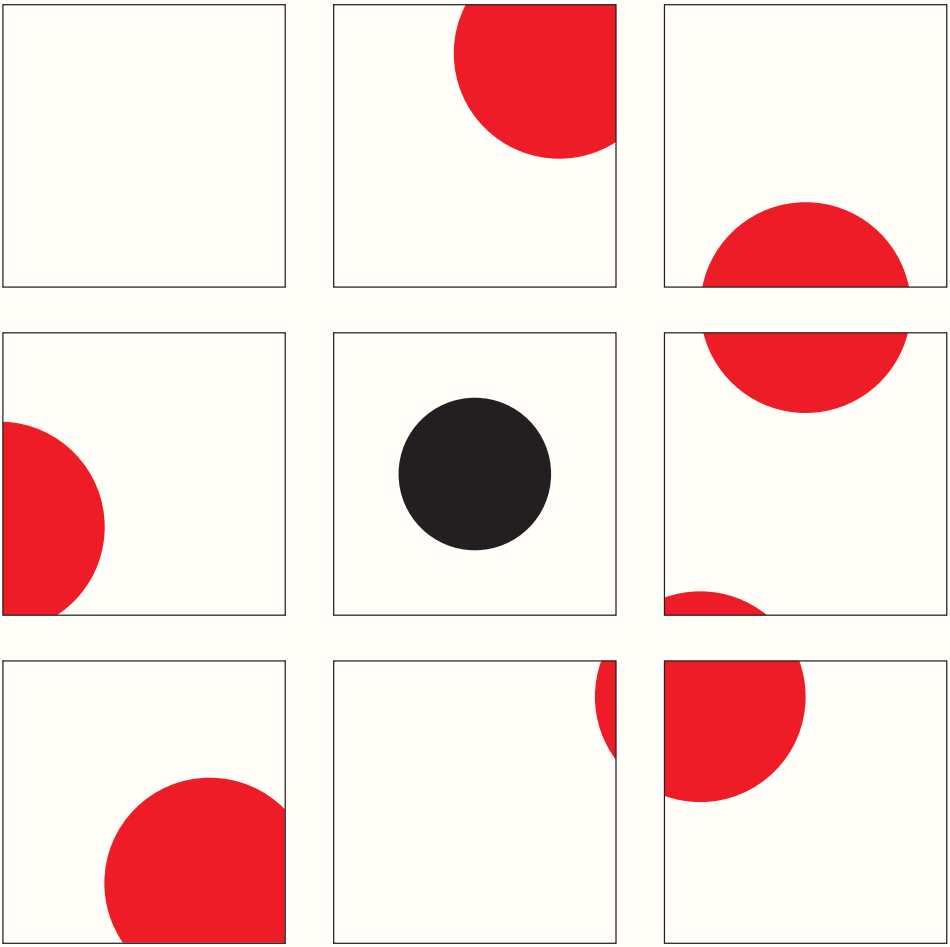
DÁLNÝ VÝCHOD



(eds.)
Tereza Slaměníková
Markéta Koklarová

East Side Story

Papers on Chinese Storytelling by Věnceslava Hrdličková

East Side Story

Papers on Chinese Storytelling

by Věnceslava Hrdličková

Far East Series (Collected Works)
Volume 1

The development and publication of this work was made possible thanks to special support for specific university research granted by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic to Palacký University Olomouc (IGA_FF_2025_047).

1st edition

https://doi.org/10.5507/ff.25.24467030
ISBN 978-80-244-6703-0 (print)
ISBN 978-80-244-6704-7 (online: iPDF)

Palacký University Olomouc

East Side Story

Papers on Chinese Storytelling
by Věnceslava Hrdličková

(eds.)
Tereza Slaměníková
Markéta Koklarová

Olomouc 2025

CONTENT

Acknowledgments

Our deepest gratitude goes first and foremost to the heirs of doc. PhDr. Věnceslava Hrdličková, CSc., who kindly granted permission for the re-publication of her texts. We extend special thanks to V. Hrdličková's grandson, Mgr. Zdeněk Hrdlička, who facilitated contact with the heirs and generously contributed the introductory text.

We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Mgr. Jan Brzobohatý and Mgr. Martina Jemelková, Ph.D. students at the Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, Palacký University Olomouc, for their valuable assistance in the digitalization process and initial proofreading of the texts. Their contributions were essential to the preparation of this issue and are gratefully acknowledged. Our appreciation also goes to Mgr. Klára Adámková from the Interlibrary Loan Service at the Central Library of Palacký University Olomouc for her kind support in collecting English-language papers.

Last but not least, we would like to thank the employees of the Publishing House of Palacký University who made our intention to honor V. Hrdličková's work possible, namely the responsible editor Mgr. Jiří Slavík, Ph.D., the technical editor Jiří K. Jurečka, and the authors of the cover Kateřina Janků and Lenka Wünschová.

Editors
Olomouc, 20 October 2025

EDITORIAL

This book is a collection of academic papers written in English on Chinese storytelling by the Czech sinologist and Japanologist **Věnceslava Hrdličková**. The book continues the tradition that was started within the journal *Dálný východ* [*Far East*]. Specifically, it is the fourth collection in the series, which presents the foreign-language works of a significant Czech orientalist in a comprehensive form.[1]

Chinese and Japanese oral literature, along with the aesthetics of Chinese and Japanese gardens, were the two most important topics of V. Hrdličková's scientific interest. Particularly in the case of Chinese storytelling, she wrote a series of studies in English, a representative selection of which is presented in this collection. It is worth mentioning that, in addition to a careful analysis of primary and secondary sources, they also rely on extensive fieldwork conducted between 1950 and 1954 at various locations in northern China.[2] The collected papers focus on three main topics. The first is the early translations of Buddhist sutras into Chinese literature, exploring how they shaped Chinese narrative traditions. The second topic delves into Dunhuang bianwen, a genre of Chinese literature discovered among the manuscripts in the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang, Gansu Province. The final topic examines Chinese storytellers' techniques, performances, professional training, and organizational structure.

We used the bibliography of V. Hrdličková, compiled by Lucie Olivová, to abstract the list of papers for this collection.[3] The papers are referred to here by their original date in the following list, which is ordered chronologically from the oldest to the newest.

---

1 The first collection gathers texts from Oldřich Švarný (Uher, David and Tereza Slaměníková (Eds.): *Oldřich Švarný: Prosodia linguae Sinensis*. *Dálný východ* 2019, IX(1). Olomouc 2019.), the second from Zdenka Heřmanová (Slaměníková, Tereza and Michaela Frydrychová (Eds.): *Journey to the East: The Lexicon of Chinese language*. *Dálný východ* 2022, XII(1). Olomouc 2022.) and the third from Jaromír Vochala and Žu-čen Vochalová (Slaměníková, Tereza and Martina Jemelková (Eds.): *Gramata Serica Silesian*. *Dálný východ* 2023, XIII(1). Olomouc 2023.).

2 Hrdličková, Věna: The Chinese Storytellers and Singers of Ballads: Their Performances and Storytelling Techniques. *The Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 1968, 3(10), pp. 98.

3 Olivová, Lucie (Ed.): *Věna Hrdličková, Zdeněk Hrdlička: soupis publikovaných prací a přednášek. Bibliografie 1945/46–2002*. Prague 2002.

1958 The First Translations of Buddhist Sūtras in Chinese Literature and Their Place in the Development of Storytelling[4]

1962 Some Questions Connected with Tun-huang Pien-wen[5]

1964 Some Observations on the Chinese Art of Story-telling[6]

1965 The Professional Training of Chinese Storytellers and the Storytellers' Guilds[7]

1968a The Chinese Storytellers and Singers of Ballads: Their Performances and Storytelling Techniques[8]

1968b The Motif of the God of the Hearth and the Division of the Joint Family in Chinese Chap-Books[9]

1981 Tradition and Individual Creativity in the Chinese and Japanese Story-telling[10]

1991 The Significance of The Dunhuang Jiangjing Wen for Chinese Literary History[11]

We have chosen a distinctly reverent adaptation, only interfering with the texts in the technical sense, most often unifying the graphic elements. The adjustments were made in favor of facilitating the reading of the papers.

The input methods of Chinese characters, i.e., sinograms, were limited when the earlier papers were published. It was common practice to provide the Chinese versions of names, terms, or examples in handwritten form at the end of the text. In light of current possibilities, we have typed the originally handwritten sinograms in papers 1958, 1962, 1964, 1968a, and 1968b. Moreover, we put them into the text in places where the numerical references originally were.

The articles were written when significant language reforms were in progress in the P.R.C., including graphic simplification of sinograms. The outcome of these reforms is the List of Simplified Chinese Characters published by the

4 *Archiv orientální* 1958, 26, pp. 114–144.

5 *Archiv orientální* 1962, 30, pp. 211–230.

6 *Acta Universitatis Carolinae – Philologica 3, Orientalia Pragensia* III, 1964, pp. 53–78.

7 *Archiv orientální* 1965, 33, pp. 225–248.

8 *The Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 1968, 3(10), pp. 97–115.

9 In: Oldřich Král and Vlasta Hilská (Eds.), *Charles University on Far Eastern Culture*. Prague 1968, pp. 81–102.

10 In: Fritz Gruner (Ed.), *Literaturen Asiens und Afrikas*. Berlin 1981, pp. 323–327.

11 *Archiv orientální* 1991, 59, pp. 173–180.

Language Reform Committee in 1964. Its practical implementation took time, and there was a transitional period during which both traditional and simplified versions of the sinograms were used. It would be hard to set a strict line between their use, even more so when many references from the time before the simplification were used. For this reason, we refrain from any changes and, in the texts, keep the version provided by the author. However, a different approach was adopted in the complete lists of references we compiled and added behind each article. To maintain a unified version of the repeatedly quoted sources, we provided all sinograms in their simplified version.

The most significant adjustment involved replacing the Wade-Giles transcription with the currently used Hanyu Pinyin in all the texts, except for the last one, where the latter was already applied. In the case of the text 1962, this change was also reflected in the title. The reason for the transfer to Pinyin was practical: younger generations of sinologists are no longer familiar with Wade-Giles.

Except for the already mentioned references, we avoid making any alterations to given word boundaries and to the use of capital letters or a cursive font. However, the interspersed font used in the texts 1962, 1964, and 1965 has been replaced with bold type, as this is the standard way of highlighting today. In addition, we keep the system of how transcribed words are graphically marked and how simple and double quotation marks are used in the original papers. Any interventions in this respect are made solely to ensure a consistent approach throughout the respective paper. Moreover, each text has an internal system of in-text citations that we preserved without any changes. Finally, should we intervene in the text's content, it was solely to correct occasional typos or other errors.

In a few cases, however, we decided to unify the spelling of certain expressions that appeared in older forms, such as story-telling, tea-house, or market-place. These were replaced with their modern equivalents (storytelling, teahouse, marketplace) to ensure consistency and clarity throughout the volume. This change also applies to the title of the text 1964.

Following the current practice, we have supplemented all articles with English abstracts and keywords. This, in other words, means that these were not included in the original papers, but we summarized the most important facts as editors. The exception is the text 1964, in which the original Czech résumé was translated into English. Furthermore, we compiled a list of full references

for the written sources quoted in the papers. As briefly mentioned above, we preferred uniformity throughout the whole book. This means explicitly that, in the list of references we compiled, we not only used simplified sinograms, but also maintained a consistent approach to word boundary notation and capitalization, which may differ from how these elements appear in individual papers. Similarly, we followed a uniform method for transliterating other scripts into the Latin alphabet. Specifically, we used the Library of Congress system (ALA-CL) for Russian and the Hepburn system for Japanese. The format of the citations adheres to the guidelines initially used in the journal *Dálný východ*. This, among others, includes adding English translations to each article, journal, or book title in any other original language.

Although we have made every effort to minimize their occurrence, we apologize for any mistakes we have made in the digitalization and subsequent editing of the original texts. Please send your comments to Tereza Slaměníková, KAS FF UP, tř. Svobody 26, 771 80 Olomouc, Czech Republic.

Věnceslava Hrdličková: A Devoted Pioneer of Chinese and Japanese Oral Storytelling (Field) Research

Zdeněk Hrdlička

The life journey of **Věnceslava Hrdličková (1924–2016)**, who is described by many encyclopaedia entries as **a global pioneer of the idea that oral folk storytelling plays an irreplaceable and vital role in the literary tradition of China and Japan**, was shaped in her early youth.

She was born to the family of the headmaster of a Civic School[1], a convinced social democrat of the First Republic era, in the Prague-Nusle municipality.[2] The idea that the low social class is not all that low and the upper class is not all that high was ingrained in her. (Compared to academician J. Průšek, by erudition a historian most focused on literature in its classical form who saw books as objects which he liked to enjoy, this was a rather fundamental difference.) Her sense of language and Vančura-Čapek-like folkloric spirit was awakened in her by her Czech teacher O. Spalová-Srbová, and the Czech translations of the works of Pulitzer Prize winner P. S. Buck also influenced her.

The meeting with her future husband Zdeněk Hrdlička, with whom she used to read B. Mathesius' paraphrases of ancient Chinese poetry during their first dates and began attending Chinese and Japanese courses led by J. Průšek and V. Hilská, proved fateful.

After the War, thanks to her command of English, Věna (as V. Hrdličková was known to all) decided to respond to the advertisement by the US Embassy in Prague offering scholarships at American universities. At that time, other Czech sinologists tended to stay in Europe thanks to J. Průšek's authority. During her studies at Harvard University, based on the wartime military drill of teaching oriental languages, she not only mastered both Japanese and Chinese at a very good level in a relatively short time, but also forged significant and strong contacts (A. Lévy, R. van Gulik, S. Elisséeff, F. W. Cleaves). J. K. Fairbank's non-elitist orientation and his focus on practical issues, in addition to the number of personal

1 In German Stadtschule or Bürgerschule lasting between four to six years.

2 The biographical data are based on the entry *Hrdličková Věna*, published by the author of the text in the *Biographical Dictionary of the Czech Lands*. Full citation: Hrdlička, Zdeněk: Hrdličková Věna. In: *Biografický slovník českých zemí, sv. 27 Hr–Hüb.* Prague 2024.

friends in China, were sins for which he was investigated and condemned in America for a relatively long time. Despite this, or perhaps precisely because of this, Věna adopted those values as her own. Her encounter with E. Reischauer, a leading world expert on Japanese culture and later a diplomat, was also significant. An equally interesting formative moment was the proclamation of the "New China" in October 1949. The majority of those who then used to promote classical literature and its research in China either left the mainland with Chiang Kai-shek or abandoned the discourse in the first years of communist rule. Since the days of the Cultural Delegation, Věna's strong personal friendships with influential icons of the time, such as the novelist Mao Dun, historian Guo Moruo, Slavist Ge Baoquan, and the author of the *History of Chinese Folk Literature*, published in 1938, Zheng Zhenduo, lasted. Her enthusiasm for everything "folkish", including artists around Beijing's Tianqiao and street folk storytellers, prevailed. She and her husband used to invite various artists to their house in a Beijing hutong called By the Iron Trough and made the world's first unique recordings of their performances on wire-phones. Until then, few people had thought of systematically documenting these fleeting performances. Regrettably, the collected material did not receive much academic acclaim in Prague after Z. Hrdlička revealed its existence in his essay Old Chinese Ballads to the Accompaniment of the Big Drum. Nevertheless, Věna began to study it in detail at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague after her return to Czechoslovakia in 1955.

The dissertation, which she started compiling in 1958, was entitled *Chinese Storytelling*. For its lack of topicality in the Prague environment, where the main task was to translate key works of Chinese classical literature, she was forced to base her thesis, alongside extensive field research, on a deep theoretical base and foreign publications, predominantly in the West. Perhaps that was why she was directed by J. Průšek, who did not approve her work until 1968 and who sought continuation of the ancient classical works and old stories – most likely rooted in the Song period – within the oral Chinese tradition, to the question of even older Dunhuang bianwen, a text which proved essential in her bibliography.[3] As V. Børdahl wrote in 2016:

[3] A full list of publications by the Hrdlička couple can be found in: Olivová, Lucie (Ed.): *Věna Hrdličková, Zdeněk Hrdlička: soupis publikovaných prací a přednášek. Bibliografie 1945/46–2002*. Prague 2002.

"… in the 1950s it was mainly Chinese scholars who undertook fieldwork on contemporary orally performed arts in China. This kind of study was exceedingly rare in Europe and the U.S.A. When Věna delivered her thesis on Chinese storytelling in 1959, this must have been the first on this subject in the Western world. … Věna's articles during the decade 1958-1968 were all substantial contributions to a field of studies that was only in its infancy among Western sinologists." [4]

The end of the 1950s and the entire 1960s found Věna in the sinologically prolific environment of Tokyo, where resided, alongside others, her former pedagogue E. Reischauer, member of the Asiatic Society of Japan – a platform where she and her husband met and became friends with the greats of their time, namely R. van Gulik and N. Fedorenko. Contacts with Russian sinologists bore many palpable fruits, such as her cooperation with B. Riftin on Tunkan fairy tales and her acquaintance with N. Spěšněv. As H. Honcoopová wrote for a special edition of the *Kokoro* magazine compiled on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the resumption of diplomatic relations with Japan in 2017: *"The Hrdlička couple first published their studies on declamatory art forms in Japan in foreign periodicals."* [5] Věna collected material for her work on Tokyo storytellers in the Ueno quarters and in the streets of the old town near the Asakusa Shinto temple, as she recollected about half a century later in her book *Laughter Is My Craft [Smích je mým řemeslem]*. Her Japanese was not tuned to the earthy dialect of storytellers, so she used her son Zdeněk, subject to compulsory education and well acquainted with the properly pithy speech thanks to his boyhood wandering around Tokyo, as an interpreter. Often, his interpreting during performances proved disruptive, and storytellers sometimes used to make fun of it, actively using those "mishaps" to insert anti-foreigner insinuations. The presence of many of the world's leading sinologists in Tokyo enabled the Hrdlička couple to build ties with, for example, German sinologists and thus also promote the work of their colleagues from the homeland outside Czechoslovakia. This proved especially important after the bans on their activities, which many were subjected to after 1968. In this regard, it is important not to forget the revival of sinological and Japanological activities in the United States in the 1970s. At that time, an academic battle broke out on the pages of leading journals over the nature of storytelling, with advocates of

4 Børdahl, Vibeke: In Memory of Věna Hrdličková, 1925–2016. *CHINOPERL* 2016, 35(1), pp. 83–88.

5 Regrettably, the printed version of the issue was not published for various reasons. H. Honcoopová shared its electronic version privately among friends and colleagues.

W. Eberhard using the argument of V. Hrdličková as a global pioneer of field research of Chinese and Japanese storytelling(!). Today's generations of Czech and foreign sinologists and Japanologists might find it inspirational that despite many fundamental academic differences, in both good and the most daring times, there was always extraordinary human concord, friendship, harmony, and mutual practical support between the followers of both schools of thought. In our country, besides his monumental academic work, this was probably the most significant legacy of J. Průšek.

Other close friends of V. Hrdličková from the ranks of sinologists were Z. Heřmanová, L. Hájek, L. Kesner senior, O. Král, O. Švarný, Z. Černá, later also I. Bakešová, and many more, not forgetting the community of Japanologists, Indologists and Orientalists. For Věna, the 1970s were a period of uncertainty and political persecution. So, together with her husband, following in the footsteps of their beloved Chinese poet Su Dongpo, they took refuge in the countryside and until the 1980s, in addition to growing garlic and wine, beekeeping and the art of bonsai, they were fully devoted to their writing, primarily the kind which could at least partially provide them with a living, i.e., children's books *(The Magic Pumpkin [Kouzelná tykev])*, film and television translations *(Goro-Ógon no inu-Golden Dog [Goro, bílý pes])*, and TV scripts *(Judgements of Ōoka the Judge [Rozsudky soudce Ooky])*. In 1981, they initiated the establishment of the Bonsai Club Prague and thanks to their son Stanislav, who mastered the techniques of the architectural craft, they were able to embark on designing Chinese and Japanese gardens in Czechoslovakia, for example, in the Boskovice arboretum. In 1983, their Japanese garden created for the Flora Olomouc festival won a gold medal.

At that time, V. Hrdličková taught Chinese literature, Sinological propaedeutics, and other related subjects at the Institute of the Far East, the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague. There, many close ties started not only with J. Vochala, with whom she wrote university textbooks and other academic texts, but also with many students, including from other fields of studies, of which the most media-gracious include O. Hejma, T. Smetánka, and P. Kolář, in addition to very close friendships with H. Třísková, J. Šrajerová, L. Olivová, O. Lomová, Ľ. Obuchová, V. Liščák and others.

As paradoxically as it may sound, after her politically forced retirement and despite the adversity of fate, she found the much-desired peace of mind around 1988, i.e., just before the Velvet Revolution, thanks to all her extra academic work and support from her peers. Then, she began to fully revive and deepen

her international contacts, for example with the famous folklorist D. Ben-Amos. The success of the publications of *Japanische Gartenkunst [Japanese Garden Art]* and *L'art des jardins japonais [The Art of Japanese Gardens]* allowed the Hrdlička couple to start travelling again and visit their friends in China after a long time in 1988 and 1989. The relaxed nature of their lives at that time is reflected in the epic, yet practical, publication *Emperor Shenzong's China [Čína císaře Šen-cunga]*, published in 1992. Věna's devotion to Chinese literature is also evident in the collection of translations of modern Chinese short stories by various authors on the theme of the Cultural Revolution called *The Voices of Spring [Jarní hlasy]* from 1989. It was the first publication of Chinese literature translations after decades of China being taboo. With the detective *Stories of Judge Ōoka [Příběhy soudce Ooky]*, she encouraged her student O. Lomová, who later became the leading Czech expert in Chinese literature, in her work on *Judge Bao Stories [Příběhy soudce Paoa]*. In 1990, she advocated for the establishment of both the Czechoslovak-Japanese Society and the Czechoslovak-Chinese Society, of which she was the Chairwoman until 2001.

After the Velvet Revolution, her husband declined the post of Czech ambassador to Japan, offered by J. Dienstbier, out of great love for his wife and a desire to make many of her unfulfilled dreams come true. These comprised publishing of previously unpublished texts, closer contacts with both Japan and China, and taking care of their beloved Elbe estate *At the Press [Na Lisu]*; to ensure that during the autumn of their lives they could do everything they had not been allowed to do until then. And it was not a dry autumn, but a fruitful Indian summer – a decade when they once again declared their love for each other through a collection of poems *Ocarina with a Bouquet of Chinese Flowers – Verses for the Married [Okarina s kyticí čínských květů – verše pro vdané a ženaté]* and when they were, thanks to constant diligence and devotedness, able to remain close not only to each other and their family, but also to the general public and the leading authorities in their field of expertise. One of the undisputable peaks of V. Hrdličková's career was the *Oral Literature in Modern China* conference held in Copenhagen in 1996. It was also around that time when L. Olivová, who had returned from Berkeley, began to follow in her footsteps of interest in Chinese storytelling, albeit with a slightly greater focus on Yangzhou, and further developed this line of Czech contribution to world sinology on an international scale.

Although she resigned from numerous honorary positions and reduced her involvement in various organisations after her husband's death in 1999, she immersed herself even more in everyday contemplation and writing. Even under

rather complicated personal circumstances she repeatedly visited China after 2000 when she was in her eighties, to attend the Kunming International Flower Expo, the Yangzhou conference on storytelling, and to take a "backpacker" trip via now-unknown night hard seat trains and sleeper coaches across China from Shanghai through Jingdezhen, Wuyishan, Xiamen, and Guangzhou to the distant hills around the J. Straka's residential city of Guiping.

Thus, even in her mature years, she still managed to please her friends and the general public with books such as *The Wisdom of Ancient China [Moudrost stare Číny]* and *The Most Beautiful Chinese Stories [Nejkrásnější čínské příběhy],* beside numerous essays and articles. She often Skyped with J. Vochala for long hours about Qu Yuan or the issue of F. Stočes's translations of Li Bai raised by some younger, not yet mellowed out, sinologists, some of whom called them *sinoromantics*, believing it was derogative.

The legacy which should be most cherished and emphasised, in addition to compassion, kindness, and grace, is her unprecedented diligence, adamance, and adherence to principles. After all, when she passed away in the winter of 2016, she left a book draft on her laptop about her beloved poet Su Dongpo, with whom she felt a close connection and who accompanied her on her final path.

Acknowledgements:

The author would like to express his gratitude to Alice Lamb for kindly refining the English language of this article.

The First Translations of Buddhist Sūtras in Chinese Literature and Their Place in the Development of Storytelling

Abstract: This study explores the early translations of Buddhist sutras into Chinese literature and their significant role in the evolution of Chinese storytelling. It emphasizes the introduction of the prosimetric form, i.e., an alternation of prose and verse, into Chinese literature. The text is divided into two parts. Part one traces back the translations of Buddhist sutras into Chinese in two time periods: a) from the Han dynasty to the end of the Western Jin and b) from the Eastern Jin to the end of the Sui dynasty. It provides an overview of the early translators of Buddhist sutras and examines the challenges they faced and the methods they used. Among others, this part of the paper demonstrates how the prosimetric form was introduced and adapted and how the blending of Indian and Chinese literary traditions eventually led to a creation of a new narrative style. Part two investigates the manner in which sutras were recited. It points out how the originally simple and strict format of Buddhist sermons was enriched by national elements and unique storytelling techniques.

Keywords: Buddhist sutra, Chinese translation, Chinese storytelling, narrative style, prosimetric form.

Introductory Note

Shuochang wenxue 說唱文学[1] – "stories combined with songs" play an important role in contemporary Chinese literature. They include a great many kinds, varying as regards form, melodies and place of origin. Besides enjoying great popularity among Chinese people to this day, they have also attracted the attention of scholars, such as Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, Sun Kaidi 孫楷第, Zhao Jingshen 趙景深, Li Xiaocang 李嘯倉 and others. In the field of Czechoslovak Oriental studies, J. Průšek who is the well-known pioneer of research in this interesting branch of Chinese literature, has devoted to it several valuable studies.[2]

1 The figures in brackets refer to the List of Chinese names and terms at the end of the article. Editors' note: For clarity, we placed the Chinese characters directly in the text.

2 See "*The Narrators of Buddhist Scriptures and Religious Tales in the Sung Period.*" *Archiv Orientální* 10,

Thanks to this research, and above all to the work of Professor Zheng Zhenduo, it has been possible to reconstruct the whole line of development of the stories combined with songs, in which the turning point was the discovery and proper evaluation of *Dunhuang bianwen* 敦煌變文.

It was Hu Shi 胡適 who showed the important place of the translations of the sūtras in Chinese literature. Zheng Zhenduo then drew the attention to the connection between *Dunhuang bianwen* and the translations of Buddhist sūtras. Between *Dunhuang bianwen* and the translations of sūtras there are two striking points of resemblance: the Buddhist content of some of the *bianwens* and the prosimetric form common to both, that is the alternation of songs with narrative prose. This form is also characteristic of some of the storytelling forms which have been preserved up till the present time, as for example the South China *tanci* 彈詞, with purely secular content, and the moralist *baojuan* 寶卷. Storytelling in prosimetric form also influenced the Chinese theatre, especially the *Yuan zaju* 元雜劇, as well as mediaeval popular stories and novels. If we want to gain a proper understanding of development of *shuochang wenxue* we have to go back to the translations of Buddhist sūtras into Chinese, in which prosimetric form appears for the first time in Chinese literature. The recitals of sūtras were supplemented with oral commentaries and singing as we find it in some of the Dunhuang texts. The content of these texts are excerpts from the sūtras, with explanatory commentaries. And it is just in these commentaries that we find various secular elements. Moreover, among *Dunhuang bianwen* we find several secular and typically Chinese themes.

Our aim will be to show the gradual development of the storytelling forms from the sermon in the temple to the storytelling in marketplaces. For this reason we take as our starting-point the earliest translations of the Buddhist sūtras dating from the Later Han dynasty to the beginning of the Tang period. I would like to emphasize that a great deal of translation work was done and the problems connected with it would require a special investigation. In any case this would take me too far from my original aim which is to explain the origins of *shuochang wenxue*. I shall therefore limit myself to considering the translations solely from the point of view of literature and of their connection with the introduction of the prosimetric form into Chinese literature.

1938, p. 375 et seq. – "*Researches into the Beginnings of the Chinese Popular Novel*," *Archiv Orientální* 11, 1939, p. 104 et seq.

The period of translation of Buddhist sūtras into Chinese is of special interest as providing an instructive example of the influence of a foreign literature – in this case that of India – on Chinese literature. To avoid the danger of overestimating such foreign influence we must bear in mind that every literature reflects the life of the nation that creates it and that correspondences between literatures arise as a result of the similarity of conditions under which they have developed. At the same time we must reject the opposite tendency to minimize such an influence for fear of detracting from the originality of Chinese literature.

In seeking an answer to the question of the introduction of prosimetric form into Chinese literature, we cannot satisfy ourselves with the simple answer that the form came from India. The problem must be studied more broadly and taken into consideration the merging with Chinese elements – especially in the field of poetry and music – and the development of the form to the stage when it became thoroughly national along with the new content, making it possible for the prosimetric form to survive up till the present time. We shall show that this form was not taken over mechanically but that it passed through the modifying medium of creative artistic experience.

Thus we can trace its development from the first translations of the Buddhist sūtras to the rise of the secularized *bianwen*. Here we must point out that the translated sūtras could become a weapon of religious propaganda only if they were made understandable for the common people. This the translations succeeded in doing at least in part and so were able to fulfil their main purpose. Their originally religious content gradually became in the course of the sermons enriched with descriptions and illustrations from daily life, till the religious elements finally receded into the background to make way for the new realistic stories which have left their indelible stamp on the Chinese literary tradition.

Sources:

My main source for the translations themselves was the "*Buddhist Canon*" – *Da Zangjing* 大藏經 and for the identification of individual translations and for information about their authors I used Bunyiu Nanjio's, "*A Catalogue of the Chinese Tripitaka*" (Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1883).

The *Canon* contains two works which are valuable for the light they throw on the work of translation: the first of them is the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 – "*The*

Lives of Honourable Monks"[3] which was compiled in the year 519 by Hui Jiao 慧皎. It contains the lives of five hundred monks from the Later Han to the Liang dynasty. The lives are grouped according to the abilities which distinguished their subjects. They include "translators" – *yijing* 譯經, "wonder-workers" – *shenyi* 神異, "self-tormentors" – *wangshen* 忘身, "the sūtra tellers" – *jingshi* 經師, "those who showed the way through song" – *changdao* 唱道, etc. For our purpose the chapters on translators (*1–3 juan*), the sūtra-tellers and *changdao* (both in *juan 13*) are of special interest. From these we can draw enough material – though not always altogether reliable – not only about the work of the translators, but also about the way in which the Buddhist sūtras were recited.

The other source of similar kind is *Xugaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 – "*The Continuation of the Lives of the Honourable Monks*".[4] It was compiled by Dao Xuan 道宣 in the year 645. The best material is to be found in the chapter entitled *Zake shengde pian* 雜科聲德篇 (*juan 30*).

Of the modern authors Hu Shi devoted to this theme the ninth and tenth chapters entitled *Fojiao de fanyi wenxue* 佛教的翻譯文学 in his *Baihua wenxue shi* 白話文学史 (book 1, chapter 15, page 255–263). Zheng Zhenduo devotes a relatively short chapter headed *Fojiao wenxuede shuru* 佛教文学的輸入 in his *Zhongguo wenxueshi* 中国文学史 (Book 1, c. 255 et seq.) to this problem.

Many scientifically well-founded facts are to be found in the study by Professor Sun Kaidi entitled *Tangdai sujiang guifan yu qiben zhi ticai* 唐代俗講軌範與其本之體裁 included in the book *Lun zhongguo duanpian baihua xiaoshuo* 論中国短篇白話小說. It is especially valuable for the information it gives on the formal aspect of sūtra recitals. To Prof. Sun Kaidi I am also indebted for valuable advice and assistance in my work on this subject and for the explanation of several difficult problems.

I also gained many helpful suggestions from the article by Zhou Shujia 周叔迦, *Mantan bianwen de qiyuan* 漫談變文的起源, published in the magazine *Xiandai foxue* 現代佛学, No. 2, 1954 and from Wang Wencai's 王文才 introduction to the book *Dunhuangqu chutan* 敦煌曲初探. As regards European literature, I was able to draw on the study by M. P. Demiéville "*Les débuts de la littérature en Chinois vulgaire*" in AIB, 1952, p. 536 et seq.

3 See *Da Zangjing, Zhuan jibu* 傳記部, *juan* 慧皎.

4 See *Da Zangjing, Zhuan jibu, juan 30*.

Part one. Translations of the Buddhist sūtras into Chinese from the time of the Han dynasty to the end of Sui

The need to translate at least the most important works into Chinese to facilitate the spread of the new religion, which was in many respects alien to Chinese thinking, faced the enthusiastic propagators of Buddhism during the Later Han dynasty, soon after this religion penetrated to China.

The combination of verse and prose, which we find in the original Buddhist sūtras, was kept to also in the Chinese translations and thus appears, as present research would indicate, in Chinese literature for the first time. This form, as originally in India, was very well suited to the purpose for which it was designed – the propagation in a simple and interesting way of a far from simple religious doctrine. The combination of prose with verse not only helped to add variety to preaching, but also made it more comprehensible, because the verses often repeated the story already recited in prose and vice versa.

Nor was the soil of Chinese literature altogether unprepared for the Indian innovation. At that time there was alive among the Chinese people a very rich tradition of mythical and legendary stories, as is clearly reflected already in such works as *Shujing* 書經, further in the work of Qu Yuan 屈原 and also in the book *Shanhaijing* 山海經. Some affinities with the storytellers' methods are also to be found in some histories, especially *Zuozhuan* 左傳, then in the work of the Han historian, Sima Qian 司馬遷, further in the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 and in the collection *Lienüzhuan* 列女傳. Among the people many historical stories survived in the oral tradition, of which, however, only fragmentary versions have been preserved. We must point out, that it was just these stories, which gradually replaced in prosimetric form those with religious themes, as we can see from some of the secular *Dunhuang bianwen*.

Chinese literature was also in respect of form fertile soil for the seed of foreign influence. Chinese poetry especially was very highly developed. Already in the Han dynasty we can follow the development of five and seven-syllable lines. Characteristic of these verses from the first was their close connection with music, and this, as we shall see, was of great significance for the use of this metre in the translations of the Buddhist sūtras.

And the fact that the verses of the sūtras were interpreted to the Chinese people in the form well-known to them, greatly helped to divest the translations of their alien character and to make them acceptable to popular taste.

a) The Work of the Translators from the Later Han to the End of the Western Jin

This is the first phase of the translator's activity. The task of the first propagators of Buddhism who came to the Han court to introduce the new faith into China, was a very difficult one. They had no material in Chinese from which they could preach, and they themselves knew no Chinese. At first they probably read the texts which they brought with them in the original, they may even have recited the sūtras by heart. Soon of course it became evident that this method was ineffectual for propaganda of a new religion in a foreign country. It thus became a matter of urgency to translate, if only in a very simple form, some of the sūtras into Chinese.

Gaoseng zhuan[5] introduces as the first translator She Moteng 攝摩騰, a monk of Indian origin, from the monastery of the White horse – Baimasi 白馬寺 in Luoyang, who translated the "*Sutra of 42 Chapters*" – *Sishi'er zhangjing* 四十二章經.[6] Tradition has it that this sūtra was brought to China as early as 70 A.D. The whole translation is in prose. The sūtra contains forty-two chapters, in which it presents very briefly the essence of Buddhism.[7]

Among the first translators of Buddhist sūtras into Chinese are An Shigao 安世高, Zhiloujiachen 支婁迦讖 and Yan Fodiao 嚴佛調, from Later Han period. The author of *Gaoseng zhuan*[8] describes in considerable detail the life of An Shigao. Unfortunately he devotes more attention to the different miraculous stories connected with An Shigao than his work and methods as a translator. An Shigao was said to be of princely origin and to come from the present-day Iran. He arrived in China in the year 148 and after studying Chinese for a short time, soon devoted himself with great energy to the work of translation. He is said to be the author of translation of 176 sūtras.[9] Some of his translations are all in prose, as for example *Chang'ahanshibaofajing* 長阿含十報法經.[10] At the

5 Chapter 1, *juan 1*, p. 1.

6 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 678.

7 The fact that this sūtra is not extant in the Sanskrit original leads some scholars to suggest that there was no Sanskrit original and that it was therefore no translation, but a compilation, based on the thoughts from several sūtras. See for example Nanjio, opus cit., No. 678, further Huang Chanhua 黃懺華: *Zhongguo fojiaoshi* 中国佛教史, p. 5.

8 *Juan 1*, chapter *Yijing*, p. 1–2, see also Nanjio, opus cit., p. 381, No. 4.

9 See Nanjio, opus cit., p. 3, No. 4.

10 *Sūtra on the law of ten rewards in the Dīrghāgama*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 548.

same time we find among his translations works also in prosimetric form, as *Fowei'azhiluojiayeshuozita zuokujing* 佛為阿支羅迦葉說自化(read 他)作苦經.[11] The prosimetric form is here quite evident. The verses are in pentasyllabic metre. An Shigao uses the same form also in his translation of *Foshuozishisanmeijing* 佛說自誓三昧經.[12]

The fact that An Shigao made use of this form in his translation is very important, because it shows us, that even the earliest translators did their best to do justice to the literary form of the original. The style of An Shigao's translations is characterized by Hui Jiao as follows: "The sense is clear and readily grasped, his words are suitable and right. They are appropriate, but not flovery. They are simple, but not vulgar."[13]

This valuation is not only just, but shows us that at this time the main demand was for simple and clear translation and the use of a comprehensible language. That it is so will become evident from a very short extract from An Shigao's translation of *Foshuoyinsanmeijing* 佛說印三昧經:[14]

> "Each of the delegated Bodhisattvas flew to the place where Buddha was seated. They all sat down round about (him). Thus all the Bodhisattvas were assembled here. They were as many as the grains of sand in the river Gaṅgā for number. Every grain of sand, a Bodhisattva. Like forty grains of sand from the Gaṅgā, they sat here side by side. Each of the Bodhisattvas was sitting in a natural position on a single large lotus." 各遣諸菩薩者飛到佛所。坐處邊坐。諸菩薩皆會。其數如恒水邊流沙。一沙者為一菩薩如是四十恒邊沙。皆悉。上下相次。一菩薩者自然坐一大蓮華上。

Simplicity and intelligibility also distinguished the translations of An Shigao's contemporary, Zhiloujiachen,[15] who was also a foreigner from Yuezhi 月支. He came to China probably round about the year 147, and he devoted himself to translating the sūtras till the year 186. He lived in Luoyang. His translations also made use of the prosimetric form, as for example in the sūtra

11 *Sūtra spoken by Buddha to Akira* (?) – *kāśyapa on pain caused by oneself or another*, see Nanjio, opus, cit., No. 705.

12 *Sūtra spoken by Buddha on the Samādhi called Tsz'-shi or vow*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 282.

13 See *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan 1*, chapter *Yijing*, p. 1.

14 *Buddhamudrā-samādhi-sūtra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 451, see also *Da Zangjing*, *Fangdengbu* 方等部, p. 67.

15 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 3 and also *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan 1*, chapter *Yijing*, p. 2.

Banzhousanmeijing 般舟三昧經[16] where he uses five and seven-syllable verses. *Gaoseng zhuan* says about his translations that "they give the original meaning without any ornaments."[17]

We may ask how it was possible for foreigners to translate into Chinese the works of such a difficult religion as Buddhism. The answer is to be found at least in part in the description of the co-operation of the above-mentioned Zhiloujiachen with two Chinese scribes, Meng Fu 孟福 and Zhang Lian 張蓮. Zhiloujiachen read the sūtra aloud in Chinese and the scribes put it down in writing.[18] From the names of the scribes we can see that they were not monks but laymen. Their role may seem passive and insignificant, but it was not necessarily so. Chinese was their native tongue and they gave valuable assistance in making the translation more perfect. Here we have the channel through which comparatively early popular elements could find their way into the translations. This fact is of cardinal importance, for it shows that the way in which the translations were done by the foreign monks was not translation in the real sense, but mostly oral interpretation of the text. And in writing it down the most important role fell to the Chinese themselves.

Further proof that the method described above was used in translating the sūtras is documented in the co-operation of An Xuan 安玄 and Yan Fodiao.[19]

An Xuan was a foreigner. His duty was to read aloud the Sanskrit text, which Yan Fodiao – of Chinese origin – wrote down in Chinese. The translations resulting from this cooperation were valued especially for their beauty and accuracy.

The last of the Han translators whom we shall mention here was Zhi Yao 支曜,[20] also from Yuezhi. He lived in Luoyang round about the year 185 and was engaged in translation. Two of his translations are preserved in the *Ming Canon*. His translations also employ prosimetric form, as for example in the sūtra *Foshuo cheng guangmingdingyijing* 佛說成光明定意經.[21] The alternation of prose and verse is very evident here. The verses are in lines of four and five syllables. Of his

16 *Sūtra on the Samādhi, called Pratyutpanna*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 73.

17 See *juan* 1, chapter *Yijing*, p. 2.

18 See *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 1, chapter *Yijing*, p. 2.

19 See *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 1, chapter *Yijing*, p. 2.

20 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 7 and also *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 1, chapter *Yijing*, p. 2.

21 *Pūrṇaprabhāsa-samādhimati-sūtra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 381.

translations it was said that "his words were straightforward, the meaning aptly expressed and without additional ornaments."[22]

As we have seen from the examples cited above, the use of prosimetric form in the Later Han translations is evident and undoubtedly contributed to their comprehensibility and variety. Great merit is also due to the Chinese scribes, who helped the foreign monks to overcome otherwise insurmountable language difficulties.

The form of five and seven syllable metrical lines favoured in these translations remained popular in the *shuochang wenxue* up to the present time.

For translation work of this period is important to note that all known translators were foreigners with the exception of Yan Fodiao, who is described as An Xuan's assistant.[23] The names of the other assistants have not come down to us. In their cooperation with the foreign monks, however, they did a great piece of pioneer work and only thus can we explain that in this early period a great number of complicated religious works was successfully translated into such a difficult language as Chinese.

The unstable conditions in the time of the Three Kingdoms and the Southern and Northern dynasties, when the whole country was troubled by wars, were particularly favourable for the spread of Buddhism. The growing popularity of the religion made correspondingly greater demands on the translators and their ability to present the teachings of Buddha in a way acceptable to the common people.

Well-known among the translators of this period was Zhi Qian 支謙[24] originally from Yuezhi. He came to China towards the end of the Later Han dynasty. After 220 A.D. he fled to the South where he was engaged in the state of Wu as a tutor to the Emperor's son. Hui Jiao praises his wisdom. He was reputed to know six languages and is described as having "eyes yellow as a cat's and although he was very thin, his body was a sack of wisdom."[25] For three decades, from 223–253 he devoted his whole energies to the translations of the Buddhist sūtras. According to the *Ming Canon* he translated 49 works. Of special importance is his translation of the sūtra *Weimojiejing* 維摩詰經,[26]

22 See *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 1, chapter *Yijing*, p. 2.

23 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 9, p. 384.

24 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 18 and also *Gaoseng zhuan*, chapter *Yijing*, p. 3.

25 See *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 1, chapter *Yijing*, p. 3.

26 *Vimalakīrtti-sūtra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 147.

which played an important role in Chinese literature and art, as will be shown later. Zhi Qian also used prosimetric form, as for example in his translation of the sūtra *Foshuo wuliangmenweimichijing* 佛說無量門微密持經[27] where five and seven-syllable verses are inserted into the prose. In *Gaoseng zhuan*[28] his translations are assessed as follows: "The songs acquire sacred meaning. The sentences are beautifully composed and the expressions elegant."

Another translator, Wei Zhinan 維祇難[29] came to China in the year 224 along with the monk Zhu Lüyan 竺律炎 bringing with them the text of *Dharmapada-sūtra* which they translated into Chinese under the title *Fajujing* 法句經.[30] This translation is important because it is in verse throughout. *Gaoseng zhuan* says of it and of Wei Zhinan's arrival in China:

> "Wei Zhinan came to Wu in the third year of the reign of the Emperor Huang Wu, with his companion Zhu Lüyan. They brought with them the Sanskrit text of Tanbojing 曇鉢經. And Tanbo is no other than Fajujing. At that time the people of Wu begged them to translate it. Although (Wei Zhinan) was not yet sufficiently versed in the language of that country (it is China, tr. note), he translated it in collaboration with Lüyan, into Chinese. Yan did not know Chinese well either. Because of this their translation is very imperfect. They tried to preserve the sense of the original. Their words are over simple."[31]

From this we can draw a further conclusion, namely, that not even this imperfect translation, considering the translator's small knowledge of Chinese, could have been made without Chinese help. And that this translation was more under the influence of the Chinese vernacular than of the difficult literary style is apparent from this short excerpt:

> Although you utter a thousand words.
> If the sense of the sentence is not correct, what use it is?
> Does not a single word serve much better,
> which, when you hear it, enables you to mortify all your desires?

---

27 *Buddhabhāsita-amitamukha-guhyadhara-sūtra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 355.

28 *Juan* 1, chapter 1, p. 3.

29 See *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 1, chapter 1, *Yijing*, p. 4, see also Nanjio, opus cit., No. 19, p. 389.

30 See also Nanjio, opus cit., No. 1365.

31 *Juan* 1, chapter 1, *Yijing*, p. 4.

If you express a thousand thoughts,
if they are not correct, what use are they?
Is it not much better to express only one
which if you hear it, can carry you over the see of death?
If you recite many sūtras
and understand not their meaning, what use is it?
But if you understand but one sentence,
you can achieve wisdom.[32]

雖誦千言/句義不正/不如一要/聞可滅意/
雖誦千章/不義何益/不如一義/聞行可度/
雖多誦經/不解何益/解一法句/行可得道

In the time of the Western Jin dynasty lived another notable translator, Zhu Fahu 竺法護,[33] also known as Fahu or Zhutanmoluocha 竺曇摩羅察 which is the phonetic transcription of the Sanskrit Dharmarakṣa. His people were of Yuezhi origin, but had been settled for some time in *Dunhuang*. Fahu travelled with his tutor to the Western regions where he is said to have acquired knowledge of thirty-six languages and different dialects. In 266 A.D. he went to Luoyang, taking with him sixty-five sūtras which he then started to translate. *Gaoseng zhuan* has this to say of his work: "His whole life was spent in doing translation. He worked unweariedly. It is thanks to him that the Buddhist sūtras spread throughout the whole country."[34]

Zhu Fahu's work as a translator was very extensive. The *Ming Canon* contains ninety of his translations, though the total number was over two hundred.

Zhu Fahu's Chinese assistant is known to us by name. It was Zhu's talented pupil Nie Chengyuan 聶承遠,[35] who revised Fahu's translations, as we can see from this quotation: "In the sūtras translated by his master, Hu very often corrected words and sentences."[36]

Nie Chengyuan translated himself several sūtras. Fahu's other assistant was Nie's son, Nie Daozhen 聶道真,[37] who also made some independent transla-

32 See *Da Zangjing*, *Shu Qianpin* 述千品 *6*.

33 See *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 1, chapter *Yijing*, p. 4, and also Nanjio, opus cit., No. 23, p. 391.

34 See *juan* 1, *Yijing*, p. 4.

35 See *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 1, chapter 1, *Yijing*, p. 4, and also Nanjio, opus cit., No. 31, p. 395.

