



Three Sagas of Yangzhou Storytelling

Water Margin

水滸

The Water Margin saga, *Shuihu*, relates the adventures and exploits of a bandit group from Shandong province during the late Song period, around 1120. The group had its stronghold in the Liangshan mountains and the surrounding moors and marshlands that have given name to the saga. The leader of the bandits, Song Jiang, belongs to Chinese official history, and banditry was widespread at the time, but none of his one hundred and eight men seem to have any background in historical fact. They are part of the Chinese folklore pantheon of gods and heroes, well known to everybody. The episodes told in the following are all related to one of the most famous heroes of the marshes—Wu Song.

**Wu Song Fights the
Tiger**

Wu Song da hu

◆ 武松打虎

For the past year Wu Song has taken refuge in the home of a rich and generous landlord, Chai Jin, because he was involved in a case of murder, or so he thinks. News from home reveals that the person didn't die after all, and Wu Song is eager to return home to see his elder brother, his only relative. After some days on the road he arrives one evening in Jingyang town and enters the local inn, where the young waiter Xiao'er, Little Secundus, serves him the good wine called Three Bowls and You Cannot Cross the Ridge. This is how Wang Shaotang began his tale for Nanjing Radio in 1961.

Wu Song Fights the Tiger

Told by

Wang Shaotang 王少堂

Chai Jin accommodates guests in Henghai County.

Wu Song fights a tiger on Jingyang Ridge.

Second Brother from Guankou, Wu Song, was in Henghai County at the estate of Lord Chai when he received news from his elder brother. He bade farewell to Chai Jin, and went off to Yanggu District in Shandong to find his brother. He was not just one day on the road—he had marched for more than twenty days—and today he had reached the boundary of Yanggu District in Shandong, more than twenty *li* from the city. It was in the middle of the tenth month, and now the sun was slanting steeply towards the west.

Our hero felt hungry in his stomach and wanted to take a rest. The moment he looked up, he saw in the distance a pitch-black town. Our hero shouldered his bundle and holding a staff in his right hand, marched forwards in big strides, making his way to the gate of the town. When he raised his head again and looked up, he saw the wall piled up with flat bricks all the way

to the roof and the round city-gate. Above it there was a whitewashed stone with three red characters: 'Jingyang town'.

As he entered the gate, he saw a broad alley, neatly lined with shops on both sides, most of them thatched

cottages. There were also quite a few people around. Walking along he noticed an inn to his right, a brand-new thatched cottage with three wings. Under the eaves a brand-new green bamboo-pole was stuck in, and hanging on the green bamboo-pole there was a brand-new blue wine-banner. On the blue wine-banner a piece of brand-new pink paper was glued. On the pink paper were written five big brand-new characters: 'Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge!'.

The moment he glanced inside the inn, he saw brand-new tables and stools, a brand-new kitchen-range, a brand-new chopping-board, a brand-new

counter and also two brand-new people.—You must be joking! Other things can be ‘new’, but how can people be ‘new’? Why not?

Behind the counter sat a young innkeeper, just in his twenties. In front of the counter stood a young waiter, eighteen or nineteen. Probably young people could be called ‘new’ people. And then it follows that old people might be called ‘worn’ people. The proverb is right:

Wave upon wave the Yangzi River flows,
New people overtake the elder generation.

So people can also be counted as ‘new’.

From the other side of the counter he saw the butler standing in the main room—that’s what he is called in storytelling, but it’s really just the waiter. He was handsome, with a clear brow and bright eyes, white teeth and red lips, a delicate mouth with thin lips: he certainly looked like he had a glib tongue. On his head he wore a soft cap, around his waist he had tied an apron as clean as can be, and below his feet showed in cotton socks and cotton shoes. With both hands on his hips he glanced out from the door of the inn. Why did he stand there and look? He was on the look out for business. Suddenly he caught sight of a customer, bundle on shoulder and staff in hand, who was approaching and made a halt. Sure enough, this must be someone who wants to drink some wine. A businessman who sees business coming his way will always give it a warm welcome! So the young fellow, all smiles, hurriedly took a few steps forward, greeting the customer with both hands clasped and a mouthful of phrases in so-so Beijing accent:

“Sir! Does Your Honour want to take a rest in our humble inn? Millet gruel, sorghum, chicken, pancakes, steamed rolls, the food is fine and the prices are reasonable. Please, come in and have a seat, Sir!”

