

Introduction

Chinese Puppet Theaters

The traditional string puppet or marionette theater (*tixian mu'ouxi* 提线木偶戏, *xianxi* 线戏) also generally known as puppet theater (*kuileixi* 傀儡戏) is the earliest known form of China's various puppet theaters, including shadow theater (*yingxi* 影戏),¹ glove puppet theater (*budaixi* 布袋戏), rod puppet theater (*zhangtou mu'ouxi* 杖头木偶戏), and iron-rod puppet theater (*tiezhi mu'ouxi* 铁枝木偶戏).² Presently in northern China, string puppet theater exists only in Heyang 合阳, Shaanxi. The marionette theater of southern China (particularly in Fujian and Taiwan) has been amply documented (Chen 1986; Jin 2003; *Minsu quyi* 1983, 2002a, 2002b; Ruizendaal 2006; Song 1994; Ye 2004).³ Only one book and a handful of short articles, however, focus on Heyang puppetry (Heyang xian Wenhua guan n.d.; Huang 1999; Shi 1999).⁴

Possibly due to the similar natures of puppets and statues for representing deities, both are thought to exercise spiritual powers by enacting

1. Technically speaking, the Chinese separate the two-dimensional shadow theater, *yingxi* 影戏, from the three-dimensional *mu'ou* 木偶 puppet theaters. For information on Chinese shadow theater, see Fan Pen Chen, *Chinese Shadow Theatre: History, Popular Religion, and Women Warriors*; and Fan Pen Chen, *Visions for the Masses: Chinese Shadow Plays from Shaanxi and Shanxi*.

2. For a survey of Chinese puppet troupes (based on my field trips conducted during 2008 and 2009), see Fan Pen Chen and Bradford Clark, "Survey of Chinese Puppet Theatres."

3. These are selected from among fifty-some bibliographic items I collected concerning string puppetry in Fujian and Taiwan. See the bibliography for a more complete list.

4. These are selected from more than a dozen bibliographic items about the string puppetry of Heyang, Shaanxi. See the bibliography for the others.

specific religious rituals. In Fujian, traditional puppetry has been considered particularly efficacious for representing deities in legendary religious ritual plays (Ye 1999; Ye 2004). However, this formerly vital religious role for puppet theater is all but extinct in northern China and is not mentioned in any published sources. Through fieldwork conducted in Heyang during 2004, I learned from Dang Wenhui 党文辉 (then sixty-eight years old, a former performer and troupe director of Heyang's official marionette troupe) some rituals relating to Lord Guan (Guangong 关公; Guan Yu 关羽),⁵ patron saint of Heyang's marionette theater⁶ and the most popular local deity. Through Dang, I obtained a rare copy of *Short Version of River Yang*—one of the most popular plays because it featured Lord Guan—which I translated for this book.

History of the Marionette Theater

Puppet theater predates human-actor theater in both India and China. Many scholars have noted string puppetry's influence on human theatrical forms, such as Peking opera (jingju 京剧; Chang 1951, 134–135; Su 1995, 3:13–14; Sun 1965). The geographical origin of puppetry is, however, a controversial topic. Richard Pischel believes India is the home of puppet theater and that gypsies (who migrated from India) spread it to the rest of the world (Pischel 1902). Berthold Laufer connects the Chinese word for puppets—*kuilei* 傀儡—to the Turkish name, *kukla*, for marionettes. Tracing the word to Medieval Greek, he suggests that puppetry spread from Byzantium to the Slavs, who passed it on to Turkish tribes in Central Asia. The word *kukla* is still used in the Slavic, Turkish, and Romani (i.e., gypsy) languages (Laufer 1923, 39). Noting the eleven variant orthographical forms (or characters) for the Chinese word for string puppetry—傀儡 *kuilei*, 窟磊子 *kuleizi*, 魁磊 *kuilei*, 魁欄 *kuilei*, 窟磊 *kulei*, 魁墨 *kuilei*, 魁搨 *kuilei*, 滙磊 *huilei*, 傀磊子 *kuileizi*, 苟利子 *goulizi*, 加[嘉]礼戏 *jialixi*)—Victor Mair

5. For more on the rituals, see the Introduction to the chapter on *Short Version of River Yang*, a play included in this book.