36 See *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 1, chapter 1, *Yijing*, p. 4.

37 See *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 1, chapter 1, *Yijing*, p. 4, and also Nanjio, opus cit., No. 32, p. 395.

tions. Today we cannot, alas, ascertain whether the pupils were not perhaps greater than their master. It is certain, however, that they had a great merit as regards the fluency of Fahu's translations, which *Gaoseng zhuan* evaluates as follows: "His translations, although they make no pretence to be of showy beauty, are very noble."[38]

Among the most interesting of his translations, both as regards form and content, is the *Xiuxing daodi jing* 修行道地經.[39] This sūtra was translated into Chinese in the year 284. It is divided into four parts and thirty chapters. In form this sūtra does not differ in any respect from the later *bianwen*, *baojuan* and the contemporary *tanci*. Narrative prose alternates quite regularly with verses and in comparatively short sections. The verse lines are five or seven-syllable and are in most cases introduced by the formula: And then the hymn says [*yu shi song yue* 於是誦曰].

The following extract from the 9th chapter of the 3rd *juan* called *Quanyi pin dijiu* 勸意品第九, will give some idea of its character:

"(How) to devote oneself to religion and make one's heart pure, of this I once heard told this story: In the olden times there lived a prince, who wanted to choose some wise man in his kingdom to perform the duties of minister. This prince was not only very powerful, but he was also famed for his wisdom. He chose a man who was very wise, intelligent, had a strong will, was strict, but not cruel. His name was Dejuzu 德具足. The prince wanted to try him to find out what his real qualities were and so laid on him very heavy punishment. He ordered his officials to let this man carry a bowl filled to the brim with oil from the northern gate to the southern gate. The man was to carry this bowl through the town twenty li to the park Diaoxi 調戲. The prince commanded that should he spill a single drop, his head would be cut off without mercy.

The hymn says (here follow four seven-syllable verses):

If this man reaches the garden
without spilling a single drop, as I have commanded,
then esteem him as myself.
But if he spills its content on the way, then cut off his head.

When the ministers heard the prince's severe order, they filled the bowl to the brim with oil and gave it to the man. He raised it in both hands, turned very sad and said to himself: – The bowl is full to the brim with oil. In the city there are many people

38 See *juan* 1, chapter 1, *Yijing*, p. 4.

39 *Karyāmārgabhūmi-sūtra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 1325.

and the road is full of carts, horses and onlookers. If the wind blows on the surface of the water, waves rise. And it is the same with a man who has no peace in his heart. – He withdrew into his own thoughts and said to himself: – There is no one who could encourage me and say: – Fear not! – And this bowl is so full of oil, that were I to take only seven steps, I would spill some of its content, much more were I to walk such a long distance. – And so he was very grieved and did not know what to do. Within him he was greatly afraid.

The hymn says (here follow four seven-syllable verses):

I see people, elephants, horses and waggons.
My heart is perturbed as when a strong wind blows upon the water.
I am afraid, terribly afraid that I shall not reach my goal.
How can I possibly fulfil this task!

Our man thought to himself: – Today I shall certainly die. Of that there is no doubt. How could I carry the bowl of oil as far as the garden without spilling a single drop and thus save my life? – So he made a plan. When he saw that nothing could be done about it he had no other alternative but to concentrate on the bowl of oil. If he thinks of nothing he will succeed. And so this man set out at a moderate pace. Hundreds and thousands of officials, soldiers and onlookers without number followed him with their eyes, as when clouds rise and envelop mountain Taishan 太山.

The hymn says (here follow four seven-syllable verses):

The man carried the bowl and his heart was unwavering and strong.
Bordering the road he saw immense crowds of people
who surrounded him and followed him
like a river or great clouds.

When our man had thus set out with the bowl in his palms, the news of it spread everywhere and there was none who did not know about it. Without being called, numberless people thronged the road. They all said that the (man's) dress, his appearance and his movements bore the mark of a man destined to die. When these words reached the ears of his family, and when his father, mother and all his relatives heard about it, they hurried to him and wept broken-heartedly and lamented. But our man concentrated entirely on the bowl nor did he pay any attention to his parents, wife, son or other relatives. With his whole heart he concentrated on the bowl of oil and thought of nothing else.

The hymn says (here follow four seven-syllable verses):

Tears streamed down the cheeks of his son,
in a torrent of words he lamented (the fate of his) father.

But his father was so tensely strained
that he took no heed of his relations and only concentrated on the bowl.

The people round him talked unceasingly. The minister ordered them to make three times as much noise. There was a throng of onlookers, who shouted, ran here and there and when they got where they wanted, they sought one another, knocked one another down, got up again, stamped on one another's feet, so that it was not possible to get through (the crowd). But our man did not allow himself to be distracted and paid no attention to them at all.

The hymnus says (here follow four seven-syllable verses):

People kept making a hullaballoo.
They were running here and there, so that it was not possible to get through the crowd.
But our man carrying the bowl paid no heed to it at all –
as if the storm could not harm him.

The news spread among the onlookers that a woman had appeared, virtuous, beautiful, dignified of bearing, with lovely features and of beauty unequalled in the whole country. She was like a full moon, whose light outshines the stars. Her skin had the texture of a lotus-flower. And thus she made her way along the highroad. Noble of mien and her beauty such that people compared her to the daughter of heaven. She was like an empress, the wife of the Heavenly ruler of the City of Paradise, the city of pure silver. Her name was Huli 護利. There was no one in the whole word, who would not adore her for her virtue and beauty. And today this woman shone in all her glory. Her voice was pure and sweet.

The hymn says (here follow sixteen five-syllable verses):

She moved gracefully and quietly,
she sang and danced without violating a single rule.
She was of a happy disposition
so that she made on all a deep impression.
As she sang the hymns, her voice expressed such longing
and her body rippled like the waves of the sea.
She walked neither too quickly nor too slowly.
She was beautifully dressed
and skilled in all seven tender sounds (of music),
and she knew by heart different stories.
Her body, mouth and mind were pure,
she sang correctly according to the melodies,

her body was adorned from tip to toe
with precious stones and necklaces.
Her language was choice
as dew falling from heaven.

At these moments our man concentrated his whole heart on the bowl. His attention was not in the smallest diverted nor did he even turn his head. All the onlookers said: It is better to take advantage of this moment and look at this woman at the risk of losing one's life, than to live long and never to have seen her. But our man, although he heard these words very clearly, remained concentrated on his bowl and paid no heed to anything else.

The hymn says (here follow eight five-syllable verses):
She was clever and mild,
she could dance exquisitely,
so that everybody was enchanted by her.
She was like the empress of demons.
She was able to move even a man who can divest himself of passion,
not to speak of us, ordinary people.
But our man, by whose side she stood,
remained unmoved and concentrated on the bowl."

This short extract shows that instead of words of deep philosophical meditation we have a story directly created for a crowd of eager listeners, a story full of dramatic tension. From the translation we can at the same time see what part the poetry interspersed among the verses played. Its role was to enrich the story, to make it more colourful and at the same time also help to keep up the dramatic tension. Thus the author did not hesitate to repeat in verses what he had already said in prose. If the verses were omitted, the content of the story would not be in the smallest effected, but such a text would have much less variety.

From the above description of the translation in the period reaching from the Later Han to the end of the Western Jin, we can see that already in the very early period the translation of Buddhist sūtras went through a well-marked development. Characteristic of the translations is the simple language and prosimetric form, features, which were the best guarantee that from these beginnings a rich narrative literature would gradually grow up.

b) Translation in the period from the Eastern Jin till the end of the Sui dynasty

In the 4th and 5th centuries Buddhism made rapid progress, especially under the Wei dynasty, who ruled in Northern China throughout the 5th century. The seed of Buddhism was beginning to bear fruit. Already around the year 450 extensive works were started in the Yungang caves at Datong, where at the Emperor's order, thousands of workers and artists hewed the caves chiselling statues of Buddhist saints and rich reliefs, in which Indian elements clearly mingled with the Chinese. The same process is observable in the translations of the sūtras. They ceased to be novelty and gradually merged with their environments. A positive feature is that the art of translation did not stagnate, but developed further. Thus the translators of this period, especially the famous Kumārajīva, laid stress on more fluent and intelligible language.

Under the Eastern Jin, as under the Western Jin, translation flourished on a wide scale. Nanjio gives the names of sixteen translators[40] while many of them remained anonymous.

Of these translators we shall mention here Qutansengjiatipo 瞿曇僧伽提婆,[41] whose real name was Gautama Saṅghadeva and who came from present-day Kabul. He reached China in the year 383. Only three of his translations have survived. The longest of them is the translation of the sūtra *Zhong'ahanjing* 中阿含經,[42] divided into 60 *juan* which were transposed into Chinese in prosimetric form, with prose prepondering, but in parts also containing poetic passages of some length. The verses are in five and six-syllable lines. Similar in style too, is the translation of the sūtra *Sanfadulun* 三法度論.[43]

The most fertile translator of this period was Zhutanwulan 竺曇無蘭,[44] by origin a foreigner from the Western regions, who lived in China from 381 till 395. The *Ming Canon* has preserved twenty-nine of his translations. These include, for example, *Foshuojizhiguojing* 佛說寂志果經[45] which was translated altogether in prose and concludes with a poem composed in five-syllable verses.

40 See opus cit., No. 397–403.

41 See Nanjio, opus. cit., No. 39.

42 *Madhyamāgama-sūtra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 542.

43 *Tridharmaka-śāstra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 1271.

44 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 38.

45 *Sūtra spoken by Buddha on the fruit of the calm-minded*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 593.

At this time translators were mostly foreigners. Out of sixteen translators eleven were foreigners, while of the five remaining, the Chinese origin of three is doubtful. Two whom we know for certain to have been Chinese are Shi Faxian 釋法顯 and Shi Tuigong 釋退公.[46]

Faxian, the well-known traveller to India, set out in 399 A.D. and returned in 414. After his return he devoted himself, along with the Indian monk Fotuobatuoluo 佛陀跋陀羅[47] to the work of translation. He also translated a number of sūtras independently. Four of them are preserved in the *Ming Canon*.

The translations of sūtras continued to develop during the comparatively short dynasties of the Earlier and Later Qin. Noteworthy among the translations of this period is that of the sūtra *Ayuwangzifayihuaimuyin yuanjing* 阿育王子法益壞目因緣經.[48] It is a long epical poem, translated into Chinese in verses of four syllables. It contains 10,880 characters corresponding to the 343 ślokas in Sanskrit.

An untiring assistant of the translators of this period was the well-known Chinese Shramana Zhu Fonian 竺佛念[49] who was himself the author of several translations. In *Gaoseng zhuan* we find an interesting description of his translation method. Zhu Fonian knew Sanskrit. Later on, when a foreign monk called Sengjiabacheng 僧伽跋澄[50] came to Chang'an, the Buddhist believers asked him to translate sūtras. He however, refused, because he did not know enough Chinese. "Thereupon everybody started to praise Zhu Fonian. So Cheng read the Sanskrit text and Zhu Fonian translated it into Chinese."[51]

Of Zhu Fonian own translations, his translation of *Zhongyinjing* 中陰經[52] is of interest as showing distinct prosimetric form. The verses are mostly five-syllable, as also in his translation of *Chuyaojing* 出曜經.[53]

---

46 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 45 and 50, and also *Gaoseng zhuan, juan 3*, chapter 1, *Yijing*, p. 12–13.

47 See Nanjio, No. 42, p. 399.

48 *Sūtra of the Nidāna or cause of the eye-destruction of Fayi (Dharmavardhana) of the prince of Aśoka*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 1367.

49 See Nanjio, No. 58, p. 405, and also *Gaoseng zhuan, juan 1*, chapter *Yijing*.

50 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 54, p. 404.

51 See *Gaoseng zhuan, juan 1*, chapter *Yijing*, p. 6.

52 *Antarā-bhava-sūtra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 463.

53 *Avadāna-(sūtra)*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 1321.

The best and most famous translator of this whole period however, was the monk Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什 – that is Kumārajīva.[54] Born in Karakar he came to Chang'an in the year 401, being involved in a somewhat long adventure, which was the cause of war between the ruler of the Former Qin dynasty Fujian 符堅 and Karakar. From Karakar his fame as a preacher of Mahāyāna Buddhism spread to China. Fujian wanted to get Kumārajīva by force if necessary and so he sent a military expedition to Karakar to fetch him. The commander of this army, Lü Guang 呂光 conquered Karakar, but here he set up his own kingdom, where he kept Kumārajīva seventeen years. It was not till the reign of the Emperor Yao Xing 姚興 that Kumārajīva finally reached China, where he spent a short but the most fruitful period of his life. In the years 402–412 he devoted himself to translations of the sūtras, of which fifty are preserved in the *Ming Canon*. In *Gaoseng zhuan* Kumārajīva is described as a man who did not give up worldly pleasures. It is said that the emperor sent him eleven concubines and insisted on him accepting them. After that Kumārajīva no longer lived in a monk's cell, but had his own dwelling where he lived in luxury. Speaking of himself he would often say to his pupils: "Take for example the lotus – a flower, which grows in stinking mud. If we pick the lotus we do not take the mud with it."

Even in the case of Kumārajīva all the credit was not exclusively his, because not even he always translated quite independently as the following quotation shows: "When he translated the sūtra *Dapinbanruojing* 大品般若經, he held in his hands the Sanskrit text, which he interpreted aloud (into Chinese), while Xing 興 held the old sūtra, which he compared (with Kumārajīva's words), and more than five hundred other monks, who knew the old text well, examined in detail the sense of his words and then wrote them down."[55]

Here a new feature appears. Some of the sūtras, already before translated into Chinese, were re-translated. The new translations developed a well-defined style more elaborate than that of the earliest simple translations, yet different from the official written style. It was closer to the spoken language and therefore comprehensible to a mixed audience.

As an illustration of how these old texts were revised and improved we quote this description: "When in the old times Zhu Fahu translated *Fahuajing* 法華經, chapter *Shoujuepin* 受决品, he said (in his translation): Heaven sees

54 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 59 and also *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan 2*, chapter 1, *Yijing*, p. 7–9.

55 See Huang Chanhua, opus cit., p. 30.

people and people see heaven. Shi (i. e. Kumārajīva tr. note), when translating this sūtra drew attention to these words saying that, though they corresponded to the original meaning, they were too simple. Rui 叡 replied: What if we should say: people and heaven are in mutual correspondence, one sees the other. Shi said delighted: Yes, that's right!"[56]

The work of Kumārajīva and his pupils is very voluminous. The *Ming Canon* contains fifty translations under Kumārajīva's name, some of them running to dozens of volumes. Among the most outstanding are *Miaofalianhuajing* 妙法蓮華經,[57] *Weimosuoshuojing* 维摩所說經.[58] *Mohebanruoboluomidamingzhoujing* 摩訶般若波羅蜜大明咒經,[59] and others.

All of these translations were widely popular. Nor was it a vain boast when Kumārajīva predicted that after his death, when his body has turned to ashes, his tongue would remain unscathed by fire as a proof of the truthfulness of his translations.[60]

If we study some of the works translated into Chinese in greater detail, we cannot but admire some of their beautiful realistic descriptions. To translate them successfully it was necessary to have a deep knowledge of the Chinese language. An extract from the sūtra *Miaofalianhuajing*, from the 3rd chapter *Piyupin* 譬喻品第三 tells about the children playing in an old house whose "walls are in ruins, the plinths of the pillars are rotten and threaten to collapse". And this house has only one door. All of a sudden fire breaks out on all four sides, so that the whole house is in flames in which children are playing, knowing nothing of the danger. The anxious father, although he could have got out through the only door and saved himself, thinks first of the children and does not want to leave them to perish. So in order somehow to get them out of the house, he tells them to fly. "But the children were enjoying their fun and went on playing. They heeded not their father and did not feel the slightest fear. Nor did they have any intention of leaving. Then the father promised them "carriages drawn by sheep, does and bulls", all of which are waiting for them outside in front of the burning house. The children tempted by this promise rushed out of the door, so as to get all the

56 See *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan 6*, chapter *Yijie*, p. 34.

57 *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 134.

58 *Vimalakīrtti-nirdeśa*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 146.

59 *Pṛajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 19.

60 See *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 1, chapter 1, *Yijing*, p. 9.

things their hearts longed for. The father gave each of this children "a large waggon. The waggon was high and broad. It was loaded with treasures, small bells hung from the sides. Covering the waggon was a sailcloth crusted with stones and pearls."

It is a metaphor in which the children stand for humanity and the loving father for Buddha, who wishes to lead his children out of the burning house – this sinful world.

The passage in prose is followed by a section in verse which supplements the preceding story with rich descriptions and has the same function as in the later *shuochang wenxue*. The following extract will serve as an illustration:

Like the old man
who had an old house
The house is shabby
and broken
The halls and premises are high and lofty,
the plinths of the pillars are rotten,
the beams are ready to fall,
the steps are mouldering away,
the walls are broken,
the plaster is falling down,
the thatch is hanging untidily from the roof.
Roof timbers are yawning apart and falling in,
the veranda round the building is ready to collapse,
dirt all around –
and there inside
lived five hundred people.

Owls, eagles,
falcons, vultures,
crows, magpies, turtle-doves and pigeons,
big ones and small ones, snakes, cobras, scorpions,
reptiles and centipedes,
lizards and millepedes,
weasels, foxes and mice,
all kinds of nasty insects

were running all over the place.
The place stank of their excrements
and it was full of filth.

It was overrun by beetles and other insects.
Foxes, wolves and wild beasts
suckled, chewed the cud, stamped their hooves
and gnawed carrion.
Wolves devoured the flesh with the bones.
Whole packs of pariah dogs went there
and fought for what they could get.
They were hungry, thin and terribly jumpy
and everywhere they scavenged for food.
They fought for the booty
bared their teeth and howled.
It was a terrible house!

This very short extract suffices to show what a wide and deep knowledge of Chinese the translation of Buddhist sūtras called for. Kumārajīva translated, among others, the sūtra *Weimojiesuoshuojing* out of which grew the long *bianwens*, preserved in Dunhuang. The *Vimalakīrtti* sūtra had been translated into Chinese by Zhi Qian in the period of Three Kingdoms. Kumārajīva made a new translation of this very interesting sūtra. – It comprises fourteen chapters which, in their structure, resemble the chapters of a novel. Kumārajīva translated it in three *juan*. It may be worth while, especially considering the important place this sūtra has in Chinese literature and art, to give here some idea of its content and form. The translation is in prose with the exception of two hymns. The first of them is in the first chapter and is composed of seventy two seven-syllable verses. The second one, in the eighth chapter contains a hundred and twenty five-syllabic verses.

The sūtra tells the following story: In the city of Vaiśālī there lived the hero of the story, the noble Vimalakīrtti who, although he did not wear a monk's robe and remained a layman, was an example of all Buddhist virtues. He was so virtuous, that "when he visited gambling-dens, he did so in order to recall the gamblers to the straight way. When he crossed the threshold of taverns, it was in order to lead people away from

their passion for drinking."[61] As another means of accomplishing people's salvation, he allowed illness to come to him and made use of the opportunity when crowds came to ask about his health to preach to them about the ephemerality of the human body. He said to them: "Dear friends, this body is not eternal, has no potency and no power of resistance. It is something that will pass away quickly. It is nothing to be relied upon. It is the source of pain and suffering, it is the seat of innumerable diseases. Dear friends, a wise man never relies on this body. It is like a spray which we can neither catch nor touch. It is like a foam, which cannot keep long. This body is like a flame which on touching water changes its physical character. It is like a banana tree which lacks strength. This body is like a phantom that vanishes, like dream which has no substance."[62]

In such and similar poetical comparisons did Vimalakīrtti speak to the crowds about the ephemerality of the human body. In the meantime Buddha, who was instructing his pupils in the Āmrapālī grove, turned to them and asked them to go to Vimalakīrtti to inquire about his health. And what was his surprise when the best of his pupils refused to go to the sick saint for fear of his scholarly powers of disputation, which at one time or another had put every one of them to shame. The sūtra gives in detail the answers of the eleven pupils.

Ānanda, for example, answered as follows: "Buddha said to Ānanda: You will go to Vimalakīrtti and ask him about his health. Ānanda made reply to Buddha: Most Mighty, I cannot accept this duty and go and ask him about his health. And why not? I remember once when you, Most Mighty, were somewhat ailing and were to drink milk. So I took a bowl and stood at the door of a rich Brahmin. Then Vimalakīrtti came and asked me: Ānanda, why stand you here so early in the morning with a bowl in your hand? – I replied: – Sir, the Most Mighty is a little sick and is to drink milk. That is why I am here. – Vimalakīrtti said: – But just a minute, just a minute, Ānanda, you mustn't talk like this. The body of Tathāgata has the invulnerable quality of a diamond, from which all that is bad, has been excluded and in which all good has been included. How then could he have any kind of illness? How then could he have any kind of grief? Be silent, Ānanda, and do not accuse Tathāgata of wickedness. You should not allow strangers to hear such a nonsense. Do not, I beg you, commit the mistake of letting such talk come to the ears of the mighty gods and Bodhisattvas, who come from the Land of Purity. Ānanda, you have surely heard that the Prince (Cakravartin), although he had not such great merits (as Buddha), did not suffer from any sort of

61 See *juan* 1, chapter 2, *Fangbianpin* 方便品, p. 2.

62 See *juan* 1, chapter 2, *Fangbianpin*, p. 9.

> illness. How much less then Tathāgata, whose luck and perfection are unlimited. Go, Ānanda, and do not bring us to shame. If non-believers or Brahmins were to hear such words, they might think: – How can he call himself a teacher, when he cannot protect himself from diseases. Leave this place quickly in secret, so that nobody hears you. You should know, Ānanda, that the body of Tathāgata is the body of the (Buddhist) laws and is not a sinful body. Buddha is called the Most Mighty and he has gone through all three worlds. His body is free of passions. What kind of disease could such a body suffer? – And at that time, Master, I was completely embarrassed."

All the answers are written vividly and in form of natural conversation like this one. The author makes skilful use of the question and answer form, which enables him to employ dialogue very close to the speech of everyday life. At the same time he uses comparatively simple examples and parallels to explain religious ideas. Kumārajīva in his translation used fluent and easily comprehensible language.

These chapters, in which Buddha asks his pupils to go to Vimalakīrtti, were later on worked up into several *Dunhuang bianwen*.

In the fifth chapter of the sūtra we learn that the only pupil never to have been taken to task by Vimalakīrtti was Mañjuśrī, who is thus able to undertake the difficult task of visiting him. Then the whole splendid procession headed by Mañjuśrī goes to Vaiśālī, where Vimalakīrtti is lying ill in bed. The remaining chapters describe not only the wisdom of Vimalakīrtti, but also Mañjuśrī's ability to hold his own with him in learned dispute.

Most of the explanations of difficult philosophical ideas in this sūtra are in the form of dialogues. The heroes of the story – the Bodhisattvas – are characterized very truthfully, so that they leave a deep impression on the listener. The best of them is the portrait of Vimalakīrtti, for whom the pupils express their deep respect, but the main impression is fear of this uncompromising layman, who always gets the better of the Bodhisattvas.

Under the patronage of the rulers of the Northern Liang dynasty, the work of translation continued to flourish. A number of direct translators – Chinese monks – is now at work. Out of nine known translators, five were certainly Chinese, three were foreigners, while the origin of the remaining one is doubtful. At the same time journeys to Western regions for the purpose of seeking new Buddhist texts become more common. For example, the translator

Juqujingsheng 沮渠京聲[63] left in his youth for Khotan, where he formed a friendship with the Indian preacher Buddhasena and where he learned to recite Sanskrit texts. On his return to China he translated several texts which, however, have not been preserved. The next Chinese monk to go in search of sūtra texts was Shi Zhimeng 釋智猛,[64] who set out for India in 404 A.D. with fourteen companions. Nine of them turned back on reaching Himalayas and one died on the journey. Shi Zhimeng got as far as Pāṭaliputra, where he obtained quite a number of text, returning to China with them in the year 424. After his return he devoted himself to translating but, unfortunately, his translations have not come down to us.

*

Kumārajīva died at the beginning of the 5th century, which saw great progress in this branch of literary activity. At the beginning of the period translation was being done in the south as well as in the north.

One of the outstanding translators of this time was Tan Wuchan 曇無懺.[65] His life is typical of monks who devoted themselves to the translation of sūtras. We shall therefore deal with it in greater detail. Tan was of Indian origin. In his youth he gave proof of unusual intelligence and so his mother, a poor widow, sent him to a monastery to become a monk. The boy was able daily to memorize ten thousand words and he shone especially in philosophical disputations. When he was twenty he already knew by heart two millions words of sūtra text. As he could also predict the weather, his fame spread far and wide. He was invited to China, arriving there in the year 414, and he was immediately asked to translate sūtras. He replied that he could not do so until he had studied Chinese three years. And in fact in these three years he is said to have acquired such a good knowledge of Chinese that he could talk fluently and dictate the translations to the Chinese monks. During his stay in China he once more returned to the West to obtain some more texts, and later on sent his pupils to try and find the missing parts of the sūtra *Dabanniepanjing* 大般涅槃經.[66] Tan's notable achievement is the trans-

63 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 68.

64 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 70, p. 412.

65 See *Gaoseng zhuan, juan 2*, chapter 1, *Yijing*, p. 11, and also Nanjio, opus cit., No. 67, p. 411.

66 *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 113.

lation of *Fosuo xingzanjing* 佛所行讚經,[67] the work of the great Indian poet Aśvaghoṣa. An interesting comparison of the Chinese translation with the Sanskrit text has been carried out by E. Wohlgemut.[68] E. Wohlgemut points out the deviations in the Chinese text from the Sanskrit original, which may be mostly attributed to the use by the translator of a different variation of a Sanskrit text than the one which we have now. These deviations are, however, of no great importance. On the whole we can say that, although this translation did not attain the high artistic level of the original, it had a wide influence and enjoyed great popularity among the Buddhist believers. This translation was in verse throughout. A number of other translations by Tan, as for example the *Dafangdengdajijing* 大方等大集經,[69] show definitive prosimetric form. The alternation of prose with verse is here very common and some of the rhymed sections are of considerable length. The verse lines are of seven, five or four syllables.

From the period of the early Song a whole group of translators is known to us.[70] Ten of them are of foreign origin, three of Chinese, five are probably Chinese, while the origin of one is unknown. The greatest volume of work, to judge from what is preserved in the *Ming Canon*, falls to the translator Qiunabatuoluo 求那跋陀羅[71] known in China as Gong Dexian 功德賢.

Under the rule of Northern and Eastern Wei, too, there was a number of translators, mostly of foreign origin. One of the most active of them was Putiliuzhi 菩提流支[72] who came from North India to China in the year 535. With the help of Chinese assistants he translated more than thirty works. Well-known is his translation of *Jingangbanruoboluomijing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經[73] in prosimetric form. Of the remaining translators of note belonging to this period, we may mention Ji Jiaye 吉迦夜[74] and his translation in prosimetric

67 *Buddhacarita-kāvya (sūtra)*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 1351.

68 See E. Wohlgemut: *Über die chinesische Version von Aśvaghosha Buddhacharita*, Berlin, Inaugural-Dissertation, 1916, 76 pages.

69 *Mahāvaipulya-mahāsannipāta-sūtra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 61.

70 See Nanjio, opus cit., p. 414–419.

71 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 81, p. 416 and also *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan 3*, chapter *Yijing*, p. 17.

72 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 114, p. 427 and also *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan 1*, chapter *Yijing*, p. 86.

73 *Vajrachedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 11.

74 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 110, p. 426.

form of *Fufazangyinyuanjing* 付法藏因緣經[75] where verses are mostly of five syllables.

We shall mention only very briefly the translation work done during the Sui period. From these years Nanjio notes six translators, of whom not one is of Chinese origin. Of these the translator with the largest output was Dunajueduo 闍那崛多,[76] a native of Gandhāra. In the *Ming Canon* thirty-six translations are attributed to him. Definitely prosimetric form is employed, for example, in his translation of the sūtra *Dafangdengdajixianhujing* 大方等大集賢護經.[77] The verses are translated in seven-syllable lines.

And now a few brief observations on the language of these translations. Demiéville[78] makes this critical comment: "The Chinese translators worked out for the translations of the Sanskrit Buddhist sūtras a special language, which was not altogether the language of the vernacular, but differed at the same time from the literary language in vocabulary, syntax and still more in its easier rhythm, more natural than that of the Chinese written language."

This assessment is very just. The reason why the translators could not take over the literary language has been made clear above. Of main importance was the audience for whom these translations were designed. This was the general public and not merely the narrow circle of literati, who at that time produced literature in the fossilized style of *pian'ouwen* 駢偶文, where content was subordinated to form. The style was of no use to translators who had to serve practical needs. In spite of that, they also took over some of the features of the *pian'ouwen* style, but in a vulgarized form. The language of the translations went through a certain development, from a very simple diction to the style of translation represented by Kumārajīva, when the translators set themselves high artistic standards.

In conclusion we may say that the translations of the Buddhist sūtras introduced new and interesting features into Chinese literature – the most important being the prosimetric form – but that from the very beginning they absorbed a number of purely Chinese elements. Thus was initiated the fertile merging of Indian and Chinese influences, the translations gradually

---

75 *Sūtra of the record of the Nidāna or the cause of transmitting the Dharmapiṭaka*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 1340.

76 See Nanjio, opus cit., No. 129, p. 433.

77 *Mahāvaipulya-mahāsaṉnipāta-bhadrapāla-sūtra*, see Nanjio, opus cit., No. 75.

78 See "*Les débuts de la littérature en Chinois vulgaire*," p. 566.

lost their alien character, became domesticated and prepared the soil for the growth of the rich literary form of the *shuochang wenxue*.

The Indian influence here represents a fruitful impulse, which very soon assimilated itself to Chinese conditions. In this process the method of translation was of first importance: the translator – a foreigner – usually translated the original text into Chinese orally, while Chinese scribes corrected his Chinese and put down his translation in writing. These scribes were not of course Confucian literati, but apparently simpler folk who were not so much bound by tradition and were closer to the people.

Important, too, was the selection of the sūtras. Works which enjoyed the greatest popularity, were such, where the philosophy of Buddhism was represented in the form of realistic stories, in parables and metaphors instead in the form of abstract theoretical treaties.

It should also be noted that very soon the translations of the sūtras formed only a basis for the sermons. The monks and especially the less educated ones, started to alter and adapt the sūtras in order to increase their popularity among the listeners. Thus the sermons were again enriched with new Chinese elements, an aspect to which we shall devote attention in the following chapter.

Part two. The Recitation of Buddhist Sūtras from the Earliest Times till the Tang Dynasty

If we are to gain complete picture of the way in which the Buddhist sermons became increasingly popular and moved more and more away from a strictly religious basis, we must look more closely at the manner in which the sūtras were recited. Comparatively early the translations of the sūtras provided only the core of the sermons, to which new elements were added. It was above all the music, accompanying the songs, then the explanations of the different parts of the sūtra in the preachers own words and, finally, the narration of independent stories with religious themes. Such sermons then became very popular among the masses.

At first the form of Buddhist sermons was very simple and strictly laid down. The preacher took his place on a raised platform, paid honour to Buddha and started to sing the introductory hymn. Then followed the recitation of

the sūtra. In conclusion he again sang a hymn, made obeisance to Buddha and slowly and with dignity descended the platform.[79]

The believers also met at special meetings, where they repented their sins, called on the name of Buddha, bowed their hands in adoration etc.

Even at this still quite simple stage the propagators of Buddhism came up against the difficulty of introducing into China the Buddhist hymns, called *fanbai* 梵唄 which were sung in India to prescribed religious melodies with instrumental accompaniment. It would have seemed quite simple just to take over the music as it was. But the question was more complicated as we learn from the old sources. It was very difficult to apply the more simple phonetic values of Chinese to music originally composed for Sanskrit.[80]

The best solution of this problem and the one that was adopted was to create new music which of course was under strong foreign influence. The first composer of music to accompany the *fanbai*, is according to tradition Cao Zhi 曹植,[81] but it is more probable that the creation of new melodies was not the work of one man, but was the result of a longer development. Later the hymn melodies were divided in China into two sections – *fanbai* and *zhuandu* 傳讀[82]. *Fanbai* were the introductory hymns accompanied by wind and string instruments, while the singing of the hymns and verses of the sūtras – more chant or recitative than songs – were called *zhuandu*.

To be able to fulfil his duties well, the monk had to be not only good reciter, but also an accomplished singer. In *Gaoseng zhuan*[83] we have many allusions to what was required of the reciters of the sūtras and which of their accomplishment were most highly esteemed. So, for example, speaking of Bo Faqiao 帛法橋 (p. 74) it is said that from his youth he had a passion for reciting sūtras, but was not very successful. All at once, after seven days fasting, his throat opened and he was able to sing so that his voice could be heard far and wide. Of the

79 See Sun Kaidi: *Lun zhongguo duanpian baihua xiaoshuo*, p. 72.

80 See *Gaoseng zhuan, juan 13, Jingshi*, p. 76, where we find the following comment: "The sounds of Sanskrit are very rich, while those of Chinese are very simple. Were we to use Indian music to accompany Chinese words, then there would be too much of music and the singing of the hymn would be difficult. If we should use the Chinese music for recitation of Sanskrit, then there would be too little music for the words. Thus it was that the sūtras were translated, but the Indian music was not introduced (to China)".

81 See *Gaoseng zhuan, juan 13*, chapter *Jingshi*, p. 76.

82 See Wang Wencai: *Introduction to the book "Dunhuang qu chutan,"* p. 15.

83 See *juan 13*, chapter *Jingshi*, p. 74–76.

other famous reciters it was Zhi Tanyue 支曇籥 (p. 74) whose voice is described as being especially pure, resounding on all four sides and returning as an echo. Also noted for his beautiful voice was the monk Zhi Zong 智宗 (p. 75), who was such a skilled reciter that, at the night sermons, when the "snakes of sleep" appeared, he had only to start reciting and no one felt tired any more.

Even if the preacher used every means to hold the attention of the audience, it was not possible to do so with entire success so long as the believers did not fully understand the meaning of what was sung. In the sūtras there were many new thoughts and expressions which called forth questions among the listeners, who no doubt often turned to the preaching monk for explanation. And thus the sermons were enriched by new elements.

As to the performance of such sermons valuable material exists in *Gaoseng zhuan*, chapter *Jingshi* and *Changdao* and in the *bianwen* also called *jiangchang jingwen* 講唱經文 found in the Dunhuang caves, especially the three fragments about Vimalakīrtti.[84] (A detailed analysis of these text will follow in a special study.) Although these texts were written at a later period, they show very clearly how the Buddhist sermons developed. The texts in question are composed of regular sections, each containing a quotation from the sūtra followed by its explanation in prosimetric form. These texts are concrete, written records of popular sermons, of "reading and singing sūtras", as practised during the Tang dynasty. From certain allusions in *Gaoseng zhuan* it is evident, however, that this "reading and singing of sūtras" existed already in an earlier period.

About this we can form the following picture: at first the preacher probably explained the difficult passages himself and he may also have answered questions given to him directly by the listeners. This of course was possible only when there were not too many people present. But the duties of the preacher were many – he had to recite, sing, explain and answer questions, so that soon it was found to be too much for one person. Probably already from the beginning of the fifth century two persons usually took part in the explanation and recitation of the sūtras – it was the *fashi* 法師 – the master of Buddhist laws and the *dujiang* 都講[85] – the preacher, – he was usually *fashi's* pupil.

---

84 See *Dunhuang bianwen huilu* 敦煌變文彙錄, p. 29 et seq.

85 Both these terms occur, for example, in *Gaoseng zhuan*, chapter *Yijue*, *juan* 4, p. 24, where in the description of the life of the monk Zhi Dun 支遁 it is said: "In the evening he left Shanyin to recite the *sūtra Weimojie*. Dun was *fashi* and Xu Xun 許詢 *dujiang*." See also Sun Kaidi, opus cit., p. 105, where there are further references to the existence of the *fashi* and *dujiang*.

The *fashi* sat during the sermon on the left side, known as *fazuo* 法座 – "the place, where the laws are explained", on the right side sat the *dujiang* and his seat was called *jingzuo* 經座 or *changjing zuo* 唱經座, "the place where the sūtras are sung".[86]

The *fashi* besides explaining the sūtras had also to answer questions put by the *dujiang*. These questions were called "*nan*" 難 and the answers "*tong*" 通.[87] The explanation of the sūtra given by the *fashi* was another new element in the sermons. As long as it was given by highly educated priests it could not endanger the strictly religious spirit of the whole sermon. But as soon as it got into the hands of less well educated monks, it gave them a good opportunity for their own descriptions and comparisons taken from real life and thus the penetration of secular elements was greatly facilitated.

Besides the *fashi* and the *dujiang*, an important part in the ceremonies connected with the sermons was taken by the monk known as the *changdao*. Originally the ritual at the sermons prescribed prayer, but soon this proved to be too tedious and monotonous for the believers.[88] To revive their interest when it was flagging a monk was invited who could sing to them in the middle of the ceremony, when the listeners were tired and sleepy "and through the singing about Buddhist laws open the heart of the people."[89] He told them about "causes and effects", "about the circle of life and death", about the meaning of the sermon. His performance was, as we can imagine, successful. The attention of the listeners was captured and the ceremony could go on. Soon some of the monks went in exclusively for *changdao*. The author of *Gaoseng zhuan* devotes the whole final chapter to them, although he feels it necessary to excuse himself for giving so much attention to such a small and unimportant art, which however, as he says is very popular (p. 78). In comparison with the other features of the religious ceremony this element of *changdao* was the newest and gave the greatest scope to storytelling talents among the monks and the opportunity now and again to introduce some secular theme into the narration.

Such a performance of the *changdao* is vividly described by the author of *Gaoseng zhuan*: "The monks of all four grades concentrated their thoughts,

86 See Sun Kaidi, opus cit., p. 107–108.

87 See Sun Kaidi, opus cit., p. 115.

88 See *Gaoseng zhuan, juan 13*, chapter *Changdao*, p. 78.

89 See *Gaoseng zhuan, juan 13*, chapter *Changdao*, p. 78.

folded their hands and were silent. Then the preacher ceremoniously lifted the censer. His speech was melodic, his argumentation vivid, his words without end. When he talked of the spirit which comes in the time of death everybody trembled with fear, when he talked of hell, everybody shed tears. When he preached about past causes, everybody saw the past rise up before him. When he talked about future consequences, everybody began to anticipate the rewards which await him. When he talked about joy, everybody was happy. When he spoke of sad things, everybody wept and was filled with grief."[90]

Thus at a very early stage we see that distinct narratory elements are present in the performances of the Buddhist monks. We do not know exactly what form *changdao* took at first, but we can presume that they were composed in prosimetric form from the description of the main qualifications which were required of a monk performing *changdao*. He had to have *sheng* 聲 – voice, *bian* 辯 – the ability to dispute, *cai* 才 – talent and finally *bo* 博 – wide knowledge. "He who has no voice cannot hold the attention of the listeners. He who cannot dispute, cannot cope with a situation, who has no talent, his words are of no use, and he who has no wide knowledge, has no proper foundation for his preaching."[91]

The main qualities which were required of the *changdao* were also those which were later characteristic of the storytellers in the Song marketplaces, who had to recite fluently as when "a small ball runs over a board", or "as when water is poured into a cup."

Thus the Buddhist sermons gradually came closer to the common people. One of the reasons was that preaching was entrusted to less scholarly monks simply because more and more preachers were needed. In any case the common folk did not demand such erudition from the preacher, but had his own requirements which the monks, if they wanted to satisfy their audience had to respect. It was above all the demand for comprehensible and interesting subject-matter and not least was the enjoyment derived from the pleasant music.

In *Gaoseng zhuan*[92] we read that the patterns of the musical melodies composed, according to tradition, by Cao Zhi were changing all the time. Many of them were interpreted incorrectly, so that gradually the original basis was entirely lost. The religious melodies began to merge with secular folk melodies,

90 See *juan 13*, chapter *Changdao*, p. 78.

91 See *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan 13*, chapter *Changdao*, p. 78.

92 See *juan 13*, chapter *Jingshi*, p. 76.

especially melodies from the region of Zheng 鄭 and Wei 衛[93] and thus during the Tang period there was no longer anyone who could compose music of an exclusively religious character. This penetration of folk melodies into the singing of sūtras was an important factor in the popularisation of the sūtras. What, however, was to the liking of the common listeners, did not please the noble and scholarly monks, and so the author of *Xugaoseng zhuan* also talks of the decline of the recitations.[94] He reproaches the singers for their fondness for the melodies of Zheng and Wei and for the careless way in which they took over this free music, in which there is much that is vulgar and secular and so brings confusion into the people's minds instead of showing them the right way.

The original *fanbai* then came to be called *tianyin* 天音 – heavenly music – or *baizan* 唄讚 or *gezan* 歌讚, a meaning a "hymn of praise".[95]

In *Xugaoseng zhuan*[96] the melodies are grouped according to their place of origin, and we can assume that the purely religious music was by then entirely lost. The author of *Xugaoseng zhuan* describes the melodies of different regions and points out the main differences especially between northern and southern melodies.

Though the Buddhist authorities observed with satisfaction the growing influence of Buddhism, they no doubt realized the danger of too great popularisation of the sermons for their greater tendency to break away from the religious basis. Therefore five errors were enumerated for the monks to avoid: it was a mistake for the monk 1. to sing in too enthusiastic voice, 2. to arouse among the listeners a love for his own voice. 3. It was also a mistake when the laity started to imitate him and 4. when the song did not leave in people solemn feelings but on the contrary 5. brought confusion into their hearts.[97]

From this we can see that the higher Buddhist priests looked with disfavour on the acting of the priests during the singing of hymns and recitations of sūtras. But they were also aware that these preachers were gaining new adherents for the Buddhist faith. And so at this stage, they did not make any special prohibitions as far as the manner of preaching was concerned and

93 See Sun Kaidi, opus cit., p. 66.

94 See *juan 30*, chapter *Zake shengde pian*, p. 59.

95 See Zhou Shujia, opus cit., p. 13.

96 See *juan 30*, chapter *Zake shengde pian*, p. 60.

97 See Sun Kaidi, opus cit., p. 73.

gave the monks a comparatively free hand. The educated monks looked on the *fashi* and *changdao* with a good deal of contempt, but this only drove the common monks into closer contact with the people. It is certain that the explanation of the sūtras became increasingly free and that for example two or three sentences of the sūtra, themselves quite comprehensible, were explained in a flood of words, sometimes entirely irrelevant to the original text.

Xugaoseng zhuan severely criticised the performance of the *changdao* saying that they were insufficiently educated and that they were sometimes even vulgar: "When they talked about the free manners of beautiful women, so it may even induce men and women to elope. Common people may be moved, by this, but good monks will stop their ears and educated people will feel cold at heart."[98]

It is of course natural that the monks had to adapt their preaching to the kind of public to which it was addressed.[99] In preaching to monks their aim was to evoke in them pious thoughts. In preaching to educated people their style must be elegant and learned. While for the common people such stories they could readily understand were the most suitable.

In conclusion we may say that the main characteristic of the Buddhist sermons in the period extending from the Later Han to the beginning of Tang, was gradual departure from their original simple and strict form and the constant penetration of national elements, especially through the medium of music and the oral explanation of the text of the sūtras. Special storytelling features too, were introduced into the performances of the *changdao*.

Up to the beginning of the Tang dynasty the development had not yet gone so far as to necessitate the expulsion of the preachers from the temples. The ties between the newly developing forms and religion became increasingly loose and very soon the time came when the religious sermons developed purely secular forms as in some of the *Dunhuang bianwen*. Thus a new literature and art was born on Chinese soil.

98 See *juan 30*, chapter *Zake shengde pian*, p. 59.

99 See *juan 30*, chapter *Zake shengde pian*, p. 59.

References

DEMIÉVILLE, Paul M.: Les débuts de la littérature en Chinois vulgaire [The Beginnings of Vernacular Chinese Literature]. *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* [Proceedings of the Meetings of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres] 1952, 96(4), pp. 563–571.

HU Shi 胡适: *Baihua Wenxue Shi* 白话文学史 [The History of Vernacular Literature]. Shanghai 1928.

HUANG Chanhua 黄忏华: *Zhongguo Fojiaoshi* 中国佛教史 [The History of Buddhism in China]. Shanghai 1947.

NANJIO Bunyiu: *A Catalogue of the Chinese Translation of the Buddhist Tripitaka*. Oxford 1883.

Pinjia Jingshe Xiaokan Da Zangjing 频伽精舍校刊大藏经 [Pingjia Jianshe Edited Buddhist Canon]. Shanghai: 1909–1913.

PRŮŠEK, Jaroslav: The Narrators of Buddhist Scriptures and Religious Tales in the Sung Period. *Archiv orientální* 1938, 10, pp. 375–389.

PRŮŠEK, Jaroslav: Researches into the Beginnings of the Chinese Popular Novel. *Archiv orientální* 1939, 11, pp. 91–132.

SUN Kaidi 孫楷第: *Lun Zhongguo Duanpian Baihua Xiaoshuo* 论中国短篇白话小说 [On the Chinese Short Stories in Vernacular Language]. Shanghai 1953.

WANG Wencai 王文才: Introduction. In: Wang Erbei 任二北 (Ed.), *Dunhuang Qu Chutan* 敦煌曲初探 [A Preliminary Study of Dunhuang Songs]. Shanghai 1954.

WOHLGEMUT, Else: *Über die chinesische Version von Aśvaghosha Buddhacharita* [About the Chinese Version of Aśvaghosha Buddhacharita]. Berlin 1916.

ZHAO Jingshen 赵景深: *Dagu Yanjiu* 大鼓研究 [Research on Ballads Accompanied by the Big Drums]. Shanghai 1936.

ZHENG Zhenduo 郑振铎: *Zhongguo Wenxueshi* 中国文学史 [The History of Chinese Literature]. Peking 1932, 4 vols.

ZHENG Zhenduo 郑振铎: *Zhongguo Suwenxue Shi* 中国俗文学史 [The History of Chinese Popular Literature]. Peking 1954, 2 vols.

ZHOU Shaoliang 周紹良 (Ed.): *Dunhuang Bianwen Huilu* 敦煌変文汇录 [The Anthology of the Dunhuang Bianwen]. Shanghai 1955.

ZHOU Shujia 周叔迦: Mantan Bianwen de Qiyuan 漫谈变文的起源 [A Discussion on the Origin of Bianwen]. *Xiandai Foxue* 现代佛学 [Modern Buddhist Studies] 1954, 2.

Some Questions Connected with Dunhuang Bianwen

Abstract: The paper discusses the challenges in defining *Dunhuang bianwen* as a literary genre. First, it reviews the history of the existing bianwen collections, highlighting their contributions to the field. The disputable content of these collections opens a discussion about which Dunhuang texts are supposed to be designated *bianwen*. Unfortunately, only a limited number of rolls have maintained the original designation. Considering this, the paper identifies content as an additional classification criterion. Moreover, it points out the significance of the prosimetrical form. Consequently, it emphasizes that some other literary forms must be considered while investigating *bianwen*. In light of this, the article provides a list of texts that can be categorized as either *bianwen* or other Dunhuang texts that are closely related to them. The second part of the article introduces the plurality of approaches used by different scholars while defining the literary genre of *bianwen* and provides a new insight into the issue.

Keywords: Chinese Buddhist literature, Dunhuang texts, *bianwen*, narrative, prosimetrical form.