“Xiao'er!”

“Yes, Sir!”

“Do you have good wine in this inn?”

Why would Wu Song pose as such a connoisseur! Even before he had entered the door of the inn, he began to ask if they had good wine. Well, he was this kind of lofty and unyielding character, not just like anybody. People of former times had four words they couldn't do without: wine, sex, wealth and vigour. These four words are actually not for the good. So people nowadays don't care too much about those four words. But at that time, they didn't have any good education, so they couldn't do without those four words. But Wu Song only cared for two things: He was fond of drinking good wine and he was fond of using his strength on behalf of innocent people, he was so full of vigour. These were at the same time his weak points impeding him his whole life. He saw that the town was small and the inn was small, too, so he was afraid that they did not have good wine. He didn't care for wine that was diluted with water. In that case he would rather not take his rest at that place. Therefore even before Second Brother Wu had entered the door, he first asked whether they had good wine.

“Oh! Sure, Sir! In our humble inn, we wouldn't boast about other things, but the quality of the wine is amazingly good. People from afar have given our humble inn eight verse-lines in praise.”

“What eight lines?”

“It is like jade nectar and rosy clouds,

Its sweet bouquet and wonderful taste are worth
boasting about.

When a wine jug is opened, the flavour makes people
tipsy three houses away.

Guests passing by will pull up their carts
and rein in their horses.

Lü Dongbin once paid with his famous sword,
Li Bai, he pawned his black gauze hat,
The immortal loved the wine so much he never
went home ...”

“Where did he go then?”

“Drunken he tumbled into the West River embracing
the moon!”

When Second Master Wu heard this, [he said]:

“Good!”

Why did he say ‘Good!’ in this way? There was a reason to it. The wine was not merely good, it was extraordinarily good! When they opened a gallon of wine, the neighbours three houses away would become tipsy, just by smelling it you would get tipsy. What else was it that was so good about that wine? Lü Chunyang [Lü Dongbin] loved this house wine so much that he drank up all the money he carried in his belt and even pawned his famous sword to pay for the wine. Li Taibo [Li Bai] also loved the wine so much that he drank up every penny he had, whereupon he tore off his black gauze hat and pawned it to pay for more wine. How could it be true that Li Taibo pledged his black gauze hat or that Lü Chunyang pawned his famous sword? No such thing ever happened. This was only flattery from the guests. But since the customers had thought out these phrases in order to flatter the wine of the inn, one can imagine that their wine was indeed good. Highly pleased Second Master Wu followed Xiao’er to the door and stepped into the

hallway of the inn. They passed through a half-door and came to the next wing with a small courtyard and a thatched hall just opposite. The thatched hall was clean and nice, with seven or eight tables. But there was not a single customer. What was the reason? It was already long past the lunch-time rush. The sun was slanting steeply towards the west.

As Second Master Wu walked inside he took down his bundle and staff, placed his bundle on the corner of a table to the right and leaned his staff against it. He brushed the dust off his clothes and sat down at the main seat of the table right in the middle. Xiao'er wrung out a hot napkin and served him a cup of tea:

“Master, what do you want to eat with the wine?”

“Good wine and good food, and be sure there is enough, too!”

“Ow! — Yes!”

Eh? How come the waiter Xiao'er had changed his accent? A moment ago at the doorway he was talking all in so-so Beijing accent. Why did he afterwards begin to talk in the dialect from the district north of the Yangzi River? What was the reason? There was some sense in it. This young man, Xiao'er, was from the district north of the Yangzi River, he was our fellow townsman. How come he was able to speak Beijing dialect? Because he would stand at the doorway of the inn looking out for business. The travelers from south and north were not acquainted with the dialect from north of the Yangzi River. Therefore he had made a special effort to study a few sentences of Mandarin in order to be able to deal with the customers. But he had only learnt a few phrases, uncivilized whelp as he was, and he wasn't able to get going much longer. At this moment he wasn't able to turn out any more phrases in Beijing accent. He had better be honest and stick to his own dialect. Therefore his pronunciation was different.