6. When Ye Mingsheng 叶明生 went to Heyang in 2014, members of the Xiangruo Theatrical Society (mentioned below) claim two patron gods, Lord Guan and Prince Zhuang 莊王. According to Wang Hongsheng and Shi Yaozeng, however, Prince Zhuang was traditionally the patron god of human-actor operas (*daxi* 大戏), while only Lord Guan was the marionette theater (known as the *xiaoxi* 小戏 locally) patron god. See Wang Hongsheng and Shi Yaozeng, 200–201.

also concluded that the term “. . . must undoubtedly have been transliterated from a foreign language” (Mair 1983, 18).

Other scholars believe puppet theater originated in the masked dances of exorcistic *nuo* 傩 rituals of the Han (206 BCE–220 CE) and earlier (Dolby 1981, 99; Dong 1983, 36–37; Jiang 1988, 63–68; Sun 1980, 40, 55–57). Still others consider funerary statues symbolizing the dead (and people accompanying the deceased to the underworld) as predecessors of marionettes (Dong 1983, 24–35; Sun 1980, 52–55). In 1978, a large wooden puppet with detachable limbs was found in a Han dynasty tomb in Shandong’s Laixi County 莱西县 (Ye 2004, 3–4). Earliest use of the word *kuilei* 傀儡 occurs in a source from the end of the Han (Ying Shao’s 应绍 [ca. 178 CE] *Fengsu tong* 风俗通) (quoted in Sun 1952, 4), although this source was not recorded until the sixth century (Dolby 1981, 97). According to this and later sources, by the end of the Han, puppets were used during funerals, but also to entertain guests at private parties. Foreign puppetry influences may, consequently, have co-existed with those of Chinese provenance even before the Tang period.

During the Northern Qi dynasty (550–557) of the Northern and Southern Dynasties period, Baldy Guo (Guo Tu 郭秃)—a renowned clown puppet character, also known as Master Guo (Guo Lang 郭郎 or Guo Gong 郭公)—came to represent puppetry itself. According to the Northern Qi scholar, Yan Zhitui 颜之推 (531–ca. 591), a certain Guo, bald due to illness, habitually entertained others by clowning around. Puppets were fashioned in his likeness and called Baldy Guo (Yan Zhitui 1993, 17:305). The Tang dynasty musicologist, Duan Anjie 段安节 (fl. 894), notes in his *Yuefu zalu* 乐府杂录 that marionette song-and-dance shows were always led by a bald clown puppet known as Guo Lang (Duan Anjie 1982, 1:62). The relationship between Guo Lang and puppetry in Central Asia deserves further investigation. There is a striking resemblance between bald Guo Lang and the prominent Turkish shadow puppet figure Karagös (a clown figure of gypsy origin, also famously bald). However, a form of string puppetry may already have existed in China that was deeply affected by foreign influences arriving during the Northern Qi (550–577) and Tang (618–907) dynasties. Incidentally, Guo Lang is generally considered to have survived in Heyang’s marionette theater as the ever-popular bald clown Lai Baozi 赖包子 (excerpts of whose comical monologues have been translated in this book).

A plethora of different puppet theater forms thrived as secular, commercial entertainment in the Song dynasty capitals. But unlike shadow theater and human-actor operas, marionette theater was apparently performed mainly to entertain the gods and exorcise evil spirits in rural areas (since

the Yuan (1206–1368; see Wang Hao 汪顛, *Lintian xulu* 林田叙录, quoted in Jiang 1992, 51) and Ming dynasties (1368–1644; Zhu Yu 1975 reprint, 40). Marionette theater continued to serve these religious functions through the Qing (1644–1911) and the Republican period (1911–1949), particularly in Fujian and Taiwan. Considered a more ancient theatrical form, in many areas it is still revered and given precedence. The marionette stage is given the more exalted location (i.e., to the left of any human actors' operatic troupe), (Liu 1986, 322) and commences its performances first (Ye 2004, 119).

