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# The Man-Hunting Tiger

## From “Wu Song Fights the Tiger” in Chinese Traditions

### **Abstract**

The article takes as its point of departure a central story from oral and written genres of fiction: the tale of the hero Wu Song and his life-and-death struggle with the man-eating tiger on Jingyang Ridge in Shandong. In its Gilgamesh-like primordial resonance of the battle between man and nature, the story has kept audiences spellbound for about seven hundred years. The episode is among the most popular Chinese tales, told and retold, written and rewritten, in a wealth of oral, oral-related, and written genres since the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. While much has been said about Wu Song, the human hero of this tale, little attention has been given to his worthy opponent, the tiger. In this article the focus is on the King of Beasts, the Lord of the Mountain.

**Keywords:** China—drama—novel—performed arts—storytelling—*shuoshu*—tiger

THE STORY about Wu Song 武松 and his battle with a man-eating tiger has been popular in China since the Yuan Period (1279–1368).<sup>\*</sup> The tiger tale belongs to a longer cycle of events, the Wu Song saga about one of the “good fellows,” *haohan* 好漢, that became an outlaw during the early twelfth century.<sup>1</sup> Stories about Wu Song were among the tales of storytellers as early as the Song Period (960–1279) (LUO 1958, 4). The episode about how he barehandedly conquered the man-slaughtering tiger is documented for the first time as the title of a non-extant *zaju* 雜劇 drama by a prolific playwright from Beijing, styled Hong Zi Li Er 紅字李二 (Red-Tattooed Second Li) (fl. 1295):<sup>2</sup>

Wu Song Fights the Tiger with a Broken Shoulder Pole  
Zhedan'er Wu Song da hu  
折擔兒武松打虎

In Chinese drama, *xiqu* 戲曲, the oldest extant version of the tale is from the late sixteenth century, where the whole saga of Wu Song was treated in the southern drama genre, called “play of the marvellous,” *chuanqi* 傳奇. In this drama by Shen Jing 沈璟 (1553–1610), entitled “The Noble Knight-Errant,” *Yixia ji* 義俠記, in thirty-six acts, the episode of Wu Song’s encounter with the tiger is found in the fourth act:<sup>3</sup>

Subduing the cruel beast  
Chu xiong  
除兇

Previously, the saga was already incorporated into a larger cycle of stories about heroic outlaws who had taken refuge in the moors of Liangshan in Shandong around 1100 CE. Legends about the historical figure Song Jiang 宋江 and his band of one hundred and eight good fellows had for several centuries circulated in oral storytelling, in various kinds of folk reading, called “plain tales,” *pinghua* 平話, as well as in poetry and pictorial art. In the late sixteenth century the tiger tale is found in extant editions as a chapter written in the

“storyteller’s manner”<sup>4</sup> in the famous early vernacular novel, *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳).<sup>5</sup> The title of the chapter takes the form of a couplet:

Chai Jin Entertains Guests in Henghai County  
Wu Song Fights a Tiger on Jingyang Ridge

Henghaijun Chai Jin liu bin  
Jingyanggang Wu Song da hu

橫海郡柴進留賓  
景陽崗武松打虎

Eyewitness reports of oral performance of the tale go back to the middle of the seventeenth century, when the “father of storytelling” in China, Liu Jingting 柳敬亭 (1587–1670?), won fame particularly for his performance of this tale (ZHANG 1986, 68). In the professional performing arts, *quyi* 曲藝, including a wealth of subgenres, this story is a frequent item of the repertoire up to the present time. These variations or “instances” of the story can be investigated both from contemporary performances, recorded on audio- or videotape, and from oral-related texts in the form of “scripts” (librettos for performers) or “notational texts” (texts that reflect oral performances as closely as the given methods of transcription allow). There is also a wealth of popular printed booklets containing the story, meant for either reading or performance or both.

The present study examines: 1) the two earliest editions of the novel that contain the tiger tale, the so-called simple recension edition *Shuangfengtangben* 雙峰堂本 (1594) and the full recension edition *Rongyutangben* 容與堂本 (1610); 2) the earliest extant drama edition, *Yixia ji* 義俠記 (1599); 3) a drum tale pam-



FIGURE 1. The earliest picture of Wu Song and the tiger. From the *Shuangfengtangben* edition of *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*) (1594).

phlet (ca. nineteenth century); 4) a performance of Yangzhou storytelling (1992); 5) a performance of a Shandong clapper tale (1999). The instances are chosen from a larger body of primary sources on the Wu Song saga, currently prepared for a database on Chinese storytelling.<sup>6</sup> The titles of the three instances of performance literature that are investigated below correspond with that of the early *zaju* and the second couplet of the novel's title, either in the short form "Wu Song Fights the Tiger" *Wu Song da hu*, or the full line "Wu Song Fights a Tiger on Jingyang Ridge," *Jingyanggang Wu Song da hu*.

In the following, the figure of the tiger as manifested in the above textual sources (including oral texts in electronic formats) is analyzed from linguistic and narrative angles. By these methods I try to isolate the meanings of the tiger in the various genres in which the story is found, both its immediate and its symbolic significations.

This essay on the tiger, King of the Beasts, from a story of great age and influence in Chinese folk culture, aims to combine the results of narrative studies with some reflections on folklore and folk beliefs. For this purpose the tiger in its shifting image has been chosen as the main focus. But as we shall see, the role of the tiger is inextricably bound up with the role of the male hero, Wu Song, so much so that in the final analysis it is difficult to separate the two. Or, in other words, the tiger can be seen as a symbol of the deepest motivations in the life of the man.

#### NAMING THE TIGER

The tale of Wu Song and the tiger contains only a few proper names that are always part of the various "instances." These constantly mentioned names are: Wu Song, the hero, and Jingyang Ridge, the mountain where the tiger lives. No other proper names can claim such widespread usage within this tradition. Wu Song actually has a lot of extra names and appellations, some of which are connected to the Chinese habit of calling the sons in the family according to their number in the order of sons. Since Wu Song is the second son, several of his names are based on the number two. His most famous nickname is Second Brother Wu, Wu Erlang 武二郎. As for the tiger, as might be expected, it does not have a proper name. However, across centuries and genres it is called by several appellations and has quite a few magnificent epithets and symbolic names.