Xiao'er went to the front and took a big piece of beef, more than two pounds, and cut it into thin slices, a big plate of red-chopped fragrant meat, just the right size. Apart from that, he peeled a dozen eggs, he peeled the shell off the boiled eggs. He sprinkled [the meat] with gravy. [The eggs] were snow white and tender. He put a handful of white salt on a small plate; the salt was for the eggs. Then he filled two other plates, one with steamed rolls and another with pancakes. When he had filled a mug with wine, he arranged cup and chopsticks on the tray and carried everything over to the thatched hall in the rear wing. He placed the tray on the table where Second Master Wu had left his bundle, and then he arranged the snacks, wine and food, beef, cup and chopsticks in front of his guest. Xiao'er removed the tray, took up a position to the left of our hero and smiling looked at Wu the Second. Second Master Wu

pushed his teacup away and reached for the wine mug:

“Get me a big cup in stead of this one!”

“As you wish!”

His wine cup was exchanged with another much bigger one. This wine cup was almost as big as a rice bowl: “Sh-sh-sh ...”, he poured himself a cup: ‘Uh! That wine is not good. Its colour is not right and it doesn’t have any flavour. Such wine probably doesn’t have the least spirit. Let me try and have a sip! Let me see how it tastes in the mouth!’ Second Master Wu took two sips of the wine: ‘My goodness! This wine is really bad! It is watery wine and it has no body to it. Strange, it is not in line with what the waiter told me a moment ago at the doorway. I had better ask him!’

“Xiao’er!”

“Yes, Master!”

“Is this the good house wine?”

“Oh, no! This is only a medium good wine of our inn!”

“Ah, why do you not bring the good wine?”

“If you want the good wine, it’s surely not bad. If it’s the good wine that Your Honour wants, it’s ‘Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge’.”

“Fine!”

Oh, my, how glad Second Master Wu was! Sure enough, before he entered, he had noticed a piece of pink paper glued to the wine-banner of the inn with the inscription ‘Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge’. ‘I do not understand, I have no idea what it means, why not ask him?’

“Xiao’er, what does it mean: ‘Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge’?”

“Well, Master, our small town, this town of ours is called Jingyang Town, and west of the town, seven *li* along the highway, there is a mountain ridge, called Jingyang Ridge. The highway runs east-west and the mountain ridge runs north-south, so all the travellers

going west must cross the ridge at this point. But you should not drink the wine of our humble inn, or else drink only the medium good wine, because if you really do drink the best wine, then after only three bowls—when you have drunk three bowls—you cannot cross that Jingyang Ridge ahead. That's why people have given the wine of our humble inn this name: 'Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge'."

"Fine! Bring me a mug to taste!"

"Oh, don't be in a hurry! Ordinary people cannot drink this wine, or else they get drunk!"

"No harm in that!"

"Well, Master, if you insist on having this wine, that's up to you, but I should like to ask a question: After you have dined and wined, do you plan to stay overnight in our humble inn? We can find a room for you, and in that case I shall serve you promptly. But if you want to travel onwards after your meal, that won't work!"

"I'll travel on!"

"You cannot travel on!"

"Why not?"

"In case you want to travel on, and in case you are going west, as I can see you are, I'm afraid you cannot cross our Jingyang Ridge, and what will you do then?"

"What nonsense are you talking? Are you poking fun at an outsider for having no drinking capacity? I can drink thirty bowls and still go straight across the ridge! Bring the wine!"

"Oh!"

