

說唱文學 杭州評話

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Chapter Two: Subduing the fierce tiger a good fellow makes his name

In the crowded street Wu the Elder is insulted Translation HY, VB 12 Sept 2008

## Chapter Two

### Subduing the fierce tiger a good fellow makes his name

#### In the crowded street Wu the Elder is insulted

*The story goes* that when Wu Song thought of the fierce tiger that was killing people, he made up his mind and ran straight towards the top of the ridge to fight it. After he got to the top, he pushed aside the weeds with his staff and made his way to a higher spot where he looked around. But there was no trace of the tiger, and not even a hare showed up. Wu Song said to himself: perhaps there is no tiger on the ridge, and people are simply timid. Maybe a few wolves once came to the ridge and killed some children, which gradually developed into a rumour about a tiger. Now I cannot even see a wolf. Since there is no tiger, why should I care? So Wu Song pushed aside the weeds and continued along the path.

The moon was bright and clear, and a fresh breeze was blowing. While walking and searching, Wu Song saw by the path several old pines, under which were some black rocks. Passing travellers and merchants used to take a rest here. Wu Song was still drunk and felt tired, and when he found the rocks were flat and smooth to the touch, he thought: since there is no tiger here, I might as well have a nap. So he wiped the fallen leaves off the rock, undid his pack and looked around in all four directions. Then he put his staff aside, lay down on the rock and closed his eyes to rest, taking the posture of the immortal Lan Caihe languishing on an ivory-inlaid bed.<sup>1</sup> Soon he fell into a slumber.

*Let's go on with the story:* Was there indeed a tiger on the ridge? Of course there was! The tiger was hiding in a mountain cave about two *li* away from Wu Song. The cave was so small that it could only hold the tiger's body, and weeds taller than a man covered the opening.

Did the tiger eat people? It is naive to ask this question. Why should a tiger not eat people? Since a fierce tiger had arrived at Jingyang ridge the area had become unsafe. More than ten persons among the local people had been killed or wounded. What Xiao'er had told was only the few cases that he had heard about. But the calamity caused by the tiger was much more profound. Not only people, but also husbandry and wild animals had suffered disaster.

Now the tiger was also having a hard time. It had not eaten its fill for three days. When the tiger stepped out from the cave and stared at the bright moon, it was so

<sup>1</sup> Lan Caihe is one of the Eight Immortals from the fairy tale of "Eight Immortals Cross the Sea", *Ba xian guo hai* 八仙過海. (Translators' note)

hungry that it wished to swallow the moon. The tiger stretched out its two forepaws, hunched its back, and sprang out, with a roar that made the hills and valleys tremble. The crowns of the trees swayed, and the sky over the mountain seemed full of whirling red leaves. A large patch of dry grass was trampled flat as the tiger dashed out.

When the tiger appeared from the cave, it was overjoyed at the smell of a human being. So taking advantage of the rays of the moon, it leapt and bounced over the mountain. Wu Song was sound asleep, but suddenly he heard a sound “pooh” nearby. He woke up with a start, and sure enough: there was the tiger. Wu Song broke into a cold sweat, and this time he sobered up completely. He got to his feet, seized his staff, and took the position of “poking grass for a snake”. Wu Song thought: ‘How shall I attack the tiger? Let me first give it a blow with my staff from the side and try to blind it on both eyes. In that way I may be able to subdue the animal.

At this moment the moon was shining like silver on the weeds and brushes, and the tiger was taking advantage of the moonlight to move forwards. When Wu Song stared in that direction, he was dazzled by the light. *It is slow in the telling, but it was fast in the act.* In one jump the tiger had landed in front of Wu Song. At the sight of him the tiger felt a red light flashing before its eyes. It moved back two steps, raised its head, fixed its eyes on Wu Song, and with all its strength broke into a loud roar once again. The sound came like a bolt from the blue, shaking heaven and earth.

The tiger sprang up into the air and hurled itself downwards. As soon as Wu Song heard the sound of the tiger and saw it coming, he turned a somersault in the air and leapt to the left side of the tiger. He gripped his staff with the right hand in the front and left hand at the back, swung it and struck at the tiger’s head with all his might. This blow was accurate and heavy, and should have struck the tiger to the ground. However, with an “Aiya!” from Wu Song, the staff broke at once. It turned out that one end of the staff was hollow, and it was not as solid as a golden stick or a wrought iron stick.

*Dear audience, you may ask:* Why did a brave man like Wu Song carry such a staff? Actually this was reasonable. Flocks of wolves harassed the roads of Shandong, and travellers were accustomed to carry staffs. One end of the staff was formed as a blowing whistle. The whistle sounded like the roar of a dragon or a tiger, and when wolves heard it, they thought the wild beast was close by and fled. And people nearby would also come to chase the wolves after hearing the whistle. When Wu Song was on his way back from Cangzhou, he had no idea of fighting a tiger. He just took a staff with him as usual.

