

### Wu Song Fights the Tiger

Performed by Nie Feng with Yangzhou Ballad Instrumental Ensemble,

Slender West Lake, Yangzhou, 24 May 2000.

< 42 Drunk and not in my right mind,

I happened to wound a man;

Elder Brother insisted on my leaving our hometown,

for more than a year I have been hiding.

My surname is Wu, my given name is Song,

and everyone calls me Second Brother Wu,

I am from Qinghe District; both of my parents died long ago.

Depending on my elder brother, I grew up.

Since childhood I loved fighting with sword and cudgel,

all my life I defended people who suffered injustices,

my character being great-hearted and staunch.

Unforeseen, one day in a drunken state, I wounded a man by accident,

scared, my elder brother insisted that I escape from my hometown.

Thus I took refuge with Chai Jin, hiding for a while.

How fortunate it was that I met Song Jiang at a tavern!

I heard the news from him: that man I wounded never died,

calling to mind my longing for home, so I wanted to go and see my elder brother.

Therefore, I **said farewell to Chai Jin and Song Jiang**,

anxious to return to my hometown.

Wearing a broad bamboo hat and a dark **coloured cotton** dress,

I hold my cudgel and **carry** a bundle **with silver on my shoulder**;

**all this** was **given to me** by Lord Chai,

and the warm-hearted Song Gongming.

I travel during the day and sleep at night,

arriving at Yanggu District **before I realize it**.

Suddenly I feel my empty stomach and I am awfully hungry.

From a distance **I see** a wine-banner waving in the wind;

five characters **are written** on the **banner**:

“Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge”!

This leaves **me**, **Second Brother** Wu, in the dark;

**I** step into the tavern, lay **my** cudgel aside,

**put my** bundle down and take out some silver,

**calling the host**: “Hurry up and pour some wine for **me** to taste!”

Hearing the call, the **host** comes to **the** table right away,

brings a plate **of cooked food** and a pair of bamboo chopsticks.

He pours a **big bowl** of the wine and places everything on the table.

Wu Song takes the bowl in his hand and **drains** the wine in one gulp,

exclaiming: “Good wine!”, and it is surely strong.

He calls the host: “Bring more wine and dishes, to fill up *my* hungry stomach!”

The host does not dare to neglect his guest, he goes to the kitchen right away;

he cuts two catties of beef and prepares five plates of sausage,

then he pours another bowl of wine——

Again Wu Song drains the bowl in one gulp!

He keeps praising: “Good wine, what a good wine, strong and tasty!”

The host pours another bowl of wine, turns round and steps out of the dining room.

“This guest already drank three bowls, now I must take care of the other guests.”

Wu Song bangs the table and shouts out——

“Why don’t you come and pour the wine?”

Hearing his call, the host hurries over——

“Good guest, please, *listen so very carefully*:

I can bring you more rice and dishes, but not even one more ounce of the wine;

the wine-banner says—— ‘Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge’!

Although the wine of our humble tavern is a local brew,

it is much stronger than old liquors,

everyone gets drunk after three bowls, and is not able to cross the ridge ahead;

all guests both new and regular, after three bowls they drink no more,

so that is why it’s called ‘Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge’.”

On hearing this Wu Song bursts into a loud laughter——

“Wine sellers always claim their own wine is better;

I already drank three **big** bowls of your wine,

how come I've not collapsed in drunkenness here in your tavern?"

"Good guest, since you come from far away, you don't know that our wine has a  
name 'Flavour through the Bottle';

**another name is** 'Falling at the Door',

it is tasty when you drink it, but it has a **real** kick afterwards!"

"Stop talking nonsense, **my dear** host. Quickly **get me** the wine,

just pour the wine, **I won't cheat you of one single silver coin!**"

The host **can see** that his guest **sure enough** is not yet drunk,

so he **pours** another three big bowls of the wine and places them on the table.

**Wu Song** yells again: "Hurry up and **bring** me more beef!"

Once again he drains three big bowls of the wine **in one go**.

**He calls the host again:** "Hurry up and bring more wine,

all this silver here is for paying the wine!"