Heyang and Its Marionette Theater

Heyang is about 200 kilometers northeast of Xi'an (five hours, by train, from this capital of Shaanxi Province when I traveled there in 1999 and 2004). It is situated in the cradle of Chinese civilization, within the ancient State of Qin 秦 that unified China in 221 BCE. Part of this region, Hechuan 洽川, has extensive river marshland along the Yellow River, reputedly the location of the first poem in the *Book of Odes* (*shijing* 诗经).⁷ Besides claiming to be the birthplace of Chinese marionette theater,⁸ Heyang boasts two ancient rituals related to *nuo*: Dancing Play 跳戏⁹ and Beating Gongs and Drums (*shangluogu* 上锣鼓).¹⁰

7. This verse starts with the stanza: “*Guanguan* chirp the ospreys/ On the river isle/ The beautiful young lady/ Is sought after by gentlemen” 关关雎鸠 在河之州 窈窕淑女 君子好逑.

8. A long tradition of marionette theater also exists in Zhaoyi 朝邑, Dali 大荔, and Chengcheng 澄城 in Shaanxi, Ruicheng 芮城 in Shanxi, and Lingbao 灵宝 in Henan (*Zhongguo xiqu zhi weiyuan hui* 1995, 105). It is a Heyang researcher who insists that marionette theater originated in Heyang (Shi 1998, 93–101).

9. Considered a living fossil of ancient drama, this simple dramatic form emphasizes martial arts postures. See “Heyang tiaoxi jiqi shehui huanjing” 合阳跳戏及其社会环境 in Shi 1998, 111–127. Also see Holm, 2003.

10. This unusual exorcist ritual consists of male villagers beating gongs and drums, almost completely in the nude, during the cold First Month. See “Huanghe panshang xiangren nuo de yicun—Shaanxi Heyang Donglei cun de shang luogu” 黄河畔上乡人傩的遗存—陕西合阳东雷村的上锣鼓; “Ye shuo shang luogu de ‘man’” 也说上锣鼓的‘蛮’; “Weibe nongmin de gangyang zhi mei—Qiantan ‘shang luogu’ zhong de luoti 渭北农民的刚阳之美—浅谈‘上锣鼓’中的裸体”; “Wo shi zheyang jinxing ‘shang luogu’ de tianye diaocha de” 我是这样进行‘上锣鼓’的田野调查的 in Shi 1998, 140–164 and 247–254.

Heyang's string puppet/marionette theater was traditionally known as *xianhou* 线吼, *xianhu* 线胡, or *xianhou* 线猴, and formally labeled String Opera (*xianxi* 线戏) in 1957.¹¹ It is now also called the Heyang Operatic Tradition (*heqiang* 合腔) (Shi 2008, 78–80).¹² Performers use strings to manipulate the puppets, combined with singing, music, and dialogue. The facial features of Heyang's traditional marionette puppets¹³ resemble those of Tang dynasty figures, providing some support for locals' claim that their marionettes originated during the Tang.

Thirty-six troupes existed in Heyang before 1949. According to Dang Wenhui 党文辉, former director of Heyang County's official marionette theater, all the local troupes' trunks were confiscated by the government sometime after 1949. A troupe formerly named Morning Light Marionette Troupe of Heyang (*heyangxian chenguang xianjushe* 合阳县晨光线剧社) became the official troupe when it changed its name to The Red Marionette Troupe (*hongxian jutuan* 红线剧团) and performed revolutionary plays. In 1973, this troupe was renamed again as the Heyang Marionette Art Troupe (*heyang tixian mu'ou yishutuan* 合阳提线木偶艺术团), and dominated the local puppet theater scene until early this millennium.