In the Ming novel, both the simple (Chapter 22) and the full recension (Chapter 23), the general name for the tiger is "big beast," *dachong* 大蟲 (大虫),<sup>7</sup> a word with dialectal flavor in modern Chinese (*Xiandai hanyu cidian* 1999, 230). This expression is by far the most frequent in the prose narration and dialogue, but in the poems and in a few compounds the word "tiger" *hu* 虎, is used, for example "fight the tiger," *da hu* 打虎, "kill the tiger," *sha hu* 殺虎, "fierce tiger," *menghu* 猛虎, "tiger's skin," *hupi* 虎皮, "tiger carrier," *huchuang* 虎床, "tiger's tail,"

*huwei* 虎尾. Only in a few monologue utterances of Wu Song is *hu* used, for example “Well, then there is for sure a tiger there!” *duande you hu* 端的有虎, and “Then there is really a tiger there!” *zhenge you hu* 真個有虎. In a verse passage it is referred to poetically as “tiger of the mountain,” *shanzhong hu* 山中虎. The specific epithet describing the tiger is the fixed phrase “with slanting eyes and white forehead,” *diaojing bai'e* 吊睛白額,<sup>8</sup> mentioned in the official proclamation about the dangerous animal, and repeated several times. In a long poem of praise, it is called King of the Beasts, *shouzhong wang* 獸中王.

In the Ming drama, *dachong* alternates with *hu* in the text that is meant for vocalization (the form “tiger,” *laohu* 老虎, the normal form in modern standard Chinese, *MSC*, is used once), but in the stage directions *hu* is used everywhere. Wu Song swears at the tiger “damned monster,” *niechu* 孽畜, and in the title of the drama it is called “cruel beast,” *xiong* 兇, but elsewhere in the drama this word is only used a couple of times as the adjective “cruel,” not directly as an appellation for the tiger. The fixed epithet of the tiger is the same as in the novel, “with slanting eyes and white forehead.” A poem praises it as Lord of the Mountain, *shanjun* 山君.

In a performance text from the nineteenth century—namely, a drum tale, *dagushu* 大鼓書, which is entirely in rhymed verses—the appellation of the tiger is distinctly different from that of the early novel and drama. “Big beast” as well as “cruel beast” are not found in this text, and only the words for “tiger,” *laohu* and *hu*, are used with about equal frequency as free words (but *hu* besides the prefixed word *laohu* also enters into a number of compounds, so that this syllable-morpheme by far outnumbers the occurrences of *laohu*). The epithet “King of the Beasts,” *shouzhong wang*, suiting the rhyme and rhythm of the drum tale perfectly, is used three times over. But the formula “with slanting eyes and white forehead” is not found in the drum tale. Neither is it found in an oral performance of the Shandong clapper tale, *Shandong kuaiban* 山東快板, from the 1990s, which is close to the tradition of the drum tale in many respects.<sup>9</sup> The tiger is in this spoken version frequently called “tiger,” *laohu*, but the form *hu* also has a wide usage, not only in compounds but also in phrases like “this tiger,” *zhezhi hu* 這只虎, “there was really a tiger there,” *zhen you hu* 真有虎, and “subdue the tiger,” *ba hu chudiao* 把虎除掉. The alternation between *laohu* and *hu* seems partly due to the requirements of the metrical form.

In a performance of Yangzhou storytelling from 1992, *Yangzhou pinghua* 揚州評話, which is largely in prose with only a couple of poems and verse lines interspersed, the tiger is definitely predominantly called *laohu*. In compounds, *hu* enters as usual in modern Chinese (there is no difference between the usage of the Yangzhou dialect and that of *MSC* in this respect). Only in a few formulaic expressions do we find *hu* as a free word, notably in the title of the tale “fighting the tiger,” *da hu*. Intermittently the tiger is called a “creature,” *chusheng* 畜生, and

sworn at with the expression “evil monster,” *niezhang* 孽障. None of the epithets from the novel, drama, drum tale or clapper tale are found, but in a final poem describing Wu Song’s great deed, the poetic “tiger of the mountain,” *shanzhong hu* 山中虎, is applied.

The naming of the tiger, as exemplified in the above instances of the tale, seems to correspond to a linguistic shift in the appellation of this animal since the sixteenth century, “big beast,” *dachong*, being replaced by “tiger,” *laohu*, as the most frequent term in vernacular narrative.<sup>10</sup> However, in verse making and in textual portions where conciseness is demanded, the short form “tiger,” *hu*, is predominant. In Yangzhou storytelling, the most “talkative” of the genres presented here, *hu* is used much less frequently than in any of the other texts. As a monosyllabic entity, *hu* carries a “literary” flavor that makes it the first choice for titles, sayings, epithets, and verse, but in ordinary narration and dialogue *dachong* and *laohu* are the popular expressions in their respective texts.

The general appellation of the tiger in the novel and early drama, “big beast,” *dachong*, survives in a number of instances of the tale in the dramatic genres *Jingju* 京劇 and *Kunqu* 崑曲 and in local drama like *Huaixi* 淮戲.<sup>11</sup> In a performance text of Fuzhou storytelling, *Fuzhou pinghua* 福州平話 (actually story-singing), and in present-day Yangzhou ballad singing, *Yangzhou qingqu* 揚州清曲, it also occurs with high frequency.<sup>12</sup> It is probably no coincidence that the “instances” in which “big beast” is used are also those in which the epithet “with slanting eyes and white forehead” appears, a feature that points to direct textual derivation between these genres and the novel and/or drama. On the contrary, the lack of these expressions in Yangzhou storytelling and the Shandong clapper tale is among the features that point to their textual independence from both novel and drama.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from the appellations and epithets for the tiger, there are a few proverbs that reflect its high position in the mythical world of animal symbols. In the full recension of the Ming novel *Rongyutangben*, the wind that announces the first appearance of the tiger on Jingyang Ridge is described in a poem, after which follows a proverb: “Clouds originate with dragons, and wind comes forth with tigers,” *yun sheng cong long, feng sheng cong hu* 雲生從龍風生從虎. This saying is reflected also in some instances of *Yangzhou pinghua* in the form: “Clouds follow the dragon, wind follows the tiger,” *yun cong long, feng cong hu* 雲從龍風從虎.<sup>14</sup> In this tradition the dragon and the tiger also form a pair in the expression: “Opening with the tiger and closing with the dragon,” *hu qi long shou* 虎起龍收, a description of the whole Wu Song saga that begins with the tiger tale and ends with the hero joining the other bandits at Twin Dragon Peak.<sup>15</sup> The juxtaposition of dragon and tiger is a common notion in Chinese folklore and art, where the majestic tiger reaches into the supernatural realm of the dragon and these two animals are sovereign respectively in water and on earth. This kind of thinking, which is very much alive in the popular culture of the present day, seems to go

