CHAPTER NINE

THE SOVEREIGN AND
THEATER:
Reconsidering the Impact of Ming Taizu’s Prohibitions

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Ming Taizu is often regarded as one of the most powerful and hegemonic emperors in Chinese history. Many believe his influence extended well beyond the political sphere and could be felt in multiple areas of Chinese society. The realm of Chinese theater is no exception.

Taizu held a dual attitude towards Chinese theater. On the one hand, he was aware of the entertainment value of theater for himself and the court, and also the educative value of certain plays for the propagation of conventional morality. On the other hand, and more saliently, Taizu was wary of the subversive potential of the theater, and took several measures to curb its influence. For example, Taizu banned actors and their families from taking part in the imperial civil service examinations. In addition, he ruled that any officers or soldiers in the capital who learned singing should have their tongues cut out. One account even states that Taizu banned songs and dances altogether.

Scholars have believed that these actions by Taizu robbed actors of the opportunity for social advancement, and Chinese theater of its vitality and ability to develop in the early Ming period.

Is this common assumption about Taizu’s power and influence on Chinese theater justifiable? In this paper, I will question this as-
sumption by reconsidering the effects of one specific prohibition: on jiatou zaju, a subgenre of Chinese drama that involves the role of an emperor. Taizu’s ban on this kind of drama has led to a general belief that impersonations of the emperor on stage were effectively outlawed. Was the prohibition indeed effective? Should we assume that it was strictly carried out, and that most jiatou zaju were banned or destroyed as a result? Was Taizu indeed so powerful that his prohibition would have made such an impact on Chinese theater?

To put Taizu’s prohibition in perspective, we should note that portraying the emperor on stage was not at all uncommon in the Yuan period. This can be gathered from the fact that the emperor role, designated by the term jiatou, is one of the customary role types in Yuan drama. According to The Green Bower Collection (Qinglou ji), a valuable collection of short biographical notes on performers in the Yuan dynasty compiled around 1364, jiatou is one of the extra roles (swuijiao) in zaju, a role played alongside the female and male lead roles, dan (female) and mo (male):

[The extra role types] include the jiatou, the beauty pining in her boudoir, the bawd, the coquettish young girl, the high official, the poor person, the brigand, the government servant, and those [roles involved in plays] concerning immortality and Daoist deliverance, and family matters.5

The term “jiatou” originally referred to the throne that an old eunuch would carry in front of the emperor’s carriage on an imperial tour of inspection,6 and the term “jiatou zaju” came to refer to all plays that included the role of an emperor.7 The jiatou zaju make up an important subgenre in the Yuan dramatic repertoire.8 According to The Green Bower Collection, there were even a number of professional actresses who specialized in the performance of these jiatou zaju in the Yuan period:

“Pearled Curtain Beauty”9: [Her performance of] zaju stands by itself today; [whether it is] the jiatou, the coquettish young girl, or the “soft” male lead, [she] always creates beauty out of the role.10

“Timely Beauty”: [Her performance of] zaju is most excellent in playing the beauty pining in her boudoir. [As for the] jiatou and the various dan roles, [her performance] is equally proper.11

“The Southern Spring Joy”: Excels in jiatou zaju; [she is] also a leading actress in the Capital.12

“Natural Beauty”: For zaju about a beauty pining in her boudoir, [she was] the best actress during her times. [Her impersonation of] a coquettish young girl or jiatou also reached the highest beauty.13

Cross-dressing was very common in Yuan drama, and the majority of zaju performers were females who could play various kinds of male roles, including the emperor, on stage. The performance of jiatou zaju appears to have enjoyed considerable popularity in the Yuan dynasty.

The heyday of jiatou zaju, however, appeared to be over in the early Ming as they were outlawed, and impersonations of the emperor on stage were prohibited. There were various reasons for the prohibitions. As recorded in the (Imperially-issued) Great Ming Code (Yuzhi Da Ming li) of 1397,

In all cases of theatrical performances, actors shall not be permitted to dress up as former emperors, empresses, or other imperial consorts, loyal ministers, martyrs, sages, or worthies. Any violations shall be punished by 100 strokes of beating with the heavy stick. If the households of officials or commoners allow them to dress up this way for performances, the penalty shall be the same. As for acting as immortals, righteous husbands, chaste wives, filial sons, or obedient grandsons with the aim of motivating others to be good, it shall not be prohibited.14

An example of Taizu’s dual attitude towards theater, this statute gave clear instructions on what kinds of plays (those that “exhort people to good action”) were acceptable, and what were not. Scholars have suggested that one possible reason for making such a prohibition is that it was disrespectful to Taizu and the whole imperial order to have lowly actors and courtesans impersonating emperors and sages.15 Indeed, in the Wanli edition of the Great Ming Code, the first prohibition is accompanied by explanation:

The emperor, the king, the empress and the imperial concubines of all eras, the loyal minister and the ardent man of valor, and the divine images of the ancient sages and the ancient worthies are characters whom the officials and the common people should all look up to with reverence, and [therefore] to impersonate them in performing zaju is most contemptible.16

In addition, as Wilt Idema has suggested, the plebeian origins of Ming Taizu, and the similarities between his doings and some of the situations staged in these plays, may have led to the prohibition.17
The Great Ming Code was repeatedly reprinted in the later reign periods of the Ming dynasty, so this prohibition was always part of Ming law, and was also repeatedly applied in the Qing dynasty. Furthermore, about fourteen years after Taizu’s prohibition, in 1441, the Yongle emperor followed and exceeded his father's example, issuing a more specified and stricter proclamation. Not only were impersonations of the emperor on stage prohibited, but the texts of these jiatau zaju were also not allowed to be kept, circulated, or printed for sale.