Xiao'er was frightened. The voice of his guest resounded like a bronze bell and the whole place trembled at his shouting - it was deafening. Glancing at his guest's face, he saw him rolling his eyes and blinking 'wa-da-wa-da', his fists as heavy as a five-bushel willow basket each! A businessman is not very brave. As soon as he is scared, he has no guts to refuse,

and acting by order the wine came on the table. The mug of bad wine was removed and changed into a mug of wine from the front and you can be sure it was 'Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge'.

"Please, Master!"

"Fine!"

Wu Song gripped the handle of the wine mug and filled himself another bowl.

Ah, interesting, no need to drink this wine—just a glance would tell how good it was: the green and clear colour, the fragrance attacking the nostrils, and wine 'crystals' clinging to the edge of the bowl. What is a wine crystal? A wine crystal is the same as a wine 'flower' [bubble]. What kind of wine was it, this wine? 'Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge'. This name 'Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge', how to explain it? No need to come up with explanations. Such names are simply fabricated by the wine merchants. After serving you a good wine, they may overhear the names you people invent. There are lots of such names, not just one name, all kinds of odd and strange names that they have overheard from wine bibbers who like to outdo each other by voice power. For example: 'The fragrance penetrates the bottle', 'Clear like seizing the moon', 'A gust of wind and you collapse', 'You will collapse before paying your bill', and then there is also the name 'Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge'. Searching for the root and source of such names leads to nothing but the fact that it is an exquisite wine, an original brew. Anyhow, it is just a good wine, and that's all.

What good is there in drinking good wine? I think there isn't necessarily any good in it. But according to those who like to drink, drinking this wine has two advantages. Which advantages? When you drink it there are two flavours! First the flavour you feel when taking a sip of the wine in your mouth and it smells so

delicious. After a while, you may have a good burp: 'A-a-ah!' Again you feel the delicious smell. Apart from this there are no other advantages.

Second Master Wu had great capacity. After three large cups the wine mug was finished. It would be unfair to say that there was too little wine in the mug, the reason was that the bowl was particularly large. Well, if he had stopped drinking, that would have been the end of it. But after these three cups he looked both greedy and thirsty and stared at Xiao'er like a greedy caterpillar hanging on a straw. Xiao'er was standing silently beside him, biting his tongue: 'The drinking capacity of that fellow is frightening. Our large cups are as big as rice bowls, but he empties them in one mouthful. Although he has a capacity like the sea, I'm afraid he is good and drunk by now!'

"Xiao'er!"

"Master!"

"Fill up!"

"Uh, you must be joking! Just think the way Your Honour is eating, I've never seen the like, and those two bowls Your Honour downed, that's quite something! You shouldn't drink more! More of this wine and Your Honour will surely get drunk, and then you cannot cross the Jingyang Ridge ahead!"

"What nonsense are you talking? Are you poking fun at an outsider for having no drinking capacity? I can drink thirty bowls and still go straight across the ridge! Bring the wine!"

"Sure, sure!"

Xiao'er did not dare to refuse him, noticing how his eyes were beginning to roll again. He left to get him another mug which he filled up: 'Hua-a-a...'.

"Bring the wine!"

"Here you are!"

"Fill up!"

"As you wish!"

Like the rich and wealthy who know no limits, so Wu
Song who was drinking deep. How much had he

drunk? Five mugs. Each mug could hold three bowls, three times five is fifteen. Henceforward he began to shout and cry ever more rudely and roughly to the alarm of the other one, the young innkeeper at the counter in the front. The young innkeeper was astonished. He couldn't figure out what was going on in the rear, and he couldn't relax the way they were shouting and quarreling. The young innkeeper lifted up his gown, stepped down from the counter and went over to the half-door, where he glanced inside: 'Hem!' All he saw was that single customer sitting and drinking with Xiao'er attending to him. The young innkeeper called in a low voice. What did he call? He called:

"Wang Er!"

The waiter's surname was Wang and he was second among his brothers, so the young innkeeper called him Wang Er [Wang Second]. As soon as Wang Er heard his boss calling, he hurried over to the half-door at once:

"Yes, boss, you were looking for me?"

"Why does the customer over there quarrel with you?"

"For no reason, he wants to drink!"