back three to six thousand years in Chinese history. Tigers and dragons form pairs of ornamentation on utensils and sacrificial items since earliest times. For the art historian and the researcher of mythology, here is indeed a broad track leading into old totemic systems, philosophical and religious ideas widespread in East Asia.<sup>16</sup> But in the versions of the tiger story that are investigated here, these sayings seem to play merely an ornamental role and do not really influence the image of the tiger or the interaction between the animal and people.

In the novel, the saying about clouds and wind marks the arrival of the tiger, but nothing more is said about it.<sup>17</sup> In *Yangzhou pinghua* the proverb about the wind and the tiger is in some versions explained away as superstition or is given a “rational” explanation, namely that the tiger is clever enough to employ a gust of wind to scare people, or that the wind is in fact the foul stench from the tiger’s mouth. The association of clouds and dragons, and wind and tigers, is treated as an unspoken belief that everybody is assumed to know. It adds a touch of magic to the animal, but is of no further consequence.

In the drum tale and the Shandong clapper tale the tiger is given the epithet “three lines and one stroke reads as King,” *san heng yi shu nian ge wang* 三橫一豎念個王, pointing to the stripes on the forehead of the tiger, considered to form the character for “king,” *wang* 王. Thus, in Chinese folk beliefs nature itself has inscribed the tiger with its royal dignity, stamping the mark of “king” onto its brow. But as was the case with the saying about dragons and tigers, the royal distinction is of little importance, and the drum tale and clapper tale present this “king” of animals in a sorry and mirth-provoking role.

In Yangzhou storytelling its majestic conduct is repeatedly hinted at. Whenever the tiger is on the hunt, it approaches its prey “in no haste and no hurry,” *bu huang bu mang* 不慌不忙. Leaving its tiger’s den, it “sways along with steps exactly like an official,” *laohu zhenzheng shi yao guanbule* 老虎真正是搖官步. After the fight, Wu Song is not sure if the tiger is really dead or not. The animal is intelligent and might be pretending. He remembers the saying “a dead tiger keeps its posture,” *si hu bu luo jia* 死虎不落架. Even in death, some tigers retain their majestic air and are able to scare people out of their wits. As the storyteller remarks, it is no wonder that great generals of former times compared themselves to tigers: “My Lord, you are certainly a tiger general!” *Ni jiangjun zhen nai hujiang shi ye!* 你將軍真乃虎將是也. A tone of irony peeps through and its focus is on the animal as well as self-imposing men.

#### THE LIFE OF THE TIGER

In the Ming novel, both the simple recension and the full recension, as well as in the Ming drama, the tiger is a dangerous creature, a threat and a disaster to people of the area, with no redeeming features apart from its impressive looks. The

reader/audience is constantly on the side of the hero, never giving a thought to the situation of the animal. In the drum tale, however, there are a few lines that take the side of the tiger, a feature that adds to the light humor of the whole piece:

Meanwhile let's wait performing what happened to Wu Song,  
 let's rather perform what happened to the King of Beasts high up in the  
 mountain.  
 For three days it had not eaten fresh human flesh  
 It had grown so thin that its chest almost touched its back  
 Today it was not going anywhere else  
 Its mind was set to go for Jingyang Ridge!  
 It hurried along at high speed,  
 seeing in front of it the Jingyang Ridge  
 It lifted its eyes, raised its head and looked carefully  
 There was a big fellow lying there  
 It bellowed "b-r-r-r-r..." and fell upon him at one jump.<sup>18</sup>

In the Shandong clapper tale the tiger is provided with a "human" soul, and during the fighting scene it enters into a kind of conversation with its opponent, Wu Song:

When Wu Song saw the tiger approaching,  
 he said to himself:  
 "Don't become flustered,  
 it doesn't help to be afraid.  
 My goodness! I certainly want to see how strong this tiger is."  
 When the tiger caught sight of Wu the Second,  
 in its heart of hearts it felt awfully happy.  
 "Oh!" the tiger thought: "This guy isn't small,  
 after two meals there will still be leftovers."  
 The tiger thought: "What an opportunity!  
 After two meals I cannot eat him up!"  
 After two meals it cannot eat him up,  
 but what about the man, can he stand it?  
 This tiger,  
 "b-r-r-r-r..." it roared as it came forth,  
 and leaped towards the good fellow Second Brother Wu.  
 Wu Song cried out:  
 "Holy terror!"  
 and dodged away to one side.  
 Since Wu Song dodged away

the tiger hit the ground.  
 As the tiger did not catch the man  
 it couldn't but think:  
 "Why!" the tiger thought, "Where is that guy?  
 When eating humans I never used to spend much energy,  
 how come today is different?"  
 Sure! When ordinary people saw the tiger, they were terribly frightened,  
 they would cover their eyes with their hands and call for mummy.  
 The tiger would eat to its heart's delight,  
 digging its claws into the neck of its victim : "Yum, yum, delicious!"  
 The tiger took him for an ordinary man,  
 how could it know that man in front was the good fellow Second Brother  
 Wu.

From these few lines it is already apparent that the clapper tale is not aiming for heroic austerity, but transforms the tale into pure comedy.

