

'Wu Song Fights the Tiger'

Told by Chen Yintang

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Chai Jin accommodates guests in Henghai County
Wu Song fights a tiger on Jingyang Ridge.

The God-blessed Second Brother from Guankou, Wu Song, had sought refuge in the home of Chai Jin, the Lord of Liang, of the Chai estate in Cangzhou, Hebei Province. When he had received news from his elder brother, he bade farewell to his lord and went off to Yanggu District in Shandong Province to find his brother. He had been on his way not only for one day, no, he had marched for more than twenty days, and today he had reached the boundary of Yanggu District in Shandong. It was the season of October, and the sun was slanting steeply towards the west.

Wu Song 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, held on to his staff and marched forward in big strides. When he came to the gate of the town, he saw the wall piled up with flat bricks all the way to the roof, the round city-gate, and above it a white-washed stone inscribed with three large characters: Jingyang town.

As our hero walked into the town with hasty steps, he saw a broad alley, neatly lined with shops on both sides. On the right side there was a brand-new thatched cottage with three wings. Under the eaves a brand-new green bamboo-pole was hooked on to the wall. On the green bamboo-pole a brand-new blue wine-banner was hanging. On the blue wine-banner a piece of brand-new pink paper was glued. On the pink paper were written five large brand-new characters: 'Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge!' When 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 brand-new people. Why? Utensils and things can be new or worn; where has one heard about people being 'new' or 'worn'? Well, behind the counter sat a young innkeeper, barely twenty years old. In front of the counter stood a waiter, still in his teens. It's a common saying:

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

Therefore this, too, must be counted as something 'new'.

At this moment Xiao'er saw a man standing in the doorway and he guessed that it was a customer. On his head he wore a floppy cap, his apron was nicely tied around his waist, and a dish-towel was hanging over his shoulder. Smiling all over his face, he stepped forwards, looked at Wu Song and said:

"Master, please have a rest at our humble inn! We have millet gruel, sorghum, chicken, steamed rolls. The food is fine and the prices are reasonable."

"Xiao'er!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Do you have good wine in your inn?"

Even before Wu Song had entered the inn, he asked for good wine, how come? As you may well wonder, people of those times were fond of four words: wine, sex, wealth and vigour. But that fellow, Wu Song, only cared for two of them: He was fond of drinking, and of using his strength on behalf of wronged people. The two words 'wealth' and 'sex' were not in his lot. When Second Master Wu saw that this town was not very large, and the inn not too large, either, he said to himself: 'I'm afraid they do not have good wine. Just in case they do not have good wine, I had better not enter the inn. Then I can continue to the next inn.' Therefore Second Master Wu asked before he had entered the inn if they did

have good wine.

"Yes, sir! In our humble inn, we wouldn't boast about other things, but the quality of our wine is amazing. The guests passing by 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 will make people tipsy
three houses away.
Guests passing by will pull up their carts and rein in
their horses.
Lu Dongbin once paid with his famous sword,
Li Bai pawned his black gauze hat,
the immortal loved the wine so that he never went home ..."*

"Where did he go then?"

"Drunken he tumbled into the West River embracing the moon!"

CY[1]

"Good wine!"

Oh, my! That wine seemed to be a good one. When a wine jug was opened, people would become tipsy three houses away. This kind of wine you need not drink, just by smelling it you would become tipsy. Li Taibai had come to this inn to drink wine, and he had loved their wine so much, he had spent all the money he had with him, and then he had taken off his black gauze hat and pawned it for wine. And when Lu Dongbin had come to this inn to drink, he, too, liked their wine so much, he drank up every penny he had, and then he took down his famous sword and pawned it for wine. Pray, do you think this wine was good or not?

At this moment Second Master Wu hastily entered the inn, crossed the hallway, entered the half door, passed the screen and came to the second wing. The second wing had a large dining room, but ¡X oh! ¡X who would have imagined that there was nobody around! What was the reason? It was already past lunch-time. At this moment Second Master Wu placed his bundle and his staff on a table to the side, while he himself sat down at a table right in the middle, at the seat of honour. Xiao'er wrung out a hot napkin and brewed a pot of tea for him.

"Oh, sure, Master, what kind of wine and food does Your Honour actually want?"

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

"Yes, OK!"

