

UNMASKING A "SITTING GHOST":  
A CROSS-GENERIC EXPLORATION OF THE  
CHINESE HEROINE IN STORIES TOLD BY  
CHINESE IN NEWFOUNDLAND

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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Canada

Unmasking a "Sitting Ghost": A Cross-generic Exploration of the  
Chinese Heroine in Stories Told by Chinese in Newfoundland

by

Seana Kozar

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfilment of the  
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## Abstract

This thesis is a cross-generic examination of the heroine in Chinese folklore and how the narrative tradition surrounding that figure is symbolic of the traditional roles and expectations placed upon Chinese women both from past and present generations. The heroine's existence and actions are defined by the parameters of her cultural context, and her final placement or displacement with respect to her society is at least partially predicated upon her decision to either stay within or to transcend her boundaries. This dilemma appears to be not unknown to many contemporary Chinese women and the narratives have survived and are transmitted today, though sometimes as part of a private, or "underground" tradition.

Chinese folklore has had a longstanding reciprocal exchange with manuscript and print forms, and therefore none of the narratives discussed in this thesis can be said to come from a "purely" oral tradition. As the martial heroine comprises an extremely small part of a much more extensive body of heroic narratives, the scope of this thesis was widened to include amazons, scholars and transformed female animal and celestial spirits. The majority of informants interviewed during the course of this research are residents of Newfoundland, and are either emigrants, their children or graduate students from Mainland China who, like the heroine, can be seen as liminal

or transitional with respect to the larger societies in which they live.

This thesis explores the nature of the heroine figure and her narratives through a variety of analytical approaches. The researcher's experiences as a fieldworker balancing cross-cultural methodological concerns are critically examined. Issues relating to the dynamics of Chinese storytelling and the presentation of second language oral texts, as well as the academic interpretation of genre and function are also discussed.

## Acknowledgements

To my *hsiao kuies* ("little devils") Isobel, Terry, Jody and Seana.

That is the dedication of a book written by a wise old lady who went to China as a nurse when she was about my age. The first three are sisters; the one on the end is me. We are cousins. A *hsiao kuie* or *xiao gui* is a term that was first used to denote village children, usually boys too young to enlist, who volunteered to serve as porters and messengers for the Communist soldiers during the Sino-Japanese War (1937 - 1945) and the Long March which took place prior to armed resistance to the Japanese invasion of Northeastern China (1934 - 1935). They were something like squires and pages. They carried the burdens and one can imagine that they shared, vicariously at least, in the triumphs. They also were, like many of the world's children today, of tender years and compelled to try to make their way through the war. As I write these words, this particular battle is over; whether I am victorious or not is for others to judge. The burden upon me now is to try to express my gratitude to all those who helped me in this effort; to make my way through the faces and names and identify them all, so that their contributions are recognized and not merely lost in the interstices of this work. That I call one before another is not meant to signify a descending order of importance. I must begin somewhere, so I will begin with my

teachers and other members of the Folklore Department.

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I have probably so far transgressed the length and propriety in content of "traditional" thesis acknowledgements, but I will finish the job by ending this piece with a dedication:

This work is dedicated to the memory  
of **Jean Ewen**,  
Canadian revolutionary nurse and  
my grandmother,  
from the least and youngest  
of her *xiao gui*,  
for whom her stories  
became tradition, personal history and  
a source of inspiration.

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## Introduction

He went into the family cave and emerged a few minutes later with a volume wrapped in a piece of blue cloth. He was pleased to tell us that this book told all about the lands from which we came. He called it *Hai Wai Hsien Hua* Grimm's Fairy Tales! (Ewen 98)

The preceding excerpt is taken from my grandmother's book which details her experiences as a nurse in China during the Sino-Japanese War. The precocious bibliophile described in the passage was the young son of a widow. He was just learning to read and lived with his mother and a few other families in a quiet mountain hamlet. At the age of seven, he expounded the wisdom of the ages and held what he thought to be the definitive tome on Western culture.

This thesis examines some facets of Chinese folklore through one of its more elusive characters, the heroine. Through the stories about her, I will be looking at one aspect of Chinese culture, the conflict and the compromises of tradition and independence as they are expressed in the words of members of both sexes and experienced in the lives of contemporary Chinese women. The Chinese heroine's story is the story of the ordinary Chinese woman and like most stories, versions of it are found in many parts of the world.

This thesis attempts to address both the general and the specific in its scope. I examine the figure of the heroine and that particular narrative tradition in detail and attempt to relate her stories to other aspects of Chinese folklore. In order to accomplish this in a realistic and ethical way, I found it necessary to look at my own experiences in the field and my perceptions of Chinese society in all of the "versions" that I have encountered over the course of my research. Words like contemporary, ancient, modern, traditional, established and liminal only begin to describe the complexity of the "community" which I studied. My initial exploration of the heroine quickly made it clear that while her stories are part of a living tradition, that tradition is not often clearly **visible**. Therefore, in order to provide some insight into the processes of transmission, I discuss other aspects of Chinese storytelling at length. Storytelling in Chinese folklore touches on both sides of a difficult question in narrative research, the nature of the connections between oral and written forms. Related to this important problem is the transcription of folklore texts. While transcriptions do not represent the **solution** to the oral/written dilemma, they are often the **reconciliation** of it according to the abilities and purposes of the scholar. Although the decision to include all of these facets within this thesis – the heroine, "her" changing communities, my interpretations, storytelling and the creation, transmission and reporting of texts – made for a long and challenging academic journey, I feel that they are all necessary components of the overall argument.

This work, like many of the famous epic stories and *märchen* from this culture, is an exercise in *zhi liang*, both a meditation and an active search for understanding. It is a necessarily circumscribed approach to a complex topic. Through it, I hope to rectify certain misunderstandings, some of which are not unlike those represented by the smug little scholar described above. This study enfolds a year of research and many more of my personal history. Although I might take momentary comfort in the

delusion that this is **the book** on this aspect of Chinese culture, I must admit, as will I think most who may read this in the future, that we are none of us so wise again as when we were seven.

This introduction is intended to clarify certain issues which are central to the comprehension of this topic and to provide a synopsis of the material covered in the various chapters. Before summarizing the content of the actual chapters, I will briefly outline certain key features of Chinese folklore in general and introduce the "folk" whose voices, insights and stories constitute the various threads which are woven against a rather eclectic theoretical framework. My chosen "framework" borrows from the perspectives of folklore, comparative literary criticism and sociolinguistics in an effort to weave a coherent piece out of sometimes halting impressions of a tradition and a culture that impinge unequally upon each other, achieving an uneasy alliance on the one hand, while on the other seeming to be diametrically opposed. I will then attempt to summarize the "underground tradition" of the heroine, which appears to be at once impossible within the context of the traditional societal order and possible precisely because the strictures of Confucianism dictate that she cannot ever fully and gloriously exist. Narrative and social tradition accumulate into the heroine's progress. She emerges, resists and is defeated and subsumed and so retreats to the mountains. She later resurfaces in the defiant meditations of the next generation:

When we Chinese girls listened to the adults talking story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen (Kingston 19).

It appears that these idealistic, personal uprisings are later quelled by the cycle of real life and a certain degree of regret:

... perhaps I could make myself a warrior like the swordswoman who drives me. ... That I am not a burden has to compensate for the sad envy when I look at women loved enough to be supported. Even now

China wraps double binds around my feet (Kingston 48).

Finally, I will be looking at what the heroine *means* within the context of her tradition and to the storytellers and passive bearers who perpetuate it. Even when she is "unsuccessful," she does not die a coward's death and for some reason she keeps coming back.

### The Peaceful Co-existence of Oral and Written Forms: Its Significance to Chinese Folklore

Just as I cannot claim to have uttered the final word on this topic, I cannot state unequivocally that I am dealing with some ideal of "purely" oral tradition. It must be made clear from the outset that, if there ever was a Chinese oral tradition independent of a literary one, it appears to have been either subsumed into the greater folk-literature complex, or to have been lost long ago. There are still existing forms of literate "high-culture" traditions that did not appear to establish points of common exchange with the Chinese folkloric canon, but these are not the areas with which the present work is concerned. Although orality and literacy does not present a formidable dichotomy in terms of Chinese folklore, there are others that do. Stories that underscore distinctions between rich and poor, rural and urban, male and female and especially **official** and **unofficial** abound in this material, which also echo throughout the social infrastructure. Following this line, I agree with Holbek's statement regarding the significance of fairy tales in pre- and industrializing Danish culture:

This enables us to propound the hypothesis that some of the distinctions that were of importance in the narrators' *lives* were also of im-

portance in their *tales* (Holbek *Interpretation* 182).

I deliberately used the term "exchange" rather than "borrowing" in the foregoing discussion because – if I may be permitted to effect the syntactic inversion of a common phrase – as will be shown in subsequent chapters, the Chinese world of orality gets back from literacy as "good as it gives." The divisions between oral and written forms in Chinese folklore have become much more "permeable," like a wall or a fence separating two households in a slightly dilapidated courtyard, and the discourse is less like a standoff and more like a form of gossip, a discussion, or a faintly competitive swapping of "tall tales." The state of the wall that separates the two peaceable neighbours is unimportant, what matters are the words that pass between them.

Orality informs the literate world and that world rewrites the oral one. That world uses what the written world has produced in a form that it can easily assimilate and elaborate on – episodic folk novels, chap-literature, and more recent redactions from contemporary popular traditions – and tells the story of what "it's all about," which in turn is written down and reworked into text, then told again. To a large degree, the process in many Western folklore traditions is similar, though perhaps it is safe to say that the Chinese have been longer at it, and in their folklore, as in other aspects of their worldview – if the former can be said to represent the minute texts, patterns and beliefs of everyday life and behaviour and the latter to denote a more global expression – they "don't waste anything." Failure to understand this point **now** as being one of the central premises of this thesis and this material as far as I have been able to interpret and present it will put both future readers and myself in an uncomfortable predicament, as if the farmer with the fox, duck and bag of corn had likewise a leaky boat to compound his troubles at the riverside. The

entire argument will sink and nothing will get across.

## The "Folk"

With the exception of a few preliminary telephone and tape recorded interviews conducted in Vancouver at the start of my most concentrated period of collecting in the Spring of 1992, all of my interviews took place in Newfoundland. The details of my fieldwork experiences are given in Chapter Two and it should be noted that this thesis does not present a detailed account of settlement patterns or the history and struggle of the Chinese emigrants to Newfoundland, although sufficient sources are referenced in that chapter and the bibliography which thoroughly provide that background. I am not taking the position that historical considerations have no place in a folklore thesis, they certainly do. A cursory look at the citations listed should indicate that such accounts have already been written and a more detailed examination would find that they are, for the most part, both recent and comprehensive. Had I attempted to include this material again, my thesis would have far exceeded its present length. In addition, the greater part of the recorded history of the Chinese in this province is specific to the established families living throughout Newfoundland, mainly on the Avalon Peninsula, in the greater St. John's region and in Central Newfoundland. These people are originally from Guang Dong (Canton) Province and Hong Kong and although I interviewed some of them during my fieldwork, I did not find many bearers of this particular narrative tradition within this group.

Most of my informants are men and women from Mainland China who are currently doing graduate work at Memorial University. They tend to come from urban

centers and fairly "wealthy" provinces, or have worked in the "special economic zones" in the south. Their fields of study are mainly concentrated in the pure and applied sciences. They share the common feature that English is their second language, and the vast majority of them are in Canada on student visas. As foreign students, they are "between worlds" to the extent that they have only minimal chances at securing permanent residence in Canada, and so they neither fit completely in with the mainstream culture nor with even the most recent generation of emigrants, most of whom may also have language problems, but who have extended family connections here and are entrepreneurs with full landed status. Although it can be said that they are a rather sophisticated "folk," the scholars here occupy a liminal place in local society and many of them are "displaced persons" unable to arrange for their families to join them and without a voice to express to the Western world the richness of the traditions that they left behind, or the compromises that they have had to make in reconciling them to a new and confusing cultural environment.

My ultimate decision to conduct my research within this "community" was, like any important decision, fraught with advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, I had access to initial interview contacts because I was then an ESL tutor and had taught many of them. Entry into the research field was further facilitated by my youth, my functional fluency in Mandarin, some teaching experience in China and, I must confess, the occasional ride on my grandmother's coat tails, since she was at one point a nurse and interpreter for the illustrious *Dr. Bai* - Norman Bethune. Concomitant with these factors, many of my informants have become friends and acquaintances, and some of the young women have been roommates. In describing these individuals, I find it difficult to fully contextualize them. This may be partly because it is generally difficult to uncover the extraordinary in the people that we encounter everyday, and partly because I struggle with a desire to present them as



the talented, real people that they are while being sensitive to the fact that they may not want me to say proportionately more about them separate from their stories than the information that appears on tape and the vast majority of their personal "bios" are quite self-effacing. The other aspect of my position as novice ethnographer with this group is one that, for reasons that will become clearer in subsequent chapters, traverses a bittersweet path between an advantage and a stumbling block. I have an acute awareness of the nature and extent of their sense of disenfranchisement in their present situations and their love-hate relationship with their own culture. I have experienced it myself, and been caught in the repercussions that it can produce.

## The Heroine Tradition

Almost from the start of my research, I found it necessary to redefine the scope of possible guises of the heroine, as strict adherence to stories about amazons proved to be too narrow in two ways. Firstly, many of my informants, particularly the women, supported the adoption of a wider inclusive range:

Syl: My personal definition. I think a hero is not just person who can enter the world to fight for the enemy, I mean to fight the enemy just for the country. ... You can say soldier is also heroes, are heroes. But, I think it's different. And both { referring to non-military heroines discussed earlier } of them you can say are they are. But I don't think, you know, usually we say hero just those who fight in the war, just like that. But I think it may have very wide definition, more meaning than that.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, although on the whole the Chinese folk literature corpus displays a marked preponderance of heroic tales (Eberhard, "Notes" 26-27), there are few stories fea-

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<sup>1</sup>Sylvia ZHAO. 22 May 92. Tape#sk92th-10.

turing warrior-heroines. This is probably at least in part because of the fact that in Chinese folklore generally, there are relatively few stories in which the protagonist is female. I therefore decided to conduct a cross-generic study that would encompass stories of warrior-women, female scholars and transformational tales involving female animal spirits.

Part of my original motivation for undertaking this particular project in the first place stemmed from reading the two books already quoted from, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* by Maxine Hong Kingston, and *Canadian Nurse in China*, by my paternal grandmother, Jean Ewen. Both written accounts and my own personal experiences and friendships countered the blanket statement which cast doubt on the validity of this topic: "Chinese heroines? Are there any? Chinese women are really submissive. ..." My research has led me to the conclusion, stated earlier, that this particular narrative tradition is culturally defined and subject to certain "self-correcting" traditional constraints. Unlike the anomalous figure of the Western heroine who has been described as one who rose up to challenge the established way of things only to ultimately recede into a kind of "museum piece" existence (Dugaw, *Popular Balladry* 65), the Chinese heroine appears to be a part of a domestic storytelling tradition and while not always a popular figure, she is known in some form to both men and women (Holbek, *Interpretation* 181). Like many of my informants and to some degree myself, she is also "between worlds." A paradoxical figure, she is defined out of existence in proverbs such as:

It's a *nu zi*, *wu cai bian zi de*. You know this words? This mean, woman, it's a woman, who has no any, who has no ability, is good!  
<laughs><sup>2</sup>

Yet like much of folklore which seems to champion underdogs and allow the least

---

<sup>2</sup>WANG Youliang. 4 June 92. Tape #sk92th-18.

likely within a given society to "make good," because she is not given an independent voice and existence within that society, she **makes** a place for herself in the stories of her often secret admirers.

## Life Validating Art: Meaning in the Heroine Tale

I often found throughout my research that the heroine was eluding me and to some degree my changing impressions are reflected in different ways in the chapters. The tradition seemed to exhibit the same characteristics as the figure. Heroine stories surfaced, then receded and ostensibly vanished, sometimes within the span of a single interview. I could find no "key" with which to unlock the real meaning behind this tradition. As Holbek says of such keys, however:

It is conceivable that they are statements in a secret language, the key to which has been lost. In that case the task of the interpreter is to recover, or, if need be, to re-create the key. Secret or restricted languages are familiar phenomena in folklore. . . . which contain numerous elements fraught with meaning to the initiated but incomprehensible to the outsider. We possess no evidence to indicate awareness of such a code . . . but that must not deter us; the code may be unconscious, or secret, or known only to people who by accident have not been visited by any folklore collector (*Interpretation* 202).

From an examination of some of my informants' statements, I have come to realize that the Chinese heroine story in fact resembles Western male and female hero tales insofar as it is an encapsulated portrayal of maturation, the difference being that the oblivion which is the heroine's lot is expressed in the West as a "happily ever after," while in the East it is a footbound silence. To Chinese writers and storytellers who have been haunted by the same old ghosts in the New World, perhaps it really is a "slavery." There is also evidence in their words of a possible tension in response

to this line of questioning. My informants all told me that the heroine was not a model of behaviour, that in effect she had nothing to do with them **now**. That does not mean to say that they did not find her in the storybooks at school and that she was not a tacit source of inspiration. The intriguing problem of the function of these stories will be addressed in a later chapter. As grown women in male dominated fields who have also married, they may feel the heroine's conflict between traditional female roles and the desire to achieve greater things. "Do the women's work; then do more work, which will become ours too" (Kingston 48).

The story of the heroine presented here is essentially the story of the "typical" Chinese woman, preserved as much as possible within its cultural context. She never quite achieves the final victory, but she always returns. In the contemporary oral "redactions" which appear in the conclusion, her "syndrome" bears a strong resemblance to the Western figure representing female malaise, "the SuperWoman."<sup>3</sup> Although this thesis highlights the differences between the Western and Chinese heroine traditions, in the final analysis it must persist, because it is an expression of life. The Chinese heroine story then, is ageless. It has been told the world over. It is our story too.

The Chinese heroine seems to be the model of ultimate individuality and individual servitude. Individuality is another concept that does not stand up well

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<sup>3</sup>This term was a common headliner on the covers of women's magazines during the 1980s. These publications presented profiles of ultra-successful women, those who "had it all," having achieved the perfect balance between career, family and "personal space." In the West, the 90s brought with them the realization that "the SuperWoman" was for the most part the product of the mass media which glorified her. To a large extent, however, she remained a variation on a set of traditional themes. She was successful, beautiful and the ultimate wife, mother and lover. For a survey of similar kinds of magazine portrayals, see J. Demerest and J. Garner, "The Representation of Women's Roles in Women's Magazines Over the Past Thirty Years," *Journal of Psychology* 126.4 (1992): 357 - 368. As is seen in the Conclusion of this work however, "the SuperWoman," like the heroine, has resurfaced in a different time and space. Unfortunately for many young Chinese women today, "she" is alive and well and living in the People's Republic.

against Chinese culture. During an orientation lecture that I attended before leaving for China under the auspices of the Simon Fraser University Summer Field School, Dr. Jan Walls, from the Communications Department at S.F.U., remarked that "individual" could not be translated into Chinese because it described an impossible situation within that society. *Ge ren*, literally means "one discrete item of humanity," and everyone in China is defined as soon as they are born – by their surnames, their placement within the family, their family's position, **and** their gender. Taken out of the cultural context, as a source of individual motivation, the heroine is both the perfect man and woman. In her book, Kingston describes how the heroine – as an idealized extension of herself – wraps her newborn baby in the layers of the adjustable armor that had previously masked her condition and rides back into the fray. Writing later of her own life, she says:

I will – I must – rise and plow the fields as soon as the baby comes out (48).

As a sharp contrast to that kind of glorious strength, my grandmother relates the following experience she had as a rural midwife:

When we arrived, all the relatives had gathered in expectation that the patient would die. . . .

When I examined the patient I nearly died myself. A small hand protruded from the mouth of the vagina. With every contraction the mouth gaped a little more and the grotesque tongue-like hand got a little blacker. The hand was cold, swollen and the tiny bones broken. No fetal heart sounded, so there was no hope of a living child. I put on gloves and started the task of putting the hand back. It seemed a very long time before it went back. Dousing my gloves and myself and everything around me with soapy lysol solution, I reached into the vagina and pulled down the feet. . . . The greatest fear kept shouting at me; post partum infection from my own and the midwives' dirt.

Since I had heard nothing from the patient in nearly three days, I decided to ride out and see her. She wasn't where I had left her but

was out in the field working. Her husband was astonished that I was concerned about his wife, who, he declared, was as strong as a horse. He could not afford to keep her in idleness; and because she did not have a child to suckle, she must earn her keep. I excused myself and fled (Ewen 30,31).

The heroine's story is both a transcendence and an expression of Chinese women's lives, even those who remained voiceless, and were probably too soon silent, like the woman described above. In a discussion of oral performance texts, Foley makes a comment that I think would be applicable to other folkloric phenomena and therefore to the heroine tradition. It is a story and a commentary on the nature of women's existence and so it is "... the thing in itself, and the same thing" (150).

## Outline of Chapters

Chapter One is an introduction to the heroine figure and describes who she is in terms of the extant literature that has been written about her. Most of this literature comes from the disciplines of Comparative Literature, English, and Women's Studies, and not from Folklore, although in Chinese literary criticism, it is possible to find a considerable body of commentary on the military romance, which is the written genre in which the most famous heroines are found. There are several areas where potential problems may arise with the "borrowing" of theoretical approaches, the greatest in this case being the danger of removing the heroine from her cultural context. This chapter examines the heroine's placement within Confucian society, which in many respects operates as a homeostatic system. As mentioned earlier, the conflict facing the heroine is essentially the same one facing the Chinese women that I encountered, the choice between creativity, individual expression, success and

freedom from constraint, versus the protection provided within that structure. While the data collected from male informants is summarized, it is not used for analysis because it reflects a range that is too broad for comparative purposes. This chapter looks at this conflict as it has been expressed in the women's narratives collected for this thesis using several theoretical approaches, including comparative analysis, structuralism and to a lesser extent the notion of annular composition inherent in oral formulaic theory. This latter approach is further developed in the fourth chapter.

The second and third chapters are concerned with methodology and fieldwork experiences and issues of storytelling respectively. I have chosen to summarize them together because they share the common feature of both adhering to a particular "frame." In the second chapter, I describe my experiences with the first and second generation Chinese residents of Newfoundland who were my informants in terms of the meeting of trickster-figures. The trickster represents a figure that is neither good nor bad, but that has the power to not only exist "between worlds," but to move through them as well. I use this analogy as a way of describing myself as a researcher, and some of my informants, who, though they did not see themselves as transient "sojourners," were aware that, even after establishing families and businesses here, there were still some people who perceived them as "strangers-from-away," though the delicate, symbiotic balance of local economies appears to mitigate this somewhat.

The third chapter discusses a variety of issues relating to storytelling: the existence of visual memory, creativity, identification and the use of written stories as sources for oral material. This chapter also addresses the fact that the majority of my informants are **not** storytellers, although they are familiar with the heroine and a variety of other narrative traditions. This phenomenon has also been noted by other researchers:

The storytellers were a small minority. ... Nothing indicates that this had ever been different. (It should be remembered that singing ballads and playing musical instruments were also the accomplishments of a limited number of specialists.) Storytelling was an art form practiced by only those who wanted to take the time and expend the effort to acquire and master a repertoire of their own. It was probably not difficult to get acquainted with a fairly large number of tales, but the individual narrator took only what appealed to him or her. Most of the audience was content to be listeners (Holbek *Interpretation* 181).

Other issues relating to the degree of assumed or negotiated truth-value in narratives, the establishment of the beginning of actual performance and the authenticity of narratives performed in a second language, are also discussed. This chapter is framed within the context of a common tale type in Chinese folklore, in which the hero falls asleep and lives a full life in the span of a dream. I do this in order to show that, like the hero who awakens to discover that only minutes have actually passed rather than his entire life, although this chapter is able to touch upon many issues and discuss some in detail, entire books have been written about individual narrators and stories from a single tale type. Therefore, my effort is really not able to cover as much ground as it appears to - despite its length.

Where the first chapter was basically concerned with an examination of literary texts about the heroine, Chapter Four takes a closer look at the problems associated with the presentation and interpretation of oral texts about her. Building on some of the issues presented in the third chapter, the fourth chapter discusses transcription as it relates to second language verbal texts and explores ethnopoetry as a means of amplifying performance artistry that might otherwise be masked by language problems. Ethnopoetry also provides a means for contrasting some of the different ways in which men and women tell or talk about these stories. Bakhtin's genre theory is used as a way of examining the multiple genres which often appear in an individual heroine tale, as a form of intra-narrative discourse. Finally, the oral-written-oral cycle



of transmission is examined with respect to both Chinese and Western folklore.

The Conclusion is a summary and focuses on informants' perceptions of the placement and potential displacement of Chinese women today, which again can be viewed as both a reflection and a manifestation of the dilemma that the heroine faces in her tales. An Appendix containing fuller transcriptions of certain stories immediately follows the list of Works Cited.

# Chapter 1

## Closing the Ranks: The Chinese Heroine in Review

### Introduction

This thesis is an attempt to explore the complex nature of the female heroic identity in Chinese folklore. The heroine in most traditions is by her very nature a dangerous, anomalous construct. Within the context of an inherently misogynistic social order like traditional Confucian China, she becomes a threatening figure of insubordination. Although the heroine occupies a relatively small part of the Chinese heroic tradition, she takes on a variety of forms and meanings to the people who know about her. For this reason, I have found myself faced with a potentially immense topic, which I have done my best to control. The heroine is, by her adoption of disguise and her subsequent forays into male dominated quest and combat, a subversive character,

and her stories form a kind of sub-genre of duplicity. I will explore these ideas later in this chapter and their twining strands will be woven throughout this entire study. The main questions that this thesis will address are: the identification of the figure and concept of the heroine in Chinese folklore, the exploration of the extent of her narrative tradition and the academic interpretation of what she could possibly mean to the bearers of this tradition. The first of these questions forms the basis of the next section.

## Some Preliminary Considerations

The heroic identity is not gender specific. In this myth, the tale is always the same: a young nobody of unknown origins rides in from nowhere and eventually turns out to be someone from somewhere (Schofield 18).

The preceding statement succinctly captures the spirit of the research problem that this work is trying to "operationally define" and examine. Several studies (such as Dianne Dugaw's work on English and Scottish balladry and Margaret Tomalin's study of medieval Italian literature) have underscored the concept that the virago is a dangerous, unpopular anomaly, best either quickly married off, or slain (Tomalin 14). On the one hand, I am delving into a narrative tradition whose characters are few and whose "heralds, troubadours and bards" – as active tradition bearers – seem even fewer. Ultimately, I may have to surrender and concede that the heroine may not exist save as a transitory adjunct, subordinate to the male tradition. On the other hand, I still hold to my position that the Chinese heroine is *qualitatively* different from her male compatriots. Men and women have different ways of telling stories, a point that I will return to many times throughout this study. Her story departs from that

of the hero, because despite occasional instances of gender subversion, she remains quintessentially a female character. Like most traditional women, she is therefore socially compelled to travel a different road.

She is different because she rises from a wider range of genres and adopts a greater variety of disguises. She is a warrior-woman, a scholar, and a wife, both human and supernatural. For this reason, she is more elusive and more short-lived despite the apparent length of the tour of duty: under the glare of the never quite eclipsed Confucian worldview she is ever ready, or at least ever mindful, that her greatest test and sacrifice awaits her at her homecoming, when she must surrender her hard won glory, or risk being stripped of it, as well as her family, her social position, her dignity, perhaps even her life, without attaining to a heroic death. This is the dilemma which is central to the heroine's story. As I will demonstrate later, it is her response to this problem which splits the ranks along the lines of successful heroines and tragic ones, but the demarcations tend to become blurred due to her dynamic nature.

According to Margaret Atwood: "The traditional hero is defined by the purpose and quality of his death" (166). The returning heroine, by the very fact that she is returning, becomes, like Atwood's profile of the twentieth century Canadian hero, something of an absurd failure. She does not enjoy the freedom to glory like Odysseus in "... *kleos* the glorious reputation or fame which is the goal of heroic action" (Murnaghan 149), or to rejoice in the embrace of her longsuffering beloved, her triumphant return foreshadowing a praiseworthy death in a future battle. If she lives, it is not to fight another day, but to exchange sword and shield for shears and ladle and to once again take up her watch near the hearth. She must daily die to herself, so that her sacrifice, while in a form that can be understood within the exigencies of the traditional order, becomes a Promethean trial that appears completely bereft of

glory.

It would be wrong of me, therefore, to present this material as simply belonging to a female repertoire that directly valorizes the noble exploits of women. The heroine-figure in Chinese folklore is something of a resistance fighter, she appears to operate underground. Tomalin has discussed the contradictory portrayal of the "divided heroine" in Italian literature,<sup>1</sup> noting that even Boccaccio praised women who had "transcended the limits" of their sex (21). Tomalin refers to this as "back-handed misogyny," and I suggest that this attitude also enjoys a wide currency in Chinese folk literature, and serves to give the heroine a rather two-dimensional appearance, a figure who occasionally attempts to step out of the societal cross fire, although these underlying contradictions are often the very "tension of essences" that is keeping her upright and moving forward on her quest. This concept was first introduced by Lord in his book on the oral composition techniques of Slavic epic poets and singers,<sup>1</sup> as " ... a force or 'tension' that might be termed 'submerged.' It arises from the depths of the tradition through the workings of the traditional processes to inevitable expression" (97). It is later used by D.K. Wilgus in an article on the murdered sweetheart ballad and is applicable to what I characterize as the homeostatic nature of traditional Chinese society which developed and perpetuated highly circumscribed roles for women. The heroine is seen as one who pushes against her confines, while simultaneously being impacted upon by them. It is this tension which propels the narrative and if stressed, adds layers of action and intrigue to her adventures. If by some oversight the tension is irreparably broken however, the heroine is free of the social order although she may have been destroyed by it in the process of emancipation. I will discuss this in greater detail later, but the adoption of disguise challenges the stability of her confines, making them permeable. The choice that she faces - whether

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<sup>1</sup> *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

or not to return to ordered confinement – is the one which determines whether she becomes a heroine or a pitiable outcast. The basic Chinese heroine tale then, like many of those from Western tradition "... points to the misogynistic tendency of general human opinion, the inclination to blame women for the circumstances by which they are constrained" (Murnaghan 135).

## Theoretical Approaches and the Researcher's Position

In the following sections, I will be trying to establish the identity of the female heroine. To accomplish this, I will draw on various theories and approaches, as well as present a summary of my fieldwork findings, which I feel provide insight into the distinctive interpretations of my male and female informants. I suggest that these differences are at least a partial reflection of gender repertoire and cultural socialization patterns.<sup>2</sup> I will be looking at the female heroic cycle, though the suggestion has been made to me that it might be more aptly termed a "syndrome."<sup>3</sup> In my analysis, there will at times be a concentrated borrowing from Comparative Literature methodology. Nevertheless, I submit that this is a folklore thesis. In addition to occasionally "literary" modes of analysis, it subsumes fieldwork-intensive research. It is my folkloristic training that allows me to see the minute patterns and nuances in my informants' often halting words, which some purely literary scholars might otherwise gloss over

<sup>2</sup>As discussed in Chapter 3 and reiterated in the presentation of response data later in this thesis, most of my informants were passive tradition bearers who were conversant with the tradition, but not active artists creating within it. As will be seen in later analysis, male and female informants tended to define "heroic women" quite differently.

<sup>3</sup>Dr. Jan Walls. Telephone interview. 29 Apr 92.

as being too fragmented to warrant serious analysis. However, I reject the idea of the possibility of a completely inarticulate text, especially in narrative research, where even pauses can be significant to the performance art and interpretation. As a folklorist, I can be sensitive to the fact that I was essentially asking my informants to challenge and confront their worldviews, with questions whose underlying meaning framed my multi-faceted inquiry: Who is the Chinese heroine? Does she retain her femininity? Does she manifest true courage? How does she fare in a traditional interpretation? Are her experiences still valid today?

Using techniques that were as non-threatening as I could make them, I asked men and women to critically examine a character which demonstrated the potential to completely invert the cosmic and social order, to turn the entire world upside down. Many of my informants astutely discerned that I was not only looking for the heroine's story, but for theirs as well, whether they saw themselves as being able to "stand and deliver" siding with (or as) the heroine, or facing her. In all fairness, I have repeatedly asked myself those same questions over the past year, and their echoes are still painful. In the fourth chapter of this thesis, I discuss "the problem of the text" as it impacted upon my research, but there is one aspect of my ethnographic voice that has been consistently deleted from all transcribed segments. At the start of collection for this project, I was a bride waiting for my beloved to arrive from the homeland of the Chinese amazon. There was joy, and slightly self-conscious anticipation in the interviews which is now silenced. By the end of my fieldwork, I was a battered wife, and as I write these sentences, I am virtually on the eve of my divorce, a choice that I had to make in order to ensure my own survival. By Chinese tradition, I am a fallen woman who has lost all rights, because I dared to resist and to defend those rights. I am like the title of this thesis, a sitting ghost, crossing the threshold between the world of the living, and that of the morally damned. Wu cites Kristeva's summation

of traditional China, which also describes my present status (and, as I will later show, many of my female informants' enduring fears) measured against the censure of the ancient (but still pervasive) mores of the society that I have chosen to study:

With Confucianism, two barriers are erected to ensure the cohesion of the feudal social order: the first is the door to the bedchamber, the second is writing and knowledge in general. A woman cannot cross them both at once.<sup>4</sup>

There are tears between the lines of this account; by its final stroke, they should be dry. I will tell the story of the heroine by calling forth from the distaff defile a collection of unlikely footsoldiers: daughters, students, wives and ghosts. By reviewing them from the eyes of both male and female informants, I will tell my story as well.

Although the "heroic identity" may be essentially androgynous from the standpoint of an ideal or an archetypal construct, the "roll call" which precipitates the identification of the male and female heroic contingents is by definition gender based. It seems to me that the roles of female characters in folklore are defined in much the same way as the roles of contemporary women in many cultures, in terms of their "inverted" patterns of socialization and behaviour, and their deviations from the goals and activities of men. Women are often viewed as the opposite, rather than the mutual complement of men. In order to better understand the heroine's universe and the constellations of factors that impinge upon both her world and her often thwarted forays beyond her immediate horizon, I will begin by first examining the heroine as both harbinger and exemplar of the "world turned upside down," and then by comparing her development to that of the hero of tradition.

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<sup>4</sup>Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women* (New York: Urizen Books, 1974.) 76. qtd. in Fatima Wu, "Foxes in Chinese Supernatural Tales: Part 1," *Tamkang Review* 17.2 (1986): 121-154.



## The Self-Righting "World Upside Down"

The Confucian world was a self-regulating system, whose stabilizing mechanism was subjugation. The five relationships of subordination which according to Confucian philosophy are necessary for the maintenance of social order are: 1) the people are subordinate to the Emperor, 2) the son to the father, 3) the slave to his master, 4) the wife to her husband and his family and 5) the friend to the friend. I will later address the reasons as to why the heroine is rarely used as a model for young girls, being passed over for what Elshtain and others have called the "Spartan mother," women who inspire their sons to fight for the ruler and his regime, no matter how corrupt. One of the reasons is that the heroine is dangerous because she takes subordination to its ultimate extreme, forfeiting the good of her family for the good of the country. She goes too far, a course of action sternly discouraged in a typical Chinese daughter.