In 2004, I was told that only three troupes survive in Heyang: the official county troupe (the Heyang Marionette Art Troupe); a private troupe (New Artistic Marionette Troupe [*xinyi xian'outuan* 新艺线偶团]); and amateur

11. See Zhongguo Xiquzhi Weiyuanhui 1995, 105. It is also referred to as the minor theater (*xiaoxi* 小戏) in Heyang, versus the major theater (*daxi* 大戏), the human-actor theater.

12. The *qiang*, or musical style, is what distinguishes various traditions of traditional Chinese drama or opera.

13. The official troupe changed its stage setup and style of puppets to resemble the more modern configurations created by the famous official marionette troupe in Quanzhou 泉州, Fujian (the most renowned string puppet troupe in China). Twenty Heyang students were sent there to study puppetry for a three-year period—first in 1961, and then again in 1979. See Wang Hongsheng and Shi Yaozeng, 79–80. The use of long strings by Heyang's government-sponsored troupe is a result of Quanzhou influence (although the traditional short strings continued to be used). The newer style of facial features, with larger eyes and more prominent noses, also came to dominate the local scene. The number of strings also increased for many puppets. Wang Hongmin 王红民, director of the official troupe in Heyang when I visited, had a puppet (manipulated by thirty-four strings) take off his robe himself in a playlet titled, “Zhou Ren Decides to Return Home” 周仁回府.

village performers at Xizhonglei Cun 西中雷村.¹⁴ Tourism has become an important factor in keeping many of the traditional arts alive, including the marionette theater. The official troupe was still, by far, the most formal and elaborate. It received 160 awards between 1986 and 1994,¹⁵ but was already in decline by 2004. Selected for training based on their voices and appearance, most of the fifteen troupe members were attractive females, in their mid-thirties by 2004. Although an official troupe, support (if any) from the county had become minimal, and its performances were mainly hired by locals. The troupe had to seek its own sources of income, so it performed at individual events (e.g., weddings, funerals, birthday celebrations of the aged, and the building of new houses) and communal events (e.g., festival celebrations and temple fairs). Aside from these traditional venues, the troupe also participated in commercial fairs and exhibitions and other tourist venues (e.g., Maiden Spring 處女泉,¹⁶ a Yellow River marshland theme park at Hechuan 合川). Two to four puppeteers (hired from the official troupe by this private park) regularly performed, for free, short excerpts on their own elaborate, permanent stage, three to four times daily. The troupe also performed on request, for thirty *yuan* per excerpt or playlet.¹⁷ Apparently, fifteen years ago it was an honor to be a member of

14. In 2009, Guo Cuicheng 郭崔成, a member of Guo Family Troupe 郭家班 at Guojia Slope 郭家坡 in Lujing Town of Heyang County, performed regularly at the tourist venue of Fuke 福客 Restaurant (at the North Plaza of the Big Goose Pagoda 雁塔北广场 of Xi'an 西安, Shaanxi). Guo Cuicheng claimed to be a descendant of Baldy Guo 郭秃. See the chapter on "Lai Baozi" for more information on Baldy Guo. The local Heyang cultural bureau also discovered (since I last visited in 2004) a troupe named Xiangruo Theatrical Society (*xiangruo jushe* 向若剧社) at Nanxun Village 南顺村 of Xinchu Town 新池镇 in Heyang, which boasted having twenty members. Ye Mingsheng visited them and shared his photos with me.

15. In 1987, it received first place representing Weinan 渭南 region and Shaanxi Province at a Beijing art festival. From 1992–1994, it was selected three years in a row as the most progressive performing arts troupe in the province (*sheng xianjin yishu tuanti* 省先进艺术团体).

16. This spring is characterized by small, individual waterholes of spouting sand and water that are able to keep one afloat when stepped on. Traditionally, brides in this region were sent to bathe in this spring before marriage, hence its name.