"If he wants to drink, please, serve him! We innkeepers are not afraid of big-bellied guys!"

“Do you realize what kind of wine he is drinking?”

“Eh?”

“It’s ‘Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge’!”

“My goodness! You can’t let him drink much of that wine!”

“Exactly my words!”

“How much has he drunk?”

“Five mugs!”

“Oh, mine! You stupid fool! Other people cannot take even one mug of that wine, and you have served him more than five mugs!”

“But he ordered me to!”

“Does our guest want to drink more?”

“No idea!”

“Let me give you a hint: If he doesn’t order any more, well and good! But in case he orders more”

“Yes?”

“Then you have to fix it a bit on the sly!”

“Sure!”

What does it mean: ‘to fix it a bit’? It is a secret expression used by people in that trade, something they cannot say openly. If a customer shouts for more wine, you may dilute it with a little water, you cannot give him more of the real stuff. But since you cannot admit openly that the wine is diluted, you just ‘fix it a bit’ on the sly. It is only the insiders who understand it; outsiders have no idea.

When the young innkeeper had left, Xiao’er did as he was told. What about Second Master Wu? Second Master Wu still wanted to drink. He was in high spirits. Had he not drunk his fill long ago? He certainly had drunk his fill. Why did he then want to drink more? Because a moment ago he had uttered a certain sentence: ‘Are you poking fun at an outsider for having no drinking capacity? I can drink thirty bowls and still go straight across the ridge!’

As said, so done. Had he said how much he could drink, then he had to drink that much. Since he had said he could drink thirty bowls, he couldn't stop short of a single bowl. One mug equaled three bowls. He had drunk five mugs. Three times five is only fifteen bowls. He was only halfway through and that's why Second Master Wu wanted to drink more.

"Xiao'er!"

"Yes, Master!"

"Bring more wine!"

"Please!"

"Fill up!"

"There you are!"

Thereupon another five mugs went down the hatch. The last five mugs were, however, far less potent than the first five. The first five mugs were from the original brew, but the next five were diluted with water, three parts wine to seven parts water. At that moment Second Master Wu couldn't tell the difference any more. Why? The more he drank, the less he was able to cope. He sure had an enormous drinking capacity, but now he had downed almost ten mugs and his face had turned the colour of crimson silk, he looked blank and his tongue was glued to his gums so that he could hardly speak:

"Xiao'er!"

"Yes, Master!"

"Bring more wine!"

"Does Your Honour want still more? It's no joking matter! Hasn't Your Honour had enough?"

"What nonsense are you talking? Are you poking fun at an outsider for having no drinking capacity? I can drink thirty bowls and still go straight across the ridge!"

"You have already had thirty bowls!"

"Have I?"

"Yes! Please have a look, Your Honour, and count

the mugs! On the table there are altogether ...five ... ten ... about eight or ten wine mugs. One mug holds three bowls, ten mugs of wine for sure equals thirty bowls!”

“Ha, ha!”

“Why do you laugh?”

“I laugh at [you poking fun at] an outsider for having no drinking capacity. Now I have drunk thirty bowls, and what has it done to me, pray?”

“Sure, Your Honour has a considerable capacity, were it not that your eyes look blank and your tongue is glued to your gums, stiff as a plank!”

“What nonsense are you talking?”

Second Master Wu had stopped drinking and now he was busy eating the steamed rolls, pancakes and beef. Otherwise he only cared about drinking, not about eating. But at this moment he was eating, not drinking. He even ate up all of the eggs, to the very last: ‘Burp!’ He was full. Since he was full, he stopped eating. Xiao’er wrung out a napkin for our hero to wipe his hands and face.

“My bill!”

“Sure! Will Your Honour please come over to the counter?”

“OK!”

Second Master Wu rose to his feet, gripped his bundle and staff, and stumbled and staggered forwards ...

“Oh, no need to hurry, be careful not to fall, let me give you an arm!”

“No-no-no need for your arm!”