Let's take it easy now! Just a moment ago when this fellow, Xiao'er, was talking in the doorway, he was speaking in Northern dialect. How come, he afterwards ... , how come he changed into local dialect? Well, who would guess that this fellow, Xiao'er, originally was a native from these parts, and so he spoke the local dialect. But when he was standing in the doorway to solicit customers passing by, he was afraid that other people wouldn't be able to understand the local dialect, and therefore he had taught himself a few sentences of Northern language. Sorry! But he had only these few sentences, he had not acquired any more. So afterwards, since he couldn't turn out any more, he had better stick to the local dialect. Xiao'er went to the rear of the room and took a piece of beef, well over two pounds heavy, which he cut into fine slices and laid on a big plate and sprinkled with gravy. Then he fetched a mug of wine, peeled a dozen 'chickies', added two plates of steamed rolls and a few pancakes. On the tray he also placed a pair of cups and chopsticks, and then he went to the front. When he was in front of Wu Song, he put down wine and food and removed the tray. Then he stood besides Wu Song with his arms hanging at his sides, prepared to serve him.

When Second Master Wu saw that the wine had arrived, he gripped the wine mug and: Sh-sh-sh..... filled a cup of wine to the brim. Then he looked at the wine: 'Uh! That doesn't look right! What kind of tricks are they playing? According to what they were telling me a moment ago, this wine should be pretty good. But how could this wine ever have been good, pray? It has no flavour whatsoever. Oh, maybe it isn't worth looking at, but only worth drinking. Let me take a sip and see!' Second Master Wu lifted the wine cup: Gulp!Click-click-click-click! Oh, my! When he tasted the wine in his mouth, it was so thin that he pulled a face. It did not have the least spirit. 'A little while ago Xiao'er told me, that the wine of their inn was pretty good. Let me ask him and see':

"Xiao'er!"

"Yes, Master!"

"Is this the good wine of your inn?"

"Oh, no, this is only a medium good wine of our humble inn."

"Why don't you serve me the good wine?"

"Oh, Master, that good wine, you can have it, if you want to, but 'Three bowls and

you cannot cross the ridge'!"

"OK!"

Wu Song was gladdened in his heart. A while ago when he was looking around at the gate, he had seen the wine-banner with the inscription 'Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge', but he had no idea what that meant. Aha! So this was the name of the wine.

"Why is it called 'Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge'?"

"I'll tell you, Master! Our town is called Jingyang town and seven *li* from this town there is a ridge called Jingyang Ridge, that is on the highway from east to west. If customers want to travel towards the west through this place, they have to pass over the ridge. But if someone has drunk three cups of this wine from our inn, then he cannot climb the ridge. That's why the travellers passing by have given our humble inn this name for the wine: 'Three bowls and you cannot cross the ridge'.

"Fine! Bring me a mug and let me have a taste!"

"Uh! It's no joke! May I ask Your Honour whether you intend to spend the night in our inn, or whether you want to go on?"

"Why so?"

"I'll tell you, in case Your Honour wants to continue on your way, excuse me, Sir, but then you cannot drink this wine."

"Why so?"

"After you have drunk three bowls, Your Honour will not be able to walk any more."

"Ha, ha! 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!"

"OK!"

Xiao'er glanced at Wu Song. Gosh! You couldn't fool this fellow. One could see a majestic light in his eyes, and his fist was like an iron hammer. This fellow wasn't easy to handle, mate! Better not argue and thus prevent him getting angry and bothersome, better fetch a mug of wine and send him on his way. Xiao'er went to the back and fetched a mug of wine, and he also threw away the first wine mug.

Second Master Wu gripped the wine mug and ¼Xsh.....¼Xfilled a cup of wine to the brim. Then he looked for the second time: Fine!

What was the trick? It looked like the colour of this wine was fine, a green and clear colour, the flavour attacking one's nostrils, and the fat limpid liquid clinging to the cup. Mmmm! That wine was good! He lifted it up ¼X Gulp!.....Click-click-click

ǐXand let it roll down into his stomach. Yes, but even if the wine was good, he only got three cups. The bowl was big and the mug was small, so now it was already finished! 'No more discussion, just let me ask him to fill up.'

"Xiao'er!"

"Yes, Master!"

"Bring more wine!"

"My goodness, Master, when you have finished these three cups of wine, Your Honour will not be able to walk any further."