Dunhuang bianwen 敦煌變文 often briefly described as *huaben* 話本 – it is handbooks of texts for narration of either sacred or secular content – are very important Chinese literary documents. They not only contribute to the knowledge of the development of narratives combined with song – *shuochang wenxue* 說唱文學, but also throw light on certain features of the short story, of the folk novel and of the folk drama.

The discovery of *bianwen* has helped to fill in an appreciable gap in the history of Chinese literature. Nevertheless, although more than half a century has passed since then, these important and valuable texts have not yet been adequaly investigated.[1] The reason is probably that not till recently were the principal texts

[1] Before this article appeared in print a very valuable book by Arthur Waley, *Ballads and Stories from Tun-huang*, George Allen and Unwin LTD 1960 was published. It contains the English translations

reprinted in an edition which would satisfy the requirements of scholars. The original texts are deposited mainly in three different libraries – in the Peking Library (*Beijing tushuguan*), in the British Museum and in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris. Prior to 1954 the *bianwen* were published occasionally in periodicals except for several pioneering and now not easily accessible publications from which the following are the most important: Luo Zhenyu's 羅振玉 *Dunhuang lingshi* 敦煌零拾, published in the *Luoshi qianyinben*, 1924. Luo Zhenyu was the first to reprint fragments of four texts, which he termed *foqu* 佛曲, and which are known under the titles: *Weimojie wenjipin bianwen* 維摩詰問疾品變文, *Xiangmo bianwen* 降魔變文, *Huanxi guowang bianwen* 歡喜國王變文 and *Ji Bu Ge* 季布歌. From further works there is the already more comprehensive collection edited by Liu Fu 劉復: *Dunhuang duosuo* 敦煌掇瑣 published in 1925 by *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan* in 2 vols., which contains the texts deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, copied by Liu Fu during his stay in Paris. It consists of 104 fragments of texts of all kinds. Among the *bianwen* here texts with secular themes predominate. Another pioneering work is the collection *Dunhuang shishi xiejingtiji yu Dunhuang zalu* 敦煌石室寫經題記與敦煌雜錄, compiled by Xu Guolin 許國霖, 2 vols., published by Shangwu yinshuguan, Shanghai, 1937. The first volume of this publication contains over 400 collected manusript notes made by copyists and commentators of Dunhuang texts. The second volume reproduces 12 *bianwen* texts, the originals of which are in the Peking Library.

The growing interest in folk literature prompted the endeavour to compile a new colection of *bianwen*, which came out in China in 1954 under the designation *Dunhuang bianwen huilu* 敦煌變文彙録, of which Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 was the editor. It was brought out by the publishing house Shanghai chubangongsi. There are 36 texts in this collection. In 1955 a second revised and enlagred edition was published. The book *Dunhuang bianwen huilu* though it contributes to a basic acquitance of the reader with the *bianwen*, cannot serve as a basis for research work owing to the uncritical reproduction of the texts without notes, even though in the second edition some of the shortcomings of the first one were corrected. Two years later a valuable addition to the literature on *bianwen* appeared with the comprehensive two-volume collection: *Dunhuang bianwenji* 敦煌變文集 edited by Wang Zhongmin 王重民, Wang Qingshu 王慶菽, Zhou Yiliang 周一良, Qi Gong 啓功, Zeng Yigong 曾毅公 and Xiang Da 向达, published by the Renminwenxue chubanshe. The texts are provided with

of important Dunhuang texts.

rich glossaries and notes and it is the most satisfactory publication to appear so far in this domain of literary research.

The task of compiling a selection conforming to the requirements of scholars is particularily difficult, not only because the texts are not easily accessible, but also because the reconstruction of the ancient often not well preserved rolls calls for a comprehensive knowledge of the Tang language and of the social and historical background. Here must be stressed that the textual criticism in the collection *Dunhuang bianwenji* is carried out (with the exception of minor blemishes) with thoroughness and accuracy and is the work of qualified specialists. We have, however, certain critical reservations as regards the choice of the texts and their classification and certain opinions put forward by the editors on the basic questions relating to *bianwen* as a literary genre.

Above all, it has not yet been laid down with precision which of the large body of Dunhuang texts can be really called *bianwen*, nor has the exact and exhaustive definition of this literary genre been so far formulated.

In seeking for a solution to these problems I should suggest that first of all we should select from the Dunhuang texts those which are designated *bianwen* in the original manuscripts. This first and in my opinion essential step has so far been neglected and, in fact, we meet with the tendency to call all Dunhuang literary rolls *bianwen*. This is the case, for instance, in the collection: *Dunhuang bianwenji*. Included among *bianwen* are also texts which, in the original rolls are designated either *fu* 賦 – for instance *Han Peng fu* 韓朋賦 P 2653[2] or *shi* 詩 – for example *Ye Jingneng shi* 葉淨能詩, S 6836, or *ci* 詞, see for instance *Xianü ci yiben* 下女詞一本, P 3350 and others. This only adds unnecessarily to the difficulty of finding an accurate definition of true *bianwen*. On the other hand, however, the publication of these texts with critical notes is highly recommendable, for it helps to give us a picture of how rich and varied was verbal folk art in the Tang period.

Besides manuscripts bearing one or other of their original designations, whether *bianwen* or *fu*, *shi* or *ci*, a large body of fragments was found in Dunhuang without designation. Most of these texts, rightly or wrongly, are included in the category of *bianwen*. The rolls in which the original designation, *bianwen*, has been preserved are relatively few. Insofar as the accessible material is known to me, they comprise the following:

[2] P 2653 is the index number of the Dunhuang text, P is abbreviation for Pelliot and (in other instances) S for Stein. In Peking Library the index number consists from one Chinese character and number, as for example *chengzi* 成字.

1. Theme: *Xiangmo*

Texts:
a) *Xiangmo bianwen yijuan* 降魔變文一卷, S 5511, nine lines, including title.
b) *Xiangmo bianwen yijuan*, without number and with the designation at the end. Together with text a) it forms one roll torn into two parts. Prosimetrical form.
c) *Xiangmo bian yijuan*, S 4398, lines 1–41 with title.

2. Theme: *Mulian* 目連

Texts:
a) *Damu qianlian mingjian jiumu bianwen bing tu yijuan* 大目乾連冥間救母變文并圖一卷, S 2614. The text is complete. The title is noted at the beginning and at the end. The latter runs: *Damujianlian bianwen yijuan* 大目犍連變文一卷. The text is in prosimetrical form.
b) *Damuqianlian mingjian jiumu bianwen yijuan*, P 3107, in prosimetrical form.
c) *Damuqianlian bianwen yijuan*, *Beijing yingzi* 北京盈字 76. The beginning is missing, the designation is at the end. In prosimetrical form.

3. Theme: *Baxiang* 八相

Texts: *Baxiangbian* 八相變, *Beijing*, *yunzi* 雲字 24. The title itself is missing, but the designation *Baxiangbian* is on the back of the roll, which is otherwise blank. In prosimetrical form.

4. Theme: *Pinposuoluowang* 頻婆娑羅王

Texts:
a) *Pinposuoluowang hougong cainü gongdeyi gongyang ta shengtian yinyuanbian* 頻婆娑羅王后宮綵女功德意供養塔生天因緣變, S 3491. The end is missing. In prosimetrical form.

5. Theme: *Pomo* 破魔

Texts: *Pomo bian yijuan* 破魔變一卷, P 2187. Designation at the end of the text. At the beginning, it is designated *Xiangmobianshi yazuowen* 降魔變示押座文. In prosimetrical form.

Manuscripts of secular content:

1. Theme: *Liu Jia taizi* 劉家太子

Texts: *Liu Jia taizi bian yijuan* 劉家太子變一卷, P 3645 – designation at the end of the text. At the beginning of the text: *Qian Han Liu Jia taizi zhuan* 前漢劉家太子傳. The text is exclusively in prose.

2. Theme: *Shunzi* 舜子

Texts:
a) *Shunzi bian* 舜子變, S 4654 – fragment. Only the first part of the manuscript is preserved. It contains the original title. Prose throughout.
b) *Shunzi zhixiao bianwen yijuan* 舜子至孝變文一卷, P 2721. The second part, which though it links up with a) is obviously not of the same origin. The designation is at the end. The text is in prose, but concluded with two poems.

3. Theme: *Hanjiang Wang Ling* 漢將王陵

Texts:
a) *Hanjiang Wang Ling bian* 漢將王陵變. Text originally in the possession of Shao Xunmei 邵洵美, now in the Peking Library. In prosimetrical form.
b) *Hanjiang Wang Ling bian*, S 5437, in prosimentrical form.
c) *Han banian Chu mie Han xing Wang Ling bian yipu* 漢八年楚滅漢興王陵變一鋪, P 3627. Designation at the end of the roll. This roll is one of the three parts into which a single roll is torn, the parts being catalogued under numbers: P 3627 [1], P 3867 and P 3627 [2]. The text is in prosimetrical form throughout.

Thus in the category of religious themes texts' treating of five different subjects are preserved and the secular category comprises three subjects. The different themes are then often treated in several variants, which points to the considerable popularity they must have enjoyed. In the original designations the term *bianwen* occurs in our survey six times and the term *bian* nine times. The religious texts are written in a very characteristic prosimetrical form, which is reminiscent of translations of Buddhist sūtras into Chinese. The same form is adopted for *bianwen* of secular content: *Hanjiang Wang Ling bian*.

I think that this preliminary narrowing down of the texts to those that are undeniably *bianwen* being as such designated in the original titles will to some extent pave the way for further research.

The second step then will be to add to them those texts which though not actually bearing the designation on the original roll, may from their form and content be held to be *bianwen*.

Here I should list the following texts:

Religious themes:

a) *Taizi chengdao bianwen* 太子成道變文, P 3496, prosimetrical form
   ditto S 4480, short fragment, prose only
   ditto S 4128, short fragment, prose only
   ditto S 4633, short fragment, prose only
   ditto S 3096, short fragment, prose only
b) *Mulian bianwen* 目連變文, Peking, *chengzi* 成字 96, prosimetrical form.
c) *Diyu bianwen* 地獄變文, Peking *yizi* 衣字 33, prosimetrical form.

Secular themes:

a) *Wu Zixu bianwen* 伍子胥變文, P 3213, beginning of the story *Wu Zixu bianwen*
   ditto S 6331, short fragment
   ditto S 328, main body of the story
   ditto P 2794, similar to S 328
   All texts are in prosimetrical form.
b) *Meng Jiangnü bianwen* 孟姜女變文, P 5039.
c) *Li Ling bianwen* 李陵變文, fragment, Peking Library, not numbered, prosimetrical form.
d) *Wang Zhaojun bianwen* 王昭君變文, P 2553, fragment, prosimetrical form.
e) *Zhang Huaishen bianwen* 張淮深變文, P 3451, fragment, prosimetrical form.
f) *Qiu Hu bianwen* 秋胡變文, S 133 rhythmic prose.
g) *Dong Yong bianwen* 董永變文, S 2204, all in verse. (This form, too, was evidently intended for singing and narrating. The verses only, however, have been recorded in writing, while the prose was improvised and added by the storyteller.)
h) *Zhang Yichao bianwen* 張義潮變文, P 2962, prosimetrical form.

Summing up we may say that the texts which we can call authentic *bianwen* are both of religious and secular content, and that the majority of them are written in a characteristic prosimetrical form.

Let us first of all pay attention to the fact, that *bianwen* are written in a form, which consists of alternation of verse and prose. From it developed a characteristic literary genre – narratives combined with song – whose development

we can follow in the Chinese literary tradition uninterruptedly from the Tang period up to the present day.

If we take prosimetrical form as the main criterion for our further selection of texts belonging to the body of *bianwen*, we see that among the Dunhuang rolls have been preserved, in addition to those enumerated above, a group of unusually interesting texts written in this form. They differ from the above-mentioned religious *bianwen* in that that they contain direct quotations from sūtras, which are then expounded in verse and prose in such a way as to make them understandable for the uneducated listener. These texts are usually called – texts for the exposition of the sūtras – *jiangjingwen* 講經文, after the title of the text P 3808 *Changxing sinianzhong xing dianying shengjie jiangjingwen* 長興四年中興殿應聖節講經文. This text is in prosimetrical form and contains quotations from the sūtras.

Other rolls of the same character, but without original designation, are:

b) *Jingang banruo boluomijing jiangjingwen* 金岡般若波羅蜜經講經文, P 2133 with quotations from the Diamond Sūtra. Several quotations from the sūtra are introduced by the typical storyteller's formula – *changjianglai* 唱將來 – now we shall start to sing.
c) *Foshuo Amituojing jiangjingwen* 佛說阿彌陀經講經文, with quotations from The Amida Buddha Sūtra, P 2931. Prosimetrical form.
d) *Foshuo Amituojing jiangjingwen*, S 6551. A somewhat different way of quoting sūtras. Prosimetrical form.
e) *Foshuo Amituojing jiangjingwen*, P 2955, short fragment, prosimetrical form.
f) *Foshuo Amituojing jiangjingwen*, 3 rolls of the same content, P 2122, P 3420 and Peking *yinzi* 62 殷字六十二号.
g) *Miaofa lianhuajing jiangjingwen* 妙法蓮華經講經文, P 2305. Quotations from the Lotus Sūtra are introduced with: *Changjianglai.*
h) *Miaofa lianhuajing jiangjingwen*, P 2133. Quotations from sūtra are introduced with: *Changjianglai*. Prosimetrical form.
i) *Weimojiejing jiangjingwen* 維摩詰經講經文, S 3872, prosimetrical form. Quotations from the Vimalakirti Sūtra are introduced with: *Changjianglai.*
j) *Weimojiejing jiangjingwen*, S 3872, prosimetrical form. Quotations from sūtra are introduced with: *Changjianglai.*
k) *Weimojiejing jiangjingwen*, P 2292, prosimetrical form. Quotations from sūtra are introduced with: *Changjianglai.*

l) *Weimojiejing jiangjingwen*, P 3079 and Peking *guangzi* 94 光字九四. Prosimetrical form. Quotations from sūtra introduced with: *Changjianglai*. The designation at the end of the Peking roll runs: *Chishijing di'erjuan* 持世經第二卷.

m) *Wenshu wenji diyijuan* 文殊問疾第一卷. This is the original designation at the end of the roll, which is usually referend to as *Weimojiejing jiangjingwen* (see, for instance *Dunhuang bianwenji*, p. 632). The original text was the property of Luo Zhenyu. Prosimetrical form. Quotations from sūtra are introduced with: *Changjianglai*. At the end of the roll there is the same designation as at the beginning.
(In the *Dunhuang bianwenji*, included among the *jiangjingwen*, is text P 323, which is entirely in verse. It is nearer in character, however, to *yazuowen* 押座文).

n) *Foshuo guan Mile Pusa shangsheng Doushuaitian jing jiangjingwen* 佛說觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經講經文, P 3093, prosimetrical form.

o) *Fumu enzhongjing jiangjingwen* 父母恩重經講經文, P 2418. Prosimetrical form. At the end the designation: *Yousu diliu* 誘俗第六.

p) *Fumu enzhongjing jiangjingwen*, Peking, *hezi* 12 河字十二号. Prosimetrical form. Quotations from the sūtra are introduced with: *Changjianglai*.

q) *Taizi chengdaojing yijuan* 太子成道經一卷, P 2999. The original designation is preserved and the text represents a transitional form between *jiangjingwen* and *bianwen*. It alternates verse and prose, does not quote the sūtra directly, but we find in it the typical *changjianglai*. Identical in content are rolls S 548, S 2652, P 2924, P 2299, S 4626 and Peking *qianzi* 80 潜字八十号.

r) *Wuchangjing jiangjingwen* 无常經講經文, P 2305. Almost all in verse, with only short prosaic passages interspersed.

——

In listing the texts which we wish to make subject of our investigation, we must also take into consideration those rolls designated *yuanqi* 緣起, which do not differ in form from *bianwen* of religious content. The designation *yuanqi* occurs among the Dunhuang rolls in connection with the following texts:

a) *Mulian yuanqi* 目連緣起, P 2193.

b) *Huanxi guowang yuan yibenxieqi* 歡喜國王緣一本寫起. This designation is noted at the end of the text. The roll was originally divided into two

parts – the first part being in the possession of Luo Zhenyu. Now it is deposited in the Shanghaishi wenwu baoguan weiyuanhui. The second part is in Paris under cat. no P 3375.

c) *Chounü yuanqi* 醜女緣起. This is the title of text P 3048. Almost identical with it are four more texts. Of these, text S 2114 is entitled *Chounü jingangyuan* 醜女金岡緣. The others are: S 4511, P 3592 and P 2945. Text P 3048 has the following interesting note at the end: *Shanglai suoshuo choubian* 上來所說醜變. – Thus was told the story (*bian*) on the ugly woman.

Finally, we may number among the *yuanqi* the text (without original title) *Nantuo chujia yuanqi* 難陁出家緣起, P 2324.

An important feature in the recitation of *jiangjingwen* and *bianwen* were the short verse introductions – *yazuowen*. We mention them because they contribute to our picture of popular interpretations of sūtras.

Yazuowen, originally so entitled:

a) *Weimojing yazuowen* 維摩經押座文, S 2440, two copies on the same roll. Other identical texts: P 3210, S 1441, P 223.
b) *Sanshen yazuowen* 三身押座文, S 2440.
c) *Baxiang yazuowen* 八相押座文, S 2440.
d) *Wenshi jing jiangchang yazuowen* 温室經講唱押座文, S 2440 and the identical text P 3210.
e) *Zuojie senglu dashi yazuowen* 左街僧錄大師壓座文, S 3728.
f) *Gu Yuanjian dashi ershisixiao yazuowen* 故圓鑒大師二十四孝押座文, S 7 and the identical rolls P 3361, S 3728.
g) *Yazuowen* P 2044.
h) *Xiangmo bianshen yazuowen* 降魔變神押座文, P 2187 – this is the title on a text which is designated at the end *Pomo bianwen*. The designation *yazuowen* relates to the introduction which precedes the *bianwen* proper.

The two remaining *yazuowen* are without original title:

a) *Yazuowen*, S 4474.
b) *Buzhi ming yazuowen* 不知名押座文, P 3128.

— —

We have thus delimited the larger body of texts which we may call *bianwen* and the other Dunhuang texts closely related to them. These we may divide into two principal categories:

1. Texts of religious content.
2. Texts of secular content.

The first category would then contain the following sub-divisions:

a) Texts quoting sūtras – *jiangjingwen*.
b) Texts without quotations from sūtras – *bianwen* and *yuanqi*.
c) Versified introductions – *yazuowen*.

As the form of the texts included under the heading *bianwen* and other Dunhuang texts closely related to them, is with only a few exceptions (most notably the verse *yazuowen*) the same, i.e. prosimetrical, we shall make the subject-matter the principal criterion in grouping them. This is the procedure adopted by Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (see *Zhongguo suwenxueshi* 中國俗文學史, published by Zuojia chubanshe, Beijing, 1954, 2 vols., vol. 1, p. 205) and Zhou Shaoliang (see op. cit., p. XII). Zhou Shaoliang sub-divides the first category into the following three groups: a) texts with quotations from sūtras, b) texts without quotations from sūtras, the verse being introduced by some fixed formula such as *dang er zhishi* 當爾之時 and under c) texts of essentially the same character as those grouped under a) and b), but without in introductory formula preceding the verses. I consider this third group unnecessary, as there is no basic difference in the texts and suggest their being bracketed with those under b).

We come across a rather different approach to the problem of grouping *bianwen* in the collection *Dunhuang bianwenji*. Here grouping is carried out, as already mentioned, on the basis of the inclusion of a very wide body of texts from Dunhuang, regardless of their inherent differences of form and content and not considering the prosimetrical form to be one of the main distinguishing features of *bianwen*. The editors of the collection divide the texts which they all call *bianwen* into two main categories (see op. cit., p. 1); 1. historical tales (*lishi gushi* 歷史故事) and 2. Buddhist tales (*fojiao gushi* 佛教故事). The historical tales are further subdivided according to the form into those written in a) prosimetrical form, b) in prose and c) in dialogue. The Buddhist tales are grouped under a) tales about Buddha, b) exposition of sūtras in prosimetrical form and c) Buddhist tales in general.

As regard this basic grouping, I would point out that the use of the term – historical tales – is not accurate. A much more suitable designation is – secular tales –, in contrast to religious or, still better, Buddhist tales. There are, namely, among the historical tales in the *Dunhuang bianwenji* several which are undoubtedly *bianwen*, but which draw on contemporary events for their subject matter (Zheng Zhenduo calls them *jinwen* 今聞 – topical tales, see op. cit., p. 252). An example is *Bianwen on Zhang Yichao*. In addition, grouped along with historical tales, are in the book also texts written in dialogue form, such as *Cha jiu lun yijuan* 茶酒論一卷 and *Xianü fuci* 下女夫詞, which are neither historical tales nor are they *bianwen* in the strict use of the term. At the same time I support the view that, considering the close and demonstrable connection between *bianwen* and Buddhist expositions of sūtras, Buddhist tales should form the first category and secular tales the second one. Here, however, we are faced with a deeper problem: What is the origin of the *bianwen*? Secular – or did these texts develop from expositions of sūtras? The compilers of *Dunhuang bianwenji*, while not giving a formal answer to this question, indicate by their groupings that they incline to the view that *bianwen* are of secular origin and that they consider the influence of Buddhist literature to be of secondary importance. One of the editors – Xiang Da – puts forward in his introduction to this collection of Dunhuang texts a number of important questions (see p. 4): In what period did the *bianwen* become popular? Did they originate in the temples or did this kind of combined narrative and song exist previously among the people? And at once he adds that it is difficult, owing to the lack of material, to find the answer to these questions.

We cannot, however, quite agree with this view. In our opinion, Xiang Da and his collaborators have unnecessarily complicated matters by giving too broad connotation to the term *bianwen* and have not drawn an accurate enough line between true *bianwen* and texts having the form of prose stories, or of long *fu* or of dialogue. It is obvious that many prose pieces preserved in Dunhuang are tales designed more for reading than for telling. In the texts written in dialogue form, we can then follow the transition to drama, while true *bianwen* were a specific form, different from these, though closely connected with them. Let us attemp now, taking as our starting-point the typical features of the above delimited body of texts, clear up the relation of *bianwen* not only to the Buddhist expositions of the sūtras but also to the Chinese tradition of verbal art.

The *bianwen*, as we find them recorded in writing in Dunhuang, date from the Tang period and also partly from the beginnings of the Five Dynasties. Zheng Zhenduo (see op. cit., vol. 1, p. 268) lays down, as the outside limits of this period, the beginning of the reign of the Emperor Xuan Zong (713–756) and the seventh year of the reign of the Emperor Zhen Ming (921 A.D.). The determining of the period when *bianwen* flourished is made easier by the fact that some of the texts are dated in notes added by the copyists or revisers (see, for instance, the text *Jingang banruoboluomijing jiangjingwen*, P 2133, or *Weimojiejing jiangjingwen*, P 2292). The earliest *bianwen* and other texts found in Dunhuang are separated by more than three centuries from the oldest Dunhuang texts, while the dates of the last Dunhuang texts correspond roughly to the dates of the last *bianwen*.

It should be remembered too that the *bianwen*, as they have come down to us, are not from the brush of the original authors, but mostly – and especialy the *jiangjingwen* – are the work of copyists, whether monks or laymen, who copied them with the same purpose as they copied sūtras, namely, as a pious act that would help them to the fulfilment of their wishes. Besides, it is evident that there were also professional copyists in Dunhuang. The latter worked for a fee, being commissioned to make copies of sūtras and other religious texts for those who wished, without personal exertion, but for a sum of money, to acquire merit. A number of rolls found in Dunhuang even note the fee was paid to the copyist. Among the reasons that prompted believers to make or have copies made were, for instance, husband's sickness or the desire to return from a distant place to one's native village. Some notes written on the rolls show that the copying of sūtras was an act of piety executed in some cases with the greatest care, the text having been collated twice or thrice with the original. Side by side, however, with these carefully copied rolls are other texts which are very negligently copied – among them several *bianwen* – with many wrong or artificially constructed characters where the copyist was unable to read the original. The authors of these copies were probably monks with little education or semi-illiterate women devoted to the Buddhist faith. (See Introduction to the book *Dunhuang shishi xiejingtiji yu Dunhuang zalu*.)

Bianwen were thus written and copied in the course of two centuries – from the middle of the eight to the middle of the tenth century of our era. Prior to this period we have no proofs of the existence of similar literatury creations under the title *bianwen* and the term itself disappears with the closing of the Dunhuang caves, although the form continues under different designations in

varying kinds of folk storytelling up to the present day. What then were *bianwen* and what was the meaning of this special term?

The views of scholars are not unanimous in their interpretation of the term. Zheng Zhenduo (see op. cit. p. 190) explains – *bian* – as a verb with the meaning of – to change –, so that – *bianwen* would mean something like – a changed text –, in the sence of – to change the original religious text to popular expositions – *sujiang* 俗講. Zheng Zhenduo notes in this connection the existence of the term – *bianxiang* 變相, the name given to paintings on walls or on scrolls preserved in Dunhuang. On the same analogy, he explains – *bianxiang* as – sūtra changed into pictures –. Professor Sun Kaidi 孫楷第 holds a different view (see *Lun Zhungguo duanpian baihua xiaoshuo* 論中國短篇白話小說, published by Tang di chubanshe, 1953, pp. 1–2). He does not explain the meaning of the word – *bian* – as – to change –, but as – unusual, special –. According to Sun Kaidi, *bianwen* are thus texts which narrate something unusual or special. A similar view is evidently shared by Zhou Shaoliang (see op. cit., pp. X–XI), who states without further explanations that *bianwen* signifies – verbally explained strange stories in the sūtras.

The question of *bianwen* has also attracted the interest of Japanese scholars. Professor Naba Toshisada 那波利貞, for instance, assumes that the main purpose of *bianwen* was to serve as a verbal accompaniment to, or commentary on, the pictures known as *bianxiang* (see *Zoko to henbun* 俗講と變文, *Bukkyo shigaku*, nos. 2–4, Showa 25, published by Bukkyo shigakukai, p. 104). He explains – *xiang* – in the word – *bianxiang* – as meaning the same as – *renxiang* 人相 – and – *bian* – as equivalent to – *bianhua* 變化 –. As a Buddhist term the designation *bianxiang* was originally used only for the picture of Buddha, but later came to be used in a wider sense for the depicting of other circumstances and incidents, but always bearing some relation to – *bian* –, change –, that is, to various events forming the content of the stories about Buddha. A similar explanation to that given by Prof. Naba is offered by Kanaoka Terumitsu 照光金岡, namely that *bianwen*, as Chinese equivalent to the Sanskrit – parinnama – (in the sense of – stories about the life of Buddha or about the life of other saints (see Kanaoka Terumitsu *Chugoku bungakushi kenkyū hōhō no ichi mondai* 中國文學史研究方法の一問題 published by Junshin joshi tanki daigaku p. 34). *Bianxiang* is then the Chinese equivalent for the sanskrit – mandara – picture of Buddha and of the stories of his life. – (The painting of mandara was particularly widespread in Tibet and in Mongolia.)

Thus both Japanese authors agree with the view of Zheng Zhenduo that – *bian* – has the meaning – to change –, but differ in respect of what it is that changes. According to scholars Naba and Kanaoka – *bian* – relates to the changes in the flow of events, that is to the different episodes, while Zheng Zhenduo relates it to a change in form – a change of the original sūtra into a story or into a visual representation. Here it is of interest to recall the view of Prof. Pelliot, which is basically in agreement with Naba's. J. Průšek quotes Pelliot in his work – Researches into the Beginnings of the Chinese Popular Novel –, *Archiv Orientální*, 11, 1939, – in connection with his use of the English translation of the term *bianwen* as – changing texts – (p. 104 et. seq.): "I doubt that *pien-wen* is altered texts. Of the meaning of *pien* and *pien-hsiang* for the scenes illustrating episodes of Buddhist sūtras and the Japanese use of the term *hengo*. The Buddhist use is the most ancient one and may apply to – episodes – as a transitory aspect of a permanent truth."

The author of the article – *Hen to henbun* 變と變文 – Umetsu Jiro 次郎梅津 (in the periodical *Kokka* 國華, No 760, July 1953, published by Kokkakai, pp. 191–207), supports the view that – *bian* – is the Chinese analogy for the Sanskrit – mandara –. He rejects the view of Sun Kaidi and stresses that the meaning of *bian* is closely connected with the Buddhist terminology and quotes old sources in confirmation. According to Umetsu, the designation *bianwen* relates only to that part of the Dunhuang texts written as an explanatory commentary on the pictures. This was originally its principal function and hence, too, the designation. In the course of time *bianwen* became separated from *bianxiang* (p. 194) and came to form an independent literary genre.

In the preceding paragraphs we have summed up the main views as to the meaning of the term *bian* or *bianwen*. None of them, of course, can give a fully satisfactory answer, for we are dealing with the reconstruction of a very ancient term and one used for unofficial, folk literature, and, furthermore, a term, which occurred only in a certain limited period. We have seen that the authors of the above cited views base their deductions on a translation of the word *bian*. They then relate their translation to different contexts. Nearest the truth would seem to be those scholars who incline to the view that *bianwen* is the Chinese equivalent for the Sanskrit parinnama and *bianxiang* for the Sanskrit mandara, for they take into consideration all the circumstances accompanying the rise of *bianwen* and of their presentation. They consider the word *bian* to be etymologically associated with a root meaning – to change – in the sense of

a change qualitatively different from the sense which Zheng Zhenduo would assign to it. They are closer to the explanation of Prof. Pelliot given above. *Bian* thus has the meaning of **a flow of epic episodes, of passing scenes, from the life of Buddha or of some other saint**. This is borne out, too, by the content of religious *bianwen*, bearing the original designation, such as the *bianwen* about *Mulian*, which describes the sequence of events in which the monk Mulian went to look for his sinful mother in hell, or the *bianwen* about Buddha's Eight Incarnations, or the *bianwen* about the Casting-out of the Devil, the content of which is the description of the great variety of Shelif's incarnations in his fight against heretics and so on.

This explanation points, too, to the close connection between *bianwen* and Buddhist literature, despite the fact that in the course of development the term *bianwen* came to be used also for literary forms of secular, but always epic content.

There can be no doubt about *bianwen* and *bianxiang* being nearly related. Among the grounds for the assumption is also the designation of a number of *bianwen* as *pu* 鋪 – the numerative for rolls – as, for instance, the *Hanbanian Chu mie Han xing Wang Ling bian yipu*, P 3627. A further proof is possibly the text *Wang Zhaoqun bianwen*, P 2553, where we read; Here ends the first *pu* and the second begins. (See *Dunhuang bianwenji*, p. 100).

Besides *bianxiangs* painted on the walls of temples, an example has been preserved of an illustrated *bianwen*. It is *Xiangmo bianwen*, P 4524, where at the side of the pictorial scroll are verses explaining in detail the episode depicted in the picture. There also exists a *bianwen* with the original title – "An Illustrated *bianwen* about how Damuqianlian saved His Mother", S 2614.

We may thus suppose that *bianwen* were also originally texts accompanying or explaining pictures. The majority of those that have been preserved, however, are quite independent literary pieces, overstepping the limits of a mere verbal explanation of pictures, and can be investigated as such.

Bianwen are usually most briefly described as *huaben* for *sujiang* – a manual of text for popular sermons. (See for instance Zhou Shaoliang: *Dunhuang bianwen huilu*, p. VII, or *Dunhuang bianwenji*, p. 3.) The *sujiang* was very much in favour in the Tang. Its aim was to make the content of the sūtra comprehensible to common folk, which preachers endeavoured to do by explaining the quotation from the sūtra in their own words and also, on various occasions, by telling and singing independent Buddhist tales. *Huaben*

for the original manner of expounding the sūtras are rolls called *jiangjingwen*, characteristic of which is – if we look carefully at their content – that very often their authors lay greater stress on the colourfulnes and attractivenes of the description than on the deeper interpretation of the religious thought contained in the quotation. It is interesting that, for instance, in the fragment usually called – *Weimojiejing jiangjingwen*, there appear by the side of the versified parts indications as to the character of the poem or the manner of its performance, as – recite – *-yin-* 吟 (see *Dunhuang bianwenji*, p. 621), or rhymes *-yun-* 韻 (*Dunhuang bianwenji*, p. 622), which is one of the proofs that these texts served as *huaben* for preachers of popular sermons – *sujiang*. Another interesting feature of *jiangjingwen* and, at the same time, a proof that these texts were actually recited, is that they are divided into shorter sections by quotations from the sūtra and these are preceded by the formula – now we shall start to sing.

In general, these texts for the exposition of the sūtras have a very marked narrative character and it is quite natural, that thanks to their attractive qualities, they should have become very popular among a wide circle of listeners. Their form – the alternation of verse and prose – is in no way different from the prosimetrical form of the Buddhist sūtras, the translations of which occupy an important place in the history of Chinese literature.[3] This place they have earned, not only because of their form, but because the language in which they are couched was influenced far more by the language of everyday speech than by the written language, which would not have been understood by ordinary folk.

There cannot be the smallest doubt about the close connection between the explanations of the sūtras and the *jiangjingwen*. A greater freedom in the treatment of the original religious text is to be found in texts which are religious, but without quotations from the sūtras – that is, in *bianwen* in the strict use of the term. They come under section b. of the first category of our classification. Their prosimetrical form, like the form of the *jiangjingwen*, derives from the Buddhist sūtras which was its pattern. Only a small step was needed for the layman or the preacher himself, in his endeavour to attract the interest of his audience, to substitute a more interesting secular subject for the religious one. There were plenty of such stories at hand, for Chinese literature was rich in traditional tales, while presentation in attractive narrative form

3 See V. Hrdličková, The First Translations of Buddhist Sūtras in Chinese Literature and their Place in the Development of Storytelling, *Archiv Orientální* 26, 1958.

must have found appreciative listeners. And just at the juncture when religious subjects come to be replaced by secular themes, the process of the fertile blending of Indian and Chinese literary influences reaches its culmination. It is certain that without a strong and healthy Chinese literary stock, without the tradition, of rythmic prose *fu* and of folk storytelling, *bianwen* could never have become an inseparable part of the Chinese literary tradition, but like alien plants would have perished without taking deeper and permanent root. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to try to belittle or even exclude the influence of popularized interpretations of the sūtras from the history of Chinese narratives combined with song, or to try and separate the development of prosimetrical form in Chinese literature from the translations of the sūtras into Chinese. And even though some authors claim that examples are to be found in the pre-Tang literature of forms mingling verse and prose (see, for instance Wang Qingshu 王慶菽. *Shitan bianwende chansheng he yingxiang* 試談變文的產生和影响, in Xin Jianshe, March 1957, pp. 21–26, esp. p. 24), it would not be legitimate to infer that texts such as the *Wang Zhaoqun bianwen* arose quite independently of *jiangjingwen* or even that they influenced the rise of texts such as the *Mulian bianwen* and others like it. Moreover, the prosimetrical form of *bianwen* is so mature and the alternation of verse and prose so fluent, that it far surpasses comparison with the rhythmic prose of *fu* or with other forms where one or two short poems are interpolated into the prose in which the main body of the work is written (See Zheng Zhenduo, op. cit., p. 191).

Above I have noted several circumstances which point to a connection between *bianwen* and Buddhist *sujiang*. I have also mentioned that *bianwen* have absorbed many elements of the Chinese literary tradition and this influence has helped so much to shape them that they have become, in the form of a widely popular narratives interspersed with songs, an inseparable part of Chinese literature. In what features of the *bianwen* is this influence reflected?

If we consider that *bianwen* arose in milieu as saturated with creative activity as the Tang, they could not but assimilate many features of Chinese national literature.

This influence is already apparent in *jiangjingwen* and in *bianwen* treating the religious themes. As in translations of sūtras into Chinese, here, too, the verse sections are long hymns of praise, written for the most part in verses of five or seven syllables, a favourite metre in the Chinese prosody and one which is still used in forms of mixed verse and prose. The five-syllable line was especially

characteristic of the *Han yuefu* and was obviously favoured in translations of sūtras and in *bianwen*, because is was well suited to setting to music.

Not even the prose section of *jiangjingwen* and *bianwen*, however, remained unaffected by Chinese literary traditions. Although they were mostly written in an idiom approximating to the vernacular, and often with the addition of lively folk-colouring, their authors were fond of using device of parallel sentences – *pian'ouwen* 駢偶文. *Pian'ouwen* was a dry stylistic device used in essays by literary pedants. The authors of *bianwen*, however, turned them into a lively and effective ornament of style and made especially good use of them in their long and remarkably inventive descriptions. Here was an element that, in official literature, had lost its vitality and become a mere cliché unexpectedly developed into new and lovely forms and preserved as a valuable stylistic element for future generations not only of storytellers, but also of authors of folk novels.

Purely Chinese influence is clearly discernible, too, in the rhythmic of certain *bianwen*, enriched by numerous poetical elements. This is the case, for instance, in *Miaofa lian huajing jiangjingwen*, where the prose sections do not differ essentially from poetry. They are similar in style to *fu*, for they are composed of sentences of unequal length, with irregular rhymes.

Chinese traditional influence is reflected most strikingly in the content of *bianwen* relating stories that are purely Chinese. Yet here mention must be made, too, of several *bianwen* of religious content, the conception and treatment of which betray clear evidence of the Chinese way of thought and Chinese feeling. A striking example is the *Mulian bianwen*, preserved in Dunhuang in several variants, which points to the great popularity of this story only very episodically treated in the original sūtra. The Chinese listener was evidently moved by the powerful motive of filial love embodied in this tale, for the principle of honouring father and mother is deeply rooted in Confucian ethics and is correspondingly firmly anchored in the minds and hearts of the Chinese people. Folk fantasy then worked up from this modest core a full-scale story glorifying Mulian more as a devoted son, who allowed no obstacle to stand in the way of saving his mother, than a pious and, indeed, ascetic monk, as he is represented in the sūtra.

In addition, there have been preserved among the *jiangjingwen* two interesting fragments of the theme *Fumu enzhong jing jiangjingwen* (Interpretation of the scriptures on the devotion of parents and children). The quotations from the sūtra are here obviously unauthentic, and the whole story has been made up by

the preacher, layman, or perhaps even a woman, with the idea of working as strongly as possible on the feelings of the audience. The religious content yields in interest to descriptions with a purely secular appeal, such as an account of the tribulation and suffering of a woman before the birth, at the birth of her child and afterwards. At the close, the listener is called upon to hold his parents in unflagging love and respect. In the Peking fragment, *hezi* 12, there occurs the phrase, he wept in front of the bamboo and lay on the ice- (see *Dunhuang bianwenji*, p. 699), which is an allusion to the classical examples of filial devotion contained in the book *Ershisi xiao* 二十四孝.

The authors of all these texts, moreover, themselves contributed greatly to the secularisation of their content and its separation from the religious base on which the *bianwen* originally arose. By means of their creative powers, they transformed what were simple and didactic interpretations of the Buddhist scriptures into exciting, true-to-life stories, where the realities of this world, so scorned by religion, are projected into the foreground with almost ironizing force. In them the heroes succumb to passions, instead of raising above them as should saints who have become dead to this world. The consideration, too, that the story related should confirm the transience of human existence, and that grasping of this fact will enable us to attain the consciousness of eternal truth and bliss, retreats into background. Quite on the contrary, the story of the true life, without thought of future consequences, became the centre of interest of the audience, most of whom were illiterate and who had few other opportunities of amusement. Thus an independent and characteristic genre gradually grew up and it is remarkable that the whole long stories were recorded in all their details in writing. It indicates that they must have been immensely popular and that copies must have circulated among less gifted preachers and storytellers, who recited them without substantial change. At the same time this form of verbal art must also have attracted a number of educated literati, whose wish it was to write more freely, without shackles of a literary art style. And so we find among the *bianwen* compositions of widely varying levels; some written in a richly expressive and flowing idiom, and others in which a strongly folk tone predominates, which at times does not avoid downright vulgarity.

*

In addition to *jiangjingwen* and *bianwen*, we include among the texts belonging to this field of investigation the prosimetrical compositions known as *yuanqi*. As we have already pointed out, these texts do not differ essentialy from *bianwen* of religious content. Zheng Zhenduo (see op. cit., p. 187) regards *yuanqi* as a kind of introduction preceding the sermon or the recitation of true *bianwen*, but also suggests that *yuanqi* may have been only another name for *bianwen*. According to Zhou Shaoliang (op. cit. p. 241) this designation is a translation of the Sanskrit – pratit yasamutpoda – in the sense of – a cause which has its effects in a future life. Prof. Naba (see op. cit., p. 91) holds *yuanqi* to be a kind of *bianwen*. It is clear that *yuanqi* were originally designed to introduce a serious sermon by attracting to it the attention of the listeners. For example, the *Mulian yuanqi* concludes with the words (see *Dunhuang bianwenji*, op. 172); "Today I have told this story and early tomorrow morning come and listen to the sūtra itself." But there certainly seems to have been no strictly drawn line between *bianwen* and *yuanqi*. Thus, for instance, the text *Chounü yuanqi* ends with the sentence: "I have told the *bian* about the ugly woman", (see *Dunhuang bianwenji*, p. 800), although this text bears at the beginning the original designation of *yuan* in the title.

There remains to be said only a few words about *yazuowen*. These were short introductions to expositions of the sūtras, mostly in verse and usually concluding with the set phrase: "And now the title of the sūtra will be sung." (See for example *Sanshen yazuowen*, S 2440 etc.). An explanation of the term *yazuowen* is not easy and there is little material on which to base conclusions. So, in the meantime, I shall confine myself here to mentioning the principal theories, without formulating my own standpoint. Prof. Sun Kaidi (see op. cit., p. 129) bases his view on an explanation in Huilin 慧琳 *Yi qie jing yinyi* 一切經音義, *juan* 26, where the character *ya* is interpreted as *ya* 壓 – to quieten, to tranquilize, suppress excitement etc., and *zuo*, as having the meaning of *sizuo* 四座. From this it would follow that the compound *yazuo* would signify "to quieten all who sit below the platform", or, in other words "to quieten the people before the exposition of the sūtra starts. Zhou Shaoliang mentions the view (see op. cit., p. XIV), according to which the term *yazuowen* means the text being recited beneath the platform (*zuo* meaning platform). He himself, however, inclines to the view of Prof. Sun Kaidi. Quite a different explanation of the term *yazuowen* is given by Prof. Naba (see op. cit.,

p. 48), who suggests that *ya* here means a stick or some other object used for pointing at pictures.

*

In concluding these notes on some questions connected with *bianwen*, we may sum up by saying that *bianwen*, closely related to the expositions of the Buddhist sūtras, are a valuable product of the Chinese creative spirit in the domain of literature. A detailed study of the language, content and form of the *bianwen* will contribute much of value to Chinese literary studies and mark further step forward in the investigation of the development of narratives combined with song.

References

Hrdličková, Věnceslava: The First Translations of Buddhist Sūtras in Chinese Literature and their Place in the Development of Storytelling. *Archiv orientální* 1958, 26, pp. 114–144.

Kanaoka Terumitsu 照光金岡: Chūgoku Bungakushi Kenkyū Hōhō no Ichi Mondai 中國文學史研究方法の一問題 [A Problem in the Methodology of Chinese Literary History Research]. *Junshin Joshi Tanki Daigaku Kiyō* 純心女子短期大学紀要 [Junshin Women's College Bulletin] 1955, 2, pp. 33–60.

Naba Toshisada 那波利貞: Zokukō to Henbun 俗講と變文 [A Lecture on Bianwen]. *Bukkyō Shigaku* 仏教史学 [Buddhist History] 1950, 2–4.

Průšek, Jaroslav: Researches into the Beginnings of the Chinese Popular Novel. *Archiv orientální* 1939, 11, pp. 91–132.

Sun Kaidi 孫楷第: *Lun Zhongguo Duanpian Baihua Xiaoshuo* 论中国短篇白话小说 [On Chinese Short Stories in Vernacular Language]. Shanghai 1953.

Umezu Jirō 次郎梅津: Hen to Henbun 變と變文 [Odds and Bianwen]. *Kokka* 國華 [National Pride] 1953, 760, pp. 191–207.

Waley, Arthur: *Ballads and Stories from Tun-huang*. London 1960.

Wang Qingshu 王庆菽: Shitan Bianwen de Chansheng he Yingxiang 试谈变文的产生和影响 [A Tentative Discussion on the Origin and the Influence of Bianwen]. *Xin Jianshe* 新建设 [New Development] 1957, pp. 21–26.

Wang Zhongmin 王重民, Wang Qingshu 王庆菽, Zhou Yiliang 周一良, Zeng Yigong 曾毅公 and Xiang Da 向达 (Eds.): *Dunhuang Bianwenji* 敦煌变文集 [The Collection of the Dunhuang Bianwen]. Peking 1957, 2 vols.

Xu Guolin 徐国霖: *Dunhuang Shishi xie Jingtiji yu Dunhuang Zalu* 敦煌石室些经题记与敦煌杂录 [Inscriptions and Miscellaneous Records of Dunhuang Stone Chamber]. Shanghai 1937, 2 vols.

ZHENG Zhenduo 郑振铎: *Zhongguo Suwenxue Shi* 中国俗文学史 [The History of Chinese Popular Literature]. Vol. 1. Beijing 1954.

ZHOU Shaoliang 周绍良 (Ed.): *Dunhuang Bianwen Huilu* 敦煌变文汇录 [The Anthology of the Dunhuang Bianwen]. Shanghai 1955.

Some Observations on the Chinese Art of Storytelling

Abstract: Chinese storytelling is a representation of an extraordinarily rich creation. In its overall assessment, it is not enough to confine ourselves to studying written texts alone. It is necessary to extend the research to ethnographic methods, enabling us to grasp the range of significant circumstances that accompanied the emergence and practice of storytelling. Only then can we reach positive conclusions about the extent to which storytelling was indeed folk art and to what extent it was dependent on texts written, so to speak, "for the people" by representatives of the educated strata of society. However, it must also be considered that the art of storytelling is rooted in the people and gradually spread to other sections of the population. In evaluating texts, thus, we must always ask ourselves for whom they were intended. To shed light on the extent to which folk storytellers depended on written texts, research into living storytelling traditions provides a great deal of material. Based on this, we can observe that the folk storyteller was a genuinely creative artist within the framework defined by the tradition and was not a mere mechanical reciter of the written text. These texts, conversely, drew inspiration from the oral tradition and were usually intended for reading rather than recitation.

Keywords: Chinese storytelling, professional training, forms of Chinese storytelling, prompt book, improvisation.

Introduction

In recent years Czechoslovak sinologists have devoted particular attention to the narrative literature of China, which presents an unusually fertile field. A thorough study of this genre is fraught with difficulties, but can be most rewarding, for the results offer useful material for the comparative study of the storytelling and epics of other peoples.

Considering the fundamental aspects of our approach to Chinese narrative literature, to determine its general character, it is essential to deal with it in the broadest possible context. We cannot confine ourselves to the study and analysis

of those texts alone which have been given a fixed written form. The theoretical conclusions we would reach in this way would be one-sided, for they would be based on knowledge of material that has been refined and deprived of many factors which helped to create this kind of art and keep it alive for centuries in an oral folk tradition.