The tiger bounced down from the sky baring its teeth and flaunting its claws. It opened its mouth wide to swallow Wu Song. On the one hand, Wu Song was dazzled by the moonlight; on the other hand, the tiger jumped down from above and its jaws hid its eyes. Therefore, it so happened that the blow of the staff fell on the tiger’s mouth. The blow was so heavy that it split up the tiger’s jaws, and blood

trickled from the wound “drip, drip, drip”.

When the tiger attacked Wu Song on the black rock, it gave a loud roar. It thought the man in red would be sure to faint from fright. But against expectation, it missed the man, and still worse, it received a severe blow in the mouth. The tiger bore the pain and bit the staff with all its strength. How could the staff stand the bite of a tiger? It broke into three parts, one in Wu Song’s hand, one falling to the ground, and the third gnashed into mash in the tiger’s mouth. The tiger was very hungry at the moment, and it could not help swallowing the mash of the staff.

After that blow, the tiger lowered its head and leapt with a mighty tiger spring about six meters away from the black rock. It had not expected that the supper that night would cost so much trouble. The tiger was annoyed and flew into a fury, so it whirled around and charged. This time the tiger was even more ferocious. Wu Song had turned round with his back to the moon, and when he now was able to see the tiger, he did feel a pang of fright in his heart. The tiger’s body was as big as a rhinoceros, and its head was like a grain vessel with two ears erect and two eyes bulging and shining like bronze bells. It opened its mouth wide, stretched out its four paws and sprang forward.

Wu Song showed resourcefulness in the emergency. Before the tiger could catch him, he threw away the staff, stood on tiptoe, twisted round his waist, put forth his strength to the feet, and whizzed into the sky higher than the tiger like an immortal of unusual strength. When the tiger saw this, it was scared. It sat back on its hindlegs, lifted its forepaws, opened its mouth and bounced towards him. Wu Song, who had thrown away the stump of his staff long ago, now dashed forwards and struck the tiger a heavy blow on its head with his fist. The stroke came right in the face of the tiger and broke the bone of its nose bridge. The tiger was dizzy with pain and saw stars above its head.

The tiger was perplexed by that fellow who was constantly making trouble, and this time it was prepared to make an extra effort. Displaying its formidable power it turned round and with a tiger’s spring once more bounced upon Wu Song. With an agile leap he dodged so that the tiger missed him. Wu Song twisted his waist, aimed at the tiger’s left flank, and struck vigorously with his fist. Now the tiger was wounded again, but it would not admit defeat and was still full of fierce strength.

In a split second, it turned round and sprang towards him again. Wu Song was alert and jumped to the right, clenched his fist and struck vigorously the right flank of the tiger. Every time the tiger sprang, it had missed Wu Song. Instead, it had suffered three blows of his fist and starved as it was, it gradually lost its powerful appearance.

In spite of its bronze head, iron tail and striped flank, the tiger had now suffered two blows in the flanks and its internal organs were wounded, and so its former majestic air was coming to nought. But the tiger was not willing to admit defeat, with a mighty roar sounding like an earthquake, it made a jump of about ten meters. Wu Song guessed that the tiger intended to flee, so he raised himself on tiptoe

and leapt forward, also making a jump of ten meters, and landed on the tiger. With both hands he seized the tiger by the neck and with his feet gave it two heavy kicks in the flank.

As Wu Song noticed that the tiger was unable to move, he began pummeling it with his fist. He gripped the tiger firmly and made it suffer unbearable pain. The animal could not turn over, but by a violent effort it managed to plough up the earth below with its forepaws. The tiger was still not without resource and it was intent on finding a chance to fight back. Only its tail was free now and moving its hips soundlessly, it slowly raised its tail. Transferring its energy all the way to the tip of the tail, the tiger twisted its tail and suddenly slashed out for Wu Song's back. If Wu Song at that moment had been totally immersed in striking with his fist, and the tiger's tail had struck his spine, he would certainly have fallen off the tiger's back, and that would have been the end of his life.

But Wu Song was alert and attentive. As soon as he heard the sound of wind, he knew that the tiger's tail was sweeping down on him. So he took a firm grip on the tiger's neck and bent forward so that the tiger's tail failed to hit him. The tiger did not expect that Wu Song was so clever. After slashing, the tiger kept its tail erect like a flag pole to show its power. Wu Song turned round, raised his palm and slapped the tail, breaking three joints in it.

The tiger was struck by grief to the point of shedding tears. It thought that it had enjoyed power and prestige all its life and never suffered defeat, but this time it would be finished. If it had foreseen such consequences, it wouldn't have come in spite of missing a meal. Now the tiger had really lost heart and simply sprawled on the ground. Since there was no fear of danger in the rear, Wu Song lifted his iron fist, concentrated his energy, aimed at the tiger's forehead, and let his heavy blows fall like raindrops. Mounted on the tiger Wu Song beat it soundly, and all of a sudden the painting of Bian Zhuang fighting a tiger, which he had seen in the tavern of Jingyang Town, came to his mind, and he couldn't help laughing.