CY[2] "Ha, ha! So you are poking fun at an outsider for having no drinking capacity. Even when I have drunk thirty bowls, I shall go straight across the ridge! Fill up!"

"OK!"

There was no way out. Xiao'er immediately filled up. And so by and by, since the rich and wealthy know no limits, five mugs of wine went down the hatch. To tell the truth, the drinking capacity of Wu Song, you see, those five mugs of wine that he had downed, were just right for him, just perfect. Why not stop there? Oh, are you kidding! Wu Song had given his word. 'Just now I said to Xiao'er: "Are you poking fun at an outsider for having no drinking capacity. I can drink thirty bowls and still go straight over the ridge." How much have I drunk now? Five mugs. One mug holds three bowls, three times five ǐX that is fifteen bowls. So I have drunk half of it now. In case I do not drink the other half, but simply walk away, won't that little Xiao'er ask me: "Ah, didn't you say you would drink thirty bowls, why do you only drink half? So you were boasting and bragging!"' Are you kidding! He could not make a fool of himself.

"Hm, fine!"

Actually Wu Song was a much too honest man. Didn't you drink this time, well then Xiao'er probably wouldn't bother! But Wu Song was so very truthful. He had downed three [should be: five] mugs of wine, and now he went on to finish the next five mugs. He was a man who kept his word. Thirty bowls, excuse me, but he wouldn't miss one single one!

"Xiao'er!"

"Master!"

"Bring more wine!"

"Here you are!"

"Fill up!"

"Please!"

One by one another five mugs of wine were served. He had downed ten mugs of wine. How did he take it? Wu Song was not quite himself. He looked like a big red crab in his face, and he had difficulties in talking. His tongue had grown thick.

"Xiao.....Xiao'er!"

"Yes, Master!"

"Bring more wine!"

"My goodness, Master, I think you are joking!"

"Ha, ha! You are poking fun at an outsider for having no drinking capacity, but I shall drink thirty bowls and still go straight over the ridge!"

"Oh, Master, Your Honour has already drunk thirty bowls!"

"Oh, have I really?"

"Sure, sure, sure! Look down there! On this table there are five mugs, and on that table there are five mugs. See? One mug holds three bowls, aren't ten mugs thirty bowls, then?"

"Ha, ha, you were poking fun at an outsider for having no drinking capacity, but I have drunk thirty bowls and I'll still go straight over the ridge. My bill!"

"Oh, sure! Please go to the front to pay!"

Xiao'er fixed the towel on his head.

"Hello! Listen over there! Our guest wants to pay his bill. Four silver ounces and five coppers!"

"Sure!"

Second Master Wu shouldered his bundle, lifted his staff and went over to the counter in front to pay his bill.

Wu Song, Second Master Wu, stumbled and staggered, tottered and staggered forwards towards the counter to pay his bill. When Second Master Wu stood in front of the counter, he placed his staff in front of the counter, took down his bundle and put it on the counter, stuck his hand into the bundle and ¡XSwish! ¡Xtook out his silver-wrapper. When he had opened his silver-wrapper, one could see that inside there were twenty or thirty pieces of silver money. The biggest piece was about two taels, and the smallest were three or four ounces. Second Master Wu deftly fished out one medium piece, and placed it on the counter."

"Weigh this piece!"

"Oh, sure!"

The young innkeeper placed the silver piece on the weight. With his right hand he picked up the string of the weight, with his left hand he regulated the counterweight. He bowed his head and looked at the piece of silver, then lifted his head and looked at the expression on Wu Song's face.

"Ah, Master, this piece of silver of Your Honour's weighs one tae-e-e-.....e-el minus one copper."

What kind of statement was that? Why did he draw out the sound and then break it halfway? How could one imagine that this young innkeeper had bad intentions? When he saw that the man coming over was good and drunk, he wanted to swallow this piece of silver, and so he meant to let a big piece seem like a smaller piece. That silver piece was one tael five ounces and four coppers. How much did he say? One tael minus one copper. One tael minus one copper! Why didn't he say nine ounces nine? Why did he say one tael minus one copper? Oh, this was no joking matter! If you said nine ounces nine, you must beware of your guest having good account of his silver, because then he might immediately start scolding you: "Come on! How could my piece of silver weigh only nine ounces nine? You scoundrels in this inn are after my silver!" When it comes so far and that person starts scolding, you can't answer back. Therefore he said: one tael minus one copper, and drew out the sound of 'one tael', while his two eyes were fixed on the face of Wu Song. If Wu Song kept account of his money, then this Second Master Wu might ask: "Oh, my piece of silver couldn't be only one tael?" Then he could easily steer clear: "Wait a bit, my friend, don't make a fuss! I have something more to add ;Xone tael four ounces and five coppers!" Thus he would steer clear. But at this moment the young innkeeper saw that the face of Wu Song looked quite absent-minded. He guessed that the other man didn't keep account, and so just after saying 'one tael', he changed tack:

"... minus one copper."