From Dugaw's study of the warrior-woman in English and Scottish balladry, one develops the impression that the upside down world with the disguised virago-sweetheart at its center also forms a kind of feedback loop, though one which ultimately functions in a more positive fashion. The heroine's reversed domain (which is intimately linked to and made possible by her use of disguise, a crucial point that I will often return to) reflects back upon and enables her actions, which in turn informs the continued shaping of her environment. The system also operates paradoxically, like the folktale of the clever child who approaches the king, emperor or tsar being at once "clad and naked, both riding and walking, bearing gifts and arriving empty-handed,"<sup>5</sup> and who wins a boon by the manipulation of words, images and their

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<sup>5</sup>A-T 875 *The Clever Peasant Girl*

meanings. According to Dugaw, the victorious heroine is the harmonizing of Venus with Mars, the linear path of combat transecting the convoluted orbit of romance (92). She further stresses that while the relationships and values expressed in the ballads (especially in earlier versions, before the advent of feminized adaptations and bawdy parodies by which the heroine's leanings toward Venus become obvious by means of her thickening form and eventual confinement) are "straight," their modes of expression are less so: "Although the outline of the story is strenuously upright, - the separation and reunion of separated heterosexual lovers - almost anything in fact is possible, for inversion and reversal rule this world " (91).

Although researchers studying the heroine tend to find different metaphors for conceptualizing and describing her, most (myself included) seem to be playing "variations on a theme." For example, Schofield sees the divided heroine not as the eclipse of Venus with Mars, but rather as a continual struggle between the "virago and the virgin," which symbolizes "female passion," and "male reason" (21). Although the military romance is a well-defined genre of Chinese fiction, the dichotomy that one is **either** a lover **or** a fighter exists in the Chinese knight-errant (Liu 125) just as it does among Western medieval cavaliers who, through the rigorous code of courtly love "...pursue in their beloved ...not only a woman, but above all an image of themselves" (Haywood 126). Dugaw however, counters this point, saying that the men and women in the body of ballads that she studied managed to be balanced characters in both respects and she links this to attitudes toward gender in England during the period when the ballads were popular: "If heroic women are warriors as well as lovers, then heroic men are lovers as well as warriors. Indeed, these ballad heroes reflect the ethos of sensibility which, as scholars note, emerged in mid-seventeenth-century England " ( *Popular Balladry* 160). It seems that the differences in opinion arise from scholars' willingness or ability to divorce sex from gender, a schism which

I suggest is not part of the traditional Chinese worldview.

It is the shifting pattern of forces that are at once complementary and contradictory between and within the heroine and her placement (and eventual displacement) in her society that provides the dynamic reinforcement which innervates the heroine's story, rather than the final attainment (or loss) of a static balance between discrete male and female elements within the individual heroine. As I have mentioned, this "tension of essences" keeps the story going, but it also seals her impossible fate, a destiny out of step and incommensurable with her ideals:

What one quickly discovers is that one cannot have both love and quest, both selflessness and selfishness. The two texts – male and female – cannot exist simultaneously. The woman cannot be both selfless martyr to the man and true to herself. The quest that the female character wants to participate in is impossible and incompatible with the successful courtship and marriage that she must participate in (Schofield 27).

In many Western traditions, virginity is celebrated as one of the heroine's sources of power (Olsen 229). According to Tomalin's interpretation of the Italian amazon, any display of passion other than bloodlust is tantamount to surrender and defeat. The St. Joan figure, the divinely driven, sexless heroine <sup>6</sup> appears to have been the epitome of the Western ideal:

The female warrior's acceptance was often based on denial of her sexuality and great emphasis was placed on her virginity or sexlessness in popular representations (Wheelwright 12).

Martial, aggressive women are used as interesting material for tales and at the same time, their independence is ignored and they are used as an exempla [sic] for modest, submissive behavior. Women ought

<sup>6</sup>Although it would seem that even her gender was merely suspended rather than sublimated outright. Stories about her place great emphasis on her womanhood after she begins to lose her battles and is finally incarcerated in an English prison, where, as a French heretic, her final "disclosure" was probably of a rather violent nature.

ticular, seems to be tied to the Biblical notion that woman is the vessel by which sin entered the world and therefore any transformations which actually or apparently mitigate the evils of femininity can be overlooked to a greater degree than those which distort the image of man, and so presume to throw a falconer's hood over the face of God.<sup>9</sup>

Sex is a problem in Chinese heroine stories, but only to the extent that the pursued gentleman cannot run fast enough. This is in contrast to the Western tradition, where willing entry into intimate relations signals the "fortunate fall" (Schofield 26-27) and subsequent full-scale transfer from the battlefield to the nursery. The prototypical Chinese warrior woman:

... is far more often the wooer than the wooed. Judging by her best-known exemplars, she has studied under a female exemplar since early childhood and is in greater command of magical power than the man she is to marry. As a barbarian, she is unashamed in her pursuit of love and unhindered by the kind of moral scruples that would beset a Chinese girl.<sup>10</sup> While impressed by her beauty and power, the object of her love is usually too shocked to want to acknowledge his interest. The romances consciously exploit this love situation as a clash between two ways of life (Hsia 373).

Hsia also mentions that another stock figure of the military romance, the comic hero, is often paired with the heroine in order to provide some comic relief which lightens but does not detract from the more important campaigns (372-373). She usually captures him, finding to her dismay that the dashing figure beneath the doublet is a rather lecherous, misshapen dwarf.

<sup>9</sup>See Dugaw for further elaboration of the use of disguise in women's hagiography (*Popular Balladry* 152).

<sup>10</sup>Many of the most renowned heroines in Chinese folklore, such as Hua Mulan and Mu Gui Ying, are not actually Chinese (Han nationality) at all. They are in fact from northern border tribes, Manchuria, and Mongolia.

The enduring "successful" heroine of popular tradition acts out of filial piety (Mitchell 8) and seems content to trade her boots for foot bandages and slippers at the first available opportunity. It is possible that these popularly reworked heroines are actually the icons of peacetime, when during times of relative affluence and stability the roles of men and women tend to be more clearly separated (Elshtain 181).

My preceding comment alludes to one of Tomalin's main points, which is that the fortunes of the heroine were intrinsically linked to the opinions of the society in which she was placed. A then-contemporary heroine who knowingly went against the prevailing mores would not remain popular for long:

The fluctuating literary fortune of the warrior maiden has depended on the culture pattern. Where the role is treated seriously, woman is correspondingly respected and active. Where the position is guyed, her position in society is very subordinate indeed (18).

Just as Dugaw argues that the ballad heroine devolves into a harmless, winsome creature under the influence of the Victorian era, the Chinese heroine is softened into a demure yet thrifty housewife whose domestic exploits go almost unsung (Loewe 152). This devolution can perhaps be most clearly seen with the folktale "The White Snake" – a story which figures often in this thesis, both for its helper, heroine, literary changes and enduring popularity in oral tradition – which begins as a simple love story in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), becomes a frightening lamia tale featuring a bloodthirsty succubus in the Ming period (1368-1644) and is finally distilled and humanized to the extent that, by the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) the White Snake figures as a long-suffering, dutiful wife and the story bears less resemblance to a *märchen* than to a "novel of manners," a form popular during the period (Hsü, "Part One" 140).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Versions of this story and references to it can be found throughout this thesis, particularly in Chapter Three and the Appendix.

## Matching Strides With the Hero: A Comparison

I would now like to move into a general comparison of the hero and heroine.  
If Lord Raglan's statement

The fact that the life of the hero of tradition can be divided up into a large number of incidents ... has suggested to me that the story of the hero of tradition is the story, not of a real man, but of ritual incidents in the life of a ritual personage (150).

is true, then I can only conclude that male and female heroes must signify qualitatively different rituals, based upon the divergence of their respective origins and journeys. Raglan posits several features ("moves" that are somewhat like Propp's functions)<sup>12</sup> which map the (Western) hero's fortunes. Hsia echoes this idea with respect to the Chinese hero, saying: "The principal heroes share certain basic experiences in their youth" (359). Combining the features highlighted by both scholars, these include: 1) an unusual birth to extraordinary parents, 2) a strong preference for two person combat, rather than being part of the collective heroics of a particular army,<sup>13</sup> 3) his preference of death over unnoticed return, 4) mastery over the elements as a result of a special apprenticeship, and finally 5) a change in his position through marriage or some other bestowal of royal favour. There is some difficulty however, in placing the Western hero into the context of the Chinese tradition, because although they share many common attributes, there appears to be no direct equivalent of the Homeric hero in China (Loewe 151). The discrepancy becomes greater when the model is juxtaposed with the essential characteristics of the Chinese female hero. She is often

<sup>12</sup>See V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed. Ed. Louis A. Wagner. (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1975).

<sup>13</sup>This may be a manifestation of Olrik's *Law of Two to a Scene* (135) in order to highlight the prowess of the hero, who (as Raglan points out) is most often not a commander. For an explanation of these and other rules of narrative, see: Axel Olrik, "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative." *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965, 129-141).

of lowly or ignoble birth, although she may occasionally be in reality an unknown scion of a royal house.<sup>14</sup> She does not often suffer an early pretense of death and if she is a warrior, she is most often elevated to a high rank, especially in a story that involves disguise. Many of my informants have mentioned the warrior-woman's elevated status as a possible reason for her ability to avoid disclosure for an extended period of time. Her rank afforded her certain privileges, among them privacy, not having to "bunk down with the enlisted men:"

[SK asks how Hua Mulan could have gotten away with disguising herself for so long.] LB: The Chinese clothes is very thick, in ancient military force uniform I mean, the uniform, the uniform very thick and - [SK: But twelve years?] Twelve years, yes it's quite a long time. <pause> [SK mentions about how the commander wanted "him" to marry his daughter.] But this happened in the end of her 12 years military life. [SK: But how could she deceive people for so long? To disguise herself so well for so long?] Good question! I think mainly because the life of military soldiers is quite in-normal {abnormal}. The <pause> I don't know very much about this!<sup>15</sup>

During another interview:

<informants discussing the success of Mulan's disguise> F: <voice stronger, interjecting> NO people know he, no people know she was female.

ZX: People, yeah, that's right.

C: In the army, in his, after fight, or other soldier don't know, she is a woman, doesn't think she -

[SK: How could she do that?]

F: Ha-ha-ha!

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<sup>14</sup>She may also have an extraordinary birth in the sense that she may be of autochthonic origin, such as Meng Jiang Nu, who is usually said to have been born from either a pumpkin or a watermelon that grew on the property line between homes of the Meng and Jiang families.

<sup>15</sup>LIU Bin. 27 Feb 93. Tape # sk93th-39.

ZX: Yeah, just because they don't live together, they do everything very privately so and also because some kind of stuff man must work like privates.

C: I don't know!

F: <exasperated> I DON'T THINK IT'S A TRUE STORY! <laughs>

ZX: <slaps arm rest> It's true! This is the truth.<sup>16</sup>

Marriage most often signals that the heroine has, or is about to come down in the world. The one exception that I am aware of is Mu Gui Ying who fell in love with and married her captor, much to the violent chagrin of her father-in-law. Soon a widow, Mu ascended the ranks of her late husband's clan and became a distinguished commander. The male scholar hero, which Loewe describes as an "ideal type" (148), often ascends to high status as an automatic reward for scholarship. If he is the *zhong yuan* (top ranked scholar in the national examinations), he receives a plush commission and becomes the Emperor's son-in-law. The scholar-heroine often marries, like the amazon, beneath her station, either as an unwilling concession to an arranged marriage, or to a classmate who is beneath her in intellect. Sometimes she disguises her way to the marriage chamber in order to save or to better the position of a disgraced family member:

LB: Actually, she wanted to save her brother. Her brother was misunderstood by the, by the Emperor. And so she took the examination. If you get the best score, you will be *zhuang yuan* First position. You will be assigned to a high post, as high as a province-governor. So, she took the high position ... And the Emperor, before the Emperor assigned her to a province-governor, the Emperor want her to marry one of the Emperor's daughters. A princess <laughs>. And, the marriage was not to be - was not necessary to be discussed by the Emperor and somebody else. So the Emperor announce the marriage, and, the fe-

<sup>16</sup>ZHOU Zhongxin (m), FAN Chunxia (f), CHEN Zhao (m). 8 June 92. Tape #ak92th-19. Zhou and Fan are married, and the symbiosis present in the mutual negotiations of their respective positions during this interview is also highlighted in the third chapter.



male scholar and the princess was asked to live together the night after the announcement. And I think the female scholar cannot hide anymore. And he, SHE <laughs> she tell, she told the Princess the truth. She said: "I can make my brother substitute me! <Yeah, laughs> My brother is very handsome and my brother was very good officer. He was misunderstood by the Emperor." And the Princess is very kind, and Princess told the story to the Emperor. So the Emperor knows every truth, knows everything and make the female scholar's BROTHER to be the, to be his son-in-law. The Emperor's son-in-law is a kind of high post of officer.<sup>17</sup>

The hero is often credited with the authorship or provenance of a code of laws which changes his society. The heroine is often placed under the dictates of that prevailing code. The only exception to this rule would probably be someone with special powers. One historical example that several of my informants pointed to is Empress Wu, who is seen in a rather contradictory light, being at once heroic and powerful, but also cruel:

"Ann": She was the consort of the old emperor. And, I don't know why she was thought that she will affect men. Her fate will affect men. So she, she was put into a tempe(r)l in the mountains and he, she wasn't allowed to, to approaching, the old emperor anymore. So he, she stays in that, temple in the mountain for lots, for such, for many years. No, for some years, I don't know exactly, how many years. But I don't know why after the old emperor dead, the son of the old emperor thought that she was no, maybe the son of the emperor was attracted by her, or I don't know what he think. He got this woman back from the temple in the mountain. And I think she had, she had a son later. And after her husband dead, she, she tried to get power, gradually, by fighting with a group of men around her. And took, finally she get the power. She become the first emperor {empress} of China.

But, I think she, she was cruel. She was cruel. In the way she treat her son, the people around him, around her. But, she did do, she did do several things to make the society, to make the country to develop. Yeah. <Sylvia, interjecting: Especially employ women as officer.> No, She's the first one to set to *ke ju zhe dou* in China. *Ke ju zhe dou* means

<sup>17</sup>Liu Bin. 27 Feb 93. Tape #ak93th-39. This story is also reproduced as part of a collection of three of Liu Bin's military heroine tales in the Appendix.

by, to chose the, to choose the official by examination. So, in the time before, a official would be, might be suggested by other officials. So, in most of time, it will be the relatives of the old official. But she is the first one to give a examination, examination *she dou*, how to say - <Sylvia: System?> Yeah, number system, yeah maybe. To set a exam system to choose the official. So the poor people who has the best knowledge, who were more knowledgeable, could have the chance to become official in China, yeah.

And she, she also set a lots of regulations, a very hard, the regulation give a very hard punish to any, to anyone who daren't obeyed the government. Can say. The pu(m)nishment was very, were, was very cruel, but that, that regulation did, did make the society more peaceful and the people were have a good environment to develop the country to produce more product. So, no matter, so there is a very rich culture and good, good living style, not living style, living - standard, yeah.<sup>18</sup>

In popular tradition, she exhibits a less daunting, more ridiculous side:

LB: One night she was drunk. {S} he issued a special order. The order issued by the Emperor or the Empress is very special ... people should obey and if people do not obey, people DIE, definitely. So he issued a very special order. In a poem, she simply wrote a poem as a special order. <recites in Chinese, then translates> That means,

Tomorrow, I will visit the royal garden,  
Tell the Spring: "As soon as possible."

'Spring,' he think 'Spring' is a person. <chuckles>

Tell the Spring: "As soon as possible  
All the flowers should bloom overnight  
Don't wait the morning wind."

She want, because the time is winter and he want the flower all b{loom} overnight, when tomorrow he will visit the garden, can see all the flowers. <laughter> The Spring is a female god, goddess. And the Spring is, was 'afraid of the, the human Empress. She hesitate for some while,

<sup>18</sup>"Ann." 27 May 93. Tape #sk92th-11.

and then she asked all the flowers, "Please, bloom for me, because the human-beings-god want you to bloom, she will punish you, all of you!" <laughter> So the flower have to bloom in the winter. Only one flower, one kind of flower, peony . . . only peony refused to bloom. Peony also is a female character! <chuckles> So, in the morning when the Empress Wu Zi Tian visit the royal garden, she checked all the flower, and suddenly he find the peony didn't bloom. Then she gave a special order, the peony was exiled.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the paths of the traditional hero and heroine often converge at death, their respective passings being both untimely and understated, until a folk tradition is created which either glorifies or wistfully laments their earthly fates.

Before I begin a discussion of the disguise traditions associated with this type of story, I would like to mention another interpretation of the heroine's progress. Donaldson, evaluating Campbell's formulation of the mythic hero's journey – a cyclical quest involving separation, initiation and return but one that leaves the hero less self-centered and more aware of the need to further the collective good – suggests that the Western heroine's quest involves this metamorphosis in reverse. If the hero must lose a measure of his pride and replace it with a degree of self-effacement, then the heroine must let go of some of her self-negation and develop some self-pride (102). Donaldson further differentiates between women's social and spiritual quest, speculating that the same dichotomy may not exist for men, whose spiritual development is seen to be informed by their positive social actions, which are in turn expressions of their deepening concern for humanity (103). The divided heroine's quest may have two parts because her character involves a struggle not only to win acceptance by her actions within her community, but also within herself, her character being as I have already discussed inherently more dangerous and more flawed. The Chinese heroine appears to follow the course of the hero, except that she becomes, in popular tradi-

<sup>19</sup>LIU Bin. 20 Feb 93. Tape #sk93th-36.

tion, duly burdened by the Western heroine's accouterments of her socialization. She is a brave, but already self-effacing character who is driven to altruistic action and beyond to oblivion. She has the guts, but is by tradition denied, or made to deny the glory.

## Disguise in the Heroine Tale

Disguise is a central element to both the Eastern and Western heroine traditions. Disguise at once masks and highlights gender differences, affording the woman the anonymity and safety she needs in order to perform her impossible tasks (Duval and Stephenson 4). Yet disguise inevitably plays with the fluidity of gender constructs (Wheelwright 7) and often while cloaking the heroine behind the *illusion* of genderlessness, in fact has the effect of "...bringing forward the theme of sexuality in high relief" (Szarmach 154). Disguise is the necessary springboard for making possible and building upon subsequent heroic exploits. The warrior-woman in Chinese tradition first emerges during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) in which women were more able to travel independently. Even for women who were merely sojourners and not soldiers however, disguise was a common practice, especially on long journeys. The disguise state also gives the woman considerable romantic freedom. One female informant, in discussing the role of disguise in a novella featuring a female scholar-heroine, said that the heroine took to the road in a gentleman's garb:

Wanda: To find a mate, that's what my father told me. But back in the old days, when women travelled, like I seen this in a movie... if you don't know karate it could be pretty dangerous for women to travel, because that guys tend to... take advantage of her and all that. So a lot of women do dress up as men before they travel, and then if they end up... with a man on the road or whatever, and they become friends

and she wouldn't reveal herself as a woman ... so a lot of woman do disguise themselves as men to travel on the safety side.<sup>20</sup>

However, illusory safety for the wearer can also impart a false sense of security. Disguise is a "liberating cloister," the heroine is liberated into "active service" in some spheres, but veiled behind other, potentially threatening barriers. The most dangerous of these unforeseen constraints that the heroine might accidentally stray into is perhaps forced disclosure by suspicious male characters who disapproved of such camouflage, its purpose being to dress up "womanly deception" as "manly conduct" (Tomalin 25). On a related note, Schofield, speaking of the reader's role in the masquerading romance, presents a warning that reminds us that disguise has in fact a reversible nature in its very construction. Like a traveller's cloak with a darker lining, disguise

... operates then, in two distinct, perhaps conflicting ways. On the one hand the heroine disguise allowed the female reader to experience a self other than her own self. Masquerade permits one the freedom to be someone one is not, an "other." In the romance guise, the trivialized, ignored, exploited woman becomes an object to be striven for, fought over and eventually won. Paradoxically, as the heroine of the romance, she is often the victim of male lust and power, a being defined only by the man (26).

## Cross-dressing

It should be mentioned that, heroine ballads aside, disguise serves different cross-generic ends within the Eastern and Western traditions. Despite the dangerous freedom that it introduces into the narrative, the description of the disguising process is often mentioned only as a brief aside (Dugaw, *Popular Balladry* 151) in both Western

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<sup>20</sup>Wanda CHANG. 28 Aug 92. Tape #sk92th-35.

and Eastern traditions, although some ballads go to great lengths to describe the heroine's final costume (Dugaw, *Popular Balladry* 132). The workings of the ruse, regardless of its length, are never fully explained, a feature that is alluded to by both my informants and scholarly writers alike (Dugaw, *Popular Balladry* 131). It is yet another anomalous feature integral to the construction of an anomalous character.

Whereas disguise is an element in many serious and fantastic genres in Chinese folklore, such as the military romance, dramatic ballad, novelle and märchen, Duval and Stephenson have pointed out that in English tradition, disguise plays a greater role in comic balladry (5-6). They also argue that the disguised heroine's world is not one that is **completely** reversed. A woman may go to war, but the lover that she chooses or overtakes is not entirely effeminate (8).<sup>21</sup> It is however, "... a universe if not completely upside-down, at least unforeseeable and difficult to master" (9).

## Shapeshifting, Nudity and Other Transformations

According to the research scope that I have previously defined, disguise in Chinese heroine tales takes itself a variety of guises. In stories involving soldiers and scholars, the disguise mechanism is obviously that of cross-dressing in the appropriate male attire. In stories of supernatural wives, the disguise is the human transformational state. For example, "Lady White" remains a snake spirit who in moments of weakness risks turning back into her serpentine manifestation. Yet, while disguised as a lovely woman clad in white silk:

DW : ... this allows the snake to move more freely to have different

<sup>21</sup>He does however, often manifest feminine qualities, such as weeping to express sorrow and nurturing concern for his lovely comrade (Dugaw, *Popular Balladry* 158-160).

adventures and if you call an adventure falling in love, well the snake definitely had an adventure, fell in love. It also, if you're also talking about adventure it also created problems such as her changing back into her snake-form and her husband finding her ... without any of the shifting of form, nothing would have happened. She would, at the beginning of the story, if she did not change into a woman, none of this would have happened. She would not have met the boy whom the god played with, and she would have not fallen in love. It, her shifting to the human form gave her gave her freedom, of movement, and perhaps even gave her human feelings.<sup>22</sup>

I will return to the issue of the White Snake's expression of human emotions when I discuss the role of the helper as an alternative to disguise later in this section, since "Little Green," a younger transformed snake spirit, seems to brook little of her mistress' romanticism. Like other essentially nonsentient implements of disguise, while she is an instrument of inversion, she is not taken in by the spell she casts.

Disguise can also take the form of unintentional disclosure. I have heard it said that people's body images are so intrinsically tied to the clothes that they use to cover themselves with that nakedness can become a form of disguise. In the story of Meng Jiang Nu, the heroine is bathing in a pool in the garden at the rear of her home. Unknown to her, her future husband (who is hiding in a tree in an effort to escape the Emperor's pressgangs who are forcibly recruiting labour to build the Great Wall) sees her dimly illumined form. He overhears the rash promise she makes in the moonlight<sup>23</sup> that she would marry the man bold enough to look upon her. The enterprising young fellow scrambles down the tree and calls her on her bargain. They are happily married at once, but he is pressed into service at the wedding feast and the newlyweds are separated. The heroine waits for several months, with no word as to the fate of her beloved. She begins the arduous journey to the farthest outpost of

<sup>22</sup>Donna WONG. 21 June 92. Tape #sk92th-23.

<sup>23</sup>Any such speech would be a binding verbal contract, as it would be made in the presence of "the Old Man Under the Moonlight," the Chinese version of Cupid.

the Wall, only to uncover his remains. Her unintended disclosure initiates both her romance and eventually her lonely quest.

## The Helper as Disguise Element

Where there is no explicit "vestige" of disguise in a story, or where the story is comprised (like the "White Snake") of several interleaved episodes, I have found that the inversion is accomplished with the aid of a clever maidservant or other helper close to the female protagonist. She is literally "vested" with the office of turnkey and is able to open doors that might otherwise be closed to the heroine. Before leaving this section, I would like to explore this idea further.

Early in my research, I became aware of an interesting trend in Chinese heroine stories. There is frequently a maidservant who ostensibly manifests a greater degree of courage and resourcefulness than the actual heroine, who is therefore the more **heroic** of the pair. The achievements of this character however, are consistently downplayed. Her presence in the narrative serves to balance the structure and her character provides a contrast to that of the "leading lady." Her mannerisms and personality are bolder, she is far less hesitant in her actions and she is far less constrained by societal conventions than the heroine. I began playing devil's advocate in my interviews, championing the cause of the downtrodden handmaiden. Several informants by contrast, consistently upheld what Olrik calls the most important narrative law, *Concentration on a Leading Character* (139). Despite my logical arguments and my search for narrative precedents, my informants perfunctorily dismissed my defense. When I placed "Little Green" on the stand, they conceded that while "Little Green," manifested more heroism, "Lady White," was more feminine, and it was the latter



quality that was most admirable in a female character, "heroine" or not.<sup>24</sup>

[SK: Comparing the two snakes, who would you say is more heroic, White Snake or Green Snake.] XD: Well, White Snake is very much a human figure. Well, she is a typical symbol of a female of China, who is very much in love, who is loyal to her family, who is loyal to her family who is loyal to her husband. And who has every human feelings, every human emotions. Any kind of feelings, any kind of emotions! It's just a human figure. Green Snake is more or less a rebelling figure, and she never well, surrender. To human morality, and she condemns Xu Xian {her husband} while and she, he left his wife, and he fight against the monk which stands the traditional morality or traditional justice of the Chinese trad-, <pause> history. And she fights BRAVELY against that. And she never give up. And so, I would say that Green Snake is more heroic, but White Snake is more human.<sup>25</sup>

[SK: Which snake is more virtuous?] LX: White. [SK: Which snake is more heroic, more brave.] fact in this story the White Snake was a typic, typical Chinese woman, so is very kind and very devoted to her husband. And the Black Snake was more brave and more .... more vivid [SK: Vivacious.] It's another type of Chinese woman and is that. So why some many people have sympathy with White Snake because he, perhaps, to express the typical Chinese woman. [SK: So do people not like the Black Snake ...] No, no they, her too. [SK: But she is very different.] Different character, different char- but I can't express the- [SK asks if a real Chinese woman behaved like the Black Snake, would she be considered a good woman?] At that time, it's not as good as White Snake. At now, we think this also.<sup>26</sup>

[SK: What do you think of *Qing Shi* {"Little Green"}?] Li: Oh, I think it's not a hero, it's not a hero it's just is a, a page. [SK: She seems braver ...] She is a servant, of ... *Bai She*. {"Lady White"} So it's not very important, in the story.

[SK: What do you think of Green Snake, in the White Snake Story. I'm very interested in her because nobody likes her!] <Li laughs>

<sup>24</sup>It should be mentioned that the informants featured in this segment are all men. As the material from my female informants forms the basis for my analysis, I will highlight their ideas later in this as well as the final chapter.

<sup>25</sup>WANG Xuding. 26 June 92. Tape #sk92th-26.

<sup>26</sup>XU Kangcheng. 22 July 1992. Tape #sk92th-27. The initials "LX" stand for "Lao Xu," or "Old Xu." This is Kangcheng's nickname.

Young: I, I like her, but I don't know how to compare the Green Snake with White Snake, they are different. <Li: Yeah they play a different role in the opera.> If there is no Green Snake, I think the end of the story will not be good. Green Snake is a necessary part of that story.<sup>27</sup>

Taking my informants' responses as a whole, I began to conceptualize the Chinese divided heroine as waging a battle between creative courage and passive femininity. The White Snake story is interesting in that it separates these two traits into two different characters, whose individual actions and motivations can be more easily analysed.

The helper figure in the heroine tale, as I have said, enjoys and exercises greater freedom than her "gently-born" lady. She appears to be a no-nonsense woman, independent and able to look out for herself. No matter what part she plays in a given intrigue, she never loses herself in the deception and always keeps her goal in sight. The heroine, by contrast, appears to be too easily caught up in her own designs. Murnaghan calls this tendency "reactive duplicity," which refers to the heroine's tendency to become "...involved in a plot of which she is not aware" (127). She gives the example of Penelope who weeps as she goes to fetch Odysseus' bow. She had earlier set a contest, promising herself to the suitor who performed most skillfully. She smugly rationalizes that the contest would be an all-around draw, since no man could use that bow as well as Odysseus himself. Her weeping is an expression of fear and personal reprisal that there may actually be a victor and so in remarrying she would be unfaithful to her "deceased" husband's memory, even though her society sanctions the remarriage of widows. Her tears are also a response to her living hope that Odysseus may indeed return before the contest. In comparison, both "Little Green" and the maidservant Hong Yang in the story, "The West Chamber" (who

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<sup>27</sup>Li Zhaopeng. YOUNG Zhenpeng. 5 Aug 1992. Tape #sk92th-30.

cleverly arranges a series of clandestine meetings between her mistress and a young scholar) are examples of directed young women who do not let sentimentality interfere with their larger plans, even though their carefully orchestrated machinations are often confounded by their mistress' soft-hearted foolishness. Hong Yang endures a severe beating from her mistress' mother, but still ensures that the two lovers become sufficiently intimately associated that they must marry. In so doing, she assures herself the comfortable position of second wife to Zhang Sheng, since as Ying Ying's faithful retainer, she would become an automatic part of the dowry:

Li: So Hong Yang is very important role in the story. So everything is done by by Hong Yang, I think ...

Young: You know, in old China, if the Cui Ying Ying married Zhang Sheng, Hong Yang will be also also <Li: Yeah, she will follow ... Cui Ying Ying> ... to Zhang Sheng's family. And she will be the second wife ... since Hong Yang also like Zhang Sheng.

Li: So {s}he do that things help the Cui Ying Ying, also help herself! <laughs><sup>28</sup>

When her lady's conjugal bliss is threatened by a jealous, meddling monk who tries to convince her husband to abandon the snake demoness, "Little Green" tries in vain to persuade "Lady White" not to drink the doctored wine which will cause her to transform into a snake and result in her separation from her spouse and her own imprisonment. "Little Green" chastises Xu Xian for his weakness, cursing him for wanting to leave his pregnant wife. She leads an assault on the monastery where Xu Xian has become a novice and she eventually returns to the prison with her lady's son, in order to set "Lady White" free.<sup>29</sup> Although these appear to be the actions of a truly courageous spirit, some of my informants suggest that it is precisely "Little

<sup>28</sup>Li Zhaopeng, YOUNG Zhenpeng, 5 Aug 1992. Tape #sk92th-30.

<sup>29</sup>Other tape-recorded versions of this story can be found in subsequent chapters and in the Appendix.

Green's" lack of human emotion which causes her to fall short of a starring role in this tale. She is seen as somewhat underdeveloped; a hero or heroine who does not struggle with inner flaws lacks genuine noblesse. One of my informants suggested that "Little Green's" own colour betrayed her "youthful," unfeeling immaturity. She had learned enough to take on human form, but not the complexities of human feeling:

XD: According to Chinese tradition, a snake has ten thousand years age, can become white. And one thousand can become blue. Or green. And that's why and the story of White Snake, there are TWO snakes there, one is white, one is green, or one is blue, and according to Chinese *Xiao Qing* and *qing*, well, I think it's green yeah. *Qing* can be translated literally "green." Well, this two whites, two snakes and they and the Chinese term is called *ziu liang* {meditate} I mean it's Taoist expression. You just spent many many times there, to purify yourself. And to learn the pure knowledge, then you becomes able, or capable, and the more you learn and the more you practice, and the more you you are, are capable doing things. So the white snake there about ten thousand years. And she can do a lot things now, and the green snake, she was there about thousand years.<sup>30</sup>

The maidservant is, perhaps to an even greater degree than the disguised heroine tale itself, a force of unbridled subversion, challenging not only her lady's world, but often the heroine herself. She is never the victim of reactive duplicity, though she is inextricably yoked to the heroine's rise or fall. Perhaps part of my great admiration for the stilted progress of this character comes from my own experience. Just as the helper is in some way constrained or made to suffer when the heroine forfeits the chance to break free of her syndrome or to redefine her destiny thanks to the intervention of her loyal companion, so too were several of my friends frustrated and saddened by my repeated, willing attempts to effect a hopeless reconciliation, which is admittedly a cycle of a different kind and another story.

<sup>30</sup>WANG Xuding. 26 June 92. Tape #sk92th-26.

## Specifying the Pantheon

In this section, I will summarize and examine my research findings which are composed of responses from both male and female informants. The details of my fieldwork experiences and methodology are presented in the second chapter, so I will not discuss them here. I have separated my informants' responses into two frequency distributions according to gender.<sup>31</sup> While quantifying the responses, I felt that this approach, rather than presenting a combined distribution, possessed several advantages. Firstly, it is obviously the simplest way to show certain trends which I feel are at least partially due to gender-based repertoire differences. Secondly, it creates smaller, more manageable samples that are easier to handle. Thirdly (though I may be accused of reverse discrimination), it provides me with a convenient way to dispense with a set of data that, due to everything from poor experimental rigor and miscommunication to machismo, will skew rather than enhance my analysis. I will briefly call attention to what my male informants had to say, after which time they will be dispatched.

Before I present the actual data which I gathered from my male informants, there is one point that, although I address it at length in the third chapter, I want to stress here. The vast majority of my informants are **passive tradition bearers**, that is they are not viewed by their peers and do not view themselves as the creators,

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<sup>31</sup>On the actual frequency graphs, readers will notice that I have used the word "stray" to denote a single item that was mentioned by only one informant of one gender group. It was pointed out to me by Dr. Paul Smith that this is non-standard terminology, and that an item of data which falls outside of the set is properly referred to as a "maverick." Although I had never heard that particular term, I should probably have chosen a more empirically correct term. Since the items in question however are ones that have been left out of the actual frequency analysis, I ask that the homespun character of my nomenclature be overlooked. Single counts that were mentioned by at least one informant in **each** gender group are included.

preservers and representative artists of Chinese narrative tradition. For the most part, with the exception of a few individuals who can tell a handful of stories well, most of my informants relate summary outlines of stories. Although their performances are linguistically and stylistically fragmented, my informants are familiar with the tradition from the standpoint of being able to analyse and evaluate it, as well as being able to frame the heroine within a valuable body of cultural information and as such their responses are meaningful to this project.

### Description of Male Informants' Response Data

The men's responses are both qualitatively and quantitatively different from the women's answers. On the former dimension, it should be noted that the men highlighted a wider range of women, which would represent what I consider to be a gross misreading of the data if it was inferred that they held a broader definition of heroic womanhood. In fact, their responses show considerably more random variation in the middle ranges. For example, Empress Wu, a "Spartan Mother figure" named Yue Mu (Mother Yue), and a much celebrated but much despised concubine (who was finally executed in order to silence her influence over the emperor) each received four counts. By contrast, the women's distribution appears to show a certain degree of balancing: Empress Wu is matched by an older military commander; the "White Snake"<sup>32</sup> provides a balancing contrast to Yue Mu and two peacemakers complete the subset, each member receiving three counts.