After thirty to fifty blows, Wu Song saw blood streaming from the tiger's eyes, mouth, nose, and ears, as if a red dye vat was broken. The two piles of yellow earth which the tiger had ploughed up with its forepaws had turned into red earth. Wu Song loosened his grip and found the tiger had stopped breathing. He rose to his feet and wanted to drag the tiger along to test whether it was pretending to be dead or really was dead. Then he thought: 'That beast has harmed so many people, so I'd better drag it down the ridge to relieve them from their worry.' He tried to lift the beast up from the blood pool, but try as he may, that was beyond him! He was so exhausted that all strength had left his hands and feet.

At the time the sky was bright and clear and not a single cloud was in sight, the gurgling of the stream and the sigh of the wind in the pines created an enchanting atmosphere. But Wu Song was a man of action and determination, so he returned to the black rock alone and sat down to have a rest. But soon he was

overcome by thirst, and the shape of the moon told him that it was already pretty late in the morning. So he fetched his bundle and shouldered it, and then he took a path around the forest. Making his way through the withered weeds, he finally found the right road, and step by step he descended the ridge.

Half way down the ridge, there was suddenly a sound coming from the thicket. Wu Song cocked his ears and stared into the direction of the sound, much taken aback. Out from the undergrowth two tigers raised their bodies: “Pooh, pooh!” he thought by himself: ‘Terrible, I’ve walked into a tiger’s lair. This is the end of my life!’ He collected himself and however full of misgivings he was, slowly took a step forward. Much to his surprise he suddenly noticed that the two beasts stood upright in the dark.

It turned out that the two beasts were hunters in disguise. One hunter was old, and the other was young. The surname of the old hunter was Chen, and he was called Old Father Chen. He had been engaged in hunting for years and was very experienced. The young hunter was about nineteen years old and the second child in his family. He was born in the Year of the Tiger, so people called him Second Tiger Lad. He was a bit rough in manners. At present he was taking on the responsibility of his grandfather, who was also an old hunter in his sixties.

His grandfather had not been able to [catch the tiger] within the deadline [given by the authorities] and therefore he had been flogged and had his legs smashed at the court of Yanggu County. He could not afford to hire another man in his place, so he had to ask the boy Second Tiger Lad to undertake the task. At first, Second Tiger Lad considered it great fun to hunt a tiger, but much to his dismay never saw as much as the shadow of the tiger. Therefore he also had got fifty blows of the cane, seething with rage and pain. Since then he had not been able to walk properly.

That night Old Father Chen and Second Tiger Lad were on duty. They had hidden themselves in the withered weeds and kept an eye on the path, not daring to blink an eye. Suddenly they heard the tiger roaring again and again like an earthquake in the mountains. Old Father Chen was experienced and did not get flustered, but Second Tiger Lad was so scared that his hair stood on end. He begged to Old Father Chen:

“Let’s withdraw!”

Old Father Chen smiled:

“Second Tiger Lad, you’re so young and need to get steeled! Calm down! With me here at your side, the tiger won’t touch you!”

As they whispered, Old Father Chen was alerted and heard a sound from the ridge. He immediately ordered Second Tiger Lad to get his bow and poisoned arrows ready:

“Don’t be afraid! Just let the tiger come out!”

Around the place the hunters had already prepared several traps covered with bamboo poles, reed mats and loose earth. When Old Father Chen heard the sound

from the ridge, he put aside his steel pitchfork, took up the bow and arrows that had been immersed in poison, stared up the slope of the ridge and told Second Tiger:

“Be careful taking good aim before shooting!”

The sound came nearer and nearer, and suddenly a figure appeared in the darkness. Second Tiger Lad became nervous and pulled his bow to shoot. Fortunately Old Father Chen held him up in time. Otherwise, Wu Song could not have escaped this hidden arrow. Old Father Chen took Second Tiger Lad by the hand and said:

“Don’t hurry! It’s not the sound of a tiger’s steps.”

As they looked closer, they saw the figure was big and tall, so both of them began to have doubts: if it were a man, who would be so tall? If it were a tiger, which tiger could walk on its hind legs? Second Tiger Lad mumbled:

“Old father, could it be a tiger that has turned into an evil spirit?”

Old Father Chen smiled:

“Is it possible for a tiger to turn into an evil spirit? I suppose it is the Mountain Spirit coming out to patrol the mountain.”

Second Tiger Lad had better eyesight and now he was able to discern the figure:

“It looks like a man. Look, he is watching us. May I call him?”

“Don’t shout,” Old Father Chen answered hurriedly. “It’s no good disturbing the Mountain Spirit. No man is so bold except the Mountain Spirit!”

“Is the Mountain Spirit good or evil?”