Let's take it easy, now! Did Wu Song actually keep account of his silver? How could he? When he set out on his trip, he had received this silver, altogether fifty taels, from Chai Jin, the Lord of Liang, of the Chai estate in Cangzhou, Hebei Province, to cover his travel expenses. On his way he had used up about half of it, and now there were still left twenty to thirty taels. You shouldn't say that Wu Song didn't have a good check on things at that time. Second Master Wu surely had a very good check on things. But at that time he did not keep account. What do you mean by that? He had drunk that wine. After he had drunk the wine, he had momentarily become somewhat muddle-headed, and therefore he did not keep account.

"Is this piece of silver enough or not?"

"Oh, this silver piece of Your Honour's is just a little more than you owe for your bill."

"If there is a little over, please, give it to Xiao'er."

"Yes!"

CY[3]

"Fine! Thanks a lot, Master, excuse me for not seeing you off, Master, please come again early tomorrow!"

At that moment Xiao'er was so happy. Wu Song wrapped up his silver-wrapper and put it in his bundle, shouldered his bundle, held on to his staff, left the gate of the inn, and headed straight from east to west.

At this moment the young innkeeper was standing at the counter, without touching the silver, his two eyes following Wu Song as he left the gate, until he couldn't see him any more. Only then did he take his gaze away and look at the silver piece. He lifted his hand: "All right!" and took it and prepared to put it into his money box. How could one imagine that there would be at the very moment another person standing outside the counter and observing the young innkeeper? Who was that? The waiter, the waiter Wang Er. Wang Er stood besides him and gazed at that piece of silver on the counter. When he saw that the young innkeeper prepared to put the silver piece into his money box, he cried out:

"Wait a bit, boss! That piece is overweight. Our guest said he would give me the surplus. It is only me, Xiao'er, who received the tip. How could you, the owner, receive the tip?"

"You are right, young fellow, this silver piece is overweight. Let me explain to you: This silver piece is worth nine ounces nine. Our guest has dined for four ounces five coppers. You see! I will take this piece of silver, and then I'll return the surplus, five ounces and four coppers, to you."

"No, no, no, boss! Give me that piece of silver! This piece weighs nine ounces nine, our guest dined for four ounces and five coppers, so I'll return the four ounces and five coppers to you to cover his debt."

"Come on, young fellow! Whether you pay me or I pay you, isn't that the same?"

"Oh, no, no, boss! Please give me that silver piece."

"Come on! I take this piece of silver."

"It won't do! You must give it to me!"

"Come on, young fellow! Why do you want this piece of silver?"

"Come on, boss! I cannot get into my head why *you* want this piece of silver?"

"I'll tell you what's the matter. The day before yesterday your sister-in-law asked me to have a silver pin made for her. I don't think that the colour of our local silver is nice, and the road to the city is too long. But I can see that the colour of this piece is certainly not bad, so I plan to take this piece and have a silver pin made for that sister-in-law of yours."

"Come on, slow down a bit, boss! That sister-in-law of mine is a widow, how could she ever have asked you to have a pin made for her?"

"Oh, dear! That's an unfortunate misunderstanding, most unfortunate! Don't be angry, don't be angry! Let me explain, I don't mean the sister-in-law of your family."

"If you don't mean the sister-in-law of my family, then who is it?"

"I'll tell you. I am a few years older than you, so I can be considered your eldest brother, see?"

"Nothing wrong with that."

"Isn't that wife of mine your sister-in-law, then!"

"Oh, that kind of sister-in-law! I thought you meant the sister-in-law of my family."

Just as boss and waiter were standing there and having a heated argument about that piece of silver, somebody else turned up at the door

CY[4] ...