<sup>32</sup>Despite her seeming passivity, the "White Snake" is often heralded as a romantic symbol of "...the pursuit in freedom of love and happiness" (Hsü 143). I say that she provides a balancing contrast because while the "Spartan Mother" Yue Mu is held up in popular tradition as a more acceptable model than the female heroine, many of my informants grudgingly acknowledged her as one possessed of heroic intent. She was said to have inspired her valiant son to defend the country, though he was actually fighting for a corrupt emperor.

With respect to quantity, as I indicated earlier, the male responses are too numerous to include in anything other than a descriptive analysis. I suspect that, in answer to the question, "How would you define a heroic woman, and can you give me an example?" most of my male informants equated "heroic" with "famous," and proceeded to descriptively list all of the noteworthy females that they were aware of in both history and folklore. They mentioned several women whose main accomplishment was their renowned beauty, although they did mention Li Qing Zhao, a poetess and one male informant told me that one of the legendary heroines (Mu Gui Ying) had also been an accomplished literary scholar. The mention of these women however, may have been because they knew that I would be talking to the women-folk, who would naturally be curious to see what "the guys" came up with. By the same token, perhaps the absence of scholar figures within the main female pantheon (although they all agreed that a female scholar in any society and at any period could be considered heroic) was a gesture of modesty on the part of these women who for the most part are also scholars, so as to avoid any hint of identification with more illustrious forebears, or to forget for a moment their own hard-won positions that are always culturally, more than academically speaking, somewhat precarious.

The intersection of some responses can be accounted for by the method employed, the sorting and selection of choices from a deck of playing cards, each portraying a famous woman. Although I was expecting my informants to be discriminating and I intended that the cards be used in order to visually jog their memories, I fear that I may have "stacked the deck" with regard to my results. Some of the men may have decided that, assuming women to have a natural advantage in the telling of these stories, if they could not tell them **better**, they would at least tell **more** and **different** stories. I caught on to the possible existence of this "competition effect" after being regaled with several stories from one informant's particular "hall of fame,"

which bore a strange resemblance to a house of ill-repute. After he had finished talking, he made the following statement, which I do not think that I would be remiss to call an "inquiring proposition:"

Gao: In Chinese history, we have a lot of famous heroes, women heroes. ... I don't know why famous hero, famous women's hero why there are all prostitute! <laughs> ... But I want to say something they did not tell you, they did not, tell you. [SK: Okay.] Yeah, so that I know maybe most of them, they told you, all of them they told you. [SK: No, they talked about their favourite ones.] Favourite ones, you want to know any one you can choose, which one. [SK: No, I want to know the ones you consider important.] Anything, anything, I think no problem. You can choose any one! <laughs><sup>33</sup>

The following list explains the shortened forms used in the graph of the frequency distribution, and also gives the number of counts, as well as a brief description of the character.<sup>34</sup> The graphs of both the male and female frequency distributions will be presented together, in order to better allow for visual comparison:

**Mulan** HUA Mulan (7 counts): She is the prototypical "successful" warrior-woman, serving in the army in her father's place, then at the end of her long campaign, refusing the Khan's commission and returning to her parents' home. First appears in Tang Dynasty ballad, "The Ballad of Mulan."

**MJN** Meng Jiang Nu {"Meng-Jiang girl"} (6 counts): Legendary figure named for the two families who found her. She is of autochthonous birth and is separated from her husband on her wedding night. Against various interdictions, she travels to the Great Wall, to find her husband. Her tears so move Heaven, that

<sup>33</sup>GAO Zhi. 8 June 92. Tape #sk92th-20.

<sup>34</sup>The descriptions are based on information gathered from interviews, though none of them represent verbatim transcription. Where a character's description appears sketchy or incomplete, that is a reflection of my informants' lack of conclusive information, or unwillingness to rely on unsure recollection. Sometimes informants wanted to ensure that a particular character be counted, but they were unable to clearly articulate the reasons behind their "nomination."



part of the Wall crumbles, revealing her husband's bones. In some versions, he is said to have died of exhaustion, in others he is a foundation sacrifice. Some endings have her taking the bones home for burial, others have her outwitting the lecherous emperor who, seeing her at the site, desires her for a concubine. In the latter case, she jumps off the Wall into the ocean, but instead of dying, becomes thousands of little silvery fish. She is usually portrayed as a southern Chinese girl. She is seen as "tragic," and her story points to the corruption of the Qin Dynasty (221 -206 B.C.). The emperor referred to is Qin Shi Huang, who commissioned the building of the Great Wall.

**MGY** MU Gui Ying (5 counts): Portrayed as a rebel Jin Dynasty (1115-1234, Manchurian occupation) heroine fighting against the YANG family, until she falls in love with and marries her captor, the sixth son. She overpowers her father-in-law's violent objections to the union by preventing him from killing his son. She assumes joint leadership of the clan with her mother-in-law after her father-in-law, husband and other male relatives are killed. She is a figure in the novel *Commanders of the Yang Family* and is considered to be a "successful" heroine. She is a popular figure in Beijing opera, and is sometimes described as being also possessed of some literary talent, although this may be a result of confusion with another real-life character, QIU Jin.

**LQZ** LI Qing Zhao (5 counts): A Song Dynasty (960-1279) poet who wrote romantic poetry and descriptions of nature. Not heroic, except that she is often described as a "female DU Fu or LI Bai," who were two renowned Tang Dynasty poets.

**W.Snake** "Lady White" (5 counts): Transformed snake spirit who falls in love with a mortal, but is later imprisoned by a wicked monk who accepts her husband as a novice. In some popular versions, she is freed by her servant "Little Green" and her half-mortal son. Because the son has become an upright, scholarly man,

Heaven pities her and she becomes an Immortal. A popular theme in opera and art, she is seen as an unfortunate victim of the "old system."

**WZT** WU Zi Tian (4 counts): First (and only genuine?) Empress of China. Heroic, but not feminine.

**YYH/YGF** - YANG Yu Huan/YANG Gui Fei (4 counts): The first name is her given name, YANG Gui Fei is a title bestowed upon her by the emperor "Most Precious Consort YANG." Perhaps the most celebrated beauty of the Tang Dynasty, she was the emperor's favourite, but fell from grace when her dissolute brother took a posting which she arranged. She went into exile with the emperor, but was executed along the way. Not heroic, even in the tragic sense, she seems to have been included for her looks and intrigue.

**Yue Mu** - "Mother YUE," (4 counts): The prototypical "Spartan Mother" she is reported to have tattooed the characters *Qing Zhong Bao Guo* {"Uphold Loyalty to the Government"} on her son's back. Her son, YUE Fei, went on to become one of China's most famous traditional heroes. While she herself is not heroic, she is held up as a model of traditional values.

**DC** DIAO Chuan (3 counts): One of the "Four Beauties" of China, she is also another lovely "extra."

**Wen Chun** "Princess Wen Chun" (3 counts): A minor princess or lesser concubine, sent to marry the ruler of Tibet as a peace gesture. Often confused with WANG Zhao Jun, she is "successful," but in a passive way, as she had no choice in her marriage.

**ZYT** ZHU Yingtai (3 counts): Heroine of well-known novella. She disguises herself in order to go away to school, but falls in love with a classmate without disclosing

her true identity. She is sent home to be married but her classmate discovers her true feelings and tries to visit her before the wedding. He is denied permission to see her and shortly thereafter dies of a broken heart. She later requests that the wedding entourage stop before his grave so that she can pay her respects. The grave opens and she jumps inside. She is "tragic," but ultimately transcendent, as she is reunited with her true love after death.

**Qiu Jin** QIU Jin (2 counts): A real life soldier-poet who fought under Sun Yat-sen and died a martyr. "Successful" from the viewpoint of history and propaganda.

**HWJ** HU Wen Jun (2 counts): Her given name is often confused, but she appears to be a "real" Yingtai who eloped and lived happily ever after. ¶ "Successful," but sketchy.

**TXP** "Tian Xian Pei" (2 counts): Appears to be a fairy who marries a mortal, then is separated by the meddling of her celestial family. The couple are permitted a brief reunion at certain festivals. Detail is rather lacking and story may be confused with a related tale, "Cowherd and Weaving Maid."

**STJ** SHI Tai Jun (1 count): MU Gui Ying's mother-in-law and joint commander-in-chief.

**LXJ** LI Xiang Jun (1 count): Famous Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) courtesan who fell in love with and supported a young up-and-coming official. When he changed sides and sided with the Manchurian Qing Dynasty, she committed suicide.

## Description of Female Informants' Response Data

As I stated earlier, I was completely at a loss as to how to incorporate the

responses gathered from male respondents into manageable analytic models. The burden of proof therefore, rests with the women, which perhaps is how it should be. The only characters in this data set that are not in common with that provided by my male informants are WANG Zhao Jun (described below) and "Qi Shi Nu," another fairy who marries an earthly lover. In contradiction to the sub-plot of separation which is the usual outcome of tales involving romantic misalliances, this one appears to end happily as the young couple are permitted to stay together, although it appears that the fairy had to sacrifice her immortality in order to keep her spouse. The distribution is given below:

**Mulan** HUA Mulan (5 counts)

**MGY** MU Gui Ying (5 counts)

**MJN** Meng Jiang Nu (5 counts)

**W.Snake** "Lady White" (3 counts)

**WZJ** WANG Zhao Jun (3 counts) In most accounts, she is described as a young widow, who agrees to marry Sima Xiang Rou, who is most often either described as a Mongolian or "Turkish" (from Xin Jiang region) chieftain, though in some versions, he is a foreign scholar. She is often confused with Wen Chun, but is considered more heroic because, as a young widow, she can choose her next husband and she takes the opportunity to give herself a better life. Most often portrayed with a Chinese lute, an instrument that she was said to play skillfully.<sup>35</sup>

**WZT** Empress WU Zi Tian (3 counts)

<sup>35</sup>For a printed version of the love story, see "Ssuma Hsiang Ru and the lutenist," in Hensman's collection. The name in the title is *Sima Xiang Rou* rendered according to the old phonetic-orthographic system.

WenChun "Princess Wen Chun" (3 counts)

Yue Mu "Mother Yue" (3 counts)

STJ SHI Tai Jun (3 counts)

TXP "Tian Xian Pei" (2 counts)

QSN "Qi Shi Nu" (2 counts)

LXJ Li Xiang Jun (1 count)<sup>36</sup>

YYH/YGF YANG Yu Huan/YANG Gui Fei (1 count)

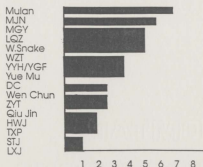
HWJ HU Wen Jun (1 count) (Substituted for Yingtai, because the informant felt that her story ended too unfairly.)

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<sup>36</sup>In the case of notorious women like Gui Fei and Courtesan Li, it should be noted that they receive few "votes," and the women who mentioned them expressed sympathy for their situations, seeing them as tragic casualties of the traditional Confucian order.

Heroines (male informants, N=16)

(1 count="stray" unless also mentioned  
by at least one female informant)



Heroines (female informants, N=13)

(1 count= "stray", unless mentioned  
by at least one male informant)

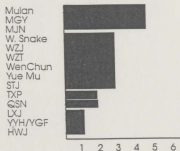


Figure 1.1: Response Frequency Distributions: Male and Female Informants

## The Heroine's Syndrome

The remainder of this discussion is concerned with an analysis of the "heroine's syndrome" mentioned earlier. According to my female informants, a "successful" heroine is one who **attains creative and unusual accomplishments to the fullest extent of her social boundaries, WITHOUT openly being seen to transgress those boundaries.** A "tragic" heroine may also achieve, but she loses her place in society because she either forgets to return quietly to that station once her quest is over, or she becomes lost along the way. The Chinese heroine's progress is culturally bound. Popular tradition subjects the unruly heroine to a process not unlike footbinding, creating something small, fashionable and almost painfully warped out of a concept or motif that is large, strong vital and free. The heroine outside the Confucian social matrix experiences a rush of freedom that must be not unlike the removal of the tight, embroidered bandages which though painful, keep her upright and supported, her "tension of essences" that, if shattered, leads to nothingness. I will return to this issue in the final chapter, but I suspect that most of my female informants face a dilemma not unlike that of the heroine, who even while disguised is still in danger of being destroyed upon reentry into a traditional system that demands obedience to the extent that if anomalies cannot be subjugated, their very existence is denied. My informants frequently expressed dismay, fear and sadness with regard to the fragile balance that they had to continuously maintain between their roles as women, daughters, wives and scholars. Like the young women who came to the nursing station where my grandmother was working during the Sino-Japanese War demanding to have their feet unbound but unprepared for the shock that would come, these contemporary Chinese women also often feel uncertain, not knowing whether "to dance, or to faint" in their lived worlds outside China.

In order to examine this syndrome, I will first compare the Chinese and Western heroine cycles by using some of Dugaw's ideas placed within a cultural framework. Secondly, I will draw on some of Levi-Strauss' ideas regarding structural applications to mythology, but again I will be concerned with issues of cultural context and interpretation. An examination of the female creation myths involving "Nü Wa" and "Eve" which superimposes an understanding of the development of guilt and shame cultures can, I believe, partially account for the divergent directions of the Eastern and Western heroine. Thirdly, I will look at the range of "recruits" put forward by my female informants and keeping in mind the Chinese cosmological principle of harmony, use some of Buchan's ideas from his structural study of the ballad to see if I can find a pattern of balancing contrasts, which expresses the underlying meaning of the configuration, which I have found to be the struggle between creativity and passivity, at its centre. Finally, I will briefly analyse an example of each of the heroine types encompassed by the scope of this study - warriors, scholars, wives and spirits - in order to see how they - as examples - and I - as a researcher - measure up.

## The Heroine's Literary and Lived Worlds

The relative "success" or "tragic undoing" of a Chinese heroine is linked, as it in Western tradition, to conceptualizations of gender. It seems to me that the successful Western amazon has an advantage over her Eastern sister-in-arms, because by her exploits she is:

... manifestly active, pointedly "manly," and directly tied to the male role she plays. The Female Warrior is not only a good woman, but for the most part a determinedly good soldier or sailor as well. ... the Female Warriors do not appear to be any less "womanly" for having appropriated masculine behavior ... For the Female Warrior enacts her



heroism by rules she ultimately contradicts. Looking like a man, acting like a man, celebrated as a man, she is a perfect woman (Dugaw, *Popular Balladry* 153, 157).

It is of utmost importance when looking at an essentially literary figure like the heroine not to take her out of context in order to get a closer look. When this is done, it is frequently at the expense of what she may actually signify to the contemporary, real women of the culture from which she comes. We forget to anchor our motifs in meaning. The Western amazon appears to be slightly more than marginally better off than the Chinese heroine, because she can shamelessly aspire to the glory that Westerners might see as her rightful due. Given this power, while the male-dominated world outside **might** have seen her as a disturbing anomaly, the "world of the ballads" did not (Dugaw *Popular Balladry* 157) and neither, presumably, did the female ballad-singers who dared to enter her world, if only to extoll her virtues *sotto voce* while the rest of "mankind" looked disdainfully on.<sup>37</sup> The Chinese heroine, when she is given voice enough to herald anything, is not entirely her own mouthpiece, depending upon the political and social agenda of her times:

"Ren": When we were taught, all these stories, they turned to propaganda. What they really want to tell us, so they won't say those women did those things in order to show off themselves. 'Cause this is not the way Chinese people should do. That what my fellow country might think. So, they won't tell if those women really want to, want to just show themselves. They wouldn't say that, or they wouldn't tell you that. Nobody knows if they just want to do something fun or [SK: To be famous.] okay, right.

Like her Western analogues however, she has her supporters who do not condemn her desire and pursuit of independence:

Syl: That's not bad, I think. [SK: It's not bad to be famous?] Yeah.  
[SK: Not bad to be individually famous.] Yeah, that's not bad. [SK:

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<sup>37</sup>I am grateful to Jamie Moreira for bringing this point to my attention.

But it's not traditional.] Not traditional. But that's not bad. I think, I can understand that this if some, you know someone do that, that's just - how to say that - in Chinese words, just *Fa xian ta zi ji de jia shen* {Basically, "to follow one's own way."} So I don't think it's bad. Especially, I mean in this world, at this time, I can accept this kind of idea or the choice.<sup>38</sup>

The "successful" Chinese heroine, as I have demonstrated, is not overtly individualistic, whereas the Western heroine can be. If, as previously discussed, the goal of heroism is two-fold - accruing personal fame for exploits which also promote the common good - then it is possible that the "successful" Western heroine falls short of her goal, though the tragedy is external to her own fortunes:

Their exploits challenged the existing categories of sexual difference, but the terms of the debate usually remained the same . . . They proved that women were equally capable of excelling in the masculine sphere, but since the female soldiers and sailors remained such staunch individualists, they presented little threat to the established order (Wheelwright 11).

It is interesting to note that the preceding arguments suggest that both kinds of "successful" Western heroine - literary and legendary as well as historical - ultimately fail to some degree to realize their "objectives," the former because she is a marginal construct within the larger, traditional culture, despite the fact that she may have meaning for certain individuals, and the latter because she is subsumed into a kind of counterculture (living the life of a "rakish sailor," for example) and by initially asserting her individuality she forfeits it, despite the fact that she may succeed in standing as a passing, scandalous example for the mainstream culture that she has left behind.

I highlighted the word "objectives" because I think that that may actually

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<sup>38</sup>"Ren," Sylvia ZHAO. 12 May 92. Tape #sK92th-09.

be the key difference between the various manifestations of the Eastern and Western heroine. Western society encourages individualism, even selfish individualism is condoned to a large extent, while dependency in any form is decried. The "dependency" of Western women on their menfolk has been something of an economic issue in past generations. In times of great abundance as well as great scarcity, women have been encouraged to stay at home. In the first instance, perhaps a large female work force added to a bustling economy might engender fears of a collapse, since any system cannot maintain full capacity functioning for long. In the second case, men are the traditional breadwinners and were perhaps seen as having the greatest right (or need) to seek work outside the home, while a woman could still define her domain within the domestic sphere. In times of unrest however, there are many accounts in which Western women were expected to fight alongside men, whether on the battlefield, or more recently, in factories and being so encouraged, they rose to the challenge as a matter of course. History attests to the fact however, that they were not (and in some cases, still are not) equally rewarded for their efforts. Conversely, Confucian society upheld from the beginning the ideal of the dependent woman, a concept so pervasive that it was adopted into the language. *Nei ren*, meaning literally "inside person," was a typical expression for wife, one that has an almost frightening quality in its hushed undertones. For me, one of the most disturbing things about it is that it is still sometimes used today. Although, as I will show, the heroines appear to start from different points and progress in different directions, perhaps these divergencies are another illusion of this subversive character and that in fact, the "syndrome" affects them both, the Western heroine's hidden strength (or, if you prefer her society's reciprocal deception) being that her culture allows her to be a "carrier" of the female heroic syndrome for a longer period of time before she too manifests her latent symptoms and fails to achieve full, "manly" honour or partake of a full measure of the spoils. I will now look at other theoretical approaches which I feel can contribute

to the study of the Chinese heroine in folk-literature.

In the following tables, I will present a comparison of typical Western and Eastern "successful" and "tragic" heroines. HUA Mulan and ZHU Yingtai (described earlier in the response analysis) are contrasted with Mary Ambree and Harriet respectively.<sup>39</sup> In the first comparison, the filial Mulan and the swashbuckling Mary Ambree are juxtaposed. Each comes out successful, Mulan because she knows her place is at home, Mary because she knows her place is **not** as the noble English wife of a foreign prince. Both handle crisis situations that are not themselves actual battles. Mulan's commander wants to marry "him" to an admiring daughter<sup>40</sup> while a blackhearted traitor in the ranks, "the false gunner," temporarily resupplies Mary's stock of ammunition, making her defenseless. In the tragic comparison, it may be pointed out that I am comparing a scholar with a sailing maid, but the reason for their adventures and untimely ends is the same, freedom in love.

<sup>39</sup>The ballads which refer to these heroines can be found in Dugaw, *Popular Balladry* 37-39, 71.

<sup>40</sup>William Hung's interpretation of the final stanza of the ballad suggests that neither did Mulan return home with a group of companions from her former regiment, nor was she visited by her ageing commander, but that in fact she came home accompanied by a single comrade in order to let him "meet the folks," so that while she eschews military honour, she actively seeks romance. While most of my informants dismissed this as a misinterpretation, the article carefully examines a passage in the ballad which has not only confounded translators, but also gave those of my informants who could remember the ballad considerable difficulty, both with the diction and scansion. See William Hung, "The Last Four Lines of the Mulan Ballad," *Studia Asiatica: Essays in Asian Studies in Felicitation of the 75th Anniversary of Professor Ch'en Shou-Yi*, ed. Lawrence G. Thompson. (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center Inc., 1975) 357-362.

The "Successful" Heroine's Progress...  
(East and West)

	Eastern	Western
char.	Mulan	Mary Ambree
lack	father to war	lover slain
transformation	disguise as soldier	disguise as sailor
action	victorious	victorious
conflict	risks disclosure	false gunner
resol'n	returns home refuses glory	refuses marriage glory okay...

The "Tragic" Heroine's Progress...  
(East and West)

	Eastern	Western
char..	ZYT	"Harriet"
lack	no schooling	can't marry...
transformation	dis. as scholar	dis. as sailor
action	goes to school	stowaway
conflict	falls in love	shipwrecked
resol'n	jumps in lover's grave	dies together w/ William

Table 1.1: Successful and Tragic Heroines From East and West

Before moving on to the next part of this discussion, I would like to add one more feature to the Chinese heroine's world that will allow it to function as a model for both tragic and successful characters. The Chinese heroine's world can be seen, as I have stated earlier, as being a struggle between creativity and passivity and between courage and femininity. The passive, feminine side of the divided heroine represents the demands placed on her by the overriding principle of filial piety, while the courageous, creative side can only be manifested through a brief foray into freedom. At the start of the heroine's adventure, as with most heroic tales, a lack develops – her father is conscripted, her husband is killed, she is confronted with the prospect of a loveless marriage – which she seeks to rectify. Disguise, whether in the form of transvestism, transformation, unintended disclosure<sup>41</sup> or through the intervention of a helper, provides the heroine with the temporary escape that she requires. If there is no disclosure before the completion of the heroic action, then the heroine is likely to come out "successful." If, however, she is found out before she is able to finish her task (i.e., "Lady White" is warned not to drink wine during the festival, as in so doing she risks a transformative reversal and that would lead to her losing the family and happiness that she desires as the wife of a mortal), then she is at a crossroads, and must choose whether to return to her former constraints and complete her sacrifice, or risk security for freedom. Had Mulan accepted an imperial post for example, eventually anxious matchmakers, prospective in-laws and amorous daughters smitten with the "young general" would have discovered her real identity and she might have been executed for putting on a false face before the Great Khan, certainly a serious form of treason. If the heroine submits to the yoke of her sex, she will be quietly

<sup>41</sup>Of course, it can be argued that, for the "passive" heroine, any disclosure that is not forced cannot be construed as completely accidental. Taking the example of Meng Jiang Nu, there is an element of daring in her bathing in the back garden in the evening and announcing to the moon and the rest of the world that she is doing so. A truly passive, modest girl would have bathed in the empty kitchen or another enclosed area adjacent to her house.

"successful," or at least save face. If she takes the unknown road, she will wander lost and nameless, forgotten forever, except perhaps in the often unspoken stories of a hopeful and rebellious few.

## The Heroine's World...

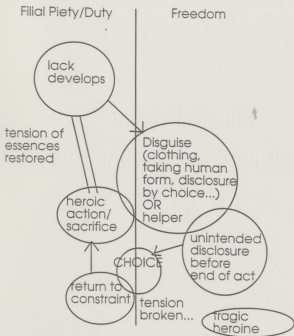


Figure 1.2: The World of the Chinese Heroine



# The Heroine's World...

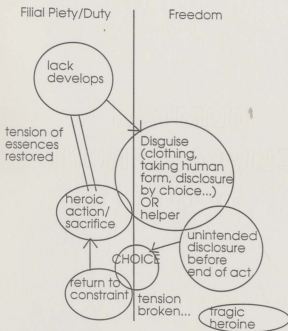


Figure 1.2: The World of the Chinese Heroine

## Eastern and Western Directions: Creation Myths, Shame and Guilt

Levi-Strauss' structural analysis of the Oedipus myth has been subjected to a considerable amount of criticism and there are certainly more contemporary structuralists whose theories enjoy wider acceptance and discussion within the field of folklore. I see one of the weaknesses of this thesis as being that, although I have done a considerable amount of reading, and have tried to select materials which both broaden and deepen my understanding of the Chinese heroine, for much of the theoretical "meat" of this work I have relied on classical studies. I have chosen Levi-Strauss because I find something appealing in "deep-structure" approaches in general; I like to try to comprehend the possible "undersides" of texts and linguistic processes. At other times in this study, I refer to Chinese stories and storytelling processes in terms of silk and brocade. By studying the heroine, I am forced at times to look through prismatic spectacles which focus and define the heroine along axes of inversion and subversion. While working from such a perspective, I find myself at once looking for the string which will unravel the mysteries surrounding the heroine and at other times hoping that it will continue to escape my grasp, for in the pile of gauzy silken stuff I may have found the theory, but forfeited the tale. I do not agree with all aspects of Levi-Strauss' interpretation of this "myth," even its generic name to me sounds questionable in many respects. However, in an analysis of what he states are all variants of a Zuni creation myth which accounts for the emergence of agriculture, hunting and eventually war and death, Levi-Strauss juxtaposes the two extremes of the continuum, finding "... the two variants placed at the far ends being in a symmetrical, though inverted relationship to each other" (439). By using an Eastern and a Western female creation myth and overlaying them with a certain amount of cultural

contextualization, some insight can be gained into the emergence and initial course of direction of the two characters.

The two female creation myths to which I am referring are those of "Eve" and "Nü Wa." At the risk of sounding ethnocentric, the story of the transgression of Eve requires little elaboration, except to say that by bringing restricted knowledge into Paradise, she is traditionally credited with engendering original sin. She was created from man who had been earlier created in the image of God and therefore she has been superficially held up as being man's "equal," being born from his side. In reality, as I have stated earlier, "femaleness" is seen as a deviation from the perfect template. In Chinese cosmology by contrast, Nü Wa, is a cosmic giantess who existed side by side with Pan Gu, the male creation figure. When Pan Gu separated the universe into the earth and Heaven, Nü Wa melted stones to patch up the holes in his handiwork. She is neither weak, nor seen as having fallen from grace on account of her gender. One male informant configured her as a kind of celestial alchemist, melting stones into rainbows:<sup>42</sup>

LW: And according to the magic story in China, the universe is just like a egg ... Yeah so one guy, called *Pan Gu* he just use a knife to separate the egg. And the heavy one fell down, to become the earth and the light one go up, become the sky. And then the people find <interference> in the sky there is some hole, not there perfect, you know. So a very GREAT female lady <laughs> she called, her name is *Nü Wa* use some special stone, and use some special fire to - I think she is the "grandmother" of Chemistry, she just do the work like laboratory work, and to mix the all kind, all kinds of stone, and to fill in hole in sky.<sup>43</sup>

The story of Eve is of course a form of religious allegory, and while the story of Nü Wa is not, a brief examination of the concepts of "shame" versus "guilt" societies

<sup>42</sup>This is a common story involving Nu Wa. See "Nü Wa and the Rainbow," in Bertha Hensman's *More Hong-Kong Tale-Spinners* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1971).

<sup>43</sup>"Lao WANG." 17 Feb 93. Tape #sk93th-42.

would be useful at this point. According to Eberhard:

As Chinese society certainly falls into the "tradition-directed" type and as its ideal is the extended family, it can easily be seen that social psychologists have regarded Chinese society as a "shame society." ... A person "loses face" if he does not live up to the expectations set for his role, if he breaks rules of conduct. He is, then, punished with ridicule, contempt or ostracism. The reaction of society is not only directed against the culprit but may reflect back upon his family, sometimes even upon his ancestry (*Guilt and Sin* 4).

Western society is typically characterized as a guilt-oriented society, one in which individual offenders are supposed to be punished for serious infractions, without the blame being placed on that person's family. For less serious transgressions, the individual in the guilt-oriented society is likely to feel private remorse or guilt for his or her wrongdoing and to then hopefully be compelled by those feelings to rectify the situation. For the individual from the shame-oriented culture, it is necessary to avoid the occurrence of the infraction from the outset, because retribution from significant others in the "sinner's" environment might be swift and terrible to the extent that atonement and a restoration of the protective extended family network could prove impossible. It should be mentioned however, that these are not absolute and exclusive categories, as Eberhard says: "...if a culture is called a shame culture, this should only indicate that shame is a more prominent agent than guilt, not an absence of guilt" (*Guilt and Sin* 3).

It seems to me that the point of symmetry in both of these myths is the culturally-defined submissive role of women as a result of the development of the concepts of shame and guilt. While Nü Wa represents a strong character with the power to literally compensate for the weaknesses of Heaven, Eve is the manifestation of weakness within the originally perfect system created for "mankind." With the emergence of Chinese feudalism and Confucian philosophy, Nü Wa is eclipsed, being

eventually replaced by the submissive *nei ren*. Chinese heroine tales tend to also march, regressing toward a kind of "subjugated mean," though I suspect that her decline took several dynasties rather than a couple of centuries, which is the timeline that Dugaw puts forth for the English and Scottish ballad heroine. The Western heroine (perhaps not being able to fall much further), progresses away from this mean, and "redeems" herself by her gender-transcending acts of valour. It is interesting to note however, that even these characters from the creation myths are themselves anomalous, a fact which lends support to Eberhard's earlier observation. Nü Wa, as a pre-extant entity, is without family and therefore she embodies the fear which underlies stories of rebellious women, she is sinless herself and yet "disowned." Eve, the "mother" of many individualistic races, imparts her "shameful" sin to every child in every generation. I said earlier however, that this analysis is only intended to give a possible explanation for the different directions taken by each heroine at the **beginning** of her adventures and I suspect that perhaps the heroine's real course - if looked at from start to finish - is more of an orbit than a linear path or trajectory.

Structural Analysis of Eastern & Western Heroines  
at Level of Creation Myths: Where Nu Wa Meets  
Eve...

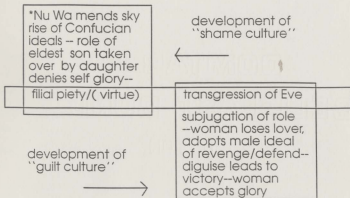


Figure 1.3: An Analysis of the Different Directions Taken by Eastern and Western Heroines According to Creation Myths

## Towards a Structuralist Interpretation of the Chinese Heroine Tradition

Chinese culture appears to be centrally concerned with **balance**. This final discussion will therefore focus on a method of structural analysis which attempts to uncover central meanings through the balanced contrasting of textual elements. Buchan asserts that: "The habit of thinking in balances, antithesis, appositions and parallelisms is intrinsic to the oral mind" (88). As I discuss in subsequent chapters, many researchers have shown that the introduction of print into Western cultures affected many aspects of traditional storytelling: memory, patterns of repetition and emphasis, length, use of cohesive devices, etcetera. The general Western worldview tends to be linear as well, whereas many Eastern cultures tend to reflect greater synchronicity.<sup>44</sup> If Buchan's comment can be extended to include the Chinese mindset (whether literate or not) because of the different emphasis of its cosmology, then it may be possible to balance off the various manifestations of the Chinese heroine in order to discover the basic issue in these tales. To do this, I will use the pantheon delineated by my female informants, because it is of a reasonable size and reflects a definite pattern, since the majority of the women I interviewed demonstrated "heroic" vigilance in staying with this rather difficult and personal topic.

During a lecture on oral composition theory, structuralism and the ballad, in one of my graduate classes in 1991, David Buchan suggested that in order to find the "heartwood" of the ballad, its essential meaning, it is often necessary to critically examine similarities in order to uncover their differences. Using annular or

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<sup>44</sup>See Barre Toelken's treatment of these concepts in "Folklore, Worldview and Communication," *Folklore: Performance and Communication*, eds. Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein. (The Hague: Mouton, 1975.) 265-286.

ring composition to order the events in the ballad "Fair Annie," we were shown how the balancing of the verses and phrases in the song pointed to the cause of Annie's distress when her husband brings home a new young bride. Annie is charged with various tasks in the preparation of the couple's homecoming, and although she agrees to perform each chore, she recalls her honeymoon and marriage, and her emotions suggest that there is more than the husband's two relationships impacting upon her world. Not only must the heroine bear the shame of being temporarily replaced despite her devotion as a wife and mother, but the introduction of a "secondary consort" betrays an incestuous liaison – the new bride is the forsaken wife's younger sister. By paying attention to the implicit harmony of the stanzas, the real theme of the song could be uncovered.<sup>45</sup> Recalling that lecture, I looked at the main characters that my informants kept bringing up and wondered if I could not arrange them in a similar configuration as had been demonstrated in my class in order to discover the central conflict facing the heroine, and perhaps the women who helped me to define her.

Mulan was both brave and devoted to her country and family. Her character demonstrates perfect filial piety and courage and so she is a "successful heroine." She can be contrasted with another character, Hu Wen Jun, who is also successful but in the field of romance. She is courageous to the extent that she dared to challenge the existing order and the authority of her parents to marry the man she loves, but in so doing she can hardly be said to be obedient. Zhu Yingtai is tragic in as much as she does not achieve happiness in love during her lifetime, but she cheats the system by

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<sup>45</sup> Ballad scholarship provides, I believe, an ideal environment in which to study the oral and written interconnections in Chinese folk literature, because it examines written texts that are part of oral tradition, and that undergo a variety of changes and adaptations as a result of the confluence of both modes of transmission. The oral-written-oral cycle in Chinese and Western folklore, as well as the process of annular composition, will be looked at in greater detail in the fourth chapter.



her death.<sup>46</sup> Wu Zi Tian also found her way around the system, but as Empress, she had the power to change it during her lifetime. The warrior-women Mu Gui Ying and Shi Tai Jun are Manchurian rebel leaders who sharply contrast against Mother Yue, who though she sternly admonishes her son and inspires him to heroism, indelibly marks him as the loyal defender of a corrupt status quo in the form of the Imperial court of the time. Two peacemakers are left, Princess Wen Chun and Wang Zhao Jun, who seem only to part company with respect to the destinations of their bridal palanquins – one travels to Tibet, the other to a more northern wilderness. The difference lies in the careful examination of the characters' respective stations before marriage. Princess Wen Chun is literally an object, a peace offering sent to an enemy nation in order to keep the peace. Wang Zhao Jun by comparison:

Syl: Another one is Wang Zhao Jun. ... then I mean her future is very miserable or awful. ... Mmm, I mean, at that time, the country need a woman can marry with the minory, minority king, or emperor. So she stood out to be a volunteer to do that, to, I mean to to, to find a new life for her. So, I think it is also difficult to do and difficult to be a real person, a real human being.<sup>47</sup>

The feature which distinguishes the truly successful heroine then, appears to be her ability to recognize situations in which she could act, both in order to fulfill her expected role and to go beyond the circumscribed existence which that role rigidly defines. We do not know how Wang Zhao Jun fared after her decision, but at least she had taken the chance to fashion a destiny of her own choosing.

<sup>46</sup>Although I did not include her in the chart which follows this discussion, the same could be said of Meng Jiang Nu, who flaunts her freedom before the face of tyranny (in the form of the lustful emperor), whose grandiose building schemes resulted in the death of her beloved husband.

<sup>47</sup>Sylvia ZHAO. 22 May 1992. Tape #sk92th-10.