“Of course he is good!”

Second Tiger Lad was glad to hear this and thought: ‘If he is good, I don’t fear him.’ Before Old Father could speak again, Second Tiger Lad shouted:

“Hello, you fellow over there, are you a spirit, a ghost or a man?”

As Wu Song saw the tiger, he was about to deal with it when he suddenly heard it speak in human voice. So he felt relieved and asked:

“What are you doing here?”

When Second Tiger Lad heard the reply, he pushed back the artificial tiger head to the back of his head and said:

“We’re hunters of Jingyang Ridge waiting here for the tiger. If you’re the Mountain Spirit, please show mercy to us, and help us catch the tiger. My hips have been smashed to bits by the magistrate!”

Wu Song broke into a hearty laughter, and then he stepped over to them and said: “I’m not the Mountain Spirit. I’m just a traveller.”

Old Father Chen was astonished:

“Why, are you a man?”

Second Tiger Lad was also stunned to see a man so big and tall.

Old Father Chen called out to Wu Song:

“Don’t go any further. Beware not to fall into the trap!”

Saying so, he walked over with his five-pronged towering pitchfork. Second

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Tiger Lad followed at his heels, stepped forwards in front of Wu Song and looked him up and down.

“How tall you are! Tell me, where are you from?”

“I’ve just crossed the ridge.”

Second Tiger Lad was astonished:

“Do you have seven heads and eight arms? Have you eaten a crocodile’s heart or a panther’s gall? How did you cross the ridge at night and unarmed?”

Wu Song spread his hands and replied in a light manner:

“Just as usual.”

“Haven’t you met the tiger?” Old Father Chen asked.

“I bumped into the big beast on top of the ridge and killed it with my fists and feet,” Wu Song said smiling.

Second Tiger Lad did not believe him, and Old Father Chen also shook his head slightly. He thought: ‘So many people living under the ridge have been on the look out for it for months, but had no chance against it. What the big fellow says sounds too easy.’ So he asked:

“Are you telling the truth?”

“It’s true that I have killed it. Father, please, look at the bloodstains on me!”

Now Second Tiger Lad noticed that a piece of cloth from the man’s tunic was missing, his trousers were torn, blood was splattered all over him, and hair from the tiger’s skin stuck to his clothes. He made a jump of delight and said:

“Old Father, sure enough, the tiger has been killed.”

Old Father Chen felt Wu Song was a man of integrity and did not look like a liar, so he folded his hands in a greeting and asked:

“Strong master, what’s your name, please?”

“I’m from Qinghe County in Shandong. I’m the second son in my family and my name is Wu Song. On my way home from Cangzhou in Hebei to visit my elder brother, I have to cross this ridge.”

With tears in his eyes Old Father Chen made a bow:

“Thank you, hero Wu, you’ve saved our lives! You’re the benefactor of us hunters! Second Tiger, quickly call the others over!”

Second Tiger Lad turned round and shouted with his hands cupped around his mouth as a loudspeaker:

“Hey, listen, you hunters at the foot of the ridge! A strong master has come here, by the name of Wu Song, and he has killed the tiger with three punches and two kicks. Come and meet this strong master!”

His words were followed by a racket from below, and after a short while a group of hunters came running along. Some had a tiger’s fur draped over their shoulders, and some carried a tiger head with them. Some had steel pitchforks, some had bows. Some carried staffs or spears, some iron rakes or broad swords. With weapons of all forms and colours they swarmed onto the ridge and asked in chorus:

“Where is the strong master? Where is the dead tiger?”

Old Father Chen pointed at Wu Song to show him to them. They saw with their own eyes what a tall and great man this was, how strong and powerful he looked. Second Tiger Lad told the story of how Wu Song killed the tiger with gusto. Every time a newcomer joined them, he would repeat the story and exaggerate it vividly. As a matter of fact, Second Tiger Lad actually did not know how Wu Song had managed to kill the fierce tiger. He was so happy that he kept telling and telling, something that on the other hand made the others sceptical about his story. They smiled and said:

“What one can see with ones own eyes is true. What one only has heard about is likely to be false. Second Tiger, please, stop talking nonsense!”

When Wu Song saw that they did not believe it right away, he smiled and said:

“Let’s go! Let me bring you there to take a look.” Once again Wu Song climbed the ridge and the group followed him.

Before long Wu Song saw some pines in the distance and pointed at them, saying:

“Right under those big trees.”

The people strode across the dry weeds and went towards the pine wood. Second Tiger Lad took the lead and charged forwards. After they had walked for a while, Wu Song pointed and said:

“Can you see it?”

In the moonlight they suddenly discovered the big beast lying dead in a great heap.

They all burst into exclamations of joy. One said:

“What a creature!”

Another said:

“What a fur it has!”

Still another said:

“Is it really the tiger?”

The fourth said:

“It is surely enormous!”

Someone said:

“Indeed! It is like a bull!”