As we have seen, these prohibitions by Taizu and his successors were sweeping in their aim to ban all impersonations of the emperor and other sagely figures on stage. Some scholars believe that the prohibitions were indeed very effective. The fact that the prohibitions are also often cited in histories of Chinese drama also shows that many believed in their impact on its development. Previous studies have pointed out that prohibitions may have affected the development of jiatau zaju. But in fact, we lack direct sources on the impact of the prohibitions. How can we determine their effect on the jiatau zaju?

One way to do so is to compare different editions of the same jiatau zaju before and after the prohibitions to see if any changes were made. But of the 700 known titles from the Yuan period, only some 160 zaju have come down to us in one form or another, and only thirty of these plays have been preserved in a Yuan-period printing. Most extant Yuan plays survive in only late Ming editions, which scholars believe all originally derived from copies once kept in the imperial palace. Since the editions may have been altered by censors or literati editors in the Ming, they can only represent the state of the texts under the prohibitions, not before. Of the thirty extant Yuan editions of zaju, fourteen include the role type “jia,” a term commonly used to designate the emperor role on stage. To understand how emperors were represented on the stage before the Ming prohibitions, I have compared the Yuan and Ming editions of these fourteen jiatau zaju, looking for changes or evidence of censorship related to the staging of the role of the emperor. This comparison should reveal something of the actual impact of the early Ming prohibitions on jiatau zaju.

The fourteen Yuan-edition zaju plays that stage the emperor are as follows:

1. Guan Hanqing, Guan daiwang dandao bii; short title Dandao bii (Lord Guan Goes to the Feast with a Single Sabre)
2. Gao Wenzhi, Haojiu Zhao Yuan yu Hsianghuang; short title Yu Hsianghuang (Wine-craving Zhao Yuan Meets the Prior Emperor)
3. Ma Zhiyuan, Taibua shan Chen Yuan gaowo; short title Chen Yuan gaowo (At Taibua Mountain, Chen Yuan Rests on High)
4. Shang Zhongxian, Yubi Gong sanduo sbuo; short title Sanduo sbuo (Yubi Gong Thrice Seizes the Lance)
5. Shang Zhongxian, Han Gaohuang zhoezuo qi Ying Bu; short title Qi Ying Bu (Gaohuang of the Han Waits His Feet and Thereby Enrages Ying Bu)
6. Zhang Guobin, Zhe Rengui yijin huanxiang; short title Yijin huanxiang (Zhe Rengui, Cloak in Brocade, Returns to His Home Village)
7. Wang Bocheng, Li TaiBei bian Yelang; short title Bian Yelang (Li TaiBei is Banished to Yelang)
9. Kong Xueshi, Dizanguang zheng dongchuan sbi fan; short title Dongchuan sbi fan (Dizanguang Testifies to the Running Asof of the Affair of the Eastern Window)
10. Yang Zi, Chengming dian Hua Guang guxian; short title Hua Guang guxian (Hua Guang Remonstrates as a Ghost at the Chengming Hall)
11. Gong Tianting, Sisheng jiao Fan Zhang ji shu; short title Fan Zhang ji shu (Friends in Life and Death: Fan Shi and Zhang Shao, Chicken and Millet)
12. Zheng Guangzu, Fu Chengwong Zhonggong shezheng; short title Zhonggong shezheng (In Aid of King Cheng, the Duke of Zhou Acts as Regent)
13. Jin Renjie, Xiao He yueze zhui Han Xin; short title Zhu Han Xin (Xiao He Pursues Han Xin During a Moonlit Night)
14. Anonymous, Zhuo Liang Bowang shaojun; short title Bowang shaojun (Zhuo Liang Burns the Encampment at Bowang)
For the purposes of the following discussion, I have divided these fourteen jiaotou zaju into four different groups. Only eight of the fourteen plays survive in both Yuan and Ming editions. These eight can be divided into three different groups, A, B, and C, according to the changes made to the “jia” (emperor) role in their Ming editions. Case A (four plays) includes plays in which the jia has been removed, while Case B (two plays) consists of works in which the jia role has been renamed. In Case C (two plays), the jia role remained unchanged. The other six jiaotou zaju, Case D, survive only in Yuan editions. In what follows, the plays will be referred to by these numbers and their English titles.