The "Heartwood" of the Heroine:  
Underlying Defining Characteristics  
Between "Successful" and "Tragic"  
Heroines (female informants)

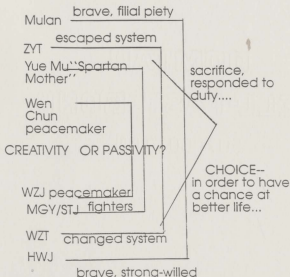


Figure 1.4: The Central Issue in the Narrative Construction of the Chinese Heroine

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored a few of the many facets of the female hero in general and specifically the Chinese heroine. The nature of the heroine's world, the forms of disguise and its function as both a starting point and shaping force within heroine tales, as well as differences in notions about the heroine's identity and purpose among both informants and researchers has been discussed. My scope has all but completely revealed itself - Mulan as a warrior, Yingtai the scholar, Meng Jiang Nu the widowed newlywed and "Lady White" the snake spirit, a prisoner to love, the system and the instability of her own transformative powers - and has demonstrated, I hope, the fluidity of the female heroic construct. My analysis has inevitably excluded certain anomalous characters who could not be brought into my theoretical formation, but these outliers also merit further study. The heroine, either as a motif or as a historical figure is, by virtue of traditional Chinese society, a complex character. In this sense, she is revolutionary and each quiet dissenter adds a new dimension to her general persona.

This essay has been concerned with describing the "heroine's syndrome," and determining the criteria for success and tragedy which overshadow her campaigns. As I have said, the Chinese heroine's world turns upside down, but is restored to its original state of servitude by the demands of the cultural hierarchy, and as such her victory appears to be exceedingly transient. A reinterpretation of "success" and "failure" in light of this consideration would question the victory of the "successful heroine" who returns willingly to the deadening subjugation of her lived world and who risks her life to perpetuate the order and values of that society. The greater victory might actually go to the "tragic heroine," whose refusal to turn back leaves

her figuratively and often literally dead to that world, but who is remembered and "re-owned" in story and song and so is finally freed. Perhaps it is because I have had my own world recently turned "heels upward," and have had to occasionally adopt various guises in order to protect myself and complete my appointed tasks, that my own agenda is so transparent. Now, in learning to master my own disclosure, I want the tragic heroine to have a happy ending. As Kingston writes: "The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. . . . What we have in common are the words on our backs. . . . The reporting is the vengeance " (53). My standard is emblazoned on my mind, not my back, and they are different words. The heroine is not only an avenger, she is a woman and so a nurturer as well. The revenge is in the telling, but all must achieve balance, and so the healing is there as well.

## Chapter 2

# The Sitting Ghost Meets the Trickster: Methodology and Fieldwork Experiences

"Why are you here?

You should go to Vancouver.

Vancouver

or Toronto.

Is better, I think ..."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The most common response I received while doing fieldwork in Newfoundland.

## The Fabric of Analysis

This chapter explores the various frames of narrative and discourse which have shaped my fieldwork experiences and this thesis. With respect to the term *frame*, I am not referring to a rigid structure or parameter. I have been unable, throughout my fieldwork, to confine myself to any particular mode of analysis or theory, though like most aspiring scholars, I respectfully borrow the brilliance of others with shameless abandon.<sup>2</sup> To me, these stories are not static tableaux in need of some suitable backing so that they can be aesthetically displayed. Instead, my "frames," can be likened to embroidery hoops or to a weaver's loom. They are admittedly ephemeral in their application, as I am at best a novice sinologist. They may well be subconsciously ephemeral in their design, however, since if my analysis remains the most prominent feature of this undertaking and not the actual stories and their various tellers, then I have somehow missed the mark. This chapter is about how a young *lao wan*<sup>3</sup> burdened down with a tape recorder, sundry artifacts of cultural baggage and the foreshadowing of an "auspicious cloud"<sup>4</sup> found a living Chinese storytelling tradition

<sup>2</sup>I found that Nai-Tung Ting's *A Type Index of Chinese Folktales* (see the list of Works Cited for the complete citation) proved to be an invaluable tool during my research. Ting provides Chinese analogues to A-T types, adopting standard numbers and titles where possible. In those cases in which a particular Chinese story does not correspond to a recognized type, Ting gives a detailed explanation of the storyline and uses a modified number. He also provides extensive bibliographic notes and annotations. His introduction (7-23) contains a wealth of information for those interested in Chinese narrative research. I also consulted Thompson's *Motif Index* for comparative purposes (though the individual motifs of most of these tales are not given by number, see Donna Wong's "White Snake" in the Appendix) and his enlarged classification of Aarne's *The Types of the Folktale*. As with Ting, complete references for these works can be found in the list of Works Cited.

<sup>3</sup>Literally, "old foreigner," this is perhaps the most common colloquial term in Mandarin for a person who is not Chinese. In the transplanted worldview of many Mainland Chinese, Canadians are still referred to as "foreign friends."

<sup>4</sup>This is an allusion to A-T 400 *The Men on a Quest for His Lost Wife*, and Ting 400A *The Disappearance of the Immortal Spouse*, which are tales about the often tragically mismatched relationships between celestials and mortals. The "auspicious cloud" is the method by which the fairy maiden finally makes good her escape. Some of these stories have been described in the preceding chapter, as their female protagonists fit many of my informants' conceptions of heroic characters.

in Newfoundland.

Stephen Stern maintains that "new" folklore is subject to processes which include:

... 1) the expansion of traditional genres to include new content, 2) the contraction of traditional genres and behavioral patterns which results in a quantitatively different output and 3) the combination of modern cultural forms with traditional genres so as to create a qualitatively different configuration (26).

A Chinese story, like Chinese silk is a beautifully tensile and resilient thing. Like Shantung (Shan Dong) silk it "... can be bleached, scrubbed and generally mistreated, yet it retains its texture, weight, colour and beauty" (Ewen 27). The frames of reference and analysis that I must necessarily impose upon this material are temporary measures. I hope to show, in the continued unfolding of this story, that these tales possess sufficient substance to stand on their own.

According to the wisdom of one of my informants, a definition is a "... song sung frequently by professors."<sup>5</sup> With that in mind, I hope that I can beg poetic

My own personal epic, though far from heroic, did inform my research insights in a bittersweet way, and as such is part of my ethnographic voice. I doubt however, that readers looking for a stirring feminist treatise will find my voice, at this point in my life at least, sufficiently stentorian. It may whisper and it may crack in places, but it remains my own. This is a record of my first major ethnographic and professional journey; it is also in a poignant sense a personal one. To assign tale roles to that closed chapter might be perceived by some to be tantamount to assigning blame and though that may be my right, I will leave the reader to decide who played the cowherd and who the fairy. The final chapter looks at the social position of legendary and contemporary, real Chinese women, and the difficulties faced by each. Spousal abuse never enters into the lived world of the fairy princess, but then again, she is able to make a more graceful getaway.

<sup>5</sup>"Lao WANG." Electronic mail correspondence. 18 Feb 93. The above pseudonym was chosen by this particular informant, whose surname is Wang, as a joke. "Lao Wang," following the previous example, means "Old Wang." He personifies himself as a wise old man with a fragile memory who comes every so often to regale me with stories, as this message of 17 Feb 93 shows (original spelling and syntax preserved): "I am very gald to see you this evening, BUT, I forget All the stories I have! therefore I have to go to library to copy some book. this is an accident, sorry, this evening you will meet a no memory very odl man, gives you separte words, sounds very mudelled, ask beer from you time by time and May be no story at all, any way see you later, Skozar: wow, so disappointing." He

licence enough to continue "same song, second verse," in order to clarify a few additional terms. A *narrative* is defined as a story, recitation, song or other (oral, transcribed or written) text and *discourse* as the way in which that narrative is communicated, both in terms of the storyteller's performance and my reaction to it. Discourse then, in its various guises, corresponds roughly to what folklorists call "texture." I have discussed elsewhere in this work the fact that I found it necessary to widen my definition of *Chinese heroine* beyond the parameters of the female warrior at an early stage of my collecting in order to adequately reflect my informants' ideas. Although most of my informants were not storytellers and did not regard themselves as such, as I have said their range of interpretations located the heroine in a narrative tradition that encompassed more than martial maidens. Echoing the sentiments of several of my informants, both male and female, a medical student succinctly explained:

Lu: In my opinion a hero must be a fighter, ... must be fighting with somebody else. Sometimes use a pen, sometimes use a weapon, but must be a fighter. That's a hero.<sup>6</sup>

The Chinese heroine can be either a warrior or a scholar. Often, she is both simultaneously and sometimes she takes on additional guises as well.

For the purposes of this thesis, I have adopted the expanded definition of texture/discourse suggested by Toelken in his article, "The 'Pretty Languages' of Yellowman: Genre, Mode and Texture in Navaho Coyote Narratives." He maintains that texture can be defined as "... any coloration given a traditional item or statement as it is being made" (157). He states that his position is in contrast to the one offered by Alan Dundes in his classic work on the subject. Dundes rightly states that

is a student in Chemistry, and for all his ageless wisdom, is only five years my senior.

<sup>6</sup>LU Weiyang. 3 June 92. Tape #sk92th-16.



with some "fixed-phrase genres," notably tongue-twisters and certain proverbs: "The more important the textual features are in a given genre of folklore, the more difficult it is to translate an example of that genre into another language ..." (255). For a fieldworker entering a culture with which he or she has a degree of familiarity (which certainly was the case with Toelken among his Navaho informants), the statement that "...the study of texture in folklore is basically the study of language ..." (Dundes 255) is too reductionistic, and fails to consider important nuances of performance that the tape recorder cannot pick up, or that may be lost in the transcription. Although "the problem of the text" as it pertains to my research will be discussed at length in a later chapter, it is important to note that no matter how detailed my notes, how accurate my transcription, or how attuned my ear to the linguistic subtleties of "Chinglish" (Mandarin Chinese speakers' English), transcription is a linear means of representing a synchronous event.

In another article, Toelken suggests that the shape of the (white) North American worldview is conceptualized as a grid, whereas in many Oriental and Aboriginal cultures, it is a circle (Toelken, "Worldview" 282). Cultural worldview permeates our concepts of time and space, as well as our ideas of relationships and reciprocity. A Chinese storytelling session (like many that happen "around the bay"), does not fit well into Western time slots. The most experienced scholar-storytellers find it hard to perform on the spur of the moment, even if their disciplines often demand that they do so.

At the risk of infringing on a topic that I have reserved for later, I have come to understand that the "opening formulas" for many Chinese folktales begin with lengthy regional descriptions, both for the benefit of foreigners and Chinese who may not have travelled extensively in their homeland. Then there is time for tea, questions

and asides from the storyteller, as the wheel turns imperceptibly to the point in time when the adventure begins, usually at a traditional festival. Then the stories come, embedded each within all as the storyteller's mind applies gentle pressure to thoughts that must be translated into words. When those words must be translated again, as my informants often did (both to practice and to be corrected), it is a process that must be somewhat like carving jade. It takes great courage to look into the sacred stone and great precision to bring forth its hidden images, but above all it takes *time*. I was recently told:

When I feel the extremely tired, I found that yesterday was one of my happiest days after I was here. Honestly, I thank you for providing this opportunity to make me talk so much and this is the first time I have talked so much since I came here. You know why I was tired? I guess you may know ... Have you ever tried to talk so long in Chinese? My English grammar and terminology is extremely limited. So I have to organize, bring back and develop at the same time as I was talking and that make me even more physically tired than a soccer game. Just like a soccer game, the more tired I get, the more joyful I feel.<sup>7</sup>

Then there is more tea, laughter and "free talk," and finally, "*song ni hui jia*"— seeing people off home. That last gesture may seem to many Westerners to be incidental, but it is of great importance. Chinese culture is one held together by separation. That may seem paradoxical, but in many respects it is true. Overseas Chinese families are among the farthest flung of any that I have encountered and economic conditions in Mainland China often mean the separation of families for extended periods. "There were only four people in my family when I was young," an informant told me, "but we lived in three different places."<sup>8</sup> Closer still to my own experience, visa regulations are such that young couples and families are often separated for so long that reunion becomes a stress of equal magnitude imposed upon

<sup>7</sup>LIU Bin. Electronic mail correspondence. 28 Feb 93.

<sup>8</sup>LIU Bin. 27 Feb 93. Tape uncatalogued.

an already fragile unit. Seeing someone off a few paces with a smile is perhaps the most important form of thanks. "The first time you did this," Mr. Liu told me as we walked down the hall, "I was very surprised! It is not a Canadian habit." The sun often goes down on a Chinese "hour," but the stories that arise are both bright and timeless. Certainly, it can be argued that when informants "code-switch" into Mandarin for a proverb, either intentionally or when fluency fails them, they are adding texture along the lines which Dundes specified. However, when they modify their own roles within the storytelling session – adopting a character voice for emphasis, or becoming by turns a student asking for verification of vocabulary and a long-suffering tutor drilling me in Dynastic order – they are giving qualitatively different layers of texture to their performances and in order to appreciate them, I must adopt a definition that recognizes their existence. In the next section, I will examine some of the culturally defined layers of meaning and expectation which serve to give slightly different kinds of texture, substance and colour to the research interview.

## Methodology: Crossing the Crooked Bridge

At this point, after looking over my "story" as it presently stands, I can see similarities with my account and that of someone who has been beset by the entity which overshadows this thesis, the *Sitting Ghost*. The *Sitting Ghost* is the Chinese version of the "Old Hag," a supernatural visitation experience which David Hufford has shown to be quite widely known in this province. Like the Old Hag, the *Sitting Ghost* has a (temporary) paralytic effect on her victims, which is often later described as terrifying and physically draining. To break the Ghost's power, the person must move or speak and after the visitation passes, the person's ears must be pulled or

rubbed and her name chanted in order to call back her soul. Maxine Hong Kingston describes this spectre from the perspective of her mother, Brave Orchid, who tells her medical school classmates:

This Sitting Ghost has many wide black mouths. It is dangerous. It is real. Most ghosts make such brief and gauzy appearances that eyewitnesses doubt their sightings. This one can conjure up enough substance to sit solidly through a night. It is a serious ghost, not at all playful. It does not twirl incense stick, or throw shoes and dishes. It does not play peekaboo or wear fright masks. It does not bother with tricks. It wants lives (74).

She eventually succeeds, by means of a series of exorcisms performed with the aid of her fellow students, in destroying the frightful apparition. While writing this chapter, I am struck by the feeling that I too am trying desperately to speak while staring full in the face of my own Ghost.

Diane Goldstein has observed that when relating personal experience narratives which deal with the supernatural, informants often include a considerable number of "unnecessary details," which may help them to distinguish between classes of supernatural and mundane elements (35). With regard to my collection experiences, the reverse appears to be true. I feel that I am able to provide a measure of insight into the storytelling sessions, as well as the tales and histories told. I am also able to pinpoint some of the dynamics that seem to be operating, which I will go into in greater depth in the next section. It is possible that for me these are the "mundane" features, those aspects of my fieldwork experience that fit together most sensibly, especially when I suspend disbelief and enter the storyteller's world. Theories and models which necessitate the *de facto* classification of this material into an established typology but whose analytical template must be adjusted to suit my purposes, are the otherworldly things which I find difficult to reconcile. I therefore draw upon a variety of scholarly applications, selecting those which both enhance and challenge

my understanding of this material.

It has been suggested that folklorists who call themselves comparatists are guilty of belaboring the obvious (Georges 6). Throughout my pre-writing work, it was necessary for me to compare informants' responses and versions of stories (both from the same and different tellers) in order to find similar patterns and themes as well as contrasting features. I wanted to be open to the kinds of stories that I might find, despite being advised by one informant that I should let the availability of first hand printed sources (in this case Qiu Jin's poetry and other works) inform and guide my selection of a topic.<sup>9</sup> I felt that the advance choice of a theory to organize a corpus of material that I was still uncertain of would leave me like the fool trying to rescue the reflection of the "drowning" moon. Though many would criticize this "trawler approach" to fieldwork, I was able to find some fine storytellers who needed to tell their tales as much as I needed to hear them.

Regional pride is a strong source of textural "coloration" in Chinese folklore. By paying attention to certain geographical, sartorial and other details, it is often possible to determine an informant's approximate home region from a transcribed text, without first having to check the tape for linguistic clues (such as intonation contour and certain aspects of pronunciation) which tend to transfer even if the interview is conducted in English.<sup>10</sup> Donna Wong, a second generation Chinese-Newfoundlander from Botwood who will be properly introduced in the next section, related regionalization in Chinese folklore to trends that she saw in some of her most beloved books. It is evident that folklorists are not the only comparatists, as her statements show:

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<sup>9</sup>Mr. TSE. 22 Apr 1992.

<sup>10</sup>Approximately 75 % of the interviews that I conducted among Mandarin speaking informants were conducted primarily in English, except for idiomatic expressions and some terminology. As I have mentioned elsewhere, this was at their request, as they saw it as a chance to practice.

DW: Yes, the stories that I've told you come from a book, and the book's name is *West Lake: A Collection of Folktales* and they come all from *West Lake*. And I'm sure there are books that just have Beijing folkta- folk literature in it and maybe Szechwan and other, different regions. I have another book - which I cannot find - <laughs> of Chinese folktales, and they come from different areas and underneath the title, in brackets it'll have which area they come from. And so, yes, each region does have its particular stories. I've read a lot of Greek mythology and they have one particular story of how the seasons got started where the daughter of a goddess of a, Nature, got kidnapped by the god of Hades. [SK: Ceres and Persephone.] Ceres and Persephone, right. And, depending on which region of Greece you lived in, it depended on the number of seeds that she ate, which represented winter. . . . So in the North, she would be eating more seeds in order to represent the winter, in the south, she would be eating less. So yeah, regionalism has a lot to do with folk literature. In order to explain the different elements of nature which they were created to explain.<sup>11</sup>

Occasionally, in order to help initially reticent informants "warm up," I would say: "Alright, can you tell me a story that you feel captures the spirit of your hometown? Even if there aren't any heroines in it, it's okay." The look of delight on their faces is beyond my powers of description in either Mandarin or English. More often than not, these storytellers worked heroines into their stories, even if these characters were originally somewhat "cloaked" and hard to find. For example, Quanshun Liu (a Ph.D. candidate in biology who originally hails from Fujian province), after describing some of the habits of traditional costume and behaviour of the women in his home region and the (relatively persistent) custom of arranging marriages, told me this story which explains why the architecture of Chenzhou city is particularly distinctive:

LQ: Yeah, in China, there's people always make joke of the ladies who live in the areas in my hometown {Chenzhou, Fujian} near my hometown. That's people call, them *fu yan*, *fu yan* woman. *Fu yan* woman, they are many, they are working hard and also they have a lot of, they

<sup>11</sup>Donna WONG. 22 June 92. Tape # sk92th - 24.

have done a lot of good things for the family. I think people call them *fu yan* woman, that's especially find out not just a good to do the house work, they also good, as good as the men, male, to do all the farming work. So, but this traditional culture they're a little bit strange, quite different from other part of China. And people this they maybe belong to the minon, minonia, minonity? [SK: Minority?] Yeah, minorti(t)y, but actually they are, they AREN'T. They belong to Han. Han. But they just keep their traditional culture. When and now they got some change, but even, even now they still keep most of the traditional way. When young woman and men got married, they also have some people to introduce each other. But mostly all of the marriage controlled by their parents, they have to got the permission from their parents. And then they got married. When they marry, seem to be a little bit, stranger, even that people here maybe can't understand what's happening there. And the boyfriend, what here people call 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend,' but there, they seem to be. When they have the relationship, but actually they don't know each other, they haven't got a chance to talk to each other.

And the, the lady there seem to be so 'sighed' {sad} and they always have their - how to call it - their many well, beaut- well made hat and made of bamboo. And they have their head they have a hou? How to call that? [SK: Like a hood.] Yeah, hood and to cover most of the face. Just let the two eyes. You can see only the two eyes? <gestures as if veiling> there and that I think that you can recognize them just from that kind of, - how to call that? - decoration? [SK: The costume?] Yeah and they always wear the pretty short shirt, but pretty long and large and loose pant. So but their feet, just seem to be barefoot. And now they got some of the lady they wear the shoes, but before, they're always barefoot and go to work and heavy farming work and they're always barefoot. And they can, they work HARD.

And they have this story. Because, before, in the old time, several hundred, maybe a little more than 1000 years ago. And the Chinese emperor, they have, the Chinese emperor always have, has a lot of wife. You know that? Like maybe thirty-six wife and seventy-two just like some of the - how to call that - <chuckles> and so this is a as the, because they got ONE, one as a real marriage wife. Another thirty-six is just *fei zi* [SK: Oh, like a concubine, consort.] And then he has another seventy-two just for him, to enjoy, something like this. But it's a quite different. But at that time, the emperor, maybe every three years and he will send out some of his official, to just look around to find some of the beautiful girl. And send to there. And then the people live in the area, one there's one girl, seem to be, seem to be pretty ugly,

not so beautiful, because the head, this are always, that's have a lot of just like skin disease. So there seem to be no hair! No hair, at, her her head. So this things just like a bare-headed but she don't like people to just look down upon her and cover with the hood and that's all the time. But when, when the emperor send some official out to try to search some of the beautiful girl and most all the girl just hide some place, or running away. And this girl, she also know this bad news, also running away. But her, her sister-in-law just feel so angry because her sister-in-law just look down upon her and she think her is so ugly needn't run away <laughing> because, there's no body will take her to, to the Emperor! And even her sister in law, just so c{r}uel to, to her and use the, big give her a snap? [SK: Beat her?] Yeah, beat her.

But there's some story come up from there! Beat her, and the whole skin of the head, come out. And then the whole hair just come out, almost go, can go reach the ground. Reach the floor! That long! Become so beautiful! <voice slow, soft as if lost in wonder> So, actually she was sent to, was choosed and sent to the Emperor and become of the *fei zi*. Ca - how to call that? [SK: Concubine.] And also become the, the Emperor so like and like her. But she always feel homesick and crying, crying all the time. And just that way. And the Emperor try to com{f}ort her and ask her "What you like to, like me to do for you?" And she just complain about her home and her home is have, has her mother-home, and the house are so <unclear> and the house at the sunny day, the house can see a lot of the sunshine, go through the roof and recall that, it's just like a small egg, around the floor, because the sunshine just go through the hole and on the floor a lot of, they call *ya dan* [SK: Oh yes, a lot of shadows, of the sun.] That's all. In the raining season, they just like the beach, the beaches, when the sea water edge, edge of sea water? Sea water gone? The beach just so, a lot of water still on the ground. So, she just complained about this, the Emperor and then Emperor just, feel so sorry about this and try to, to do something for her and just like to make her happy. And then, because the Emperor, whenever he speak something, it has to be realize and then to be, become true. So the Emperor then, give her the permit, and permit, give her can have one of the palace build in his, for his parents, for her mother. But this lady there, she can't understanding proper, official Chinese, because that one 'building' actually it's dialect is 'the WHOLE, whole province,' or just the whole area, the same sound it's a - in Chinese it's *dū*. *Dū* is one building, but it's old Chinese. And then this lady just repeat the same word, use little bit different, become one *zhou -jiu*. So in China, you can find out the only area it's in my hometown allowed to set the building as the palace-style, no other place. Because of the, later the lady the girl



become the Emperes(t). So that's a pretty powerful. And then, for, to remember her, in other, that's why the area the girls still keep the traditional custom. Yeah, to remember her.<sup>12</sup>

One of my methodological problems – how to get a group of pure and applied science students to “talk-story” – was overcome in part by a thoughtful gift that I received from a classmate in Vancouver. He gave me a deck of playing cards, which portray a rogues’ gallery of famous (and infamous) women from ancient Chinese literature. Each card has a picture of one woman on the face, accompanied by her Chinese name and a short sonnet or description of her exploits. I employed these cards in various ways. Sometimes I isolated only the warriors and asked informants to relay specific stories and descriptions. For other interviews, I gave the informants the entire deck, first asking them to isolate the ones that they knew the most about (whether they were warriors, concubines, poets, etc.), and then to arrange that subset after the fashion of a Rogerian Q-sort: “Arrange these cards according to your personal opinion, from least to most heroic.” We would then discuss their choices and the reasons behind their configuration. I have alluded to the idea that a tragic heroine is one for whom dreams and duty become unbalanced. The overriding concern of the culture is harmony, whether one is looking at Confucian teachings, cosmology or interaction patterns. This was reconfirmed to me during another interview, with a young woman, during which I employed the Q-sort technique previously described. My informant chose seven cards, arranging what I thought to be a motley crew in a puzzling order. First, a warrior, followed by a concubine, then another warrior, then a famed beauty, then another amazon, then a poet and so on. The order appeared to be only nominal and linear, rather than ascending or descending. I made sure that my informant had understood my request. Yes, she understood, but the order had to be equivalent. I asked her what could possibly be heroic about a concubine, a quasi-

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<sup>12</sup>LIU Quanshun. 3 June 92. Tape #sk92th- 15.

legal item of chattel. She told me that that particular woman had been attached to the Imperial Court, but permitted herself to be given in marriage to a barbarian king, thus helping to avert a war. Then I understood. One to go to war, one to be a peacemaker. One to go forth, one to remain. In my informant's eyes, some semblance of harmony had to bind all of her decisions.

I had to be careful not to be seen to directly impose my "agenda" on my informants' stories. The interview process involved a considerable amount of negotiation, that often seemed to me to take the conceptual form of a spiral. We talked around *to* subjects. Most of the time, if I asked direct questions, especially if they were of an analytic nature, they fell flat. Many of my informants chose to work out their analysis within the context of the stories themselves. In retrospect, it seems to me that this phenomenon had as much to do with worldview as with language. Briggs gives the following commentary on this sometimes very frustrating aspect of interviewing:

The effects of my attempts to impose my own metacommunicative strategies on my consultants also made it quite difficult for me to see that they were presenting me with extremely valuable material. . . . My epistemological preconceptions suggested to me, however, that exegesis was properly obtained by asking questions and obtaining explicit answers (58).

Or, as my grandmother once wryly commented: "Seana, the bridges across the lotus ponds in Chinese gardens are zig-zagged because 'devils and foreigners can only run in straight lines.' " With this in mind, I kept my "metacollection" strategies in check. It goes without saying that I used a tape recorder (unless explicitly asked not to do so) and obtained release permission for all interviews (with restrictions in some cases regarding the deposition of the tape), including those which do not appear in this work.

The other aspect of my particular methodology can perhaps best be described

as the way in which I **listened**. As an ESL (English as a Second Language Teacher), observation and what some education theorists like to call "active listening" are part of both my daily teaching repertoire and my normal social interaction pattern. Sometimes, my status as a teacher backfired. I wondered with "hypercorrective" informants whether they were trying to show deference to me as a teacher,<sup>13</sup> or trying to compensate for perceived deficiencies in their second language skills. The exact variables are open to debate, as Michael Agar points out:

...an ethnographer (or any social science researcher) is like a drunk pretending to walk a straight line in a dark room with a gale force wind blowing through it. It's clear that the ethnographer's culture-personality background, though increasingly acknowledged as critical, is a great unknown in ethnographic research (44).

He goes on to say that ethnographers must present themselves honestly, so that they are logical intruders in the the various worlds of their informants (61). I do not know if this represents a methodology worthy of a label, but it does provide a star to steer me by.

The last issue that I want to address with regard to finding my way as an ethnographer is to admit that this exercise was in many respects a "glorious failure." This cautionary tale has the undertones of a confessional. It is as much a sojourn as a pilgrimage, though what blessing I am seeking as yet eludes me. It cannot reach the status of a "real" ethnography, since that "...represents some of both of these strategies (*going native versus keeping one's distance*) as the ethnographer

<sup>13</sup>ZHU Nianqiang, in his M.A. thesis (MUN, 1991), describes this as "proper Confucian piety," (42) and indicates that it is always shown to teachers. I will comment on some of Zhu's other assertions in the next section, but, as a teacher on the outside of the culture, it has been my experience that Chinese students give "face" to an instructor until they are sufficiently at ease with her to let the "tyranny of the red pen" (the teacher's role as corrective authority) fall by the wayside. An alternative explanation for this could be that I see a different side to many students because I am slightly younger than the vast majority of them and as such I am seen as either approachable, or as someone who does not require or merit the typical politeness formulas in their full measure.

moves around the goal of detached involvement" (Agar 51). In my personal world, by trying to be both a scholar and a Chinese scholar's wife, I ventured "too far into the culture" (Agar 47) and I suffered, just as the tragic heroine often does. The female character who pursues, or who is pursued by, her dreams to their full realization usually forfeits her place within the familial and/or social structure. She is victorious over her Ghost, but if she does not allow herself to be pulled and chanted back into her "rightful place," she is lost forever. These issues are addressed from different sides in the first and final chapters of my thesis, but again I draw upon the stories for my own strength. The tragic heroine is often reborn into greater freedom – once she is able to slough off her Confucian cocoon, she becomes a butterfly.<sup>14</sup>

The confessional is only one layer of texture in this particular narrative. It will contain elements of both the realist (van Maanen 53) and the impressionist tale (van Maanen 107). The former will become apparent when I find it necessary to shift into an almost journalistic stance, reporting the facts of my brief visits to other communities in Newfoundland. The latter style is more difficult to define. In my mind's eye, I see Monet's study of a Japanese garden. Hopefully, having stepped back from the lights, shadows, defining points and strokes, I can achieve enough of a sense of distance to let future readers see the waterlilies over the railing of the (crooked) bridge in whatever way they see fit. The confessional tale has the problem of a tendency toward textual artificiality (van Maanen 76), but in this mode the "ethnographer as the visible actor ... is often something of a trickster<sup>15</sup> or fixer ..."

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<sup>14</sup>This is a reference to the outcome of the tragedy of "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai." (A-T 970A: *The Turning Branches* which Ting further specifies as *Inseparable Pairs of Birds, Butterflies, Flowers, Fish and Other Animals*. Both classifications have the same type number.) Yingtai, who disguises herself as a young man in order to become a scholar, falls in love with her classmate, Shanbo. He discovers her identity and feelings too late and hearing that it has been arranged that she marry another, kills himself. Passing by his grave with her wedding entourage, she stops, prays that the tomb should open to admit her and jumps in. The lovers' spirits become two butterflies.

<sup>15</sup>Rachel Gholson, in a seminar paper on Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* looks at this

(van Maanen 76). The fieldworker is not the **only** such character in this story however, but that issue is looked at in the next frame.

## Sojourners, Tricksters and Going Out the Way I Came In

I took my informants' advice. In April of 1992, I returned to my "hometown," Vancouver. Despite a considerable amount of published documentation on the history of Chinese settlement in that city,<sup>16</sup> there wasn't a "folk in Chinatown," at least not for me. Most of my Chinese and Chinese-Canadian friends had moved after graduation, or were busy doing other things. One of my classmates, a close friend, was killed at work shortly after I returned. I managed to compile a fairly representative bibliography and to conduct a few telephone and taped interviews.<sup>17</sup> I left Vancouver feeling that the better part of my fieldwork should be done in the place that I have come to "belong to" – at least with respect to my scholarship – Newfoundland.

There have been numerous studies on the "Chinese community" in this province.

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idea of the narrator-as-trickster. I was quite intrigued by her analysis and chose to apply it to the fieldworker's role as well.

<sup>16</sup>Although I am well aware that there are more, one book that I particularly like (as it is a rather impressive photographic history) is Paul R. Yee's *Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1988.)

<sup>17</sup>I appreciate the time and helpful guidance given to me by Dr. Chou Wan-Yao (U.B.C. History Dept.), Mr. Tse (U.B.C. Asian Studies Librarian), Dr. Pat Howard (S.F.U. Communications Dept.) and Dr. Jan Walls (David Lam Center for International Communication, S.F.U. Harbour Center). Their comments helped to determine the ultimate path of this thesis, although I do not quote from telephone interviews as I cannot be sure of a verbatim transcription. It should be noted that the book which Donna mentioned earlier, *West Lake: A Collection of Folktales* was edited by Jan and Yvonne Walls and that all of the tales have motifs noted. Donna inadvertently let me know this before I even had an opportunity to look at the volume, indicating that there were some "funny little letters and numbers" in the Appendix.

They include general overviews of varying lengths (Hong et al. 1975, Yu 1986), detailed, historically based studies concerned with immigration, settlement, employment patterns and how these processes were affected by racial discrimination (Hong 1987), foodways (Liu 1991), and jokes (Zhu 1991). At the risk of turning this chapter into an imperial "eight-legged essay," I will not summarize their work here. For the benefit of future researchers however, I wanted to cite a representative sample of extant scholarship.

I have placed the term "Chinese community" in quotation marks because I feel that Caucasians often mistakenly assume that all Chinese (regardless of their particular place of origin), tend to form a single, collective and homogeneous group. This is not the case. In her research on foodways, Liu found that within the student population at M.U.N. alone, there are at least three groups of Chinese students, in addition to the Mainland Chinese who, for the most part, come here as graduate students. These other groups include: second generation Chinese-Newfoundlanders who are the children of the first immigrants to this province and whose parents mainly come from the counties of Taishan and Kaiping in Guang Dong (Canton) Province, students from Hong Kong, Macao (*I would also add Malaysia*) and students and researchers from Taiwan (66).<sup>18</sup> Each of these groups seems to hold a slightly different "operational definition" of what it means to be Chinese. One Mainland Chinese student told me that the "Hong Kongers" **should** be reliable sources for information on Chinese customs, as they kept up many traditional practices. The trouble was that "they aren't real Chinese."

Ward suggests that these "emic" definitions are quite complex, and are linked

<sup>18</sup>Another group that should be delineated are students who are the children of recently arrived immigrants from the counties mentioned above. These children were born in Guang Dong, but learned English in elementary and high schools here, such as Wanda CHANG of Corner Brook, whose father operates the Jade Garden Restaurant.

to regionalization and to educational (and, with the changes brought about in the P.R.C. with economic reform, I would add *socio-economic*) status:

Chinese of all social strata carry in their heads ... "homemade models" of the ways of life of other Chinese. Some of these models refer to regional differences: on the national level, they include culturally recognized stereotypes for the customs and temperament of people from this or that province ... The various stereotypes are linked with differences that are by no means purely imaginary, though whether or not they conform in detail to unbiased observation is another matter. In other words, cultural differences within the Chinese population exist, Chinese perceive and make use of them ... It seems likely that these quite frequent responses argue the existence of a view that differences between the educated and the uneducated equate with different degrees of knowledge of what are felt to be the proper Chinese cultural forms. "Being Chinese" is thought of primarily in cultural terms, people are not simply classed as "Chinese" or "not Chinese," but are graded as more or less "really Chinese" (186 - 187).

I asked Donna for her opinion concerning these "homemade models," and she confirmed their existence. In her words:

DW: Well, the Chinese community here in Central Newfoundland is basically established of older Chinese people, older Chinese families, who are the who were among the first Chinese to come into Newfoundland. And so the community has developed friendships and they've because "birds of a feather flock together." So they've been here for awhile, thirty years or more. My mother's been here for forty, so it's, they're established here, this is where they've lived most of their lives. In St. John's, the community of Chinese has different sections. You have the older, established because my mother knows friends out there and in Mount Pearl and they've been there for just as long, if not longer. And then you have the newer, the newer group of Chinese that come from Hong Kong and Mainland China. And the people from Hong Kong and Mainland China seem to differentiate between themselves.