17. Tourists could also play with the marionettes or take a picture with them for 2 *yuan* each (about 25 cents U.S. then). The park charged a 30-*yuan* entrance fee. A 10-*yuan* fee was charged for "swimming/sporting" in the spring, the main attraction of the park. The performers were paid a salary of 2,000 *yuan* per month.

the official marionette troupe. Today, troupe members are so poorly paid that this is no longer the case.¹⁸

The private troupe was a small and simple setup, directed by a middle-aged female performer named Dang Fengju 黨凤菊. Dang was native to Heyang and hired to perform short excerpts of marionette plays, and one shadow play, for 10 *yuan* per person (for a 10–15 minute-show, at a traditional Xi'an mansion converted into a tourist attraction in 2004).¹⁹ Four other performers (primarily musicians) accompany Dang; two of them sing, and one of them manipulates marionettes as well. The performers learned the short shadow play recently to add variety to their show. The performance took place in a tastefully decorated room (with a small stage and chairs near the mansion's gate), and the performers slept on boards behind the stage. Dang also sold VCDs (one of her own performance, and others by the official Heyang county troupe and a local shadow theater troupe).²⁰

Villagers at Majiazhuang xiang Xizhonglei cun 马家庄乡西中雷村 formed what they called Self-Entertainment Group (*zileban* 自乐班). Believing that the marionette theater originated in their small village, the villagers proudly boasted twelve members who continued to perform (as singers and/or puppeteers, or musicians). Usually, three to eight performers were recruited when a marionette show was required, either by one family, or the village as a whole. The performers were given gifts (wine, cigarettes, candies, steamed buns) and partook of the banquet that invariably accompanied such events, but they received no cash payments.

Shows by this amateur group would typically start between 6 and 7 pm, and last until around 10 pm. A main play was usually performed first, followed by a light-hearted 10-minute short play that ended the show. When I visited in 2004, the star of the village was the ninety-two-year-old master puppeteer Wei Tiancai 魏天才 (1914–), whose index finger was callused

18. By 2009, the official county troupe, which was no longer supported by the government, had only sixteen members and was strapped financially.

19. This mansion was known as the Gao 高 residence. Its address was Beiyuanmen yihao minju Gaofu 北院门一号民居高府. It was located close to the grand mosque in Xi'an 西安. When I went to Xi'an again in 2009, no one was performing at the Gao residence. Dang Fengju was performing at Maiden Spring instead of the official troupe, which was there during 2004.

20. The VCDs cost about 100 *yuan* each. According to Dang, profits were split 30 percent to the tour guides who brought the tourists, and 70 percent to the establishment. It was not clear how much Dang's own percentage was.

and deformed from manipulating strings since he was fifteen. Modest and affable, Wei (who directed the orchestra) also sang and manipulated a puppet for me for about eight minutes, to the delight of the villagers. The village did not have any puppets, so Dang Fengju brought a few of her own. Dang also made a detour to her home village to collect her portable stage when she accompanied me to Wei's place. Normally, the villagers would arrange to borrow, when needed, Wei Tiancai's old set of puppets²¹ (which belonged to Wei's only daughter and her husband in a different village).²²

The entire repertoire of the Heyang marionette theater boasted more than five hundred titles, of which two hundred-some were supposed to have survived. However, the performance was unlike the shadow theater in Shaanxi in that the repertoire of the Wanwanqiang 碗碗腔 shadow theater tradition benefited from the creation of its most famous ten plays by the *juren* 举人 (holder of the prestigious Select, or Second Degree) Li Fanggui 李芳桂.²³ During the Qianlong reign (1736–1796), Heyang's marionette plays tended to be comparatively less intellectual. Numerous high-ranking scholars did, however, leave their mark on this tradition. One source considers two late Ming (1368–1644) scholars, Ning Hong 宁宏 and Li Guan 李灌 (1601–1676), as particularly involved and influential in the earliest known history of this tradition.²⁴ Both of them retired to the countryside after the fall of the Ming dynasty, and performed marionette plays as a form of self-expression thereafter.

Ning Hong was the son of Ning Shimo 宁时镛, who obtained his *jinsbi* 进士 degree (the most prestigious Presented Scholar, or Third Degree) in 1589, although Ning Hong himself was apparently a respected scholar without a degree. The father and son rewrote and created numerous plays, but only a Clapper Opera and a marionette play have survived. *Pavilion of the Immortals in Exile* (translated in this collection) was the marionette play

21. This set of puppets consists of four trunks of old puppets and props. The puppets are carved, painted, and outfitted in traditional style with Tang dynasty features.

