

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is a supplemental episode.

So now that I've gotten a few episodes under my belt and have cut back the length of the regular episodes, I'm finding them easier to produce. Not so much easier that I'd feel comfortable upping the three-episodes-a-month pace I had set for myself when this project started, but enough that I think I might have time to occasionally do a short supplemental episode where we delve deeper into things that come up during the narrative that would take too long to explain in detail in the regular episodes.

Today, I want to take a look at the story of Yi (1) Yin (3). In episode 4, when Dong Zhuo was telling the ministers that he planned to depose the emperor, one minister spoke against it and invoked the precedent of Yi (1) Yin (3). This minister quoted a line from the great ancient Chinese philosopher Meng Zi, better known to the west as Mencius, that said, "Only with Yi (1) Yin's (3) talent can one act like Yi (1) Yin (3). Otherwise, such a deed is treason." So let's talk about who this guy was.

Yi (1) Yin (3) was a prime minister during the early years of the Shang dynasty. The Shang was the second recorded dynasty in Chinese history and lasted from 1766 BC to 1122 BC, so it began almost 2,000 years before the time period in which the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is set. This is part of why I love Chinese history -- the simple fact that there is just so much of it. Here we are, talking about characters from a novel set almost 2,000 years before our time, and those characters are making references to people who lived 2,000 years before their time.

As you would expect for someone who lived almost 4,000 years ago, we don't know exactly when Yi (1) Yin (3) was born, but he was around in the 1500s BC. He was born during the late stages of the Xia Dynasty, the first recorded Chinese dynasty, which is believed to have lasted from 2070 to 1600 BC.

Yi Yin was a classic rags-to-riches story -- a guy who started out in life as the child of slaves and ended up being a king-maker. There is a legend about his birth. It is said that his mother was a slave girl who lived by the River Yi (1) -- and that's where his last name comes from -- and her job was to collect mulberry leaves to feed silkworms. Before she gave birth to Yi (1) Yin (3), she had a dream in which a god

came to her with this ominous warning: When you see water gushing out of your mortar, run toward the east and don't look back.

The next day, water really did start to gush from her mortar. Remembering her dream, she quickly warned her neighbors, and they fled toward the east. They had run for about four miles when she turned around and saw that where the village had once stood, there was now only water. So her vision saved her and her neighbors. By looking back, however, she had done the one thing the god had told her not to do, and for this, she was turned into a mulberry tree.

Ok, you might be thinking right now: Hey, this sounds kind of like the story of Lot's wife from the Bible, except with more water and less fire and brimstone. And you are right. That's what I thought, too. I'll leave it to you to draw conclusions about what that says about ancient societies and their views on women's ability to follow seemingly simple commands from deities.

In the meantime, another slave girl who was out collecting mulberry leaves saw a baby hanging in this tree, so she brought him home with her and presented him to her master, the ruler of the kingdom of Shen (1). This king gave the baby to the slave who served as his chef. So as Yi (1) Yin (3) grew up, he became a master chef. And in fact, part of his fame today stems from his alleged culinary contributions to Chinese culture. He is said to have developed the principle of creating harmony from the five flavors -- sour, sweet, bitter, hot, and salty -- as well as the principle of how to properly use fire to cook, and both of these principles remain cornerstones of Chinese cooking today.

But Yi (1) Yin's (3) genius was not limited to the kitchen. He was very intelligent and yearned for knowledge. He studied the legendary ancient sage rulers and became well-versed in the proper way to govern a kingdom. He was so knowledgeable, in fact, that Tang (1), the ruler of the kingdom of Shang (1), heard about him and tried three times to obtain his services in exchange for jade, silk, and other valuable gifts. The king of Shen (1), however, refused these offers. Finally, King Tang (1) upped the ante and offered to marry the daughter of the king of Shen (1). To this, the King of Shen (1) agreed, and Yi (1)

Yin (3), as a servant of the king's daughter, accompanied her to the court of Shang.

Now, there is another version of how Yi (1) Yin (3) ended up in the service of the king of Shang. This version says that rather than growing up a slave, Yi (1) Yin (3) was actually a farmer. He was troubled by the turmoil enveloping the country in the waning years of the Xia dynasty. He had heard that the ruler of the kingdom of Shen (1) was a wise and good king, so he wanted to get close to him and talk him into using his army to overthrow the Xia. To do this, Yi (1) Yin (3) willingly subjugated himself to slavery and became the king's personal chef. Through their interactions, the king discovered his talent and gave him a position overseeing meals. However, after a time, Yi (1) Yin (3) discovered that the ruling family of Shen (1) actually descended from the ruling family of Xia, so there was too much blood connection there for them to go to war against each other. Besides, Shen (1) was a pretty small kingdom anyway. At this point, Yi (1) Yin (3) set his sights on the larger kingdom of Shang and its ambitious king, Tang (1).

When King Tang (1) married the daughter of the king of Shen (1), Yi (1) Yin (3) volunteered to be one of the servants in the princess's entourage. Once in Shang, he set to work gaining the ear of King Tang (1). While cooking and using food and flavor as conversation starters, he revealed his talent to the king. Upon this discovery, King Tang made Yi Yin his top minister. So that was a pretty nice promotion, from chef to to minister. Of course, it does make me shudder to imagine Rachel Ray being the secretary of state.

Yi (1) Yin (3) then played a key role in helping King Tang's (1) war against the Xia, and after a number of campaigns, the Shang displaced the Xia as the ruling dynasty. Yi (1) Yin (3) served as prime minister under King Tang, who reigned for 30 years. After King Tang died, one of his sons came to the throne. But this son died after just three years. Then another son of King Tang took the throne, but he died after just four years. At this point, a grandson of King Tang, Tai (4) Jia (2), was elevated to the throne.

When Tai (4) Jia (2) became king, Yi (1) Yin (3) wrote three essays for him, basically how-to guides on being a good ruler. In the beginning, Tai (4) Jia (2) followed Yi (1) Yin's (3) advice and acted prudently. By

the third year of his reign, however, the young king had forgotten everything and became an autocrat who ignored Yi (1) Yin's (3) words, broke the rules handed down from his ancestors, and treated his own people cruelly.

Seeing that his words were falling on deaf ears, Yi Yin knew he had to act to preserve the dynasty. So he removed Tai (4) Jia (2) from the throne and exiled him to the grave site of King Tang, basically telling him, you can come back when you decide to grow up. While Tai (4) Jia (2) was in exile, Yi (1) Yin (3) himself took up the day-to-day responsibility of governing the country and restored order and prosperity.

When Tai (4) Jia (2) arrived at his grandfather's grave, he found a rather plain burial site with just a small building nearby that was used once a year for rituals to honor the ancestors. When the old man who tended to the grave heard why Tai (4) Jia (2) had been exiled, he told the deposed king about his grandfather's deeds and how and why he established the myriad laws and rules of propriety that the young ruler had flaunted so recklessly. These tales shamed Tai (4) Jia (2) into changing his ways.

After three years, sufficiently satisfied that Tai (4) Jia (2) had reformed, Yi Yin went with the other court ministers to bring him back to the capital and return him to the throne. Now tempered with the wisdom he gained during his exile, Tai (4) Jia (2) ruled wisely, and the empire entered a golden age. Yi Yin, meanwhile, is said to have lived until around the age of 100 and went down in history as one of the greatest ministers in the history of China, not to mention an awesome cook.

Ok, so that's the story of Yi Yin, and now you know the backstory behind that one line from episode 4. Thanks for tuning in to this supplemental episode, and I'll see you next time on the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast.