Exorcism and Money
The Symbolic World of the Five-Fury Spirits in Late Imperial China

Qitao Guo
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Robert Gough · Hu Shibin · Robert Hymes · David Johnson ·
Harold Kahn · Kang Xiaofei · David Keightley · Kate Lang ·
Christopher Lind · Liu Xin · Mao Gengru · Mark McMicholas ·
Eugenio Menegon · Thomas Miller · Jim Oberly · Jane Pederson ·
Joanne Sandstrom · Judy Stitt · Michael Szonyi · Tang Lixing ·
Frederic Wakeman · Stephen West · Wen-hsin Yeh ·
Zhang Haipeng · Zhao Guohua · Zhao Huafu ·
and the outside reviewers

with My Deepest Appreciation
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Introduction

In 1826, on the first day of the eighth month, a grand procession paraded from Xidi village to the county seat of Yixian and then back to Xidi, a distance of about eight kilometers. The procession was held to invoke the Wuchang Five-Fury Spirits and thereby protect the Hu lineage that resided in Xidi. The village of Xidi was a showcase of all Huizhou, a Jiangnan prefecture noted empirewide since the sixteenth century for both its intense gentrified lineage culture and its strong mercantile tradition. The man behind the procession rituals was Hu Yuanxi, a son of one of the "six wealthiest Jiangnan merchants," who was living at home in Xidi at the time, perhaps on leave from his post as prefect of Hangzhou. More than three hundred Wuchang supplicants participated in the Xidi parade; they were "all boys under the age of fifteen," Hu proudly noted. "The procession went through the county seat, and the county magistrate let all into the Hall of Double Osmanthus, giving two buns to each of the participants, all the while highly commending everyone."

The Wuchang procession was part of the preliminary ceremonies for a grand showing of ritual operatic performances scheduled for the following month. The ceremonies were organized by the prominent and wealthy Hu lineage to commemorate the compilation of the genealogy of the Xidi Hus, who numbered "nearly three thousand adult kinsmen," as Hu Yuanxi's father-in-law, Cao Zhenyong, a scholar-official at

1. Hu's "Memorandum" to Xidi Mingjing Hushi renpai zu pu (Genealogy of the Ren [ninth] branch Mingjing Hus in Xidi), in Daoguang wunian (last section, 1a–3b).
the imperial court, noted in his preface to the lineage genealogy. Early in the ninth month, for eleven consecutive days and nights, more than sixty plays were performed on three stages erected in the village. The most magnificent of these was two-tiered, built in front of the huge Apical Ancestral Hall, the largest of twenty-six Hu lineage ancestral halls that filled the village. On the sixth night, when the “grand ritual” was held in honor of the Hus’ apical ancestor—a prince of the Tang-dynasty royal family—three troupes staged ten plays for an audience of more than forty thousand.2

In his Memorandum to the Genealogy of the Ren-Branch Mingjing Hus in Xidi, Hu Yuanxi did not bother to identify Wuchang. Perhaps he thought he did not need to, as the ritual of the Five-Fury Spirits had a deeply rooted tradition in Xidi. In fact, he did not even refer to Wuchang. Instead he used the term huchang 呼嘔, “to invoke the chang (fury)” spirits, which were nevertheless believed to consist of five entities, that is, Wuchang the Five Furies.3 What is more, he felt no need to explain the term huchang, either. Here, couched in Hu’s unexplained use of terminology, is a clue about a well-established ritual, a lineagewide rite known to all his kinspeople.

But the absence of an explicit mention of Wuchang could also imply that the deity’s symbolic character was elusive, defying easy identification. A survey of local sources from Huizhou and the larger southern Anhui region does not supply much information on the identity of the Five-Fury Spirits.4 Even when sources, especially official gazetteers, do

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2. Ibid. See also Cao’s preface to this genealogy. Mingjing (明經; Clarifying the classics) refers to the examination the Xidi Hus’ apical ancestor passed, for which he was thereafter called the Lord Mingjing. The Xidi Hus’ genealogy is itself “monumental,” being one of the most beautifully caligraphed and printed among hundreds of Huizhou genealogies stored in the Anhui Museum and Anhui Provincial Library. In 1826, Hu Yuanxi (1821) was the prefect of either Hangzhou or another prefecture in neighboring Zhejiang province. For biographical information on Hu Yuanxi, see also YXZ, pp. 71–72, 121. For the deeds of Hu’s father, ancestral halls in Xidi, and the village’s size (about 210,000 square meters), see YXZ, p. 422; Zhao Huafu, “Ming-Qing Huizhou Xidi,” p. 20; Yu Zhihuai, Yixian, p. 34; and chapter 4 herein.