In the Chinese Church,<sup>19</sup> there are, the majority of the Chinese Church are made up of people from Hong Kong and Malaysia, and there are

<sup>19</sup>The history of Chinese involvement with various churches, notably Gower Street United, is an interesting one. I refer readers to the report by Jane Hong et al., (1975) which states that the United Church was instrumental in establishing English classes (72). Of course, the other side of that is the argument that the churches were merely another agent of assimilation, a general theme underlying

some Mainland Chinese. But a lot of Mainland Chinese don't have the Christian beliefs and they don't go to that Church, and therefore, they tend to not interact with each other. You mentioned in conversation with me that there are different parties for the Chinese New Year, like there was one, by the Chinese, the Newfoundland Labrador Chinese Association, and then there was another one for the church itself, and then there was another one by the ... Student's Association. And so that's three different ones, and so you don't get the people interacting together, you get them in their own little groups. If there are these little groups in the culture... they look at the differences between themselves, but they don't look at the similarities.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, this is one aspect of my research in which the colour of my skin might have proven advantageous. Zhu discusses the difficulty which he experienced in trying to elicit anecdotes from the "CBCs" (Canadian-born Chinese), because they did not seem to want to say very much to him (42). They appeared to want to have little to do with their ancestral ties to the Mainland, or to participate in verbal genres which accentuated those ties. From my discussions with Mainland students, it is my opinion that his statement (framed in the context of paying respects to one's ancestors): "...the average Chinese, whatever his ritual observances, usually feels little or no defensiveness toward other Chinese. He knows that he will not be the object of disapproval or contempt, whether or not the spectators share his customs" is only showing one reflection in this two-way mirror (30). While Mainland Chinese may not express open rejection of other Chinese ethnics in their presence, there is a

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Hong's dissertation. Mr. William Ping, (who among other distinctions should be recognized for being quite possibly the most interviewed Chinese resident of St. John's) talked about the role of the Women's Auxiliary at Gower Street in putting on English classes and a monthly "Chinese Social Hour." There is now a Chinese Church on Newtown Road (in which the services are conducted by laypeople in Cantonese, Mandarin and English), but prior to that Gower Street (where Mr. Ping attends church) had a Chinese minister. Of this appointment, Mr. Ping said (with a degree of both regret and mild chagrin, which changed to a chuckle when he later mentioned the pastor's dismissal): "Not enough the people. Four, five years ago, we had, we figure out you know, couple hundred people in town. We build up the Church and build up our own congregation... We use the Gower Street Church... We had the minister, we hire the minister, unfortunately, didn't do the job... We lose all the congregation, we haven't got much." Bill PING. 18 Aug 92. Tape #sk92th - 33.

<sup>30</sup>Donna WONG. 22 June 1992. Tape #sk92th-24.



definite, guarded awareness in social interaction that is maintained and perpetuated on *both* sides.

Toelken holds an understandably cynical view of Western cultural assimilation.

He says:

Our few successes have been called "apples" by the Indians, "bananas" by the Orientals and "Oreos" by the blacks, each has the appropriate colour on the outside, but is white on the inside. When the Anglo-American moves among other cultures, he expects at most to *add* its language and some of its customs to his own vocabulary; however, he expects them to *convert* to his world view, and essentially to give up his own ("Worldview" 268).

Although I had never heard "CBC" used in this context before, I was familiar with the epithet "banana." It appears to be almost as widely travelled as the stereotypical overseas Chinese to whom it refers. While I was studying in Changchun, the capital city of Jilin Province in northeastern China, the local students at Jilin University had a special name for the Chinese Canadians in our group – *xiang jiao ren* – banana people. Changchun used to be called Xin Jing (New Capital) and was the political and cultural center of the Japanese-run puppet kingdom of Manchukuo. As might be expected, woe betide the banana who looked slightly Japanese, the nicknames took on a rather different tone. Donna is painfully aware of the connotations of that label and she tries walk the horizon between her birthplace and her motherland. She, like the heroine, is aware of the need for balance and the consequences of losing it:

DW: I consider myself a Chinese first. I'm very regionalistic. I consider myself a Newfoundlander, and then I'm a Canadian. Well, it's like you see another, I see another Chinese person, and I, I tend to have more of a convers- I tend to initiate a conversation with another Chinese person that I don't know than say with a Caucasian that I don't know. So it's – [SK: Why do you think that is?] With me? With me it's because I'm trying to, I believe that I've lost a lot of my culture, and I'm trying

to strengthen it, reinforce it, perhaps expand it. No, not perhaps. I AM trying to expand it ... Okay, I worked during, <pause> I worked during registration as a, as a helper. During registration week, I would direct people into the proper lines, tell them what to do, if they need help. <interference> I saw a lot of people ... but I also saw a lot of Chinese students that were here for the first time. And I would help EVERYBODY, but I would probably initiate a conversation, like a five minute conversation, with the Chinese students rather than maybe the first year students coming from Fogo who were Caucasian. And that is because they're here straight from China or Hong Kong, and they have the culture which I have lost. Because in trying, in growing up, in a community with Caucasians, and me being the only Oriental, in order to feel accepted, I have, I have, I sort of ignored my own culture, during my younger years, in order to, in order to FEEL like I'm more Caucasian and try to be accepted into the community of my peers, It didn't HELP, I'm sure my peers would have accepted me if I retained my culture, but as a young person, I did not have the foresight to see this. ... I want to try to expand my own, by interacting with them. And sometimes it helps. Sometimes it doesn't help because they're trying to - THEY'RE TRYING TO come in, they're trying to absorb the Canadian culture and sometimes they want to absorb <voice quickening, as if passing off remarks> it so much that they don't want, they just want to forget they're Chinese culture. But sometimes it helps, because as I give them some of my Canadian culture, they'll give me some of their Chinese culture.<sup>21</sup>

I am sure that she would take exception to Stern's assertion that, since she was born into the New World, she does not know "the tensions of the Old World, and her folklore is restricted to those forms in which she participates within the context of North American culture (16). I told her once that I thought that she was the perfect rendering of East and West, since for me, "the sun rises and sets" on our friendship. She replied: "Seana, you are the reverse of a 'banana.' That makes you an 'egg.' White on the outside, yellow on the inside." Before I could feel the glow of cross-cultural solidarity however, she continued: "... and a little cracked."

Newfoundlanders have often told me, "It's not *what* you know, it's *who* you

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<sup>21</sup> Donna WONG. 22 June 1992.

know." In my experience, the same holds true for Chinese society. As a foreign expert teaching English in China, I found it impossible to get anything done without the aid of a *jie shao ren* – an introduction person. Once I had all my necessary working papers with their variously emblazoned red seals however, letters of introduction could precede me in my travels, providing (of course) that these same epistles had been written by the *right* people. I had been warned at the outset of my adventures in this province that because I was white, female and unable to speak Cantonese, the "backstage pass" that I had with many of the Mandarin speakers (as an ESL instructor) would not enable me to move in the local, established community. I reasoned however, that while I would likely not be fortunate enough to have an "introduction person" throughout the course of my entire sojourn in Newfoundland, I could begin – in the middle – in Botwood, with Donna.<sup>22</sup>

I have called my fieldwork experiences in Newfoundland a "sojourn." I use that term for two reasons: 1) to express the fact that my collecting trips were too short for me to develop a thorough understanding of the communities that I visited and 2) to try on a stereotype "for size" from the inside out. Before I began my fieldwork, I was familiar with the Chinese-American sojourner complex as the "Gold Mountain dream," the so-called hope supposedly cherished by countless overseas Chinese that they would someday return to China, if not as "conquering heroes," then at least as successful examples of what could happen when Confucian ethics were patiently applied in a New World setting. Likewise, when I first arrived in Newfoundland, I cast young, would-be expatriate Newfoundlanders in a similar light. I had been told that I was coming into a culture that traditionally looked toward the sea. When the sea failed them, or in her way held back her bounty because they had somehow failed

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<sup>22</sup>The timeline behind my fieldwork resembles a Chinese story with regard to its synchronicity. While I was planning my fieldwork trips, I was also doing extensive collecting among Chinese students on campus.

her, the youth turned toward the Mainland, Toronto-bound.

When I mentioned these impressions to Donna, she cringed. She had been talking about how Botwood was slowly dying. We were walking through the town on a glorious azure afternoon. As we passed the graveyard, I noticed, through the signs of unkempt life that persisted in growing up through the cracks, that the dead had not changed their otherworldly view. All the stones still faced the sea. I thought of my classmate. Just graduated, third day on the job. Two weeks before he was to go study in Taiwan. He had spent part of his childhood in refugee camps in Vietnam. All he wanted to do was to leave Vancouver, to get out of the Promised Land. I recalled one day when, as we were driving, we got lost and he stopped at a house to ask for directions. He was threatened and chased away. The old man thought he was a Chinatown gang member. We sped away. "But he's Chinese *too*!" Vince said, a tear in his eye. I shivered in the sunlight. I remembered the name of the place he was now - Oceanview Cemetery. The sojourner experience, I decided, was not a dream, as some still maintain (Langlois 83). It was an unfortunate necessity that the Chinese immigrants to this country lived with, but did not use to define themselves or their place in Canadian society. The lived world of the dominant culture has its various press gangs, whether they are comprised of the merchant class, absentee authorities, blue eyed Ghosts, or even those who had perhaps "served their time" under them. The human spirit, once so shanghaied, has nothing to do but stowaway on a Land-and-Water Ship.<sup>23</sup> Whether that then becomes part of the dream, I am not sure. I suggest, as others have done, that it becomes a part of life and so part of the folklore.

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<sup>23</sup>A-T 513B. A similar image was presented in a paper given by Martin Lovelace at the 1991 AFS/FSAC-ACEF meetings in St. John's. In "Whittled Chips to Sailing Ships: Unlikely Vessels and Magic Voyages in Newfoundland Legendry," legends were examined in which certain people had the ability to take magical voyages back to their homeland. The "magic" was seen as tied to material freedom, a pattern which bears a strong resemblance to the sojourner idea.

Although he focuses on folktales which originally centered around communal festivals, Ban Seng Hoe demonstrates how folktales are transformed, reflecting the concerns and values of the generation telling them. Thus, in an established community where festivals are no longer considered to be of great importance, tales are shorter and more realistic, having fewer supernatural elements than tales collected from early immigrants, for whom folk beliefs and the observance of tradition would have been of greater significance (28, 33). Venetia Newall discusses a tradition in which Anansi arrives on the scene in a banana boat. She says: "Symbolically, this describes how the traditional stories came with the immigrants . . ." (55- 56). She goes on to suggest a parallel between this immigrant folklore and the stories people tell about gigantic spiders hiding in fruit shipments. This image is similar in my mind to the traditions that early Chinese immigrants may have brought with them which were distorted through what Anthony Chan calls the "pattern of strength" created by the sojourner image. According to this idea:

...one of the most enduring images, almost always taken without question, and basically untested, was the "sojourner" image. This image assumed that Chinese nationals coming to Canada viewed their lives in terms of being Chinese nationals and citizens (Chan 37).

Chan goes on to say that, unlike "banana," "sojourner" never entered into the lexicons of either the overseas Chinese, or those living in the motherland (38 - 39). Chan therefore suggests, as noted earlier, that the sojourner complex was exoterically superimposed upon Chinese in North America, and that they never adopted it as a cultural ideal.

I felt that I needed to conceptualize my fieldwork experiences in a way that would be feasible in a Newfoundland context and that would be fair to all sides. The sojourner is a culturally-loaded image here, the ultimate embodiment of the

dangerous, wandering stranger. The one who "belongs to" nowhere. As an aspiring narrative researcher, I wanted to choose a term that was less sinister, or at least slightly more neutral. I finally settled on a character who, "as a figure in whom opposites meet, ... the 'personification of ambivalence'" (Hurley 75), would enable<sup>24</sup> me to look at the intersection of myself, the various Chinese communities and my research through the eyes of one who is both wise and foolish, since knowing when to "play the fool" ("I'm not quite sure how that one ends ...") is an important skill for the fieldworker (Agar 53). The trickster<sup>25</sup> is both good and bad, but as a character remains free to move through multiple story-worlds.

In terms of Western literary scholarship, conventional analysis of the trickster has suffered from what Doueihi calls "a discourse of domination." She elaborates on this idea using native American narratives as an example:

In this discourse, Western conceptions of the sacred and profane, of myth and literature ... are used to frame Trickster particularly and native American culture generally, so that Western civilization can see the primacy or degeneracy of the other – and so justify its own domination and its own discourse (292).

If this is true, then my analysis (coloured as it must be by my own worldview) is doomed to fall prey to the weaknesses inherent in this kind of ethnocentric dom-

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<sup>24</sup>This word probably best captures the trickster's power. He is not a character with omniscience or great physical strength, but he is one endowed with a kind of catalytic potential. I address this idea elsewhere with regard to the deceptive power of disguise in heroine tales. By donning other garb, the heroine in effect becomes, at least temporarily, a trickster figure. True believers in the purity of the heroic ideal might challenge me on that statement, but most storytellers who are well versed in the trickster tradition within the folklore of their respective cultures see this character (and other characters who assume these characteristics) in much the same way that Yellowman views Coyote: "... less as a trickster per se and more as an enabler whose actions, good or bad, bring certain ideas and actions into the field of possibility ..." ("Yellowman" 155 - 156).

<sup>25</sup>For other perspectives on the trickster based on a variety of narratives, see Li Lienfung, "Chinese Trickster Tales," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 6 (1950): 69 - 81 and William A. Wilson, "Trickster Tales and the Location of Cultural Boundaries: A Mormon Example," *Journal of Folklore Research* 20.1 (May 1983): 55-66.

ination. My application of the trickster model to this problem is therefore invalid from the beginning *except* that I am taking the position that all participants and non-participants<sup>26</sup> in this research took on the trickster role at some time and that if anyone was the dangerous stranger, it was me.

I found that my fieldwork sojourns were physically and mentally exhausting in the sense that I was not able to give myself the recovery time that is normally associated with travelling to a faraway land. Agar, in contrasting his different fieldwork experiences (in India and New York) says:

In ethnography of the traditional sort, there is a period of travel and adjustment to the field setting, followed by a long period of time in residence. After the fieldwork, one travels home and readjusts to the home culture. When you work in your society, you cross the line between field and home often and rapidly (52).

In my particular case, although the impact of both the reverse culture shock that I experienced upon my return to Canada from teaching overseas, coupled with the adjustment to the homogeneous and close-knit structure of Newfoundland society appears to have subsided, I was affected by the opposing forces of the internal culture shock that I experienced in the field (I can recall incidents in Botwood where even in Donna's presence, local people speaking to her would refer to me in the third person) and the external backlash of my spouse's cultural adjustment when I came home. Yet like the trickster, I wore a laughing mask and even though I was not exactly triumphant within my personal sphere, I was sufficiently "enabled" to continue with my work.

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<sup>26</sup>In her article, "Participation in Tradition," Kay L. Cothran addresses the fact that tradition bearing should not be seen as a dichotomy of active versus passive, but should be looked at as a continuum. Thus, the informant who chooses not to participate in traditional genres (either in the researcher's presence, or as a general statement of a difference in personal aesthetic) is still providing valuable (if paradoxical) "non-performance" data (446).

Quantitatively speaking, when compared with my collecting forays around campus, my trips around Newfoundland were not particularly successful. Klymasz speaks of the changes in folklore that take place as different ethnic groups establish their niche in a new society as a process in which:

...many of the old folkways are abandoned without any massive resistance; others linger on; still others are reexamined, revamped and reactivated in an effort to depict, validate and perpetuate the community's sense of ethnic loyalty and identity (138).

It is possible that the insular nature of Newfoundland culture, combined with the geographic isolation and difficulties faced in travelling at certain times of the year, have had an impact on the storytelling traditions of many of the established Chinese families here. It may have been because of the brevity of my visits, but I did not find the phenomenon described by Ban Seng Hoe in his work among the Chinese of Quebec City, where folktales (such as excerpts from *San Guo Yuan Yi - The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) were used to reinforce clan or family ties - despite the fact that there are a relatively limited number of surnames used in Newfoundland - and mutual trust (105 - 107). Then again, I was looking for heroine tales and one does not find what one does not dig for. Several young people (including Donna and Wanda Chang), told me that their parents had never told them any of these "ancient stories," and these children were only made aware of this aspect of their parents' traditional knowledge after its expression was triggered by an outside stimulus, such as a translated book of folktales, a film - or a would-be folklorist.

I visited Botwood, Grand Falls, Bishop's Falls, Baie Verte and Corner Brook. Donna indicated that the connections that she had were through her mother and that the further one moved away from Botwood, the more tenuous they became:

DW: There are a lot of Chinese in Grand Falls, but then again, there's some in Fogo, some in Gander. The ones that I interact with most is



with Grand Falls because of the short distance, and because my mother knows them better.<sup>27</sup>

This proved to be the case, although sometimes the draglines of the web were rather fragile, even close to home. I believe that this might have had something to do with the fact that Donna is the youngest child in her family and therefore, even though she is no longer a child, she may not carry great weight as a negotiator. She is a co-editor on the student newspaper at the university and her sense of filial piety and deference to elders is occasionally overridden by her investigative instinct. If she comes upon a "lead," it takes considerable resistance to shake her resolve, as an incident at the start of my second trip into Central Newfoundland demonstrated. But, like the trickster with the power of magical travel, I am getting ahead of myself.

The highlight of my first trip to Botwood, in late June of 1992, was recording Donna tell "The White Snake,"<sup>28</sup> a wonder tale that I had first heard her tell in October of 1991. After recording her the first time, I shared with her some of the things I had discovered about the story during a course annotation project. A comparison of the two performances shows the later one to be much fuller. She seems to have incorporated many features that appear in other printed versions of this story. That is my fault. When I told her that the heroine, "Lady White" (a transformed snake spirit who took human form for the sake of love), was portrayed as malevolent in some texts, she could not believe that her heroine could be so slandered and demanded to read these libelous tales. We were housemates at the time and she marched resolutely upstairs with an armload of open books. I saw her the next day, ashen-faced and rather subdued. "I can't believe Lady White was bad," she said. That was the first of many times that I have cursed the iconoclastic nature of my discipline.

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<sup>27</sup>Donna WONG. 22 June 1992. Tape #sk92th-24.

<sup>28</sup>This story is discussed in another chapter and a full transcription appears in the Appendix.

I have stated that adventures often begin during festivals. The Flower Service is a memorial service that takes the place of the *Qing Ming Festival*<sup>29</sup> on the first Sunday after the Regatta in St. John's. I did not need to go to Fogo, as the woman I wanted to interview, Mrs. Huang, was in the Health Sciences Center. I checked with her son to ensure that a visit would not be too taxing and, like Anansi gone a-courting, dressed in my best with flowers in hand, went to visit Mrs. Huang. After considerable coaxing on the part of her nephew, Colin Au, she let me record two folktales in dialect, which Donna later translated. Colin suggested that I go to Grand Falls and interview Highland Lee. Intrigued, I broached this idea to Donna. "Gonna be hard to do," she said, "he's deaf."

On my second visit to Central Newfoundland, Donna met me in Bishop's Falls and thought that perhaps we should go see the Chows. Unknown to me, old Mr. Chow had been a passenger on the same bus. Donna thought that he might be a good person to interview. Prior to this, she had tried unsuccessfully several times to arrange a taped interview with Mr. Fong in Botwood, which he always declined.<sup>30</sup> She ran up to Mr. Chow's car as he was pulling away from the bus station/convenience store. A rapidfire exchange in Taishan followed and undaunted by his initial rebuff, Donna said that she would translate for us. He agreed. We followed Mr. Chow down the road to Chow's Restaurant, where we were met by a younger male relative. This man's English was also limited and he had forgotten most of the Mandarin that he had been forced to learn in school. Donna was not willing to give up, but finally, with

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<sup>29</sup>The "Shining Bright Festival," or "Tomb Sweeping Day," is also called "Double Nine," as it takes place on September 9th of the lunar calendar. "Double Nine," in Mandarin - *jiu jiu* - is homophonic with the word "old" that is reserved for inanimate objects. In some parts of China, *jiu jiu* appears to have evolved into a kind of "Grandparents' Day." For a story about "Double Nine," and other auspicious "double number" holidays, see Rosemary Agonito's "Three Chinese Legends," in *New York Folklore Quarterly* 28.3 (1972): 234 - 240.

<sup>30</sup>Mr. Fong passed away during the preparation of this thesis. Though I was unable to hear his stories, I enjoyed visiting him with Donna and recognize that, with his passing, an important part of the oral history of the established Chinese families in this province is now silent.

a wave of his hand, old Mr. Chow disappeared behind a beaded curtain into another room of the restaurant. The other fellow gave us a gold-toothed grin and custard cones. The Beijing version of the "brush off" involves watermelon. We left, having been led down a gravel road in lieu of a garden path.

At Donna's suggestion during my second trip, I arranged to go to Baie Verte. I learned from the shuttlebus driver who met me in Grand Falls that "the Jim's Restaurant in Baie Verte was an institution." The Jims were kind and friendly hosts and after the interview, invited me to a splendid lobster supper. I was beginning to form the idea that a symbiotic relationship existed between local Newfoundlanders and Chinese immigrants, an alliance that because of economic conditions, had managed to make a separate peace in the face of racial discrimination and mistrust. By the time I went to Corner Brook, I was at the end of the dragline, but this idea persisted and was reconfirmed.

Once again listening to local Newfoundlanders, it seemed to me that Chinese businesses were among the most resilient. Their comments will serve as a frame for two of my most vivid experiences. I was reluctant to do the "restaurant shuffle," I envisioned language problems and people who would be too busy "doing business" to talk to me. But as a taxi driver told me, "The Chinese restaurants are the only ones that seem to last here." So I decided to try it.

Bill, a student at Sir Wilfred Grenfell College (whose acquaintance I had made on the bus) had some interesting things to say about the Chinese of Corner Brook. He spoke highly of Mr. Francis Chong, who was in charge of the Science Stores at the College. Mr. Chong was unfortunately away during the time of my visit. Bill thought that I should try to find him, as it might be difficult for me to make connections by myself. "It's a really close culture. You hardly ever see them out

shopping or anything," he mused. I **thought** that I had come prepared for that.

I went to the Seven Seas Restaurant. A sign, in peeling neon plastic letters proclaimed: "Fresh Halibut and Cod Tongues." I walked in, and tried to speak to Mr. Au Wing, who waved me away contemptuously. His (head) waitress attempted to establish communication.<sup>31</sup> A female patron suggested that I try the Lucky Star, saying that the people would certainly speak to me. That did not hold true, but perhaps my "star" was in the wrong heaven that day. I think I can draw a parallel between my research into the role of the maidservant in the heroine tale and my fieldwork experiences with regard to the role of locals, especially women, in helping me to make connections on this trip. With Mr. Chan, Mr. Au, and the Changs, the initial contact or intermediary was always a local waitress.

Bill also told me in passing: "They're really proud of their culture. You see paintings and literature and decorations up in their businesses." Most of the restaurants I visited in Corner Brook had the atmosphere of Western diners. One restaurant however, was different. Upon entering the Jade Garden, I immediately saw a sea-blue fan to the left, then passed under an intricate lattice-worked moongate and entered a softly lit seating area. On the top of the wall that separated the kitchen and cash area (which was lower than the ceiling by about three feet), sat the four Heavenly Taoist messengers, the three angels and Lao Shou Xing, the God of Longevity surrounded by an abundance of longevity peaches and smiling benignly

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<sup>31</sup>In his thesis, Zhu discusses the belief among Chinese restaurant owners that local waitresses were needed as "customer solicitors" (20). Although this sounds like they served fare of a kind beyond the parameters of a restaurant licence, he is referring to the fact that waitresses served as linguistic and cultural liaisons between the Chinese restaurant owner and the public. Mr. Chan, owner of the Dragon Restaurant in Corner Brook, told me that he learned most of his English from waitresses. Employment regulations and entrepreneurial visa requirements aside, local women working in a Chinese eating establishment could also serve to validate the enterprise in the eyes of other Newfoundlanders. These young women were employed and their presence might render the cuisine and surroundings slightly less foreign. That in turn would be good for business.

down on all proceedings. By the time I arrived at the Jade Garden, I was feeling quite dispirited and so I appreciated the liminal perspective afforded by the moongate. I felt like I was entering another world. I met Wanda Chang, a student at Memorial who works in the family business during the summer. The most interesting thing in this interview is something that is not immediately clear from the tape. Her father sat across from us, a rather bemused look on his face. He suddenly began (after I had switched off the recorder at Wanda's request because her father, she said, only knew 'bits and pieces,' of the story of Meng Jiang Nu)<sup>32</sup> to tell a most animated tale, gestures and all. He kept Wanda entertained for some time. She translated the story onto the tape, and said that Meng had died by hitting her head against the Wall in remorse after learning of her husband's death and the gods took pity on her, and crumbled part of the Wall. She promised to collect more stories from her father, and bring them to me in St. John's. I was impressed by several things during this interview. Her father seemed to enjoy telling the story and Wanda said he was not given to doing such things. Although the setting took on an air of magic for me, the interview was frequently interrupted by the persistence of reality. Wanda handled telephone orders, questions and minor kitchen emergencies with grace and never lost her composure or her train of thought. When it was time to go, I wished them "ten thousand years," and left, recalling something Donna had mentioned about the disposition of the Chinese heroine:

She remains calm, there's another characteristic, she remains calm, she thinks. A female hero in Chinese literature thinks. Very calm. Very practical, very organized.<sup>33</sup>

I thought of Hua Mulan, who had served in the army for twelve years in the

<sup>32</sup>This story is discussed in the first chapter, although some of my informants rejected Meng as a true heroine because in most versions (except the one given by Wanda's father) the tears that cause the Great Wall to collapse also mark her as a weak woman.

<sup>33</sup>Donna WONG. 21 June 1992. Tape #sk92th - 23.

place of her father and upon her victorious homecoming, became a daughter again. A Chinese heroine can fight with a sword or a pen, I had been told. I wondered if young women like Donna and Wanda did not cross between these worlds more often, perhaps as frequently as every semester break.

This chapter will literally end the way it began. When I was leaving to get the taxi to Grand Falls on my second visit to Botwood, Donna's mother was visibly upset. Not because she would miss me, but because she objected to the door I had chosen for my departure. I had come in through the garage, I was leaving by the front door. After talking to her mother in hushed tones for some time, Donna said: "It's okay. You can go that way, because it's your second visit. The first time a stranger visits a house, he has to leave the way he came. Otherwise it's bad luck. Ma forgot - this is your *second* visit." It appears that I made a fine trickster. I was such a figure of "social ambiguity" (Hurley 75), that Donna's mother did not recall that I had darkened her door once before.

As this chapter draws to a close, I am aware that I may have been tricked by the duplicity inherent in the trickster model itself.

For what is a story but a trick played by the discourse of the Trickster? The illusion of a clear, unique, referential meaning, given by the rhetorical body of the discourse is precisely what Trickster, as discourse, is able to conjure forth, with our unprotesting and willing occlusion (Doueiri 298).

But, as the ubiquitous t-shirt popular a few years ago proclaimed in rather small script: *If you can read this, you're too close*. Likewise, if you've followed me this far, I suggest you fell for it. The mask is off and I am laughing. Quietly though - as befits a scholar.

## Chapter 3

# The Pot Still Simmering: An Exploration of Chinese Storytelling

When yellow millet is on the fire and nearly finished cooking, the time for this dream is about to come.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This quotation is taken from a short story written by Pu Songling. He refers to it as a "sequel" to another tale in which a destitute hero has a brief glimpse of Paradise through a fleeting dream. Pu says of the original story: "A well-known Tang Period classical tale in which, with the aid of a magic pillow offered by a Taoist, the poverty-stricken hero experienced a lifetime of wealth and fame during a dream. He fell asleep as an innkeeper on the road to Handan after setting a pot of yellow millet on the fire and awoke to find that it was still cooking." Pu's tale involves a young scholar whose vicissitudes devolve from fame to infamy and who upon waking opts for the life of a recluse and disappears into the mountains.

## Sailing In and Out of Years

To begin this chapter on storytelling, I have chosen to introduce a story that is not part of my research collection, but which I feel aptly illustrates the difficulties that I face with this subject. Entire theses have been written on the issues of storytelling and performance.<sup>2</sup> I must confine myself to the space of a single chapter, although among my research contacts and acquaintances there are storytellers to whom I could also devote a monograph length study.

The title of this chapter and its opening quotation are a reference to A-T 681 *King in the Bath; Years of Experience in a Moment*.<sup>3</sup> In this kind of tale, the hero falls asleep and has a dream in which the fortunes of his life, good or bad, are played out. Upon his (occasionally rude) awakening, the hero discovers that time has played him false – he feels that he has been away for ages – yet finds that in reality only a few moments have passed and his evening meal is still cooking. Ting suggests that these tales arise in response to the notion that “heaven” and “hell” are not spiritual waystations external to the soul, but are in fact contained within each individual. This idea is common to much of Eastern religion and mythology, but as Ting goes on to say: “Whether such a hypothetical story appeared first among the Arabs or the Chinese is moot and unimportant” (“Years” 186).<sup>4</sup> He also mentions some West Asian variants of this story that have an interesting twist. A man is transformed into

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<sup>2</sup>For example, see Gerald Thomas, “Stories, Storytelling and Storytellers in Newfoundland’s French Tradition: A Study of the Narrative Art of Four French Newfoundlanders,” diss., Memorial University, 1977.

<sup>3</sup>In Ting’s system, this type has the same number but omits reference to the bathing monarch.

<sup>4</sup>Ting and others have stated that the finest examples of these stories are based on Taoist rather than Buddhist legends (“Years” 205). This assertion appears to be in keeping with the contrasting cosmologies of the two belief systems, since the ultimate goal of Buddhism is the transcendence of both pleasure and pain and as such, if the Buddhist hero had a dream, he would not be moved by the apparitions and experiences that he had while in the dream-state.



a woman because of lack of faith, or for belittling women's suffering. Although the transformation lasts but a few seconds, the man feels that he has been subjected to the hardships of the fair sex for a lifetime:<sup>5</sup>

A man doubtful of the Almightyness of God fell into a pond while performing religious ablutions and came out a naked woman. After years of marriage and two children, "she" descended into a pond and was back at the same spot, still doing the same ablutions as a man. The miracle naturally sobered him." (Ting, "Years" 198 - 199).

As I said, I was not able to collect an example of this story during my fieldwork, but I did mention an episode from *Water Margin* (also called *Outlaws of the Marsh* or *Shui Hu*) to one of my informants which contains this tale type. The hero, Song Jiang, tries to escape from some guards and hides in a small temple that was originally built by the Song clan, but which has fallen into a state of disrepair. He vows that he will rebuild it if the gods make his pursuers overlook his hiding place. His vigilance weakens and he falls asleep. He dreams that he visits the court of the Queen of the Ninth Heaven. She designates him as "Star Lord Song," and presents him with some mystical books which indicate, through a series of clues, the loyal members of his earthly company who will aid him in his mission to bring justice and peace back to Shan Dong. My informant (who admits that he is not a good Taoist), did not think particularly highly of this device, but paid a degree of grudging respect to the time-honoured ruse:

[SK: Can you remember about that dream?]

LB: Oh, yeah, I can't remember very exactly, but he was chased by the guards and he hide in a temple of his home I think ... Then he met the Goddess and she, he showed him a book. <pause> ... I think the name of the goddess is *Jiu Tian Xian Nu* ... Very high! [SK asks about other examples of dream journeys.] I think you can see very similar stories in

<sup>5</sup>For a commentary on other types of transformations, see Robert E. Allinson, "Early Literary Forms of Self-Transformation in the 'Chuang Tzu.'" *Tamkang Review* 17.2 (1987): 97 - 108.

every Chinese ancient novel. When they, I think when the novelist find very difficult to explain something, they will create a clue of something like that. For instance if you read the story of the *Three Kingdoms*, and some of the story, about the Zhou Dynasty ... At that time we have a lot of countries in China, and usually the king always dreamed that the god show them something.<sup>6</sup>

When masterfully done, the effect of these tales can be quite spectacular, such as Maurice Sendak's classic children's story, *Where The Wild Things Are*. If taken merely as a convenient device for patching together disparate plot elements however, the result is unbelievably absurd. Instead of leaving listeners and readers feeling at once haunted and relieved that the hero returns from his adventures finding that his supper "was still warm," they are abruptly brought back to the present by the sound of a shower faucet.<sup>7</sup> I realize that although I must wear seven-league boots in order to cover adequate ground in this chapter, the journey will be brief and the time and distance travelled over will unfortunately be negligible. I will be trying in vain to jump off Buddha's hand,<sup>8</sup> but even so, borrowing again from Sendak -

"Let the wild rumpus begin."

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<sup>6</sup>LIU Bin. 13 Mar 93. Tape #sk93th-40.

<sup>7</sup>I do not claim to be either an expert in popular culture adaptations of narratives, or an avid fan of the show, but one of the worst redactions of this tale type is probably the infamous *Dallas* episode in which Bobby Ewing was found in the shower, his year-long hiatus having been "just a dream."

<sup>8</sup>After the Trickster Sun Wu Kang (the Monkey King) is accused of disturbing both Heaven and the Dragon King of the Eastern Sea, he is subjected to all kinds of punishments. These various tortures only serve to endow him with new magical powers and he becomes more of a nuisance than ever. Only the Buddha, who challenges Monkey to jump off his hand succeeds in controlling him. Monkey jumps as far as he can, but lands in the same spot on the Buddha's palm. The Buddha turns his hand over and Monkey is imprisoned under the Five Mountains for several hundred years.

## Folk Literature: Trying to Let the Genre Out of the Bag

Early in Chapter 2, I introduced one of my informants by way of a footnoted electronic mail message that he sent me. In that message, he jokingly tried to convince me that as an old man in his dotage, he had managed to forget his entire repertoire and needed to go "copy some book." That evening we had scheduled an interview, during which time he would amaze me with a "story from every Dynasty." He arrived breathless and about a half-hour late. He came tripping into the Folklore graduate room, carrying an overflowing bag of books. He had indeed been to the Arts and Culture Center Library, which accounted for his lateness. Two of the volumes were Chinese folk stories, which he intended to refer to periodically over the course of our interview. The other twenty odd were slim hardcovers that all looked alike. They opened back-to-front and were written in old script. I picked out a few characters and laughed. They were *gong fu* novels, a sort of "Harlequin Romances featuring Bruce Lee" sub-genre which are published in great quantities in Hong Kong and Taiwan. These books are quite popular among Chinese male students, although they are somewhat abashed to readily admit it. I laughingly confronted my friend. He smiled sheepishly, and placing the telltale volume back with its mates, said: "No, no, no. This not folk-story. This very good book." He seemed a little disconcerted that I had "found him out," however, because although he set himself to the task that he had promised, he was a little off his stride. By my reckoning, we are only up to "Great Yu Stops the Flood." We have a good 4,000 years to get through yet.

The preceding anecdote was intended as a way of showing one informant's conception of "genre." The vast majority of my informants seem to share an "enlightened

layman's" view common to many Westerners. "That's not true, it's just folk-story," appears to be a well-entrenched, working dichotomy. There are a variety of reasons for this. They have to do in part with the traditional separation of the educated elite from the uneducated masses, as well as the drawing and re-drawing of the "official Party line" around the folklore of the P.R.C. over the past several decades. I have come to the conclusion that similar to the "homemade models" of what it means to be "really Chinese" discussed in the previous chapter, there seem to be just as many models of (to use a little "scholars' cant") "what means Chinese folk literature." Any discussion of storytelling must therefore begin with a discussion of genre.

Dan Ben-Amos has dealt at length with some of the problems inherent in established models of generic classification. I first encountered the often tenuous and threadbare connection between "genre" and "theme" (Ben-Amos 278) while I was attempting to find types for several of the stories in my collection. For example, I initially characterized Liu Quanshun's "Hooded Beauty" story given in the last chapter (he did not actually title it) as belonging to the Cinderella cycle (A-T 510)<sup>9</sup> or perhaps Ting 403A\*\*<sup>10</sup> *The Suffering Girl and the Gift of Beauty*, which Ting places with A-T 403, *The Black and White Bride*.<sup>11</sup> Instead, the closest that I managed to come was Ting 1699A *Misunderstanding Because of Ignorance of Another Dialect*,<sup>12</sup> which falls under the heading "Lucky Accidents." This type (despite the fact that it

<sup>9</sup>Ting's citation omits the character name *Cap O'Ruskes* from the Cinderella type.

<sup>10</sup>See A-T *The Wishes*.

<sup>11</sup>In a paper given at a conference before his Type Index was completed "Do Chinese and Japanese Folktales Belong to the Same Regional Tradition? - A Chinese View" (Folk Narrative Conference, Helsinki, 1974, Memorial University Folklore and Language Archive Xeroxed Article File, 1 - 12), Ting argues that Chinese folktales contain a greater number of versions that are common to the international tradition than do Japanese, and as such he adopts the convention of assigning them A-T numbers (2). It should be understood that, unless otherwise noted, all tale types used in this thesis have been determined with the aid of Ting's *A Type Index of Chinese Folktales*. Types that do not have A-T counterparts have been denoted as "Ting numbers."

<sup>12</sup>See A-T 1699 *Misunderstanding Because of Ignorance of a Foreign Language* and A-T 1699A *Criminal Confesses Because of Misunderstanding of Dialect*.

captures the reason for Chen Zhou's distinctive architectural style) is usually reserved for humorous court cases in which the accused gets off on a linguistic technicality. By the same token, a purely functional approach to the study of Chinese folklore is also riddled with problems, even if I honestly tried, as is the fashion with that approach, to confine myself to purely "emic" terminology (Ben-Amos 284). Not only do I admit that my Chinese is not yet sufficiently refined to be able to handle certain nuances,<sup>13</sup> but those nuances themselves appear to change from teller to teller. One of my informants, a Ph.D. in English, while trying to express the contrast he saw between "folk" and "serious" literature, told me that, "White Snake" is just a folktale and Pu Songling's *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi/Strange Tales From Make-Do Studio* is literature, classical literature.<sup>14</sup> While the "White Snake," a well-known folktale dating back to the Tang Dynasty<sup>15</sup> seems to have had its origins in oral tradition, it was one of the first examples of Chinese folklore to become the subject of serious scholarly investigation (Wang 838). Pu Songling's 17th century work was based primarily on stories that he collected from a variety of sources, including interviews with "the folk." He appears to have had some appreciation for the delicate "politics" of fieldwork:

There is one tradition that when he wanted to hear unusual stories he would keep tobacco and tea ready at his door and invite country folk to tell tales, later making use of these materials (Lu 255).<sup>16</sup>

Like the Brothers Grimm however, Pu may also have been guilty of "sanitizing" large

<sup>13</sup>For example, while "shen qi gu shi" (literally "strange, marvellous story"), corresponds fairly closely to "märchen," "tong hua" (literally "children's speech") is used to describe tales such as those written by Hans Christian Andersen, whereas I at first took it to denote nursery rhymes.

<sup>14</sup>WANG Xuding, 24 June 92.

<sup>15</sup>For a history of the development of this folktale, see Wen-hung Hsu's two articles: "The Evolution of the Legend of the White Serpent, Part I: The Earliest White Serpent Story, *Pai She Chi* in the T'ang Dynasty," *Tamkang Review* 4.1 (1973): 109 - 127; and "The Evolution of the Legend of the White Serpent (Part II): 'Thunder Peak Pagoda' a Story of the Ming Dynasty, 1368 - 1644," *Tamkang Review* 4.2 (1974): 121 - 156.

<sup>16</sup>Li Hongran (in "Lu Xun and Hu Shi on Fiction: Historical Research Versus Textual Criticism," *Chinese Literature* (Spring 1986): 204 - 211) states that Lu Xun's *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* represents "the first systematic account" of this material (205).

parts of his collection (Wang 836). Another informant had this to say about the author of the *Strange Tales*:

Li: I think the first it is a folk story. Then, some writer, get the information in the everyday people. Then they add some, some romantic something, add some romantic ... and write a whole story, made story grammatically and romantically ... [SK: So is that what Pu Songling did.] Li: Yes, I think Pu Songling ... should like the bee(n), go to the flow—go to the countryside, to to pick up the honey. I think he should interview with the peasants. He can, I don't think he cannot, cannot CREATE by hisself, this story. I think it's a kind of folk story, it's from the ... during a long long time.<sup>17</sup>

The difference that marks Pu Songling's piece as "classical literature" according to Xuding appears to lie in the fact that from the start, Pu Songling intended to write a **book** that would tell a story on two levels. His fantastic tales of ghosts, fox-fairies, unfortunate dreamers, tragic lovers and lecherous priests and officials were intended as a pointed commentary on both the good and the bad of human (or, more precisely, Qing Dynasty) society.<sup>18</sup> The book, a written text, is by Chinese reckoning a form that is certainly more "fixed" or "stable" than an oral tale like the "White Snake" was until it too took on written form and became a subject for commentators, authors, playwrights and finally grist for the propaganda mill.<sup>19</sup> However, given the ancient classical tradition of annotating with extensive, and often incompletely referenced borrowing, the "stability" of this form can become rather questionable as well.

<sup>17</sup>Li Zhaopeng. 5 Aug 1992. Tape #sk92th-30.

<sup>18</sup>On the one hand, his human characters are often trying to escape from the confines of daily life and routine. On the other hand, netherworldly beings crossing the threshold into earthly existence (and often earthly love) find temporary respite from the emptiness of the ethereal plane. When the two forces meet (clandestinely or otherwise), the results are often tragic. In the end, as with most Chinese stories, corruption and deceit come to naught, although in Pu Songling's time (as now), the outcome of wickedness was not often such a swift retribution as he seems able to bring about.

<sup>19</sup>This is an extremely encapsulated synopsis of the "snake's progress." For a fuller account, see Whalen Lai, "From Folklore to Literate Theatre: Unpacking Madame White Snake," *Asian Folklore Studies* 51 (1992): 51–66.

As the preceding discussion has suggested, comparing a collection of printed stories to a single **usually** or **frequently** orally transmitted tale is not sufficient for the establishment of a generic classification. If indeed Xuding's assertion regarding the differences between "elite" and "folk" literature are representative of a typical Chinese "model:"

[SK: asks about connections between folk lit/classics/ drama] XD: Yes, there are strong connections. Well, classical literature, now if we just talk about novels of the novels we mentioned, Three Kingdoms, and *Shui Hu* is called *Water Margin*, and *The Dream of Red Chamber*, *Hong Lou Meng* and those novels, if we talk about those novels and they are probably a kind of combination of folk literature and classical literature and serious, well, **SERIOUS LITERATURE IS CLASSICAL LITERATURE**. Well, this is novel, but in Chinese literature, classical literature or novel is only a small part of it. And a poetry is more important. Of course, and poetry in in Chinese literature is serious literature, and it's totally different from folk literature ...<sup>20</sup>

then Eberhard's statement has a high degree of validity:

What traditional Chinese literary historians regarded as "literature" consisted of works cast in final form allowing no changes and they excluded from "literature" all those works which customarily were subject to deliberate changes, leading to different versions ("Notes" 27).

Eberhard does not, however, provide an example of a "literary form," and I am left like the man waking to the sound of his bubbling porridge – wondering what can be taken from the immediate environment to use as a concrete reference point. Going back to Xuding, and taking into account the particular tendencies of Chinese as an isolating language – its script, grammar and phonemic features (Hanan 14) – there is one form that by virtue of its austere construction withstands the tyranny of the editor – the poem.

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<sup>20</sup>WANG Xuding. 24 June 1992. Tape #sk92th-25.

According to Ben-Amos:

The basis for the categorization of verbal art into prose and poetry is the concrete, physiological reality of speech. . . . Metric speech constitutes an ontological system objectively distinct from prose (290).<sup>21</sup>

Based on my research interviews, this idea appears to be a key concept. Poetry and prose are also two distinct systems of expression within the Chinese language. Hanan feels that a novel can be classified as more or less classical depending upon the degree to which it deviates from an "ideal" poetic structure (15). Those deviations are in turn dependent upon the setting and characters. The more informal the setting (the woods as opposed to a courtroom) and the more down to earth the characters (a traveller arguing with an innkeeper rather than a magistrate), then the more vernacular and colourful the language. Following this, the novel *San Guo Yuan Yi/Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is considered a classical novel because the style of the language remains fairly true to a poetic rendering. *Shui Hu* by contrast, with its motley crew of one hundred and eight gallants from all social strata, uses more degrees of freedom in its description and dialogue. As might be expected, prefacing a story with a brief aside about the *Three Kingdoms* is (for my informants, at least) a way of injecting a little class and historicity<sup>22</sup> into the proceeding. Some of my informants set their heroine tales against that venerable backdrop.<sup>23</sup> For the most part however, informants indicated that they preferred *Water Margin* and Pu Songling's *Strange*

<sup>21</sup>This statement, though perhaps elegant in its simplicity at the time, does not hold up well in the face of more recent work in the area of "ethnopoetics." I regret that I did not have either the time or the skill required to ethnopoetically transcribe my interviews. Two sources of information on this technique are: Heda Jason, *Ethnopoetry: Form, Content and Function* (Forum Theologiae Linguisticae 11. Bonn: Linguistica Biblica, 1977) and Dell Hymes, "Particle, Pause and Pattern in American Indian Narrative Verse," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 4.4 (1980): 7 - 51.

<sup>22</sup>Lu Xun estimates that *The Three Kingdoms* is approximately 70% fact and 30% fiction, however, it is difficult to figure out the exact proportions of romance and history in each episode (399). Lu also traces the historical underpinnings of *Shui Hu* to court records from the time of the Fang La Revolt (1129 - 1121 A.D.) during the Song Dynasty (*Brief History* 170 - 171).

<sup>23</sup>E.g., HAN Shao Qiong. 15 Feb 1992. Tape # sk92th-05.



One of Xuding's comments alerted me to an interesting feature of Chinese folklore. The poetry/prose dichotomy is rendered completely invalid and artificial if considered only as an expression or manifestation of mutually exclusive systems. In Chinese narratives, poetry and song verses – *cantefables* – frequently appear at key turning points in the action. He alluded to an example of this in the course of describing how all of the characters had nicknames which reflected their diverse personality traits and how he learned this extensive roll call by heart from childhood:

XD: ...for example and *Shui Hu* and this book there are 108 major characters in the story, I can tell, well EVERYONE'S name, and their nickname. And I know every major event in that thick book and I can retell most of the stories that are in that book, to, well to children who are younger, who are younger than I was at that time. ... Well in *Shui Hu* and Song Jiang of course is the head, of that group of people there and Song Jiang's character is called "*Ji Si Yu*," means 'the rain is in time,' when, well, it's dry, and if, why he has that nickname? Because he is generous to everyone, and he just give out you know, his money or his to everyone who is in need. That's why he called well, 'the rain in need,' or, 'rain in time.' And well, there are some other stories in in the book, that some characters and they are not as generous as that...<sup>24</sup>

He then offhandedly configured the Chinese generic universe in a particularly insightful manner. He focused on an early episode of *Water Margin* in which a small band of exiled brigands have decided to relieve the Imperial entourage of the burden of the Emperor's birthday gifts in order to shore up the coffers of their mountain stronghold. Bai Sheng, "the Daylight Rat," disguises himself as a peasant heading for the village in order to sell his two vats of wine. The others disguise themselves as date merchants and buy one of the vats. They freely partake of the contents in full view of the exhausted Imperial troops. Finally Yang Zhi ("the Blue-Faced Beast"), commander of

<sup>24</sup>WANG Xuding. 25 June 1992. Tape #sk92th-25.

the retinue and soon-to-be member of Song Jiang's company, relents and allows his men to buy the other vat. The second vat is drugged and the "merchants" transport their booty back to Liangshan Marsh. According to Xuding, not only is this a place where poetry and prose overlap, but also it is an example of how *Water Margin* succeeds in making fluid transitions between "folk" and "serious" literature. The poem, though most often recited unsung, is taken from a well-known folksong.

XD: Well, this is novel, but in Chinese literature, classical literature or novel is only a small part of it. And a poetry is more important. Of course, and poetry in in Chinese literature is serious literature, and it's totally different from folk literature. And folk literature, well, when poetry becomes ballads, and you can only find them in dramas or in plays - ... Well the combination of this two I would just give you the example in Shui Hu, and very famous poem,

"Chu he ri dan wu  
Han di he sha tu  
Shei zi pan dong can  
Li bi jie xing ku,"<sup>25</sup>

And this is a very famous poem, but in Shui Hu, it becomes a kind of ballad, the story when when, well they tried to to just catch the treasures, the golds, and some officials tried to send to the Emperor, but those people tried to catch this. And one figure just tried to pretend to sell, sell wine in hot day, and he just sung this poem and when he just songs in that book, more or less just more close to the common people.<sup>26</sup>

The interspersing of poetry within prose is not a new development in either Chinese or Western folklore traditions. Eberhard mentions that *hua ben* (prompt

<sup>25</sup>The English translation of the above is given in my edition of *Outlaws as:*

"Beneath a red sun that burns like fire  
Half scorched in the fields is the grain  
Poor peasant hearts with worry are scalded  
While the rich themselves idly fan!"

(Shi 253) The theme of workers' or peasants' inadequate victuals is also a theme in an article by Herbert Halpert, "The Cante Fable In Decay," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 5.3 (1941): 191-200.

<sup>26</sup>WANG Xuding. 24 June 92. Tape #sk92th-25.

books) often contained either cantefables or other poetry ("Notes" 1). He goes on to hypothesize that these poems served as cohesive mnemonic devices, and that (as has been pointed out elsewhere) they remained essentially intact while the "story" might have undergone numerous redactions in the course of printing and distribution (3).

I am not certain as to whether I can rightly call the verses that appear in Chinese stories "cantefables," as the melodies appear to have long since been forgotten and therefore the verses are not sung. The lack of widely known melodies surviving into the present day however, does not diminish the cantefables' original importance. I will continue to use that term on the basis that many of the cantefables that have survived in Western narratives are also no longer sung.<sup>27</sup> For example, I have found that while children can recite the taunting refrain of the Gingerbread Man as he runs away from his various pursuers, they are at a loss as to its tune, unless perhaps they have heard a "version" of it on a commercial recording. Along the same lines, at all of the storytelling sessions that I have attended in either Mandarin or English, when the storyteller comes to a part in which a song is called for (e.g., the heroine is described as singing a lament), he or she signals the transition to poetic form "... And a wistful song could be heard coming from the princess' garden ..." followed by the song's recitation at a slightly more measured pace than the rest of the narration. I asked Liu Bin about this and then pointed out that a poem seemed to come up in almost every major transition in *Water Margin*. He recited and then commented upon a poem which Song Jiang composed upon the chalky wall of a tavern while he was

<sup>27</sup>Since the original preparation of this thesis, I have been told that there are a number of examples of cantefables in Newfoundland tradition that are still sung. I am not familiar with this particular body of material, though it provides several interesting points for future comparison. My main point is that it appears to be often true that a verse survives while its tune may be somewhat less enduring. For example, a person who is judged to be a fine storyteller but who cannot sing well may decide to tell a story with a spoken cantefable. If that story survives in local tradition, it is possible that later generations may not know the original melody of the cantefable but be quite familiar with the rhyme.

drunk.

[SK: mentions part of novel where Bai Sheng sings the song on the ridge, asking: When storytellers tell that part of *Shui Hu* do they sing that song, or do they just say the verse?] LB: They just say the words. [SK: I see.] Yeah, I think nobody know how to sing the song. [SK: Was that song part of a folksong at one time?] ... Yes, I can remember part of the song. But it's something like, it's something between a song and a poem, you know. And I think the song, or the poem, in *Shui Hu* is very popular. [SK: ... Does that help people remember the particular episodes?] No, I don't think so. ... [SK: How would you characterize the poem that Song Jiang writes on the wall-] Yes, I can remember the whole poem. [SK: Oh, can you say it?] It's very famous ... I have to say it in Chinese <laughs> it's okay? [SK: That's okay.]

Zi you cheng gong jing shi  
Zhang cheng you xuan mou  
Xia rou meng hou ru feng xiu qi  
Ye hu zhao ya ren shuo  
Bu xing ren xuan jia na kan  
Pai zai jian rou pai zai jian re shen  
Xian zai jian rou, xin zai wu  
Piu feng jiang hai man jie shu  
Ta nian rou sui bing ren zhi  
Ban tiao Huang Chao bu zhang fu<sup>28</sup>

LB: I think, he was exiled, and he stayed in a small restaurant and he was drunk. Then he wrote the poem on the wall of the restaurant.

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<sup>28</sup>Diligently translated in Shi:

Since childhood I studied classics and history  
And grew up shrewd and intelligent  
Today a tiger enduring in the wilderness  
I crouch with tooth and claw, intent.  
Criminal's tattoo upon my cheek  
An unwilling exile in far Jiangzhou  
I shall have my revenge someday  
And dye red with blood the Xunyang's flow.  
Heart in Shandong, body in Wu  
Drifting I breathe sighs into the air.  
If I achieve my lofty aim,  
No rebel chief will with me compare.

(Shi 629-630).

Which means he thought himself a tiger, and the tiger is very active in the mountain. He thought he was a tiger, and stay in the plain, in the ground and (s)he was very upset. But, (s)he was a very promising man and (s)he said she will become a hero someday.<sup>29</sup>

The Emperor's men discover this nicely scanning graffiti and Song Jiang "the Timely Rain," an unassuming civil servant, is from then on marked as an insurgent and later - as a hero.

I realize that if I crisscross the "generic streams" many more times I will be compelled to "pay the ferryman," but I would like to reiterate a point that Hymes makes with respect to songs that appear in native North American myths. Although *Water Margin* may be a novel based on various legends and quasi-historical sources, it is **not** a myth. The poem that Song Jiang writes on the wall however, becomes a major turning point in his development. The meaning and symbolic function of the poem appear to be analogues to the patterns in the material that Hymes discusses. Hymes states: "Songs occur in myths as manifestations of identity and particular power" (127). I have already indicated the significant role as source material that *Water Margin* plays in storytelling. The poems appear to function in a way that I can describe as being analogous to that of cirrus clouds. Just as those latter formations signal an upcoming change in the weather, the cantefables usually signify that the Emperor or some other corrupt official is going to have to "come down" handsomely, or face the storms of the Timely Rain.

That still leaves poor old Lao Wang holding the bag of *gong fu* novels. His hurried and slightly embarrassed remark literally "told volumes" about his own particular tastes and generic distinctions. He drew my attention to the fact that he not only enjoyed popular literature, but also that he did not consider what I studied

<sup>29</sup>LIU Bin. 13 Mar 93. Tape #sk93th-40.

("folk stories") and what he read to be of equal value. In his estimation, gong fu novels were "good books" – exciting, readable *mature* fiction – whereas folk stories were "... tool Mam used to threaten baby and the drug for insomnia."<sup>30</sup> Despite my being somewhat sensitive to his rather belittling verdict, I cannot discount popular literature as both a source of folklore and a reworking of it (Danielson 131-132).<sup>31</sup> As with poetry and prose connections however, my informant's conceptualization of these forms as discrete entities is off the mark. As C.K. Wang points out:

The presence of some oral or popular elements in a particular version of a story does not indicate that it belongs only to an oral tradition. Though it is true that in some cases (oral and written or popular and literary) develop independently, more often than not, they influence and draw on each other (838).

Before leaving this discussion of genre, I would like to address another issue related to Chinese folklore and popular culture. Popular tradition is not merely confined to the reworked plots of gong fu novels; another major influence on the spread of popular traditions has always been drama. Popular theatre is a dynamic connection between the otherwise (and perhaps intentionally) disparate folk and elite cultures of China. Folk stories – such as episodes from the "White Snake" – have been turned into Beijing operas, which though an inherently "high" form in itself, possesses the flexibility to go from the opera house to the park with fewer trappings, but otherwise little difficulty in the transition. The "folk" have always had access to classical literature through the medium of the stage. It seems that the good actor, like the good storyteller, is able – however briefly – to reconcile the differences between the peasant, the poor scholar and the not-always-so nobleman.

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<sup>30</sup>"Lao WANG." Electronic mail correspondence. 18 Feb 93.

<sup>31</sup>Dr. Graham Shorrocks also discussed these ideas in an informal seminar given to students and faculty of the Folklore Department, "Popular Culture and Dialect Literature," 24 Feb 1993.

Almost all of my informants described Chinese folklore as "folk-literature." I would like to tentatively posit this as a generic meta-category which aptly reflects the ties between Chinese oral and written tradition. I will return to this idea at length in the fourth chapter, but I want to make it clear that it is not necessary to be *alphabetically* (or in this case, *phonemically*) *literate* in order to have an impressive active and inactive repertoire of *folk-literature*:

It would be a mistake however, to see the literature of China as the property only of those who could read. On the contrary, much of the material from the histories, legends, novels and stories was constantly being brought before the wider public – even in the villages – through the medium of the performing arts, of storytelling and popular theatre (Ward 193).

Ward, like Eberhard, did much of her field research in Taiwan. She describes the transformation that takes place in a village in preparation for a theatre festival:

A normal population of between three and four hundred, occupying a dozen houses and up to thirty boats, swelled to something over eight thousand with at least five hundred boats. The single, drab street along the shore of a fairly remote, small island was suddenly filled with lively, colourful, noisy smelly (incense and the smoke of fire crackers) processions, hawkers and peddlers of several kinds, street performances by lion dancers and an enormous proliferation of dubiously legal, wildly exciting forms of public gambling. Three teahouses appeared overnight ... All this and the organization, preparation and expense involved are what a villager has in mind when he invites you to visit him, "when we next do plays" (194).

Liu Quanshun's hometown was also highly esteemed as a local center for theatre and opera. He told me this as a preamble to the long, multi-episodic narrative, "The Building of Loyang Bridge."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup>The entire story appears in the Appendix, for a version that closely resembles the one given by Liu Quanshun, see Bertha Hensman, *More Hong Kong Tale Spinners*, (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1971, 37-82. For additional information about *Gaan Yin P'u Sa* (and her other various manifestations within the Chinese female pantheon) see Henri Doré S.J., *Researches*

[SK: How frequent are the operas in the country side?] LQ: Oh, it's pretty frequently, because they might, they have the different holiday. So, different village, they always like to celebrate the different holiday and the holiday, they always like to have their opera show there. Different villages, they always like to challenge each other, "Oh, this time, we have the better opera show here!" And other village, they will follow in that. So they always try to, this time I, we got the many famous opera, come to show here and the other village will invite better, better one. But they spend a lot of money, that's right. They spend a lot of money, but the money is come from every family. They like to do that, just challenge each other.<sup>33</sup>

Several of my informants who would fit von Sydow's definition of "passive bearers of tradition,"<sup>34</sup> became much more animated and eloquent when I asked them to tell a story from a film, even though the structure of those tales is both quantitatively and qualitatively different from stories that are based on books or family tradition. The most noticeable difference (aside from length) is the predominance of explicit "stage directions." An excerpt from Donna's later telling of the "White Snake" demonstrates this. The movie, she told me, came out on Chinese television at approximately the same time as she read the book:

DW: Okay, suddenly a rainstorm comes, comes up, the young man jumps down, runs, and they both, Lady White, Little Black and the young man, run towards the same boat. And he allows Lady White and Little Black to share the boat with him, to get to wherever they're going. And they began to talk. And the, the <pause> proprietor of the boat starts singing a lovesong. And so at this point the story would cut off, and we jump ahead in time. And we just go past. And so Lady White and the young man have now been married, they've fallen in love, they got married.<sup>35</sup>

For the most part, informants who did **not** characterize themselves as storytellers

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into *Chinese Superstitions*, (Trans. M. Kennelley, S.J. Vol 6. Taipei: Ch'eng Wen Publishing, 1966. Originally published by T'Usuew Printing Press, Shanghai, 1920). 134-233.

<sup>33</sup>LIU Quanshun. 3 June 92. Tape #sk92th-15.

<sup>34</sup>See C.W. von Sydow, "On the Spread of Tradition," *Selected Papers on Folklore*, ed. Laurits Bodker (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1948, 11 - 43.)

<sup>35</sup>Donna WONG. 21 June 92. Tape #sk92th-23.



said that it was easier and more interesting to tell a story from a movie:

[SK: Do people ever tell stories from movies?] Sun: Yeah, There are some movies, they just come from *Liao Zhai*, so some people who watch this t.v., or film, will tell the story to other people who haven't watch it. [SK: Are those stories as interesting when you tell from the movie, as when you tell from the book?] It's more interesting, tell from movie. Because some film maker add something into it! ... They don't change it, basic thing.<sup>36</sup>

By contrast, Liu Bin, the universally acknowledged storyteller among my informants said that storytelling was: "Easier from book, I think. ... Yeah, you have to describe everything!"<sup>37</sup> Of his military heroine tales, the one told from a movie contains distinctly "medium dependent" image frames and the comic dialogue is quite disjointed, similar to a "guess you had to be there" joke.<sup>38</sup> His shorter tale, a synopsis of the exploits of Qin Liang Yu, is concise despite his problems with "lexical density."<sup>39</sup> The imagery in this story is also much more developed. In describing the method by which Qin's troops scaled the mountain – hooking together their barbed lances to create a ladder – his hand gestures and eye orientation gave the impression of the creation of a ladder to victory,<sup>40</sup> and I could almost hear the click of the hooks and rings:

... Her army is called "White Bar Army" because the gun of her soldiers

<sup>36</sup>SUN Yongmel. 3 June 92. Tape #sk92th-14.

<sup>37</sup>LIU Bin. 27 Feb 93. Tape#sk93th-39.

<sup>38</sup>The full transcript of this story appears in the Appendix.

<sup>39</sup>Gillian Bennett describes this feature as a way to tell if a contemporary legend has become part of an individual's established repertoire and as such is not being told as something which the person considers to be true (25-26). I address this point later in this chapter, but there are of course, obvious problems in applying this criterion as a defining parameter of truth-value with respect to the stories that I have collected since the vast majority of them are told in the informants' second language.

<sup>40</sup>Hrdlicková discusses the ways in which Japanese storytellers use gaze and gesture to simulate props, such as swords, in their stories. For example, by concentrating on a certain point, storytellers can give the impression that they are looking at the point of a drawn sword (202-203). Liu Bin's gestures were very similar; he put one hand over the other in an upward motion and hooked them together to simulate the lances, which he described as guns that were not for shooting. He looked up as if to see the steadily ascending ladder.

are made by a white wood. ... And there is a small hook in front, in one end of the gun and there is a ring in the other end of the gun. And when the soldiers climb the mountain, the first one, the second one can use the front hook, to put the front hook into the back ring and they climb, all the soldiers one-by-one climb the mountain.<sup>41</sup>

Differences in narrative styles as a result of informants coming to terms with different plots – or systems of mental sequencing (Hanan 19) – need not be subjected to any kind of arbitrary aesthetic judgements, I am merely trying to point out that films and other popular culture media may be one way for some (predominantly passive) tradition bearers to “talk-story.”

Returning to my opening metaphor, it is possible that A-T 681 takes such an “eternally fleeting moment” because all of the events which comprise the fullness of the hero’s life are necessarily interwoven. As this section ends, I am aware that I have already strayed into both the next section and the next chapter. The question of genre has proven to be problematic for scholars who are far better equipped to deal with it than I. I have tried to present a generic classification that addresses both the issues of the oral-written interplay of Chinese folklore and the distinctions that most of my informants seem to make between folk and classical literary forms. In addition, I have tried to avoid splitting hairs, since unlike the Monkey King, I do not possess the magic breath to transform the hairs into more splendid configurations,<sup>42</sup> and as Ting says, “I realize that what stories belong with what genres may vary from scholar to scholar” (“Chinese View” 2-3). The Chinese have a proverb which basically runs “Three shoemakers make one clever man.” The idea is that genius is a cooperative endeavour built up out of the combined honest efforts of several individuals. If this discussion appears to be somewhat lacking in absolute truth, I

<sup>41</sup>LIU Bin. 27 Feb 93. Tape #sk93th-39. The full transcript of this story appears in the Appendix.

<sup>42</sup>When Monkey is in difficulty, he often plucks three hairs from his head, blows on them, and they become three copies of himself, or whatever magical beasts or objects he requires.

suggest that my informants and I (being almost all scholars and therefore comfortable with hammering of a more existential sort) were unable to cobble together a definition that we completely agreed upon.

## The Real Artistry: Daring to Paint the Dragon's Eyes

According to the general consensus of my informants, a good storyteller must possess at least two qualities: passionate interest and a facility with language. In the last chapter, I alluded to the fact that regionalization can cause profound changes in narrative content, such that geographic features, expressions and other subtle details can be so modified as to create regionally distinct stories. Although stories may not be judged aesthetically according to their provenance, storytellers are often initially assessed on the basis of their *lao jia*, or (paternal) hometowns. Because of the geographical vastness, one of the distinguishing features of different regions is dialect, a point I will return to in a moment. When I asked her to come up with a prototypical image of a "good storyteller," one informant told me:

HB: Oh, in my opinion? At first like, first he should be very talkative, like very humorous. Like his personality, is not serious man. And other things, he's knowledgeable. Some people I think, especially some people from Beijing I think . . . all the people from Beijing, like very, very talkative! . . . They're very good talking stories. Nobody else can compare to them, in China. <laughs><sup>43</sup>

As the above quotation suggests, one of the regional characteristics of Bei-

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<sup>43</sup>ZHANG Hongbing. 1 June 92. Tape #sk92th-12

jingers is that they are known to be verbose. Having enjoyed the status of being the capital of both Old and New China for a considerable length of time (and therefore the seat of bureaucracy), Beijingers seem to have internalized the notion that economy of words is equivalent to poverty of spirit. This trait is wonderfully entertaining in a fine storyteller, but absolutely coma-inducing to a weary *lao wai* who has stopped a couple of locals to ask for directions. I have an entire inactive repertoire of place name legends that the world will never know, because on those memorable occasions, I had neither the means to record them accurately, nor the patience to care.

The main reason that Beijingers enjoy a kind of understood status as the purveyors of verbal art is that "Beijing Mandarin" is equivalent to the "Queen's English." It is supposed to represent the purest spoken form of the language. I think that some of the respect that non-Beijingers have for Mandarin speakers from the capital can be compared to Delargy's description of listeners' rather befuddled admiration for storytellers who spoke "hard Irish," high-flown antiquated Gaelic which seemed to lend a dignified tone to even simple tales (207).

From my research findings, I have come to the conclusion that Georges' model of storytelling, which holds that individuals select the role of storyteller from a range of possible social personae is not an accurate reflection of the dynamics operating in this particular tradition. The role of storyteller is as much **attributed** to others by those who say they are not storytellers as **acknowledged** by those who say they are. As I said earlier, I have examples of both active and passive tradition bearers and interestingly, this distinction does not appear to be particularly susceptible to the equalizing nature of "face." "Face" is an umbrella term for the complex of Chinese politeness rituals and social demands. It requires that individuals publicly downplay their talents or accomplishments, in order not to be perceived as arrogant or in

any way "special" or different from others. I have met published scholars who will completely disavow any contribution to their discipline, but who will say without much hesitation (though with a degree of almost delighted self-consciousness), "Yes, in China, I could tell stories."

I will save further elaboration of the characteristics of "good storytelling" for my discussion of creativity in the next section. Before leaving the issues of regionalization and language, I have a few final things to mention. First, with regard to regional distinctions, Ting mentions that for classification purposes, China and Japan are often combined into one "region," but that in fact the tale types that are common to both countries are relatively few. The apparent connection stems from the fact that most of the common types are quite popular in China and as such are widely distributed ("Chinese View" 9). It should be noted however that this spurious correlation is definitely **not** part of the regional identity of most of my Chinese informants.

Secondly, I found that many of my informants tried, between their two languages, to "break through the limitations of traditional poetics" (Azadovskii 44). Certainly, they were affected by a smaller English vocabulary, but sometimes even the right word in Chinese escaped them. Bruford has also noted this phenomenon (30). This suggests to me that even the native language of a culture's verbal art can prove to be a rather muted palette, since not all storytelling artists possess equal mastery of the brushstrokes. While I give all of my informants credit for being courageous artists to the extent that they were willing to try to sketch outlines of stories for me that were tinged with unfamiliar linguistic colours, it is indeed a rare and splendid thing to encounter a storytelling "Ma Liang." Ma Liang was a boy who painted with a magic brush and his images could be brought to life if he gave them sight. A gifted narrator is able to paint images so lifelike that if the dragons, phoenixes and war

horses poised within the stories were given eyes, they would surely fly away.

## From Silk to Brocade: Issues of Creativity

In her comprehensive study of storytelling in a Hungarian village, Dégh addresses the issue of creativity by saying that for many storytellers it is not so much a question of adhering to the original "text" of the first-heard tale, but rather of the narrator's attitude as to "whether he views the tale as a sacred tradition, or as material he can embroider" (*Folktales* 167). Although some investigators have found particular storytelling traditions to be fairly fixed and conservative, in which tellers attempt to transmit stories word-for-word (Bruford 34), I have found that Chinese storytellers are not so bound and that skillful elaboration is both permitted and encouraged, particularly by passive tradition bearers:

HB: Like some kinds of things just so so small, little bit things, they can speak in very large things! <laughs> [SK paraphrasing, Beijing people can elaborate detail.] Yeah, make some imagination and add what. And also make other people believe it! Maybe just small things and magnifies it!<sup>44</sup>

By contrast, serious storytellers may assert that their particular version (the one that they first heard) is the "real" one, although that does not necessarily mean that they insist on verbatim recitation each time they tell it:

XD: <describing blind storytellers from Shan Dong> Well, those people because they are blind, and they, it's difficult for them to do other things, but for storytelling, and they learn storytelling from some other scholars and they remember them very well, and those people and they have particular good memory, and they can memorize anything just tell

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<sup>44</sup>ZHANG Hongbing. 1 June 1992. Tape #sk92th-12.

them once. And some of them are creative and they just learn a sketch of story probably they just fill in a lot of details. And put in a lot of details, then they can tell the story very vividly and very moving, and will attract a lot of people. [SK asks if it is okay to fill-in if a storyteller is professional.] Well, according to Chinese tradition, I think many, many people and they just believe what they they have heard, and what they have read. And they can tell the sources or resources of the story, and they just don't want to say anything which are different from the [SK: The first version that they know.] the original, yeah, the first version that they know. Many people do that, and a lot of people are very serious people, I mean prob'ly because also because Chinese tradition. And they can argue very bitterly if they have a different version from their own. And they can argue against you: "Well, yours is not true, mine is true and I can have my original from where and where."<sup>45</sup>

Falassi points out that it is often the opinion of both tellers and their audiences that it is necessary to keep "the basic narrative order" intact in order to preserve the social power of the moral (67). Because of their historical connections and complexity, a caveat seems to accompany the ancient epics and tales. Several researchers (including Azadovskii, Lord and Delargy), suggest that these tales are most often the province of the most accomplished (male) storytellers within a community. I asked one of my informants whether there was a difference between telling an anecdote and telling an ancient story with regard to "mixing it up:"

[SK goes back to the issue of "mixing up stories"] SC: I may not know that exactly or I may know little 'bout that. I couldn't tell the whole, I couldn't remember clearly what's that. [SK: So a good storyteller doesn't get it mixed up?] Yeah, they don't. Of course they're very clear, what they will say, they can tell any time. But for me, I'm not. [SK Does it matter if you forget something with an ancient story?] I think it makes a difference. Yeah, that's ah, we forget that story, it's look like a very far away, we couldn't remember most of them. But for the now things we say we forget it's only a little part of that, right? Like all these stories, I know some, but I really don't think I can recall most of them. I only read a little, little ones like that. I couldn't

<sup>45</sup>WANG Xuding. 26 June 92. Tape #sk92th-26.

get the whole thing, right. [SK asks if ancient stories are held in a different regard.] Yeah, that's true. And I don't think for the like the our generation, people. I don't think most of them like story, ancient story something. We more like more about the modern ones, modern things are happen in our life. But maybe I'm wrong, for me I like that! I don't pay lot of attention those ancient stories. ... But maybe for other people, they like this old story, or something. Like you know the Beijing Opera right, so now, most of young people don't have interesting on that, but old people they like very much. So I think same as those old stories. But they say it's very beautiful, it's very good, the culture of China <laughs><sup>46</sup>

There seemed to be a general agreement among my informants that while there may not be a great deal of active interest in historical epics, the wisdom of the ancients should not be rewritten by ineptitude.

I realize that throughout this chapter I have been guilty of trespassing into the domains of other chapters. At the risk of suffering the fate of a bourneshifter,<sup>47</sup> I will again venture into the fourth chapter by looking briefly at how closely a storyteller needs to "go by the book." Having just forewarned readers against the regional combining of China and Japan, I would like to point out that Eberhard and Hrdličková have found similar opinions as to what degree a storyteller should follow a novel or a prompt book. A comparison of audience response revealed that among the three Taiwanese storytellers in Eberhard's study, the best one was judged to the "Mr. Li" (there were two) who did not consult a book during his performance (21). Likewise, Hrdličková reported that according to "Mr. Sansuke":

...the book was not intended for the storyteller but mainly for the reader, because storytellers learn a narrative not by reading but by listening to their masters relate it to them orally (179).

<sup>46</sup>"Suchan." 1 June 92. Tape #sk92th-13.

<sup>47</sup>A person who moves markstones in the dead of night. In "Guilt and Punishment in Norwegian Legends" (*Fabula* 11 (1970): 253-270) Ronald Grambo mentions the horrible supernatural punishments (such as being condemned to walk the earth carrying red-hot markstones) and harsh societal rejection of people who were known to redefine boundaries for their personal gain.



Many of my informants told me that despite the fact that Chinese storytellers often told stories from books, they did not tend to read them during a performance. My confusion on this point showed up in one of my interviews. Sun was describing how her brother told stories from *Liao Zhai* and *Shui Hu*. Forgetting for a moment that the candle did indeed come before the lightbulb, I initiated the "enlightened" exchange:

[SK asks if Sun's brother tells long stories from Water Margin.] Sun: Yeah, he, when we are very young, when we were very young, the electricity always go out. In some night, we don't have lights. So in such day, my brother begin to tell a story from this book. Then, on other day, he will continue, he would continue his story. [SK: Did he read from the book?] Read from, by book. [SK asks how he could read during a blackout.] He memorized! [SK: Oh, so when he told you the story, he memorized it.] Yeah, yeah.<sup>48</sup>

I then realized that while a book does not serve as a "prop" in a performance, a Chinese storyteller must be well read in his art. I previously likened a Chinese story to a silken fabric. Careful reading of accurate texts<sup>49</sup> provides the storyteller with a "needle" – the precision necessary to both stitch a tale together, and embroider it. Sometimes other "texts" (both oral and written) are consciously assimilated by storytellers as desired enhancements to individual repertoires. Newall discovered that when she related a humorous anecdote to an Asian informant, he was so delighted by the story that he immediately added it to his own repertoire, with various embellishments according to his own personal style ("Narrative" 101). I found this to be true of Donna, who said during a recent discussion that far from shattering her illusions of "Lady White," she was "strong enough to take" the other printed versions of the

<sup>48</sup>SUN Yongmei. 3 June 92. Tape #sk92th-14.

<sup>49</sup>Bruford notes that one of the causes of changes and content loss in the stories found within the tradition that he was studying may have been the inaccurate copying of texts by scribes who had had limited education (28). Like the effect of weak ESL students trying to teach each other, the mistakes and inaccuracies would unfortunately tend to be among the first features to be assimilated into the new redactions.

story that she had later read. In fact, she told me that she appreciated knowing about my annotations as she was able to broaden her understanding about one of her favorite characters. She chose to add other elements to her "White Snake" story. I felt silently relieved and resolved to grant my discipline a reprieve from my earlier condemnation, since my friend's icons appeared to be still intact.

## Subtitles and Ancient Swords: Facets of Memory

Researchers have often lamented that literacy has had a debilitating effect on memory (Dégh *Folktales* 166) and therefore on storytelling. As I mentioned earlier, the other side of that argument – that printed sources form a necessary part of storytelling – has been borne out by evidence in most Eastern traditions, and a number of Western "purely oral" ones. Delargy notes the influence of the itinerant poor scholars who helped to bring literature (and literacy) to the "folk" (201).<sup>50</sup> Taking the position of numerous other scholars, Delargy also says that, concerning Irish literature: "Both oral tradition and written literature have exercised considerable influence one on the other" (204).

Unlike the Gaelic tradition, which has been characterized as conservative and static, relying heavily on rote memorization (Bruford 27, 34), I discovered through a comparison of storytelling performances and texts elicited from the same infor-

<sup>50</sup>This connection to poor scholars (often teachers unable to find postings, university and seminary students) is not unique to Irish experience, it existed in French tradition as well. See Grace Neville, "Mediaeval French Fabliaux and Modern Urban Legends: The Attraction of Opposites," *Béaloideas* 57 (1989): 133 - 149 for a more detailed discussion.

mants on different occasions<sup>51</sup> that Chinese storytelling, unlike many other aspects of traditional learning, did not rely primarily on rote memorization and recitation. I hypothesized that because Chinese "folk-literature" is so closely tied to both oral and written language, then mnemonic devices and processes used in storytelling might mirror those used in language acquisition. I knew from my experiences in trying to learn Chinese as an adult and from what Chinese friends had said about their experiences in primary school, that the experience of literacy was not a holistic awakening, but has several stages. Full comprehension (the addition of a new phoneme-ideograph into a student's vocabulary that was distinct from and only rarely confused with features of other such units, so that the student could use it correctly ninety percent of the time) would not be possible until the student had rehearsed the character orally, practiced writing it and visually identified the entire character as well as any "radical" or stylized elemental components - 'heart,' 'water,' 'tree,' 'fire,' etc.- that it might contain. The pronunciation of phonemes is often (but not always) cued to the pronunciation of the radical within its structure. I suggest that the oral-written-oral interface operates within many Chinese storytellers in an analogous fashion, although the number of stages may vary, depending upon the abilities of the individual and the type of tale. A story may first have been heard in childhood, then the individual may read the larger work from which the oral story had been excerpted, and then later elaborate and tell the story in an appropriate context. Many storytellers have told me that they remember both images and actual text from stories. Sometimes, this may even take the form of "subtitles" or simultaneously pictured images and text, even for a story that is not based on a cinematic version. The text, it seems, helps the storyteller to get "a proper vision of the thing" (MacDonald 19-21).

<sup>51</sup>Admittedly, time constraints on both my informants and myself did not allow me to conduct detailed follow-up interviews as often as I would have liked, although many scholars advocate this approach and rightly caution against generalizations made about data that has not been replicated (Dégh, *Folktales* 178).

MacDonald's work with a Gaelic storyteller represents a seminal study of the "mind's eye" of the teller. According to his findings, narrative memory involves at least three levels: conceptual, visual and verbal memory. His work raises several intriguing questions, such as: how do storytellers compensate for the perceptual lag between what is firmly visualized and what can be clearly verbalized, that is, how much of the fantastic world of the story can actually be communicated to listeners, even by the most accomplished tellers? Likewise, if a "proper vision" is necessary, is the "first image" as sacred to the teller as the first version heard or read?<sup>52</sup> It is difficult to elicit to elicit perceptual descriptions from informants, because while they are answering, the pictures tend not to be fresh in their imaginations for the most part and as such they must try to recreate them. Also, there are people who, through no verifiable fault of their literacy, tend not to be particularly visually oriented in their thought patterns. "Suchan," although she does not consider herself a storyteller, was extremely insightful and able to review and describe her memory patterns in a detailed, analytical fashion. From her reported perceptions, we can again "see" the role of movies in her visual memory, the pictures that she sees are like stopped-frame images, and her descriptions show a sensitivity to language cues common to that media in China, as evidenced by my mentioning of "subtitles."<sup>53</sup>

[SK asks how SC remembers things that she is very interested in.] SC: Yeah I think so, I think that I have picture in my mind. [SK: Do the pictures move? <SC drinking, sound echoes in cup, "Mmmmm."> Like it's like the whole action.] Yeah, I, mmm, let me see whether it move.

<sup>52</sup>At the moment, I am conducting regular interviews with LIU Bin. One of the stories he is telling me is the long epic *Xi You Ji/Journey to the West* which features the exploits of the Monkey King. His narrations do not resemble film scripts, but when I asked him what image he had of Monkey, the Dragon King, General Erlang Shen and the others, he replied "From the cartoon!" referring to the popular animated series. Attesting once again to the pervasiveness of popular culture media, I must confess that I have exactly those same images, having watched the cartoons in China and bought most of the translated picture book series.

<sup>53</sup>In China, because of the many dialects, written Chinese subtitles are a common feature to most movies. That way, a Cantonese movie filmed in Hong Kong can reach a wider audience, as can a Mandarin movie shot in Changchun, but being shown in Canton.

Sometimes if I want dis, describe something, I describe some picture, I don't think that's move, but if the story is go long and take some time, maybe move. But I think if, when I tell something I think always have picture in my mind. [SK: If you have a picture that doesn't move when you tell the story, do you look at different parts of the picture?] Yeah, maybe. Yeah, ah, I don't really pay attention on that. Whether it's always part and part. Mmm, I don't think really I just focus on one part and don't see any part. I think in my mind, I think always see the whole picture, even I tell this, but still look the whole thing. I think. I think it's that way. [SK asks if SC ever hears parts of the stories she tells.] Yeah, if we, if I got this story, it's from the movie, right? They have, they talk, so I can remember the voice they talk, the way they talk, but if I read from book, I just have picture, don't talk that. But I remember what they say, that's better, only by the words. Not by the sound or something, but it's get from the movie. [SK asks SC if she sees characters of dialogue, like subtitles?] Yeah, some words, some sentence, if it's I'm very interesting in that, I may remember the whole sentence. Like some, I may get I may only get the main idea, but I tell by my language. That's it, maybe it's that way.<sup>54</sup>

In a recent interview with Liu Bin, I was provided with a vivid description of his visual memory as he was talking about a poem. He had indicated earlier that the terse structure of the poem was highly conducive to the creation of mental images, "You can't help the imagination!" The words were strung together by images and action, which helped to fill in the gaps left by the constraints of style. Alone, the poem seemed "footbound"; imagined, it came alive and danced:

LB: Let me recite it first in Chinese, and then I translate it for you.

Jiu Li Shan qian zou ran cha  
 Mu tong zhi de, jiu dao jiang  
 Shen feng xue qi, wu jiang shui  
 Hao si Yu Ji, bie <voice quickens, sharpens> bie ba le.

LB: The first sentence is "Jiu Li Mountain is a battleground, a thousand years ago." The battle is between Chu and Han. And the second

<sup>54</sup>"Suchan." 1 June 92. Tape #sk92th 13.

sentence is, because this poem is written by the author or the novel, and what happened in this novel is in Song Dynasty, so the second sentence is "A small cowboy, in Song Dynasty picked up a old weapon, used by the soldiers in the battle, in the war between Chu and Han," which is a thousand years ago. You can see that the second sentence describe the situation, that small cowboy, was playing in the old, ancient battleground, Jiu Li Mountain. He was taking care of his cows, and playing with, pick up some old things Didn't know, what this old things is, but he happened to pick up a weapon, which is used by the soldiers of thousand years ago. Third sentence is: "The wind blew over the Wu Jiang." The Wu Jiang is a big river in China. The fourth sentence is: "You can see, or you can imagine that one thousand years ago, in the war between Chu and Han, the head of the troop, he win a lot of, he won a lot of battles, but he lost the war." It's a very great pity. And in the final battle he lost, his wife, Yu Ji, make suicide, and you can, you can see that. The third sentence and the fourth sentence could be viewed together, which mean, you can see what happened in the last battle, between the Chu and Han. What happened when the Chu's head wife make suicide, by watching the wind blowing over the Wu River.

So this poem, this just give you a very vivid picture. The picture contains two parts. One part is in the end of the Qin Dynasty, and another part is the Song Dynasty, which is one thousand years ago from the Qin Dynasty, and — [SK: In your mind, does the picture have two levels, is it like you're watching two movies?] No, actually it's not two levels, it's just MIXED together. You can see, you can see the cowboy, but you can also see ambiguous background. These things happened, in one thousand years ago <voice slow, thoughtful> — [SK: Behind the —] Behind the cowboy, behind the Jiu Li Mountain. [SK: Okay, behind the cowboy, is the battle going on?] Yes, the battle is going on. [SK: Are the fighters like ghosts —] No they isn't like a, they just human beings, yeah. This is a picture drawn by the poem. I think every Chinese can see this picture. So Chinese always took the picture and the drawing, the poem and the drawing together. [SK: So this picture that you have, it doesn't exist as a painting, it's your mental picture.] Yes, it's my mental picture. [SK: Do you think most Chinese have the same mental picture?] Yes, I believe.<sup>65</sup>

Sometimes informants gave other reasons as to why they recalled some stories more vividly than others:

<sup>65</sup>LIU Bin. 13 Mar 93. Tape #sk93th-41.

DW: No, no. When I was in China, there was a little store and they had some books. And I hadn't been reading anything for about two weeks and I just gobbled up these books and, when I mentioned White Snake to Ma, she just began talking about it. And so. And then the movie came on and she kept on talking about it. And so it sticks in my mind.<sup>56</sup>

XD: Well, the folk-literature, or folktales or fairytales, I heard in my childhood, well some of them specially influential. And I think and it all depends on the person who listen, or who heard the stories their environment and their and I mean their environment, not only necessarily geographical environment, not only necessarily geographical environment, but also moral environment. [SK: What do you mean by moral environment?] Oh, oh. Well what I mean by that is that in that kind of environment you grown up. And the moral, you are, well, influenced by, and, I'm from the province which is Confucius home, home province and the moral is very strict, and more of less like the Puritans in the Western World. Well, even now, in the villages still, they have this kind of moral there, and they still behave according to that kind of moral code. And that what I mean, just a moral environment, well the fairytales are very influential on me. For example, I know one type, it's just loyal to your parents, do whatever you can for your parents and that's one thing. Another thing is the the injustice and of all the, I wouldn't say all but most of the fairytales or folktales I HEARD, well, either have a official, which is a corrupted one, very corrupted one, and well the ending of the story must be the downfall of that corrupted official. ... And this is a kind of a fairy-tales which very influential on me. ... I was one of the children in my village who just addict to this kind of for - fairytales and folk literature.<sup>57</sup>

As the foregoing segments indicate, these reasons often had to do with family influences, or identification with characters or some aspect of the setting of the story. But, these are other threads of the brocade and I must be careful not to tangle them up. Perhaps the essential mechanism behind memory in Chinese storytelling is indeed as simple and elegant as the one that Xuding posited: "You love them, and that's why probably it's easy for you to remember them."

<sup>56</sup>Donna WONG. 21 June 92. Tape #sk92th-23.

<sup>57</sup>WANG Xuding. 24 June 92. Tape #sk92th-25.

## Grandma, Radios and VCRs: Changing Faces of Transmission

According to my informants, the most common source for the transmission of Chinese folklore and tradition is still the home, a characteristic that is also reflected in Western society, one that Falassi and others have commented on at length (Delargy 196). This is followed by books and popular media – television, film, and “short story” newspapers (such as *Cai Feng* published in Shanghai) – and folk drama, although the latter form is primarily a feature of the rural areas. Grandparents tell stories more often than parents, as was Liu Bin’s experience:

LB: Yeah actually I didn’t tell stories when I was in China very much. But when I was a kid, I think I told stories to my little friend very often. When I grow up! <laughs> When you grow up, you can’t ask somebody: “Come here and I tell you a story!” Can’t do that. [Liz: No.] [Liz: Did your grandmother tell you stories?] Yes, my grandmother tell me a lot, told me a lot of stories. [Liz: Where did she learn her stories from?] Maybe <laughs> she learn her stories from her granma! Her mother yes I think so. [Liz: Was it a tradition in China for grandparents to tell children stories?] Yes but very interesting, for par – parents do not tell stories very much to their kids [Liz: Why?] Grandparents tell. ... I think, I think parents, I think my mother and my father were very busy in working studying and the grandparents have nothing to do because they are old. They retired from their work, or they have enough time to tell stories!<sup>58</sup>

Sometimes however, especially if a child’s grandparents have a limited repertoire (i.e., Sun recalled her grandmother as having only one story, a contemporary legend that will be discussed later), children might gather at the home of an elderly neighbour, often a friend’s grandparent.

<sup>58</sup>LIU Bin, with LIN Yude and Liz COVIELLO. 27 Feb 93. Tape #sk93th-38.



SC: Usually, it's parents or in school we can read some, we have some book and some the detailed kind of book <unclear> or pictures, some like that. Just for the kids. [SK: Could your grandmother tell ghost stories?] No, not my grandmother, some my, some other mmm, kids their grandmother tell them and I also listen those things with them.<sup>59</sup>

Sylvia cited both family members and primary school teachers as sources for stories,<sup>60</sup> but again as von Sydow suggests (in the context of transmission within immigrant communities) a family's particular straits often determined to what extent "talking story" could be part of the family routine (16-17). This is exemplified in the following exchange in which "Ann" counters Sylvia's image of the tale-spinning granny:

"Ann": The question's strange. Syl: <singsong, "Yea-ah."> "Ann": Normally, this kind of story are not told by people, I don't think. By not us. We're told this story by other people. We know this by novel, by movie, by play. <Three way conversation, masking by other speakers, hard to follow, Sylvia says stories can be told by "either grandmother or mother."> "Ann": Your grandmother? Not mine! Syl: Yeah, my grandmother and my mother and I think maybe the teachers in the kindergarten! Women, sure.<sup>61</sup>

Soap operas have been shown to exert a significant influence on storytelling traditions, affecting such factors as the length of performances and, in many instances, even "pre-empting" the public tradition altogether (Thomas 179-180). Hongbing informed me that China was similarly affected by lunch time radio plays and storytellers. The appeal of these broadcast performances was so widespread, that crime (and presumably traffic accidents on otherwise clogged streets) decreased during the programme slot:

<sup>59</sup>"Suchan." 1 June 92. Tape #sk92th-13

<sup>60</sup>Liu Bin told me that some primary school teachers, when faced with a particularly unruly class, would "threaten" to tell a story, which they usually followed through with. It is likely that during the Cultural Revolution, these would have been heavily moralized tales, but I asked Liu Bin if it was sometimes worth misbehaving in order to get a story. "Yes, sometimes," he admitted.

<sup>61</sup>Sylvia ZHAO, "Ann". 22 May 92. Tape #sk92th-10.

HB: Oh, yeah. I heard some I think I heard some story from the radio, like a long stories, just everyday. No, lots of people have heard about this, ... Like some people really good at talking these kind of stories. [SK: Is she a storyteller?] Yeah, storyteller, so she just, she just became famous because she, talk about this things .... Almost every people knows this -what's her name's?- Niu Lan Fang! ... for Spring Festival she was on the t.v., for several times. [SK: Is she an older woman young woman?] Oh, it's a middle-aged woman. [SK: Is she from the countryside, or an intellectual?] No, she's specialized woman. But do you know that *ping cheng tudn*? She's this not just like a actress, she's specialize, specialize in telling stories. ... And that lady, just told you, storyteller, just became famous. I think that time all the people like to listen it, because she is so good, talk so well, so, maybe nowadays people changed. Don't want to listen to again, anymore. At that time I think all the people, oh yes, all the people in the streets, like China's was very crowded at that time. The streets no no people! What people disappeared! Because they went home to listen to the radio. I think one reason is that at that time the things, the equipment for the amusement for entertainment is so rare. Even t.v. is not that popular. So people liked radio so much. Like things, the crime, the instance of the crime decrease, just around that time, during the time.<sup>62</sup>

In China's march of affluence and progress the radio storytellers appear to have all but been replaced - by the television and the VCR, a common fixture of many modern Chinese homes.

## Breakthrough: Another View of the Summit

In his classic study, Hymes describes several features of the phenomenon which he calls "breakthrough into performance," - the moment at which an informant begins to "talk story" rather than merely talk about a narrative. Some of the significant cues which he believes signal this transition are: 1) code-switching between the lan-

<sup>62</sup>ZHANG Hongbing. 1 June 92. Tape #sk92th-12.

guage of the interview and the native language (if indeed the informant is bilingual) without apparent recognition that this is taking place and 2) switching from the third to the first person in relation to the discourse of the protagonist ("Breakthrough" 90). He suggests that there are differences in what informants are able to interpret, report and repeat ("Breakthrough" 82-85). I would agree with these observations, as I found evidence of these phenomena in my interviews and certainly language ability, cultural background knowledge, the affective filter of the interview context – whether an informant felt comfortable enough to perform in my presence – influenced each narration. Again, although he raises this question with regard to the telling of Chinookan and other native Indian myths, the fact that the language of most of my informants' performances was not the original language of transmission could cause some to question their authenticity ("Breakthrough" 129). I continue to defend these second language performances, since for me, Mandarin is not just "an object of study," (as Wishram was for Hymes) and students **could** have chosen to speak Chinese if they so preferred. Hymes interprets code-switching and other related features as "momentary forgetting of the role of the audience" ("Breakthrough" 91), whereas in my experience it demonstrated a greater awareness of me as a participant-observer in the storytelling process. Informants knew that I had at least a working knowledge of Mandarin and so vocabulary could often be mutually negotiated, though sometimes I missed the sense of a phrase, especially if it was particularly pithy or idiomatic, or if the informant came from a Mandarin dialect region that I was not familiar with.

Concerning some of the key formulas used in the stories that I collected, I noticed that while closings tended to be rather abrupt ("And that's the story,") openings displayed a wide range of variation with no real fixed phrasing. Breakthrough in many cases appeared to be tied to a description of the setting for a festival or other cus-

tomary observance.<sup>63</sup> Informants felt that I had to be given adequate background information before I could fully appreciate the story. Many Chinese stories take place in the context of festivals, since they provide in the story-world (as they do in real life) the liminal atmosphere which makes the fantastic possible. The necessity of an elaborate explanation also provides some informants with a justifiable way of entering the story more fully. They provide themselves with the unspoken mandate of having to increase my understanding of Chinese culture, thereby sparing themselves the embarrassment of having to actually admit that "This is not true, is just folk-story." Many festival practices are no longer followed however and so their formerly sacred nature becomes, like Coyote in the secular winter, merely an opportunity for commentary before entering the "real story" (Hymes 131).

One could get the idea from reading Hymes' article that 'breakthrough' must be a unidirectional bursting onto the story-scene from which there is no retreat. That term, in general usage, also carries the sense of gradual penetration, infiltration or seepage. Those words may give the impression that an informant does not so much "tell" a story as "leak" it, but penetration is most frequently from the outside-in and infiltration is often a process which goes from the bottom-up. For a person with limited language skills, this conceptualization might more closely approximate this phenomenon. In the following transcription (given in full below) Xu Kangcheng tells me his version of the "White Snake," and his style, though admittedly quite disjointed in places, has the quality of a mountain climber who tests each face before attempting it, periodically stopping to rest (or in this case, to pull me up after him):

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<sup>63</sup>The main festivals around which stories appear to take place are Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Dragon Boat Festival and *Qing Ming*, or "Shining Bright" Festival. I have touched upon these observances in earlier chapters, but for a detailed and entertaining discussion, see Eberhard's *Chinese Festivals*, ed. Lou Tsu K'uang (Asian Folklore and Social Life Monographs, vol. 38, Taipei: The Orient Cultural Service, 1972.)

XK: The West Lake in Hangzhou is a very famous see- sightseeing place, I mean. And the west- there are two gauseway, causeway [SK: Causeway.] causeway is in the lake. One is Su Causeway, one is Bai Causeway. And the Su Causeway is made by Su Dong Po, do you know Su Dong Po? [SK: No.] Is a famous, famous writer and *shu fa jia* [SK: Calligrapher.] in China, <approximates term a few times> ... and he at that time he was Hangzhou, he was the governor of Hangzhou. Hangzhou. And he make this gauss, gaussway, gaussway. So it is called Su Gaussway. And there is a bridge, bridge called "Broken Bridge," in on the Su Causeway. And they a story, there is a story about the White Snake, ... First the White Snake, White Snake change into a beauty, with a black snake. When they went sightseeing in the West sake, uh, West Lake it was, it was raining. Raining and they run to through the Broken Bridge and get a *-fa wu yuan sha, zen me shou?* - <Voice very quiet> [SK: There was a storm.] Yes. And the ruv- ah yes, and they meet Xu Xian. He has a umbrella, he has an umbrella. He saw that they this two lady, ladies, was, were on the <unclean> and he give them the umbrella. And, because Xu Xian is very honest frank *-zhe shi lao si ren*, yeah, that's sort- ea(r)-nest. So the White, S- the White {S}nake fell in love with him. And later she married, <pause> him. <occasionally says 'uh-huh' or says a word over again like a kind of tag phrase quietly to himself, perhaps to check accuracy of either his diction or details> And Xu Xian was very happy to live with them. But they, a monk, called Fa Hai met Xu Xian and he know, he knew that Xu Xian was host by a <pause> a snake, a snake. So he told Xu Xian that his wife, is, was not a human. She at first, at first Xu Xian did know believe, believe him. But the monk told him to told him, "At the fifth, fifth mm- fifth of May," *zhe shi duan wu jie*, {Dragon Boat Festival} Yes, in fact, you know. "On that day put some ... medicine into the wine," and offer his wife to drink and saw what happened. Xu Xian act as the monk told him. And at that date, White, the White Snake at first refused to drink. But Xu Xian insisted on. At last, he drank and she got drunk and lie on the bed, change back into a White Snake. Xu Xian is very eff- fear, afraid that. <pause> Fra- and faint, got faint. And after, after the White Snake came to conscious, she found that Xu Xian was died on, on the floor. She knew that, he must have saw, have seen her(e) in the origin-form that is, the snake. So they, they went to a mountain, in, on the sea, to get a, to get a, the he(r)b *zhen cao you 'herb' herb called lingzi*,<sup>64</sup> because they, this herb can make Xu Xian rive {alive, or rise} again. The lingzi, the herb was in, in fact it's in the mountain, the mountain, the mountain was belong

<sup>64</sup>This herb is a traditional symbol of longevity and can often be found painted in stylized form on porcelain.

to another, another *xian* ... *zen me shou*? [SK: Another spirit.] Ah, spirit. And there are two, two *se{r}*-vant look for the herb. One, the snake, the White Snake and the Black Snake to get the herb, these two *se{r}*-vant fight with them. When the spirit come back, he knew all, all the efforts and then had a sympathy with the White Snake and let them to get the herb back and with the herb they make Xu Xian come to life again make Xu Xian come to life again. And the, the White Snake talk, told him that what Xu Xian had saw, had seen, in fact is a magic. And later Xu Xian believe in it. In fact, at that time the White Snake had a, a baby. Is about to give birth a baby, about several months later he give birth, give birth to a baby, and short time, shortly after that Fa, the monk Fa Hai come back and use a bowl to capture capture the White Snake too. And then the bowl become a pagoda. And to the White Snake was kept under the pagoda. And the pagoda is on the <unclear> is also if this is the West, West Lake <sketching> this is the Su Causeway, causeway, and this is the first, this is the Broken Bridge, Broken Bridge. And here is the Guo, here. And the pagoda is here. ... And the pagoda is called *Lei Feng* Pagoda, yes. *Lei Feng* Pagoda. And this pagoda collapse in 1916, it is collapsed. Yeah, if you go to West Lake, this is a sight-seeing point this is also a sight-seeing point, the pagoda is colla- is not here. Anymore. This is the story about that.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup>XU Kangcheng. 22 July 92. Tape #sk92th-27. Xu continued with a short 'coda' about how the crab came to walk sideways (also mentioned in Donna's performances) and he validated his performances by mentioning Lu Xun's reaction to the collapse of Thunder Peak Pagoda: "...and Lu Xun, do you know Lu Xun. Lu Xun, wri- have wrote a short story, and also say that when he was young, he heard that, heard the story, heard the story, and he have sympath{y} with the White Snake and hate the Fa Hai, mo- monk, Fa Hai to interfere with their happy family life. And when Lu Xun hear that the Lei Feng, Lei Feng Pagoda collap(t){collapsed} he was very glad, so that he, the White Snake can went out. Yeah, he said. And Lu Xun also said that *peng zie shi*, *jiao* <unclear> And they say, there is a folklore say that the crab is in fact the Fa Hai and if you pull the cover, you can see a face, that is a man! This is Fa Hai! <laughs> And it is said that Fa Hai hid in the hid in the, in the crab, and dare not, dare not to come out." Shorter fables relating the origins of features of certain animals are common stories-within-stories in long Chinese *märchen*, such as Liu Quanshun's description of how the flounder came to take its present form in his version of "Loyang Bridge," which can be found in the Appendix.

## Cat-Woman, Reluctant Monks and Foxy

### Maidservants: A Look at Truth, Identification and Gender Repertoire

From her research on contemporary legend, Bennett found several criteria which she feels can be applied to narratives in order to assess whether a story has been told for its truth or its entertainment value. Many of her criteria can be validly applied to Chinese storytelling. Chinese storytellers also often choose to tie the legend to a particular place, or state that the account can be found in other verifiable sources such as the newspaper, or that other reliable people also know the story as a means of validating a story that they personally believe. As I have said before, her premise that "lexical density" (concise description) is one of the hallmarks of a story that has become part of the informant's established repertoire (25-26) – and therefore one that is not believed by the teller, having presumably been "polished" by repeated performances – cannot be used as an index of analysis with the second language narratives that I collected. Furthermore, her Western-based assertion that truth is a *sine qua non* of non-narrative communication (31) frankly does not hold up in the face of *face*.

Sun told me the following story, "the Cat-Woman of Shanghai" after I mentioned the "People-Meat Dumpling" incident that was picked up from the *Peoples' Daily* about two years ago in which a Sichuan man was arrested for selling dumplings that contained the meat of corpses. The authorities were in a dilemma, not knowing whether to convict the entrepreneur on charges of grave robbing or operating a business without a municipal vendor's license. Sun adamantly denied that such

sensationalist drivel ever featured as conversation topics at Chinese parties:

[SK: What kinds of stories do Chinese young people tell today?] Sun: Ah, we are not like Western people who use so much imagination. When people come to my age, we don't believe ghost, or something. We usually we don't tell story from imagination. [SK: What do you talk about when you go to a party?] Go to party we don't talk story! We talk some politic view, or talk about the ordinary life, tell our feeling about life.[SK mentions contemporary legend about *ren rou bao zi*.] Yeah! It's from human body! Oh, I know. [SK: Do you ever tell stories like that?] Yeah! We do! This is not story! It's in the newspaper, how could you say it's a story. It's true. [SK mentions that the English language newspaper version of the story, had the man coming from Chengdu, but a former student said he was from her home town of Wuhan.] <laughs> [SK: So don't things like that become stories?] Yes, yes, yeah. [SK: But you don't talk about that in a party -] Yeah, if, maybe we talk about this. But it not happen very often. Not such amazing thing happen 'lot! Yeah, sometimes people tell somebody in the party.<sup>66</sup>

Her subsequent delivery of the story (which *immediately* followed her disavowal) was quite rapid. Speed should not be confused with accuracy; her delivery understandably lacked the fluency required of lexical density. The pace of her performance, coupled with her conflicting verbal-gestural portrayal of the young suitor's quandary – she moved her hands as if weighing options, but spoke in an incredulous falsetto – left me with the impression that she did not believe this story, but it had become part of her established repertoire out of deference to her grandmother:

Sun: There is woman from Shanghai. He, she has a very long, tail. Just like cat. In his body. Something like this! <giggling> [SK: And she turns into a cat?] No, no no, she just have this very long tail! And she has very difficult problem to find a husband. [SK: Because of her long tail.] People said there is a woman from Shanghai, she has a long tail. She cannot go to the, how to say, to have operation, because if SHE go to the hospital, everyone will know she has a long tail, she is animal, not human being! [SK asks to clarify some details] And she find a husband who love her very much, but at last this man KNOW that this girl

<sup>66</sup>SUN Yongmei. 3 June 92. Tape #sk92th-14.



have a long tail and she, he was CONFUSED he don't know whether should, he should marry her or not. In her walking, he always said: <voice whispers> "Oh, should I marry a girl with a long tail, should I, <moves hands back and forth, as if considering options on one side then the other> shouldn't I?" He said said said. So a lot of people know this girl have such a long tail, so this girl committed suicide. And the boy who love her, also follow her, to commit suicide. It's a story tell in Shanghai! Lot of people know this story! [SK: When was this story supposed to take place?] It's not in ancient China, maybe 60 or 70, 1960, or 1970. I don't know, maybe it's just people's imagination! Yeah, This is the story my grandmother told me. This is the only one story, he, she can talk, she can tell. She don't she's very old. She don't have education and she don't have any good story to tell. If I ask her to tell me story he ALWAYS tell me this story! So sometime in the party, when people discuss something, such as human being having this, having that, I remember, I tell this story to my friends!<sup>67</sup>

Many investigators have discussed the ways in which both skilled narrators and involved listeners take sides in a story (Dégh *Folktales* 182, Azadovskii 35, Falassi 49-51). The only narrator who identified himself with particular people or events in a given story was Liu Bin. Liu's grandparents were of Manchurian descent and he seems to be extremely proud of his grandfather's exploits during the Sino-Japanese War. As a consequence perhaps, his repertoire is replete with military stories, among which are a few notable warrior-women, some of whom I have previously introduced. The two Manchurian dynasties, the Later Jin and the Qing, are sharply contrasted in the tomes of Liu's oral history. The former is seen as glorious, while the latter is characterized as dissolute and corrupt. Whenever he describes a warrior fighting either for or against the Later Jin, he refers to that dynasty as "the Later Jin, my ancestor."