22. When I visited Xi'an in 2009, I was told that this collection had already been sold. Fortunately, I had been permitted to take photos of most of it in 2004.

23. Li Fanggui's plays are so refined and intriguing that some of them have been adapted by the marionette theater.

24. Huang 1999, 69. Li Guan may have been influential in drawing puppetry away from religion. He was supposed to have resided in Nanxun Village 南顺村 of Xinchu Town 新池镇, where he established a Xiangruo Theatrical Troupe 向若剧社. A puppetry troupe of the same name has been revived at the village (see Fig. 1.13 and Fig. 1.14).

attributed to them.²⁵ Li Guan was a *juren*, credited with rewriting many plays and authoring one play. Having received his degree at the end of the Ming dynasty, but dissatisfied with the ensuing Qing (1644–1911) government, Li Guan retired to the countryside and associated frequently with marionette theater performers. He sang sorrowful lyrics most expressively when performing with them, rewrote many of the popular plays of his day, and authored a play titled *Tale of the Black Mountain* 黑山记 about contemporary events. Unfortunately, this play was banned and lost due to its anti-Manchu sentiments.²⁶ Tradition also remembers contributions, during the mid-Ming, by a certain village school master (*mou shushi* 某塾师), the scholars Wang Bopeng 汪伯彭 and his brother Wang Yi 王异, and a member of a Qin 秦 family.²⁷

Ten figures who have contributed to the creation (or rewriting) of marionette plays are remembered from the Qing dynasty.²⁸ Most were learned scholars, although the majority of them wrote only one marionette play. They include two *jinsshi* (Xu Pan'gui 许攀桂, who received his degree in 1661, and Cui Wenyu 崔问余, who received his degree in 1801); a *juren*, who was also a magistrate (Lei Yu 雷豫, who received his degree in 1714); a Licentiate Wang (Wang Xiucui 王秀才, holder of the First Degree, mid-Qing); an anti-Manchu scholar (Xu Baigong 徐拔贡, early Qing); a certain secretary (*mou shuli* 某书吏, late Qing); an eremite (Luoyi Chushi 洛邑处士, late Qing); a certain Wang Wenzhi 王文志 (late Qing); and two marionette performers, Chen Lai 陈来 (late Qing) and Du Jinhu 杜晋虎 (mid to late Qing). Chen Lai was the only author of a play not known to have received extensive education. He was a performer who wrote a short, “extra” playlet, known as *shaoxi* 捎戏,²⁹ about a contemporary flooding

25. Ibid. The play was more likely written by Ning Hong, with minimal (if any) participation by his father, since the Ming dynasty fell 55 years after the father obtained his *jinsshi* degree.

26. Huang 1999, 70–72.

27. This local scholar or squire supposedly created the marionette play version of *Romance of the Western Chamber* (*Xixiangji* 西厢记) by adding episodes on quelling foreign incursions and eliminating Chinese traitors (after attempts at invasions by “barbarians” to the north during the Jingtai [1450–1457] and Tianshun [1457–1465] reigns). Huang 1999, 60–61.

28. Huang 1999, 75–76, 90–92, 103–106.

29. These are short, extra plays, usually light-hearted and based on daily life or contemporary events. Before the Qing dynasty, they were performed prior to the main plays and were called *shaoxi* 捎戏 (“tip” plays). Since the Republican Period, they have been performed after the main plays and are called *shaoxi* 捎戏 (“extra” plays). Huang 1999, 146.

event. The most important playwright of this tradition appears to have been Du Jinhu.