CASE A: THE EASY WAY OUT

In four of the jiaotou zaju, the emperor was removed from the Ming editions in different ways. Previous studies of individual plays have pointed out that because of the prohibitions, changes needed to be made to these jiaotou zaju so that they could still be performed.28 In some cases, the jia did not play a major part and could be easily written out. After the jia was removed, his lines could be taken by a minister or a eunuch.29 For example, the Yuan edition of #1, Lord Guan Goes to the Feast with a Single Sabre, begins with the following stage direction:

[Jia, accompanied by his entourage, opens the play and stops.][The secondary male role (oujiao) playing the role of Lu Su, enters, presents a memorial, stops and speaks.] [Jia speaks.] [Lu Su speaks and stops.][The male lead (chengmo) playing the role of Senior Minister Qiao enters and stops.] [Lu Su speaks.] [Senior Minister Qiao ponders and speaks] The tripartition of the empire between the kingdoms of Wei, Shu, and Wu has now been settled. I fear that further warfare would bring suffering to the people. You ministers should give the king your advice. [Senior Minister Qiao moves over and pays obeisance] [Jia speaks] [Senior Minister Qiao speaks] May your Majesty live a myriad years! In my humble opinion, we must not take back Jingzhou. [Jia speaks again.] [Senior Minister Qiao speaks] We must not! We must not.

The jia, here impersonating Sun Quan, only appears in the opening scene, when Lu Su, Minister of the Kingdom of Wu, presents to him a memorial, which demands that Guan Yu return Jingzhou. The dialogue of the jia is not included in the Yuan edition, a common prac-

As the jia only appears in this opening scene, it was not difficult for the Ming editors to write him out. In the Ming edition, the play commences with the entrance of Lu Su, who is now played as another secondary male role (chengmo).

[Lu Su enters and speaks]... I now wish to take back Jingzhou, but I suppose with Lord Guan as the governor there, he would not return it to us. Now, I send General Huang Wen to present to our king a memorial proposing three plans...32 Lu simply explains that he has sent a memorial to his master Sun Quan and reported to him about his scheme.33 This change allows the role of the jia (Sun Quan) to be removed from the play.34

A related adjustment can be observed in the “title” (timu) of the two editions of this play:

Yuan edition:
Senior Minister Qiao remonstrates with the Emperor of Wu;
Sima Hui resigns from his official post.35

Ming edition:
Sun Zhong plans to monopolize the Jiangdong region;
[Lu Su] invites Mr. Qiao to discuss the three schemes.36

As Sun Quan no longer makes an appearance in the Ming edition, Senior Minister Qiao cannot remonstrate with him directly as in the Yuan edition. Therefore, a change has been made to the “title”: we are now simply informed by Lu Su of Sun’s plan to monopolize the Jiangdong region, and are shown Lu discussing with Qiao his three schemes to force Guan Yu to return Jingzhou.37

Similarly, we find that the jia featured in the opening scenes of the Yuan editions of two other plays, #11, Friends in Life and Death, and #4, Yuchi Gong Thrice Seizes the Lance, were removed in the Ming editions.38 For example, as in the case of Lord Guan Goes to the Feast with a Single Sabre, in the Yuan edition of Yuchi Gong Thrice Seizes the Lance, the jia, Emperor Gaozu of the Tang Dynasty (r.618–627), was actually remonstrated with on stage by an official, Liu Wenjing, in Act One,39 but the jia role was removed from the play in the Ming-period collection Anthology of Yuan Plays (Yuangu xuan).40
If the jia only makes a brief appearance in the opening scene, removing the emperor is relatively easy. When the jia is involved in the entire plot, it is harder. A good example is #6, Xue Rengui, Clad in Brocade, Returns to His Home Village, which was rewritten in the Ming dynasty under the title of Xue Rengui Returns in Glory to his Native Village (Xue Rengui ronggui guli) and included in the Anthology of Yuan Plays.41 In the Yuan edition, Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty is featured throughout the short prologue known as a "wedge" (xiazi)42 and the first three acts. In Act One, he personally supervises a shooting match between the soldier Xue Rengui and his commanding officer Zhang Shigu, an impostor who has falsely laid claim to most of Xue's military feats.43 Xue Rengui wins the shooting match and proves himself to be the real hero. He is appointed to a higher rank, and is later featured as the son-in-law of the emperor in Act Four.44

However, in the Ming edition of the play, the task of supervising the shooting match has passed to the army supervisor Xu Maogong.45 In addition, Xue Rengui now marries the daughter of Xu, instead of the daughter of the emperor. In other words, Xu Maogong is used to perform some of the tasks originally carried out by the emperor. This is perhaps most summarized in the changes in the "title" and "name" (zhengming) of the two editions. (The "title" and the "name" are conventional features of Yuan zaju drama, usually placed at the end of a play to summarize its plot.) While the "name" of the Yuan edition stresses how Emperor Taizong welcomed the virtuous and took in scholars, the "title" of the Anthology of Yuan Plays edition has shifted the focus to Xu Maogong supervising the shooting match at the main gate.46

In the four jiatou zaju discussed in this section, the emperor role has been removed from the Ming editions of the plays. If we believe that the prohibitions were strict and effective, then we may expect that all jiatou zaju shared a similar fate, undergoing rewriting or heavy editing to make them more acceptable to the Ming court. However, we will see that this is not the case, and that the whole situation is far more complicated. The next two sets of plays, cases B and C, demonstrate how the role of the emperor continued to find its way into the Ming editions of some other jiatou zaju.

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**CASE B: A QUICK-CHANGE ACT**

In the two plays making up Case B, the jia in the Yuan editions was renamed as another role type in the later Ming editions. One play about the story of the Three Kingdoms entitled Zhuge Liang Burns the Encampment at Bowang (#14) is unique. It is the only one of the fourteen Yuan jiatou zaju with a Ming edition that came directly from the imperial archives (neifu) and that contains a detailed costume list (zhuangyuan). While previous scholars have shown that the great majority of the late Ming editions of Yuan drama originate from the copies held at the imperial palace, this clear example of a Ming text of a drama actually performed, or at least prepared for performance, in the palace provides important information about what was acceptable at court. We shall see that the censors might not have been that strict after all. There were rules and prohibitions, but there were also ways to get around the rules quite easily.

In this play, the main character is Zhuge Liang, who is played by the generic male role (mo) and the main male lead (zhengmo), respectively, in the Yuan and Ming editions. Zhuge Liang is the wise statesman and advisor of Liu Bei. Yuan and Ming zaju writers followed the lead of the Song Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi in considering Liu Bei the legitimate heir to the Han throne.47 Liu Bei is only a secondary character, and from the stage directions in the Yuan edition his role type is unclear. In the Yuan edition, he is interchangeably designated as "Liu Bei," "Liu" and "huangshu" (Emperor's uncle) throughout the whole play. Only in the final stage direction is Liu Bei designated as jia: "Emperor (jia) makes a judgment."48 Considerable changes were made in the Ming edition: the stage directions clearly state that Liu is played as the secondary male role (zhengmo),49 and the character's variety of designations are standardized as "the male role Liu" (Liumo). The final stage direction omits the term jia to simply read "male role (mo) Liu makes a judgment."50

Censors at the Ming court insisted on inspecting the complete text of each play before its performance.51 They might have found it difficult to remove the character Liu Bei completely from this play, but such a play could apparently still be considered acceptable as long as all the designations that might be related to the emperor, such as jia or huangshu, were replaced by other, neutral designations, such as
“the male role Liu.” Some jiatou zaju editors worked around the rules of prohibition quite easily, simply by renaming the “jia” as another role type.

Another jiatou zaju that continues to portray the emperor, but under a different role name, is #5, Gaohuang of the Han Washes His Feet and Thereby Enrages Ying Bu. This play is part of a larger group of around thirty Yuan plays that deal with the founding of the Han dynasty, which was once a very popular theme in dramatic literature. Because of their extremely negative characterization of the imperial protagonists, most of these plays were not passed down in later times; only Gaohuang of the Han Enrages Ying Bu is preserved in the Ming-period Anthology of Yuan Plays. Liu Bang, the founder of the Han dynasty, who is designated as a jia role in the Yuan edition of the play, is consistently referred to only as “the King of Han” (Hanwang) in the Anthology of Yuan Plays edition and no longer as the emperor (jia). While it may appear that the portrayal of the emperor could be avoided this way, I suspect that such changes to the designation of jia were chiefly aimed at the censors, who would review the text rather than the performance of the play. This is because while on paper Liu Bang is changed from the “jia” to “the King of Han,” the difference it makes in performance might indeed be quite minimal.

The replacement of the “jia” by other role types in these two plays can hardly be regarded as a strong supporting evidence for the effectiveness of the prohibitions. Rather, it suggests that one could easily get around these prohibitions simply by renaming the jia, without making any substantive changes. This was so even for a play that was destined for performance in the imperial palace. The following case raises even more questions as to whether the prohibitions were effective.

CASE C: BUSINESS AS USUAL

We have seen that the prohibitions might have brought about some changes in the Ming editions of the Yuan jiatou zaju. But there are also cases in which the texts seem completely unaffected by the prohibitions. Two of the jiatou zaju actually retain the role jia in their Ming editions.

Wine-craving Zhao Yuan Meets the Prior Emperor (#2), in its Yuan edition, has the jia Emperor Huizong of the Song dynasty making his first entrance in Act Two. Emperor Huizong leaves the palace with two of his followers to drink at a tavern, but they forget to bring any money, and get into a fight with the tavern bouncers. Zhao Yuan comes to their rescue and settles the bill, whereupon the emperor suggests that they become sworn brothers. Later, when Zhao Yuan is set up by a governor who had an illicit relationship with Zhao’s wife, is to be punished for his late delivery of an official letter, the emperor not only pardons Zhao Yuan, but also sees that justice is done by punishing both the governor and Zhao’s wife. The main plot of the story remains unchanged in the Ming edition of the play, and the jia role is retained, but the emperor portrayed is now the Song dynastic founder Zhao Kuangyin.