Another said:

“Luckily he killed it!”

So they uttered one sentence after another, but nobody dared to proceed. Wu Song took Second Tiger Lad by the hand:

“Little Brother, let us go first!”

Second Tiger Lad hesitated. In that moment somebody mumbled:

“It looks as if that tiger is only sleeping!”

When Wu Song heard it, he was about to laugh, but on second thought, he knew that the big beast had done a lot of harm to the local residents. So he went forward alone, and lightly kicked the tiger a couple of times on its head. The people



watched carefully and said.

“It is really dead!”

People at the back rushed up in a crowd. After they had looked over the dead tiger, they all turned their eyes to Wu Song with admiration, and did not know what to say.

Second Tiger Lad leapt forward to ride the tiger, swung his fist and began to strike it.

“Second Tiger, how can you pretend to be a hero by beating a dead tiger?” somebody shouted.

Second Tiger Lad laughed:

“Elder brother, you’ve got it all wrong! This beast ate human flesh, drank human blood, rode roughshod over us, and we were flogged time and again because of it! My grandfather has to stay in bed and cannot walk any more; the county magistrate had me beaten up until my behind was a bloody mash. ‘When enemies meet, their eyes are ablaze.’ I beat the tiger to give vent to my anger.”

With these words, he gave it several heavy blows.

Old Father Chen told the hunters to find rope and poles to carry the tiger. He took a look at Wu Song and said:

“We cannot let our benefactor walk down the ridge on foot. Our hero Wu is exhausted now, and you must get hold of a sedan for him.”

The hunters answered with one voice: “OK!” and ran downhill to arrange things.

When Wu Song saw how cheerful they were, he was also very happy. He thought: ‘Just by good luck I have killed a tiger! When I tell my elder brother about it, he will surely be very happy, too.’

At this thought, he folded his hands in a greeting to take leave and said:

“Old Father, you’re going to great trouble, but I must be going!”

At these words Old Father Chen and the others all said in a hurry:

“You can’t leave us! You, our hero Wu, have done away with the evil, and we should provide for your needs and comforts all your life.”

Second Tiger Lad grasped Wu Song’s hand:

“Dear benefactor, please, do not go! When my grandfather hears that you killed the tiger, he will come to see you, even if he has to crawl!”

Then he wept again. The others comforted him:

“Don’t worry, our benefactor won’t leave, and we won’t let him go!”

“I understand and appreciate your kindness, but my elder brother in Qinghe County is expecting me any day, so I can’t stop over here!” Wu Song tried to decline.

“In this case we’ll send for your brother.” Old Father Chen said.

Another followed up:

“We’ll report it to the magistrate tomorrow morning, and there is a reward for killing the tiger! Dear benefactor, please, go with us to receive your reward, and then

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we'll send for your elder brother in Qinghe County.”

“Yes, that is how we should do it,” the crowd agreed.

But Wu Song still insisted:

“You've taken a lot of trouble keeping watch all these nights and you deserve the reward. I, Wu Song, just ran into the tiger by chance and knocked it down. That was nothing.”

As he talked, one saw the hunters return with a sedan, a door plank, rope and poles. Old Father Chen pulled Wu Song by the arm and said:

“Dear benefactor, please, get on the sedan, and we'll continue our talk in the village.”

All the hunters came up and pushed Wu Song into the sedan in a bustle, leaving him no chance to make excuses.

The hunters were smart, for what they had brought was an open sedan with a spacious chair; otherwise, the bridal sedan of the village couldn't have contained such a big fellow as Wu Song.

The hunters lifted the tiger onto the door plank, bound it to the plank with ropes and inserted poles into the loops. Eight men shouldered the poles and eight formed the escort, and thus they marched down. With Wu Song first and the tiger next, the hunters hurried down the ridge with joyful shouts. On their way they suddenly heard a clamour of gongs, drums, and *suonas* from the foot of the ridge. In the far distance below Wu Song could see lots of lanterns and torches moving rapidly upwards. The mountain path looked like an illuminated dragon.

“What's going on down there?” Wu Song asked.

“The villagers of the neighbourhood have got the news and are coming to welcome the hero who killed the tiger!”

*Storytellers of old had a poem in praise:*

Second Brother Wu was a brave and martial man,  
Stood up and went alone across Jingyang Ridge;  
In a drunken fit he killed the tiger of the mountain,  
Since then his great fame has swept over all the world.

The villagers crowded around Wu Song all the way to the village, and took him directly to the guest room of the ancestral temple to rest. They placed the big beast on display in the great hall for everybody to see. The heads of prominent township families and village leaders all went to visit Wu Song after receiving the message. Soon the guest room of the ancestral temple was bustling with noise and excitement.

After a short while, Second Tiger Lad arrived together with his grandfather. As soon as the old man saw Wu Song, he thanked him and praised him profusely:

“Hero Wu, young master, you're so capable, and killed the big beast. You are

our rescuer, and you've given us a new future."