Also known as Du Jinhu 杜进虎,³⁰ this marionette performer has been attributed the authorship of not only *Pavilion of the Immortals in Exile* (translated in this book), but also just about all the most renowned and popular pieces of this theatrical tradition during its heyday³¹ (when more than seventy troupes performed within Heyang County).³² Du is also known to have written, edited, and rewritten more than one hundred plays.³³ Hailing from an educated background, Du Jinhu's misfortune in his pursuit of the standard career in civil service was a blessing in disguise for Heyang's marionette theater. According to oral tradition, he was disqualified from taking further civil service examinations when, during one of the tests, he made the mistake of writing a character used for one of the reigning emperor's names.³⁴ He was so disheartened by the experience that he befriended marionette performers, joined their troupes, and became an expert of its plays.

Although theatrical performers were considered of low social status, and the theater in general was condemned by orthodox Confucians, this seems not to have been the case in Heyang. As we have seen, many of the playwrights were scholars. According to Dang Wenhui 党文辉 (former director of the official marionette theater of Heyang County), his father Dang Shengkun 党生坤 was an educated man, who was told by his own father to become a marionette performer for some unknown reason. Aside from being a performer, Dang Shengkun transcribed more than two hundred plays (recited from memory by old performers). In 1953, when the Cultural Bureau of Northwestern China (*xibei daqu wenhua* 西北大区文化) began collecting traditional play scripts, Dang Shengkun donated

30. Zhongguo xiquzhi 1995, 106.

31. The above gazetteer on the performing arts makes this attribution (which differs from Huang's book, which attributes *Pavilion of the Immortals in Exile* to Ning Hong and his father). It lists the following as the most popular plays of this tradition, and attributes all but the last two titles to Du: *The Hundred Treasure Hairpin* 百宝钗; *Romance of the Western Chamber* 西厢记; *Nangzai Fills the Trunk* 囊哉装箱; *Pavilion of the Immortals in Exile* 谪仙楼; *Pavilion of Mandarin Ducks* 鸳鸯楼; *The Gold Bowl Hairpin* 金碗钗; either *The Double Bowl Hairpin* 双碗钗 or *The Golden Phoenix Hairpin* 金凤钗; and *The Butterfly Bracelet* 蝴蝶环). Ibid.

32. Ibid. and Huang 1999, 147.

33. Huang 1999, 106.

34. Considered highly irreverent, this was a punishable offense.

all his transcriptions. Thirty-five marionette plays (selected from the plays collected) were “published internally” in three volumes in 1962 by the Cultural Bureau of Shaanxi Province (*Shaanxi sheng Wenhua ju* 陕西省文化局).³⁵ During the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), all the hand-copied play scripts, marionette puppets, and other performance paraphernalia collected by the government were lost. Even the published plays have become very rare.

When I interviewed Huang Shengwen 黄笙闻 from the Provincial Research Institute for the Arts (*sheng yishu yanjiu suo* 省艺术研究所) in Xi’an, I asked him about the possibility of obtaining photocopies of extant marionette plays. He contacted his superior and reported that they needed to know which ones I wanted, that the plays may be difficult to locate, and that the cost may be considerable due to the issue of cultural heritage and legacy. Such institutes generally charge for photocopies of materials by the page, with negotiable rates. At first I thought this was an attempt to negotiate a higher rate, but it occurred to me that perhaps the Institute no longer had the play scripts. However, I was subsequently able to obtain photocopies of five plays from Dang Wenhui when I interviewed him in Heyang. Dang possessed parts of the three published volumes of marionette plays (from which he selected five of the most popular and had them photocopied for me). He also presented me with a printed booklet containing the lyrics for a few short “Extra Playlets” (*shaoxi* 捎戏)³⁶ and excerpts from main plays.

