

### Wu Song Fights the Tiger

(From Chen Ruheng: *Shuoshu shihua* [The history of Storytelling])

(*Poem*) There was a hero with amazing martial skills. He was frustrated and hampered by a mundane life with dreams unrealized. He had a sense of propriety and justice even though he had never read any books. Courage and righteousness had kept him pure and innocent. He had never had a chance to show his ‘iron bones and copper muscles’ to good advantage. In his loyal and sincere heart, he had always been longing for a true friend. On the mountain of Jingyang Ridge he won himself a name, and ever since his fame has spread far and wide. (*Intro*) *Our performance is about a hero who never forgot his dear brother, and who, after traveling a long way, finally returned to his old home. (Qing Yun Rhythm)* Second Brother Wu longed to see his elder brother and his sister-in-law, and therefore he took farewell with Chai Jin and set off. He had only a light bundle on his shoulder and a quarterstaff<sup>1</sup>. This journey started during late autumn, a freezing wind blew right through his clothes. High in the sky wild geese were flying in lines, deep in the forest maple leaves were falling. On this day, as he approached Yanggu District, a red sun was slanting towards the west, still lingering in the horizon. Before the mountain pass he saw a tavern, with a signboard hanging at the door. One line read: “May I ask where I can find a tavern?” A line opposite read: “The herder boy points to Xinghua Village.”<sup>2</sup> Wu Song stepped

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<sup>1</sup> *qimeigun*

<sup>2</sup>借问酒家何处有,牧童遥指杏花村.: 一句古诗, 出自(唐)杜

into the tavern. The waiter was very hospitable. Second Brother Wu drank three bowls of wine one after another, and only then he began to talk to the waiter, saying: “What is this mountain called, and how far is it?” The waiter answered: “It is not very far. But nobody travels there anymore, since there has been a wild tiger on Jingyang Ridge. The travelers should be aware of the danger. You, good guest, should stay here for the night and wait until tomorrow morning if you want to cross the mountain. Those who want to enter this mountain must gather together, and they need to be armed with weapons to safeguard themselves.” Wu Song did not really believe in what the waiter said. He asked the waiter to warm up more fine wine and fill up his bowl. Second Brother Wu kept drinking seven or eight more bowls of wine, and so our hero was at the point of getting drunk. This master paid for his wine, then picked up his bundle and cudgel. He was ready to go. The waiter grabbed Wu Song’s arm and *said these words: (Liu Shui Rhythm)* The waiter said: “Good guest, where are you going?” Wu song said: “I am going to visit my family in Yanggu Town.” **<page 2>** The waiter said: “To get to the town you must cross the mountain. If you meet the wild tiger at this time, you will be killed. Please think about it, good guest. Even sober people need to avoid this danger, let alone a drunken man like Your Honour.” These words angered Wu the Pilgrim. *Just look how* he stared at the waiter, and anger showed in his face as he said: “I’m going! I’m going! I’m definitely going! You are forcing people to stay. You must have bad intentions!” When the waiter heard this, he

dared to say no more. Wu Song turned around and stormed out of the door. He walked toward the mountain pass in a great fury. The road was deserted, not a single person was within sight. When Second Brother Wu became aware of this, he felt weird. He began to look around and search the surroundings carefully. Suddenly, he saw a proclamation posted in front of the mountain. *In fact*, this was a warning from the District Magistrate to the people. It read: “There is a wild tiger on Jingyang Ridge. Travelers and merchants should be on guard. The District Magistrate offers a thousand strings of cash to whoever kills the tiger.” After reading this, Wu Song thought: “What the waiter said was true. Today, I’m travelling into the mountain alone. Isn’t that like seeking death without a reason? I wish I could stop and return to the tavern, but then I am afraid that the waiter will laugh at me and regard me as a coward afraid of death. Why not cross the mountain while the wine still has effect? I am surely able to protect myself by my usual agility and martial skills! ” At this point he made a decision. *Look at him*: eyebrows arching and eyes glaring like tiger’s eyes, shouting to the top of the mountain: “Hey! Today, I, Wu the Second Master, shall meet the Lord of the Mountain!” (*Poem*) The hero was so mad, his rage flew to the sky. With no care for danger, he ran into the mountain forest. On Jingyang Ridge he won himself a name. Who would not praise this tiger killer? (*Spoken part*) *The story we are performing* is about how that Wu Song was offended by the waiter’s word, how he walked toward the mountain pass in a fury, and how he saw the proclamation from the District Magistrate and thought: “There is in fact a tiger on the mountain. I

should return to the tavern and stay over for the night, and then continue tomorrow. However, when I left the tavern, I bragged. If I do not climb this mountain, the waiter will laugh at me. A real man must face the world: How could he be happy just by staying alive? And how could he break down in fear just by facing death? Trusting my arms' strength and this single cudgel, I shall for sure press on and aim for that wild tiger! Yes, even if this Jingyang Ridge were a mountain of knives, I must go forward!" (*Lian Zhu Melody*) Second Brother Wu, climbed the mountain with long strides. When he entered the mountain pass, he looked around very carefully. He saw vertical cliffs up to the clouds on both sides. In between there was a winding path just allowing one person to cross. Along this winding path, he walked for quite a while, finally reaching the top of the mountain. The red sun began to set, and the evening glow covered the sky. Dark was about to fall and he felt lonely. As he stood on the top of the mountain, he took a little rest, <page 3> then he went on. Suddenly there was a blow of mountain wind. He felt the effect of the wine. His eyes blurred and he staggered along, swaying back and forth, with unsteady steps which he could not control. He gathered himself together, moved just about ten more steps, and without noticing it, he entered the pine forest. A large block of black rock blocked the road. It was smooth and clean and there was no dirt and mud on it. Wu Song was delighted to see the rock. He put down his cudgel, rested his head on the bundle and reclined on the rock. He closed his eyes and tried to sleep. When he was almost asleep, suddenly he heard a strong wind that swirled with sand and stones, blowing through the forest

and above the gullies. Dust filled the air, and the wind blended with a stinky smell. Second Brother Wu woke up from his dream. He turned over and stood up. He looked far above into the sky where the moon appeared; the ridge top was lit up like a white painting, revealing a crouching mottled wild tiger on the top. Wu Song shouted angrily when he saw it: “You damned monster, how dare you kill people?” The tiger roared like thunder and sprang down when it saw this man. Second Brother Wu seized his cudgel with both hands. With the utmost of his strength, he whirled it aloft. With a loud cracking “Trash!” half of his quarterstaff fell to the ground. *In fact* he had, in his haste, struck the root of a pine tree, snapping the cudgel in two. Pine branches, pine leaves, pine needles and pine cones tumbled down his head and covered his body. That tiger bared its teeth and flaunted its claws, swung its tail and swayed its head, then it leapt at the good fellow. Second Brother Wu swiftly stepped to one side, threw the remaining half of the cudgel away. He stretched out his iron arms, seized the tiger’s head and held its neck with his hands, exerted all his strength which was no less than the weight of Mount Tai. The big wild beast panted like a roaring bull. Its great strength was now of little use. The King of the Beasts was pressed down on the ground. He lifted one leg and rode on the tiger’s back, freed his right fist and “Bah! Bah! Bah!” with all his might began to pound. With the pounding sound, soon after, blood streams came out from the mottled wild tiger’s nose and mouth and finally it died. Second Brother Wu, on Jingyang Ridge, he did away with the evil for all the people. *Truly, so it was*: everybody admired him, his name reverberated like thunder.

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Forever lasts the fame of this hero who killed the tiger.

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