3. Wuchang was understood in the Huizhou region sometimes as five supernatural beings making up the Five Furies, and sometimes as a generic deity, or more accurately, a pentad spirit (a cluster of deities grouped in five). Below, I mirror the ambiguity of the original usage by referring to Wuchang sometimes in the singular and sometimes in the plural.

4. Southern Anhui 安徽, the geographical focus of this study, is in western Jiangnan (literally, south of the Yangzi River), the great cultural and economic heartland of late imperial China. In late imperial times, southern Anhui consisted of Guangde 广德 sub-prefecture and the four prefectures of Taiping 太平, Ningguo 宁国, Chizhou 池州, and Huizhou. Huizhou prefecture was composed of the six counties of Shexian 襄县, Xiuning
Part I

Integrating Local Exorcism

The Evolution of the Symbolic World of the Five Furies
The Origins of Wuchang Exorcism

Elements of Wuchang exorcism in late imperial southern Anhui can probably be traced back to shamanism, which had played an important role in religious and social life since the dawn of Chinese history. Wuchang rituals originated from ancient Nuo exorcism, "popular" both as a "great tradition" in royal palaces and as "little traditions" among the country folk; and the original form of the deity was ambiguously linked with both exorcising agents and exorcised objects. Later, the ambiguous character of Wuchang continued to grow with the textualized liturgies of institutionalized Daoism, as well as with local popular observances. This chapter delineates the basic developments in pre-Ming exorcism in light of their relevance to late imperial Wuchang rituals and their contribution to the making of Wuchang's symbolic world.

The Nuo or masked performances of ghost exorcism started in prehistorical times in the Yellow River plain, the birthplace of Chinese civilization. The term *nuo* initially seems to have been an onomatopoeic word that mimicked the shouting sound the exorcists made when expelling demons or plague. The word is a cognate of *nan* 難, "difficult," and is related to the Tibeto-Burman root word *na*, meaning "sickness." Some scholars suggest that Nuo exorcism originated in the ritual exposure of

1. The terms "great tradition" and "little traditions," coined by Robert Redfield, are used here merely for convenience. This does not suggest that I accept the formulation of dichotomies such as elite/folk, universal/local, and urban/rural. See Sangren, "Great Tradition and Little Traditions Reconsidered."

Two of the most important turning points in the history of popular Wuchang worship came in the Ming dynasty. The first push came from the political sphere, from no less powerful a figure than the founding emperor, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋. This "Grand Martial" (Hongwu 洪武) Emperor incorporated Wuchang into the imperial rituals to the (deity of) military banners (qidu 旗纛). In the beginning, sacrifices to the military banners were made together with those to other deities. In the ninth year of the Hongwu reign (1376), an independent temple was built for worshipping the military banners. The official Ming History notes,

Every year in mid-autumn, on the day when the Son of Heaven personally offered sacrifices to the [deities of] mountains and rivers, [the emperor] sent the banner bearers and imperial guardians over to pay tribute to the military banners. The sacrifices were offered to the Great General of the Banner-Head; the Great Generals of the Six Banners (Liudu dajiang 六纛大將); the Banner Deity of the Five Directions (Wufang qishen 五方旗神); the Honest Deity Commanding Military Ships; the Deity of Golden Drums, Bugles, Blunderbusses, and Cannons; the Deity of Crossbows, Flying Spears, and Flying Stones; and numerous other deities such as the Celestial and Terrestrial Wuchang in the Battlefield and Barracks (Zhenqian Zhenhou Shenqi Wuchang 陣前陣後神祇五昌). Totaling seven, [these deities] shared one altar facing south. Wearing a leather cap, the emperor went to the Fengtian Palace and offered incense there.¹