Even though the **host** can see **his guest** is capable of drinking quite a lot,

he **intends** to ignore him, **so he turns away** and just stands idle;

but **this** good guest has an **impatient** temper,

so he has to **pour** bowls of wine one by one.

Second Brother Wu **drinks** eighteen bowls of wine from the first to the last,

before he finally feels satisfied and walks out of the tavern; he shouts:

"Host, from now on you can stop reminding me 'Three bowls and you cannot cross

the ridge’! Look, with bundle on my shoulder and cudgel in my hand, **I am as steady as ever!**”

The host steps out right away, yelling at the top of his voice:

“May I ask, good guest, where are you going?”

**Wu Song** stops and turns, looking back:

“Surely **I, Second Master**, have paid my bill for the wine and beef?”

“Good guest, *listen so very carefully*,

please come back **and have a look at this proclamation, this proclamation.**

Recently there **has arrived a fierce tiger** on the Jingyang Ridge,

often attacking people;

twenty-thirty big fellows were eaten up,

**and many hunters were wounded, yes, wounded.**

Travelers and merchants shall gather in groups **before setting out**,

**only** morning, noon and afternoon are they allowed to cross the ridge.

Since you’re alone, why don’t you stay here **over night** and wait until **daybreak**.

**Wait until daybreak** and cross the ridge together **with more guests!**

**If you go alone, I’m afraid you will have a short life!”**

Wu Song **suddenly** laughs out loud when hearing this——

“My home is right there in the neighborhood of Qinghe District,

**I used to pass this Jingyang Ridge, going back and forth ever so often,**

**at least thirty to fifty times,**

and I never heard there was a tiger attacking people,

since you want me to stay for the night in your tavern,

I know what's in your dirty mind:

You'll wait until the third watch and then sneak in, steal my silver and take my life!

You'd better not try to scare me with your lies,

even if there is a tiger, what can it do to me!"

After these words, Wu Song takes to the road,

the hero strides off towards the Jingyang Ridge.

Shaking his head, the host heaves a sigh:

"All my good will is turned into the worst of intentions!

Since you don't believe me, just do what you like!"

Having no choice, the host returns back inside.

Holding the cudgel, Wu Song strides off towards the ridge.

After traveling three or five li, he sees a notice;

lifts his head and scrutinizes it, it is written so very carefully,

saying: recently a tiger frequently attacks people on the mountain.

After reading this, Wu Song is scared, realizing that the host didn't lie to him.

'Shall I cross the mountain or return to the tavern, this I must find out——

If I go back to the tavern, they will laugh at me of course.'

After thinking back and forth, he just strides off to cross the ridge.

'I will see what this big beast can do to me!'

While I'm walking, the effect of the wine is coming,

I'll take off my broad-brimmed bamboo hat and string it on my shoulder.

Looking at the sun going down towards the foot of the ridge,

I ponder: Where is the tiger which attacks people? Oh, oh, my!

Surely, people worry of troubles of their own imagining and are bewildered by their own fantasies.

My goodness! I have no alternative, the effect of the wine makes me feel hot.

I have to loosen my clothing and bare my chest.

I hurry through the forest, staggering and stumbling, staggering and stumbling,

*but just look*: a black rock, so big and long and smooth!

My goodness! I can't wait to put down my bag and lie down on the rock.'

Suddenly a gust of wind can be heard blowing up in the forest: "Hu-----"

After the wind has passed, from behind a tree, a resounding "Plop" is heard.

*In fact* it is a big tiger with slanting eyes and white forehead,

giving Wu Song such a shock that he turns sober on the spot;

he jumps over the rock, grasps his cudgel,

with a fixed look he stares towards the big beast.

See, how awe-inspiring this tiger is!

It is so famished that it hunts humans, swaying its head.

*Just look* how it plants its forepaws into the ground, it's rear paws hump,

and then it jumps into the air,

like a mountain it swoops directly down on Wu Song.

With a sudden step Wu Song jumps to the rear of the big beast,

The moment the creature realizes that it missed its aim,

it has to bend its back and tries to lift Wu Song.

Wu Song dodges to the other side,

he feels no panic, he is so calm.