The approach limited to the study of written texts, often leads to adoption of the theory of the "aristocratic" origin of folk art, and degenerate cultural values, put forward by **H. Naumann**[1]. According to the supporters of this theory, the talent of the ordinary people is reduced to mere reproduction of what has been created by higher social strata. However, scholars like **V. V. Radlov**, the **Sokolov** brothers, **M. K. Azadovski**, **M. Parry**, **A. M. Astachova**, **I. V. Tchitcherov**, **L. Dégh** and **V. Zhirmunski** and others proved in the course of detailed research in the field, among folk-singers and storytellers, that the folk artist has a gift of original creative power and is rarely a passive interpreter of a written text. Even when the folk-artists draw their themes from written literature, they do not take them over in a passive, mechanical way, but develop them in a creative fashion. On this point **Václavek** remarked that the people already perform a valuable activity in their choice of what they like and can use of the individual's contribution, in the way they adapt what they have chosen to their own manner of feeling, and in the way they remodel it after their own taste. "It is essential," **Václavek** continues, "to consider this from the ethnographical standpoint, tracing the way in which the element which has been taken over becomes an integral part of folk art and popular taste, and what constitutes the special character of folk art. Above all, the creative talent of the people must not be judged only from the point of view of the origin of the song. Looking at the matter in this light we realise that it is not true that folk song is only a passive factor without creative power. Even in the way literary verse is taken over by the people we must see the creative element."[2]

V. Zhirmunski gave a valuable summary of the results of comparative study of the folk epic in his book *Narodnyi geroicheskii epos*, stressing that knowledge of the living epic tradition of our own day gives us the key to "knowledge

1 See further V. I. Tchitcherov: *Russkoye narodnoye tvorchestvo*; Moscow 1959, p. 117; and B. Václavek: *Písemnictví a lidová tradice*; Prague 1947, p. 50.

2 Václavek, op. cit., p. 63.

of the epics of the ancient and mediaeval worlds, which have only been preserved in written form in both east and west."[3]

When studying Chinese narrative literature research into living storytelling traditions is all the more important since the written texts are only a very small fraction of the total wealth of stories handed down among the people in innumerable different forms without ever being written down. When they were written down (and this was usually in order that they might be read and not listened to, as we shall see later), this fixing of their form in the written word meant a greater or lesser degree of deformation of the original, especially an ideological deformation. If we do not take this into account, and try to state definitively the degree of folk or nonfolk character of narrative literature as a literature created mainly by the educated for the non-educated,[4] we shall find ourselves dealing only with a very small part of this literature, while the main sources from which it springs will have escaped our notice.

In China, as among other peoples, the telling of tales was an art which arose among the people and which kept its vitality for the most part among the people, too. Naturally, educated writers often drew their inspiration from this folk art, imitating it and creating on this basis works for their own pleasure. We must not, however, when analysing and assessing the character of such works, which are more likely to have been preserved in printed form than the real folk tales, assume that they were the "spiritual food" of the broad masses of the people.

It is enough to consider logically the simple fact that the majority of the Chinese people were illiterate, and the untenability of such a belief is clear. Well-founded information on the real character of the art of storytelling can be gained from research into the living narrative traditions. This is possible in China, where the art of storytelling existed in its original form till shortly after the liberation, and to this day is a wide-spread and popular form of amusement among the Chinese people. Significant facts are to be found in the works of Chinese scholars such as **Zheng Zhenduo** 鄭振鐸,[5] **Fu Xihua** 傅惜华,[6] **Zhao**

3 Op. cit. p. 241.

4 M. Velingerová: *Jaké jsou charakteristické rysy čínské populární slovesnosti*; Zprávy ČSO, III, November 1961.

5 *Zhongguo suwen xueshi* 中國俗文學史, 2 vols., Peking, 1954.

6 *Beijing chuantong quyi zonglu* 北京傳統曲藝總錄; Shanghai, 1962.

Jingshen 趙景深,[7] **Zhang Changgong** 張長弓,[8] **Li Xiaocang** 李嘯倉,[9] **Chen Ruheng** 陳汝衡[10] and many others. The writer **Lao She** 老舍[11] has also valuable information to give. There is much original material in studies and articles published in *Minjian wenxue* 民間文學, *Quyi gongzuo tongxun* 曲藝工作通訊 and *Quyi* 曲藝, especially about the technics of storytelling and the experience of some of its great masters.

In this study I shall mention the different forms of storytelling, in order to give a brief survey of the wealth of forms, and shall then concentrate on certain conclusions to be drawn from the study of the origin and development of individual forms in relation to the environment in which they came into being and were practised. I consider this question important, for its analysis can show us the different levels of development of the art of storytelling, which was not only popular among the common people but also became one of the pastimes of the ruling classes. It is important to draw a clear line between works which came into existence among the ordinary people and were intended for their pleasure, and tales narrated in quite a different environment and differing from the true folk storytelling not only in content and purpose but usually also in their more sophisticated form. Farther I shall use the results of my own research in the field, and the study of Chinese sources, to describe the creative methods of these folk storytellers.

The Forms of Chinese Storytelling and their Development

Feudal society, the vast expanse of the country, the isolation of one region from another, the difficulty of learning the written language, which made books the privilege of a small circle of educated men, and the differences in dialect – all these things combined to make China fertile soil for the art of storytelling which did indeed develop in many distinct forms.

From the formal point of view the products of this art can be divided into simple narration in prose only, now usually called *shuodashu* 說大書 and narration combined with song – *shuochang* 說唱. Certain transitional forms also

7 *Dagu yanjiu* 大鼓研究; Shanghai, 1936, and other works by this author.

8 *Henan zhuizishu* 河南墜子書; Peking, 1951.

9 *Quyitan* 曲藝談; Wuhan, 1951.

10 *Shuoshu shihua* 說書史話; Peking, 1958.

11 *Guo xinnian* 過新年; Shanghai, 1951.

belong to the latter category. In these forms verse predominates and prose passages are either very short or are absent entirely. Examples are to be found in the ballads accompanied by the big drums, *dagushu* 大鼓書, the ballads *zidishu* 子弟書 and others. Finally there is the important category of rhythmic narration mainly in verse, like the *Shandong kuaishu* 山東快書, the comic dialog *xiangsheng* 相聲 and so on.[12]

In old texts Chinese scholars have found references to forms which no longer exist today under the same names – among them the *yaci* 涯詞 of the Song period and later the *taozhen* 陶真 and others. These old sources of course touch only on a fraction of the wealth of this folk art. This is clear from information published in the last few years. An editorial article in the journal *Quyi gongzuo tongxun*[13] states that in the course of field work in China in the year 1954 over ninety independent narrative forms were noted down, of which only about half were known before. It is also characteristic that those forms popular in the towns, where they could more readily be taken down, were better known than those practised in the country, where for the most part they existed only in oral versions.

A considerable level of formal development can be seen in that type of tales which combine prose with song. This category can be divided into two groups – *yuequ* 樂曲 and *shizan* 詩讚. It is characteristic of the former that the melodies are more intricate and the number of the syllables in the line is variable. Of the historical forms the *zhugongdiao* 諸宮調 falls into this category, as do *lianhualao* 蓮花落, *paiziqu* 牌子曲 and other forms that have been preserved up to the present day.

The latter group covers those forms in which the metrical parts are composed of regular seven-character lines (this basic number of characters may be enlarged to ten or more by using „inserted characters“ *chenzi* 襯字) and employ simpler and more monotonous melodies than the forms in the first group. It is to this category that belong the most popular narrative forms such as *tanci* 彈詞, *dagu, baojuan* 寶卷 and others.

12 M. Ryšavá kindly allowed me to use a scheme of a practical division of Chinese storytelling literature given to her in conversation by Tao Dun 陶盹 in 1961. Chinese scholars use the following basic categories: *chang* – sung forms; *changshuo* – forms in which song predominates; *shuochang* – forms in which narrative predominates; *xiangsheng* – all kinds of dialogue; *shuo* – straightforward narration.

13 No. 2, 1954, p. 45.

This division of the narrative forms, introduced by **Ye Dejun** 葉德均[14] is useful but can serve only as a basis, for in the group of the *shizan* in particular, we find forms which besides simple melodies sometimes use more involved ones, to vary the narrative, according to the ability of the singer. These are some of the big drum ballads.[15] The same was true of the *tanci* especially the form called *nanci* 南詞.[16] It is an intricate question which will involve detailed study of material collected in different regions of China.

For the study of form it is worth while paying special attention to the forms which are transitional to theatrical forms, or from which independent theatrical forms have developed in the course of time. The relationship between the narrator's art and the theatre was always a close one. Of the historical forms, the *zhugongdiao* influenced the Yuan theatre – *zaju* 雜劇.[17]

There is a form called the *paiziqu*, or the *danxian* 單弦 which follows directly in the *zhugongdiao* tradition. This form too, passes into the theatrical form *paizixi* 牌子戲, as early as the second half of the eighteenth century. *Paizixi* is performed by several actors in costume.[18]

The *lianhualao* also showed a marked tendency to develop into a theatrical form, giving rise to the interesting border-line form *xiaokou lianhualao* 小口蓮花落. A man and a woman take part in it,[19] singing the narrative together with the direct speech taking the form of a dialogue. The woman sings the main role and the man the subsidiary role.[20] Even closer to the theatre is the off-shoot of the *lianhualao*, *shibuxian* 什不閑, in which the actors assume simple costumes – sometimes changing them in the course of the performance – and use simple

14 *Song Yuan Ming jiangchang wenxue* 宋元明講唱文學; Shanghai, 1953.

15 Z. Hrdlička: *Old Chinese Ballads*, Archiv Orientální, 25, 1957, 1, pp. 83–145, pag. cit. 113–114.

16 Chen Ruheng, op. cit. p.185, r: Zhao Jingshen, *Tanci xuan* 彈詞选; Shanghai, 1947, p. 3.

17 In an article entitled "*Les documents chinois trouvés par la mission Kozlov à Khara-Khoto*", in the Journal Asiatique, 1914, Mai–Juin, P. Pelliot calls the fragment Liu Zhiyuan zhugongdiao 劉知遠諸宮調, which has been preserved without its original designation, a stage play. Professor Zheng Zhenduo was the first to give this valuable scroll its correct designation: zhugongdiao. See Zheng Zhenduo: *Chatuben zhongguo wenxueshi* 插圖本中國文學史, Peking, 1932, pp. 707–710. On the same question see also L. N. Menshikov: *O zhanre chu-kung-chiao i o Liu Chih-yüan chu-kung-tiao*, in: Voprosy filologii i istorii stran sovyetskogo i zarubezhnogo Vostoka; Moscow, 1961, pp. 78–82, pag. cit. 79.

18 Li Xiaocang, op. cit. p. 48.

19 Z. Hrdlička: *O původu a vývoji lien-hua-lao*; Československá ethnografie, IV, 1956, 2, pp. 154–169, pag. cit. 156.

20 Li Xiaocang, op. cit. p. 83.

stage properties such as fly-swatters, feather dusters, riding-whips etc. This form often takes subjects from the operas. There is also a close connection between the *lianhualao* and the folk theatre *bengbengxi* 蹦蹦戲.[21]

The *tanci* was also dramatized to a considerable degree, frequently employing direct speech in dialogue. The comic character *chou* 丑 and the noble hero *xiaosheng* 小生 appeared in this form.[22]

We are aided in forming a correct picture of Chinese storytelling by the results of research into the development of the different forms. In Chinese sources there is a relatively large amount of material on this point which can make up to some extent for the lack of genuine narrative texts to come down to us. Not all this material is reliable, as is natural in a field which was excluded from literary research almost up to the twenties of this century. The origin of a narrative form is often known only in the version tradition has handed down to us, and cannot be accepted without reservations. If our aim is to get a better picture of where and for whom these tales were told, however, research into the development of individual forms can tell us much.

The fact that information about the forms known in towns is better preserved both in the historical and the later sources and that many such narratives were printed in popular editions, should not lead us to imagine that the people of the towns were the main public, or that only the towns gave birth to this art. This view was held among others by the Chinese scholar **Zi Chen** 紫晨, but later he renounced it.[23]

Zhu Zeji 朱澤吉, another scholar, stresses that most of the forms of storytelling current in the towns developed from narrative forms current among the country people, and shows the close relationship between the two.[24]

In the writings of Chinese scholars who have studied the origin of these forms we find convincing proof of the intricate path of development followed by the different forms, from the simple country audiences to the select audiences of the towns, and sometimes back to the village again.

---

21 Xu Jiping 徐汲平: *Laozi de yuanqi cunyi* 落子的源起存疑, in: Xiqu biji 習曲筆記, pp. 1–11, Dongbei, 1951.

22 *Zhenzhuta tanci* 珍珠塔彈詞 in the collection Tanci xuan, pp. 81–123.

23 *Quyi huiyan gei wode qifa* 曲藝會演給我的啟發; see: Minjian wenxue, August, 1958, pp. 26–29.

24 *Bixu cong yuanze shang huaqing minjian wenxue de fanwei* 必須從原則上划清「民間文學」的範圍; see Minjian wenxue, July, pp. 51–57, 1957, pag. cit. 54.

The big drum ballads provide an eloquent example of this. These ballads are divided into several types according to the way they were narrated and the type of the musical accompaniment. One type was the *lihuadagu* 梨花大鼓, the originator of which, according to the tradition, was a peasant named **Hao Laofeng** 郝老鳳. At first, he sang his ballads in the villages of his native Shandong in the nineteenth century.[25] It is probable that **Hao Laofeng** merely perfected the performance of the *dagu*, and was renowned above other storytellers for his art. He was even credited with the power to drive away sickness. "When **Hao Laofeng** appeared, the sick were cured."[26]

Hao Laofeng sang in the Shandong dialect, to local melodies. He would sit on a mat on the ground to perform, with a drum on a low stand in front of him. He would beat the drum as he sang. Later on **Hao** performed in the marketplaces of the towns as well, and as his fame grew he was invited into the homes of the wealthy townsmen. His manner of singing was called *cusu dagu* 粗俗大鼓 "vulgar *dagu*", because he sang in the local dialect. The *lihua dagu* soon became very popular in the towns and its style was adapted to the taste of their town audiences.

Unlike the *lihua dagu*, the ballads known as *Xihe dagu* 西河大鼓, which originated in Hebei province, remained faithful to their village origin, for the most part. They were sung in the dialect to simple folk tunes.[27]

The *jingyin dagu* ballads 京音大鼓 became quite at home in the towns, being sung for the amusement of the rich. They told of the heroic deeds of imperial generals or of the life of officials and students preparing for the official examinations. At the same time these ballads were still sung by the simple people, on the themes drawn from popular romances.

The Henan *zhuizi* also underwent an interesting development. According to the latest theory of Chinese scholars they were the result of fusion of the Henan form of narrative, *sanxianshu* 三弦書, and the *daoqing* 道情.[28] The

---

25 Hrdlička, op. cit. 1957, pp. 88–89.

26 The tendency to connect the rise of individual forms or tales with certain definite events and to ascribe them to certain individuals is found in other literatures of the world; see Zhirmunsky, op. cit. p. 264.

27 Hrdlička, 1957, op. cit. pp. 92–93.

28 Yu Zhang 禹漳: *Henan zhuizi yuan yuan xinshuo* 河南墜子淵源新說, in the periodical Quyi, No. 2, 1962, pp. 63–65, pag. cit. 63. Differs from Zhang Changgong op. cit. p. 2, who believes that they were the result of the fusion of *daoqing* with the folk melodies *yingge liushu* 鶯歌柳書. See also J. Průšek: Čui-c'-šu: Lidové zpěvy z Chenanu, Rozpravy ČSAV, 64, 1954.

sanxianshu were originally sung in the country, but the singers went to seek a living in the towns, where their art was influenced by the *daoqing*. Originally the Henan *zhuizi* were sung only by men, seated on mats on the ground in an open space. Gradually, as their art became more popular in the towns, the singers began to perform in the teahouses as well. The *zhuizi* were still sung by wandering blind singers, however, who came to the town from the countryside and were invited into the homes of the wealthy on feast days or for domestic celebrations.

The *daoqing*, which we have already mentioned, is a form mainly connected with the spreading of Taoist teachings. It was well known both in the towns and in the country. The same name was given in Shaanxi province, however, to a type of storytelling which had little in common with the real *daoqing* except its name, and which was discovered relatively late. **Liang Wenda** did his research in an out-of the way region of Shaanxi province, in the village of Suide, where he worked with a blind artist. He was given valuable material for the study of this purely folk form of storytelling, which is a transitional form moving towards the theatre. The musical accompaniment is provided by local folk tunes.[29]

One of the truly folk forms of storytelling is the "rhythmic narrative" represented primarily by the *shulaibao* 數來寶. The *shulaibao* was a simple form, but one in which the narrator had to improvise with skill, reacting to all that was going around him.

A complicated development, along several different lines, was the fate of the *paiziqu*, which although originally a folk form, soon attracted the notice of literary minds.[30] In the towns this form soon reached a point of stagnation, because it was cut off from its source of life, folk melodies. In the country among the peasants, it continued to grow and develop.

Besides these types of Chinese storytelling, originating in folk art, there is also the category of forms which drew on folk traditions but were primarily intended to meet the needs of the ruling class. Foremost among them were the Manchu *zidishu*, composed by Manchu men of letters, the sons of wealthy families who performed their own ballads on festival occasions in the homes of their friends. *Zidishu* were polished compositions in which the lyric element often pushed the dynamic, dramatic element into the background. The language of these narratives is much more literary than that of folk narratives.

29 *Shanbei daoqing yinyue* 陕北道情音樂, collected by Liang Wenda 梁文達, Xi'an, 1953.

30 Li Xiaocang, op. cit. p. 50.

Another traditional form is seen in the *baojuan* which were originally used to propagate religious ideas. Even in this case the development of the form followed more than one line. Folk themes kept appearing so that the content became more and more "democratic".[31] *Baojuan* have been even called "very popular literature".[32] Copied out and printed, the *baojuan* were also used as a vehicle for political activity by secret religious societies. The messages these societies issued, calling for revolt against the ruling dynasty, were found in cipher on the song sheets.[33]

We cannot mention here all the different forms of Chinese storytelling. Our purpose was to quote some of the most characteristic examples in order to show the broad range of types that went and still go to make up the vast fabric of Chinese epic narrative and ballads. To sum up, we may say that in the case of many of these forms, we can trace the line of development not only among the simple people but also in higher social circles, who took this popular art over and adapted it to their own needs. This is the reason why research into and analysis of Chinese narrative literature must pay great attention to the question of where each form of narrative came into being and for whom it was intended. Our main guide must be the content, the language, the general conception of the narrative, and the knowledge we can gain from analysis of its form.

It would be simplifying the whole question to ignore these involved aspects of the development of the art of storytelling and instead of that take into consideration only two well-known facts, i. e. the existence of written texts and the knowledge of the fact that the people listened to the professional storytellers and from this draw the conclusion that the common people listened only to what was written down for them – and therefore that storytelling literature was not folk-literature, but so-called "popular literature" in the sense of "literature written by the educated for the requirement of the people."[34]

---

31 B. L. Riftin, *Skazaniye o velikoi styenye*; Moscow, 1961, p. 62.

32 Chen Ruheng, op. cit. p. 124.

33 Fou Si-houa: *Catalogue des pao-kiuan*, Peking, 1951, p. 1. It is interesting to compare this with the story of the Czech broadsheet ballad „Kde hrob náš" ("Where is our grave"), a variant on the song „Kde domov můj" ("Where is my home", now the national anthem of Czechoslovakia), which at the end of the sixties of the last century was printed on the illegal handbills issued by the anarchist society Jednatelství z Blaníka; see: K. Krejčí, *Píseň pražské ulice, její vztah k písni kramářské a literatuře*, Václavkova Olomouc, 1961, pp. 59–77, pag. cit. 71.

34 M. Velingerová, op. cit. pp. 149–150.

This of course does not mean that we deny the existence of the so-called "popular literature" in the narrative genre. We acknowledge it, however, in a different sense and a different context from that accepted by **M. Velingerová**, who describes the popular literature as among other things a literature of great artistic value. In our view and that of other writers (as we shall show later) this truly "popular literature" is normally taken to refer to second-rate works. At the end of the nineteenth century, when the growth of the big cities like Shanghai, Tientsin, Peking and others brought about a great expansion of the art of storytelling in such centres, the printing of the favourite tales was a successful commercial venture. There were printing firms that specialised in these texts, like the well-known *Damo chang* 打磨廠 press or the *Baibenzhang* 百本張 publishing house in Peking that circulated manuscript copies of them.[35]

It is essential to stress that these texts, although written in narrative form, were intended far more as reading matter than as texts for oral performance. Existence in the tradition was not essential for them.[36]

Popular texts of this type are often poor literature, serving the interests of those trying to reimpose feudal relationships on society. They are a typical example of the way forms created by the common people are taken over by the ruling class and used as the vehicle of the ideology of that class, to exert an influence on the people.

Chinese scholars have pointed out the need to define these works, whose literary value is usually below that of true folk literature, and have suggested that they should be grouped with the *suwenxue* 俗文學 popular or semi-folk forms closely related to real folk literature. Chinese scholars vary in their approach to this question.[37] **Xi Jin**, for example, suggests a broader interpretation of the term "*minjian wenxue*" including under it works of the *suwenxue* type and at the same time defining a narrower circle for literature transmitted by oral tradition only, the so-called *koutou wenxue* 口頭文學.[38]

---

35 During our stay in China 1950–1954 Z. Hrdlička and I got together a collection of these popular booklets, especially the *Wenming dagushuci* 文明大鼓書詞 series.

36 R. Smetana deals in detail with this problem, on the basis of Czech broadsheet ballads, in the study: *K problematice jevu české písně kramářské*; Václavkova Olomouc, 1961, pp. 13–58; see especially pp. 39 and 57–58.

37 Zhu Zeji, op. cit. pp. 51–57.

38 Xi Jin 錫金: *Guanyu minjian wenxue, renmin koutou wenxue de gainian jiqi fanwei jiexian* 關于「民間文學」「人民口頭文學」的概念及其範圍界限, Minjian wenxue, 1957, July, pp. 58–60, pag. cit. 59.

To cover the entire breadth and variety of Chinese narrative literature, we should not omit mention of those works by outstanding writers which are written for narration. These are works which are so closely in conformity with the attitude and the interests of the people that the people have adopted them as their own, narrating them and adapting them until they have become the cultural property of the people. One such example are the *daoqing* of the Qing writer **Zheng Banqiao** 鄭板橋, which were widely known among the people, and sung and recited almost up to the recent times.

The mutual relations between folk and literary creation were particularly close in the field of subject matter. We shall not be dealing with this question in greater detail here, but it is one which deserves careful attention in the wider problem of narrative literature and the narrator's art.

Here, as in many other questions, Chinese scholars are faced with many problems. There is a great deal of material still to be dealt with. The subject of storytelling is one to which considerable attention is paid in China. Twenty years of collecting work is summed up in the important publication of **Fu Xihua**[39] "*Comprehensive Catalogue of Narrative Literature Current in Peking*". No attempt to give a comprehensive view of Chinese narrative literature would be complete without careful study of this catalogue and the material it contains. It would be significant, for example, to base on this catalogue a study of the degree to which the works quoted drew on literary texts, and the degree to which they drew on other sources for their subjects. Naturally not even the picture given by **Fu Xihua** is complete, in this respect, for it deals only with a clearly defined city region. The variety of material waiting to be studied in this field is very wide. **Zheng Zhenduo**[40] for example remarked that he possessed a collection of twenty thousand narrative texts. In Peking alone **Zheng Zhenduo** collected over two hundred texts on themes taken from the novel "*Water Margin*". His collection included also over three hundred different Fujian versions of the narrative *Liuhuameng* 榴花梦. Besides the texts which have been written down and printed, as **Zheng Zhenduo** emphasises, there are many tales circulating only in an oral version. In this connection he stressed the need to take down

39 Fu Xihua, op. cit.

40 Zheng Zhenduo: *Po zichanjieji de zhixue fangfa, li shehui zhuyi de lichang guandian he fangfa* 破資產階級的治學方法，立社會主義的立場觀點和方法, Minjian wenxue, 1958, double no. 7–8, pp. 42–44, pag. cit. 43.

the tales told by storytellers, whose creative ability, as he said, "has no equal in the world."[41]

Storytellers' Prompt-books

Now we shall consider in greater detail the actual activity of the storytellers. First of all we shall try to answer the question: what was the basis of their narrative? Was it texts written by poets, and learned by heart to be repeated before the audience with very small alternations, or were these storytellers creative artists in their own right, capable of improvisation even if only "within the framework of a settled tradition not only in subject, motive and metaphor, but also in the elements of style, in adjectives, comparisons, the phrases used, and so on, which provided the poet-improviser with a ready-made poetic diction."[42]

Radlov, who studied the development of the Kirghiz epic of *Manas* in the narrators' art, showed clearly that every singer improvises that is to say he does not create a new work each time, but accordingly to his ability to improvise he adapts the traditional basis of his narrative. He combines known elements of the story, changing or adding them according to the need of the moment and the audience for whom he is performing. He draws the necessary components from the narrative diction which includes many accepted formulations to help the poet complete his lines, expand his description of the setting or put finishing touches to the character of his hero, **Radlov** quotes an interesting example of this, from his own experience:[43] the Kirghiz storyteller he was listening to introduced into his tale of *Manas* a meeting of his hero with the Russian Czar, as a token of respect to his Russian listener.

Zhirmunski points out that the ability of folk storytellers to improvise is closely connected with the conditions of their professional training. He discusses the theoretical problem of the relationship between the storyteller's creative individuality and the ancient oral tradition with which he works, and comes to the conclusion that there is no conflict between individual creativeness and a collective tradition. On the contrary, he believes that they are mutually complementary.[44]

41 Op. cit. p. 43.

42 Zhirmunsky, op. cit. p. 247.

43 Zhirmunsky, op. cit. p. 247.

44 Zhirmunsky, op. cit. p. 255.

The art of the storyteller is not an easy one. The Chinese narrator or singer has no stage properties to help him, and his success depends only on his ability to establish intimate contact with an audience that is often very exacting. This in itself is a reason why it is unlikely that the storyteller would merely repeat a text learned by rote, repeating it unchanged or very little changed – all the less so, since his theme would be one known among the people for centuries. The listeners are well acquainted with the content of the story. The approach to the subject, however, will vary according to the time, the audience and the personality of the storyteller. A tale is never mechanically transferred from one narrative form to another. There is much material in Chinese sources to show how individual tales developed within the different narrative and literary genres. One of the most popular and oft-treated subjects was the story of the "devoted son **Mulian**" adapted from the brief story of the holy **Maudgalyayan** in the Sútra *Foshuo yulan penjing* 佛說盂蘭盆經 and developed further in *Dunhuang bianwen* about **Mulian** in the Tang dynasty.[45] The story about **Mulian** also formed the basis of the well-known Ming play "*A Moral Story of how Mulian saved his Mother*" (*Mulian jiumu quanshan xiwen* 目連救母勸善戲文), which boasts of a hundred and two scenes in three volumes, with a strong anti-religious tendency obvious at many points. Many *baojuan* also grew around this theme.[46]

Similarly the story of "*Meng Jiangnü the faithful wife*" 孟姜女 can be traced in many different literary genres from the oldest to the present day.[47] Only detailed analysis of such definite material can give us a deeper insight into the problems of Chinese storytelling art and allow us to determine in close relation to living storytelling practice to what degree it is folk or literary creation.

We must also endeavour to determine whether all the works written down in narrative form were in fact intended to be narrated orally. **Lu Xun** pointed out the need to distinguish between tales written as narratives but already intended to be read, and real "narrators' prompt-books".[48]

45 *Dunhuang bianwenji* 敦煌變文集, Peking, 1957, vol. 2, pp. 701–714.

46 V. Hrdličková, *Tun-huangské pien-weny o oddaném synovi Mu-lienovi*, 1958, Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philologica, No. 2, pp. 269–286.

47 B. L. Riftin, op. cit.

48 Lu Xun 魯迅: *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中國小說史略, see also English translation, Lu Xun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, Peking, 1959, pp. 152–162.

Chen Ruheng describes the development of the Song and Yuan *huaben* – "the storyteller's prompt-book" in more or less the following terms:[49] the real *huaben* served the tale-tellers as a hand-book for their narrative, and not as a continuous text. They were more like sets of notes and did not make any claims to literary style. Originally the *huaben* was secret, and intended only for the private use of the storyteller. They were handed down from teacher to disciple and often remained in the same family for generations. In time, however, some tales became so popular that they were printed. In order to make them suitable for printing they were usually given to a literary scholar to fill out and round off properly, to make good reading. **Chen Ruheng** records that as early as under the Song and Yuan dynasties there were writers who spent their time collecting and working up the tales they heard sung in the marketplaces. One of the characteristic features of society under the Song and Yuan dynasties were the literary circles – *shuhui* 書會, where lovers of literature and poetry met. They were interested in folk art, too, and even employed collectors to find material for them among the common people. It was not unusual for the writers in the *shuhui* to have direct contact with professional storytellers in the teahouses and marketplaces.[50]

What **Chen Ruheng** said about *huaben* is confirmed by what we know of the narrators methods today. **Xiao Yiwu** in an article describing the art of the great storyteller **Wang Shaotang** describes the real prompt-books known as *diben* 底本 and says that they were nothing more than the simple outline of the story, and with them the narrator could tell a single story for ten days, or several months, or even a whole year. **Wang Shaotang** for instance, spent seven months narrating episodes from the romance "*Water Margin*" using almost five million words.[51]

According to the words of **Si Su**[52] the problem of the existence of more detailed prompt-books, called the *jiaoben* 脚本, was unclear for a long time, and it was only in the course of thorough research that anything was discovered. Both singers and narrators declared that they had no notes and that they knew even the verse passages by heart as passed down to them in the oral tradition.

49 Op. cit. pp. 50, 51.

50 Chen Ruheng, op. cit. p. 91.

51 Xiao Yiwu 蕭亦五: *Tan Wang Shaotang de shuoshu yishu* 談王少堂的說書藝術 in the periodical Quyi gongzuo tongxun, 1954, No. 3, pp. 30–37, pag. cit. 30.

52 Si Su 思蘇: *Shuoshu you wu jiaoben* 說書有無脚本, Quyi, 1962, No. 4, pp. 44–45.

Gradually, however, as **Si Su** got to know the folk storytellers better and won their confidence, he found out that many of them really did possess *jiaoben*. He himself saw several of them. He writes that they were small books or notebooks written by hand and containing notes on such matters as how many chapters the narrative contained and where certain lines or episodes could be inserted. They also contained sections of verse notes on the musical accompaniment, which melodies could be suitably used, and so forth. The notes varied according to the level of education of the artist – in some there were grammatical mistakes, incorrectly drawn characters, places which the storyteller himself only could understand. These notes were handed down from father to son and it was no wonder that their existence was kept secret, for they represented the "bowl of rice" of the storyteller. The narrator **Bai Fengming** 白鳳鳴 tells us, as an example of the deep friendship between his teacher **Liu Baoquan** 劉寶全 and another well-known narrator **Bai Yupeng** 白云鹏 that the latter handed over to **Liu** some subjects he had especially worked up himself.[53]

The Professional Training of the Storytellers

As the *diben* and the *jiaoben* were only more or less scanty notes to help the storyteller's memory they cannot give us a complete picture of the storyteller's performance in front of his audience. Here we must make some further investigations.

As we were able to see for ourselves at the market-place By the Bridge of Heaven (*Tianqiao* 天橋), the storyteller whether man or woman, singing the big drum ballads or reciting *kuaiban*, "the fast boards", very seldom repeated the same tale the same way twice running. On several occasions we were the centre of attention as the artist commented on our arrival by interpolating a few lines or making a witty remark. The same was experienced by **J. Bredon** and **I. Mitrophanow**[54] who quote the verses interpolated extempore by a storyteller when they arrived on the scene:

> "Here comes a stranger from far away, from far away.
> That stranger's nose is long and his nails are short,
> yet, perhaps, my friend, his pocket is full of cash,

53 Bai Fengming 白鳳鳴: *Huai Shipian* 懷師篇, Quyi, 1962, No. 5, pp. 47–51.

54 *The Moon Year*, Shanghai, 1927, p. 151.

for we have heard it said that foreigners are rich,
even if they have no manners."

This is of course only an insignificant example. The art of improvisation was always part of the professional training of a Chinese storyteller. This type of professional training was known, too in Central Asia, while in Europe there existed the professional training of Greek rhapsodists, Celtic bards, and the blind gusle players of Serbia.[55] In China the art of storytelling was passed from one generation to another, and talented storytellers would form schools taking talented boys and even girls into their families for training. The social standing of the storytellers – except for the very successful – was not high.[56] A somewhat better standing was enjoyed by the singers who were pupils of a well-known master. Self-taught artists, however well they knew their job, were not considered real artists in the towns.[57]

It was not easy to be a real master of the art of storytelling. It was a profession calling for hard work from childhood onwards. The storyteller **Wang Shaotang**, for example, said that from the time he was seven, he would go with his father to the market-place and watch his performance. He was twelve when he first performed alone, and not until he was thirty could he say that he had mastered his art and penetrated its mysteries.[58]

Liu Baoquan, the singer of drum ballads, talking to the famous actor **Mei Lanfang** 梅蘭芳 told how his father taught him to tell tales and to sing as early as at nine years old.[59] The same was true of **Kang Zhonghua** 康重華 who specialised in the Story of the Three Kingdoms, learning from his father as a child and appearing on the stage from the age of sixteen.[60]

When a pupil was accepted into the home of his master, he had to take part in a ceremony in the course of which he beat his head on the ground before his master. Then he lived in the master's house doing all kinds of household jobs and helping the master at his performances.

---

55 Zhirmunsky, op. cit. pp. 257, 263.

56 Lao She describes this effectively in his play about the life of storytellers, "*Fang Zhenzhu*" 方珍珠; Shanghai, 1950.

57 Hrdlička, 1957, op. cit. p. 90.

58 Xiao Yiwu, op. cit. pp. 30–36.

59 *Tan guwang Liu Baoquan de yishu chuangzao* 談鼓王劉寶全的藝術創造, Quyi, 1962, No. 2, pp. 2–19.

60 *Yi hai mo xia ji* 藝海摸蝦記, Quyi, 1962, No. 1, pp. 16–19.

First the young pupil had to master the fundamental principles of the art of storytelling, known as "*gang*" 綱.[61] This included among other things the knowledge of what was forbidden and what was allowed in narration. For singers of *tanci*, for example, it was forbidden "to sing in an expressionless or monotonous voice, point to things without looking at them, sit restlessly on the platform," etc.[62] Singers usually learned to play at least one musical instrument in childhood.

The pupil learned each narrative in sections. The basic "skeleton" of the narrative was called "*liangzi*" 梁子. This the pupil gradually developed and added to, as far as his abilities allowed him. At first, however, the pupil learned his story off by heart, not according to a written text, but in the form in which it was handed down from one storyteller to another orally, without ever being written down for narration purposes. It was one of the rules of the storytellers' guilds that no story should be ever written down as it was told. The storytellers were often illiterate or blind. **Zhang Changgong** found during research in the field that out of ten singers of *zhuizi* nine were illiterate.[63] These singers, as he remarked, could narrate and sing without interruption for three whole months without repeating themselves, and yet they could not read a single character. The blind, illiterate singers said of themselves that they "learned with their mouths and read with their ears."[64]

The apprentice years of a storyteller were far from easy. The motto of the old master was "learn hard and practise hard." There was a well-known saying "Just as the stick never leaves the hand of the man who leans upon it, so song must never leave the lips of the singer."[65]

At first the master would allow his pupils to perform in public only short sung passages – usually the introductions known as *kaipian* 開篇. In the jargon of the singers of *tanci* the apprentice who sang these introductions was called *cha bianhua* 插边花.[66]

---

61 Zi Chen, op. cit. p. 28.

62 Riftin, op. cit., pp. 193–194.

63 Op. cit. p. 84.

64 Chen Ruheng, op. cit. p. 173.

65 *Tan Xihe dagu de yanchang yishu* 談西河大鼓的演唱藝術, written from the account by Wang Zunsan 王尊三, in Quyi gongzuo tongxun, No. 2, 1954, June, pp. 7–12, pag. cit. 10.

66 Zhao Jingshen: *Tanci xuan*, p. 15.

Thus we see that the apprentices did not learn the art of narration all at once, their work was not the fruit of "sudden inspiration", but of long and hard work. In the course of their apprenticeship they had to learn to use "half-finished" products, so to speak, out of which they built up their story. These "half-finished" products the bricks from which they built their tales, included not only themes handed on from one generation to another and constantly enriched with new elements in the course of centuries of use, but also the language. Chinese storytellers used a whole range of proverbial sayings, fixed ways of describing the hero or heroine, a collection of rhymes which helped them to form new lines as the situation of the moment required. The *shulaibao* singers, for example, could only create their rhymed tales on the basis of the long years of apprentice training. The notebooks in which these folk artists wrote down proverbial sayings and accepted phrases have been preserved to this day. These were the half-finished products we mentioned. Thus a rich storyteller's vocabulary was built up, the detailed study of which would be most rewarding. This storytellers' language has all the beauty of the colourful language of the people. It is interesting to note, however, that the storytellers also took over established expressions from the written language, from theatrical plays. They used words found in mediaeval romances which today sound archaic in spoken Chinese. All these elements helped them to achieve dramatic effect in their narration. The analysis of these expressions and their origin can help us to determine more exactly the character of each text.

While studying the different forms of Chinese folk literature we collected a large number of these storytellers' phrases. A whole dictionary could be made of them. Here are a few examples as an illustration: a beautiful woman was one who had "eyebrows like willow leaves and eyes like almonds" – *liu ye mei xing he yan* 柳葉眉杏核眼. The invincible hero was that one who "lived a thousand autumns" – *qian qiu bu xiu* 千秋不朽. The strong man had "the back of a tiger and the waist of a bear" – *hubei xiongyao* 虎背熊腰. A battle was expressed by the term "battle between tigers and dragons" – *longzheng hudou* 龍爭虎鬥. To hesitate was to "walk a winding path" – *pai huai qi lu* 徘徊歧路 and so on.

An important part of what the apprentice had to learn was to observe every movement, every change in the tone of voice, every expression on his master's face. The artist **Kang Zhonghua** has an interesting passage on this subject.[67] He describes how successful he was when he first began to perform, because his

67 Op. cit.

audience was less exacting in view of his youth. As the time went on, however, he lost their favour and tried in vain to think why. One of his friends advised him to attend his father's performance again and memorise carefully every movement, every gesture, every tone of his voice, to get the storytelling art into his very bones. Then he should try to use it all to create his own individual style. This process was called "*wu*" 悟 – "understanding". It was difficult to achieve "*wu*" and **Kang Zhonghua** says that he could neither eat nor sleep for it.

Sometimes, afraid of a talented pupil surpassing him too soon, a master would deliberately hold him back in his apprenticeship. Thus we are told in the biography of one of the most famous *tanci* singers, **Ma Rufei** 馬如飛, who came of a family of storytellers, that after his father's death he was apprenticed to the master **Gui Qiurong** 桂秋榮. When his master was performing himself, he would send his pupil out on errands. **Ma Rufei** tried to use every opportunity of hearing his master perform, however, even listening outside the teahouse window, and so he was able to master the art fairly soon.[68]

Some masters would end the term of apprenticeship with a public performance which in the case of the *tanci* singers took the form of a public contest, *huishu* 會書.[69] In Shanghai these contests were famous. Girl singers took the main part in them. They could win the title of *xiansheng* 先生, master, which ensured them a better social standing that of ordinary girl singers, *xiaoshu* 校書. The *xiansheng* singers were very conscious of their superiority, and if an "ordinary singer" appeared in the hall, which was called *shuchang* 書場, the master singer of *tanci* immediately left the stage to show that she had nothing in common with the intruder.[70]

Singers and storytellers were grouped in guilds according to the type of narration or song they specialised in. Inside these there was a division into schools, according to the teacher. This was known as *menhu* 門戶. The *menhu* had very strict rules. Members had to know the family tree of the whole of their guild, for example. They were only allowed to tell the type of stories in which their guild specialised. Even the time they were allowed to spend on telling a single story was strictly limited. Some were allowed to perform only during the daytime, others during the evening, and that only in a certain teahouse or on a certain spot.

68 Chen Ruheng, op. cit. p. 190.

69 Zhao Jingshen, *Tanci xuan*, p. 14.

70 Zhao Jingshen, *Tanci xuan*, p. 15.

The *tanci* storytellers were strictly professional. They even had their own patron, *Sanhuang* 三皇, to whom two feastdays in the year were dedicated. The *tanci* singers were organised in guilds, the largest of which, the *Guangyushe* 光裕社 was in Suzhou. The Shanghai guild was called *Runyushe* 潤裕社.[71]

The Creative Methods of the Storytellers

Among the essential qualities of a storyteller were a good memory, quick repartee, talented acting and above all real knowledge of life, without which the artist would never win the favour of his audiences. One of the Qing storytellers described how his teacher taught him to observe life: "A storyteller must be conversant with men of all walks of life, and with dialects, customs and conventions of different places. Moreover, his knowledge must be accurate down to the last detail. His scripts provide merely the outline of certain stories: he himself must fill in the details and add episodes to make them interesting. His success in doing this depends on his powers of observation, his skill in analysis and selection, and his discrimination in retaining what is relevant and rejecting what is not."[72]

What a singer and storyteller had to know is summed up in these four main points:

a) *shuo* 說 – his performance had to be clear and effective. Music and song had to be in complete harmony.
b) *xue* 噱 – the storyteller had to give his tale what the Chinese call "flesh and blood". He had to watch his audience carefully, following their reactions and adapting his acting to them. The characterisation of different roles was most important, both in speech and action.
c) *tan* 彈 – skill in performing on a musical instrument
d) *chang* 唱 – mastery of the art of singing.[73]

No singer or storyteller could be good unless he knew how to change and adapt his story, adding new descriptions and episodes. There is an incident in the life of **Ma Rufei** which illustrates this very well. His first public performance was

71 Zhang Yuanshui 張原水: *Tanci zhongzhong* 彈詞種種, in the book, *Huadong difang xiqu jieshao* 華東地方戲曲介紹, Shanghai, 1951, pp. 121–126, pag. cit. 121.

72 Wu Weiyun: *The Funny-men and Storytellers of the Chinese Variety Theatre*; Chinese Literature, Sept., Oct., 5., 1958, pp. 127–131, pag. cit. 130.

73 Zhang Yuanshui, op. cit. p. 124.

the Pearl Pagoda, the tale which later became his lifelong specialisation. This first performance was not a success. **Ma Rufei** completed his narration of this tale, one of the favourite stories of generations of Chinese storytellers, in a mere seventeen days, while others told it sometimes as long as a year and half. In time, however, **Ma Rufei** became so skilful that his narration of the Pearl Pagoda began to be called "The Story of the Pearl Pagoda sung to Ma's Melody" – *Madiao zhenzhuta* 馬調珍珠塔. The text of his narrative was never printed and has only been preserved in manuscript copies.[74]

Each of the narrative forms called for special skills. The *tanci* singers were famed for their detailed descriptions. One scene in the story of the Pearl Pagoda, describing how the heroine wonders whether she ought or ought not to give the hero the pearl pagoda, could last several days in the performance of a master. One day, for instance, he began by saying:[75] "Now today we shall see whether Miss Chen will come down the steps or not."[76] Zhao Jingshen comments that the printed texts of this story had nothing in common with what was actually told. The text could be read through in a fortnight, while the narration took several months. There is a well-known story about a *tanci*, singer who spent two evenings describing how his heroine bent down to tie up her shoelace.

This delight in description, in which the storyteller had to show a remarkable knowledge of life, great ingenuity and originality, was not characteristic of the *tanci* alone. The tellers of prose tales were also expert at it, even if to a lesser degree. Actually these tales were divided into those in which the dramatic action was the most important – the *geishutingde* 給書聽的 and the descriptive type – *pangzheng boyinde* 旁徵博引的.[77]

Here it is possible to make an interesting comparison. **Lao She** writes admiringly that one storyteller took five or six evenings to recount how **Wu Song** killed a tiger. He gave for example a minute account of what **Wu Song** drank, how he drank it and so on. **Lao She** even adds that when the storyteller began to describe the way **Wu Song** chased a flea down his back, his audience began to scratch themselves too. Here was a case of a storyteller with the skill

74 Chen Ruheng, op. cit. p. 194.

75 Zhao Jingshen, *Tanci xuan*, p. 10.

76 A Ying 阿英: *Tanci xiaoshuo pingkao* 彈詞小說評考, Shanghai, 1927, p. 2.

77 Lao She: *Guoxin nian*, p. 12.

to describe apparently undramatic things in a witty, colourful fashion, and keep the attention of his hearers undivided.[78]

The Shandong "fast boards" singer **Er Gouxiong** 二狗熊 was able to sing for a month or even two about the adventures of **Wu Song**. In his version the hero performed whatever the artist happened to think of, as well as what his audience put into his mind. There were many suggestive anecdotes inserted into his ballads, so that when he arrived in the city the teachers are said to have forbidden the children to come out in the street. In the evening, however, the headmaster and all his subordinates were to be found in **Er Gouxiong**'s audience, it is said.[79]

Improvisation was an essential element in the art of the storytellers of rhythmic tales – for example, the *shulaibao*, which was often made up on the spur of the moment. They usually worked in pairs, one putting forward themes and the other improvising a song about them on the spot. The *shulaibao* singers were often poor beggars going from house to house; at other times they would be professional narrators performing in the teahouses on any subject given them.[80]

The creative methods depended often on the individual skill of each artist. **Kang Zhonghua** speaks of his father, who was also a storyteller, but had rather a weak voice. When he described a scene in which the hero was supposed to shout in a voice of thunder, he began by describing the powerful voice of his hero, which was so loud that "sand and ashes would boil up, birds singing in the branches would fall to the ground like stones, fishes swimming in the water would sink to the bottom, rivers would turn in their courses..." After such an introduction the actual shout did not need to be so loud. **Kang Zhonghua** himself had a powerful voice, and so he omitted his father's suggestive descriptions and simply cried out so loudly that his hearers would jump with surprise.[81]

The prose used by the storytellers was not simple, normal prose, but had its own special features. Sometimes series of four or six syllable phrases were introduced, a rhyme would be used, or words chosen so as to have the rhythm

78 Lao She, op. cit. p. 12.

79 Lao She, op. cit. p. 12, 13.

80 Improvising on a given theme had a long tradition in China. This type of rhyming repartee was called *hesheng* 合生 and was very popular in ancient China. A similar type of improvisation was well known in mediaeval Europe, where public contests in improvisation were held. Such contests were also known in Arabia, and in Persia. See Zhirmunsky, op. cit. p. 253.