"Grandfather, don't say so. I was enjoying the reflection of your good fortune, and this was simply a stroke of good luck!"

The villagers asked questions one after another. "Strong master, what's your name? How did you kill the fierce tiger?"

Wu Song told them his name, hometown, and gave a detailed description of how he fought the tiger with fists and feet.

The villagers all gasped in admiration at Wu Song's skill. The hunters presented him with delicious pieces of game and offered him wine. Old Father Chen saw that Wu Song was exhausted from his battle with the tiger, so he asked people to leave the room and let Wu Song have a rest, where after the villagers slowly dispersed.

At daybreak the village leader went to the county office to report the case. The county magistrate ordered that the hunters make good preparations for a tiger parade the following day.

Wu Song got up, washed and rinsed his mouth, adjusted his felt hat and went out. The villagers and hunters all came to congratulate him. Raising their cups, they toasted him and then saw him off cordially. They draped Wu Song with red silk and flowers, carried the tiger out, placed it on the door plank, and crowded out of the village. Emissaries of the magistrate had long since been waiting to escort Wu Song to Yanggu County, and presently they greeted him. With Wu Song sitting in a big sedan-chair and the tiger, also decked with red silk and flowers, carried just in front of him, the procession advanced towards Yanggu County.

When the townspeople of Yanggu County heard that a strong master had killed the big beast on Jingyang Ridge, they all spread the news in a hurry. Watching from the sedan, Wu Song saw the noisy throngs crowding every street and lane. Everyone wanted to see the big beast. Wu Song was carried to the front of the county office, and the Magistrate Sun Guoqing wearing his toga embroidered with pythons was waiting in the hall inside.

As Wu Song descended from the sedan, the hunters lifted the big beast on their shoulder poles, and so they stepped into the hall through the door of etiquette. People behind them all crowded in striving to be the first and fearing to lag behind.

A guard of the county office shouted:

"The magistrate orders that except for the hunters common people are not allowed to enter. Get out quickly! Wait for the tiger parade in your neighbourhood tomorrow!"

With these words, he made a flourish with his whip. The common people had no choice but to disperse in all directions. Wu Song walked forward along the entrance.

The magistrate gazed at Wu Song:

This fellow had an imposing stature and dignified appearance, flaunting a pair

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of tiger eyes like cold stars and two dashing eyebrows as if brushed black. His broad chest held a power that could defeat ten thousand warriors; his imposing will and spirits were full of soaring aspirations; his great ambition and courage made him an equal to the Heavenly Lion appearing in bolt from the blue; in his strong physique he was equal to the Earthshaking Bear. Then he watched the fierce tiger with a white forehead and slanting eyes:

Its striped coat was made up of golden hairs,  
its eighteen paws were like steel hooks.  
Its eyes were like bronze bells and its tail a whip,  
its mouth looked like a pail of blood, and its teeth as sharp as swords.

Having seen Wu Song, the magistrate said to himself: 'It's difficult to get talented people in these troubled times. But for this big fellow, who else could have killed the fierce tiger? He will be very helpful to *me* if he is willing to work for me and become my trusted aid.' The guard transmitted his order to summon Wu Song into the hall. Wu Song hailed him respectfully at the foot of the stairs, and then came up and bowed to pay his respect to the magistrate.

The magistrate waved his hands: "Let's not stand on ceremony, my strong master." Then he asked: "What's your name? And how were you able to kill the fierce tiger?"

Wu Song answered:

"Your humble servant is from the neighbouring county, Qinghe County. My name is Wu Song and I'm the second son in my family. I was on my way home from Cangzhou to visit my elder brother. Yesterday evening I passed by a tavern in Jingyang Town, and got mighty drunk. While I was in high spirits, I climbed the ridge, but unexpectedly ran into this monster. So I killed it with my fists and feet."

Wu Song told his story in detail. The officials in the hall were all stunned by his story. The magistrate nodded again and again:

"Truly a strong master! What a rare meeting!"

The magistrate ordered his guards to get wine ready, and he took the wine pot and poured three bowls in person for Wu Song. Wu Song stood up and drained the wine in one gulp. Then the magistrate rewarded him with one thousand strings of cash contributed by the local people. Wu Song folded his hands and thanked him:

"Your humble servant killed the big beast by sheer luck. How could this have anything to do with my poor ability? Please, Your Excellency, don't praise me any more. Your humble servant has heard that, because of the tiger, the hunters were punished since they were unable to meet the deadline set by Your Excellency. Why don't we give the one thousand strings of cash to them?"

The hunters were not willing to accept the money, but Wu Song insisted, so the two parties discussed back and forth. The magistrate smiled to the hunters:

“Obedience is better than politeness in this case. Please, do not decline any more.”