But now the tiger is getting truly angry,

its mighty roar makes the mountain ridge shake;

the tail of the tiger is hard as a steel bar,

the tiger raises it and lashes out at Wu Song;

Wu Song dodges to the other side again,

the creature's three attacks were not able to wound the hero!

When such a tiger tries to eat humans,

it only has three ways of assault: thrusting, springing, lashing;

if these three methods fail,

the creature's strength is half broken.

Again it sends out a mighty roar and turns around,

turning its head and coming back to look for Wu Song.

Wu Song grasps his cudgel in both hands,

With all his strength, he brings the cudgel down

straight onto that big beast!



One only hears a loud “Crash”,  
unintentionally, he **breaks it on** a pine tree;  
branches and leaves all fall to the ground,  
he misses the big beast;  
his cudgel is broken in two,  
and he is left with only the broken half in his hand.

The creature is enraged and roars once again,  
**it** turns back and springs at Wu Song;

**Wu Song** leaps back **more than** ten steps,  
also this time the big beast **misses its aim**;

*Just look,*  
as its forepaws reach the ground,  
the tiger’s head ends up next to the hero.

**Wu Song** throws his cudgel away,  
and with **both** hands he catches the big beast;  
he grabs **the tiger’s striped neck** firmly,  
and **unflaggingly** forces it down to the ground.

As the **tiger** struggles to free itself,  
**Wu Song** kicks the big beast with his swift foot;  
putting all his strength into every kick,  
he kicks that **tiger** in the eyes.

Its forepaws keep thrashing about all the time,

churning out two big holes in the ground;

Wu Song presses down the mouth of the tiger,

deeply into the yellow mud hole.

That creature seems to have lost its strength,

panting it lies there, unable to move.

Wu Song grabs it firmly with his left hand,

with his right hand free he starts beating the big beast;

he keeps beating the creature until red blood gushes from its mouth and nose,

its whole body and four paws stop moving.

Only then can Wu Song let go,

standing by its side he looks at the big beast.

Wu Song stares at it for a while,

until he can see that the creature doesn't move the least,

with both his hands he starts dragging the big beast;

but now he is drained of all his strength, how can he move it?

His arms and legs are numb and weak, and he must let go.

Sitting on the black rock, he makes a plan:

“It's getting quite dark now. If there is another big beast on this mountain,

how am I able to cope? I'll just end up losing my life;

I'd better get down the mountain ridge,

and deal with this dead big beast tomorrow!”

**Second Brother Wu** makes up his mind.

He shoulders his bundle, **neatens his outfit**, and sets off down the ridge.

Step by step he presses forward, but before he has made half a *li*,

Gosh! Another two big beasts jump out **and block his way!**

Staring closely, the hero discovers that

these are two hunters climbing the ridge to catch the tiger,

they are dressed up in tiger's fur,

**and Wu Song** is relieved.

He tells them *so very carefully* the story of how he killed the tiger.

Shocked as they are, the two hunters are dumbfounded for a while,

they gather some villagers and follow Wu Song back up the **Ridge**,

they help each other to bind up the dead tiger and carry it ,

**bind it up and carry it** down the Ridge.

The hunters and villagers immediately inform the authorities,

the magistrate of Yanggu District gets very happy,

**and gives Wu Song a reward;**

in a parade with gongs and flowers, riding a horse through every street and alley,

**he is** appointed a captain and assigned work in the *yamen*.

Ever since he killed the tiger with his clever fist,

Wu Song's fame spread throughout the world!

說唱文學，揚州清曲，聶峰，武松打虎，黃瑛，易德波譯

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Only one thing was still on his mind:

to come back to his hometown in Qinghe and visit his elder brother. 42>

Translated by Huang Ying and Vibeke Børdahl.

[The portions in black are identical with the written published version from *Yangzhou Qingqu* [Yangzhou ballads], edited by Wei Ren and Wei Minghua, Shanghai wenyi chubanshe 1982, pp.66-69, item 42 in the database; the portions in red indicate those phrases of the oral performance that differ from the written version. Whether the singer has used the book version as script for his performance is unknown at present. The origin of the written version is not clear from the description in the book, but it seems likely that the troupe has used either the book, or the same script, *changben*, as the editors, since the versions are particularly close.]