81 Op. cit. p. 18.

required by the storyteller to suggest a certain atmosphere. When he described an impending storm, for example, the approach of a fierce tiger, or his hero hurrying home, these passages had to stand out from the rest of his narrative by means of their special rhythm. Sometimes onomatopoeia was used, or the storyteller would recite so fast that his listeners could not possibly understand his words, but were enchanted by the music they made.[82]

The language used by the storytellers had to have its own special effectiveness. **Lao She** says that often the young men in these narratives were called *Diba* 第八, the Eighth, because "*ba*" has not only a telling sound, but the character for "*ba*" can easily be described in the air with the finger, so that the audience can be made vividly aware of it.[83]

It is interesting to note that these storytellers were able to express sounds which are not normally expressible in words; by combining various means they created the exact atmosphere they needed, using not only words but rhythms, and tones of voice. One would create the impression of a falling leaf, another would modulate his voice to give the sound of water rippling under the oars of the conspirators escaping; they could imitate the sound of tea being poured out, or the tinkle of winecups knocked over. It is important when presenting characters to be able to show whether the hero walked with a light or a heavy step. Not even the sound of laughter or tears is the same always – it may be sincere or affected, happy or sad. When the storyteller **Wang Shaotang** spoke of a shot sounding far across a lake – a sound barely audible – he moved his lips once or twice and his listeners were all convinced they heard the sound coming to them from far, far away.[84]

The storyteller must concentrate all his powers on the purpose he chooses to set himself – to make his audience laugh, to make them weep, to move their feelings. The really great masters were so successful in this that when **Wang Shaotang**, for instance, said one day that on the next day he would tell how **Wu Song**, his hero, was beaten with rods, some of audience preferred to stay away, rather than hear their hero suffer.[85]

82 Lao She, op. cit. p. 6.

83 Lao She, op. cit. p. 5.

84 Xiao Yiwu, op. cit. p. 35.

85 Xiao Yiwu, op. cit. p. 36.

As a rule the storyteller avoided bombastic theatrical effects, and used economical means to meet their ends – often merely hinting – except of course in passages where the dramatic tension culminated.

In most of the narrative forms the gesticulation and the actor's whole behavior was influenced by tradition. In the ballads sung to the big drums the musician first appeared on the stage, sat down without bowing to the audience, and began to tune his instrument. Then the singer came on to the stage with quick steps. With an expression of complete indifference on his face he tapped the drum a few times with his left hand, and shook his clappers. Then in a fast, unnatural voice, almost incomprehensibly, he sang a few introductory phrases. As his listeners settled down, he began to sing in a calm, quiet voice, raising it as his story developed.[86]

Wang Shaotang used very little gesticulation as he told his tales. But he was said to be eloquent with his eyes. His audience could tell from the expression on his face whether the hero of his story was a good or a bad man. He always sat when he was performing, never getting to his feet; he moved only the upper half of his body. He motioned with his palm to show how the hero killed a tiger, a well-trained gesture showed how the heroine closed a door. He showed numbers by using his fingers.[87]

Where the text included singing as well as narration the musical accompaniment was particularly important. What singers feared most was monotony in their singing and reciting; they called it *daoyang* 道揚.[88]

The singer had to know the character of each melody, and make it fit the meaning of the words. **Wang Zunsan** speaks about the three most popular *Xihe dagu* melodies: *touban* 頭板, *erban* 二板, and *sanban* 三板. *Touban* was rather slow and was used to introduce a long narration. It was particularly suitable for the opening as it calmed the listeners down and the story could be explained to them while it was being played. *Erban* sometimes also called *liushuiban* 流水板 because it sounded like a flowing river – was very pleasant to the ear. It was suitable as an accompaniment to epic narration. The *sanban* melody was a fast one, suitable for moments of excitement.

Some singers created their own melodies as circumstances required, or altered the basic melody. This can be seen from an analysis of the *qingyin* 清音

86 Hrdlička, 1957, op. cit. p. 99.

87 Xiao Yiwu, op. cit. p. 36.

88 Wang Zunsan, op. cit. p. 8.

form. Field work showed that every singer introduced his own changes into both words and melody, so that when the collectors wanted to write down a melody and the words sung to it, they had to listen to ten or more singers in order to get an objective picture.[89]

Conclusion

For limitations of space, it was not possible to touch on all the questions connected with the art of storytelling in this short article, to clarify the creative character of the folk art and to support the theory that it has a fundamentally folk character. In the intricate and special conditions of China this question is of prime significance, for it is constantly necessary to determine the relationship between fixed written texts and the living oral tradition, between truly folk art created for the people, and art arising in and intended for a different social environment, even if drawing on folk literature for many an inspiration. Great care and sensitive analysis is needed to deal with the content of these works, their moral purpose and their form. This is the only approach which will allow us to view them correctly in the context of the many social factors that influenced their origin, the use they were put to, and their effect on their audiences. From what has been shown in the article it is essential to draw a fundamental distinction between folk storytellers and those who performed for the feudal upper classes; and between printed texts in narrative form but intended for reading rather than oral narration, texts which are already in the sphere of literature proper, and finally the "popular" literature with its propaganda aim of restoring feudal ideas, which in many ways recalls the broadsheets and similar semi-folk printed ballads in this country.

From this point of view we can form the right approach to storytelling literature closely connected and growing out of the folk storyteller's art. This question must be studied in greater detail and attention must also be paid to an analysis of the themes, which will help to clarify the relationship between folk and literary writing. The role of the storyteller's personality, his original approach to his material, must also be studied, and material collected in the field, as far as possible, to show the influence of the audience on the storyteller's performance.

---

89 Hu Du: *Women shi zen yang souji zhengli Sichuan qingyin de* 我們是怎樣搜集整理「四川」清音的, in: Quyi gongzuo tongxun, 1954, No. 2, pp. 47–49.

There can be no doubt that this approach to the question of Chinese storytelling art is infinitely more correct than the mere study of printed texts, and that this approach alone can give rise to correct and well-founded conclusions.

References

A Ying 阿英: *Tanci Xiaoshuo Pingkao* 弹词小说评考 [A Review of Tanci Texts]. Shanghai 1927.

Bai Fengming 白凤鸣: Huai Shi Pian 怀师篇 [An Essay on Cherishing the Master]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 5, pp. 47–51.

Bredon, Juliet and Igor Mitrophanow: *The Moon Year*. Shanghai 1927.

Chen Ruheng 陈汝衡: *Shuoshu Shihua* 说书史话 [The History of Storytelling]. Peking 1958.

Chichyerov, Vladimir Ivanovich Чичеров, Владимир Иванович: *Russkoye narodnoye tvorchestvo Русское народное творчество* [Russian Folk Art]. Moscow 1959.

Fou Si-houa: *Catalogue des Pao-kiuan* [Catalog of Baojuan]. Peking 1951.

Fu Xihua 傅惜华: *Beijing Chuantong Quyi Zonglu* 北京传统曲艺总录 [Comprehensive Collection of Beijing Traditional Folk Vocal Art]. Shanghai 1962.

Hrdlička, Zdeněk: O původu a vývoji lien-chua-lao [The Origin and Development of Lianhualao]. *Československá ethnografie* [Czechoslovak Ethnography] 1956, IV(2), pp. 154–169.

Hrdlička, Zdeněk: Old Chinese Ballads to the Accompaniment of the Big Drum. *Archiv orientální* 1957, 25(1), pp. 83–145.

Hrdličková, Věnceslava: Tun-huangské pien-weny o oddaném synovi Mu-lienovi [Dunhuang Bianwen about the Devoted Son Mulian]. *Acta Universitatis Carolinae – Philologica* 2, 1958, pp. 269–286.

Hu Du: Women Shi Zen Yang Souji Zhengli Sichuan Qingyin de 我们是怎样搜集整理「四川」清音的 [How Did We Collect and Organize Sichuan Qingyin]. *Quyi Gongzuo Tongxun* 曲艺工作通讯 [Work Newsletter on Folk Vocal Art] 1954, 2, pp. 47–49.

Kang Zhonghua 康重华: Yi Hai Mo Xia Ji 艺海摸蝦记 [Notes on Catching Shrimps in the Sea of Art]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 1, pp. 16–19.

Krejčí, Karel: Píseň pražské ulice, její vztah k písni kramářské a literatuře [The Song of the Prague Street, Its Relation to the Broadside Ballad and Literature]. In: Jaromír Dvořák and Josef Š. Kvapil (Eds.), *Václavek's Olomouc 1961. Sborník referátů a diskusních příspěvků o kramářské písni* [Václavek's Olomouc 1961. Collection of Papers and Discussion Contributions on the Broadside Ballad]. Prague 1963, pp. 59–77.

Lao She 老舍: *Fang Zhenzhu* 方珍珠 [Fang Zhenzhu]. Shanghai 1950.

Lao She 老舍: *Guo Xinnian* 过新年 [Celebrating the New Year]. Shanghai 1951.

Li Xiaocang 李啸仓: *Quyi Tan* 曲艺谈 [Talks on Folk Vocal Art]. Wuhan 1951.

LIANG Wenda 梁文达 (Ed.): *Shanbei Daoqing Yinyue* 陕北道情音乐 [Northern Shaanxi Taoist Music]. Xi'an 1953.

LU Xun 鲁迅: *Zhongguo Xiaoshuo Shilüe* 中国小说史略 [A Brief History of Chinese Fiction]. Peking 1925.

LU Xun: *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*. Peking 1959, pp. 152–162.

MEI Lanfang 梅兰芳: Tan Guwang Liu Baoquan de Yishu Chuangzao 谈鼓王刘宝全的艺术创造 [On the Artistic Creation of Liu Baoquan, the King of Drum]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 2, pp. 2–19.

MEN'SHIKOV, Lev Nikolayevich МЕНЬШИКОВ, Лев Николаевич: O zhanrye zhugongdiao i o Liu Zhiyuan zhugongdiao О жанре чжугундяо и о Лю Чжыюань чжугундяо [About the Zhugongdiao Form and Liu Zhiyuan's Zhugongdiao]. In: *Voprosy filologii i istorii stran sovyetskogo i zarubezhnogo Vostoka Вопросы филологии и истории стран советского и зарубежного Востока.* [Questions of Philology and History of the Countries of the Soviet and Foreign East]. Moscow 1961, pp. 78–82.

PELLIOT, Paul: Les documents chinois trouvés par la mission Kozlov à Khara-Khoto [The Chinese Documents Found by the Kozlov Expedition at Khara-Khoto]. *Journal Asiatique* 1914, 11(3), pp. 503–518.

PRŮŠEK, Jaroslav: *Čui-c'-šu: Lidové zpěvy z Chenanu* [Zhuizishu: Folk Song from Henan]. Prague 1954.

RIFTIN, Boris L'vovich РИФТИН, Борис Львович: *Skazaniye o velikoi styenye i problyema zhanra v kitajskom fol'klorye Сказание о Великой стене и проблема жанра в китайском фольклоре.* [The Tale of the Great Wall and the Problem of Genre in Chinese Folklore]. Moscow 1961.

SI Su 思苏: Shuoshu You Wu Jiaoben 说书有无脚本 [Is There a Storyteller's Handbook?]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 4, pp. 44–45.

SMETANA, Robert: K problematice jevu české písně kramářské [A Contribution to the Problem of the Czech Broadside Ballad]. In: Jaromír Dvořák and Josef Š. Kvapil (Eds.), *Václavkova Olomouc 1961. Sborník referátů a diskusních příspěvků o kramářské písni* [Václavek's Olomouc 1961. Collection of Papers and Discussion Contributions on the Broadside Ballad]**.** Prague 1963, pp. 13–58.

VÁCLAVEK, Bedřich: *Písemnictví a lidová tradice* [Literature and Folk Tradition]. Prague 1947.

VELINGEROVÁ, Milena: Jaké jsou charakteristické rysy čínské populární slovesnosti [What are the Characteristic Features of Chinese Popular Verbal Art]. *Zprávy ČSO* 1961, 3.

WANG Zhongmin 王重民, Wang Qingshu 王庆菽, Zhou Yiliang 周一良, Zeng Yigong 曾毅公 and Xiang Da 向达 (Eds.): *Dunhuang Bianwenji* 敦煌变文集 [The Collection of the Dunhuang Bianwen]. Peking 1957.

WANG Zunsan 王尊三 (Speaker) and Ding Luo 丁洛 (Record-keeper): Tan Xihe Dagu de Yanchang Yishu 谈西河大鼓的演唱艺术 [On the Art of Xihe Dagu Singing]. *Quyi Gongzuo Tongxun* 曲艺工作通讯 [Work Newsletter on Folk Vocal Art] 1954, 2, pp. 7–12.

Wu Weiyun: The Funny-men and Storytellers of the Chinese Variety Theatre. *Chinese Literature* 1958, 5(September/ October), pp. 127–131.

Xiao Yiwu 萧亦五: Tan Wang Shaotang de Shuoshu Yishu 谈王少堂的说书艺术 [On the Wang Shaotang's Storytelling Art]. *Quyi Gongzuo Tongxun* 曲艺工作通讯 [Work Newsletter on Folk Vocal Art] 1954, 3, pp. 30–36.

Xi Jin 锡金: Guanyu Minjian Wenxue, Renmin Koutou Wenxue de Gainian Jiqi Fanwei Jiexian 关于「民间文学」,「人民口头文学」的概念及其范围界限 [On the Concepts and Scope of 'Folk Literature' and 'Oral Literature of the People']. *Minjian Wenxue* 民间文学 [Folk Literature] 1957, 7, pp. 58–60.

Xu Jiping 徐汲平: Laozi de Yuanqi Cunyi 落子的源起存疑 [Doubts about the Origin of Laozi]. *Xiqu Biji* 习曲笔记 [Notes on Learning Songs] 1951, pp. 1–11.

Ye Dejun 叶德均: *Song Yuan Ming Jiangchang Wenxue* 宋元明讲唱文学 [Song, Yuan and Ming Jiangchang Literature]. Shanghai 1953.

Yu Zhang 禹漳: Henan Zhuizi Yuanyuan Xinshuo 河南墜子淵源新说 [A New Interpretation of the Origin of Henan Ballad Singing Accompanied by a Zhuizi]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 2, pp. 63–65.

Zhang Changgong 张长弓: *Henan Zhuizi Shu* 河南墜子書 [Book of Henan Ballad Singing Accompanied by a Zhuizi]. Peking 1951.

Zhang Yuanshui 张原水: Tanci Zhongzhong 弹词种种 [Various Types of Tanci]. In: *Huadong Difang Xiqu Jieshao* 华东地方戏曲介绍 [Introduction to Local Operas of East China]. Shanghai 1952, pp. 121–126.

Zhao Jingshen 赵景深: *Dagu Yanjiu* 大鼓研究 [Research on Ballads accompanied by the Big Drums]. Shanghai 1936.

Zhao Jingshen 赵景深: *Tanci Xuan* 弹词选 [Selected Tanci]. Shanghai 1947.

Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎: *Chatuben Zhongguo Wenxueshi* 插图本中国文学史 [An Illustrated History of Chinese Literature]. Peking 1932.

Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎: *Zhongguo Suwenxue Shi* 中国俗文学史 [The History of Chinese Popular Literature]. Peking 1954, 2 vols.

Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎: Po Zichan Jieji de Zhixue Fangfa, Li Shehuizhuyi de Lichang Guandian he Fangfa 破资本阶级的治学方法，立社会主义的立场观点和方法 [Breaking the Bourgeois Academic Methods and Establishing Socialist Standpoints and Methods]. *Minjian Wenxue* 民间文学 [Folk Literature] 1958, 7–8, pp. 42–44.

Zhirmunskiy, Viktor Maksimovich Жирмунский, Виктор Максимович: *Narodnyy geroicheskiy epos Народный героический эпос* [National Heroic Epos]. Moscow–Leningrad 1962.

Zhu Zeji: Bixu cong Yuanzeshang Huaqing Minjian Wenxue de Fanwei 必须从原则上划清「民间文学」的范围 [The Scope of "Folk Literature" Must Be Clearly Defined in Principle]. *Minjian Wenxue* 民间文学 [Folk Literature] 1957, 7, pp. 51–57.

Zi Chen 紫晨: Quyi Huiyan gei Wo de Qifa 曲艺会演给我的启发 [The Inspiration I Gained from the Quyi Performance]. *Minjian Wenxue* 民间文学 [Folk Literature] 1958, 9, pp. 26–29.

Poznámky k problematice čínského vypravěčského umění

Čínská vypravěčská slovesnost představuje obraz tvorby neobyčejně bohaté. Při jejím celkovém hodnocení nestačí omezit se pouze na studium písemných textů, ale je nutno průzkum rozšířit i o metody národopisné, které nám umožňují postihnout celou škálu významných okolností, jež vznik a provozování vypravěčského umění doprovázely. Jen na základě takto získaného materiálu můžeme pak dospět k positivním závěrům o tom, do jaké míry bylo vypravěčství uměním skutečně lidovým a do jaké míry bylo snad závislé na textech psaných tak zvaně, „pro lid" vzdělanci. Přitom je ovšem nutno brát v úvahu i to, že vypravěčské umění, tkvící svými kořeny v lidu, se postupně rozšířilo i mezi ostatní vrstvy obyvatelstva a že při hodnocení textů musíme si vždy položit otázku, komu byly určeny. Pro osvětlení otázky, do jaké míry byli lidoví vypravěči závislí na psaných textech, poskytuje velmi mnoho materiálu průzkum živých vypravěčských tradic. Na jeho základě se můžeme přesvědčit, že lidový vypravěč byl v rámci vymezeném tradicí umělcem skutečně tvůrčím a že tedy nebyl pouhým mechanickým recitátorem psaného textu. Tyto texty naopak čerpaly inspiraci z tvorby tradované ústně a většinou byly již určeny spíše ke čtení, než ke skutečné recitaci.

К вопросу о китайском повествовательном искусстве

Китайская повествовательная литература представляет собой чрезвычайно богатое творчество. Для общей оценки этого творчества недостаточно ограничиться одним изучением письменных текстов, необходимо также расширить исследование еще на методы этнографии. Последние дают возможность охватить целый ряд важных обстоятельств, сопровождавших появление и развитие повествовательного искусства народных рассказчиков. Только на основании приобретенного таким образом материала можно сделать положительные заключения о том, в какой степени повествовательное искусство явилось действительно народным и в какой степени оно было зависимо от текстов, сочиняемых „для народа" представителями образованных слоев общества. При этом надо принимать во внимание и то обстоятельство, что повествовательное искусство, зародившись в народе, постепенно распространялось и на другие слои населения,

так что при оценке произведений необходимо ставить вопрос, для кого последние предназначались. Много материала для разъяснения вопроса о том, в какой степени народные рассказчики были зависимы от письменных текстов, приносит исследование живых традиций рассказчиков. На основании такого исследования можно убедиться в том, что народный рассказчик являлся в пределах традиционного подхода бесспорно творческим художником, а не механическим чтецом написанного текста. Наоборот, тексты писались на основании передаваемого устно творчества и сами в большинстве случаев предназначались скорее для читателя, чем для рассказчика.

The Professional Training of Chinese Storytellers and the Storytellers' Guilds

Abstract: The paper provides a comprehensive look at Chinese storytellers' professional training and guild organization, emphasizing the importance of oral tradition in Chinese literature and culture. It describes the strenuous path to mastery of storytelling, including accepting a pupil into the apprenticeship, the slow process of initiation into the mysteries of the storytelling art, the rigorous training system, and the nature of first performances in public. Moreover, the paper mentions several artistic techniques. Storytellers used various aids, such as secret handbooks and orally transmitted "magic formulae" to guide their performances. Despite this, an essential skill for storytellers was the ability to improvise, adding new elements to stories and responding to audience reactions. The second part of the text analyzes the role of storytellers' guilds, which not only regulated their activities and protected their interests but also played a crucial role in maintaining high artistic standards. Furthermore, it describes the characteristic features of the tea rooms, where the storytellers, based on their artistic proficiency, hold their performances.

Keywords: Oral tradition, Chinese storytelling, apprenticeship, professional training, guild, tea room.

This study aims to be a contribution to the solving of the complex problem of the Chinese storytelling art, a problem made more difficult still by the fact that it is not confined to the domain of folk art alone, but overlaps into the sphere of art literature, affecting especially those works closely connected with the storytelling technique and undoubtedly owing much to the creative impulses emanating from the today in great part vanished wealth of folk creation of great antiquity. To outline and correctly fill in the complicated picture of mutual relations between folk and art literature, whose existence is an inseparable part of the development of the whole of Chinese national literature is not an easy task. It requires not only a thorough study of literary works which, in form

and content, show clear affinities with the oral storytelling tradition, but also an investigation of the conditions in which the Chinese art of storytelling arose and matured. Only along these lines will it be possible to follow correctly the course of historical development and evaluate fully the creative powers of folk artists. It will thus be necessary to extend research in this domain to include investigation of folklore character, in which we can make use of the results of both our own field work and that of other investigators. To leave out of account this valuable material for elucidating the question of the rise of such genres as Chinese colloquial short stories, known as *huaben*, would be a regrettable waste, for a living storytelling tradition existed in China on an undiminished scale and in the original forms up to the Liberation and could still be studied even after 1949. This situation, as compared with other countries, is unusually favourable for our purpose, the more so that Chinese students of folklore have themselves assembled a considerable quantity of material not only of a textual character, but also on the conditions of professional training, on artistic procedures and techniques, etc., from storytellers, many of whom are today no longer alive, their regular listeners and old people who still remember them.

Storytelling in feudal and semi-feudal China, where the majority of the people could not read, branched out into a great variety of genres and forms and achieved, especially as a professional art cultivated in both town and country, a high level of performance. Nor did it escape the notice of the educated men of letters who not only were enthusiastic patrons of storytellers, but very often themselves found in their art rich sources for their own production, in which they could cast off the shackles of formalistic, orthodox literature and give scope to their natural literary gifts and express their personal feelings, longings and view of life. Especially in the towns, the relations between folk storytellers and literati were often very close, so that the work of the latter also exercised its influence on this branch of folk art, especially as regards subject-matter. Certainly, however, it would be a mistake to take as a starting-point for the study of the storytellers' material only a knowledge of literary fixed productions and assume that these works were written for the use of storytellers who memorized them and modified them only in unsubstantial details. Such a conception would imply that the true creators were, above all, the authors of these texts, who alone were able to give the story content and shape, while the storytellers' contribution was of secondary importance.[1] If we penetrate more deeply into the true character of

[1] M. Velingerová, *Jaké jsou charakteristické rysy čínské populární slovesnosti* (What are the Characteri-

the storytelling art and make a closer acquaintance with the methods of training its practitioners, we realize that the direction of the process was reversed – that folk artists were not dependent on written texts, but rather the contrary was true, and that in this exceptionally strong stream of folk creation are to be found the origins of those works which today, although denied recognition by the literati in the past, form an integral and valuable part of Chinese literature.

A knowledge of the methods of the training of storytellers, such as V. Zhirmunski[2] turns to good account in his investigation of the epos, helps us to grasp the true essence of the art of folk storytelling, the stories which were – its content being passed down by oral tradition from one generation to the next – not directly dependent on written texts, and which underwent a long process of polishing in the presentation of an unbroken succession of reciters and singers. In this way works arose which are the fruit of centuries of creative shaping and modification by folk artists. Testifying to the greatness and strength of this creative effort are, above all, the literary collections of the materials in the form of novels of such compendious dimensions as *Sanguo yanyi* 三国演義 or *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳, which again in reverse influenced the storytellers' production for several centuries after their appearance and, indeed, into modern times.

In the storytellers' art, our interest centres especially on those aspects which are able to throw direct light on several important questions relating to the rise of those literary works in which clear survivals of the storytelling technique are apparent. Materials able to provide an answer to the question of whether these works were written for recitation by folk storytellers or whether they arose on the basis of impulses initiated by the production of folk storytellers, but designed predominantly for reading, are furnished by just such a study of the storytellers' art, its traditions and the conditions under which it flourished.

For this reason I have directed my researches in this paper on an investigation of the professional training and guild organization of storytellers, where facts which would otherwise escape our notice or might seem of little significance help us to a fuller knowledge of how storytellers penetrated the mysteries of their complicated and exacting profession and explain how it was possible for them not only to manage without written texts, but how in the conditions of severe competition in the towns and considering the restrictions of the guild

stic Features of Chinese Popular Verbal Art?), Zprávy československé společnosti orientalistické, 1961, III, cf. 146–151, see p. 149.

2 V. Zhirmunski, *Narodnyi geroicheskii epos*, Moskva–Leningrad, 1962, see p. 241.

organization, these texts were unnecessary and actually undesirable. A proper insight into the training of storytelling adepts will also enable us to grasp 'the mutual relations between the creative initiative of individual storytellers and the collective folk tradition',[3] and reach a correct assessment of the general character of this branch of verbal expression. Field investigation will indeed show that the storytellers' professionalism is not in contradiction with the folk character of the art: professionalism is inherent in the art itself, for everywhere in the world it is bound up with the existence of storytellers. Professional training also explains the storytellers' mastery of forms of considerable complexity and the high artistic level of their performances which, in China, always roused our unstinted admiration.

The storytelling vocation was often in China inherited from one generation to the next, and around outstanding exponents storytelling schools regularly formed. Master storytellers received gifted boys, and sometimes girls, into their families for training. Reciters and singers specialized, as a rule, in only one form of narration, and even more frequently limited their repertoire to a certain group of themes, or even to one single theme.

The fact of belonging to a storytelling school also influenced the social standing of the storyteller, which was usually somewhat higher than that of actors. Self-taught members of the profession found it very hard to make their way in the towns, no matter how high their qualification.[4] But all storytellers suffered in varying degree the severe social oppression of a feudal society.[5]

The path to mastery was strenuous and demanded a high degree of discipline, perseverance and self-denial, in the long years of training, often from childhood, which led to the goal. Testimony of this is amply forthcoming in the life-stories of celebrated storytellers. One of them, Wang Shaotang 王少堂, describes how his father took him to the marketplace. The boy's task was not only to assist his father, but mainly to watch very attentively his performance.[6] The future of Wang's granddaughter, Wang Litang 王丽堂, was already decided when the child was no more than six years old. Her father, also a storyteller,

3 V. Zhirmunski, op. cit., pp. 244–245. I shall treat this problem in greater detail, in a separate article.

4 Z. Hrdlička, *Old Chinese Ballads to the Accompaniment of the Big Drum*, Archiv Orientální, 25, 1957, pp. 83–145, see p. 90.

5 See, for example, Lao She's 老舍 play from the life of storytellers *Fang Zhenzhu* 方珍珠, Shanghai 1950.

6 Xiao Yiwu, *Tan Wang Shaotang de shuoshu yishu* 談王少堂的說书艺术, Quyi gongzuo tongxun, 1954, No 3, pp. 30–36.

considered that she had all the requisite qualities for successfully following the profession, for she was 'of a lively temperament, had large and expressive eyes, a strong voice and a clear enunciation'. And so, when she was still a little girl, he recited to her whole sections of the stories about Wu Song 武松, which formed the core of his repertoire. This was nothing more, however, than a mere preliminary preparation and was not accounted part of her apprenticeship. On this Wang Litang entered at the age of nine.[7]

The early age at which training was started is confirmed by other storytellers. At the same age as Wang Litang another famous singer of Drum Ballads, Liu Baoquan 刘宝全[8], started his training. The famous storyteller of Shandong *qinshu* 山東琴書, Shang Yeguang 商业光, was accepted for training by his master at the age of eight and he began to perform in public when he was thirteen.[9] Kang Zhonghua 康重华, who specialized in the reciting of The Stories of the Three Kingdoms, began his training later – at the age of fifteen, although he, too, came of a family of storytellers.[10]

The acceptance of a pupil into apprenticeship was accompanied by a rite in which the pupil had to show his submission by touching the ground with his forehead, in front of the master, and the signing of a contract which the teacher drew up. The teacher then gave the pupil a name having some relation to the school. The apprentice lived in the master's house where he not only learned to recite and sing, but carried out various household chores and assisted his master at his performances. In return he had board and lodging. Teaching was free. Celebrated masters often chose as their pupils storytellers who already appeared publicly. To be accepted as a pupil by such a master was looked upon by every artist as a great honour, for it signified also a kind of public recognition of his talent.

Typical of how such a relationship might originate is probably the case of the storyteller Bai Fengming 白凤鸣. Bai describes in his memoirs how he became the pupil of the King of Drum Ballads, Liu Baoquan,[11] after having served his apprenticeship with his father, who had taught him to sing and recite from his eighth year. When Bai began to perform independently 'he hired a

7 Wang Litang, *Wo de xueyi jingguo* 我的学习經过, Quyi, 1958, No 6, pp. 27–28.

8 Mei Lanfang, *Tan guwang Liu Baoquan de yishu chuangzao* 談鼓王刘宝全的艺术創造.

9 *Shandong qinshu Liupai qiantan* 山東琴书流派淺探, Quyi, 1962, 2, pp. 45–50, see p. 49.

10 Kang Zhonghua, *Yihai mo xiaji* 艺海摸蝦記, Quyi, 1962, 1, pp. 16–19, see p. 16.

11 Bai Fengming, *Huaishipian* 怀师篇, Quyi, 1962, 5, pp. 47–51, see p. 47.

stage' in the well-known storytellers' theatre, Daguanlou 大观楼, outside the Peking gate, Qianmen. When Bai Fengming stepped onto the platform, he noticed that Master Liu was sitting among the audience, in the first row. He got such a shock that 'you couldn't have drawn a drop of blood from him' and his 'heart started beating like a bell'. When he had calmed down a little, he tried to recite and sing his very best. After the performance Master Liu sent for him and, in front of his brother and another singer, said: 'This young man is my pupil from this day on!'

Bai Fengming struck the ground with his forehead, in accordance with custom, and the very next day his father went to the master to thank him for the honour he had shown his son.

The process of initiation into the mysteries of the storytelling art was slow. First the adept accompanied his master to the tearoom or marketplace and assisted at his performance. He prepared the table, the various requisites, the musical instruments and poured out tea. At the same time not a movement or gesture of his master might escape him, not a single word of his narrative. He had to absorb the storytelling art into his very blood, as in the interesting description of the storyteller Kang Zhonghua based on his own experience.[12] In this time of preparation the pupil absorbed the art of his master through every pore. It was the immediate goal on which he had fully to concentrate. When he went to bed at night and closed his eyes, he had the vision of his teacher before his eyes reciting or singing this or that part of a story, as if he were there in the flesh.

Thus the adept gained proficiency in the art in the perfecting and polishing of which successive generations of reciters and singers had taken part. He took over the whole wealth of the creative endeavour of artists, the majority of whom could neither read nor write. And he himself, as a rule, did not know a single character. Among the reciters and singers were very often blind artists. Zhang Changgong 張長弓 ascertained in his field investigation that of ten singers of *zhuizi* nine were illiterate.[13] And these singers could sing and recite three months on end without repeating themselves. Illiterate and blind singers used to say of themselves that 'they learned by word of mouth and read by ear'.[14]

12 Op. cit., pp. 16–18.

13 Zhang Changgong, *Henan zhuizi shu* 河南墜子书, Peking 1951, see p. 85.

14 Chen Ruheng, *Shuoshu shihua* 說书史話, Peking 1958, see p. 173.

The apprentice learned from the first to cultivate his powers of observation, his memory and quickness of perception. For being unable to read or write, he had no other means of acquiring knowledge than through them. If he was quick and teachable, he could gain much from the sources which the art of his master and of other artists opened to him. Having acquired this first grounding he was then ready to pass onto the second stage, when he learned to recite a story himself. He did not attempt to master it all at once. He worked his way forward slowly and perseveringly, just as every true artist must.

The skeleton of the story, containing the key episodes and twists of the plot, which could not be left out, was called *'liangzi'* 梁子.[15] These sections the pupil learnt 'from the lips' of his master. He practised the reciting of them on his own and then in front of his master – not once, but a hundred times till he had a perfect command of this basic material. Not in vain was the slogan of the old Chinese master-storytellers: Learn hard and practise hard! Well known, too, was the saying that 'just as a stick must never leave the hand of him who leans upon it, so a song must always be in the mouth of a singer'.[16]

On the effort expended by the adept of the storytelling art in mastering his craft in this time of training depended very often his whole future. This finds apt expression in one of the rules for the reciting of Suzhou *pingtan* 苏州評彈: Practise when you're young, or you'll miss it when you're old.[17]

All famous master-storytellers were renowned not only for the severe discipline they submitted themselves, but also for the strictness with which they treated their pupils.

This is described by the storyteller Bai Fengming, pupil of Liu Baoquan.[18] The master taught his pupils in his little house in Peking, in a room the simplicity of whose furnishings provided a suitable milieu for the acquiring of the storyteller's art. The master devoted a great deal of time and effort to the training of his pupils. Bai stresses that for all he achieved he was indebted to his master.

---

15 Zi Chen, *Quyihuiyan gei wode qifa* 曲艺会演給我的啟發, Minjian wenxue, September 1958, pp. 26–29, see p. 28.

16 *Tan Xihe dagu de yanchang yishu* 談西河大鼓的演唱艺術, as told by Wang Zunsan 王尊三 and recorded by Ding Luo 丁洛, Quyi gongzuo tongxun, No 2, 1954, pp. 7–12, see p. 10.

17 Suzhou pingtan koujue 苏州評彈口訣, commentary by Pan Boying 潘伯英 and Zhou Liang 周良, Quyi, 3, 1962, pp. 51–57, see p. 57.

18 See op. cit., pp. 47–50.

The master took particular trouble to see that his pupil recited and sang so that every word was clearly understood. He also laid special stress on intonation and accent. Certain words or sentences of particular significance had to be repeated till the master was satisfied. Sometimes the master even ordered his pupil to come and sing a sentence he could not bring off well to him at least once a day. Bai Fengming admits that when he was young, he thought his master too strict. Only later did he realize that it was the only way to gain a perfect mastery of the art of song and recitation.

The master was always concerned that his pupils should be a credit to him, as in public they were an advertisement for his own art. Bai Fengming recalls how once, when he was still Liu's pupil, he took a careless step on the platform, so that the boards cracked. It was a great fault, for the entry of a singer or reciter onto the stage should always be noiseless, his step light and inaudible. After the performance at which his pupil made this faux pas in the literal sense of the term, his master apologized to the audience, laying stress on the fact that it was his pupils who performed there and were still in his training. He thereby wished to make clear that it was he alone who was responsible for their faults, which were due to his being insufficiently strict with them.

Let us now turn our attention to the actual system of training for the storytelling profession. Its three basic grades comprised: memorizing, listening and reciting. The Suzhou rules for the recital of *pingtan* assess their relative importance as follows: To hear the master recite once is a thousand times more than to memorize his words, and to recite once oneself a thousand times more than to hear the master recite.[19]

In forms where recitation alternates with song, the artist had to be also a good singer. Besides which an essential condition of success was a gift for acting, for an important part of the storyteller's performance was the accompanying facial mimicry and gesture, which differed considerably from that employed by the stage actor.

All that a singer and reciter should have a command of is summed up in the four following points:

a) *Shuo* 說 – the art of clear and effective recital. Music and song must be in perfect harmony.
b) *Xue* 噱 – the art of acting; the storyteller must, as the Chinese say,

19 See op. cit., pp. 56–57.

give his narrative 'flesh and blood'. He must be attentive to his audience and their reactions and modify his singing and gestures accordingly. Of especial importance was the portrayal of character, it being essential to differentiate between the personages figuring in the story, both in respect of language and of behaviour.

c) *Tan* 彈 – practice in playing on a musical instrument.
d) *Chang* 唱 – the art of singing.[20]

Many storytellers, especially those artists who came of a family with a longer tradition in this profession, learned from childhood to play on a musical instrument, and some were able to accompany their master's singing before they began to perform independently. Such, for instance, was the case of Liu Baoquan, who accompanied on the *sanxian* the recital of Huo Mingliang.[21] During his training the storyteller had to acquire a large repertoire of traditional elements, the semiraw materials from which he built up his story. These structural elements comprised not only themes handed down from one generation to another and continually enriched by new elements in the process of transmission, but also various expressive means. Chinese storytellers worked with a whole stock of proverbial sayings, fixed descriptions of the physical appearance of the hero or heroine, a supply of rhymes to help him to make verses in prompt reaction to the demands of the situation. For instance, the singers of *shulaibao* were able to turn out rhymed verses only on the basis of long practice acquired in their years of apprenticeship. The notebooks of these storytellers have survived to this day and in them are jotted down proverbial sayings and a variety of verbal clichés. Thus they built up a rich vocabulary of storytelling expressions, which have all the beauty and colourfulness of colloquial speech. It is interesting, however, that in addition to the materials mentioned, the storytellers took over dialectical expressions and fixed turns of speech from the written language, from stage plays, words occurring in mediaeval tales which in the colloquial language of today sound archaic, etc. All this helped to increase the plasticity of effect of the storytelling. An analysis of the origin of these expressions would often be very illuminating. From the considerable quantity of material of this kind collected in the course of

20 Zhang Yuanshui 張原水, *Tanci zhongzhong* 彈詞種種, in Huadong difang xiqu jieshao 華東地方戲曲介紹, Shanghai 1952, pp. 121–126, cit. p. 124.

21 Bai Fengming, op. cit., see p. 48.

studies of different forms of storytelling, we may note, in illustration, the following: a lovely woman was one who had 'eyebrows like willow leaves and eyes like almonds'. An invincible hero was he who lived a thousand autumns and a strong man was one who had 'a tiger's back and a bear's waist'. Struggle was expressed by the phrase 'a fight of tigers and dragons', and vacillation by the expression 'to walk along a zig-zag path'.[22]

From the descriptions of the training of pupils for their future vocation it is quite clear that adepts learnt the stories from their master's lips.

It was, indeed, the only way to learn this art. The whole technique of recitation or singing and the final structure of the story, even though the subject was known and had often been transmitted through several generations, were to a certain extent the professional secret of the storyteller. And he passed on his secret not to all and sundry, but only to his pupils, who were bound to him by the tie of inviolable devotion, a relation which was one of the characteristic features of feudal society. For the master his art was above all his means of earning a livelihood and every competitor in the field endangered his 'bowl of rice'.

A pupil could not leave his master when he wanted, but only at the end of the term of apprenticeship laid down in the contract. He could not, therefore, make any use of what he had learned till his master acknowledged his fitness. And after setting up on his own, the pupil took care not to endanger the living of his master, with whom he usually continued in friendly contact.

When the master had revealed to his pupil his most valuable secret – the secret of his art – he handed over to him, as a rule, a secret handbook or manual – *miben* 秘本, which reciters of *pingshu* called *cezi* 册子. It contained valuable information about the guild to which his master, and along with him his pupils belonged, the names and nicknames of the heroes of the tales in which the storyteller specialized, and, finally, 'eulogies' on the hero – *renwuzan* 人物讚. Then there were also descriptions of weapons, various turns of speech characteristic of this or that hero.[23] These were the 'loci communes', to which also Gilferding refers in his analysis of national tales.[24] This notebook remained a secret and treasured possession all the storyteller's lifetime. And so it is no wonder that the existence

22 V. Hrdličková, *Some Observations on the Chinese Art of Story-telling*, Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philologica, Orientalia Pragensia III, 1962.

23 Jin Shoushen, *Laoshuguan jianwen suoji* 老书館見聞瑣記, Quyi, 1959, No 8, pp. 36–38, No 9, pp. 73–75, No 10–11, pp. 58–60, No 11, pp. 59–61, see No 11, p. 60.

24 Azadovski M., *Russkaja skazka*, 2 vols, Moscow, 1930, see p. 15, 1 vol.

of such storytellers' manuals, which singers of certain forms called *diben* 地本 or again *jiaoben* 脚本, remained unclear and that only in the course of thorough investigation was a more reliable explanation reached. The researcher Si Su states that storytellers with whom he was in contact declared that they had no such manuals, that they knew the verses, too, by heart, as transmitted by the oral tradition.[25] Only later, when he made a closer acquaintance with folk artists and won their confidence, did he ascertain that many of them did, indeed, possess *jiaoben*. He notes with regret that, in 1957, storytellers from Yangzhou handed over their *jiaoben* to the government authorities, where after some time this valuable material was burned. Nevertheless, he still had the opportunity to see some. They were, so he writes, small books or notebooks, in handwriting, containing notes for the storyteller as to how many chapters a story contained, where this or that episode should be inserted, or a verse, and such like. Then there were sections containing passages in verse and notes on the instrumental accompaniment and on melodies which could suitably be made use of. The notes varied in quality according to the educational level of the storyteller: in some were numerous grammatical mistakes, incorrect characters, and for the uninitiated many places were not comprehensible. They were handed down from father to son and from teacher to pupil.

Xiao Yiwu 蕭亦五, who has left a description of the art of the celebrated storyteller Wang Shaotang, characterized *diben* as notes containing the simple skeleton of the story. The storyteller could spin the tale out for ten days or for several months, or even for a whole year. It is on record that Wang Shaotang recited an episode from the novel, *Shuihu zhuan*, seven whole months and his narrative ran to some five million words.[26] Here we come up against a very interesting problem, which I touched upon in the introduction to my study, and one which is bound up with the origin and character of Song and Yuan tales known as *huaben* 話本, written in a form very close to the storyteller's, namely, prose interspersed with verse, furnished with an introduction and not seldom containing typical storyteller's embroideries.[27] These *huaben* are sometimes held to be real storytellers' manuals, that is, texts designed for recitation.[28] I am of the opinion, however, that a study of the professional training of storytellers

25 Si Su 思苏, *Shuoshu you wu jiaoben* 說书有无脚本, Quyi, 1962, No 4, pp. 44–45.

26 Op. cit., p. 30.

27 *Song Yuan huabenji* 宋元話本集, introduction and notes by Fu Xihua 傅惜華, Shanghai 1955.

28 J. Průšek, *New Studies on the Chinese Colloquial Short Story*, Archiv orientální, 25, 1957, 3, pp. 452––499, see p. 457.

enables us to define more precisely the function of *huaben*. I share the view of Xiao Yiwu, according to whom the Song *huaben* were all designed for reading and cannot be regarded as 'storytellers' prompt-books or manuals', which were not in the form of a continuous text, but rather of unconnected notes.[29]

Similarly Chen Ruheng 陳汝衡 characterizes the development of Song and Yuan *huaben* in effect, as follows: true *huaben* served the storytellers as an aid for their recitals and so they were not in the form of a continuous text, but had more the character of notes. For this reason, too, they made no claim to artistic perfection. Originally these *huaben* were secret and only for the private use of the storyteller. They were handed down from teacher to pupil and often, in a family of storytellers, through long generations. In the course of time certain tales acquired such popularity that they were published. In order to make a tale suitable for publication, however, it had to pass through the hands of one of the literati, who edited it, supplementing and adapting it for reading.[30] Chen Ruheng states further that already under the Song and Yuan there were literati who occupied themselves with the selection and working up of stories sung in marketplaces. One of the characteristic features of Song and Yuan society were *shuhui* 書会, literary societies which associated lovers of literature and poetry. They also took an interest in folk art and even employed collectors to gather material for them among the people. These literati from the *shuhui* were not seldom themselves in close contact with professional artists performing in marketplaces and in tearooms.[31]

Chen Ruheng's view of the function of *huaben* is borne out by what we know of storytelling practice. Artists who had acquired their art through oral transmission and were, for the most part illiterate or semiliterate, did not require continuous texts for their recitals – indeed, their existence was undesirable and several guilds, according to the communication of our informant, He Fengru 何鳳儒, actually forbade the committing of tales to writing. An investigation of the relations between storyteller and audience has shown that among the audience a group of regular listeners always formed who took upon themselves the role of critics, knew the tales perfectly and sometimes then wrote them down at home from memory.[32] These listeners may very well have been paid

29 Xiao Yiwu, opus cit., p. 30.

30 Op. cit., p. 50–51.

31 See Chen Ruheng, op. cit., p. 91.

32 See Bai Fengming, op. cit., p. 50.

assistants of the literati who were engaged in the editing and adaptation of tales for printed publication. The story in this form, however, differed from the version of the story as actually recited. This answers, too, Bishop's objection that 'the motive for committing oral literature to a written form is puzzling, since the professional storyteller could only stand to lose by the publication of his stock-in-trade', in the sense of his second suggested explanation, namely, that publishers received 'verbatim versions from oral performances'[33]... Here we must not only stress what we have noted above – that this material was worked up and adapted to a greater or lesser extent – but point out that the storytellers themselves frequently made changes in their recitals by way of improvizations, so that it is very unlikely that their version as orally presented was ever identical with the printed text. Some light is thrown on the matter in the epilogue to *Sanguo zhi pinghua* 三国志評話, written by a certain Mr Chen of Haining 海寧陳氏. 'The booksellers then too accepted the tales as recited by the storytellers and published them in book-form – these were the various *pinghua*. It is the same as when today somebody takes down the text of Peking operas as he hears them recited by the actors and not as if the actors had learned them from texts'.[34]

Not even the fact that in the printed tales direct instructions occur addressed by the storyteller to the musician, as to when and how he is to proceed in connection with the musical accompaniment, is in my view no valid proof that the text served as a true storyteller's manual. On the contrary it is more likely to prove that the editor who prepared the text for publication took over these sentences in order to create in the reader the impression of the utmost veracity, as being the authentic written version of its actual recital.

An important storytellers' aid were the orally transmitted 'magic formulae', as a guide to recitation and singing, which comprised a well-thought-out folk practical direction for the storytellers.[35]Apprentices learned these rules, composed in the form of simple, easily memorized rhymes, by heart.

Once the pupil had mastered the basic principles of the storytelling art, the master allowed him to perform in public short sections. In the case of certain forms, such as *tanci* 彈詞, the pupil sang the introductions – *kaipian* 开

33 J. L. Bishop, *The Colloquial Short-story in China*, Cambridge, 1956, see p. 11.

34 Quoted from J. Průšek, *The Creative Methods of the Chinese Mediaeval Story-tellers*, Charisteria Orientalia, pp. 253–273, Prague 1956, see p. 265.

35 See Suzhou pingtan koujue, as cited in Note 17.

篇. In the storytelling jargon, the adept who had reached this stage was called *chabianhua* 插边花.[36]

In preparing for his future profession, the pupil could not hope to get through with a mere mechanical imitation of what he had learned from his master. He had to be able to reshape the material acquired and impress on it the hall-mark of his artistic personality. As the old masters used to say to their pupils, a singer must sing 'not only with his voice, but with his heart', and it was always a fault if 'the mouth sang and the heart did not'.[37] Thus the pupil had to put a bit of himself into his singing and not be content with the mere technical command of his master's art. This process was called *wu* 悟 – 'comprehension'. So long as the apprentice had not successfully completed this stage of his training, he could find no rest 'either to eat or to sleep'.[38]

The storyteller introduced new elements into the tale by improvizing on the spot, without preparation – in front of the audience. The ability to improvise was one that every storyteller had to possess and has always been a characteristic part of the storyteller's equipment in every part of the world. Thus, for example, Radlov, who carried out an investigation of the art of the storytellers of the Kirgiz epos, Manas, has shown clearly that every storyteller improvized and confirms this by his own experience: a Kirgiz storyteller at whose recital Radlov was present inserted into his tale, as a compliment to him, as a Russian, a whole episode about Manas's meeting with the Russian Tsar.[39]

Chinese storytellers, too, were excellent improvisers. They cultivated this gift in the course of their training, when they learned to make use of the many existing fixed phrases and embroideries, to compose verses readily and react quickly and sensitively to what was happening around them.

We could quote many an instance of witty improvization on the part of storytellers from the Chinese milieu. Here we may make mention only of the art of improvisation of the storytellers of *shulaibao* 數來宝. These storytellers strolled through the streets, stopped at some suitable corner and began, without more ado, to recite. The introduction to the tale had always to contain something that would attract the interest of an audience which slowly began to gather where the insistent noise of a clapper indicated that the storyteller had

36 Zhao Jingshen 趙景深, *Tanci xuan* 彈詞選, Shanghai, 1947, see p. 15.

37 See Bai Fengming, op. cit., p. 49.

38 Kang Zhonghua, op. cit., p. 17.

39 Zhirmunski, op. cit., pp. 247–248.

taken up his stand. The strongly rhythmic character of the song was another attractive feature of this type of recital.