The latter item—the booklet, *Collected Heyang Marionette Arias* (*Heyang xian’ouxi changduan* 合阳线偶戏唱段集锦)³⁷—is forty-two pages in length, and was compiled to help people follow an audiotape of select plays and arias recorded by the official Heyang Marionette Troupe. The troupe did not give me a copy of the audio recording, but did present me with a copy of a newer VCD recording lacking scripts. This VCD (titled *A Treasure of China—The Heyang Music Marionette Theatre of Shaanxi* [*zhonghua yijue—shaanxi heyangxian heqiang tixian mu’ouxi* 中华一绝—陕西合阳县合腔提线木偶戏]) includes the complete version of “Baldy’s Wedding Night” (translated in this book). The selections about the clown, Lai Baozi, and

35. The entire set consisted of seventy volumes.

36. These are also known as Post-Midnight Plays (*boubanye xi* 后半夜戏), and ribald plays (*saoxi* 骚戏). See the Introduction to “Baldy’s Wedding Night” for more information on such plays.

37. Li Keming, 1999.

the perennial favorite “Peddling Notions” (translated in this book) are also from the booklet.³⁸

Besides the above “Extra Playlets,” I have also translated for this book the five traditionally most popular plays (which Dang copied for me from the three volumes printed by the Provincial Cultural Bureau in 1962). They include three fictional renditions of historical characters: *Empress Lü Usurps the Throne*; *Yang Wenguang*; and *Short Version of River Yang*. The tale about Empress Lü of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) is a one-sided presentation, with some attempt to preserve historical fact (at least in spirit). The stories about Yang Wenguang of the Song dynasty and the Wanli Emperor of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) in the other two plays, however, are nearly totally divorced from history. *Yang Wenguang* closely follows the tradition of women warrior stories, while *River Yang* casts the Wanli Emperor (and other characters) as reincarnations of the main characters from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (the famous novel about the Three Kingdoms period [220–280]). An important work for the worship of Guan Yu 关羽, *River Yang* is unique to Heyang. *The White Undershirt* and *Pavilion of the Immortals in Exile* are fictional romances with no connection to known historical characters. The former was based on a Ming dynasty *chuanqi* 传奇 drama, *Tale of the Hairpin and Bracelet* (*chaichuanji* 钗钏记), while the latter (similar to *Short Version of River Yang*) is the only tale of its kind and exists only in Heyang string puppet theater.

When I began translating these plays, I soon discovered that three of them had missing and torn pages. I then asked Yang Fei 楊飞, my collector friend (whose wife Li Shuwen 李淑文 is native to Heyang), for assistance. Yang and Li accompanied me to Heyang during 1998 and 2004, and were my main contacts for all the performers and sources there. Yang knew a retiree at the Xi’an provincial research institute whom he felt could

38. This form of marionette play used to be performed in Dali 大荔 and other nearby counties. The troupe’s addition of *Heqiang* (Heyang musical style) in its title might have been intended as a political statement. Traditionally, the marionette theater of the region has been known as String Opera or String Music Opera (*xianqiangxi* 线腔戏). The term *Heqiang* seems to have been created to help support the Heyang government’s insistence that marionette theater in that region originated at Heyang. See Shi Yaozeng 史耀增, “String Opera Should Be Called Heyang Opera” (*xianqiang yinggai jiao heqiang* 线腔应该叫合腔), 1999.2–3: 59–60; and his “The Home of the Chinese Marionettes is in Heyang” (*xianqing de laojia zai heyang* 线腔的老家在合阳), in *Zoujin gu Xin* (1998), 93–101. Shi Yaozeng is a very knowledgeable retired senior researcher of the Heyang Cultural Bureau.

help, but he lacked that person's telephone number. Cai Yuanli 蔡源莉, my researcher friend in Beijing, located the Xi'an researcher's phone number so Yang could contact him. According to the Xi'an researcher, the printed volumes of the plays were difficult to locate because, during the Cultural Revolution, copies of the entire *Traditional Plays of Shaanxi Province* (*Shaanxi sheng chuantong jumu* 陕西省传统剧目)—including the three-volume set of marionette plays—had been piled up in the Institute's courtyard for anyone to take. No record was made as to who took what. Yang eventually obtained for me all the requested missing pages. Someday, perhaps, I will learn the location of a complete copy of the series.³⁹

39. I hoped to learn from Yang Fei where he managed to find them, but unfortunately he passed away in 2012. Yang Fei was one of the most famous collectors of shadow figures in Shaanxi.