¹. Mingshi, p. 1302. This is just one of four occasions when sacrifices were offered to the military banners in the Ming. For the other three occasions, see ibid., pp. 1301-1302.
The Rise of Local Pantheons in the Mid Ming

Zhu Yuanzhang tried to create a lasting subsistence economy, but he could not anticipate the effect of a century of political restabilization and economic reconstruction that began with his reign. During this century, commodity production slowly developed, and this development promoted the unequal distribution of land. As a consequence, the village-subsistence ideal of the early Ming was gradually eclipsed by a commercial-landlordist model of rural life, which at the same time also fed the growth of an urban economy.¹ All of this paved the way for dramatic socioeconomic changes that accelerated after the mid Ming, especially over the course of the sixteenth century. The economy became monetized and society increasingly urbanized, particularly in the Jiangnan region.²

The new socioeconomic environment of the mid Ming ushered in new beliefs and new ritual customs and formats, which generated new religious symbols and old ones restructured into new devine systems. In particular, Zhu Yuanzhang's arrangement of the city and earth gods inevitably underwent local transformation in the new climate. The first half of this chapter analyzes the metamorphosis of Chenghuang and Tudi exorcism in local society. In the second half I will begin to shift my focus to southern Anhui, exploring how this mid-Ming change led to the construction of the local pantheon or Wuchang's new symbolic world in Guangde 廣德 subprefecture.

¹. Brook, Confusions of Pleasure; idem, Praying for Power, p. 314.
². See, e.g., Han Dacheng, Mingdai chengshi yanjiu, esp. appendix 1—a long list of hundreds of cities and towns that emerged during the second half of the Ming dynasty (pp. 666–689).
Part II

Co-opting Ghosts and Money

Popular Wuchang Symbolism
in Late Imperial Huizhou
The manipulation of Wuchang worship turned out to be even more crucial for local elites in Huizhou than for their counterparts in Guangde, in the effort to maintain traditional social order in the face of the rapid socioeconomic changes after the mid Ming. From the mid Ming onward, especially over the course of the sixteenth century, Huizhou emerged as a gentrified lineage stronghold and a major cradle of mercantile activities. At stake for Huizhou elites was not only control over their kinsfolk and bondservants, but also the relationships among different social groups within the lineage elite, mainly between the established gentry and rising merchants. This power negotiation was subtly mirrored in Wuchang imagery, which in turn further enriched the Huizhou version of the ambiguous deity. For its colorful social-cultural history, and especially given the rich sources of both elite writings and “popular” texts, Huizhou appears to be an ideal place to figure out the new identities of Wuchang and to analyze how they combined with the deity’s original character to form a pattern of popular symbolism. To reach a better understanding of this pattern and its social dimensions in Huizhou, this chapter first takes a brief look at the social fabric of the prefecture in late imperial times.

Gentrified Lineages, Merchants, and Bondservants

In the People’s Republic of China, so-called Huizhou scholarship (Huixue 徽學) has been most productive and influential in the post-Mao historical literature. This is in part due to the existence of an enormously large amount of primary sources, including genealogies, other lineage
The New Identities of Wuchang

Popular Wuchang symbolism in Huizhou, as in Guangde, was fundamentally about the exorcism of evil ghosts. And here, too, Wuchang was placed at the bottom of local pantheons and functioned to enhance the tutelary deity of the local community or lineage. But where Zhang Bo was a deified figure in Guangde, in Huizhou he was naturally overshadowed by other heroes who had made great contributions to the Huizhou region in previous times—deified figures such as Wang Hua 汪華 and Zhang Xun 張巡. The similar mechanism of ji er mingzhi made these famous Huizhou heroes anthropomorphic proxies for the city and earth gods who headed Huizhou local pantheons and presided over Huizhou exorcism rites. More significantly, Huizhou merchants adopted the deities