However, it is first and foremost in *Yangzhou pinghua* that the tiger is described from the angle of the animal world. Here is an example of the tiger hunting for prey, a storyteller's digression that is usually inserted just before the tiger attacks the sleeping Wu Song:

Who would have thought that this tiger had actually had nothing to eat for three days? How come? Couldn't it eat people? There were none! It had eaten them up! [...] They did not come one and one or two and two, no, they formed groups of two to three hundred. So even if this was such a beast—as you could see—an enormous beast, and very intelligent, too—when it saw such a crowd of people, it didn't dare to come forward. It could not eat people. What about winged game and four-footed beasts? Couldn't it eat them? There were none of them, either. They had all been eaten up by it. For example, the tiger may sit on top of the ridge, look into the sky and catch sight of a sparrow. The sparrow comes flying by. A tiger cannot fly! In the first place, if the tiger had a pair of wings, that would be disaster! Even more ferocious! However, it only has to lift its head and give a roar:

"Ma-a-a-a...!"

From its mouth streams a foul smell. It opens its mouth wide and gives a roar, letting out breath that carries the smell up into the air. The sparrow flying in the sky has to rely on its two wings. Pressing them against the wind, it is able to fly along, but when it smells that stench, it suddenly folds up its wings and falls to the ground: "Plop!" The tiger steps forward and has it for breakfast. Another example is the rabbit. Can it not run away? Those four legs of the rabbit sure run fast! The moment it sees a tiger, off it goes,

running straight into its hole. The tiger's head is so very big, and how big is a rabbit's hole? When the tiger spots a rabbit, it probably sets out chasing after it? No, it doesn't. The tiger lies prone on the ground and:

“Wu-u-u-u...ma-a-a-a...,” it roars.

“Ma-a-a-a...”

A gust of wind carries along the stench from its mouth. Over there the rabbit is running at full speed, but when it smells that stench, it begins to shiver. And as soon as it sits there shivering, the tiger—in no haste and no hurry—walks over to it, and—“flop”—has it for lunch. The monkey, however, it can climb very high, isn't that so? As soon as a monkey sees the tiger, it clings to the top of a tall tree. The two hind legs sit on a forking branch, and the two forepaws clutch some twigs. Then it looks down towards the tiger, blinking with those monkey eyes: “Wa-da-wa-da.” It says to itself: “Elder Brother, I don't care if you are fierce! Can you climb, perhaps? Can you come up here? What can you do to me?” But the tiger is even more ingenious. The tiger will sit down in front of that old tree and stare at the monkey:

“Ma-a-a-a...!” it roars.

As soon as the monkey sees it roaring, my goodness, it begins to shiver in its heart. But when you shiver, the tiger goes on roaring:

“Ma-a-a-a...!”

And the more fiercely the tiger roars, the more fiercely the monkey shivers. And thus shivering and shivering, shivering and shivering, its hands loosen their grip. And when the forepaws have lost their grip, the hind legs also slacken and it falls down: “Plop!” Then the tiger steps forward and—“flop”—has it for tea. In the evening the tiger goes down to the river to drink. The water flows in through the left side of the mouth and out through the right side. Not one single fish or shrimp will escape, and that will do for supper. Four meals a day! Winged game, four-footed beasts, fish and shrimps, everything had been eaten up by now.... If it had nothing to eat, it must be fated to die from hunger! Three days had gone by! Don't take it too seriously! No problem! Assuming there were people around, then it ate people. If there were winged game and four-footed beasts, then it ate winged game and four-footed beasts. But now it couldn't get hold of any, it couldn't get hold of any. Day after day it would drink the dew to allay its hunger and pretend to be full.

At this very moment the tiger was lying prone in the dry grass west of the ridge, and once again it emitted a tiger's roar....<sup>19</sup>

Although the *Yangzhou pinghua* storyteller does not enter into the heart of the tiger, we are presented with scenes from the tiger's life and the ways it can sur-

vive. The hunting is set in a humorous light, with the smaller animals talking to each other and relating to each other as if they were humans. This stroke of humanity is further developed in a slightly risqué episode, the tiger's unhappy love story:

Where was the tiger? South of the Jingyang Ridge. South of the Jingyang Ridge the tiger had its den. The tiger was waiting in the opening of its tiger's den. Propping itself up on its forepaws and squatting on its hind legs, it raised its tiger's head and stared at the bright moon in the sky. This tiger, you see, earlier there was no tiger there. Why suddenly this autumn had a fierce tiger arrived? Had the tiger fallen from heaven? Or had it sprung from the earth? Tigers cannot fall from heaven, nor can they spring from the earth. This tiger had met with misfortune at home, and so it had sneaked away. What kind of misfortune had it met with? Misfortune in tigers' mating. When one day a tiger has grown up and begins to feel lust, and it wants to mate, then it does not hunt for food, it only roars. For instance, the male tiger roars to attract a female tiger, and the female tiger roars to attract a male tiger, and then they mate, don't they? No, they do not mate. They stand face to face and take turns roaring:

“Ma-a-a-a...!”

What for? They talk and have fun! They like to get friendly! And then by and by, they begin to roar louder and louder, and are filled with lust, and then they mate. But on this day of mating, our tiger was not very successful, because this male tiger—or man-tiger—had a thorn on his male member. As for the tigress, in her female opening it felt like a furnace, as if she had caught fire. One of them was aching like being burned, and the other was aching like being stabbed, and they both gave a roar! When finally the lust had passed, one of them ran straight east, and the other ran straight west. After running so far, all his lust had worn off, and our tiger had hollowed out a cave and hidden himself here. So this tiger had been thrown out because of tiger mating.<sup>20</sup>

The two digressions above illustrate how the tiger of *Yangzhou pinghua* has two sides, its imposing outward appearance and its inward troubled existence, forever hungry and lovelorn. This two-dimensional aspect of the tiger has a strong parallel in the main protagonist of the story, our hero Wu Song, in particular as he is portrayed in *Yangzhou pinghua*.

#### MAN-SLAUGHTERING BEAST AND BEAST-SLAUGHTERING MAN

In the novel, the drama, and the drum tale, the tiger is throughout described from a distance; nothing is said about its thoughts and feelings—one only hears

its roaring and observes its actions. Here is the fighting scene as described in the full recension of the novel, the *Rongyutangben*:

Now the big beast was ravenous. It pressed its two paws into the ground with ease, springing upwards, and taking off into midair intended to land on its prey from above. Wu Song had such a shock that he felt all the wine start out of him in an icy sweat!