The entrance of the Emperor onto the stage is prominent in the Ming edition of Wine-craving Zhao, which includes full prose dialogues. Emperor Taizu first recites a four-line entrance verse (shangchang shi), then gives a self-introduction, announcing that he is the first emperor of the Song dynasty:

I am Emperor Taizu of the Song dynasty. Ever since I ascended the throne, the four seas have been quiet, and all quarters are at peace. Today, I lead my courtiers Chu Zhao and Shi Shouxin, the three of us dressed up as simple students, in making a private trip incognito to the rural areas.

After this introduction, the action continues as in the Yuan play. If the mere appearance of an emperor on stage was taboo, imagine staging an emperor fighting with bouncers and becoming sworn brothers with someone at a tavern! Here is the utter confusion that Emperor Taizu gets into after he fails to pay up:

[The tavern bouncer grasps the jia firmly and speaks] Pay up fast! If you don’t pay up, don’t think that I will let you off lightly.

[The main male lead (Zhao Yuan) sings] [To the tune of “Caicha ge”]
One grasps his clothes,
And the other is dead drunk.
Don’t say that you have fallen into these shadows of flowers waiting for others to help you up.
My three Confucian scholars, don’t be scared,
I will take out some copper cash to help pay your wine debt. 58

The Emperor is held tight by the bouncer, who threatens that he will definitely not let him off easily should he still fail to pay up. From the aria then sung by Zhao Yuan, we get a vivid picture of how the Emperor and his followers later get into a chaotic fight. Comparing the arias in the two editions, Zheng Qian noticed a minor alteration in the aria quoted above, from a “bloody confusion” (xue mobu) in the Yuan edition to a “drunken confusion” (zui mobu) in the Ming edition. 59 While this may tone down the degree of commotion involved, it is difficult to deny that these scenes would have still remained very unpleasing to Ming royalty concerned about their dignity. If we assume that the staging of the role of the emperor had already been effectively banned, how could this drama have been staged?

Song founder Zhao Kuangyin also continues to feature as jia in the Ming editions of another play, #3, At Taibai Mountain, Chen Tuan Rests on High. 60 The appearances of the jia are largely concentrated in Act Three, where the Song emperor tries to persuade Chen Tuan to become an official. While scholars have speculated that the Ming editions of this play may have been edited and rewritten by literati in the Ming court to make it more suitable for performance before emperors, 61 any such rewriting did not eliminate the portrayal of the emperor on stage.

These examples force us to reconsider the effects of the prohibitions: were all portrayals of the emperor banned, or were some of them perhaps more “acceptable”? To summarize, the eight jiatou zaju passed down in Ming editions, cases A, B, and C, underwent different degrees of change. On the one hand, there are examples in which the jia was clearly removed in the Ming editions, which seems to suggest that the prohibitions were effective. On the other hand, however, there are also other dramas that appear to have been unaffected by the prohibitions. The jia continued to appear in some Ming editions. This cast serious doubt on the idea that the prohibitions were strictly and consistently honored. With this in mind, how should we deal with the final group of jiatou zaju, which I classify as Case D?

**CASE D: EVIDENCE OR CIRCUMSTANCE?**

As we have seen, not all fourteen jiatou zaju survive in later Ming editions. Case D comprises the six jiatou zaju that were not passed down in Ming editions and survive only in their Yuan printings: Li Taibai is Banished to Yelang (#7), Duke Wen of Jin Cremates Jie Zitui (#8), Dizangwang Testifies to the Running Afoot of the Affair of the Eastern Window (#9), Huo Guang Remonstrates as a Ghost at the Chengming Hall (#10), In Aid of King Cheng, the Duke of Zhou Acts as Regent (#12), and Xiao He Pursues Han Xin During a Moonlit Night (#13). Previously, scholars, believing that the prohibitions had been effective, have suggested that these jiatou zaju were not passed down precisely because of their negative portrayal of emperors. One example is HUO GUANG REMONSTRATES AS A GHOST. 62 In the first act of this play, the powerful Han minister Huo Guang explicitly denounces the undesirable behavior of the Emperor whom Huo Guang had himself set on the throne only a month earlier; he then deposes and replaces his sovereign. 63 Such plays might have been left out when plays were collected in the early Ming dynasty. 64