Second Master Wu had arrived in front, and Xiao’er was right behind him ready to give account:

“Hello! Listen over there at the counter! Our guest wants to pay his bill! Four silver ounces and five coppers all in all!”

This meal didn’t cost more than four silver ounces and five! In those days prices were much lower.

Second Master Wu stopped in front of the counter, placed his bundle on top of the counter and leaned his staff on the long end against the counter. The young innkeeper looked at Wu Song and nodded, well aware that he was drunk: that was obvious from the expression on his face and the blank look in his eyes. Second Master Wu opened his bundle and took out his black silken silver-wrapper from the bundle. He had more than thirty taels of silver in his wrapper.

Originally, when he set out on this trip from the Chai estate, the Lord of Liang had just presented him with fifty taels to cover his travel expenses. On his way he had used up about ten taels, so he still had a nice sum left. The larger pieces weighed more than two taels and the smaller four or five ounces. Second Master Wu deftly fished out a piece—a piece which, as I, the storyteller, may inform you, weighed more than one tael—and placed it on the counter:

“Please, count it!”

“Oh, sure!”

The young innkeeper hurried inside to fetch his steelyard.

When he returned, he climbed the bench again and turned his face toward Wu Song. His full attention was fixed on the face of Second Master Wu. After scrutinizing him for a moment, the young innkeeper put the silver piece on the pan of the steelyard. With two fingers of his right hand he picked up the string of the steelyard and with his left hand he picked up the stick of the steelyard. The sliding weight hanging from the stick was moved to the point of balance, horizontal position. Then he removed his left hand, while his right hand still held the string of the steelyard. He looked at the silver piece, lifted his head and looked at the face of Second Master Wu and then he announced the amount

“Master, this silver piece of Your Honour’s, I have

just weighed it, it is one tae-e-e...e-e-el minus one copper!”

Why did he talk like that? As if he tried to press the counterweight out of balance! What was the reason?

Well, this young innkeeper was harbouring evil intentions. He had noticed that his guest was fond of drinking and now was good and drunk. He also saw what a large silver piece this was, and he wanted to swallow the whole piece. He meant to let a big piece seem like a smaller piece. How heavy was this silver piece after all? He had just weighed it and found out it was actually one tael five ounces and four coppers. How much did he say it weighed a moment ago? He said one tael minus one copper! Do you see how much he wanted to grab for himself? One tael minus one copper, that's nine ounces nine. Do you see what he was up to? If it were nine ounces nine, why not say nine ounces nine? Why did he have to draw out the 'one ta-e-e-e...e-el' and then add 'minus one copper'? For what reason did he have to break the sound halfway?

Translator's note on the text:

In 1961 Wang Shaotang performed Ten Chapters on Wu Song, *Wu shi hui*, 武十回 Nanjing Radio. The Wu Song saga was broadcast in daily instalments of about thirty minutes. The episode translated above is the first radio broadcast of this series.

Wang Shaotang's performances for the radio, the only recordings that exist of his voice, have been inaccessible since the 1960s and it was generally assumed that they were in very bad

Well, he had his means and ways. Even though he saw that his guest was drunk, could he be sure whether his guest kept good account of his silver? If he did keep good account, as he usually would, and if you said that this silver was nine ounces nine, it would be like dressing with your arms stretched out stiffly - you can't turn a corner! If the guest did keep good account of his money, he would be likely to swear at you and make a mess: 'In this inn you are all scoundrels! How dare you lie about my silver!' In that case he would have no reply in defense.

Therefore he used this alternative way of saying it, making it 'one tael minus one copper' which allowed him two ways out. He would draw out the sound of 'one tael', and while he was still saying this and

condition or lost. I am deeply grateful to Nanjing Radio for presenting me in 1998 with this audiotape of 30 mins, copied from the original broadcast tapes. The quality of the copy is astonishingly good, only the first few words are slightly distorted.

drawing it out, he would fix both of his eyes on the face of Wu Song. 'If he actually does keep good account of his silver, and he hears me say one tael, he will begin to quarrel and shout: "How can this silver piece be only one tael?"', but then I'll just add: 'and five ounces!' And so I will steer clear.' At the moment when the word 'one tael' came out of his mouth, he saw that his guest didn't react and clear enough didn't keep account of his silver. Since his guest didn't care, he promptly took his eyes away, adding: "...minus one copper!"