It's slow in the telling, but happens in a flash. When he saw the beast spring, Wu Song leapt out of the way, ending up behind it. That's exactly what the big beast didn't like, to have a man at its back. Thrusting upward off its front paws, it flexed its back and twisted round to pounce again. But again Wu Song dodged to one side. Failing to grasp its prey, the tiger gave a roar like half the heavens exploding, a roar that seemed to shake the very mountains, and lashed out at Wu Song with its tail, rigid as a steel bar. Once more Wu Song leapt aside.

In fact, when the big beast attacks a man, it generally has these three strategies: springing, pouncing, and sweeping. When all these three methods failed its spirit was half broken. After that big beast failed to catch Wu Song with its tail it gave a loud roar and turned round again. Seeing the big beast had turned its back on him, Wu Song grasped his cudgel in both hands and brought it down with all the strength of his body. There was a resounding crash.

But what he had done was demolish a whole tree, branches and all. He looked for the big beast. His staff had not even touched it. In fact, in a fit of panic, he'd rushed his stroke and all he'd achieved was to strike a dead tree. Now his cudgel was broken in two and he was left with only the broken half in his hand. That big beast roared, it was enraged, it turned and sprang at him again. Wu Song leapt back, covering ten paces in a single bound. The big beast reared up on its hind legs and came at him with all its claws out. Wu Song threw away his broken stick and suddenly grabbing the big beast's striped neck with his bare hands began forcing it down to the ground. The beast tried to struggle, but it lost its power, and all Wu Song's strength was employed against it; not for a moment did he relax his grip. With his legs he delivered fearful kicks to the big beast's nose and eyes. That big beast roared furiously, and as it thrashed about under this onslaught its paws churned up two mounds of mud. Wu Song thrust the beast down into the mud and irresistibly its power began to ebb. Still gripping the striped coat tightly with his left hand, Wu Song managed to work his right hand free and began raining down blows with an iron fist, hammering the beast with all his might. He got in fifty or sixty blows, till from the beast's eyes, mouth, nose, and ears the red blood began to gush.<sup>21</sup>

The fighting scene in the novel shows both the tiger and the tiger-killer as worthy opponents. The reader is not informed about the inner feelings of the tiger, only about its three ways of attacking its prey.<sup>22</sup> However, even though we are told that Wu Song is covered in icy sweat, we are not really entering into his mind either. We are observers, only able to see the fighting from the outside, and in this way both the tiger and the man stand out as equally formidable and awe-inspiring, but also both with weak points, as when the tiger's "spirit was half broken" and the man was "in a fit of panic." The tiger is killed, but it does not lose its powerful image and it dies an honorable death. The man is honored by killing this majestic animal, even though in a number of narrative comments a sardonic smile of antiheroism peeps through.<sup>23</sup>

In the clapper tale, on the other hand, the animal is "humanized" to such a degree that it expresses its thoughts in soliloquy, ending with a direct exchange with Wu Song, just before being killed:

Ha! This tiger—  
 swooping down on Second Brother Wu, it missed him,  
 trying to straddle Wu Song, it couldn't get at him,  
 sweeping him with its tail, Wu Song cleared off,  
 so the tiger started to feel anxious.  
 The tiger thought: "Damn!  
 He is spoiling my meal  
 and getting troublesome."  
 Even though Wu Song wasn't afraid,  
 he felt a little flustered all the same.  
 ...  
 He swung the cudgel upwards and beat downwards;  
 "Boom!" he hit the forking branch of a tree.  
 "Crack," the cudgel broke in two.  
 In his hand was left just a short piece.  
 Wu Song stamped his feet in anger.  
 "Hey! I told you not to be flustered, but you are.  
 I told you not to be flustered,  
 but you cannot control yourself."  
 The tiger had missed him,  
 but now it heard the "Boom!" just beside its ears.  
 The tiger thought:  
 "What's going on?  
 Oh, he wants to beat me up.  
 I am not able to eat him,  
 and in addition he is giving me a thrashing;

this is too much,  
 I'm not willing to take this!"  
 The tiger made a sudden jump forward,  
 turned round in a big circle, and aimed for the good fellow Second Brother  
 Wu.

...

The tiger could not hurt him,  
 but felt an intolerable pressure on its neck.  
 "Good gracious! How come he squeezes me even further down?"  
 The tiger hadn't tasted this kind of misfortune before,  
 so it couldn't take it.  
 It planted its forepaws in the ground and said:  
 "I can't take it!"  
 Wu Song said: "You can't take it, but you have to!"  
 The tiger said: "I have to get up!"  
 Wu Song said: "Just you wait a bit!"  
 The tiger said: "It's not comfortable!"  
 Wu Song said: "If you were comfortable, I would be finished!"  
 The tiger tried to get up three times,  
 but Wu Song pushed him back down three times.

...

In the above conversation between man and beast, Wu Song is heroic throughout, just getting a little bit "flustered" when he tries to hit the tiger with his staff and misses his aim. But he definitely has the upper hand throughout, while the tiger has the role of a clown. The description of both characters aims for a kind of slapstick humor based on the pronounced rhythmic effects inherent in this genre and combined with caricature into extreme opposites. In this performance the tiger is therefore far less powerful and the deed of Wu Song is also reduced to a comical farce.

In *Yangzhou pinghua* the balance of power between the tiger and Wu Song is more equal, and the description of their different reactions is brought about by entirely different means:

The tiger, certainly, was a beast! When the tiger had caught sight of him, it lifted its forepaws and rose on its hind legs.

"Ma-a-a-a...!" and—"thump!"—it sprang towards him. With its two forepaws it aimed at Wu Song's left and right shoulder and sprang! Hem, hem! He was not going to get caught! If it caught Wu Song, he would be squeezed flat. As soon as Wu Song saw the tiger springing, its two forepaws aiming

at his own left and right shoulders, our hero at the right moment turned his body and leaned to the left side. The tiger made a jump into the air.

“Huh!” and with this jump it landed on his right side. As Wu Song saw it lying prone in front of him, our hero planted his left foot firmly in the ground, lifting his right leg, and then he twisted the tip of his right foot and aimed at the tiger’s left eye.