But since certain dramas still managed to continue portraying the emperor after the prohibitions, we can not logically assume that these other jiatou zaju were effectively outlawed and even destroyed as a result of the prohibitions. Furthermore, other Ming sources reveal that the texts of these plays might not have been “lost” during the Ming period after all. First, we may turn to the Yongle Encyclopedia (Yongle dadian), which was compiled around 1403 to 1408 with the aim of including all existing literature. Although the portions of the Yongle Encyclopedia on zaju drama are now lost, its catalog reveals that several plays that scholars now consider to have been prohibited were included, such as #10 Huo Guang Remonstrates as a Ghost (in jian 20738), #9 Dizangwang Testifies to the Running Afoot of the Affair of the Eastern Window (in jian 20744), and #7 Li Taibai is Banished to Yelang (in jian 20746). 65 Second, the Catalog of the Baowentang Library Collection (Baowentang shumu), a catalog of the books kept in the private library of a mid-Ming literatus, Chao Li (jinsbi 1541), also lists two of these jiatou zaju, #12 The Duke of Zhou Acts as Regent and #13 Xiao He Pursues Han Xin, which shows that the texts of these plays still circulated during the Jiajing period (1522–1566). 66
If indeed copies of these now-vanished jiatiu zaju were still around during the Ming period, we cannot say that they disappeared because of the prohibitions. Suppose the texts of those zaju in the Yongle dadian and the Baewentang catalog had survived to the present day. How would that change our understanding of the effect of the prohibitions? That is to say, is it possible that the loss of transmission of certain plays might have led us to overestimate the effectiveness of the prohibitions? We must not forget that out of the over seven hundred known titles of Yuan dynasty zaju, only about a hundred and sixty have been passed down to the present day. The jiatiu zaju might simply have been lost in the process of transmission, just like many other Yuan plays, and not as a result of the prohibitions.

By showing how the fourteen Yuan dynasty jiatiu zaju experienced very different fates in the Ming dynasty, I suggest that it is difficult to draw a general conclusion about the impact of Ming Taizu's ban on this whole category of drama. There is very little evidence that these dramas were actually censored or destroyed. Nor do we have any records indicating that the staging of any jiatiu zaju was prevented because of its portrayal of the emperor. All of these uncertainties caution against the sweeping conclusion that the prohibitions by Taizu and his successors could account for all the disappearances and rewritings of jiatiu zaju in the Ming dynasty.

Our common belief in Taizu's power and influence has often led us to assume that his rule and his actions had a great impact. Early Ming has been well known for its stringent laws and severe literary persecutions under the control of the mighty Taizu. The literary milieu of this period has therefore often been portrayed as suffocating and lacking in vitality due to the restrictions. Some have believed that Taizu's draconian social policies were so successful that cultural life was at a nadir by the end of his rule, and the first half of the fifteenth century that followed was no more than a cultural wasteland. But this case study suggests that assumptions about the effectiveness of the prohibitions by Taizu and his successors are indeed questionable in the realm of Chinese theater. If we put aside our presuppositions about Taizu's power and his impact on the literary scene, we may discover a more varied picture of literary production under the emperor's rule.
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Notes to Chapter Nine

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sider the context in which later critics and scholars came to assume that the prohi-
bition was effective.

1. For general studies on how Taizu and the other Ming emperors were associated with Chinese theater, see Ikawi, "Min no kyutei to engeki" (The Ming imperial court and theater), 602-24, and Zeng Yongyi, "Mingdai diwang yu xi" (Ming emperors and theater), r-33.

2. For example, it was said that Taizu praised the southern play The Story of the Lute (Piujiji) for its moralistic content on loyalty and filial piety, and even compared it to the Five Classics and the Four Books. See Xu Wei, Nanci xia (Notes on Southern songs), 340.

3. Quoted in Wang Liqi, comp., Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoxiao xiqu shibao (Historical sources on prescribed fiction and plays during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing periods), 11-14.

4. See, for example, Xu Zifang, Ming zaju shi (A history of Ming zaju drama), 40, and Zeng Yongyi, "Mingdai diwang yu xi", 17-18.

5. Xia Tingzhi, "Qinglou ji zhi" (A note to the "Green Bower Collection"), 43. Trans-
lutions in this paper are my own unless otherwise stated.

6. For a detailed study of the term "jiatsu," see Sun Kaidi, "Yuanqu xinkao (Jiatsu zaju)" (A new study of Yuan drama: Jiatsu zaju), 332-8. One of the sources on which Sun's findings were based is an entry in Shen Kuole's jottings from the Mengzi (Mengzi shihuan), which explained jiatsu as "the emperor's throne at the Central Palace" (zhengju fazuo).

7. Since jiatsu is an important insignia of an imperial tour, the modern Chinese scholar Sun Kaidi suggests that the term "jiatsu zaju" must therefore include at least a certain scene of the emperor going out in a carriage as found in Act Three of both Autumn in the Palace of Han (Hangong qu) and Rain on the Wutong Tree (Wutong qu).

8. Sun's definition of jiatsu zaju may represent the original meaning of this term which later acquired a more general meaning. (Sun Kaidi, "Yuanqu xinkao (Jiatsu zaju)," 337). Another scholar, Zhou Yibai, speculates that jiatsu zaju may refer only to plays concerning the love stories between the emperor and his consort. His reasons are that performers of jiatsu zaju often also specialized in dan role, and that jiatsu zaju, such as Autumn in the Palace of Han and Rain on the Wutong Tree place considerable emphasis on the dan role too, which I find unpersuasive. (Zhou, Zhongguo xiju shi [A history of Chinese drama], 310).