One of the favourite tales of the storytellers of *shulaibao* was the story Dream about a Treasure. This is how one storyteller introduced his tale:

> Would you like to know what happened at our place last night?
> Well, I couldn't get to sleep – as if a devil had me in his might.
> Why am I so poor? – it wouldn't let me rest.
> Of wealth I wished I could dream at least.
> The thought then struck me – why only dream of it,
> when I could really have it.
> I jumped out of bed without delay
> and with a matlock to the south I quickly made my way.
> When I came to a place, wild and deserted,
> I said to myself – this is the very spot I dreamed of.
> Straightway I started digging
> so as to be finished by the morning...

When, however, a dog appeared in the *hutong*, that began to attack the storyteller, the artist promptly had a verse at hand:

> Look, a doggie – and wanting to bite.
> He really gave me a nasty fright.
> Call him off and take him home,
> I beg you, while there is still time.
> He's torn my jacket – you see it's quilted,
> and now the winter's already started.
> In summer 'twould be a matter for laughing,
> but in this cold wind I feel more like crying.

And when at last someone belonging to the place called the dog off, the storyteller put in a plea for him:

> Honoured sir, don't whip him – he's not a draught horse.
> He's faithful and guards his master's house.[40]

40 Fu Xihua 傅惜華, *Quyi luncong* 曲藝論叢, Shanghai, 1953, p. 197.

The future storyteller not only learned to improvise in his period of training, but often carried out changes of a deeper and more permanent character by the addition of new episodes, and by the individual characterization of the **dramatic personae**, and so on. On this aspect of training, material is provided by a study of the creative procedures of Chinese storytellers, as we can reconstruct them from an analysis of the orally transmitted 'magic formulae' for storytellers.

In illustration, we shall quote here only an excerpt from a reminiscence of Mr Zhang Shouchen, where he describes how he learned to recite the tale 'About Three Short-sighted Men'. He stresses that he did not repeat mechanically what his master taught him, but continually polished and perfected his recital. He gives, as an example, that part of the story where the scene is described in which the hero buys a melon. Mr Zhang was not content merely to register the fact, but added an episode illustrating how certain vendors cheated their customers. Similarly he embroidered the story with other minor episodes in other parts.[41]

Similarly the Suzhou rules for singing *pingtan* clearly formulate the requirement that the artist must continually reshape and perfect his narrative. He must have the ability 'to change the story' – *'huan shu'* 換书. In practice this meant that he must take the original tale as the basis for his recital, but be able to change it and give it a completely new look. When the storyteller had recited his story two or three times, the audience directly requested him to enrich it by the addition of new elements. And so this rule ran: 'To change it ten times means to reach a high-point (in recital) nine times. To keep changing all the time means to attain continual perfection in storytelling. To change it only three times means to reach perfection only once'.[42]

Moreover, each of the storytelling forms required specific abilities and training. Thus the reciters of *tanci* were renowned for their detailed descriptions. A famous storyteller could spin out a single scene from the story, 'About the Pearl Pagoda', where he describes how the heroine hesitated whether or not to hand over the pearl pagoda to the hero, to fill several days. One evening, for example, he prefaced it with these words: 'So today we shall learn whether Miss Chen 陳小姐 went down the stairs or not'. Zhao Jingshen 趙景深 observes, in this connexion, that the printed text on this subject had nothing except the bare plot in common with the actual recital. The text could be read in a fortnight, the recital of the story,

41 Zhang Shouchen 張寿臣, *Tan dankou xiangsheng "San jinshi" de biao yan* 談单口相声"三近視"的表演, Quyi, 1962, 4, pp. 58–60, see p. 58.

42 See op. cit., p. 53.

however, lasted several months.[43] There is, too, the well-known anecdote about a storyteller of *tanci* who took two whole evenings to describe how his heroine bent down to tie the lace of her shoe.[44]

A predilection for descriptions, requiring from the storyteller a remarkable knowledge of life, resource and originality, was not characteristic alone of *tanci*, but these were qualities which were possessed through to a somewhat lesser extent, by reciters of prose tales, as well. Those tales in which description predominated were known as *pangzheng bo yinde* 旁徵博引的.[45]

It must be borne in mind, however, that the degree of improvization and reshaping of the narrative varied according to the abilities and the creative type of storyteller. Less gifted storytellers did not venture on improvizations on a larger scale, whereas good storytellers were always masters of improvization.

The end of the term of apprenticeship was sometimes marked by a public performance which, in the case of singers of *tanci*, took the form of a public contest – *huishu* 会书.[46] Singers of *tanci* also had their public contests, called *wenshulaohui* 文书老会. Singers from all over the province gathered at it about May 19th. On this day performances were free of charge.[47]

We have not sufficient evidence to allow us to assert that similar contests existed in earlier times, previous to the Qing era.[48] It seems, however, that already under the Song dynasty, and after it, artists foregathered, chose their favourite tale and recited it not only to the usual audience, but to the assembled artists and storytellers. Towards the end of the Qing dynasty the rapid growth of the storytelling art greatly furthered the spread of *huishu*, which were propagated also by the daily press and were very popular with audiences.

Public contests or joint performances in which a number of singers took part was a not uncommon feature among other nations where storytelling art existed. The Kazakh and Kirgiz peoples were familiar with the institution. Contests took place at big fairs. Among the Kazakhs, competitions were held

43 See op. cit., p. 10.

44 A Ying 阿英, *Tanci xiaoshuo pingkao* 彈詞小說評考, Shanghai 1927, p. 2.

45 Lao She 老舍, *Guo xinnian* 過新年, Shanghai 1951 mp. 12. Famous, for example, for the art of detailed description, was the legendary singer Taisan, to whom reference is made in the epos, Manas. Taisan was reputed to be able to describe a single ornament on a yurta half a day. See Zhirmunski, op. cit., p. 247.

46 See Zhao Jingshen, op. cit., p. 14.

47 See Chen Ruheng, op. cit., p. 183.

48 See Chen Ruheng, op. cit., p. 133.

between male and female singers. Among the Turkmen tribes similar contests were also a feature regularly connected with the art.[49]

Singers' contests were also known in mediaeval Europe, and ancient survival being the Welsh Eisteddfod. Arabian and Persian poets had also their regular contests throughout the Middle Ages.[50]

The whole process of professional training of Chinese storytellers is practically identical with the description we possess of the years of apprenticeship of Uzbek storytellers by Zhirmunski.[51] The Uzbek storytellers also accepted pupils for training, the apprenticeship lasting two to three years. The teacher provided his pupils with board and lodging and they, in return, helped him with the household chores. The pupils learned by listening to their master's recital and assisting him at his public performances. Under his supervision, they learned by heart typical, traditional passages from the *dastan*. The other parts of the poem could be learned by the pupils themselves. In this system of training, learning by heart was linked from the very beginning with creative improvization, a feature characteristic of the art of Central Asian storytellers in general.

Storytellers' guilds

Chinese reciters and singers, especially those following their profession in the cities and large towns, associated to form guilds – *menhu* 門戶. Membership of the guilds was open to acknowledged masters and their pupils. *Menhu* made of

---

49 See Zhirmunski, op. cit., p. 250–255.

50 Singing contests, if not actually storytelling contests, are popular in China to this day. A singer comes onto the platform and sings several improvised questions or riddles, to which the competing singer must promptly and wittily reply. Such contests took place in the Lunyan district of the province of Fujian, in 1963, and were attended by several thousand villagers. As part of the contest, the local singer and poet appeared on the platform and posed this riddle:

"What is round, with a hole through the centre?
What is hollow, sharp-tongued, thick-skinned?
What tree burns red at blossom time?
What shrinks in rain and wind?

The audience was silent as all thought hard for answers. Guo Zhaofeng however, came first with a solution:

A coin is round with a hole at its centre.
The bamboo shoot is hollow, sharp, thick-skinned.
The peach tree blossoms red in March.
A small farm shivers in rain and wind."

See Peasants' Singing Contest, Peking Review, December 13, 1963, pp. 26–27.

51 See op. cit., p. 256.

their members a kind of privileged cast of artists, protected by membership of a guild from 'outsiders' from the surrounding countryside or even from more distant regions. At the same time, however, members of the guild were subject to certain restrictions and took over certain obligations. The guilds marked out fairly precisely, above all, the practising area of the individual storytellers to prevent mutual competition. Membership of a guild was a great honour for every storyteller and an essential condition in the towns for the exercise of his profession.

Guild regulations prescribed, for instance, that a member of the guild could relate only those stories in which the guild specialized. Sometimes, too, the time was strictly laid down in which the storyteller might recite his tale. According to age and artistic proficiency, certain storytellers might hold their performances only in the daytime, others only in the evenings, and again only in a certain tearoom or at a certain stand.[52]

Thus the guilds of storytellers of *pingshu*, for instance, had registers of all their members, along with their pupils. It was the duty of a teacher to enter every new pupil in the guild lists. The guild, on the other hand, was bound to negotiate with the proprietor of a tearoom a contract ensuring the pupil on the completion of his training the possibility of earning a decent livelihood with his art. In contact with the guilds were regular listeners whose critical observations were aimed to assist the young artist in his work.[53]

So for example in reciting *tanci* professionals were engaged almost exclusively. Their patron was Sanhuang 三皇, to whom two days in the year were consecrated.[54] Reciters of *tanci* were organized in guilds, of which the largest, Guangyu 光裕, was in Suzhou. The Shanghai guild was called Runyu 潤裕.[55]

The singers of *daoqing* 道情 also had their patron. His name was Qiu Changchun 丘長春, and in the course of time he became, in addition, the patron of several groups of singers of *zhuizi* 墜子.[56]

The guilds were always on the watch to see that no new storyteller entered the town – a competitor-intruder who would deprive their members of their 'bowl of rice'. So it happened that the famous singer of *dagu* 大鼓, Hao Laofeng 郝

52 According to Mr. He Fengru.

53 See Jin Shoushen, op. cit., No 11, p. 59.

54 See Zhao Jingshen, op. cit., p. 15.

55 See Zhang Yuanshui, op. cit., p. 125.

56 See Yu Zhang: *Henan zhuizi yuanyuan xinshuo*, Quyi 1962, 2, pp. 63–65, see p. 64.

老鳳, was at the beginning of his career expelled from Jinan by the local artists who feared that he would entice away their listeners.[57]

Members of the Peking guild of reciters of *pingshu*, on learning that a storyteller whom they did not know was performing in a certain tearoom, immediately carried out what was called *'Xiejiahuo'* 携家伙, that is, 'an inquiry for the purpose of confiscating requisites'.[58] The members of the guild put the question to the stranger: 'Look right, look left, we ask you: who are you? Look right, look left, we ask you: who is your master?' If the storyteller could not answer these questions satisfactorily, they confiscated his requisites and insisted on his leaving the city.[59]

The struggle for a livelihood was thus, in feudal society, as pitiless as in other vocations.

The guilds not only protected their members, but also exercised an influence on their artistic activities.

When the singer of *tanci*, Xu Yunzhi 徐云志, composed a new melody for a certain *tanci* – a very daring undertaking – the reaction of the audience was not unanimous. Some listeners liked it, others rejected it altogether. In the long run, he was called upon to perform it before an audience of experts – members of the Suzhou guild of singers of *tanci*. Members of the guild were evidently to judge whether his new melody was suitable for the singing of a *tanci* or not.[60]

Interesting, too, was the organization of singers of *paiziqu* 牌子曲 (sometimes also called *bajiaogu* 八角鼓), known as *ba'er* 把兒. Among its members were many former amateurs, singers of *zidishu*.

The acceptance of singers into this guild was accompanied by a special ceremony which included the burning of incense, called *bai bazi* 拜把子 'the making obeisance to the brethren'. When the singers of *zidishu* were still amateurs, their group was led by a 'patron'. He was usually a rich Manchu, who considered it an honour to have the management of an amateur ensemble of storytellers. The

57 See Hrdlička, op. cit., p. 89.

58 The sign of a storyteller's professional status were his basic requisites – a small staff (xingmu 醒木), a kerchief and a fan, which he received from his master on completing his apprenticeship. At the presentation ceremony, incense was burned and the master handed over the requisites to his pupil on a red tray. Only a pupil who had thus received the requisites from a master had the right to use them. See Chen Ruheng, op. cit., p. 155.

59 See Jin Shoushen, op. cit., No 11, p. 59.

60 Xu Yunzhi 徐云志, *Wo shi zenyang chuangzao Xudiao de* 我是怎样創造徐調的, Quyi, 1962, 3, p. 60–61, see p. 61.

ensemble consisted of six or more singers and assistants, among them porters for carrying the singers' requisites. When times were good, ensembles of this kind were invited to perform at family festivals by the wealthy. On their arrival it was the custom for the host himself to welcome the patron and the members of the ensemble and, with a polite phrase, request them to sing. After the performance the host again thanked the patron and at the banquet entertained him and put before him the best food and wine, treating him in every way as he would be a highly honoured guest.

The organization of singers of *bajiaogu* eventually broke up into several groups. The names of these groups also underwent changes in the course of time. At the end of the 19th century, according to the oral information of persons still remembering the old times one of them was called *shuanlongzi* 拴籠子 – 'sons of the string-tied cage'. Such was the name originally given to a round, red 'band-box', painted with flowers, in which the singers carried their musical instruments and other requisites. The patron, in connexion with the change in status of the singers from amateurs to professionals, came to be called *ba'ertou* 把兒頭 or *dabage* 大把哥. The term *zoupiaor* 走票, which meant 'to go and sing on invitation' also fell into disuse, a term which existed along with its cognate – *longpiao* 籠票, used for the Emperor's invitation to celebrated singers of *zidishu*. The patron no longer provided the singers and their assistants with clothes, which was called *mailian*, as in the days when patrons were wealthier.[61]

When the singers became professionals and received a fee, the host put the money in an envelope on which were inscribed the characters *jingshi* 敬使 – 'with all respect'. The patron sent the envelope by a servant, for to hand it to the patron direct would be a grave insult.[62]

As in the case of the singers of *bajiaogu*, equal attention was paid in the collecting of the fee to the observance of professional etiquette by singers of *daoqing*. They gathered the money which the audience spread out on the tables with an adroit, practised movement into basket-like receptacles – *jianban* 簡板 and emptied them into the drum called *yugu* 漁鼓. It was thereby indicated that direct contact with money was degrading for them. They never took a coin into their hands and the audience, knowing their custom, always put the money on

61 According to Mr. He Fengru. It is of interest that the Uzbek masters of the art of storytelling donated a chalat to their pupils, on their completing their training. See Zhirmunski, op. cit., p. 257.

62 According to Mr. He Fengru, see also Li Xiaocang 李嘯倉, Quyi tan 曲艺談, Wuhan, 1951, p. 56.

the tables in advance and took pleasure in watching the skill with which the singers collected.[63]

Among the members of the guilds various legends were commonly handed down relating to the origin of the guild, to famous personalities among the singers or to notable events in the history of the guild. Singers of *shulaibao* had such a legend about the founding of one of their professional schools. In olden times singers of *shulaibao* were said to have been itinerant beggars. The first Ming emperor, Zhu Hongwu lived, so tradition has it, when still a poor youth, in a half-demolished monastery, along with two reciters of *shulaibao*, in whose art he found great pleasure and who himself acquired it. On becoming emperor, he did not forget his one-time friends and gave them an 'imperial' warrant entitling them to collect money for their performance, so that they did not need to beg. They were authorized then by the emperor to found a school of storytellers, which was maintained from one generation to another. The descendants of these storytellers were distinguished from ordinary singers of *shulaibao* by the yellow tassels which adorned the cow-bone with bells, to the sound of which they recited their story, for yellow was the emperor's colour. Other storytellers of this form had red tassels.

The content of the legend is typical of such narrations, in which the emperor frequently figured, or some other person of high rank, as giving added glory to the storytellers in the eyes of their audiences and other singers in competition with them.

Life in the tearooms had numerous characteristic features worth noting. The customs of the Peking storytellers of *pingshu* are described by Jin Shoushen 金受申, in a series of articles published in the journal, Quyi 曲艺.[64]

Storytellers in a tearoom always changed every two months. This taking of turns was called *zhuan* 轉.

The earliest performance of the day was called *zao'er* 早儿, it lasted from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. It was reserved for beginners or less well-known storytellers. Day performances – *baitian* 白天 – took place from 3 to 6 and evening performances – *dengwan* 灯晚 – were held from 7 to 9. At these the best storytellers gave their recitals.

The proprietor of the tearoom had to arrange with the artists, before the beginning of the year, when and under what conditions they would be willing

63 See Chen Ruheng, op. cit., p. 249.

64 See note 23.

to give their performances. The proprietor sent the reciters a polite invitation to the negotiations, called *hongbaitie* 紅白帖. When everything had been settled between the contracting parties, the proprietor invited the storytellers to a supper, at which any outstanding details were discussed. This meeting was known as *qingchizhi* 請吃支. The invitation to it was not extended to the storytellers at the matinée performance.

At the tearoom, a collection was taken always at the end of each session. A part of the money collected belonged, as contracted for, to the proprietor of the tearoom, the rest to the artists. Only on the first and on the last day of the storytellers' two-month rotation did the audience pay something more and, in accordance with ancient custom, all the money collected went to the storytellers. The remuneration for the first day was called *jiefeng* 接风 – 'in welcome', and for the last day *songxing* 送行 – 'in farewell'.

If the recital pleased the listeners so much that they asked for an encore, they had to pay for it. Often such an additional item – not seldom an improvization on the spot – made considerable inventive demands on the art of the storyteller, especially when it was between the individual instalments of the story. The storyteller had a carefully worked out conclusion to each section, known as *kouzi* 留扣子, which we might translate as 'the throwing of bait', and the inserted relation had to avoid detracting from the attractiveness of this bait which was aimed to draw the listeners to the next continuation.

At the beginning of the recital, when the storyteller first struck his *xingmu*, the proprietor of the tearoom had to call for silence – *Yayan* 壓言! And when the performance was over, he admonished the audience: Come in time tomorrow!

In 1916 the Peking storytellers of *pingshu* set up an organization entitled *Pingshu yanjiuhui* 評书研究会.

As the reciters of *pingshu* were very numerous, not all were members of this society. Those who were members, however, proudly wrote up on the board announcing their performances their name followed by the designation, 'member of the Peking Research Society for *pingshu*', even after 1929 when this society broke up.

The relating of *pingshu* was a classical form of storytelling which employed different artistic means than those in which prose alternated with song, and song was accompanied by instrumental music. The artists who specialized in these forms did not as a rule perform in the same tearooms as the reciters of

pingshu, but usually in special storytellers' theatres, where several artists formed a group and performed together.

Such a group was headed by a celebrated master. Thus Liu Baoquan, when he first began to perform in Peking, entered the group called Yu Chengtang 玉成堂. Later he himself formed the ensemble, Bao Quantang 宝全堂. To this group belonged such famous storytellers as Quan Yueru 全月如 and others. The seat of this group was *hutong* Ganjing, At the Pure Well, on Qianmen wai. Here, for instance, Master Bai Yunpeng 白云鹏 had his stand, a storyteller who originally specialized in the relating of *dashu* and only later in his career began to sing *dagu*, for which he created an individual way of singing – *Baipaidagu* 白派大鼓.[65]

All the various kinds of *lianhualao* and of *shibuxian* were parts of the *zashuar* 雜耍兒, mixed performances by storytellers, singers and actors, and also acrobats, held in the towns of north and north-east China. Some of the tearooms were called after this form of recital *laoziguanr* 落子館兒, because in them the recital of *laozi* predominated.[66]

Reciters and singers of the different forms had their own jargon, which often they alone understood. Thus singers of *bajiaogu* called what in modern slang is known as 'a flop', a somersault – *zai* 载.[67]

Singers of *tanci* had a large number of such expressions. The remuneration paid to singers invited to a family celebration was called *daidang* 帶擋. A singer who was not from Suzhou was designated *waidao* 外道. The main reciter, who told the story as such – *zhengshu* 正书, was named *shangshou* 上手, and his assistant, *xiashou* 下手.[68]

Singers of Suzhou *pingtan* had quite a large vocabulary of professional terms. Thus listeners from the ranks of the working population in the towns, 'in short blouses', were called *yang* 洋. Listeners from among the intelligentzia were *xiang* 相. The last performance before the New Year holidays was known as *saojiao* 扫脚, 'the sweeping',[69] and so on. The storytellers also employed special terms for the artistic means with which they added variety to their

65 Bai Fengming, op. cit., p. 49.

66 See Z. Hrdlička, *The Origin and Development of lien-chua-lao*, Československá ethnografie, IV, 1954, 2, pp. 154–169.

67 According to Mr. He Fengru.

68 See Zhao Jingshen, p. 14.

69 See Suzhou pingtan koujue, p. 56–57.

recital. Thus a sudden and surprising turn in the situation was described as *baotou* 爆頭 – an explosion, a culminating point in the plot, *guanzi* 关子, the closing passage of the individual instalments of a long prose story was called *laohui* 落回, the first description of the hero was referred to as *kaixiang* 开相.

An investigation of the professional training of Chinese storytellers and their guild organizations throws much interesting light on the character of the storytellers' art and especially on the way in which it was transmitted. We cannot be surprised that without such an investigation there were scholars such as A. Heusler who were ready to assert that, for instance, 'improvization was foreign to the German epos at all stages of its development – and that all the scalds, Spielmänner, and others recited texts which they learned by heart'. Such epics as the Edda, the Niebelungenlied and similar works, could not be, according to Heusler, the fruit of 'inspiration of the moment'.[70]

It is true, however, that storytellers did not recite their narrative under the influence of the inspiration of the moment, but mastered their art in a long process of preparation, under the supervision of a master, who transmitted his art to his pupils orally. Printed texts were, as we noted above, not only unnecessary, but actually undesirable, and were actually forbidden by certain guilds. For the storytelling schools, and often families of storytellers, in which this profession was cultivated for generations in succession, jealously guarded the secret of their art: they could not, however, prevent regular listeners from writing down or memorizing their text or hinder the text from being edited by a member of the literati and printed for the purpose of being read and not recited. It also happened on occasion that a text composed by an educated author was adapted for popular recitation and then handed down orally, independently of the original written text. Similarly, we cannot exclude the taking over of subjects from art literature. In this connexion, it is important to ascertain the ways in which these themes entered folklore and observe the transformation they undergo in the popular tradition. It would be a mistake to suppose that in China folk art existed only in an amateur form, quite isolated from art literature. Rather is the contrary true: in the specific conditions of Chinese society, where feudal relations survived much longer than in Europe, the storytelling art flourished to an unusual extent and was not only one of the most important means of folk entertainment, but was also popular among the educated class. And here

70 See Zhirmunski, op. cit., p. 255.

it is that we find important points of contact in the reciprocal influences of literature and folklore, which offer abundant material for fruitful study.

References

A Ying 阿英: *Tanci Xiaoshuo Pingkao* 弹词小说评考 [A Review of Tanci Texts]. Shanghai 1927.

Azadovskiy, Mark Konstantinovich Азадовский, Марк Константинович: *Russkaja skazka Русская сказка*. [A Russian Fairy Tail]. Moscow 1930, 2 vols.

Bai Fengming 白凤鸣: Huai Shi Pian 怀师篇 [An Essay on Cherishing the Master]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 5, pp. 47–51.

Bishop, John Lyman: *The Colloquial Short-story in China*. Cambridge 1956.

Chen Ruheng 陈汝衡: *Shuoshu Shihua* 说书史话 [The History of Storytelling]. Peking 1958.

Fu Xihua 傅惜华: *Quyi Luncong* 曲艺论丛 [Essays on Folk Vocal Art]. Shanghai 1953.

Fu Xihua 傅惜华 (Ed.): *Song Yuan Huaben Ji* 宋元话本集 [The Collection of Song and Yuan Huaben]. Shanghai 1955.

Hrdlička, Zdeněk: O původu a vývoji lien-chua-lao [The Origin and Development of Lianhualao]. *Československá ethnografie* [Czechoslovak Ethnography] 1956, IV(2), pp. 154–169.

Hrdlička, Zdeněk: Old Chinese Ballads to the Accompaniment of the Big Drum. *Archiv orientální* 1957, 25(1), pp. 83–145.

Hrdličková, Věnceslava: Some Observations on the Chinese Art of Story-telling. *Acta Universitatis Carolinae – Philologica 3, Orientalia Pragensia* III, 1964, pp. 53–78.

Jin Shoushen 金受申: Lao Shuguan Jianwen Suoji 老书管见闻琐记 [Miscellaneous Notes from Old Bookstores]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1959, 8, pp. 36–38; 1959, 9, pp. 73–75; 1959, 10–11, pp. 58–60; 1959, 11, pp. 59–61.

Kang Zhonghua 康重华: Yi Hai Mo Xia Ji 艺海摸虾记 [Notes on Catching Shrimps in the Sea of Art]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 1, pp. 16–19.

Lao She 老舍: *Fang Zhenzhu* 方珍珠 [Fang Zhenzhu]. Shanghai 1950.

Lao She 老舍: *Guo Xinnian* 过新年 [Celebrating the New Year]. Shanghai 1951.

Li Xiaocang 李啸仓: *Quyi Tan* 曲艺谈 [Talks on Folk Vocal Art]. Wuhan 1951.

Mei Lanfang 梅兰芳: Tan Guwang Liu Baoquan de Yishu Chuangzao 谈鼓王刘宝全的艺术创造 [On the Artistic Creation of Liu Baoquan, the King of Drum]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 2, pp. 2–19.

Pan Boying 潘伯英 and Zhou Liang 周良: Suzhou Pingtan Koujue 苏州评弹口诀 [Magic Formulae of Suzhou Pingtan] (Editorial Notes). *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 3, pp. 51–57.

Peasants' Singing Contest, *Peking Review* 1963, December 13, pp. 26–27.

Průšek, Jaroslav: The Creative Methods of the Chinese Mediaeval Story-tellers. In: *Charisteria Orientalia praecipue ad Persiam pertinentia*. Prague 1956, pp. 253–273.

PRŮŠEK, Jaroslav: New Studies on the Chinese Colloquial Short Story. *Archiv orientální* 1957, 25(3), pp. 452–499.

Shandong Qinshu Liupai Zuotanhui Ziliaozu 山东琴书流派座谈会资料组 [The Information Group of Shandong Qinshu School]: Shandong Qinshu Liupai Qiantan 山东琴书流派浅探 [A Sketchy Exploration of the Shandong Qinshu School]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 2, pp. 45–50.

SI Su 思苏: Shuoshu You Wu Jiaoben 说书有无脚本 [Is There a Storyteller's Handbook?]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 4, pp. 44–45.

VELINGEROVÁ, Milena: Jaké jsou charakteristické rysy čínské populární slovesnosti [What are the Characteristic Features of Chinese Popular Verbal Art?]. *Zprávy československé společnosti orientalistické*, Prague 1961, 3, pp. 146–151.

WANG Litang 王丽堂: Wo de Xuexi Jingguo 我的学习经过 [My Process of Learning]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1958, 6, pp. 27–28.

WANG Zunsan 王尊三 (Speaker) and Ding Luo 丁洛 (Record-keeper): Tan Xihe Dagu de Yanchang Yishu 谈西河大鼓的演唱艺术 [On the Art of Xihe Dagu Singing]. *Quyi Gongzuo Tongxun* 曲艺工作通讯 [Work Newsletter on Folk Vocal Art] 1954, 2, pp. 7–12.

XIAO Yiwu: Tan Wang Shaotang de Shuoshu Yishu 谈王少堂的说书艺术 [On the Wang Shaotang's Storytelling Art]. *Quyi Gongzuo Tongxun* 曲艺工作通讯 [Work Newsletter on Folk Vocal Art] 1954, 3, pp. 30–36.

XU Yunzhi 徐云志: Wo Shi Zen Yang Chuangzao Xudiao de 我是怎样创造徐调的 [How I created Xudiao?]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 3, pp. 60–61.

YU Zhang 禹漳: Henan Zhuizi Yuanyuan Xinshuo 河南墜子淵源新说 [A New Interpretation of the Origin of Henan Ballad Singing Accompanied by a Zhuizi]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 2, pp. 63–65.

ZHANG Changgong 张长弓: *Henan Zhuizi Shu* 河南墜子书 [Book of Henan Ballad Singing Accompanied by a Zhuizi]. Peking 1951.

ZHANG Shouchen 张寿臣: Tan Dankou Xiangsheng "San Jinshi" de Biaoyan 谈单口相声"三近视"的表演 [On the Performance of One-person Xiangsheng "About Three Short-sighted Men"]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 4, pp. 58–60.

ZHANG Yuanshui 张原水: Tanci Zhongzhong 弹词种种 [Various Types of Tanci]. In: *Huadong Difang Xiqu Jieshao* 华东地方戏曲介绍 [Introduction to Local Operas of East China]. Shanghai 1952, pp. 121–126.

ZHAO Jingshen 赵景深: *Tanci Xuan* 弹词选 [Selected Tanci]. Shanghai 1947.

ZHIRMUNSKIY, Viktor Maksimovich Жирмунский, Виктор Максимович: *Narodnyy geroicheskiy epos Народный героический эпос* [National Heroic Epos]. Moscow–Leningrad 1962.

ZI Chen 紫晨: Quyi Huiyan gei Wo de Qifa 曲艺会演给我的启发 [The Inspiration I Gained from the Quyi Performance]. *Minjian Wenxue* 民间文学 [Folk Literature] 1958, 9, pp. 26–29.

The Chinese Storytellers and Singers of Ballads: Their Performances and Storytelling Techniques*

Abstract: The art of storytelling represents an integral part of the Chinese cultural heritage. Over the centuries, it has developed many forms, mostly covered by the Chinese broad term *shuoshu*. This paper explores the rich tradition of Chinese storytellers and singers of ballads, highlighting their performances, storytelling techniques, and the cultural significance of their art. The observations presented in the first section are based on extensive fieldwork. The author and her husband observed storytellers and singers in several cities and towns in northern China from 1950 to 1954. The section describes the characteristic features of performances in various settings, including street corners, marketplaces, teahouses, and small theatres. The second section discusses the form of *pingshu*, which refers to narrating prose tales without musical accompaniment. It highlights the simplicity of *pingshu* performances, the importance of voice modulation and minimal props, and the rigorous training required to master this art form. The third section focuses on the structure and composition of the storyteller's tale. It emphasizes the importance of well-known themes, the storyteller's specialization in specific genres, and the use of literary devices to enhance the narrative.

Keywords: Oral tradition, Chinese storytelling, storytellers' performances, dramatic techniques, composition of tales.

The rich and varied activities of the Chinese storytellers and singers of ballads are an integral part of the Chinese cultural heritage. For many centuries their art was almost the only source of not only entertainment but also learning for the majority of the Chinese people, who were cut off by their "cultural blindness", to use their term for illiteracy, from the possibility of reading. They learned "by ear"

* Substantially as given at a general meeting of the Society on April 12, 1965.
Editors's note: The author refers to the Asiatic Society of Japan, in which journal the paper was initially published.

and read "by mouth", as truthfully the folk artists themselves have said.[1] The art formed a continuous stream of oral tradition, absorbing the creative endeavors and struggles of generations of tellers of tales and singers of ballads, each of whom had acquired his heritage from his predecessors and then transformed and polished it for transmittal to his successors.

In the opinion of many orthodox Confucian men of letters, *shuoshu* (storytelling) was not deserving of serious attention. Yet there were other men of letters who were ardent admirers of the art of telling stories and singing ballads, and there were impoverished bureaucrats, highly literate but unsuccessful in their official careers, who gladly turned to storytelling as the only way to earn their daily "cup of rice". The gap between written literature and oral narration actually was narrower than might be supposed. The creative efforts of the folk artists may have influenced both the form and the content of written literature. The genesis of certain literary genres, such as the colloquial short story, without doubt was connected with the art of storytelling. The nature and tradition of this art, therefore, are of interest to the student of literature as well as to the student of folklore.

In attempting to learn about the telling of stories in China, I decided to rely on field work, combined with research into Chinese sources on related social aspects, rather than on the reading of written versions of the stories, which differed from the originals in not being intended for oral delivery in front of an audience. Essential to storytelling, we must bear in mind, are its dramatic and musical elements, and it is only through consideration of these that we can grasp adequately the creativeness of the folk artists, many of whom were unable to read or write a single Chinese character and yet could narrate stories extending over ten or more evenings.

This paper will concentrate on description of performances of the storytellers and singers of ballads and explanation of some of their techniques, which generally have been unknown outside the profession, within which they have been jealously guarded secrets of various schools and passed on from one generation to the next only by word of mouth.[2]

---

1 Chen Ruheng, *Shuoshu shihua*, Peking, 1958, page 173.

2 I have described the transmission of professional secrets to apprentices in "The Professional Training of Chinese Storytellers and the Storytellers' Guilds", in *Archiv Orientální*, Prague, No. 33, 1965, pages 225–48.

I

The art of storytelling and ballad-singing developed a great variety of forms during the many centuries of its existence, and most of these are covered by the broad Chinese term *shuoshu*. From the Song dynasty (960–1278), many of these were performed by especially trained professionals who often, despite illiteracy, achieved high artistic levels. Other performers were originally amateurs who went to the towns from poverty-stricken villages to earn a scanty living by giving rural tales and ballads.

While in China from 1950 to 1954, my husband and I had many opportunities, mainly in Peking, Tientsin and small towns in northern China, to observe the latest generation of these teller of stories and singers of ballads in marketplaces, teahouses and small theaters and even on street corners. Those seen wandering in the streets, giving the appearance invariably of belonging to the lowest social strata, would pause at corners in hope of drawing together listeners by the clapping of castanets (*paiban*) or the playing of the Chinese two-string violin (*erhu*). Among them were invalids who invoked attention by their disablements. A blind man might be accompanied by his wife or daughter. When a few people had stopped, the storyteller would commence. Each performance clearly was dictated by his never-ending and relentless search for a meagre livelihood.

Other outdoor performers sought audiences in marketplaces, which often were in temple courtyards. The Tianqiao, Peking's Heavenly Bridge, was one of the most colorful places of this kind, where not only storytellers but also other entertainers regularly competed for attention. Despite its exalted name, it was an unpretentious marketplace with simple earthen arenas, small crude huts and humble teahouses, but it offered much enjoyment for modest sums. We spent there many unforgettable hours enthralled by the mastery of puppeteers, the deftness of magicians, the incredible skill of acrobats, and of course the art of the storytellers. They often commented on our presence with improvised verses which, though not complimentary, were witty and never really offensive. Eventually, when we became more familiar with fairly frequent attendance, they treated us in the same way as they did the Chinese in their audiences.

If the artist was a storyteller, benches were arranged in a semicircle with a table in the middle, sometimes covered with a red cloth. It might be out in the open, depending on the weather, but usually the more reputable storytellers and singers of ballads preferred to perform in small huts or under improvised tents. The surroundings, however, were no measure of the artists' accomplishments.

The listeners would be captivated by the simple human wisdom woven and interwoven throughout the fabric of the tales and songs. For many in the audience, the storytelling truly was a "university". The storyteller Jin Shoushen 金受申 conveys this very well in quoting his mother in one of a series of articles, "What I Saw in the Old Teahouses".[3] "You children of us common people," she told him when he was a boy, "will learn most about the world by listening to the storytellers."

Regardless of any satisfaction they might derive from this important social aspect of their calling, the artists were aware, consciously or subconsciously, of three inexorable economic and aesthetic realities: earnings, because their audiences were mostly poor, were small; competition was stiff, and severity of criticism compelled their utmost competence.

Fees and contributions were not fixed and depended more or less on the mood of the listeners. The narrator or balladeer strove for as generous a reward as possible by employing his every technique to create and dramatize an impressionable tale. The measurement of his success came with the taking of a collection in the middle of the story or immediately before its climax. This interruption at a moment of suspense guaranteed at least something, and the amount might be increased by a further collection at the end. At best, though, the total was very modest. If moved by the artist's skill, the listeners did not begrudge him some of their often hard-earned money. If they did not like the story, however, they did not hesitate to make disparaging remarks during the performance, and their vocal displeasure served as a warning to the narrator, who of course tried hard to overcome it by doing better. As they included devoted and steady patrons of the art, most audiences made heavy demands. Innumerable hearings of favorite tales had qualified them to be merciless in their rejection and criticism of imperfection. As might be inferred from hearing Peking ricksha boys reciting from memory passages from well-known stories, persons in the audience often knew the stories by heart quite as well as the narrators.

Higher in status than the itinerant artists of the street corners and marketplaces were the men who performed in teahouses, who had qualified by studying

[3] Jin Shoushen, "Laoshuguan jianwen suoji", in *Quyi*, 1959, No. 8, pages 36–38; No. 9, pages 73–75, 90; No. 10, pages 58–60; No. 11, pages 59–61. The quotation is from the installment in No. 8, page 36.

under recognized masters.[4] They also earned more, though they had to let the teahouse owners expropriate the larger portion of what listeners paid during or at the end of performances.

The teahouses we visited and the performances we heard probably were much as they had been for many years, to judge from the descriptions by Mr. He Fengru 何鳳儒, a teacher of Chinese, of Peking teahouses he had known where his father, an impoverished Manchu, had performed *paiziqu* ballads about 1910. The average teahouse was small, made overly crowded by an audience of twenty. The storyteller or singer sat behind a table on which were two lamps. Between these was a teapot, from which he poured himself tea when intervals in the performance allowed. When he wished to drink, however, etiquette required that he turn his back to the audience and conceal the cup well within the palm of one hand so that his drinking would not be seen.

Each teahouse had its own individuality, determined by its location and the character of its patrons. Men from all walks of life were attracted, illiterate townsmen, peasants, highly educated bureaucrats and landowners. Thus it was mandatory on the artist to evaluate accurately the composition of his audience and adapt to it his story, language and style of performance. Failure to do so could ruin his career. The storyteller Jin Shoushen illustrates this in telling about a certain performer, Zhang Xubai 張虛白, who originally had been a Taoist monk. He was well educated and, as Jin puts it, had "a belly full of ink". For his own talent, he had a very high regard. Once, though well aware that he was facing an unsophisticated teahouse audience, he substituted for his announced series of standard stories a sequence of episodes from the well-known novel *Hong Lou Meng*.[5] The audience was rather surprised but listened to the end. For his second session, however, the house was almost empty. The patrons said they wanted exciting tales of wars and battles, not the sickly love stories of *Hong Lou Meng*.[6]

---

4 See the writer's study cited in footnote 2.

5 By Cao Xueqin (Cao Zhan), though the last third seems to be by another writer, this long novel about a declining family soon became one of the most popular works of Chinese fiction after its appearance about 1765. It has been translated into English as *Dream of the Red Chamber* in an abridged version by C. C. Wang, published in London in 1929 and reprinted in New York in 1958, and a fuller but less accurate version by Florence McHugh and Isabel McHugh, New York and London, 1958.

6 See Jin Shoushen, *op. cit.*, No. 9, page 75.

If women were predominate in an audience, the storyteller or ballad-singer had to set different standards. Women had a preference for the singing of ballads but also were appreciative of storytelling. The heroines of well-known tales, without whom the traditional storytelling treasury would be much poorer, were very popular and beloved for their independent spirit and courage.

There was a ballad-singing boom in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and one consequence was the establishment of special halls or theaters, called *shuchang*, in many towns and cities, especially Shanghai. The typical *shuchang* seated from eighty to a hundred persons, who paid a fixed admission fee. The stage, elevated, was surrounded by tables and chairs, and on the tables were teacups and towels for use during the performance.[7] Programs, somewhat like those in the Japanese *yose*, consisted of performances by several singers and such other entertainers as acrobats and magicians. Occasionally, artists desirous of putting on a special program of their own would band together under a leader of prominence and hire a *shuchang*. In northeastern China, such mixed programs were given in teahouses and known as *zashuar*.

Festive occasions brought invitations to teahouse and *shuchang* artists to perform in private homes. In times past, the birthday of the master of the house, a wedding, or an advancement in office was cause for celebration, and in this a storyteller or ballad singer added much. During the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), singers of a select class called *zidi* were asked to sing ballads in wealthy homes. These were Manchus, themselves well to do, who sang as a hobby and never accepted remuneration for performing. They were treated as guests of honor and showered with special attention in the form of food and drink. Their political and economic fortunes changed, however, and eventually they were obliged to sing for a living. Yet such was their pride in their artistic heritage that they could not accept payment directly. Fees were handed to assistants or sent discreetly to their homes.[8]

We used to invite itinerant storytellers and ballad-singers to our residence in Peking. Though their dress made it obvious that they were poor, their professional pride gave them great dignity. After singing, they were served tea. They then would bow and leave quietly. Some of them in time became our friends, divulging the secrets of their art and helping us to collect handwritten and printed texts of various forms of *shuoshu*.

---

7 See Chen Ruheng, *op. cit.*, page 207.

8 This the author was told by He Fengru.

II

One popular genre of the *shuoshu* is the *pingshu* or *pinghua*, the narration of prose tales without musical accompaniment, interspersed now and then with recitation of several lines of verse. Its performance was distinguished by extreme simplicity. The storyteller never had a mask or costume. He wore a long dark Chinese dress, which in modern times became a dark blue cotton suit with a high collar. The stage, devoid of scenery, had only a table and chair. The narrator's properties were a block of wood, called *xingmu*, a folding fan and a handkerchief. These, symbols of his professional status, had been received from his teacher in a special ceremony on "graduating" from his "storytelling school" and therefore were treasured the rest of his life.[9]

The usual performance lasted an hour or more, and its success depended primarily on the artist's ability to keep his listeners interested. Mastery was shown when he caused them to become oblivious of the present and enter completely into the world of the heroes of his tales, where scenes and actions took on vividness with the full colors of reality. Each listener felt an intimacy with the narrator such as one has with a close friend. Pulses quickened and foreheads perspired when the hero was in peril, and there were sighs of relief when he emerged victorious. Ru Guangli 茹光礼 (1888–1960), who specialized in performing *Shandong qinshu*,[10] believed that the storyteller must so mesmerize his listeners that they would not move a muscle even if beaten with a stick.[11]

The subtle spellbinding power of the narrator came from both natural talent and techniques developed through long training and disciplined practice. We have experienced a spell like unto his in listening to exceptionally skilled musicians, feeling ourselves inside what they created rather than merely perceptive of and sensitive to it from outside.

Important to the storytellers' art was *qing*, "pureness" or "perfection", as they explained it in their professional jargon.[12] The English term "pureness", however, seems inadequate, for *qing* had to do with the voice of the narrator, his acting and even the structure of his stories. A versatile voice was a prerequisite

9 Zhang Junzhi, "Shandong qinshu liupai qiantan", in *Quyi*, 1962, No. 3, pages 46–50. The details used here are from page 48.

10 Narratives from Shandong province, interspersed with songs. There are several schools, differing in the manner of performance.

11 See Chen Ruheng, *op. cit.*, page 155.

12 Zhang Yushu, "Qingzi diyi", in *Quyi*, 1962, No. 11, pages 42–49.

for success because, in the absence of instrumental music and singing, it had to encompass broad functions. In his training, the artist strove first for *qing* of voice. Clear articulation with normal sounds was of prime importance, and such was that of some talented narrators that listeners were fascinated as soon as they opened their mouths. Those not gifted with it had to work very hard to acquire it. Full control of the voice under all circumstances was also essential for *qing*. Stage fright, personal excitement and any other feeling not connected with the story were unpardonable errors. Modulation had to range from tenderness to rage, and tones had to fit sex, age and character. To make a story vivid, the voice had to be capable of imitating such sounds as those of birds, water and a thunderstorm.

This is illustrated by what is told of the storyteller Liu Jingting 柳敬亭, who lived during the end of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth. He became legendary in the history of Chinese storytelling because of, among other things, his strong voice, which he used to superb effect in giving the story of Wu Song, the famous tiger-killer, thrilling audiences especially in the episode in which Wu rushes into an inn for a drink of wine and, when the innkeeper does not appear immediately, begins to shout. So loud is his shouting that the wine jars on shelves lining the walls rattle and jump. When Liu described this, veins stood out on his neck, and his voice boomed so strongly that the walls of the teahouse all but collapsed.[13]

In addition to developing vocal perfection, the storyteller had to master effective use of his few properties, of which by far the most important was the small block of wood called the *xingmu*. Skill with this could impress an audience deeply, and Zhang Yushu 張玉书 considered it a basic criterion of good storytelling.[14] To handle this seemingly insignificant object required long and patient practice. In hitting it against his table, unbelievable though it may seem, the storyteller could lure from his *xingmu* a different sound each time.

The master artist, however, it is interesting to note, tried to avoid frequent use of the *xingmu*. Excessive banging disturbed the performance and was taken as unmistakable evidence that the narrator had inadequacies which he was attempting to conceal. Connoisseurs could not be fooled. Constant use of the *xingmu* doomed the storyteller to failure.

As manipulated by a talented artist, however, the *xingmu* could speak. The rapping which opened a performance, the very first stroke of which told fans

13 See Chen Ruheng, *op. cit.*, page 168.

14 See article cited in footnote 12, page 47.

of this art, they claimed, whether the storyteller was good or bad, seemed to say: "Please come in. I am just beginning to tell my story." And the sound of the stroke which ended the performance rang in the listeners' ears until the narrator was ready to begin his succeeding episode the next day.

The *xingmu* could sharpen emotional tones, as Jin Shoushen illustrates in his recollections of teahouses in writing about Chen Shihe 陈士和. Because of financial difficulties, this famous storyteller had to leave Peking, where he had quite an enthusiastic following, for Tientsin. Several years later, in 1939, he returned to Peking for a number of performances. As his farewell, he recited the following poem:

> One single sight
> Is not enough to look over
> The whale beautiful countryside.
> And so it is also
> When we say farewell to each other.
> Today and never again,
> You say, and yet a spark of hope
> Burns somewhere deep in your heart.

When he came to the words "never again", Chen summoned forth from his *xingmu* a sound so forlorn that the audience was moved to tears.[15] The sound of the *xingmu* had to synchronize with the part of the sentence to which it belonged. Used after a sentence, it usually represented a sharp sound, such as that of thunder. A sound coming from a distance preceded the sentence which referred to it. Ingenious handling of the *xingmu* gave to each sound the qualities appropriate to the context.

To accentuate tense situations, a well-known dramatic device called "stopping *xingmu* in the middle" was used. His destiny at stake, a hero reached for his sword to kill someone. The narrator, his face tense, raised his *xingmu* for a swift stroke. Breathlessly the audience awaited its fall. Suddenly the hero changed his mind. The storyteller's hand lowered the *xingmu* to the table without a sound, and the expression on his face changed from tension to relief.

Proper dignity in sitting on the stage is another requirement of the consummate artist. Though this may seem to be a very small matter, much stress was

15 See Jin Shoushen, *op. cit.*, No. 8, page 38.

placed on training in it. Wang Litang 王丽堂, granddaughter of the famous storyteller Wang Shaotang 王少堂, describes how it was taught to her at home by her father. With everything arranged as before an audience in a teahouse, she practiced sitting, erect but not stiff, in a calm and natural way, first resting her hands quietly on the edge of the table and gradually facing in all four directions to become accustomed to each view.[16]

Dignity and self-assurance usually marked everything about the good storyteller. They were in the way in which he made his stage entrance, walking quickly but without intrusive animation. His facial expression was one of disinterest, almost phlegmatic, and he neither smiled nor gestured with his hands. During the performance, his movements were confined to those required for emphasis. He might stand and take a step or two, as in elucidating a passage in which a famous general entered the camp of a defeated enemy after a battle, but seldom did he move very far to the right or left of his table. For this there was a practical reason. Never could he be far from his *xingmu*. Whatever movement he made and whatever position he took, the audience understood its significance. He would stand at the right side of the table when describing an important moment in a battle in which the hero was raising his sword. With the stroke of the sword, he shifted to the left side. Similar movements represented duels. Gestures with his hands, made natural by much practice, and facial expressions were likewise carefully calculated and limited to those which fitted the story. When they occurred, they were most effective. Use of the eyes also was important to convey meaning and maintain rapport with the audience. They "talked", telling whether a hero was sad or happy, whether a man was good or evil. A simple raising of the brows had deep meaning.