Wu Song distributed the money on the spot among the hunters, and they thanked him again and again. All were impressed by his chivalry, and he certainly displayed the rare character of a good fellow. The magistrate kindly urged Wu Song to stay and accommodated him in the official residence. Then the hunters dispersed for the time being.

The magistrate ordered his guards to bring a message around in the township and the countryside, beat the gongs and announce the following:

“Listen carefully, folks from every town and village: the fierce tiger on Jingyang Ridge with slanting eyes and a white forehead has been killed. The hero fighting the tiger is named Wu Song. From now on you may cross the ridge as you wish, and do not need to make a long way round. We’ll hold a tiger parade at seven tomorrow morning. Please, come early to the main street to enjoy it.”

Clang, clang, from near and far the sound of the gongs echoed.

The common people all chatted about it and passed on the news: you telling me and I telling him, the enthusiasm bubbling, so it was not long before everybody knew. Yanggu County had been haunted by the dangerous tiger for half a year, so when the news spread that the tiger had been killed, people would come to watch it even from dozens of *li* away. People who lived farther away and couldn’t manage to come were not late in cutting blocks for printing pictures, make up stories, or compose joyful music and happily sing songs of Wu Song’s feat. Peddlers also passed the news on while selling rouge, face powder, fireworks, firecrackers or toys. Soon Wu Song’s deed of fighting the tiger had spread from Shandong to Henan.

On this day there was even more bustle and hustle in Yanggu County than on market days or days of festival. People let off firecrackers, called together relatives and friends, put up wooden stages, or hung colourful silk balls. At seven o’clock, the streets were already packed with people. The tiger parade started from the county *yamen*, passing Guanqian Street, East Street and West Street—a fantastic procession and an extraordinary atmosphere.

Wu Song was extremely majestic looking this morning: a bright red band with a hero knot was bound around his forehead, ornamented with a bright red silk ball whose coloured ribbons floated in the air. He was dressed in a bright red silk jacket and a bright red silk robe, with a bright red silk ball tied to his chest. He was wearing a pair of thin-soled, coloured boots set off by white socks. He grasped a horsewhip and rode on a silver mane horse. An embroidered red silk saddle was draped over the horse, and a number of colourful silk balls in red and green were also tied to the head of the horse. The guard of honour took the lead, and a mounted guard cleared the way in the front. The rider held a signboard on which was written in bright red letters: “Tiger Parade.” After the horse came a stone pavilion, in which was placed “Ode about Fighting the Tiger” composed by a local scholar overnight to compliment Wu

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Song for his deed of fighting the tiger:

A gale blew over Jingyang Ridge,  
dark clouds covered the sun.  
With red maple leaves the mountains were aflame,  
the grassy slopes turned yellow.  
Sparkling sunset clouds hung over the groves,  
cold mist penetrated into the vault of heaven.  
With the sound of a thunderbolt,  
the King of Beasts appeared on the mountainside.  
Flaunting its teeth and claws the tiger rushed forwards,  
and all the deer in the valley ran away.  
Foxes and hares in the mountain disappeared without trace,  
apes and monkeys by the stream were in a panic.  
Had *Bian Zhuang* seen it, he would have been scared out of his wits;  
had *Cun Xiao* met it, he would have been frightened to death.  
The strong man from Qinghe was still drunk,  
when all of a sudden he ran into the tiger on the ridge.  
Hungry and thirsty, the tiger had searched for humans everywhere,  
leaping and springing, it pounced on him.  
The tiger pounced on the man like an avalanche,  
The man fought against the tiger like a rolling stone.  
His arms and fists hammered like gunfire,  
the tiger's teeth and claws ploughed a furrow in the soil.  
His fists and kicks fell like raindrops,  
his hands were dripping with the tiger's blood.  
The pinewoods emanated a foul stench,  
tufts of fur were scattered among the cliffs.  
At close quarters, its imposing manner remained,  
from a distance, its power was on the vane.  
Lying dead among the weeds its stripes had lost lustre,  
its eyes were shut never to shine again.

A group of scholars stepped forward to read and chant the ode. Behind the pavilion four golden gongs were carried, sounding “clang, clang, clang”. After the gongs a pair of way-clearing signboards was paraded, followed by ten swordsmen sent by the magistrate of Yanggu County to escort the procession. Next followed eighteen mountain patrolmen armed with light weapons, with a column of multicoloured flags fluttering in the wind. There were also twelve hunters wearing caps and clothes made of tiger's fur, marching in pairs, carrying swords, clubs, staffs, spears, pitchforks, and signboards.

Finally after the hunters, there was the fierce tiger, carried by sixteen people, eight of them shouldering the poles and eight in support. *Just as the saying goes:* “When the soy-sauce jar is broken, the stand remains.” The hunters had bound the tiger to the carrier so that it looked as if it were still baring its teeth and flaunting its claws. Its tail was standing up in the air as if the animal was on the point of jumping and sweeping someone with it. Coloured silk balls were also tied to the tiger’s carrier. Another twelve hunters marched after the tiger carrying the same weapons as the previous group. And last came Wu Song on the silver mane horse accompanied by four hunters. A sea of people crowded in the streets, pushing and shoving and striving to see the parade—what lively scenery!