9. If we consider it from a theatrical standpoint, the term jiatsu zaju also makes an important category as it indicates the need for a drama troupe to have special costumes for the jia, and also extra minor characters to play the emperor's entourage when entering the stage.

10. The names of the actors in the Green Bower Collection are their stage names. For example, the family names of "Pealed Curtain Beauty" (Zhulian xiu) and "Timely Beauty" (Shunshu xiu) are Zhu and Guo respectively. See Xia Tingzhi, Qinglou ji jianzhu, 82, 101.

11. Xia Tingzhi, Qinglou ji jianzhu, 82. For this and the following entries, see also the accompanying notes and annotations by the modern editors, which provide more detailed information. For a specific study of this actress, "Pealed Curtain Beauty," see Li Xisheng, "Yuanzai zaju yanyuan Zhulian xiu" (The actress Zhulian xiu from the Yuan period), 139-53.

12. Xia Tingzhi, Qinglou ji jianzhu, 102.

13. Xia Tingzhi, Qinglou ji jianzhu, 117.

14. Xia Tingzhi, Qinglou ji jianzhu, 118. See also Sun Chonggao and Xu Hongtu, Xiqu yuanci (A historical account of drama performers), 100.

15. Quoted in Wang Liqi, comp., Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoxiao xiqu shibao, 75. See also Hua Xiaoqiang, et al., Da Ming zu (Great Ming Code), 244. English translation cited from Jiang Yonglin, trans., The Great Ming Code, 220-2, with minor amendments.

16. See, for example, Zhao Jingshen, Li Ping, and Jiang Junong, "Mingdai yanju zhongguang de kaohua" (An investigation of the state of theater performances during the Ming period), 177.

17. See Da Ming li ji jie fuli (The Great Ming Code with commentaries attached by regulations) 26/14.

18. Idema, "The Founding of the Han Dynasty in Early Drama," 198. On Zhu Yuanzhang's origins, his early career, and a comprehensive introduction to the major events during his reign, see Mote, "The Rise of the Ming Dynasty," 44-57, and Langlois, "The Hung-wu Reign."

19. See Wang Liqi, comp., Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoxiao xiqu shibao, 18, 43-46.

20. Gu Qiyuan, Kexiao zhuyu (Records of the guests chatting), juan 10, quoted in Wang Liqi, comp., Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoxiao xiqu shibao, 14.

21. See, for example, Zeng Yongyi, Ming zaju gaolai (A survey of zaju drama during the Ming period), 75, and his "Mingdai diwang yu xi," 16.

22. See, for example, Xu Zifang, Ming zaju shi, 39; Dolby, A History of Chinese Drama, 77.

23. Ikawi, "Min no kyutei to engeki," 606-608; Kim Moon Kyung, "Genkan sanzai-ken sanjihi jiaojitu" (An introduction to "The Thirty Zaju Plays in Yuan Printings"),


A wedge is a shorter unit consisting of one or two songs which may be added to the usual four-act structure of a zaju. It could be placed at the beginning of a zaju before the first act as a prologue, or in between two acts as an interlude.

Zheng Qian, ed. and coll., Jiaodong Yuankuan zaju sanbi zbong, 202-3.

In another anonymous play in the Ming dynasty on the same subject with the title of The Molitzi Flying Kites against Arrows (Molizhi feidai duijuan), we find that the entire scene with the shooting match has been removed, which may be seen as yet another way to remove the role of jia from the stage. See Idema, "Why You Never Have Read a Yuan Drama," 799. For a detailed comparison of the Yuan edition and Ming editions of this play, see Idema, "The Remaking of an Unfilial Hero," 83-111. Yun Changke, "Yang shanxian de biezhou" (Changes in "Xue Rengui, Clad in Brocade, Returns to His Home Village"), 81-90; Deng Shaozi, "Yuan zaju Xue Rengui yin huanxian jiaosu ji" (An essay on the collation of the Yuan play "Xue Rengui, Clad in Brocade, Returns to His Home Village"), 24-103.


Idema, "Traditional Dramatic Literature", 806.

Zheng Qian, ed. and coll., Jiaodong Yuankuan zaju sanbi zbong, 408.

Zhuge Liang Burns the Encampment at Bowang (palace edition), collected by Zhao Qimei, in Guiben xiqiu congkan, 4, vol. 28, 1a.

Zhuge Liang Burns the Encampment at Bowang, in Guiben xiqiu congkan, 4, vol. 4, 30b. For a comparison between the arias of the Yuan and the Ming edition, see in Komatsu, "Naifuhe-kei shobon kō", 139-41. A study of the zhuanjuan also suggests that there is no change in Liu's costume throughout the entire play in the Ming edition. However, one may then wonder about the situation in the original performance of the Yuan edition, whether Liu puts on the costume for the jia right from the beginning, or only in the last scene when he is finally designated as jia.

Idema, "Traditional Dramatic Literature", 794.

Zang Jinshu, ed., Yuankuan xuan jiaoshu, 332-68.