The aim of *qing* was to make a lasting impression on the audience, and thus it had to permeate the whole of the storyteller's performance. His image was to stay fixed in the mind of each listener as was that of Liu Baoquan 刘宝全, king of the ballad-singers, in the mind of Lao She 老舍. After forty years, Lao wrote, he still could see him quite clearly in his "mind's eye" alive and sitting in front of him.[17]

That much attention was given to diction and stage mannerisms was only natural in view of their intrinsic importance in the art of storytelling. Stripped of these enriching elements, the written texts of the narratives are only a severed part of the whole art, and to read their words, intended originally to be

16 Wang Litang, "Wode xuexi jingguo", in *Quyi*, 1958, No. 6, pages 27–28.

17 Lao She, "Jiyi yu xin", in *Quyi*, 1962, No. 5, page 46.

spoken, is likely to give a distorted idea of their aesthetic quality. It is only fair to acknowledge that the stories may seem flat when deprived of the dramatic effects with which the storytellers brought them to life.

III

The storyteller's tale had a structure and a composition designed specifically to allow him to achieve precisely calculated objectives. The orally transmitted ballad or tale of considerable length, it has been generally recognized, could not have been born of sudden inspiration or put together on the spur of the moment. Rather it evolved out of long and sober devising by artists with substantial professional experience.

Behind each story was a long tradition in which storytelling had reached a refined artistic level. It was part of this tradition to place strong emphasis on perfection of each and every phase of the art. At the same time, such perfection was exacted by audiences which would reject a narrator for flaws so slight as hardly to be noticed by novices.

The theme generally was one that had been known among the people through so many generations that it had become a cultural fixture. It originally might have been adapted from a novel, a play, a chronicle or some other form of literature. Use of a well-known and established theme, with appropriate changes, rather than the creation of an entirely new one is a common tendency in folklore, for folk audiences are known to resist the unfamiliar and foreign. In folklore research, one of the important tasks is to discover and recognize the changes which a theme has undergone in its oral transmission. Without such knowledge, it might appear that folklore is lacking in creativity and that the telling of tales is nothing more than the mechanical repetition of certain stereotyped themes.

The typical Chinese storyteller was highly specialized. He confined himself to one genre of tales, and he might even spend his entire life narrating a single story. What a novelist would express in several sentences would take a whole evening of narration by such a storyteller. Lao She relates how one artist required five or six successive evenings to tell the simple story of the killing of a tiger by Wu Song. He described in detail what the hero drank and ate and what he said, digressing along the way with humorous episodes which never failed to entrance the audience.[18]

18 Lao She, *Guoxin nian*, Shanghai, 1951, page 12.

The plot, purely a vehicle, was therefore of lesser importance than the presentation. For the listeners, everyone of whom perhaps knew the story by heart, it was what the narrator did with it, his individual creativity, that mattered and, if satisfying, brought them back for more. The familiarity of the story, "sucked in with their mother's milk", as it was commonly said, made it all the more appealing. This the storyteller relied on, and it freed him to concentrate on his presentation.

Some insight into the principles which guided him may be obtained by studying the "magic formulas" (*koujue*) which were transmitted orally from one generation of storytellers to the next. In simple rhymes, easy to remember, they contained deep wisdom, fruit of the experience and knowledge of many storytellers. Among them were such axioms as "If superficial in your art while young, you will get nowhere when old." "While on the stage," said another, "perform; while off the stage, observe [other storytellers]."[19] They also included practical instructions about the structure of stories, what the artist should do and what he should avoid. Usually they were secret, known only to members of the storytellers' guilds, but those which have been preserved are surprisingly valuable to anyone interested in literary creation. They facilitate understanding of this art from the point of view of the artists themselves and thus help to compensate for the dearth of authoritative written records of performances.

In addition to the guidance derived from the "magic formulas", the storytellers had a number of literary devices for use in making their narratives more entertaining. Each of these had its own special name. We shall encounter some of them in what follows.

The performance of *pingshu* adhered to a pattern familiar to and expected by the audience. It began with recitation by the storyteller of an introductory poem (*shangchangshi*) and the striking of his *xingmu* for the first time. This was the signal for the teahouse master to call out: "Silence, please!" The narrator, if we assume the occasion was at least the second evening of a long story, then would say: "Now I have finished several verses of a worthless poem and shall tell you further about well-known heroes. It is a continuation of the story I told you the last time." When the session was over, he would say: "So I have told

19 See, for example, the commentaries by Pan Boying and Zhou Liang, "Suzhou pingtan koujue", in *Quyi*, 1962, No. 3, pages 51–57.

you the story up to this point and shall have the honor of telling you tomorrow what next happened to [the name of the main character]."[20]

As the narration of a long tale was far from easy, mastery of sustaining techniques was very important. With his concept of the whole story firmly in his mind, the storyteller focused his efforts on achieving a well-balanced composition that would culminate in a crucial point. Some stories, of course, might have two or three such points. This climax, in the storytellers' jargon, was called *guanzi* (literally, crisis).[21] How he handled it was often enough to decide the artist's success or failure. One of the "magic formulas" likened the *guanzi* to the crest reached by a rising wave. It must not be brought about by a sudden jump. The approach had to be fashioned carefully, often with diverse and complex twists and turns, to build up the suspense of the listeners. The narrator would allow the line of the story to rise only so far before interrupting it. This he might do several times, and there were storytellers clever enough to postpone the *guanzi* for several sessions, to each of which the audience was certain to return because unable to resist hearing the climax. "If you master the art of *guanzi*," went a familiar saying, "listeners will not run from you." Attached to this was the following practical comment: "The better the art of *guanzi*, the fewer tickets from the pawnshop the storyteller has."[22]

The narrator of imperfect skill was likely to be plagued, in giving a long story with a number of *guanzi* which had to be carried through two or more sessions, by listeners who attended only for the upward approach to a *guanzi* and did not come back. For this to happen was not uncommon, and of course the artists were not happy about it. It was to avert this that the storyteller gave very careful attention to the "bridges" connecting the *guanzi* of his story. As one "magic formula" rightly put it, "A *guanzi* is told easily, but what is around it is difficult."[23]

The basic units of a story, comparable to the chapters of a novel, were known as sections, each of which filled one storytelling session. For each section, an effective conclusion, called a *luohui*, was very important because of its obvious bearing on the desire of the audience to return for the next section. The narrator usually chose for this some dangerous situation which he broke off in the middle

20 See Jin Shoushen, *op. cit.*, No. 8, page 38.

21 See commentaries cited in footnote 19, pages 52 and 53.

22 *Ibid.*, page 52.

23 *Ibid.*, page 53.

or some unexpected and intriguing turn in the development of the plot. It was a grave mistake for him to be unable to devise a piquant *luohui* and thus to let his story become grounded in shallow waters. There was much reason for the warning to artists not to allow their *luohui* to "sink into a cold grotto".[24]

Each narration had to have the right proportions. It must not be too short, consisting of a framework without embellishments. Nor must it be too long and thus "separated by one thousand *li* from the goal".[25] Between the moments of suspense and the less exciting passages, a balance had to be struck. The storyteller Wang Shaotang deals interestingly with this in discussing the difference between, in the storytellers' jargon, the "hot" and "cold" components of a story.[26] The "cold" were the connecting passages between the *guanzi*, and the "hot" were the exciting moments. There must be, he said, not only balance between them but also smooth transition. Wang warned repeatedly against any attempt to make a story more interesting by leaving out the "cold" parts and concentrating on the "hot". This would violate the concept of the traditional story, and the result would be a cheap effort to achieve a goal which was unworthy of a storyteller who took his profession seriously. No story could be considered complete without both "hot" and "cold" passages.

For a humble audience, complete comprehension necessitated orderly and logical presentation of the story. The more characters there were, and some stories had many, and the more complex the plot, the more important this was. The artist therefore gave considerable attention to the manner, somewhat formal, in which he introduced and described his heroes. For this, there were many rules. The usual Peking style was to use "praise of the hero" (*yanwuzan*), given in poetical form.[27] A storyteller in Peking who did not do so was apt to be suspected of not being a professional. The initial description of the hero, called the *kaixiang*, set forth in rhyme his outstanding traits. Thereafter the narrator had only to mention one of these traits and his listeners knew immediately to whom he was referring. Throughout the story had to be woven a vividly realistic picture of the hero, called the *qijuese*.[28] There also had to be support for and emphasis on the main traits of the hero in the actions of the other characters. It is said of the famous Wang

24 *Ibid*.

25 *Ibid*.

26 Wang Shaotang, "Leng shu he re shu", in *Quyi*, 1959, No. 3, pages 50–51.

27 See Jin Shoushen, *op. cit.*, No. 10, page 58.

28 See the commentaries cited in footnote 19, page 53.

Shaotang that he was able to describe his heroes so graphically that his listeners, losing all awareness of their surroundings, were swept along with them. They were happy or sad with the hero, shared in his momentous decisions, wavered with him and so on in unison with the rhythm and tempo of the narrative. He was superb in breathing life into such minor characters as domestics, innkeepers, peddlers and gatekeepers, modeling them on ones he had known intimately in everyday life.[29] It was true of all good storytellers that they wove what they had observed with what they had learned in the traditional lessons in characterization of their teachers. As they often were illiterate, knowledge in books was beyond their reach.

A device frequently used was known as "drawing the characterization of the hero while the plot is resting" (*xiu zhong zhuose*). Liu Jingting, who already has been mentioned, was famed for this in telling about Wu Song, using it to create the exact atmosphere he wished in which to bring the story to a climax. Because of this, his listeners, when the most exciting moment arrived, were quite convinced that Wu, in spite of his drunkenness, was able to kill the tiger with his bare hands in the wild forest.[30]

Skilled descriptions could be very effective in building up a multi-dimensioned conception of the appearance and the character of the hero. They were seldom tedious. An experienced storyteller could spin them out almost endlessly, if necessary, and even contribute thereby to the suspense. Mr. Zhang, for example, who specialized in warrior tales from the *San Guo Zhi Yan Yi*,[31] lavished much detail on the weapons of his heroes. Ancient weapons actually varied little, but the storyteller's imagination endowed them with infinite individuality. Swords had blades of gold and silver, silver inlaid with gold, and gold inlaid with silver. Their hilts were even more varied. And each sword had its name – "Blue

29 Xiao Yiwu, "Tan Wang Shaotang de yishu", in *Quyi gongzuo tongxun*, 1954, No. 3, pages 30–36. The information used here is on page 33.

30 For a more detailed description of Liu's art, see Chen Ruheng, "Liu Jingting de shuoshu yishu", in *Quyi*, 1957, No. 1, pages 4–9.

31 This historical romance by Luo Guanzhong, of the fourteenth century, tells in 120 chapters of the civil wars from the decline of the Han dynasty in the second century to the beginning of the Jin dynasty in 265. In the preface of his English translation, *San Kuo, or Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, first published in Shanghai in 1925, C. H. Brewitt-Taylor considers it "a book adapted for the storyteller", whom the reader "can almost hear". Pearl S. Buck, in her Swedish Academy lecture on receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1938, observed that the Chinese guerillas then fighting the Japanese were peasants "who know *San Kuo* by heart, if not from their own reading, at least from hours spent... listening to the story tellers describe how the warriors of the Three Kingdoms fought their battles."

Dragon", "Tiger", "Sun and Moon" and so on. Such details enriched the story and enthralled the listeners.[32]

The wounds of a hero allowed a whole series of descriptions, keeping the audience in suspense until it learned whether they were serious or light. At a time when his life seemed to be in great jeopardy, the hero might emerge eventually with only his clothing torn. Or it was not he but his horse that was hurt. Horses, incidentally, lent themselves well to the storyteller's descriptive powers, and volumes could be filled with what was said about them. How a horse was saddled alone would provide enough material for an entire session. In this, as in other matters, each hero had special ways which were his trademarks, well known to all seasoned listeners.[33]

*

An exhaustive account of the performances and techniques of the Chinese storytellers and singers of ballads would take much more space than I have allowed myself for this paper. Nevertheless, it is without doubt that this art represents an important part of the Chinese cultural heritage and that its further exploration will reveal facts of interest not only to sinologists but to students of oral literature in general.

References

Buck, Pearl S.: *The Chinese Novel*. Swedish Academy lecture on receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature. 1938. Currently available from: https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1938/buck/lecture/ [2024-10-06].

Chen Ruheng 陈汝衡: Liu Jingting de Shuoshu Yishu 刘敬亭的说书艺术 [Liu Jingting's Art of Storytelling]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1957, 1, pp. 4–9.

Chen Ruheng 陈汝衡: *Shuoshu Shihua* 说书史话 [The History of Storytelling]. Peking 1958.

Hrdličková, Věnceslava: The Professional Training of Chinese Storytellers and the Storytellers' Guilds. *Archiv orientální* 1965, 33, pp. 225–248.

Jin Shoushen 金受申: Lao Shuguan Jianwen Suoji 老书馆见闻琐记 [Miscellaneous Notes from Old Bookstores]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1959, 8, pp. 36–38; 1959, 9, pp. 73–75; 1959, 10–11, pp. 58–60; 1959, 11, pp. 59–61.

Lao She 老舍: *Guo Xinnian* 过新年 [Celebrating the New Year]. Shanghai 1951.

32 See Zhang Yushu, *op. cit.*, page 47.

33 Ibid.

LAO She 老舍: Jiyi You Xin 记忆犹新 [Fresh in Memory]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 5, pp. 46.

PAN Boying 潘伯英 and Zhou Liang 周良: Suzhou Pingtan Koujue 苏州评弹口诀 [Magic Formulae of Suzhou's Pingtan] (Editorial Notes). *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 3, pp. 51–57.

San Kuo, or Romance of the Three Kingdoms. Translated by Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor. Shanghai 1925, 2 vols.

Shandong Qinshu Liupai Zuotanhui Ziliaozu 山东琴书流派座谈会资料组 [The Information Group of Shandong Qinshu School]: Shandong Qinshu Liupai Qiantan 山东琴书流派浅谈 [A Sketchy Exploration of the Shandong Qinshu School]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 3, pp. 46–50.

TSAO Hsueh-chin: *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. Translated by Wang Chi-chen. London 1929.

TSAO Hsueh-chin: *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. Translated by Wang Chi-chen. New York 1958.

TSAO Hsueh-chin: *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. Translated by Florence McHugh and Isabel McHugh. New York 1958.

WANG Litang 王丽堂: Wo de Xuexi Jingguo 我的学习经过 [My Process of Learning]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1958, 6, pp. 27–28.

WANG Shaotang 王少堂: Leng Shu he Re Shu 冷书和热书 [Cold and Hot Storytelling]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1959, 3, pp. 50–51.

XIAO Yiwu 萧亦五: Tan Wang Shaotang de Shuoshu Yishu 谈王少堂的说书艺术 [On the Wang Shaotang's Storytelling Art]. *Quyi Gongzuo Tongxun* 曲艺工作通讯 [Work Newsletter on Folk Vocal Art] 1954, 3, pp. 30–36.

ZHANG Yushu 张玉书: Qingzi Diyi 清字第一 [First in Purity]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, No. 11, pp. 42–49.

The Motif of the God of the Hearth and the Division of the Joint Family in Chinese Chap-Books

Abstract: The art of storytelling in China was one of the primary sources of entertainment for the broad masses. It is significant that this practice extended beyond oral storytelling and entered the sphere of written literature. The most popular ballads and stories were transcribed, printed, and gradually adapted to resemble tales meant primarily for reading. Despite this shift, the oral conventions persisted strongly, even though these written works were no longer directly tied to the oral tradition. The stories collected in the printed chap-books covered many themes, including traditional tales, episodes from celebrated novels, or real-life stories. The paper examines the circumstances under which the stories were published and describes how the printed copies were used. In order to illustrate certain features of the storytellers' books, the central part of the paper compares several variants of the famous tale about the god of the hearth, a popular deity in Chinese households, that elaborates the motif of the division of the joint family.

Keywords: Oral tradition, Chinese storytelling, chap-books, god of the hearth, family.

One of the reasons why the study of folklore offers numerous difficulties is that this type of production rarely occurs in literary sources in its unadulterated form. Much more frequently we come across it in hybrid varieties, in which it is necessary to reveal the pure strain by means of a careful analysis.

The original form of folklore being oral, we may presume that many folklore elements will be contained in those books which, according to content, but even more according to form, are likely to be directly linked with the oral tradition. Here I have in mind not collectors' transcriptions and publications, but a kind of popular press which conformed to a social demand and catered for its requirements. This ouput was, for the most part, the typical product of an urban milieu and bore its characteristic features. It was, above all, functional and

so was marked by a measure of professional facility, vulgarity and, not seldom, triviality. This circumstance, however, does not by any means lower its value as an important source for gaining insight not only into the domain of literature, but also into its historical and sociological background.

This kind of literature has appeared, during the last three centuries, in more or less similar form almost everywhere in the world: the Czech Lands had its popular small-size editions and peddlar's songs, England its chap-books, China its storytellers' books and booklets, Japan its Yellow Books – kibyoshi 黄表紙, and so on.

An investigation into the genesis of the Czech peddlar's song, for example, has brought to light a relationship to the activities of the mediaeval joculator, although at the time of the peddlar's printed song-sheet (kramářská píseň) the institution of professional storytellers and singers had already died out in the Czech Lands.[1]

The materials from a country like China, where feudal and semifeudal conditions survived much longer than in Europe and where the majority of the population was illiterate, provide on the whole ideal scope for the study of the relations between oral verbal production and popular or semi-popular printed publications brought out within the last three centuries. In this period the storytellers' art[2] in China was still alive and one of the main sources of entertainment for the broad masses. The oral tradition was rich and had a wide range of genres. It also penetrated beyond the limits of the spoken word into the sphere of written literature. The most popular stories were taken down in writing, printed and gradually began to imitate the form of tales intended primarily for reading. In them the oral conventions died hard, even though this production was no longer directly linked with the oral tradition. The relations between it and popular or semi-popular printed editions brought out by town publishers continued to remain, to judge from the extant materials, relatively very close. And so this material comes within the scope of folklore studies and

1 V. Černý: Od kramářského zpěváku k středověkému žakéřovi (From the Chapbook Singer to the Mediaeval Jester) Václavkova Olomouc 1961, Praha 1963, pp. 255–261.

2 The history of the storytellers' art in China reaches far back into the past. Storytelling achieved its greatest flowering in the Song epoch. In the course of the centuries storytelling branched out into a great number of forms, practised by professional artists in bazaars, market squares, town tearooms and private houses. Under the designation, storytelling (shuoshu 說書), was usually included, in China, also ballad-singing and the performance of simple dramatic scenes.

a knowledge of it also contributes to a better understanding of certain aspects of the storytellers' art.

While engaged in China, in the years 1950–1954, in the study of various storytelling forms, I made a small collection of storytellers' manuals and booklets, published at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. It was not so easy to acquire these materials as I had at first supposed, as the old editions were no longer currently on sale in the shops and the people who had them at home were unwilling to let me acquire them, on the ground that they contained many feudal survivals and were not only worthless, but actually harmful. This view was very widespread at the time and even Fu Xihua 傅惜華, in his Catalogue of the Peking Storytellers' Art,[3] which is the basic work for the study of this literature, sometimes adds to his characterization of the story the remark: 'the content is feudal, full of superstition, reactionary'.[4] What is particularly valuable about these books is that most of them are devoid of any kind of stylization, or where it exists is so transparently naive as to be obvious at a first glance, and that they give a picture of the time when they arose from a different angle than that of the official literature.

Popular and semi-popular books and pamphlets, printed by publishers who specialized in them,[5] contained short stories, ballads, introductory songs and also simple dramatic scenes, which still formed a part of the oral repertoire. The booklets were on sale in little shops and booths, along with calendars, votive offerings, and such like. It was truly popular reading, the literature of the bazaars, accessible to all for a mere trifle. The books sold well and copies passed from hand to hand till they often literally fell to pieces.

The subject-matter of the stories covered a wide range. Often it was traditional, with a theme going far back into the past.[6] Many of the themes were

3 Fu Xihua 傅惜華: Beijing chuantong quyi zonglu 北京傳統曲艺總錄, Peking 1962.

4 See op. cit., pp. 109, 357 et seq.

5 For example, Damo chang 打磨廠, Baibenchang 百本廠, Bie yetang 別墅堂, etc.

6 It is interesting, if only for a random comparison, to note what themes from the Dunhuang bianwen (5th–10th cents.) also occur in the storytellers' books of the 19th and 20th cents.: a) Conversation of Confucius with the boy Xian Duo (Kongzi xiang Tuo xiang wenshu 孔子項託相問書, Dunhuang bianwenji 敦煌変文集, Vol. 1, Peking 1957. See also A. Waley: Ballads and Stories from Tunhuang, London 1960, pp. 86–96.) It is a tale of how a small boy answered all the questions of the great philosopher and himself baffled the philosopher with his questions. The same story occurs in the ballad, How a Small Boy Discomfited Confucius (Xiao er nan Kongzi 小兒難孔子, pamphlet of the Baowentang publishing house, beg. 20th cent.; b) Bianwen about Zhaojun (Wang Zhaojun bianwen 王昭君変文), see Dunhuang bianwenji, pp. 98–108, Vol. 1.

common also to those of the Peking opera.[7] Much favoured were episodes from celebrated novels, such as Sanguo zhi 三國志, Xi You Ji 西遊記, the short stories of Jingu qiguan 今古奇觀, the tales from Liaozhai zhiyi 聊齋志異, and others.[8] A special category of introductory songs was composed of a play upon the names of flowers, of historical characters, of Southern and hern melodies, upon the titles of Peking operas, and so on.[9] Stories from real life were common, most of them having no literary prototype. In them were described the advantages and disadvantages of various trades, annual festivities, family quarrels, the hard life of soldiers and prostitutes, or they contained a warning against the smoking of opium, drunkenness, gaming, and other vices.[10]

There was, in China, a very close link between the various storytelling and dramatic forms and a popular story was often not only related, but also sung and acted. Thus in storytellers' books a theme often occurs in several variants, which plainly derive from different sources of oral tradition, for they show divergences in both conception and composition. Especially in stories from life there is not seldom a difference in the quality and intensity of the social motifs and in the solution offered of the social problems involved.

A common feature of this production was the colloquial language, often corrupted by printing errors past recognition, and then also the consistent preservation of the storytelling, dramatic or balladic form customary in its oral realization. Some narrations are serious, or even tragic, others strain to point a

---

The story of Zhaojun, a beauty who, about 30 B.C., was given in marriage by the Emperor to a suitor in a far-off land. This is the subject, too, of the ballad, Zhaojun chusai 昭君出塞, in the series, Wenming dagu shuci, Vol. 2, Peking, beg. 20th cent., pp. 35–38.; c) Bianwen about Mulian (Mulian bianwen 目連変文), see Dunhuang bianwenji, Vol. 2, pp. 756–760, and other Dunhuang texts on this theme. It is the story of how the pious monk, Mulian, betook himself to Hell to save his mother. See also A. Waley, op. cit. Mu-lien Rescues his Mother, pp. 216–235. In the series, Wenming dagu shuci, in ballad form, Mulian Rescues his Mother (Mulian jiumu 目連救母), Vol. 3, pp. 23–28.; d) Bianwen about Meng Jiangnü (Meng Jiangnü bianwen 孟姜女変文), see Dunhuang bianwenji, Vol. 1, pp. 32–35. See also A. Waley, op. cit., pp. 145–149. Tale of a Faithful Wife (the time of the action is the 3rd cent. B.C.), who went to seek her husband at the building of the Great Wall. In ballad form, in The Great Wall (Wanli changcheng 万里長城), in Wenming dagu shuci, Vol. 16, pp. 5–8.

7 See Fu Xihua, op. cit., for example, pp. 212, 213, 218, 219, 229, and elsewhere.

8 See Fu Xihua, op. cit., for example, pp. 259, 265, 212, 229, 217, and elsewhere.

9 See Fu Xihua, op. cit., pp. 217, 248, 261, 286, and elsewhere.

10 See Fu Xihua, op. cit., pp. 195, 201, 221, and elsewhere. Here, at least, a few titles: The Great Quarrel (p. 198), Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law at Loggerheads (p. 256), A Soldier's Sigh (p. 295), The Drunkard Is Rude to His Wife (p. 280), and others.

moral. Frequent, too, are humorous pieces, in which predominate spontaneity, non-conventionality and disrespect for social taboos. The humour is burlesque, sometimes to the point of being cynical. It is evident that the overthrow of inviolable symbols, the exposure of the other face of virtue, heroism or qualities typically extolled by official morality, were a welcome source of entertainment. In these tales people are described as they really are and not as they should be. Here the seamy side of Chinese society is revealed where, despite Confucian principles, there existed, as everywhere in the world, timid husbands, faithless wives, marriage-crazy widows, ungrateful sons, and so on.

The stories were anonymous and regarded as general property, nobody claiming exclusive right of authorship. Storytellers and publishers therefore had a free hand to alter the stories as they thought fit. These publications had, like the Czech peddlar's song, the character of written literature, but at the same time were subject to variability as complex and difficult to trace as oral relation and the folk-song.[11] In China, where the link between printed works and the oral tradition is very close, this feature is particularly marked.

Profit was an important motive in China, too, in the publishing of books and pamphlets. Thus the stories that came out in print had usually passed the test of mass popularity. Sometimes it is expressly noted that the content of the books is made up of what was being recited and sung at the time.[12]

As regards ballads and stories in which prose alternated with verse, not even in the printed form was the musical component altogether overlooked. Before the metrical section which, in the oral realization, was always sung, the name of the melody was always inserted. The printed editions were evidently designed not only for reading, but also as a practical manual for performers. Herewith is connected the question of their functions, for it is clear that they had more than one. A considerable circle of persons interested in storytellers' manuals were lovers of sung ballads and of the art of storytelling, and as such belonged to a wide variety of social groups. The quality of the printed materials was not always the same, most often, however, it met the needs of people who were not altogether illiterate (for they were able to read the books), but still not sufficiently educated to cope with the difficulties of works composed in the

11 See R. Smetana: K problematice jevu české písně kramářské (A Contribution to the Problem of the Czech Chap-book Song), Václavkova Olomouc 1961, pp. 13–58, cit. p. 26.

12 See, for example, Wenming dagu shuci, Vol. 18, p. 2.

style of wenyan. On the other hand, educated people, too, were consumers of these popular publications, for they provided them with light reading.

Storytellers' books were also used as supplementary materials by professional singers and storytellers, although the main source of their art was the oral tradition. It cannot be supposed, however, that the printed copies were published predominantly for their use. They served the purpose of a songbook or manual much more frequently among amateurs. Amateur storytelling and song, carried on for private pleasure or for 'honour and glory' before an 'audience' of relatives and friends, was in China, as well as in other countries, an accompanying feature of professional storytelling, and especially of ballad-singing.[13] The books were often read aloud, because the language was easily comprehensible for the listener, too.[14]

The method of printing the storytellers' books and the care given to their production are important if we are to have a proper idea of this type of output. At first they were primitive prints from plates. This method of printing, curiously enough, was maintained in publishing houses, in poor town suburbs, practically up to the 1940's. In older times some publishers employed copyists, who made hand-written copies of tales and ballads. In addition, however, they printed the chap-books in normal fashion. Some of them, such as, for instance, the Wenming dagu shuci 文明大鼓書詞 series, were relatively well produced. They had a yellow cover,[15] decorated with a photograph of a popular singer, in traditional or modern dress. The print was quite passable, the characters sufficiently large and clear. The ballads and tales – one book might contain as many as ten – were somewhat intellectualized and evidently designed, thanks to the editing, for a more exacting reader. On the other hand, the Fengtian luozi 奉天落子[16] series was much more cheaply produced. The slim little volumes of seven or eight

13 Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 recalls, for instance, the merchant Li Sanye 李三爷, who was a great lover of drum ballads. He was able to sing them and was fond of performing them before friends and acquaintances. See Tan guwang Liu Baoquan de yishu chuanzuo 談鼓王刘宝全的艺術創作, Quyi 曲艺 2, 1962, pp. 2, 16, cit. p. 5. The Japanese author, Kata Koji 加太こうじ recalls, for example, his uncle, who was a great admier of ballad recitation and often himself recited. Sometimes he gave his nephew 10 sen for providing a listener. See Rakugo 落語, Tokyo 1964, p. 255.

14 School-children would often read the books at home to illiterate mothers and grannies. In Peking, for instance, Miss Yang Leyun 楊樂雲 told us about the custom from personal experience. Kata Koji records a similar experience in Japan, see op. cit., p. 256.

15 The format of Wenming dagu shuci: 13 by 20 cm.

16 The format of Fengtian luozi: 12 by 18 cm.

pages were printed on cheap paper, the title-page being decorated with a carelessly reproduced and almost unrecognizable photograph of a female singer or male actor, in stage costume. The print was small and sometimes blurred. The stories were more straightforwardly presented than the ballads in Wenming dagu shuci. Similar in character to the Fengtian luozi series were also, as regards content, the traditionally produced editions printed from plates of small format,[17] on double Chinese paper. All these are, except for the reproduction on the title-page, without illustrations, whereas the predominantly moralizing and religious baojuan 宝卷[18] were embellished with at least one or several woodcuts.

Several publishing houses, such as Baowentang 宝文堂, continued to publish their chap-books even after 1949. They promptly accommodated the content of the books to the new conditions and also the decoration of the title-page – instead of a singer's portrait, there appeared the photograph of members of 'The Committee for the Reform of the Storytelling Art'.[19] It is interesting, too, that as late as 1966 popular books of a similar kind were still being published by Wuguitang 五桂堂, in Hong Kong.

In order to illustrate more specifically certain features of the storytellers' books, I make use, for purposes of comparison, of a variant of the popular tale, 'How the God of the Hearth got a Beating and the Division of a Family'. In my collection, it served as the subject of a ballad to diverse melodies – paiziqu 牌子曲,[20] of a simple dramatic scene called Fengtian luozi,[21] and of a dialogue of unidentified form.[22] As supplementary comparative material, I have also made a study of a shadow theatre play[22a] on the same theme, and the thematically related tale, 'Three Brothers'.[23]

---

17 The format of books printed from plates: 10 by 13 1/2 cm.

18 Baojuan – valuable scrolls composed in the form of alternating prose and verse, existed in the oral tradition and also in book form. Besides religious baojuan, there existed also baojuan of a secular character. The books were printed on cheap paper and published as paperbacks, the format being usually 15 by 25 cm. The authors of the tales were mostly anonymous.

19 See, for example, Lao Ma on the Way to Peking (Xin shang Jing 新上京). Peking 1950.

20 Da Zao fen jia 打灶分家, Wenming dagu shuci, Vol. 18, pp. 53–56, then also as Variant I. See Fu Xihua, op. cit., p. 212.

21 Da Zao fen jia, Baowentang, beg. 20th cent., seven pages, then also as Variant II.

22 Da Zaowang, Baowentang, about the beg. of the present century, then also as Variant III.

22a Da Zao, see Grube–Krebs: Chinesische Schattenspiele, Abhandlungen der Königlichen Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, XXVIII B., München 1915, pp. 278–284, also as Var. IV.

23 See L. Wieger: Rudiments – Narrationes populaires, Hejianfu 1903, pp. 82–88.

The tale of the beating sulfered by the god of the hearth was still during my sojourn in Peking a part of the storytellers' current repertoire. I saw it performed by a small group at the Tianqiao 天橋 bazaar.[24] The group comprised three actors in simple costume. Their acting was straightforward, but as they were good comedians, the audience enjoyed the performance.

All the texts of the tale about the god of the hearth that I have cited are anonymous and, except for 'Three Brothers', are of humorous character. From references to the manuscript catalogues of Peking publishing houses, it is evident that the story was especially popular among the singers of paiziqu.[25] The theme was taken over from the Peking opera of the same name and circulated in the oral tradition also under the title, 'The Judas Tree' (Zijingshu 紫荊樹).[26] It was, however, evidently never published in this form, as there is no reference to it in the accessible catalogues.

In respect of form, the simplest prose relation is 'Three Brothers'. The text of the paiziqu[27] is more complicated and preserves all the features of balladic form, in which song alternates with rhythmic recitation. The vocal sections are indicated by the name of the melody to which they are sung, the ballad has a prologue, chaqutou 岔曲頭,[28] and an epilogue, chaquwei 岔曲尾. The relatively short text is composed of dialogues and descriptions and, in reading, produces a very rhythmical effect.

---

24 The Peking Market, beside the Celestial Bridge, was a favourite centre of popular entertainment. In the open air or in the poorer sort of teahouses, storytellers, acrobats, conjurors and small dramatic groups gave performances. The storyteller or singer needed nothing more than a simple little table, on which stood a teapot and a cup, beside which lay a fan and a little wooden stick or brick – the indispensable storytelling requisites. Sometimes a little drum on low feet also stood upon the table, on which the artist beat a rhythmical accompaniment to his recital.

25 See Fu Xihua, op. cit., p. 212.

26 See Fu Xihua, op. cit., p. 255.

27 Paiziqu were ballads, which were sung to melodies arranged in 'tables of melodies' or paizi. Paiziqu ballads were sometimes called bajiaogu 八角鼓, after the octagonal drum which the singer held in his hand. Paiziqu were, in the last two centuries, the most popular Peking storytelling forms. From them evolved the dramatized paiziqu. The ballads were sung by professional singers; at the end of the Qing dynasty and beginning of the Republic these included many former Manchu amateur singers – zidishu 子弟書 – who with the change of political circumstances lost their gratuitous pension and had to earn a living by ballad-singing.

28 Chaqu were the prefatory poems to paiziqu. They could also exist as independent pieces. Among them are interesting poetical compositions. Chaqu formed an important component of Wenming dagu shuci, see for example, Lute, Chess, Books and Pictures (Qin, qi shuhua 琴棋書畫, Vol. 3, pp. 50–51), Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter (Chun, xia, qiu, dong 春夏秋冬, Vol. 4, pp. 47–48), and others.

The simple play Fengtian luozi,[29] and the printed version from plates (Var. III) are fairly close, certain turns of phrase, proverbial sayings and sentences being almost identical. The characters are given the same designations as for the theatre: dan 旦 – heroine, sheng 生 – hero, chou 丑 – comedian. The plot is presented to the audience very simply: the actor introduces himself, describes what he is doing. Song alternates with prose. Similar in character is the play for the shadow theatre,[30] being only fuller in content and more carefully worked out.

The language of all the variants is colloquial – it is the speech of everyday life, in an altogether raw state, such as is rare in printed form.[31]

The central motif of the story is the living under a single roof of a joint family, which in the past was one of the most acute problems of Chinese life. According to the principles of feudal morality, perfect harmony should prevail among relations forming a single household, for a big family was the goal of human endeavour, a universal ideal, the sign of wealth and prosperity. An old saying was 'smoke has always risen high where all the members of a family gather fuel for the fire'.

---

29 Fengtian luozi (Fengtian was the old designation for Liaoning) belong to those forms on the border-line between storytelling and drama, of which quite a number developed in China.

30 Shadow theatre was one of the most popular folk entertainments. Groups of artists gave performances in bazaars and marketplaces. They also accepted invitations to perform in private houses, for the puppets and other requisites were packed into a single piece of luggage that was easily transferred from one place to another. Shadow theatre performances usually took place after dark and the atmosphere they conjured up was, indeed, fascinating. A white screen was lit up from behind by a lamp; beyond the lamp the artists manipulated the little coloured figures of donkey's skin and the shadows of the puppets were projected on the screen. The puppets for shadow theatre were themselves works of art. They resembled Indonesian vajang, except that they were smaller. The costumes of the heirones and heroes were copies of those used in the classical opera. It was possible to change the puppets' heads according to need. Each group had a large stock of puppets for a wide range of repertoire – from historical plays to farces such as the play about how the god of the hearth got a beating. B. Laufer (see W. Grube, op. cit., p. XXII), in the introduction to a collection of texts for shadow theatre describe an interesting performance of this type of drama: 'In Han-k'ou hörte ich im April 1903 eine Schattenspielgesellschaft, die in einer elenden halb-verfallenen Bauerhütte untergebracht war, die Wande zum Teil aus Lehm, zum Teil aus Bretten gefügt und das Dach mit Stroh gedeckt... Hier wurde daher während des Nachmittags gespielt. Die Gäste, Bauern und Arbeiter, sassen auf rohen Banken um Tosche herum und wurden mit Tee, Tabakspfeifen und Nussen bewirtet. Nach jedem Stück wurden Beiträge gesammelt, die sich in Durchschnitt auf drei bis vier Kupfermünzen für eine Person belieferten.'

31 Several teachers in Peking used these books as a teaching aid for foreigners who wished to learn the colloquial language.

The basic economic principle of the organization of the Chinese joint family was that the oldest member, who stood at its head, should manage the whole property. Grown-up sons, even after they got married, worked either on the family fields or contributed their earnings acquired elsewhere to the family treasury of common fund. The grandfather or father, in return, fed and clothed them and disposed of the joint income as he himself thought best. Life together was often a source of quarrels and disputes, being far from as harmonious as the propagators of official morality would have liked to see it. A married son could, however, split off from the family in his grandfather's or father's lifetime. Such a step, however, entailed the division of the inherited property among the grown-up sons and the request for such a break-away, on which the joint family had to reach a decision, was generally held to be an offence against filial piety.

The divided family could continue even then to live under one roof; the outward sign of the new arrangement, however, was that each new unit founded its own kitchen hearth and was economically independent.[32]

The protector of the family hearth was the god, Zao Shen 灶神, also known as Zao Jun 灶君 or Zao Jun Pusa 灶君菩薩.[33] A representation of the god in colour-print – mazhang 馬張, often black with smoke, was a cheaper substitute for the little clay figure that traditionally had its place above the hearth. Those who were so poor that they could not afford even a mazhang stuck a strip of red paper, inscribed with the god's name, on the wall above the kitchen fire. The task of the god, who was sometimes nicknamed 'Heaven's spy', was to keep a watch on the behaviour of the members of the household and report on it to the Celestial Emperor. The inmates of the house made sacrifice to the god twice a month – at the time of the full moon and of the new moon. On the twenty-third day of the twelfth lunar month the god betook himself to Heaven to give an account of all that he had seen and heard in the house entrusted to him. At this time its inmates brought to him sweet, sticky offerings, to keep his mouth closed, or, according to another version, so that any words he might

32 See, for example, Hsiao-Tung Fei: Peasant Life in China, London 1947. Buwei Yang Chao also describes how already at the beginning of our century, her grandfather, contrary to the general custom, divided, prior to his death, the family property among his three sons, whereupon the three newly founded families abolished the common hearth and each set up its own kitchen fireplace. See 'Auto-biography of a Chinese Woman', New York 1947, p. 48.

33 See, for example, C. B. Day: Chinese Peasant Cults, Shanghai 1940, pp. 86–89 or Tun Li-ch'en: Annual Customs and Festivals in Peking, Hong Kong 1965, p. 98.

manage to utter would be sweet. An offering was also made to the horse that conveyed the god aloft, of water, a little grass, hay or beans.

The god of the hearth was among the most popular divinities in the Chinese popular pantheon. Ordinary folk, however, maintained towards this god, as towards most of the others, a distinctly utilitarian attitude, and folk characterizations, as a rule, attributed to him more human weaknesses than divine virtues.[34]

The members of the family, besides observing the prescribed rites of worship, also prayed to him to protect their newly founded hearth. Thus the motif of the god of the hearth was closely linked with that of the division of the family, and so found its way, in the process of epic cyclization, into the tale of the family of three brothers, where the wife of the youngest strives to make herself and her husband independent by founding their own hearth.

The tale of 'Three Brothers' was evidently older and more original than the farcical story of 'How the God of the Hearth Got a Beating'. In the former, the fairy-tale motif of the magic tree comes prominently into the foreground: the three brothers, in this tale, live together as a joint family even after the death of both parents. The wife of the youngest advises her husband to ask for a division of the family, because as things are the two of them have no rights in the family and no voice any decisions. The husband does as his wife suggests. His two elder brothers do not at first wish to give their consent, but in the end they decide after all to divide the joint property into three shares. This done, there remains only the Judas Tree, which has flourished in the courtyard several hundred years and is now preparing to flower. The brothers split it into three parts. The next day, however, they find it withered and the buds fallen to the ground. No sooner do they touch it than the tree overturns and the roots are exposed. The eldest brother breaks into tears, the uprooted tree is for him the symbol of the tragic

34 See 'The Kitchen Deity' in W. Eberhard's Folk-tales of China, The University of Chicago Press 1965, pp. 194–195, where the life-story of the god of the hearth is described when he was still an ordinary mortal on earth. He was, according to the folk-tradition so poor at that time that he had to sell his own wife to another man. Not only was he poor, but so goodhearted that it bordered on simplemindedness. These qualities prompted the Ruler of Heaven to have pity on him and make him god of the hearth. K. Johnson in Chinese Folklore: Peiping Rhymes, Shanghai 1932, cites several folk rhymes dedicated to the god of the hearth. One of them (pp. 75–76) describes what offerings were brought him on the day of his ascent to Heaven. Another rhyme describes (p. 174) how the members of the family make their offerings to the god of the hearth at the New Year and pray to him to fulfil various wishes. The third (pp. 407–408) is an apology for bringing the god, instead of sweet offerings, only a poor sacrifice – a bowl of water and two sticks of incense.

fate of a divided family. The youngest brother is also moved and withdraws his request. He threatens his wife, who still insists on the division of the family, with divorce. The unhappy creature is so shamed that she hangs herself in the night. The next day the tree stands in the courtyard again in all its vigour and promise. The brothers swear an oath under it that the family will always remain together.

The situation described in the tale, in which the sons do not divide up the family property and remain a joint family even after the death of the parents, was fairly common in China, for an excessive splitting up of the property, in any case no longer over-large, into what were economically unfavourably sized units, was thereby avoided. Living in a common household, however, affected the younger members of the family most adversely and so it is not surprising that where the head of the family lacked a firm hand, a striving to break away from the joint family made itself felt and a longing for a greater measure of independence. Society tended to prevent rather than encourage such endeavours and so in this moralistic tale the motif is introduced of the magic tree, which evoked in the listeners a superstitious terror of heavenly vengeance.

In the storytellers' books and in the play for the shadow theatre, the background of the tale handed down under the title, 'How the God of the Hearth Got a Beating', and also of 'Three Brothers', remains the same. In it, too, the three brothers of the Tian 田 family live under one roof and the initiator of revolt against a common household is the Third Sister-in-law. The motif of the Judas Tree, the symbol of family unity is omitted in the storytellers' books. In the shadow play only passing mention is made of it. The eldest brother says in his prefatory monologue: 'In the backyard there remained after our late father a Judas tree. I shall go and water it'. His words have not, however, any deeper meaning and serve only as a pretext for the hero's departure from the stage. Later the eldest brother reverts once more to the tree motif, namely at the point when he tries to persuade the Third Sister-in-law to withdraw her request for the division of the family: 'My late father left us the Judas tree', he remarks, diffidently rather than threateningly. The mention of the paternal legacy leaves the Third Sister-in-law unmoved: 'And what about it?' 'In our family we say that if we divide our inheritance the tree will dry up!' 'Let it dry up then, what has that to do with me!' retorts the Third Sister-in-law unabashed. The eldest brother has no further argument to offer on this theme and the Third Sister-in-law thus painlessly throws overboard the superstitious fear of the magic tree. The tree motif is here already shifted from the centre of the tale to its

insignificant periphery. A reference to it in the shadow play, however, permits of our reconstructing the relation of the tale, 'How the God of the Hearth Got a Beating', to the story entitled, 'Three Brothers'. In the humorous treatment of the theme relating to the division of a family, instead of the magic tree, it is the above-mentioned motif of the god of the hearth that has taken root. The opening episode of his skirmish with the Third Sister-in-law then provides the tale with its title.

The god Zao Shen is described, at least in the first sentences of all the variants, as a worthy divinity. In the ballad set to various melodies – paiziqu – he is seated in the company of two imps, his assistants, on the little family altar. Just when he is sighing that he sees nobody bringing him an offering, his assistants tell him that the Third Sister-in-law, Mistress Tian, is approaching. She burns incense before the god and promises him a cock, if he listens to her prayer and supports her request for a division of the family. Mistress Tian is not content, however, with a mere entreaty, in the effect of which she evidently does not believe very much, and immediately follows it up with a threat: 'And mind don't get it mixed up!' When the god makes no reply she begins to beat him about the head with the poker. The beating is accompanied by a proper scolding. The god manages to escape from this unenviable situation by changing into a golden sunbeam and ascending to heaven. Before leaving he still has time to complain: 'What a beating she's given me! I'm all aching, as if I'd had an attack of malaria'.[35]

In Fengtian luozi, the god of the hearth is presented as the protector of family harmony and lets it be known that Mistress Tian has promised him a cock if he helps her to carry through her plan for a division of the family. It seems that the 'heavenly spy' is ready to forget his duty to heaven for such a tasty

35 The god of the hearth was not the only divinity that, in folk narration, finds himself in an unenviable predicament. This kind of presentation of the gods was common in folklore production. Eberhard has this to say of it: 'Legendary tales which show deities or saints in ridiculous situations or portray them with undesirable characters are fairly common and are not the product of modern times. In popular religion deities were nothing but officials. They were higher in rank than officials on earth, but were nevertheless beings with much the same traits as humans'. See op. cit., p. 241. L. C. Arlington cites the example of the folk farce 'Beating of the Tutelar Deity', see Famous Chinese Plays, Peking 1937, pp. 345–352, where two officials instructed by Qin Shi Huangdi to catch all the local loungers to work on the building of the Great Wall, begs the local deity for assistance. When he nevertheless fails to catch anybody, he returns to the temple and gives him a proper beating. The comic aspect of the situation is heightened by the fact that the god is away 'on leave' and a local loafer is deputizing for him.

bribe and help the young wife to achieve her end. Mistress Tian herself appears on the stage and promises, over and above, to burn incense to the god, in the kitchen, twice a day. If the god, however, does not fulfil her wish, he will not see a feather, not to speak of a whole cock, and, to make sure, gives the god a beating on the spot. The god suffers the beating unprotestingly and, when Mistress Tian at last departs, he breathes a sigh of relief and says: 'She gave me what for, all right!' Before departing for heaven the god threatens to punish Mistress Tian with a big ulcer.

In the Variant III, the encounter of the Third Sister-in-law with the god is equally boisterous. The god, in his prologue, does not fail to stress that his task is to look after ordinary folk and report all their sins to the Emperor of Heaven. Mistress Tian, however, gives him a beating all the same and scolds him heartily, addressing him as 'you black misery' and so on. He, on the other hand, threatens her with an ulcer.