*Meanwhile let’s tell* about a certain man who was upset about the tiger parade. This man was very short, and because he was ugly, too, he had got the nickname: Three Inch Poxymidget. Since people could see he was timid and honest, they often bullied him. But he never flew into a rage, but just evaded them. He had moved from Qinghe County to Yanggu County and made a living by selling steamed dumplings.

At first, when he heard that a tiger parade would be held this morning, he decided to make more dumplings and take advantage of this occasion to sell more. As a result, he was late. Then he heard that the hero fighting the tiger was called Wu Song and began to wonder. Could it be that the tiger killer was his younger brother? Therefore he eagerly pushed into the crowd to find out. But he was so short and standing behind the others he could not see anything. He tried to squeeze himself through, but without result. Trying here and there, he had no luck. But he was not willing to give up, and leaving his load with someone at the entrance of Lion Lane, he hurried over to the main street again.

At this point he began to pull the clothes of a man standing in front of him. The man turned round and shouted at him:

“Damned, do you want to die?”

And then the man gave him a push backwards. A man from that direction shouted:

“No way! Get out of here! Keep them dirty hands for yourself!”<sup>2</sup>

People on all sides were getting angry and he was jostled about and could not stand steady on his legs. Just at the moment when he was at a complete loss, he noticed a wooden stage put up by the street. Two scholars dressed in robes were sitting on the stage, one in red, and the other in green. They were indulging in loud and empty talk. The scholar in red began:

“This tiger is highly spectacular.”

“Right,” the man in green responded.

“The left ear is spotted with red colour, like the sun.”

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<sup>2</sup> This is one of the few places where Hangzhou dialect seems to show through: 介秽的手; 介秽 *ga hui* means ‘dirty’ in Hangzhou dialect (HY).

The man in green said: “The right ear is spotted with red<sup>3</sup> colour, like the moon.”

The man in red said: “On its head there is the character for ‘king’.”

The man in green said: “Like a prefect inspecting the mountains.”

The man in red said: “There are three hundred and sixty five stripes all over its body.”

The man in green said: “Corresponding with three hundred and sixty five degrees of the universe.”

The man in red said: “The tiger has four paws.”

The man in green said: “Corresponding with four seasons in one year.”

The man in red said: “The tail consists of twelve joints.”

The man in green said: “Corresponding with twelve months in one year.”

The man in red said: “Right, Wu Song could never have killed the tiger, were it not for the magistrate’s illustrious model and good destiny having overcome the tiger’s fate.”

They nodded and looked pleased with themselves expressing these interesting views. The midget did not understand what they are talking about, but he saw there was room left on the stage.

“Excuse me,” he said, and was about to climb onto the stage.

“What a nuisance!” the man in red scolded. “Look at those rat eyes of yours! You don’t look like a man, nor do you look like a ghost! How do you deserve to watch the tiger?”

“Brother Ren, don’t talk to him! Just call a servant to drive him away,” the man in green said.

A servant came, grabbed the midget by his neck and threw him out without further ado.

The midget had no choice but to leave. Suddenly there was a hustle and bustle among the crowd, and people shouted:

“Here comes the fierce tiger! Only a man with the strength of a buffalo could ever have moved that tiger as much as an inch!”

People all clicked their tongues in admiration and praised Wu Song without end. When the midget heard that the tiger parade was approaching, he cried anxiously:

“Good man, please let me in. Maybe the hero who has killed the tiger is my younger brother. Let me through to see him!”

Then he bowed his head and with all his strength made his way into the crowd. But in his eager he bumped his head into a bald man. As the bald man turned round and saw the dumpling-vendor, he got very irritated:

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<sup>3</sup> Red seems to be a misprint for ‘green’, cf. Wang Shaotang 1959, p. xx, which is the obvious source for this conversation. His work is mentioned in the preface to the present book edition as an important model.



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“Three Inch Poxy Midget, you good-for-nothing! Get out of here!”

Then he felt for his pouch and found his silver was missing, so he raised his fists and beat the short man straight on his head. A bystander joined in and swore at him:

“You dirty dumpling-vendor! Why do you steal money from others? Hurry up and give it back!”

Yet another continued in the same way:

“Poor devil, are you out of your mind? Where are your dumplings? Go get them and make your apologies to the master!”

*Dear audience*, do you know who the poor man was? This was Wu the Elder—Wu Zhi, the elder brother that Wu Song had travelled so long a distance back home to visit. *Indeed*: melting into a snowy landscape, the heron is only to be seen when it takes to the wings; hiding behind the willows, the parrot is only discernible when it opens its mouth. *If you want to know what happened later, please listen to the explanation in the next session.*