, singing as he goes, and occasionally falling down on the way. Guo Zemin played Xu Ce and his phenomenal skill at making the wings on his minister's cap spin in different directions or in unison was especially appreciated (see Fig. 5, in which the visible wing is almost perpendicular to the ground). Famous *Puju* actors are known for their precise and creative manipulation of such props as their false beards, their long false hair, elements of their headgear, and horse whips. An actor is usually good at at least one of these skills (or techniques) and his or her signature play would feature that skill.<sup>37</sup>

Guo Zemin is among the best *Puju* actors still performing. He was born in Linfen in 1960 and graduated from a local opera school. He won the national award mentioned in the poster cited above in 1983.<sup>38</sup>

The two sponsors who invited the two superstars also enjoyed some honor at the temple fair. Both were asked to give a short talk before the performance. One of

<sup>37</sup> For more on these techniques associated with *Puju*, see Jessup, "Staging Traditional Chinese Opera in the Reform Era: Conflicting Local Identities in Modernization," pp. 122 (where she contrasts the emphasis on such skills in *Puju* with an absence of this in *meihu xi*) and 168–70.

<sup>38</sup> The great spoken drama playwright, Cao Yu 曹禺 (1910–1996), wrote a glowing review of the performances given by Guo and two other *Puju* performers of Guo's generation in 1983 in Beijing: "Huiyi Puzhou bangzi" 回憶蒲州梆子 (Remembering *Puzhou bangzi*), *Xiqu bao* 戲劇報 (Theater journal) 1984.12: 33–34 (originally written for publication in *Puju yishu*). For a more detailed description of what Guo does with the wings of his minister's cap as Xu Ce, see Zuo Jia 佐嘉, "Diyi jie Meihua jiang huodezhe—Guo Zemin—Yiwei zhenxi shijian de *Puju* yanyuan" 第一屆梅花獎獲得者—郭澤民—一位珍惜時間的蒲劇演員 (Winner of the first round of Plum Flower Theatrical Awards—Guo Zemin—A *Puju* actor who knows how to cherish time), *Xiqu yishu* 戲曲藝術 (Chinese indigenous theater arts) 1984.3: 12–11 (it was not uncommon for articles to be printed this way in Chinese journals of the time).

them, Ji Hai'ou, manager of the Huang Ying Road Project, gave a four-minute talk to publicize his company, Wuzhou jitian 五洲集團 (Five Continent Conglomerate) and this project. Huang Ying Road is named after Ehuang and Nüying, and it is a part of a developmental project to build an industrial park that will very directly affect Yangxie and four other nearby villages. He claimed that this project would benefit both the company and local villagers, making them become rich together.

The social harmony among local villagers, village heads, and company employees that I observed at the temple fair dissolved soon afterwards. On June 21, 2013, Yangxie village residents launched public protests against the development project and the local official corruption that they claimed was involved. They were worried that if the company's plan was carried out they would lose their land and homes and be forced to move to a new and unknown place. At the time of this writing, the Yangxie villagers have not yet been relocated, and *Puju* troupes have still been invited to perform at the annual temple fair in the Old Temple of King Yao.

### THE MEIHU OPERA PERFORMANCES AT THE TEMPLE FAIR

The *meihu* opera troupe arrived on the evening of the fifth day of the temple fair. The two troupes had to stay in the same small hostel that evening, but the *Puju* troupe left at 6 a.m. the next day. The Xiangfen *Puju* troupe was not one of the top *Puju* troupes in the local area, but since the *meihu* opera troupe gave a very poor performance, their performance was perhaps seen more favorably, in retrospect, than would have been the case if the *meihu* troupe had done a better job.

The Linyi Youth Meihu Troupe was invited primarily because of the great fame of the Linyi Meihu Troupe 臨猗眉戶劇團, a top *meihu* troupe in Shanxi. However, these two troupes turned out to have very little in common. It later became clear that the head of the youth troupe used to be an actor in the other troupe, and when he formed his own private troupe, he purposely tried to connect the new troupe with the old one by choosing a name that would tie them together. This became known to those in charge only after they saw the poor quality of the performance of the troupe on their first day of performances.

On the morning after the *meihu* troupe's first day of performances, several audience members went to submit their complaints to the head of the temple. The Temple Fair Office then sent several people to the troupe, asking them to perform better. Late in the afternoon of that day, the troupe head was invited over and was immediately criticized by many people who were there. The temple head directly said to him, "Having not performed well, how can you take the performance fee from us!" 你們這不好好演，我們的戲錢可怎麼結啊。The troupe head responded, "[Wait and] see tonight's [performance]!" 看今晚的。

The *Puju* troupe charged 1,900 RMB per performance. The *meihu* troupe originally asked for 3,000 RMB per performance, but was talked down to 2,600 RMB. These amounts were public knowledge. Many audience members were angry that the *meihu* troupe asked for such a high price while giving performances in which both the singing and acting was poor.

The part of the performance for that night that was special was their version, featuring the troupe head, of *Xu Ce Running through the City*, which was mounted

before the regularly scheduled performance. More than twice as long as the extract sung by Guo Zemin, this version began earlier in the action and was not a solo performance. The troupe head played the role of Xu Ce, and did his best to give a stirring performance. His performance did win applause from the audience, and saved the reputation of his troupe. The troupe did not receive the full amount that was originally promised, but the 25,500 RMB it was paid was only 500 RMB short.

## CONCLUSION

Temple fairs have become important to the survival and revival of *Puju* since the disbanding of many of the state-run troupes and the reorganization of the remaining ones. Currently, one of the biggest problems for the prospects of any revival of *Puju* is the aging of both the actors and audiences and their non-replacement by younger generations. Because of the long, difficult training and low earnings, it is becoming very difficult to recruit new talent to *Puju*. *Puju* was officially listed as a “National Intangible Cultural Heritage” (*guojia feiwuzhi wenhua yichan* 國家非物質文化遺產) in May 2006, but the promised benefits have not been realized.<sup>39</sup> At the present time, temple fairs are clearly important occasions to attract audiences and revive interest in *Puju*. One old man from Yangxie once said to me, “Without temple fairs, *Puju* opera would have disappeared long ago” 沒有廟會，蒲劇早就沒了。Fortunately, *Puju* does not seem to be in danger of dying out in the immediate future. It is still a favorite of many ordinary villagers who find it a good way to entertain both temple deities and themselves, and it still has its place in common people’s traditional beliefs and practices.

<sup>39</sup> On *Puju* as intangible cultural heritage, see Wang Xi 王茜, “Feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu shiye xia de *Puju* yanjiu” 非物質文化遺產保護視野下的蒲劇研究 (A study of *Puju* from the perspective of the preservation of it as an intangible cultural heritage), master’s thesis, Henan daxue, 2014. On the listing of “the living tradition of worshipping the ancient sage-kings Yao and Shun in several villages in Hongtong County [including Yangxie],” and how the money promised to come from that listing has not reached down to those one would expect, see Ziyang You, “Shifting Actors and Power Relations: Contentious Local Responses to the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Contemporary China,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 52.2–3 (2015): 253–68.