“Got it!”

“Phew!”

When he kicked it this time, he hit it very deftly. The tiger broke out in a roar.

“Wu-u-u-u...!”

Mine! It truly roared! My goodness! The tiger was hurt to the marrow of its bones! Wu Song had kicked the tiger right in its eyeball so that it exploded. This damned old eyeball looked exactly like a small egg being squeezed out, dripping with blood.

... The tiger wanted to turn round. Yes, now the tiger wanted to turn. You want to turn, and you cannot for your life do it! The tiger’s head was just there to the left of Wu Song. Our hero lifted his left hand.

“Hey!”, he said, and took a firm grip on the tiger’s neck. He took a firm grip, but the tiger was about to leap forwards. Wu Song saw this. “So you are about to jump off and run away! Where do you think you are going?” Wu Song’s five fingers were like iron hooks. In this instant, our hero held it so tight, it couldn’t get away. The next moment he twisted his left arm.

“Hey! Hey!”

Wow! Terrific! How on earth could that be an arm? It was more like a thousand-pound iron pillar. When the tiger got that blow: “Wu-u-u...!”, it couldn’t even move anymore.

However, there was the tiger’s tail, swinging—“flop, flop”—from side to side. And the four paws were scratching the earth below. Wu Song watched it intently: “Poor you! Poor you! So you are still swinging your tail, you beast, are you? Well, if that tiger’s tail slaps me that will feel like a steel whip! I don’t want to taste that!” ... Wu Song took the opportunity to mount the tiger. He didn’t treat it like a tiger. He rather treated it like a head of cattle. The tiger was suffering badly. It had never carried anything so heavy on its back before. Didn’t the tiger feel worried?

“Wu...ma ...!”

It stubbornly tried to raise its head. Wu Song was holding it. He watched it intently: “Do you have the guts to raise your head again?” Then he raised his right fist and concentrated all his energy.

“Got it!”

“Phew!”

This time he beat it on its right eyebrow.

“Wu-u-u...!”

The tiger again put down its head. Our hero concentrated his energy in his right fist and aimed at its right flank.

“Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! ...” coming swooping down on it a dozen times or so. That can’t be right! He killed the tiger with three blows and two kicks! How could he beat it a dozen times or so? Well, not so! When he beat it a dozen times, he didn’t hit it on a lot of different spots, but only beat it on that very spot he had aimed at. Therefore it was only counted as one blow, when the tiger later on arrived at the office of Yanggu District and the inspector performed an autopsy. Therefore even though he had beaten it more than a dozen times, since it was not at different spots, it was only taken as one blow, you see!

...

The tiger gave a snort, it couldn’t even roar anymore. From its left ear something looking like a red silk thread gushed forth more than three meters: Sh-sh-sh-sh...! What was it? Blood! Blood from where? An effusion of blood from its right ear. Blood from its right ear? That ought to drip from its right ear or gush forth from its right ear! Why did it gush forth from its left ear? Oh, that was because the force of Wu Song’s fist was so enormous that he had blocked up the main door. When you cannot take the main door, you have to go to the back door, and so it gushed forth from the left ear: Sh-sh-sh-sh! When this blood gushed forth, the tiger didn’t raise its head anymore and it didn’t scratch with its paws anymore. Before it had dug out four deep furrows in the ground, but now it did not move anymore. Wu Song said to himself: “It’s dead! It’s dead, dead, dead!”<sup>24</sup>

In the above fighting scene, the storyteller describes the hero, both in action and in thought. He shouts and swears at the animal, but most of the time he thinks by himself, and his thoughts are expressed as monologues. While his loud exclamations are forceful and proud, pronounced in the style called “square mouth,” which is close to the former “local officials’ language,” *difang guanhua* 地方官話, his thoughts are in “round mouth,” the idiom of daily Yangzhou “home language,” *jiaxianghua* 家鄉話.<sup>25</sup> Even if he is certainly a valiant man, the narrator, by this subtle change of voice, brings him closer to the listeners as a fellow human being. His deed of killing the tiger “with three blows and two kicks” is explained away in a storyteller’s comment, and through a number of such inconspicuous details his outer image is punctured by an undertone of irony.

The tiger appears human, but is in actual fact not “humanized:” it does not say or think anything, and none of its actions are given a human explanation. The tiger is fighting the hero with great force and instinctive ingenuity, but the

man is even more resourceful. The reason why the listeners feel they understand the tiger is that the narrator constantly describes human reactions and feelings prompted by the pain and suffering of the animal. The fight is by no means funny, and the protagonists are on an equal footing, even though the tiger loses. The confrontation of the man and the beast is no comedy in *Yangzhou pinghua*, but neither is it a tragedy. Throughout the telling of the tale the listeners will intermittently react with a smile or a chuckle, called “tacit understanding” between the storyteller and his audience (CHEN 1999, 211–12).

#### THE TIGER ON THE MOUNTAIN AND THE TIGER IN THE HEART

The meeting between the hero and the tiger on the mountain is the first major episode in Wu Song’s saga in the novel *Shuihu zhuan*. The rest of his story can be summarized as a series of encounters with beautiful and/or strong women, where he likewise manages to come out of each battle as a winner, in the sense that he resists sexual temptation. He not only beats the Tiger on the Mountain, *shanzhong zhi hu*, but also the Tiger in the Heart, *xinzhong zhi hu* 心中之虎.<sup>26</sup> The code of the bandit-heroes held up sexual abstinence as a major virtue. The line between Wu Song’s fighting of the tiger and his fighting of women (and his own sexual feelings) seems an underlying, if not explicit, theme in the *Shuihu zhuan* (PORTER 1989, 153–57). His cruelty and bloodthirstiness grows, however, wilder and wilder from one episode to the next. China’s famous erotic novel *Jin Ping Mei* or *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, *Jin Ping Mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話 (1618), published eight years after the *Rongyutangben* of *Shuihu zhuan*, borrows the tiger tale with only slight rewriting to form its first chapter. The later happenings between Wu Song and his sister-in-law, the extraordinary beauty and “man-eater” Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮, famous for her tiny “lotus feet,” is taken over to furnish the warp for the weft in the rest of this novel (HANAN 1963, 26–29). Already in *Jin Ping Mei* the parallel between the tiger and the sexually potent woman is suggested: “This book is an instance of a beautiful woman who is embodied in a tiger and engenders a tale of the passions,” *ru jin zhe yiben shu, nai huzhong meinü, hou yinchu yige fengqing gushi lai* 如今這一本書。乃虎中美女。後引出一個風情故事來。<sup>27</sup> It is also obvious that the mountain tiger is the less formidable of these two opponents. Conquering his own heart is a battle Wu Song wins only at the cost of losing an essential part of his human empathy.