1. Zhang Bo continued to be worshipped in Huizhou through the Qing and after. The King Zhang temple in Shexian, for instance, is mentioned in SXZ (pp. 231–232) immediately after temples for worshipping Wang Hua, Liu Meng 刘猛, and Zhang Xun. Evidence indicates that Wang Hua became the primary deity in a Huizhou Guanghui (Cishan) temple, (Cheng Ting, Chunfan jicheng, 2a). More interestingly, HZZ (1566 ed., 10.10b) mentions five “King Zhang temples” (Zhangwang miao 張王廟), devoted to worshipping the god Guangde Cishan, in Qimen county alone. QXZ (1873 ed., p. 314) also mentions five King Zhang temples and a new one, most of which were in the same locations as indicated in HZZ. But the QXZ editors clearly indicate that the primary god for these temples was Zhang Xun, not Zhang Bo. Could this have been a result of this locality’s ji er mingzhi strategy, or could it be that the QXZ editors have mistaken the primary god worshipped in those King Zhang temples in the late Qing? If the latter is the case, this mistake reflects the popularity of Zhang Xun in Qimen; it indicates that Zhang Xun had overshadowed Zhang Bo. Nevertheless, in Huizhou, Zhang Xun was indeed also called “King Zhang” (JXZ, p. 139).
The Social Dimension of the Wuchang Cult

Thus far, I have presented four stories: one about the origins of Wuchang as a symbol of ghost exorcism, a second about Ming Taizu’s effort to build a new, empirewide unified format of ritual observance, a third about the incorporation of Wuchang into local pantheons or its subordination to lineages’ tutelary deities in the mid-Ming metamorphosis of the official worshipping system, and a fourth about the mythological conflation between Wuchang and other pentad spirits. The meanings of Wuchang these historical processes generated were layered one upon the another, various representations built into a single popular image to form a pattern of symbolism. Behind this pattern lies one final story, that of how the changing symbolism of Wuchang reflected and helped to implement dramatic changes in class and lineage structure in the mid-Ming context and afterward. These changes affected not only state-society and elite-commoner relations, but above all gentry-merchant relations.

At the core of the mid-Ming change was the development of a money economy, particularly manifest in Huizhou, the emerging capital of mercantile activities in late imperial China. From the mid Ming onward, merchants in southern Anhui, particularly those from Huizhou, worshipped Wuchang, but not Wutong, as their patron deity of wealth. In fact, Wuchang appears to have been a mid-Ming substitute for Wutong in Huizhou and southern Anhui at large. This partially explains why the two pentad spirits converged in Huizhou folklore. However, some of the top gentry from the prefecture, and top scholars from other places in Jiangnan as well, denied any linkage between the two. The commoner devotees from southern Anhui, too, insisted that they worshipped Wuchang but
Conclusion

Let us complete our journey into the symbolic world of Wuchang by finishing the story with which we began this monograph.

In 1826, on the first day of the eighth month, in the heart of Huizhou, more than three hundred boys under the age of fifteen from Xidi of Yixian invoked Wuchang for protection in a grand procession. Wuchang was a symbol of ghost exorcism; that boys were used in the procession was part of an exorcism tradition dating back thousands of years. This age-old tradition, however, had been injected with new meanings by late imperial times. Wuchang was invoked, above all, to protect the Hu lineage; the parade was staged as part of the commemoration for the compilation of the Xidi Hus’ genealogy. The boys in this case were themselves important symbols as well, symbolizing the purity, and therefore piety, of the procession organizers and the prosperity of the lineage, blessed with many sons.¹ In addition, according to a well-established tradition in Xidi (and in Huizhou as a whole), these boys were soon to leave home to learn a trade. As an old Yixian proverb has it, “We didn’t build up merit a lifetime ago, so we got born in Huizhou; at thirteen or fourteen, it’s out we go.”²

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¹. In this case, it was the lineage context, not the involvement of boys in the Xidi parade, that made the boy supplicants important “new” symbols by late imperial times. As I have shown, three sons of Zhuanxu who died unnaturally became the main targets in ancient exorcism. But later they also emerged as the exorcising gods themselves. The ambiguity of Zhuanxu’s sons in exorcism reflected a yearning, widely shared throughout Chinese history, to see sons healthily born and grown. See, e.g., Kang, Nuoxi yishu yuanliu, pp. 327, 381–382.

². Yu, Yixian, p. 139.
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