Some scholars argue that certain characters, such as Li Shimin and Zhao Kuangyin, the founders of the Tang and Song dynasties, can only appear in plays that portray them before they became emperor but not after. See Yao Liyun, "Mingchu zaju yanji", 204. This explanation is unsatisfactory because while this may be true in certain plays, it is certainly not a general rule applicable to all cases. For example, I will discuss in the next section, the play Wine-travelling Zhao Yuan actually features Zhao Kuangyin as Emperor Taizu of the Song dynasty.
55. Zheng Qian, ed. and coll., Jiaodong Yuankan za ju sanhizhong, 56. Hu Ji points out that "Shanghuo" is an alternative name for Emperor Huizong; see his Song jin za ju kao (A study of the za ju plays of the Song and Jin periods), 109. Emperor Huizong has been a popular subject in many wuxian fiction and bixian, see p. 204–6.

56. Here, one may recall the Qing scholar Yao Xie's remark that in Yuan drama, the jia often styled himself by his posthumous title, a feature which he found amusing. See his Jinyue kiazheng (An inquiry into the current music), 310.


59. Zheng Qian, "Yuan zuo yiben bijiao" (1), 9–12.


61. Zheng Qian, "Yuan zuo yiben bijiao" (1), 9. For two examples of the songs which have been edited, see p. 26.

62. For a general discussion of the play, including the source of the play in history and a summary of its plot, see Idema, "The Tse-jju of Yang Ts," 131–7.

63. West, "Text and Ideology," 268–91; Idema, "The Tse-jju of Yang Ts," 516. For more examples of negative portrayals of the emperor on stage, see Yao Liyun, "Mingchu zuo de yanjin," 204.

64. West, "Text and Ideology," 267.

65. Quoted in Wang Litj comp., Yuan Ming Qing zand ao jinhu xiao xubu xiqu xibiao, 3–6. There is a possibility that Dongchung shibi (The affair of the eastern window) in Juan 2744 may also refer to another play of a similar title, Qin zai xiaidongchung shibi (Counselor Qin's affair of the eastern window).

66. Chao Li, Chaushi Baowantang shumu (Catalog of the Baowantang library collection), 143–4. Texts of these and other Yuan plays may well have survived until the Qing in the private collections of Ming literati. For a general survey on the vernacular stories and drama listed in the catalogs of private libraries, including the Baowantang shumu, see Liu Yongqiang, "Ming qing sjia shumu Zhulu de tongshu xiaohuo xiqu" (Popular fiction and drama recorded in the catalogs of Ming and Qing private libraries), 59–63. A number of Ming literati were known to have been great collectors of Yuan drama texts. For example, Li Kaixian (1502–68) claimed that he collected more than a thousand Yuan plays. See his preface to Gaoding Yuanxian chang, Bu Jian, ed., Li Kaixian quanji (Complete works of Li Kaixian), 1704. The only thirty Yuan editions of za ju we have today were originally kept in Li's collection too. Unfortunately, only these thirty Yuan editions in his huge collection have survived to the present day, which well summarize the common fate of the many other drama texts in private collections. As a result, what we know about the private collections of drama texts in the Ming dynasty is largely based on lists of titles in the catalogs rather than on actual texts, and our understanding is therefore still very limited.

67. Fu Xihua, in his Yuan shi zuo zuanmu (A complete list of Yuan za ju plays), records a total of 737 za ju. See his "Liyan" (Introducory words), 3.

68. In this study, I have adopted as my subject of study the jiazu za ju in the group of thirty Yuan edition plays. If we also include another play, Wang Can Ascends the Tower (Zui xiaizhong Wang Can Denglu), then there should be a total of fourteen plays in Yuan edition that stages an emperor. Wang Can Ascends the Tower is supposed to reflect a Yuan edition text kept by Li Kaixian and is only preserved through the collations of He Huang in Guinjiaza ju, Guen xiqu congkan, 1, vol. 21. This has later been separately included in Zheng Qian's Jiaodong Yuankan za ju sanhizhong, 445–60.

69. In the case of Wang Can Ascends the Tower, the jia enters in Act Two of the Yuan edition. See Zheng Qian, ed. and coll., Jiaodong Yuankan za ju sanhizhong, 445. The emperor is easily removed in the Ming edition in a similar way as in Lord Guan Goes to the Feast of Friends in Life and Death in the Yuan edition, we are only informed in the Ming edition, see Zang Jinhu, ed., Yuanxian jiazu, 208.

70. The Huang Ming tiaofu shibei zuan (A compendium of the regulations, statutes, and cases of the augury Ming), for example, did not record any substantive or regulation that was used in the actual implementation of the earlier cited prohibition of jiazu za ju in the Great Ming Code. See Dai Jin, comp., Huang Ming tiaofu shibei zuan.

71. Cases of the severest literary persecutions during the Ming allegedly occurred at the beginning of the dynasty under the Hongwu reign. See Ku Chieh-Kang, "A Study of Literary Persecution During The Ming," 355. (Editor's note: see chap. 1 in this volume.)

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