#### CONCLUSION

The figure of the tiger with its strong connotations of the supernatural (equal to dragons), the superhuman (equal to kings and rulers), and the immortal (keeping up appearances even after death), might have been the occasion for a tale full of signs and wonders. One might expect fantastic, hyperbolic, and horror-

inspired myths and beliefs making up the better part of Wu Song's meeting with the big beast.<sup>28</sup>

Contrary to such expectations, the tale of Wu Song and the tiger, in the genres of novel, drama, and performance, provides little occasion for description of folk beliefs (in the sense of transcendental or magic rituals and convictions). What is said about the tiger and the tiger-killer is by and large colored by a rationalism and a psychological insight that seems divorced from what we might think of as folk religion in China and elsewhere. This extraordinary tale, which surely has superhuman overtones, testifies mainly to a skeptical and mocking stance among storytellers and audiences in China. It is an example of detached "unbelief" vis-à-vis the supreme powers of nature, whether outside or inside man—the tiger of the mountain and the tiger in the heart. The suggestive irony, dry humor, or even farcical comedy<sup>29</sup> with which both the majestic animal and the imposing hero are treated, seem to be essential ingredients of a Chinese *Weltanschauung* that has deep roots in both upper-class *literati* spare time reading and popular entertainment in the theatre and teahouse culture.

#### NOTES

\* The paper is written in honor of Peter Knecht, who as editor of *Asian Folklore Studies* gave me encouragement and thoughtful guidance through many years. In his editorship he combined sober-mindedness with a gentle tone of support, fostering friendship along with the beautiful pages of the journal.

1. Wu Song's encounter with the tiger occurs in Chapter 23 of the current editions of the novel *Shuihu zhuan* (Water Margin) translated into English as *The Marshes of Mount Liang* by the brothers John and Alex DENT-YOUNG 1997, vol. 2. In chapter 32, vol. 2, 195, Wu Song gives a summary of his saga, which covers a period of about one year.

2. Cf. IRWIN 1953, 34–36. The title is found in the Yuan catalogue *Lu gui bo* 錄鬼簿, compiled by Zhong Sicheng 鍾嗣成, which is the earliest fairly complete list of Yuan *zaju*, cf. XU 1975, 2. See also XIE 1981, 12.

3. See Appendix. The drama is also printed in FU and DU 1985.

4. About the concept of "the storyteller's manner" in Chinese vernacular fiction, cf. IDEMA 1974, 68. About the storyteller's manner in Chinese storytelling, cf. BØRDAHL 2003.

5. The earliest fragments of extant editions of the novel *Shuihu zhuan* are dated no later than 1540. These fragments do not contain the chapters with the Wu Song saga. The episode of "Wu Song Fights the Tiger" is found for the first time in the so-called *Shuangfengtangben* edition of 1594, belonging to the system of the "simple recensions." In the system of the "full recensions" it is found in the *Tiandu waichen xuben* edition of 1589 (a Qing reprint) and the *Rongyutangben* edition of 1610 (original Ming edition), cf. PLAKS 1987, 280–93; MA 1992, 29–51; and LIU 2002, 253, 266–67. After the present article went to press, the work of Yau-won Ma, *Chazengben jianben Shuihu zhuan cun wen jijiao*, Lingnan daxue zhongwenxi, Hong Kong, 2004, came to my attention. Here a fragment of a simplified recension, *jianben*, of *Shuihu zhuan*, called *Jingben quan xiang chazeng Tian Hu Wang Qing Zhongyi shuihu quan zhuan*, extant in a Stuttgart library, is reproduced in modern typesetting. The

fragment contains the chapter of Wu Song and the tiger. Ma considers this fragment possibly older than the *Shuangfengtangben* discussed in the present article.

6. A research database of materials related to the Wu Song saga in Chinese storytelling is currently established on the website [www.shuoshu.org](http://www.shuoshu.org). Part of the collection in the database is planned for publication in 2008. The main types of texts contained in the collection are: 1) oral performances: tape and video recordings, representing a number of *shuochang* genres, such as *pinghua*, *pingshu*, *jingyun dagu*, *Shandong kuaishu*, *tanci*, *xiangsheng*, *qingqu*; 2) oral-related performance texts and drama (printed and handwritten) belonging to the category of “vulgar/popular” literature (*su wenxue*); 3) printed editions of texts mainly for reading, with a disputed relationship to oral performance, such as the novel (*zhanghui xiaoshuo*). For a list of the texts that are analyzed in the present article, see Appendix.

7. Also in other chapters of the novel where tigers are involved, such as Chapter 43 of the full recension, the animal is mainly called “big beast,” but in Chapter 43 the form “tiger,” *laohu*, is also occasionally found. Whenever the two editions of the novel (cf. Appendix) diverge in relation to the features studied, this will be noted.

8. In the *Shuangfengtangben* there is a variation of this expression, “with golden eyes and white forehead,” *jinjing bai'e*, used alongside the standard phrase with “slanting eyes.” This fixed phrase is also used about the tiger in Chapter 43.

9. Cf. BØRDAHL 2007a, 91–92 and 96–98.

10. The standard for old vernacular, *baihua*, is generally based on North Chinese; cf. NORMAN 1988, 112, but dialectal features are sometimes discernible. The naming of the tiger as *dachong* in the early texts might reflect dialect features of these texts. Both *laohu* and *dachong*, meaning “tiger,” are found in written texts from the Song Period on, cf. *Hanyu da cidian* 1988, 612 and 1398.

11. The instances of the tiger tale in *Jingju*, *Kunqu*, and *Huaixi* will be accessible on the website [www.shuoshu.org](http://www.shuoshu.org) from 2008. For a preliminary bibliography, see BØRDAHL 2007a.