Let's slow down a bit! Did Wu Song actually keep account of his silver? The money was a gift from a friend, how could he be so narrow-minded as to weigh piece after piece? And even if he had weighed his silver, he wouldn't be able to remember. Otherwise, he would have had to stick slips of red paper to each piece and bother somebody to keep them. Second Master Wu simply used his money as need be. No need to blame him for not keeping good account, but even though he used to keep account, he didn't do so right now.

Why so? He had drunk too much wine. And Second Master Wu was in no mood to waste words:

"Is this piece of silver too much or too little?"

"This silver piece is a little too much!"

"If there is too much, then give the surplus to Xiao'er!"

Xiao'er was standing at the half-door and looking. He saw the young innkeeper weigh the silver. He heard the young innkeeper announce the amount. Xiao'er was smart, he too, so he hurried out in front to take a good look at that piece of silver. Why did he do that? He guessed what his boss was up to, that he was cheating the other man out of his money. But Xiao'er was not as crafty. When Xiao'er heard the guest say that the surplus was for him, he was quick in his reply:

"Thanks a lot, Master, excuse me for not seeing

you off, Master, please come again early tomorrow!”

Second Master Wu put the silver into his bundle, tied his bundle and flung it over his shoulder. He took his staff and walked out of the door. As he lifted his head and looked up, oh, my! To the east the moon was already up! The moon was already up! Well, today it was in the middle of the tenth month, and when he had arrived at the town the sun was slanting steeply toward the west. He had been drinking for quite some time, too, and in the tenth month the days are at their shortest. ‘In the tenth month there is hardly time to comb one’s hair and eat a meal’. But now the moon was up. Second Master Wu shouldered his bundle and headed straight to the west.

The young innkeeper and Xiao’er didn’t waste another thought on Wu Song. All their interest was concentrated on the silver. The interest of Xiao’er was also concentrated on the silver, since he was well aware that his boss had cheated the other man on his money. The young innkeeper had evil intentions about the money he had cheated, he wanted to pocket it for himself, not to give it to Xiao’er. There they were, equally suspicious, when the young innkeeper deftly grabbed the silver piece and put it into his drawer. Xiao’er was on the spot:

“Hey, boss!”

“Eh?”

“Don’t put it into your drawer! A moment ago the

guest said that he wanted to give me the surplus!”

“Did he want to give it to you?”

“Sure he did, he gave it to me! Please, give it to me!”

“I shall, but this piece is too much! You don’t mean to grab everything including the money for the meal, do you? This piece is nine ounces nine, our guest’s meal amounted to four ounces five. Now I first take this piece of silver and then I’ll return a piece of five ounces and four coppers to you, all right?”

“What! You can’t fool me with your piece! Give me that piece of silver! Give it to me! Later this evening when we do the accounts, I’ll of course return your money!”

“Let’s solve the question right now, all right?”

“We make up this evening, please give it to me first!”

“Why do you want that piece of silver?”

“Why do *you* want that piece of silver, pray?”

“I have my reason why I want this piece of silver. It’s because some days ago your sister-in-law asked me to have a hairpin made for her. But the silversmith of our town doesn’t have good-looking silver, and to take the trip to the city seems a bit far. So my plan was to have a hairpin made for your sister-in-law...”

“Take it easy! My sister-in-law is a widow. Why do you make a hair pin for her?”

“Please, don’t suggest that kind of suspicion! It’s not the sister-in-law of the family on your side, it’s a female relative on my side!”

“A female relative on your side! How could that be my sister-in-law?”

“We call each other brothers, I’m older than you, so my wife is of course your sister-in-law!”

“Aha! Not bad, not bad, not bad at all!”

Just as the two of them were debating, the old innkeeper stepped into the inn....

Performed in Nanjing, 1961