In the shadow play, the Third Sister-in-law visits the god already armed with a stout stick. First of all she promises him, in addition to the cock, 'a dumpling as big as a rice bowl and a melon the size of a barrow-wheel,' but a moment later threatens him with a beating three times daily. And so that the god may know what he is in for, she immediately sets about him and beats him till the place is full of soot. The god only cries out: 'Oh, dear, oh, dear, this'll be the death of me!' When Mistress Liu departs the god confides to his assistants that he was thoroughly frightened. Now he finds himself in rather a dilemma, because he is sorry for the Eldest Brother, an honest and educated man. But after all he decides to inform the Emperor of Heaven of all that has passed. He calls for his assistant to bring his Yellow Dog, on which he wishes to ascend to heaven.[36] His assistant, however, is not willing to carry out his master's order. Instead, he warns him: 'Don't go anywhere! The Celestial Emperor will deprive you of the rank of God of the Hearth! I tell you, stay where you are!' When the god insists on having his own way his assistant asks to be taken with him, evidently because he does not fancy being left at the mercy of the energetic Sister-in-law. The god refuses, objecting that 'an assistant has not the shoes in which to walk the clouds, nor a heavenly ladder!'

The introductory scene has thus become, instead of a eulogy, a parody of the god of the hearth and his status in the family. The god makes no further

[36] The god of the hearth always rode on a horse. The circumstance that he sent for a yellow dog, an animal treated with contempt throughout China, ridicules still more the status he occupied.

appearance in the story, not even to keep his promise of punishing the Third Sister-in-law with an ulcer.

The prologue does, however, create the proper atmosphere for the continuation of the story, for if the Third Sister-in-law succeeds in overcoming the god of the hearth with the poker, it is more than probable that she settles things successfully with the other authority – this time a secular one – the Eldest Brother, in whose hands lay the fate of the family.

The Third Sister-in-law's request for permission to found, along with her husband, their own hearth was justified, as is evident from her complaints: the whole burden of work lay on her shoulders. She had to 'grind the rice, light the fire, do the cooking, wait on the guests, feed the pigs and drive away the dogs. She had not even time to dress her hair properly or dye her eyebrows'.[37] She was, to judge from this, more an unpaid servant than one of the mistresses of the house. Her position was all the more difficult because of the long absences of her husband on business, when she was left entirely alone among her in-laws. The Second Sister-in-law was, according to her youngest relative, a dolled-up flirt, who never did a hand's turn the whole day, whereas the wife of the eldest brother was for ever praying and fasting. Life became so unbearable for the Third Sister-in-law that she decided to disregard all moral qualms and ask for the division of the family. In the fight she was putting up she had, in fact, little to lose, but with a little courage and good luck much to gain, because her husband was not dependent on the family income. The Third Sister-in-law's weapons were a sharp tongue and, if the worst came to the worst, her fists. She was a 'heroine', laughable and vulgar, but still a heroine in the sense of folk genres of this type. It is not surprising, therefore, that she won the sympathy of those in the audience who shared the same fate as herself and that she was, without realizing it, the herald of female emancipation in a milieu generally regarded as unawakened and backward.

The Eldest Brother, whom the Third Sister-in-law had to petition, was not an unapproachable family tyrant, but a typical scholar, a decent man on the whole, only altogether unpractical in matters of everyday life. He spent most of his time at home, behind closed doors. His book-learning, however, was of little use to him, since he was unable to keep order in his own house. He replied to his sister-in-law's quite specific sallies in general phrases and lofty maxims, which were as musty as the books he took them from, and evoked, instead of respect,

37 See Variant II.

only laughter. The Third Sister-in-law had listened to his well-meaning advice only too often and was well aware that it was all the Eldest Brother was capable of. She rightly exposed, under the cloak of learning removed from the realities of life, the inability to act. For every piece of her brother-in-law's advice she had a prompt and apt reply. The contrast between her rude vocabulary and the choice language in which the Eldest Brother expressed himself was a rewarding source of humour. Thus, for instance, when the Eldest Brother announces that 'now he will open his mouth and give utterance', the Third Sister-in-law breaks in and tells him he'd do better to keep silent as, 'in any case, he wouldn't be able to squeeze anything sensible out of himself!' She also makes fun of the old-world politeness with which he calls himself 'the worthless Eldest Brother' (yu xiong 愚兄), pretends not to hear correctly and wonders where 'the donkey or dog' (lü xiong 驴熊, gouxiong 狗熊) comes in.[38]

The argument went so far as to move the Eldest Brother to tears at the obstinacy of his sister-in-law, which circumstance induces the laughter rather than the sympathy of the audience. The stubborn sister-in-law is determined not to give in. For every allusion of her brother-in-law to the classics and to time-honoured customs she has a ready retort. And the Eldest Brother, though not lacking in any of the qualities of a perfect man as conceived by official morality, was, in this verbal skirmish with the Third Sister-in-law, completely outwitted and his attempts to assert his authority by means of sensible advice only lead to his making himself still more ridiculous.

In this section, Fengtian luozi goes over to a more serious tone. The Eldest Brother takes refuge in the final and conclusive argument: the division of the family is an offence against filial piety. And to add cogency to this argument, he makes an assault on those feelings in which women are most vulnerable – on her maternal feelings. Instead of cut-and-dry moral maxims, he describes the troubles a mother must endure before she accomplishes the upbringing of her child: her sufferings begin from the time she conceives: she feels burdened, she has no desire either to eat or drink, she is for ever ailing. She grows thin and it seems to her that she is losing all her strength. She has pains in her back, arms and legs grow weak, as if she were to try and lift the mountain Tai. When ten months have passed at length she gives birth to a son. What she suffers at that time nobody can even imagine. But when she looks upon the face of her child

38 See Variant IV.

she is overcome by love, and when she takes the little infant in her arms, she forgets all her suffering.[39]

This passage is not original to Fengtian luozi, but was one of the stock components of the storyteller's repertoire, being handed down from one generation to another and inserted by the storytellers, according to need, in this or that story.

The Third Sister-in-law failed to be moved, however, by the enumeration of maternal trials. It would seem that the Eldest Brother has no choice but to capitulate and give his permission for the division of the family. At this critical juncture the Second Brother intervenes in the action. He was employed in the local parish office and had come home unexpectedly and somewhat lit up, as he had drunk a bowl of wine with a friend on the way.[40] He introduces himself as 'a big man, whose feet are on the ground and whose head touches the heavens'.[41] At the office, from his own account, they give him all important matters to deal with. He admits, it is true, that he is quick-tempered, but unlike the other corrupt officials he is honest and goodhearted. He is angry with the Eldest Brother for not being able to rule the family with a firm hand, which is why there is nothing else to be heard in their house all day but rows and bickerings. The younger brother leaves nobody for a moment in any doubt that he will make short work of his sister-in-law and that he is determined to use force, if necessary. When his elder brother admonishes him to control himself he retorts: 'Don't talk to me! You scholarly people can't do anything but poke your noses into your miserable books! You should take an example from me...' This behaviour, however, makes no great impression on the Third Sister-in-law. She snubs him with the remark: 'Look, the grass is high enough, it's time you went to pasture!'[42]

---

39 Whereas the Eldest Brother here brings the enumeration of a mother's trials to an end, the description in Huitu Mu Lian sanshi baojuan 绘图目連三世宝卷, for instance, continues. In it is described how the mother washes the child's nappies, how she feeds him and spends her last farthing on sweets to stop his crying, how she sleeps with him in one bed and nurses him when he gets smallpox, provides for him when he is hungry, clothes him when he is cold, takes him to the teacher and promises him new clothes and other gifts if he learns well.

40 See Var. I. In Var. III the Second Brother gives as the reason for his returning home the fact that he has two days off and has come for his clothes.

41 See Var. IV.

42 See Var. IV.

In this section, the dispute is in full swing and it is clear that storytellers, singers and actors are thoroughly enjoying themselves. The printed text, though thickly strewn with purple patches, is only a dull reflection of what the scene was like when actually performed. The artists accompanied the words with gestures and grimaces and took particular trouble to hit off the Third Sister-in-law to the life.

In the course of the squabble, the Second Brother and the Third Sister-in-law begin to divulge intimate details from everyday life in order to put each other to shame. In the shadow play, the scene ends in a free-for-all fight, performed by puppets shadowed on an illuminated screen, the speaker providing a running commentary.

Only in the ballad to diverse melodies – paiziqu – does the Third Sister-in-law succumb to the threats of the Second Brother and withdraw her request for the division of the family. The quarrel ends in all other texts with her victory. This she achieves by crying out, at the critical moment, that the tape holding up her pantaloons has burst and immediately starts calling for the neighbours to come to her assistance. The brothers, fearing a scandal, hasten to promise that they will comply with her wish and that the family will be divided.

Although the variants do not differ in the main outline, as described above, there are certain differences of detail between the texts. Thus, for example, the paiziqu omits the motif of the cock, as an offering to the god of the hearth, as well as the threat of the ulcer and the scene with the burst tape. In Fengtian luozi, the wives of the elder brothers make a short appearance on the stage and both obediently support their husbands. In this text and also in the version printed from plates (Var. III), there is introduced what is a very popular motif in Chinese folklore, namely, the motif of the henpecked husband.[43]

The place of the action is more exactly localized only in the shadow play, where the Tian family lives in the district of Xianghe 香河. This play, too, in

[43] The Third Sister-in-law laughs at the Second Brother when he boasts that he would beat his wife, saying that not only would he never dare to, but on the contrary she was much more likely to beat him. Similarly, for instance, in K. Johnson, op. cit., pp. 126, 204, 104, 216 and 222. That the fate of husbands was not always the happiest comes out in the following ditty: 'Going from the east slope to the west slope I pick up an old padded shoe. After returning home I put a pan over the fire and fry four ounces of mutton. My wife eats and drinks. When my wife is in a good temper I stand up. When my wife is angry I kneel down. I put an oil lamp on my head, I hold an urine pot in my hands. When the baby awakes I see to him (p. 222).'

contrast to the other texts, consistently gives not only the names, but also the surnames, of the participating characters.

*

There is no doubt that the original, orally transmitted story underwent in publishing a whole series of changes and deformations and that the choice of the themes for publication was also influenced by the taste of the editiors and adaptors. The alterations were rarely of so radical a character as to blur or substantially alter the essential character of this type of literature, the product above all of an urban environment and designed for a diversely composed audience consisting not only of people settled in the town, but also of fluctuating elements between town and country, persons uprooted from the traditional family milieu, such as are servants of both sexes, peddlars, artisan journeymen and then, too, country people coming to the town for work, amusement, fairs and markets, and on pilgrimages. Consequently the general ideological level of the work was sensitive, on the whole, to changes in the circumstances under which it was performed: a few different gestures, another tone of voice, an improvised ironical remark and, in accordance with the storyteller's intention and the atmosphere prevailing among the audience, the story acquired a new bias, a new colouring, for what roused laughter among a certain social stratum might very well, among an audience of a different kind, fail to rouse a response. This lability is apparent already in a reading of the texts, where certain passages provide scope for various interpretations and the text positively calls for oral realization, offering one of several possible interpretations. In China, an exclusively or at least predominantly male or female audience was not a rarity. Before a male audience, for instance, the storyteller presented the figure of the Third Sister-in-law more lasciviously than before women. And it is obvious that, when a storyteller was faced with a more select audience, he toned down the irony with which he ridiculed the pedantry and lack of practical common sense of the educated class, while being able to give full rein to it before an audience of simple folk.

The tales in the storytellers' books usually lacked any kind of stylization, on the contrary, spontaneous presentation and a special variety of disarming naivety, were among the permanent positive traits of this type of literature. Descriptive details from everyday life are very common and especially valuable for the student of sociology or ethnography. The plot is, as a rule, simple to the

point of bareness, but has always such a well – pointed climax that the tale keeps the listener in suspense to the last moment. The poverty of the plot is made up for by the actor's power of characterization, though realized with primitive means and within narrow limits. Human relations are described with a realism that leaves nothing unexposed. The events which people found difficulty in coping with, of which they were ashamed and which they sought to conceal from others, are often treated in these tales in a spirit of farce, because the storyteller was not afraid to expose the core of the problem without sentimentality and with unrelenting directness.

Comic effects were achieved by the juxtaposition of conceptions from different social levels, humour was based on puns and surprising verbal associations, and on the storytellers' inexhaustible invention and ability to unmask the true character of the persons taking part in the action. This kind of humour made it unnecessary for the listeners to pretend to be anything but what they were and induced in them complete emotional relaxation, which was just what they sought in this kind of entertainment.

The storytellers' books and oral traditions have clearly much in common and the relations between them were close. A further and more exhaustive study of these printed publications would undoubtedly enrich our knowledge and conceptions of Chinese folklore and especially of the Chinese storytellers' art.

References

Arlington, Lewis Charles: *Famous Chinese Plays*. Peking 1937.

Černý, Václav: Od kramářského zpěváku k středověkému žakéřovi [From the Singer of Broadside Ballad to the Mediaeval Jester]. In: Dvořák Jaromír and Josef Š. Kvapil (Eds.): *Václavkova Olomouc 1961. Sborník referátů a diskusních příspěvků o kramářské písni* [Václavek's Olomouc 1961. Collection of Papers and Discussion Contributions on the Broadside Ballad]. Prague 1963, pp. 255–261.

Day, Clarence Burton: *Chinese Peasant Cults: Being a Study of Chinese Paper Gods*. Shanghai 1940.

Eberhard, Wolfram: *Folk-tales of China*. Chicago 1965.

Fei Hsiao-Tung: *Peasant Life in China*. London 1947.

Fu Xihua 傅惜华: *Beijing Chuantong Quyi Zonglu* 北京传统曲艺总录 [Comprehensive Collection of Beijing Traditional Folk Vocal Art]. Shanghai 1962.

Grube, Wilhelm, Emil Krebs and Bertholt Laufer: *Chinesische Schattenspiele* [Chinese Shadow plays]. Munich 1915.

Johnson, Kinchen: *Chinese Folklore: Peiping Rhymes*. Shanghai 1932.

KATA Kōji 加太こうじ: *Rakugo* 落語 [Rakugo]. Tokyo 1964.

MEI Lanfang 梅兰芳: Tan Guwang Liu Baoquan de Yishu Chuangzao 谈鼓王刘宝全的艺术创造 [On the Artistic Creation of Liu Baoquan, the King of Drum]. *Quyi* 曲艺 [Folk Vocal Art] 1962, 2, pp. 2–19.

SHEN Pengnian 沈彭年: *Xin Shang Jing* 新上京 [New Journey to the Capital]. Peking 1950.

SMETANA, Robert: K problematice jevu české písně kramářské [A Contribution to the Problem of the Czech Broadside Ballad]. In: Jaromír Dvořák and Josef Š. Kvapil (Eds.), *Václavkova Olomouc 1961. Sborník referátů a diskusních příspěvků o kramářské písni* [Václavek's Olomouc 1961. Collection of Papers and Discussion Contributions on the Broadside Ballad]. Prague 1963, pp. 13–58.

TAKEGAKI Gyōfū 武垣堯封 (Ed.): *Wenming Dagu Shuci* 文明大鼓书词 [Lyrics of the Refined Ballads Accompanied with a Drum]. Peking 1920–1930, 25 vols.

TUN Li-ch'en: *Annual Customs and Festivals in Peking*. Hong Kong 1965.

WALEY, Arthur: *Ballads and Stories from Tun-huang*. London 1960.

WANG Zhongmin 王重民, Wang Qingshu 王庆菽, Zhou Yiliang 周一良, Zeng Yigong 曾毅公 and Xiang Da 向达 (Eds.): *Dunhuang Bianwenji* 敦煌变文集 [The Collection of the Dunhuang Bianwen]. Peking 1957, 2 vols.

WIEGER, Léon: *Rudiments – Narrationes populaires* [Rudiments – Popular Narratives]. Hejian 1903.

YANG CHAO Buwei: *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman*. New York 1947.

Tradition and Individual Creativity in the Chinese and Japanese Storytelling

Abstract: A delicate balance between tradition and individual creativity characterizes storytelling in China and Japan. This balance ensures that while the structure, themes, and performance techniques are deeply rooted in tradition, each storyteller brings a unique personal touch to his art, making each performance distinct and engaging. The "know-how" of storytelling is typically transmitted orally from master to apprentice, making it appear straightforward and spontaneous to casual observers. In reality, the art of storytelling results from systematic training, discipline, and the artist's maturity. Apprentices in both China and Japan learn through imitation, absorbing the master's art before developing their own style. Eventually, it is, however, the storyteller's unique personality and creativity that brings the stories to life. Moreover, the stories are treated as living entities, constantly adapted to suit different audiences and contexts. The quality of performance often improves with the storyteller's age and experience.

Keywords: Oral tradition, Chinese storytelling, Japanese storytelling, apprenticeship, performance techniques, creativity.

One of the important features of the art of storytelling is that it combines harmoniously the elements of tradition and individual talent. In storytelling the subject of the story, the opening and closing formulae, the storyteller's behaviour on the stage, the gestures – all is determined by tradition. And yet when we attend a performance of a true master, we are immediately aware how much of his personality is impressed in his art, how he had modified the tradition to suit his own temperament. Changes on the core of tradition do not represent sweeping revolts, but they are mostly concerned with seemingly insignificant details which combined together have a surprisingly great affect.[1]

[1] Dan Ben-Amos, Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context. Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 84, No. 331, 1971, p. 10.

Storytelling is a modest art, often considered to be more a natural skill than art in the true sense of the word and it is seldom mentioned in the cultural histories of either China or Japan. And yet it achieved in both these countries due to centuries of uninterrupted tradition surprisingly high artistic standards and preserved its existence till the present time. We read about the effort of the contemporary Chinese government to recruit storytellers to carry out the task of creating public opinion.

In Japan storytelling, especially telling of short comic tales – rakugo –, is currently experiencing a considerable boom, which has been partly promoted by means of television. Thus the art originally typical for such cities as Tōkyo (formerly Edo), Kyōto, and Ōsaka has become popular all over Japan.

Professional storytelling is an art which belongs to the sphere of oral literature, where the way of presentation gives the traditional tale new qualities and dimensions. Because the storytellers' "know-how" however is in most cases transmitted by mouth directly from the master to the apprentice, little about it is known to the casual observer, to whom storytelling appears to be a simple and spontaneous art.

In reality both spontaneity and simplicity have an involved background and are the results of the long life of the art in the stream of tradition, of systematic training, discipline and maturity of the artist. In China and Japan a whole artistic system was worked out in this humble sphere, where the aspiration of the artists was to be above all good and solid craftsman and to keep alive the traditions of their craft by transmitting them to their apprentices.[2]

In learning the ways of the tradition, the emphasis is not only on the mechanical part, but also on the gradual inner understanding of the essence of the art. According to Chinese storytellers the main goal of the apprentice is to become "soaked" in the art of his master. To achieve this the young man must be disciplined and imitate his master carefully without attempting to try something new. It is wrong if the pupil tries to change the art of his master too soon. According to the Japanese master Sanyūtei Enshō he can thus easily skid to the wrong side of the road. The apprentice's personality, his individual opinions and desires are suppressed at this stage of "mere" imitation. In the Western world the conception of imitation has usually a not favourable subtone. Not so in China and Japan. Because to imitate does not according to the

2 My research is based on fieldwork in China in the years 1950–54 and in Japan in the years 1964––1969.

Japanese storytellers mean anything wrong. It is not an easy matter, as the pupil must find by concentration and careful observation his own ways to penetrate to the core of his teacher's art. To give too much instruction means to prevent the young man from making mistakes. And without mistakes there is no way to learn. To achieve success easily is bad for the storyteller's future.

By seeing the story performed by the master both in private and on the stage the apprentice remembers the words and also the way the master tells it, the gestures, the pauses, the way of breathing and using the simple props – the kerchief and the fan.

The apprentice imitates his master for a period of time which is not exactly fixed. To know the right moment for the "departure from the master" must be the doing of the pupil himself. Nobody can give him exact instructions in this matter. It is wrong to do so too early, but it is equally wrong to do it too late. "It is like boiling sugar for caramel", says Sanyūtei Enshō. "Even though you get advice how to proceed about it, it does not help unless you have enough experience and stability of mind. Only then can you decide, when the right moment comes."[3]

The "departure" is a painful and trying process, as during the period of imitation the apprentice does not only learn the story, but he also grasps its secrets, the perfect form, which the master gave it. There is nothing the young man can change about it. The power to create seems for the moment underdeveloped, even suppressed. The words of the story follow smoothly one after the other and it is difficult to find a place, where some additional word or phrase could be inserted, or where a gesture could be changed.

The process of the combination of the traditional and individual elements can be similarly exemplified on the art of the pause, which too, is of great importance to any storyteller. He must "recognize the value of the pause, to know to the smallest fraction of the time how long it may be held"[4]. This presents no problem as long as the apprentice practices at home, turned to the wall, as was the Chinese and Japanese custom. When he performs in front of the public, it is different. The listeners remain cold, even puzzled. The storyteller must start to learn anew to adjust the pauses to his own temperament so that they would not disturb the story, but on the contrary would help it to flow. Thus he gradually becomes conscious of the "art of the pause" and eventually after a useful and

3 Sanyūtei Enshō, Yose sodachi (I Grew up in Yose). Tōkyo 1965, p. 291.

4 Sawyer, R., The Way of the Storyteller. New York 1967, p. 146.

necessary detour he will be able to appreciate the art of his master to the full and learn much more from him than before.[5]

One of the indispensable qualities of the storyteller is the ability to listen, a quality which is essential for the storyteller's art. The simple artists in China, many of whom were unable to write a single character, were well aware of this necessity, because for them the main "reading matter" was life itself and the art of the other storytellers. Therefore they learned the wise art of listening so profoundly.

In Japan it is the custom to listen to masters from the gakuya – the backstage room. This is called "listening from the side" and it is an important part of the storyteller's practise. But storytellers should also listen "from the front", which means from the audience, as there are many things which escape the storyteller's attention, if he listens only from the side. From the front he can observe the style of the artist, to learn that sometimes a wrong gesture or a "dead glance" can spoil the whole performance.

The tales which the storytellers tell are usually anonymous or they are connected with the name of the storyteller who "composed" them. Often he only retold the story already known and made it famous. Sometimes, however, the storytellers were writers of their own right and published collections of their writings.[6]

It is characteristic for the storytellers that they care little about the origin of the story. Most artists prefer traditional tales, because their qualities are tempered by the years of life in oral tradition. These stories truly are "well rounded as a pebble in the stream bed under the constant movement of water and come to us perfectly unified"[7]. In the course of years, even centuries only the best stories survive and become part of the storytelling treasury. Even thus in spite of the strong adherence to the tradition, there is a constant movement and adjustment in the sphere of the tales. A good storyteller can revive a tale long forgotten, or on the contrary a certain story suddenly loses its popularity. A storyteller always treats a story like something living, something which needs constant attention. It is difficult, almost impossible to tell one story twice in

5 In Japan the apprentice has to learn to beat the drum, which helps him to develop his feeling for rhythm.

6 In Japan it was for example Hayashiya Shōzō in first generation (1781–1842) who wrote the hanashibon – the storytellers' books.

7 Sawyer, R., opus. cit., p. 157.

exactly the same way. The changes which occur in it differ according to the place, where it is performed, the public, the mood of the storyteller.

The changes in the story are achieved by subtle means. The verbal part might remain almost untouched. New intonation, however, emphasis, which gives the same word a slightly different touch, changed rhythm, a new gesture can result in a quite different performance. Therefore the public in Japan and China does not mind to hear the same story again and again. One joke can leave the audience calm when told by an artist, while it arises laughter when told by another.

It is a natural aim of every storyteller to make his story interesting. The way to achieve it is not easy. It must be based on careful reasoning and sensitive approach to the quality of the story and also to the audience. Almost any story can be made either dull or interesting – it depends mainly on the way it is told. A careful balance between excitement and quietness must be reached. Both Chinese and Japanese storytellers point out, that to overdo the "seasoning" of the story with exciting and comic elements is a serious mistake. According to Chinese masters a story has "cold" and "hot" components. The "cold" ones serve as connecting passages between the "hot" ones – that is the exciting ones. Any attempt to avoid the "cold" passages leads to failure, warns Wang Shaotang, the Chinese storyteller. Unfortunately nowadays, complain the old masters, the young storytellers overdo the "spicing" of their stories, so that the guests do not have the chance to relax and enjoy the performance.

The quality of the performance and the interpretation of the story changes with the age of the storyteller. Chinese and Japanese public has greater confidence to elderly storytellers than to the young ones. An old master performs in a dignified manner, uses smaller gestures, gives the story proper dimensions. These qualities are the results of his experience and maturity as a human being.

To hold the listeners' attention requires a special strength. After brief introductory sentences the audience begins to listen attentively, but after ten or fifteen minutes it shows fatigue. In this moment the storyteller has to "pick up the thread of his tale", to revive the interest of the listeners and thus to bring the story to a successful end. In short humorous stories the end consists usually of a joke. In the Japanese rakugo it is called sage or ochi – the "falling". Stories which are told in instalments also have an ending called luohui in China and kireba (literally "the end of the session") in Japan.

It is interesting to note that in cases of ghost stories or stories with dramatic ending both the Chinese and Japanese storytellers add a few sentences to soothe down the horrifying effect of the final scene, so that the listeners would get into a pleasant mood and would not be afraid to return home in the darkness of the night.

Besides traditional tales there exist also new stories. In Japan some storytellers specialize in performing them. To compose a new story and to tell it well is according to some masters more difficult than to relate a traditional tale. Many of the new stories are not good enough to arise in the listeners the desire to listen to them again and again as is the case with the traditional tales. There are storytellers who compose their own stories, others take over tales written by someone else. To find people who would specialize in writing for storytellers is not easy, because of the troublesome problem of the royalties. They cannot be expected from the storytellers who traditionally consider the material they interpret a common property. But in spite of these difficulties there exists in Japan already a number of new stories, which have become the classics of the storytellers' repertoire.

In the above observation of the art of storytelling in China and Japan I concentrated first of all on such aspects which would help to establish from various angels the proportion between the tradition and the individual creativity of the artist. With good storytellers these factors are in almost perfect harmony and there is no contradiction between them. Tradition gives the storytelling the stability and depth which lead to admirable degree of perfection. The art however would be dead if deprived of the creative touch of the artist, who brings in into constant contact with the changing stream of life. Only under such conditions can this traditional art continue its existence – a problem which is vivid both in China and Japan.

References

Ben-Amos, Dan: Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context. *Journal of American Folklore* 1971, 84(331), pp. 3–15.

Sanyūtei Enchō 三遊亭圓朝: *Yose sodachi* 寄席育ち [I Grew up in Yose]. Tokyo 1965.

Sawyer, Ruth: *The Way of the Storyteller*. New York 1967.

The Significance of the Dunhuang Jiangjing Wen for Chinese Literary History

Abstract: The *jiangjing wen*, i.e., explanations of the sutras, are considered transitional texts that, within Chinese literary history, represent the link between the religious and the secular spheres on the one hand and the oral storytelling with written prose and verse on the other. They are closely connected with the Tang dynasty's *sujiang*, i.e. popular preaching, which evolved from religious sermons to more secular, entertaining forms, especially after the persecution of Buddhists in 845. This transition is evident in the lively and colorful descriptions within the *jiangjing wen*, which is rich in narrative detail and poetic metaphors. Moreover, these texts incorporate elements of everyday life and typical Chinese cultural features into the religious narrative and, thus, create an atmosphere that makes the story more relatable to the audience. This paper illustrates the transformation of Indian religious texts into epic narratives by analyzing fragments from the *Weimojie jiangjing wen*, whose skeleton is formed by quotations from *Vimalakirti Sutra*.

Keywords: Chinese Buddhist literature, Dunhuang texts, *jiangjing wen*, *Weimojie jiangjing wen*, *Vimalakirti Sutra*.

One of the characteristic features of Chinese literature is the close bond between the oral and the written tradition. The scale and vitality of the output of oral literature was determined in China by the fact, among others, that the difficult script prevented the majority of the people from learning to read. They were therefore dependent on the spoken word for education and for entertainment.

Modern research in the history of literature has shown that in one way or another oral creation influenced many genres of the written literature and was constant source of inspiration particularly for the writers of fiction. Viceversa it is without doubt that throughout the ages the written word has enriched both the form and the repertoire of storytelling and other oral genres.

Nevertheless it is rare to find both these traditions meeting in surprisingly close and immediate contact in a single work, before they merge in a balanced form heralding the birth of a new genre. Such works are of transitional character and as a rule soon lose their raison d'etre and disappear from the literary scene.

A mere coincidence, an extremely fortunate one, preserved such documents in the Dunhuang caves in North West China. Known as *jiangjing wen*, explanations of the Sútras, they come into the category of *bianwen* as used in the broad sense for different types of religious and secular texts, written mostly in prose alternating with verse.

The *jiangjing wen* were committed to writing in the course of the late tenth century. Unlike other *bianwen* texts, which comprise either religious or secular stories, and belong more or less to the realm of written literature, the *jiangjing wen* are clearly transitional in character, because they preserve in writing what is essentially an oral form. They are based on quotations from the Sútras and are therefore closely connected with the sacred texts. Each of the quotations is followed by a detailed explanation in prose and verse. These explanations are original creations in the narrative genre, and they are therefore important documents from the point of view of literature, transcending the boundaries of the exclusively religious sphere.

The *jiangjing wen* were without doubt closely connected with the *sujiang*, the "popular preaching" or "preaching to laymen" as practiced under the Tang dynasty. The Japanese monk Ennin (793–864) comments on this preaching in his Nittó guhó junrei gyóki (The Record of a Pilgrimage on the T'ang Search of the Law)[1]. In his entry for the ninth day of the first moon of the year 841, Ennin writes about the *sujiang* sermons preached to the lay population on the Emperor's orders, in seven monasteries in the left and right streets of the capital.[2]

From the fact that this activity was performed on the Emperor's orders we may assume that it represented a regular act of piety. On the other hand, the Dunhuang *jiangjing wen* testify to a different *sujiang*, a genuinely popular form intended to entertain the common people rather than to reveal to them the true meaning of the sacred books.

---

1 *Ennin's Diary, The Record of a Pilgrimage to the T'ang in Search of the Law*, transl. by E. O. Reischauer, 2 vls. The Ronald Press Company, New York 1955.

2 *Op. cit.*, pp. 298–299.

This type of *sujiang* evidently became widespread in the later years of the Tang dynasty, especially after the severe persecution of the Buddhists in 845. It seems probable that even before this date, when many monasteries in remote regions fell upon bad times and became impoverished, the monks took to wandering around the countryside preaching in order to earn their daily bowl of rice. They had to adjust their sermons to the taste of their audience. What was originally a religious occasion became more and more a secular one, to the delight of the enthusiastic listeners. Thus the professional oral narrative was gradually forming.

The *Dunhuang jiangjing wen* provide ample and unique evidence of such process. This gives them an important place in the history of Chinese fiction, for they represent the link between the religious and the secular spheres on the one hand, and between oral and written literature on the other.

The laconic *xiaoshuo* of the Six Dynasties, regarded as the earliest and most significant predecessors of Chinese mediaeval fiction, also derive to a considerable degree from the oral tradition, but they were written down to be read and not to be listened to. They therefore contain little more than the outline of the story. The *jiangjing wen*, on the other hand, lack the organized structure of a written story, but have all the "meat" (*rou*), as the Chinese storytellers call it, which makes a story worth listening to. They are full of lively and colourful descriptions and the heroes have distinctive individual characters. This method was taken over and polished by generations of storytellers and fiction writers. It was common for Chinese authors of short stories, as well as narrators, to elaborate a well-known historical or other subject, turning the basic facts into an imaginative work bursting with life, and touching the hearts of listeners by the depth of emotion.

The *sujiang* as it is reflected in the *jiangjing wen* was close to a theatrical performance. To some extent the preserved texts resemble the later *zhugongdiao* ballads. In some of the *jiangjing wen* the versed passages are preceded by the Chinese character *chang* or *ning* indicating whether the rhymed passages should be sung (*chang*) or chanted (*ning*). It is clear that at least two people took part in the performance, just as two monks participated in the religious sermons in the temples, during which the *fashi* (master) climbed the high seat to explain difficult religious terms and answer questions (this proceeding was called *nan*) and to point out doctrinal problems, whereas the *dujiang*, a monk of lower rank, chanted the Sútra. Ennin noted in his diary that it was customary to write down

during the sermon the meaning of the Sútra, and mentioned a repeated reading, during which a monk called *fujing shi* read the notes taken the previous day.[3] This gives us a clue to the circumstances under which texts like the *jiangjing wen* were recorded in written form.

The long and short hymns, which are an integral part of the *jiangjing wen* reflect the influence of Chinese poetic tradition. The prose is often rhythmic, with a number of parallel sentences, another typically Chinese stylistic device. The dramatic effect of the prose passages is heightened by the repetition of short exclamatory sentences.

The texts which have been preserved are only fragments of much longer works, but they suffice to show that there were talented storytellers among the monks. By means of words they "painted" a vivid flow of images to fire the imagination of their listeners. To achieve an intimate effect, they secularized and sinicized religious texts of Indian origin. In this way they made a lasting contribution to the formation of the distinctive traditions of Chinese fiction. I shall illustrate this briefly here on the basis of an analysis of three fragments of the *Weimojie jiangjing wen*.[4]

Judging from the number of fragments preserved in Dunhuang, the *Vimalakirti Sútra* was very popular with preachers at this time.[5] The story about Buddha asking his disciples, the Boddhisattvas, to visit the ailing layman Vimalakirti, who was well known for his unsurpassable knowledge of the Law, is well suited to oral storytelling. In the first place, its religious doctrine is not too complicated. Secondly, the composition being based on dialogues between Buddha and his disciples, offers a good starting-point for dramatic treatment. It is therefore very natural that in the course of oral exposition this originally purely religious text developed into a truly epic work, the first of its kind to come down to us in written form in Chinese literature.[6]

---

3 *Op. cit.*, p. 153.

4 See *Dunhuang bianwen ji* (The Collection of the Dunhuang Bianwen) ed. by Wang Zhongmin and collaborators, 2 vls., Renmin wenxue chubanshe, Peking 1957, 2nd vl., pp. 592–645 and *Dunhuang bianwen huilu* (The Record of the Dunhuang Bianwen), Shanghai chuban gongsi, Shanghai 1955, pp. 29–81.

5 See also *Bianwen o Veimocze, Bianwen D'esiat blagih znamenii* (*The Weimojie bianwen*, Bianwen The Ten Prosperous Signs), ed. and transl. by L. N. Menshikov, Izdatelstvo Vostochnoi literatury, Moskva 1963.

6 Menshikov, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

The skeleton of this *jiangjing wen* is formed by quotations from the *Vimalakirti Sútra*. If we examine the quotations more closely, it strikes us immediately that the phrases chosen for explanation are most of them quite simple and comprehensive without further comment, as for example: Pusa said to Boddhisattva Milo (Maitreya): "Go and ask Weimojie about his health."[7]

This quotation of fourteen characters inspired the preacher to an "explanation" of about 1,060 characters of prose and verse.

In the course of the explanation, however, the preacher succeeded in turning the Sútra story into a dramatic performance, by creating tension and making each of the personage depicted an individual character. He was the master of the art of description and of poetic metaphor. Thus the Indian and Chinese traditions were transformed into a new style which further influenced the development of Chinese oral and written literature.

The quotation from the Sútra is preceded by a short or a long hymn. It closes with the words *chang jianglai* (sing about what happened), incorporated into the rhyme system of the hymn. In the long hymns the rhyme is usually changed in the seventh line from the end, to rhyme with *lai*, while the short hymns have this pattern throughout. The words *chang jianglai* were evidently the cue for the second performer to begin his part, which was to chant the line from the Sútra.

The quotations from the Sútra divide the *jiangjing wen* as it were into "chapters", a compositional principle which holds the nucleus of the later chapter-novels. The phrase *chang jianglai* often interrupts the flow of events at a moment of tension, as for instance when Pusa has implored his disciple Wenshu to go and ask Weimojie about his health and Wenshu hesitates because he is afraid to face discussion on a difficult religious subject with the eloquent layman. He ponders for a while and just as he is about to give a decisive answer the text is interrupted by the phrase *chang jianglai*.

An important feature of the *Weimojie jiangjing wen* fragments is the authors talent for characterization, putting his heroes before the eyes of the listeners as though they were living people. This approach laid the foundations for a new aesthetic vision of the world. The Boddhisattvas are "positive" characters, and they differ both in appearance and in the way they react to the Master's plea for them to visit Weimojie. Evil is embodied in the King of Devils (Boxun, Mara Papiyas), the tender sex is represented by the heavenly maidens. The scene is thus set for an exciting drama.

7 *Dunhuang bianwen huilu*, p. 30.

The Buddhist imagination in the *jiangjing wen* has contributed to the further development of characterization, the evolution of which can be traced in Chinese literature in the portrayal of mythical and historical personages.[8] These aspects are reflected in the later novels *Shuihu zhuan*, *Jing Ping Mei* and *Xi Youji*.

In the *jiangjing wen* particular attention is devoted to the outward appearance of the heroes, a feature which is typical of Chinese fiction and storytelling. Chinese and Buddhist symbolism is interwoven in the description of the faces, eyes, brows, lips, teeth, tongues, hair and beards of the characters.

The face of a hero endowed with purity of character is as clear and shining as the full autumn moon,[9] as was later that of Liu Bei, one the heroes of the *Sanguo yanyi*.[10] The face of a beautiful maiden resembles peach blossom, a metaphor often found in Chinese folk poetry. The eyes are likened to green lotuses or to precious stones.[11] Besides the eyes, the eyebrows are important in the Chinese description of the human face of either sex, often symbolizing some significant feature of the character of the person, or his mood. In Chinese stories the eyebrows are likened to crescent moon, to the Chinese character for eight, to distant mountains, etc. In the *jiangjing wen* the brows of a noble young hero are as arched as the leaves of the spring willow.[12] When excitement touches a girl's face her eyebrows are like lotus blossoms stirred by a gentle breeze.[13] A snow-white face with long eyebrows indicates a stern and noble personality, in this case, that of Weimojie.[14]

Other parts of human body are also described in colourful terms, with striking epithets and metaphors, to create an unforgettable impression in the listeners' mind. Lips are either golden (a sign of wisdom), or purple (a sign of feminine beauty), while the tongue is likened to a lotus from which words rise like gentle clouds.[15]

---

8 This theme is treated in the book B. L. Riftin, *Ot mifa k romanu* (From Myth to Novel), Nauka, Moskva 1979.

9 *Dunhuang bianwen huilu*, pp. 31, 83.

10 Riftin, op. cit., p. 216.

11 *Dunhuang bianwen huilu*, p. 30.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 14.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 64, 45.

Weimojie's hair resembles the feathers of a crane,[16] a figure of speech found later in popular books (*pinghua*). His beard is silky without the slightest blemish.[17] In a lovely simile the hair of a beauty is compared to a flower climbing up a verandah rail.[18]

In Chinese fiction the description of a hero's clothes has always been an important element of characterization. This is already apparent in the *jiangjing wen*. Here the dress differs not only according to the sex but also according to the occasion, and it is often used to underline the action or movements of the person. Thus a travelling robe is likened to clouds floating in the sky.[19] When the hero rises from his seat on a festive occasion, his robe adorned with pendant jewels rustles as if in a fragrant breeze. The storyteller spares no effort to impress his listeners with the luxury of his heroes' apparel. Their cloud-like robes ornamented with pearls and precious stones rival the beauty of the sunset sky.

The cap has always been an important item of attire in China, signifying social position as well as expressing the character of the wearer. In the *jiangjing wen* the cap is either surrounded by a white halo, or is golden in colour, or as pure as the clear moon, or as lotus blossoms reflected in the water.[20]

To convey the general impression of the hero's personality the *jiangjing wen* employ a broad range of subtly imaginative expressions. He is either pure as a cinnamon tree untouched by forest, or a lotus bloom unbesmirched by mud,[21] or noble like a crane in the flock of chickens, or strong like a dragon which has just emerged from its cave.[22]

The eternal magic of feminine beauty enchanted the monks preaching on religious themes and inspired them in just the same way as it inspired their secular colleagues. In the *jiangjing wen* the loveliness of the maidens who descended from Heaven is compared to a budding flower, to jade, to myriads of blossoms

16 *Dunhuang bianwen huilu*, p. 46.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

in the green pool.[23] Their dainty steps resemble the magical hibiscus swaying in the breeze or lotuses floating on the surface of the pool.[24]

The authors of the *jiangjing wen* used various ways of emphasizing the individuality of the characters they were presenting and were never content to give the unadorned facts of the story. They compared the voice of the eloquent Weimojie to the sound of sea, or to the spring thunder.[25] He could utter ten thousand words as effortlessly as though they were resting in the palm of his hand.[26] He was as remarkable as a magpie in the midst of a flock of chickens.[27]

Some of the metaphors are very dynamic and add color to the story. A greedy man is like someone pursuing his own shadow[28] while if someone pretends, it is as if he took fish-eyes and offered them as jewels.[29]

Besides the constant features of the hero's character, his behaviour in such dramatic situations as moments of joy, fear or excitement is also vividly described. Overcome by a feeling of satisfaction and fulfilment, the hero is depicted as a man who has been seeking treasure and found it, a man who has been chasing a shadow and has got hold of it.[30] When he is happy, his heart opens like a mirror, but when he is afraid he is like a wild plum stricken by frost in the autumn.[31] A feeling of uncertainty is compared to thin ice melting away under the rays of the sun.[32] A man who succumbs to the temptation of worldly pleasures is like a red wild duck which flies into a net, or a white hind which falls into a trap.[33]

All these examples testify to the high aesthetic quality of the work, and the authors' powers of imagination. The colourfulness and gracefulness of the images has much in common with Buddhist paintings of that period.

---

23 *Dunhuang bianwen huilu*, p. 64.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 25.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 46.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

The hero's state of mind in moments of hesitation and irresolution is described in these texts in a way typical for later Chinese fiction, as for example in this passage of the *Weimojie jiangjing wen*: "Although he (Wenshu) had been given such an order in this festive hall, he thought it over a thousand times. He was willing to go, but at the same time he was afraid of being embarrassed before the noble throng."[34]

The method of capturing the atmosphere of an event or even of a moment, by framing it in a scene from nature, which gives a special charm to Chinese stories and novels, was already elaborated in these early texts. When a magnificent procession finally starts moving towards its destination, "it was just spring and thousands of flowers were outdoing one another in smiles... It was the day of festive young willows..."[35]

A quick rhythm of speech underlines a feeling of spontaneous joy. Descriptions of the sound of music add a special poetic tinge to the story. The music of the heavenly maidens rivals the song of the oriole, the flute is reminiscent of the voice of the phoenix, and the beat of the drum is like the sound of crushed diamonds falling into a porcelain cup.

Another feature of the *jiangjing wen* is the introduction of facts of everyday life and typical features of the Chinese background into the Indian religious story. This creates a more intimate atmosphere and makes the listener feel as if he was taking part in the events being related. The parent-child relationship is evoked when one of the saints-to-be decides to leave home in tender age. His mother reminds him in the touching manner of all the mothers in Chinese fiction, that she will be standing at the door every day waiting for him to return.[36]

The Boddhisattvas are subjects to the laws of birth like everybody else[37] and the heavenly maidens are bound by the "three obediences" (*sancong*) of the Confucian ethical code.[38] They are praised as wonderful housekeepers, which is a charmingly naive contradiction of the exclusive situation described here. The maidens are compared to the famous Chinese beauties Yuenü, Cao E,[39]

34 *Dunhuang bianwen huilu*, p. 85.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Heng E,[40] and Da Ji[41] and they are as frail as if they had just come down from Wushan mountain, the legendary dwelling place of beauties in Chinese legends.[42]

We may conclude that the *jiangjing wen* document the stage of transition from the religious to the secular, from the oral to the written. They contribute to a better understanding of the way new fiction genres developed, the result of imitation of the Buddhist texts and at the same time of the ability to go beyond accepted established methods in the natural endeavour to meet the demands of a new social and cultural situation. They have therefore undoubtedly an important place in the history of Chinese literature.

References

Ennin's Diary: The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law. Translated by Edwin O. Reischauer. New York 1955, 2 vols.

Men'shikov, Lev Nikolayevich Меньшиков, Лев Николаевич (Ed.): *Bianwen o Vimalakirti, Bianwen Dyesyat' blagikh znameniy Бяньвэнь о Вэймоцзе, Бяньвэнь Десять благих знамений* [The Vimalakīrti bianwen, The Ten Prosperous Signs Bianwen]. Moscow 1963.

Riftin, Boris Lvovič Рифтин, Борис Львович: *Ot mifa k romanu. Evolyutsiya izobrazhyeniya pyersonazha v kitayskoy lityeraturye От мифа к роману. Эволюция изображения персонажа в китайской литературе* [From Myth to Novel. The Evolution of Character Portrayal in Chinese Literature]. Moscow 1979.

Wang Zhongmin 王重民, Wang Qingshu 王庆菽, Zhou Yiliang 周一良, Zeng Yigong 曾毅公 and Xiang Da 向达 (Eds.): *Dunhuang Bianwenji* 敦煌变文集 [The Collection of the Dunhuang Bianwen]. Peking 1957, 2 vols.

Zhou Shaoliang 周绍良 (Ed.): *Dunhuang Bianwen Huilu* 敦煌变文汇录 [The Anthology of the Dunhuang Bianwen]. Shanghai 1955.

40 *Dunhuang bianwen huilu*, p. 74.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

KATALOGIZACE V KNIZE - NÁRODNÍ KNIHOVNA ČR

Hrdličková, Věna, 1924-2016
East side story : papers on Chinese storytelling by Věnceslava Hrdličková / (eds.) Tereza Slaměníková, Markéta Koklarová. -- 1st edition. -- Olomouc : Palacký University Olomouc, 2025. -- 184 stran. -- (Dálný východ = Far east series (collected works) ; volume 1)
Obsahuje bibliografie a bibliografické odkazy

ISBN 978-80-244-6704-7 (online ; pdf)

* 821.581 * 821.581(091) * 808.543 * 82.091 * 82-1/-9 * 808.543-027.21 * 398 * 82.09 * (510) * (048.8) * (081)
– čínská literatura
– dějiny čínské literatury
– vyprávění
– literární vlivy
– literární žánry
– naratologie
– lidová slovesnost -- Čína
– literárněvědné rozbory
– studie
– sborníky

821.58.09 - Sino-tibetské literatury (o nich) [11]

EAST SIDE STORY

Papers on Chinese Storytelling by Věnceslava Hrdličková

(eds.) Tereza Slaměníková, Markéta Koklarová

Managing editor Jiří Slavík
Graphic design Kateřina Janků, Lenka Wünschová
Layout design and typesetting Jiří K. Jurečka

Published and printed by Palacký University Olomouc,
Křížkovského 8, 779 00 Olomouc

vydavatelstvi.upol.cz
vupshop.cz
vup@upol.cz

1st edition
Olomouc 2025

https://doi.org/10.5507/ff.25.24467030
ISBN 978-80-244-6703-0 (print)
ISBN 978-80-244-6704-7 (online: iPDF)

VUP 2025/0417 (print)
VUP 2025/0418 (online: iPDF)

Not for sale

DÁLNÝ VÝCHOD

This volume offers a comprehensive examination of Chinese verbal art, highlighting its dynamic and evolving character. Drawing on a curated selection of English-language studies by the distinguished sinologist and Japanologist Věnceslava Hrdličková, the book traces the evolution of Chinese storytelling from Buddhist sutra recitations in temple halls to the emergence of written popular booklets. The analysis explores the cultural transformations shaping this art form, its structural features, narrative techniques, the training of storytellers, and the relationship between established tradition and individual creativity. Together, these perspectives position Chinese storytelling as a dynamic expressive form situated at the intersection of religious practice, community performance, and literary culture.

Vydavatelství
Univerzity
Palackého