12. For bibliographical information, see BØRDAHL 2007a.

13. For a discussion of the status of the novel as a “blueprint” for storytelling in the later traditions, see CHEN 1990, DUAN 1990, and BØRDAHL forthcoming.

14. The proverb is found in a tape-recorded version by the Yangzhou storyteller LI 1986, cf. BØRDAHL 1996, 291. It is also in the book edition of WANG 1984, 12. The proverb is attested to as early as the *Classic of Change*, *Yi Jing* from Early Zhou (1122–771), see HU 2002, 301.

15. In WANG Xiaotang 1992 (cf. Appendix). See also BØRDAHL 1996, 269.

16. Cf. HU 2002.

17. In the simple recension *Shuangfengtangben* a gust of wind comes through the forest just before the tiger attacks, but nothing is mentioned about the connection between wind and tigers. It is taken for granted, or there is no such connection in this version. In the full recension *Rongyutangben*, the wind is described in a poem that only describes a late autumn scenery, and then the saying is mentioned, which is the only connection between the wind and the tiger. It is noteworthy, however, that exactly the same situation is described in Chapter 43 of the *Rongyutangben*, where another tiger attacks the hero Li Kui. Both the gust of wind, the proverb about dragons and tigers, and the fixed phrase describing its “slanting eyes, and so on” are repeated here. SHI and LUO 1997, 633.

18. The translations are, unless otherwise indicated in the notes, by the author and a team of assistants; cf. the research database on Chinese Storytelling, note 6.

19. Quoted from BØRDAHL 1996, 265–66.

20. Quoted from BØRDAHL 1996, 263–64.
21. The translation is based on that of DENT-YOUNG 1997, 1–17, but many expressions are changed in order to obtain equivalent translations for fixed phrases, stock phrases, proper names, and certain vocabulary items between all the instances of the tale that are treated in the research database on Chinese Storytelling.
22. The description of the animal's strategy as a threefold plan is colored by features of the folktale; cf. OLRİK 1921, 75. In the novel (and in *Yangzhou pinghua* as well) this characterization is, however, part of the narration that stands for the storyteller's perception of things, not as the animal's own perception. Therefore it is not here analyzed as a "humanizing" factor in the characterization of the tiger.
23. Cf. PORTER 1989, 181–82.
24. Quoted from BØRDAHL 1996, 272–73.
25. Cf. BØRDAHL 1996, 83–98, BØRDAHL 2007b, 99–117. See also BØRDAHL 1997, 12–18.
26. YANG 2002, 41. See also GE 2006, 43. The tiger as a symbol of "evil" or "lust" in the human soul that should be subdued, is also part of Buddhist belief in its Chinese derivation; cf. HU 2002, 302.
27. Cf. ROY 1993, 16; *Jin Ping Mei cihua* 1982, 51. See also ROY 1993, 434.
28. In the poetry of Chinese minority populations, such as the Yi nationality of southwestern China, this kind of belief seems to infuse the image of the tiger and creates a completely different atmosphere of animism and spiritism; cf. AKU and BENDER 2006, 18–19.
29. The farcical usage of the tiger tale continues into modern Chinese literature; cf. GE 2006.

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## APPENDIX:

## Six instances of “Wu Song Fights the Tiger”

Note: Each item is identified by its title (the titles are the same for a number of items), **item number** from the database *Chinese Storytelling* (under construction), **genre**, and other bibliographic information. Titles of items that are separate

booklets are written in *italics*, those that are part of a larger book are written in normal print with quotes; oral performances are written without quotes.

*Written texts*

NOVEL

“Di ershier hui: Henghaijun Chai Jin liu bin, Jingyanggang Wu Song da hu” 21

第二十二回 橫海郡柴進留賓 景陽崗武松打虎

*Zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說, from: *Jingben zengbu jiaozheng quan xiang Zhongyi shuihu zhuan pinglin* 京本增補校正全像忠義水滸傳評林, 1594, 104 *hui*. Facsimile edition in: *Ming Qing shanben xiaoshuo congkan chubian* 明清善本小說叢刊初編, Tianyi chubanshe, Taipei 1985. The text belongs to the simple recensions (*jianben*) of the *Water Margin*. Called the *Shuangfengtangben* according to the name of the printer.

“Di ershisan hui: Henghaijun Chai Jin liu bin, Jingyanggang Wu Song da hu” 41

第二十三回 橫海郡柴進留賓 景陽崗武松打虎

*Zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說, from: *Li Zhuowu xiansheng piping Zhongyi shuihu zhuan* 李卓吾批評忠義水滸傳, 1610, 100 *hui*. Facsimile edition *Ming Rongyutang ke Shuihu zhuan* 明容與堂刻水滸傳, Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1975. The text belongs to the full recensions (*fanben*) of the *Water Margin*. Called the *Rongyutangben* according to the name of the printer.

DRAMA

“Di si chu: Chu xiong” 31

第四齣 除兇

*Chuanqi* 傳奇, in: *Xiuke Yixiaji dingben* 繡刻義俠記定本 (1612, 36 *chu*) by SHEN Jing 沈璟 (1553-1610), Kaiming shudian, Taipei 1970, 5-9.

PERFORMANCE TEXT

*Jingyanggang Wu Song da hu* 14

景陽崗武松打虎

*Dagu* 大鼓, Academia Sinica Collection of Popular Literature, Fu Ssu-nien Library, Taipei, Ku 19-175, woodcut, 9 pages.

*Oral performances*

Wu Song da hu 15

武松打虎

*Yangzhou pinghua* 揚州評話, performed by WANG Xiaotang 王篠堂 (1918-2002), Zhenjiang 1992, tape, Private collection of the author, 80 minutes. A fragment is published on video and VCD, cf. Børdahl and Ross 2002.

Wu Song da hu 65

武松打虎

*Shandong kuaishu* 山東快書, performed by SUN Zhenye 孫鎮業 (b. 1944), CD: *Shandong kuaishu* 山東快書, *Zhongguo quyī míng jiā míng duān zhēncáng bān* 中國曲藝名家名段珍藏版, China Record Corp. 1999, 14 minutes.