His version of the "White Snake" story functioned somewhat like the didactic anecdote in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's study of an informant's report and analysis of a

<sup>67</sup>SUN Yongmei. 3 June 92. Tape #sk92th-14.

parable that she told in order to diffuse a family conflict. In this article, the researcher describes an informant's insights into how she used a Jewish parable about a man who confesses to a series of increasingly grave sins in order to draw her brother-in-law's attention to the tension that he was causing in the family by continually breaking his promise to take his children to the cinema. In her subsequent analysis, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett cites Goffman's ideas concerning the ritual nature of communication<sup>68</sup> and states that the parable worked because it pointed to the conflict created by the father's repeated breach of promise in a non-threatening way, challenged him to avoid rationalization of his behaviour and helped to establish an atmosphere of compromise that all sides could accept.

In Liu's performance of the "White Snake," he concentrated on Xu Xian's angst over whether or not he should leave his beloved snake-demon wife in order to join the monk, Fa Hai. Among the numerous versions that I have collected (and the various printed versions and commentaries that I have read), Xu Xian is never seen as a character capable of experiencing conflict. He is usually placed on a continuum which at the one extreme portrays him as a hard-working but lovelorn mortal who is cruelly used by a succubus and at the other as a sexually-transfixed simpleton who deserves to be punished for dallying with an immortal. Liu's attempt to psychologize Xu Xian resembles the favorite technique of Vinokurova (Azadovskii 26), except that his narration was devoid of gesture, his hands remaining folded throughout the narration:

LB: White Snake is a very beautiful woman. And he, she married Xu Xian <clears throat> It's very interesting! <uneasy laughter> the snake married a human being.

And one night Xu Xian ask White Snake to drink some wine, liquor!  
And the White Snake cannot drink very much of course she's <laughter>

<sup>68</sup>E. Goffman, "On Facework: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction," *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes* 18 (1955): 213-31.

she's a snake! And her husband, Xu Xian FORCED her to drink - just kidding! <laughter> and the White Snake was drunk.

When the snake was drunk, he, she turned back to snake. That SCARE Xu Xian. And Xu Xian found the truth that his wife was a snake. So he told Fa Hai, a very bad monk. And the monk wanted Xu Xian, to divorce. Xu Xian hesitate for a long time <pause> he loved his wife, he loved the White Snake. Because she is beautiful, she is very hard-working woman and he, she help Xu Xian a lot in the life <clears throat> And <pause> and then I think the monk Fa Hai took Xu Xian to his temple ... The monk took Xu Xian to his temple and Xu Xian were not permit to go back home.<sup>69</sup>

The likeness of this performance to the successful parable with regard to being a "peace offering" necessarily ends there however. Given the circumstances to which it referred, the ritual cycle of restoration ending in renewed harmony could not be reasonably fulfilled. I should mention that while Liu related this segment, he faced me with downcast eyes. From what I know of Chinese interaction patterns, I should have politely averted my gaze while listening, as Liu "held the floor," being both the acknowledged expert and my elder. By adopting the posture that he did, I sensed that he was coming to me as a suppliant. He is my estranged husband's closest colleague and with the final date for the divorce hearing drawing near, he was quietly pleading the case of a friend. Several of my Chinese acquaintances had recently approached me, suggesting that I should reconcile with my spouse as he was finally genuinely sorry for the physical and emotional pain that he caused me. Some also said that he was "young and did not know how to properly treat women," and "he was only playing jokes" on me. That last statement might account for why Liu laughed when he said Xu Xian FORCED his wife to drink the wine. His is the only account that used that particular verb to describe the incident which led to the couple's ultimate separation. The reasons which Liu gave for Xu Xian's desire to stay with his wife -

<sup>69</sup>LIU Bin. 20 Feb 93. Tape #sk93th-37.

her loveliness, diligence and past devotion – are word-for-word the same reasons that I had been given by my estranged husband. Liu's narration was further constrained by the presence of one of my classmates, Liz Coviello, who had joined us in order find out more about Chinese "Jack" tales. Although I have said that it is perhaps not a good idea for a researcher to ask direct questions of a Chinese informant, had we been alone during the interview, Liu might have chosen to present this request without a narrative frame, based on his age, gender and sense of loyalty to his colleague.

The final issue that I will address in this chapter concerns a brief look at gender differences in repertoire. Holbek has shown that *märchen* told by male narrators and intended for predominantly male audiences are qualitatively different from stories told by and for women ("Fairytale" 41). Delargy found that a generic division existed between male and female tellers within the Gaelic tradition that he explored. Women were most skilled in the telling of family-oriented narratives – prayers, local legends, genealogies – but were excluded from narrating the long heroic epics, or Finn tales (181, 193). Eberhard notes that the storytelling theatres which provided the setting for his research were established as gathering places for men who needed a break from the demands of family life ("Notes" 2). On the whole, I found that heroine stories were not a substantial part of storytelling repertoires. Despite the apparent penchant of Chinese readers for heroic tales (Eberhard "Notes" 26-27), the low number of heroine tales being told could be partially a reflection of their infrequent occurrence in the folk literature canon. Some storytellers flatly disliked heroine tales:

[SK asks if Sun's brother told stories that dealt more often with men or with women.] Sun: ... He didn't like, uh, he doesn't like WOMEN. He always think men is the hero, not woman. He always look down woman, when he was young. How do you say this in English? In China we call it *Da nan zi zhu yi* {male chauvinism} <laughs><sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup>SUN Yongmei. 3 June 92. Tape #sk92th-14.

As "Ann's" earlier statement suggested, some informants thought it strange that I seemed to want to assign "gender identity" to stories. As I have discussed in the first chapter, I feel that there are marked differences between hero and heroine tales in Chinese folklore. I suggest that heroine stories may not often be told by *either* men *or* women. The skilled male narrator can, by identifying with male heroes, tell stories full of exploits which reach far beyond any of which a heroine is capable. Perhaps these stories represent more of a private tradition for predominantly female narrators and audiences. The content of these tales suggests a reason for why the public tradition does not often include these stories. Women are poignantly reminded by the tragic heroine's progress of where the real limits are, and as such these narratives do not provide even a temporary means of escape.

Kay Cothran, in her study of the tall tale tradition in Georgia, found that strange things happen when narrators attempt verbal cross-dressing, particularly when a woman finds herself bedecked in the trappings of an ostensibly male tradition, even under the contrived conditions of the interview ("Talking Trash" 225). I found two noteworthy instances of this phenomenon. The first involved the "implicit talk" going on between myself and a young woman while her husband and his male classmate were trying to give "objective" interpretations of some heroine stories. They concentrated on the novella *Meng Jiang Nu*. Meng is separated from her husband at their wedding feast when he is press ganged into building the Great Wall. In order to set the stage for this story, the two men decided that it was necessary to discuss arranged marriages in old China. This turn of the conversation can be seen as entering the domain of a male tradition, since matchmakers and arranged marriages in which the bride had no say in the selection of her mate were part of the male-dominated Confucian social structure. The young woman, Fan, had been a murmuring undercurrent of disbelief throughout the entire time that her husband

was speaking. It seemed as though barely audible disagreements (not many instances of which I was able to represent in transcription) spurred her husband on to further elaboration. Dégh found this same kind of interactive repartee existing between a Hungarian couple. The wife told supernatural legends and belief memorates; the husband countered her with irreverent humour. The more jokes the husband told, the more his wife reprimanded him, which only served to stoke his verbal fire. I got the impression from Fan and her husband, as Dégh had with the Bodas, that:

No matter what the conditions were, there was a conspicuous interdependence in the conversational performance between the husband and wife. They seemed to be engaged in an everlasting never-to-be-resolved debate ... ("Symbiosis" 246).

In Fan's case, her murmuring trickle finally swelled beyond her polite composure and she and I laughed at the effect of the deluge.<sup>71</sup>

{group is speaking about Princess Wen Chun}

[SK: But how could such a woman be heroic, if, I mean, it wasn't her decision to marry the person, maybe the Em -]

ZX: Yeah, not her decision, but -

[SK: The Emperor said: 'You go, goodbye.' Fan laughs]

C: Yeah, uh, the she, they have no choice. Ha-ha!

ZX: Yeah, actually because that's their situation, in the ancient history of China, because, even before 1949, right before the establishing of the People's Republic of China -

C: Maybe even now!

F: Ow! Women no choice! <laughs>

<sup>71</sup>This segment is presented with separating lines in order to clearly demarcate the individual speakers.

ZX: The fu- the marriage of the woman was decide by father and mother or, even the older brother, <unclear, masking>

C: Yeah and the grandfather and grandmother.

F: <giggling> And their couldn't choice!

ZX: So the sad -

C: Yeah, never see her husband, when they marry, the husband don't know, who is her wife and when they must reverse the red -

F: They must use -

[SK: The veil.]

C: Red towel, red towel and see who she is!

F: And the night, the marriage night, her husband -

C: Will be receive, will be reveal the red towel. And see, who <laughs> she is!

F: Just from, <unclear> who is other.

ZX: So there are, at this time, it is acceptable for people to do that, because for, for a king, send a princess to other nationality, I think it is a big action to do that, in for his country, for the peaceful life of a people, to do that, it is acceptable. And also people think it is big action. <F: So people, they will ->

[SK: So it's a sacrifice.]

C: Sure. <F unclear>

ZX: Yeah, it is kind of sacrifice. Yeah, sacrifice his own family, his own daughter or somethings, to do that, so and also people remembered him, at this time. <F: And remember the princess,> Yeah, princess. <F: As a hero.> So that's why people can understand that, because that's the situation during this time, even before 1949. And also I think in some place now still like that, especially in the countryside or mountain airy, areas still somethings. It's like that!

[SK: Fan's laughing, what do define <F laughs harder> -]

F: <laughing hard, very loud > I CHOICE BY MYSELF!

ZX: Yeah, because that's different -

[SK: <to Fan> Congratulations. <both women laugh>]

ZX: <a little ruffled> You know the civilization is much better in the city and especially for the people who have more education, yeah, it's different.<sup>72</sup>

The second instance, this time with two men trying to tell a woman's story (about an enterprising maidservant) to a female researcher, happened during a follow-up interview in which I paired two male informants, each of whom I had previously interviewed separately. During a conversation class, in which I paired students at random and asked them to discuss different types of Chinese stories, I noticed that Li and Young quickly developed a kind of "tag-team rapport" in terms of dialogue and I wanted to see if this dynamic could transfer into an interview setting. To my delight, this was indeed what happened, but I quickly realized that my informants were sharing a private joke.

I had asked them about female helper stories and they told me the story of Cui Ying Ying<sup>73</sup> and Zhang Sheng, two young lovers who are brought together by the "intimate designs" of Ying Ying's maid, Hong Yang. By cleverly arranging that these two characters became lovers, Hong Yang simultaneously secured for herself the position of "second wife" to a good young man and escaped the tyranny of her young mistress' mother. When my informants had to explain that the two young people slept together, they went through an extended family of "second cousins" before finally settling, as Mark Twain advocates, on the right word to express the

<sup>72</sup>FAN Chunxia (f) ZHOU Zhongxin, CHEN Zhao (m). 8 June 92. Tape #sk92th-19.

<sup>73</sup>Lu Xun mentions other versions of this story in which Zhang Sheng abandons Ying Ying because he cannot withstand her wonton charms, see *Brief History* 94-97.



awful truth. Seeing their giggling discomfiture, I decided to suggest a way for Ying Ying to try to avoid the inevitable liaison. Their reactions were hilarious. Li became altogether unseated in his merriment, he literally laughed so hard that he fell off his chair:

Young: Zhang Sheng is handsome. And Cui Ying Ying is beautiful. Ha! And Zhang Sheng loves Cui Ying Ying and Cui Ying Ying also loves Zhang Sheng. But in China, in ancient China a girl must follow every word of her, her -

Li: ... Her parents.

Young: Her parents, yeah. Her mother broke, broke her promise so that Cui Ying Ying cannot marry Zhang Sheng.

Li: Yeah, ... she feel it's unfair. For, for them. <Young: Hong Yang feel that.> So he, ... create many chance for Cui Ying Ying and Zhang Sheng. So they can meet ...

Young: Hong Yang, the maidservant, tells Zhang Sheng: You pretend to be ill <Li laughs, Yes!>, pretend to be ill. And then Zhang Sheng sleeps in the west room. A yard has three sides, in China called -

Li: Yeah, Beijing *Si he yuan* ... The main building opposite building and east and west ... <explain that Zhang Sheng was in the western chamber>

Young: Then Hong Yang told Zhang Sheng to pretend to be ill in *xi ziang*. {west room} Then Hong Yang tells Cui Ying Ying: "Zhang Sheng is ill now! You have to go there to see him."

Li: Because he's ill of, of you, he just longful for her, you see! <laughs>

Young: Then Cui Ying Ying go to, go to, west room-

Li: At night, I think-

Young: AT MIDNIGHT! <both men laugh> At midnight, go to the west room and Zhang Sheng, Zhang Sheng is very glad! <laughs> Zhang Sheng is very glad, he let Cui Ying Ying to sit down with him and they talked something, each other. Then Zhang Sheng invite Cui Ying Ying to sleep with him. But Cui Ying Ying said: No, it's not

possible I have to go! When Cui Ying Ying want to go outside the west room, they find the door was locked by Hong Yang <Li laughing> The door was locked by Hong Yang. So that they HAVE to, <pause> have to be in <laughs> ... on one bed, together.

[SK: The room didn't have any windows?]

<Li laughs heartily at suggestion of alternate escape route>

Young: I don't know. Perhaps you see in old Chinese building the room has windows -

Li: But it's fixed, fixed.

Young: Not fixed, has many grid, grid on the window, wooden grid. You cannot go through the window.

Young: That's the first night, after that Hong Yang arrange they meet in west room EVERY night. And Zhang Sheng is not ill, Cui Ying Ying is also very glad!<sup>74</sup>

This chapter has explored many of the issues which I feel pertain to a discussion of Chinese storytelling. Despite the length of this chapter, it can hardly be called a definitive or exhaustive (though it was certainly *exhausting*) study. I feel that I have indeed "sailed in and out of years." I fear that only I have become the wiser, though perhaps both my readers and I are now equally haggard. I am not quite a hoary-headed sage yet however, my youthful glow should stand the odyssey of at least one more chapter, though I may be pale and wan if that next crossing proves to be exceedingly rough. I can say with certainty that this peculiar dream has ended, though what I saw of my life's fortunes I dare not tell.

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<sup>74</sup>Li Zhaopeng, YOUNG Zhenpeng. 5 Aug 92. Tape #ak92th-30.

## Chapter 4

# **“Where is the Words for That?”: Orality, Literacy and the Articulation of Expressive Space in the Chinese Heroine Tale**

### **Introduction: The Problem(s) of the Text(s)**

This chapter is concerned with the problems of the textual representation and re-vocalization of the words of my informants. From the outset of this research project, I have been confounded by the dilemma posed by the separation of theory and practice and my own divided loyalties which seem to have emerged in response to this methodological dichotomy. On the one hand, as a scholar, I know that I

must present these texts as records of performance that are as exact, complete and verifiable as possible. On the other hand, as a young teacher of English as a second language, working from the standpoint of advocacy and the development of skills if not of friendship, I am conscious that I must try to bring out the fragile patterns of eloquence in these texts beneath their stubborn overlay of second language interference, hesitation and the fear of error and misunderstanding. The second part of the problem has as much to do with ethics in scholarship as the first, it is part of my gesture of reciprocity. I promised my informants that I would not let their self-styled "poor English" speak for them. Ethics is also about honesty, I would be representing myself falsely if I did not admit to sharing the same fear.

The student's phrase I have quoted in the title of this chapter aptly illustrates the delicate balance that I must strive to achieve and maintain in my research. While trying to put words to her impressions of the paradoxically cruel nobility of Empress Wu, Sylvia suddenly said these words and seemed indeed to be physically searching. Her speech during this segment of the interview flowed in a fairly coherent fashion and was not interspersed with the off-handed "*zen me shou?*" literally "how to say?" to which she and other informants often resorted. Suddenly, she stopped and seemed lost. Her words belied a search for not so much an item (what), or a manner (how) of articulation, but a location, a "where" upon which to anchor a verbal placelessness or liminality. As I have said, many of my informants are in a state of transition and marginality, between the world that they came from and the one that they now find themselves in. In this new cultural environment, many of them have to struggle with the establishment of social and academic expressive space, while not losing their grasp of their articulation of tradition.

This chapter discusses issues of transcription, as this research skill is funda-

mental to the presentation and analysis of the text of any performance and presents, I believe, particular difficulties with respect to informants whose expressions of verbal art are not in the language of tradition and first acquisition. I will look at the potential for ethnopoetic transcription as an alternative means of amplifying and clarifying informants' voices. With regard to heroine tales in particular, I will examine the interplay of different genres which are present in different narratives and which display variations in the degree to which they are expressed within the larger narrative whole. It is possible that the fate of the heroine is unknown because the conflicting expressive spaces delineated by the intersecting of competing genres remains likewise unresolved. This latter point is a reworked application of Dorst's interpretations of Bakhtinian genre theory in terms of its potential contributions to folklore. His work, along with that of Abrahams will be discussed in greater detail in a later section. Finally, touching upon different aspects of Western and Chinese folklore in general, the relationships between oral, literary and popular printed traditions and their impact upon the dynamic shaping and variation of folkloric texts will be explored.

Although Folklore shares considerable common ground with both the literary and anthropological domains, it is distinguished from other social science and humanist disciplines for several reasons, among them its concern with the accurate reporting of authentic oral texts which capture as much of as the performance texture and context as possible. Transcription is a basic skill for the fieldworker, but that does not mean that it is a simple one to acquire. Before I describe the methods and conventions adopted for use in this thesis and detail the underlying reasons for their selection, I will first briefly survey some of the relevant literature.

## Text as Performance: The Transcription Puzzle

Halpert and Widdowson offer a succinct statement regarding the ideal standard for transcription, however, they point out that often the resultant texts themselves do not exemplify these principles for a variety of reasons which may range from the individual practices of a given fieldworker to the conditions of the research interview. In general, they maintain that the following principles should be adhered to as closely as possible:

First, the narrative text should be collected and presented in its full social context. Next, since the telling of a narrative is a performance, to record it accurately a recording device, usually a taperecorder is essential. Third, folklorists have long recognized that there is no one text of a tale that is the whole tale: the tale exists in all of its versions. Modern performance theory carries this still further. No single text, i.e., a single performance of a tale by a single narrator, is the whole tale: the tale exists in all of its performances. Fourth, any published text of a tale should be an exact record of the performance (39).

The second point seems to be a *sine qua non* of modern research practice. It is difficult for me and I suspect, many of my former classmates who are now engaged in fieldwork as well, to imagine going out into the field without a tape recorder. The first point however, the collection and presentation of a text "in its full social context," poses certain methodological difficulties. I suggest that it would be almost impossible for any fieldworker to notice, coherently record and interpret all potentially relevant aspects of context. "Context" becomes a delimited sphere the moment the ethnographer enters the scene: what strikes one fieldworker as significant may be completely beyond the perceptions of the next. This has to do, I believe, with the mechanics of selective attention and perception as much as with research perspective. "The retina of ethnographic observation" (Dorst 415) is by definition

a selectively myopic organ. A researcher may note down all of the social context of a given performance event, but the contextualization that will be provided in the final scholarly account will tend to be those facets of the event out of which the researcher can make meaning. As far as I have read and experienced in the course of my academic training, we come to the performance context in a similar way as a reader comes to a literary text, with certain experiences, knowledge and expectations based on a kind of reflexive intertextuality,<sup>1</sup> except that the ethnographer attempts to limit the imposition of his or her expectations, or at least to define their approximate sphere of influence, in order to mitigate the effects of ethnocentric biases on fieldwork.

The implication of the third point, that tales should be collected several times from both the same and different narrators, is one that I completely agree with. Unfortunately during my research, I found that this was not often possible, both because of time constraints on both sides, and the fact that some of my informants encouraged me to collect many different heroine stories, so that the breadth of my narrative collection did not become too circumscribed, and as such, I was rarely able to collect the same thing more than once from the same informant, or the same story several times from a variety of storytellers, with the possible exception of *The White Snake*. The fourth point, concerning the precision with which the performance is transformed into print, is the central issue remaining in this section.

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<sup>1</sup>This term is taken from the work of Walter Ong, who applies it to the writer's, rather than the reader's approach to dealing with the text. Ong's ideas will be explored further later in this chapter, but I see the two performance events – the oral narration of a story and the reading of a text – as being analogous with respect to the feedback cycle established by both the present and implied audiences and the fact that both events have the goal of communication. Mary Ellen Lewis expands on this position in her article: "Some Continuities Between Oral and Written Literature," *Folklore Studies in the Twentieth Century: Proceedings of the Centenary Conference of the Folklore Society*, ed. Venetia J. Newall (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1978, 1980. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978, 1980) 272-277.

## Mechanics of Transcription: General Issues

This discussion will now focus on various "nuts and bolts" issues involved in the transcription of oral texts. According to Ives:

A transcript of any sort is simply the best representation you can make of what is on the tape, but as it is a representation, it is unavoidably an interpretation. No two people will transcribe the same tape in exactly the same way, even if they are following the same set of guidelines, nor will the same person transcribe it in the same way on two different occasions. . . . We must accept this sort of variation as inherent in the whole process, but accepting it as a limitation in no way invalidates the process. Rather, the process is strengthened, because we will use it more intelligently, knowing as we do what we can reasonably expect of it (94).

I am inclined to agree with the basic framework of Ives' approach, which can be paraphrased as: Decide on a manageable system which fits your purposes and makes the text accessible and comprehensible to the reader, and stick to it.

Halpert and Widdowson's method for the representation of different types of pauses (46) is of interest to me, both because it has potential applications for the kind of transcription that I have been doing with second language speakers, and also because there may be some artistic tradition in the use of pausing at certain stages in the performance of more active tradition bearers, like Wang Xuding and Liu Bin, which may be a manifestation of an Eastern stylistic device common to Japanese storytellers as well (Hrdličková 190).



## Transcriptive Conventions and Compromises Used in This Thesis

At this point, I want to detail the kinds of transcriptive devices used for the presentation of texts in this study. Emphasized words were capitalized if the emphasis was heard to be over the entire word, rather than a misplacement of syllabic stress. Gestures, pauses, interjections which masked the words of a given speaker, as well as mechanical and environmental interferences were enclosed in single pointed brackets (<, >). Despite the interdictions found in some fieldwork manuals, I did resort to the use of ellipses when the transcript contained several successive false starts that did not finally approximate a recognizable word, or when the informant's digression strayed too far from the point being made, or left the narrative mode completely, such as to ask how near we were to a "time limit" which, for my part, was a completely non-existent construct, but which seemed to worry some of my informants because they felt that they were keeping me too long. The only other place where I occasionally used either ellipsis or paraphrasing is when I was attempting to mute out my own voice as interviewer, most often because I accidentally resorted to double-barrelled questions which effectively asserted, then negated themselves before my informants had an opportunity to answer and as such my informants simply declined to respond until the question was restated as a series of single inquiries. My speech was enclosed in square brackets ([,]) and was preceded by my initials and a colon for a question rendered verbatim, or without for a paraphrased question. Informants' speech was presented without brackets, with one or two initials at the beginning, or the shortened form of a Chinese or Anglicized name, depending upon their preferences and similarities between names.

Concerning the actual words as opposed to the delineation of the speakers

or the particular conditions which affected the speech event, I also had to make certain adjustments. These can be summarized as phonological changes in which: 1) informants added additional sounds to words in keeping with permissible syllabic patterns in Mandarin, 2) informants elided sounds that were pronounced in English but may not have conformed to Mandarin phonological constraints, 3) informants code-switched into Mandarin, but did not follow up with an attempt at English translation, or 4) informants added sounds or elided medial syllabic vowels to create words that were anomalous to the phonological rules of Mandarin.

In the first case, "allowable" added sounds were indicated by representing the inserted sound as an orthographic letter or syllabic cluster and enclosing it in parentheses. One example of this is "Ann's" pronunciation of "tradition" as "tra(n)/dition," where, for the purposes of this discussion, "/" denotes the syllable break. The second phenomenon happened frequently, especially with words that contained consonant clusters, which are not permitted in Mandarin within the same syllable. This, along with almost random substitutions of gender pronouns ("he" and "she" in Mandarin have the same phonemic and tonal pronunciations, but different written characters), represented probably the most frequent example of first language interference which influenced informants' oral performances. In this case, the missing sound was inserted, enclosed by curly brackets ({, }) In the third instance, the English gloss for the word or idiomatic phrase immediately followed the Mandarin phonemic string, and was also enclosed by curly brackets. The final case was the only one in which I resorted to respelling, since words falling into this category lacked, I felt, "automatic phonetic realization" which would otherwise account for their differential pronunciation (Preston, "Fowlower" 311). In this instance, an elided syllable or added letter created a consonant cluster which was spoken. A common example of this was the word *probably*, which I transcribed with an apostrophe to mark the missing segment.

As with most respellings, even this compromise proved to be only marginally satisfactory, as it does not show that the syllable break occurs after the /o/ in many informants' pronunciations (e.g., Hongbing), such that /b/ and /l/ form an "illegal" blend. As the first and second cases can be explained fairly consistently as demonstrating the predictable operation of phonological rules, I would like to now focus this discussion on the last two cases, which are concerned with the issues of translation and the representation of literary dialect respectively. I will first address translation, and my abilities and limitations as a translator.

## **Teacher, Translator, Student: Linguistic Competence and the Mutual Construction of Oral Performance**

A person's ability as a translator is tied to his or her ability to create a kind of "separate peace" between his or her own first language and the target language. My experience as an ESL instructor compensates, I believe, for a measure of what I lack in formal Chinese language training. I will not deny that there is probably a fairly significant amount of reconstruction in my transcription, which can be counted in one sense as "errors" on my part. As Preston says:

The source of such error is two-fold. First, since language is a meaning-conveying system, the ability to hear form instead of meaning requires excruciating effort. Why should one concentrate on the exact forms of an utterance while at all other times in linguistic life the goal in language processing is message retrieval? Second, since the major objective is understanding, listeners naturally use any means they can to predict what is going to occur in order to avoid the time consuming task of processing all the signals. We often create what we want to hear on the basis of a wide range of context, previous experience, redundancy and other factors ("Fowlower" 321).

I was probably able to decipher without too much conscious effort most of my informants' "Chinglish," including what others might consider to be severely constricted, or even incomprehensible words and phrases because many of them were students in my academic speaking tutorials either at the time of collection or previous to that. These were weekly classes which concentrated on oral presentation skills using discipline-specific content relevant to the students' course requirements. As part of my work, I have had to make detailed anecdotal reports of error patterns, use of context clues and cohesive strategies, etcetera. In addition, it should be clear by now from the transcribed texts appearing in this thesis that the construction of many of these oral texts was a cooperative effort. Students frequently deferred to me for oddities of translation, as well as for play-by-play commentary on the accuracy of their vocabulary. I say "oddities," because although my Chinese is far from perfect, it is colourful. I can flirt, argue, bargain and curse with a certain degree of lexical agility. My Chinese is therefore very much an oral medium of communication, which I feel makes my second language skills well suited to the interview setting. Although I cannot read a newspaper without a dictionary, if a story or a letter is read aloud to me, I experience few problems with comprehension. In the same way that the writing of this thesis has necessitated the postponement of further collection, I find myself caught in another paradox. I am writing about a Chinese subject, but have had to put off regular language classes in order to write. I readily admit that I do not possess in Chinese the level of reading and writing proficiency that my students have managed to acquire in English, but to put things into perspective, I have studied informally for two years as compared to their more systematic ten or more. I believe that I possess a greater awareness and understanding of my second language than the little street urchins who used to follow my grandmother around in Shanghai, begging oranges and other delicacies off the "foreign devil nurses." Their juvenile "thieves' cant" was likely once an American sailor's lament: "Ain't got no mama, ain't got

no papa, ain't got no whiskey-soda." Like them however, my attempts have been persistent and my efforts ultimately rewarding.

### Some Inevitable Losses, Compensations and Compromises in Translation

I would like to look at one more point concerning the interface between second language proficiency and translation before closing this part of the discussion. Finnegan discusses the issue of translation at length and suggests, like Ives, that the rendering of oral texts is a pragmatic undertaking:

Translation is not an absolute process, and differs according to aim and interpretation. No one of its manifestations, not even the often assumed word-for-word "correspondence model" is self-evidently the most accurate one, and translators have to make up their own minds about appropriate models for their own purposes. But if in one sense, translation is impossible, at best relative and disputable, the duty remains not to be *unfaithful* to the original in whatever respects are being focussed on. . . . The responsible translator must fulfill obligations such as a reasonable command of both the official and target languages (or at least make it clear if not), ideally including knowledge not just of vocabulary but of grammatical and syntactical structures, of differing registers, and of language usage generally (190).

Following this line, I have been honest in my presentations of both my phonetic and orthographic translations, in the transcribed segments which appear in this thesis, and in describing my general level of linguistic competence. Die-hard sinolinguists will notice that I have left diacritics, such as tonal markers, out of my transcriptions, and that I have also not rendered the text into characters. For the translation or transliteration of poetic passages with fixed wording and scansion, I have cited published sources, while I have translated tape recorded words or phrases where necessary. There are several reasons for this, but the central one that should

be noted is that the cantefables and other "fixed" poetic forms mentioned in previous chapters are from **orally recited performances** and as such there is some variation between narrators which may have to do with such factors as reconstructions due to memory retrieval processes, or differences in the published source by which the informant originally came into contact with the story that he or she later orally performed. The last possibility comprises an entire section for later discussion in this chapter. However I can give an example of this phenomenon and the way that subtle changes inform the performance text without changing its underlying structure. Two informants who gave spoken performances of "The Ballad of Hua Mulan," one using a printed text to which she often referred or read from, and the other using a text which he himself had written out from memory beforehand. The two performers differed with respect to the means by which Mulan returns home. Mr. Ouyang said that she was borne homeward on a "swift horse," (*kuai ma*) while Mrs. Han said that the beast of burden was a "*ming tou*" a type of camel that can travel both night and day. Both animals made sense in terms of line scansion and as modes of transportation. Although some discrepancies exist between oral performances and printed sources, most of the substitutions made by informants were, like the example cited above, meaning-preserving. As I mentioned earlier, I was often unable to interview the same informant more than once, and therefore, could not collect a second example to use as a comparative standard in order to check for differences between versions given by a single performer. I have sufficient literacy to be able to read a phonemic transcription and compare it against a published one to see whether the content is similar, though I cannot say whether or not the aesthetic presentation of the English text is an accurate reflection of the Mandarin one, as the metric and other poetic conventions are completely different.

Concerning tonal diacritics specifically, while informants have told me that

I seem to display a high degree of *phonemic* accuracy in Mandarin, this does not necessarily refer to *tonal* accuracy. I do not hear all of the discrete tones in speech that is spoken at normal speed, even though I understand for the most part, through context clues and various other strategies, what is being said and where necessary I am not afraid to request clarification. Likewise, informants do not pay particular attention to the qualities of individual tones, although they are aware that they are continually making use of them. I have often found that asking Mandarin speakers to fill in the tones on a *pin yin* (phonetic) text is rather like asking them to complete a spelling test in English made up of words that they have never encountered before. The distribution of markers can have as high as a fifty-percent error rate, a result that is not much different than a completely random distribution, which one would assume for the placement of four tones would display a chance success rate of approximately twenty-five percent. This was especially true for those who, like most of my informants, came from regions in China that are outside the "Beijing standard" dialect area. For the purposes of the present discussion, I am most interested in spatial patterning and the use of phonemic markers and code-switching, and I have reproduced these phenomena as faithfully as possible. Exact and elegant transliterations of texts are beyond the combined competencies of both myself and my informants, and all that I can do is admit that I have done the best that I can.

## **Respelling and Literary Dialect: Drawing the Limits of Compromise**

I would now like to address the fourth kind of feature that my transcriptive system had to consider, that of respelling. In this discussion, I would like to specifically

explore the issues of respelling and literary dialect.

Whether partially as a result of unconscious reconstruction on my part, the fact that Mandarin and Cantonese speakers differ in the intonation patterns which transfer over into English, or the fact that most of my informants are highly educated, having studied English intensively for a number of years, I have not found instances of the "Chinatown pidgin" which appears to have become entrenched in the popular stereotypes associated with emigrant Chinese. While I definitely heard language in my research recordings that could be described as deviation from some standard of native speakers' "standard English," as mentioned earlier, almost all of these differences could be explained in terms of systematic phonological processes, which were most likely related to first language interference. The only cases in which I respelled words were those where the identifiable phonemic string deviated from the first language to the extent that it could not be accounted for within Mandarin phonology.

Like Preston, I find the possible justifications for the widespread respelling of oral texts to be rather weak:

Though the impetus for respelling may come from the desire to represent the speech of an informant accurately, what folklorists choose to respell most often turns out to be that which strikes them as non standard or unusual. The linguistic problem turns out to be very like the folklore problem. Folklorists find "folk speech" in performances that contain language noticeably different from their own or from their notion of the standard. ... In addition to seeking accuracy, respellings may have arisen from the folklorist's desire to indicate that what is written was actually spoken. There is no doubt some desire to capture something of the spontaneous quality of an interaction that was so vivid at the time of collection and so pale on paper ( "Fowklower" 306, 323).

He further warns however:

Even though the folklorist's motivations for respelling may be a desire



for accuracy, two things stand out as failures in such respellings. First, many of the representations are inaccurate or unnecessary. Secondly, they mislead the reader about the status of the informant or the collector's opinion of that status. . . . English has been spelled for so long, and we literates have read it for so long in one shape, that its very appearance has taken on significance beyond the message. I find it very difficult to think of a respelling . . . that I do not feel to be critical of the speaker ("Fowklower" 309, 322).

In a reply to Preston's argument which is specifically focussed on the last point, that respellings signal certain derogatory stereotypical associations which are directed toward the people who are purported to actually speak in a particular "non standard" way, Fine outlines her support for the use of literary dialect. The article carefully points out discrepancies in Preston's findings, and challenges many of his assertions. While the analysis itself appears to have certain scholarly merit, it is more suited to a literary discussion, as much of her cited support is invalid and incommensurable with a folklore perspective. While both she and Preston eschew the use of eye-dialect as it represents a halfhearted attempt to bring orthography in line with performance texture but fails to clarify pronunciation (Fine, 328, Preston "Fowklower" 320), her recommendations for the acceptance and use of literary dialect on the grounds that: "Many literate scholars and poets then, consciously employ literary dialect out of genuine appreciation for the dialect and people they are trying to study or represent" (324) is unfounded as a precedent in the discourse of Folklore. Although I agree with her that the problem of "translating performance into print" (324) represents a formidable one in folkloristics, I feel that there are less contentious roads to reciprocity.

As Preston and others have pointed out, the authors and poets which Fine cites in order to substantiate her assertions, such as Dickens and Shakespeare, were using literary dialect in a conscious effort to create stereotypes. By contrast, I suggest that a folklorist who tried to consciously construct "the folk" would be guilty of a

grave misuse of scholarship and of misrepresentation of the discipline. In effect, such a researcher would be "re-marginalizing the marginalized," when in fact there is often sufficient "recreation of performance" with the revival/disturbance of tradition created by even the most unobtrusive, professional and compassionate ethnographic presence.

Fine neglects to mention that often the writer's manipulation of literary dialect falls along a continuum of experience. The farther the writer moves away from the region or culture with which he or she is most familiar, often the more ethnocentric (perhaps deliberately so) the effort appears. When Shakespeare speaks through Shylock for example, he is playing on popular stereotypes that are not only unrepresentative of the cultural group being referred to, but I would argue, openly anti-Semitic. It has been pointed out to me that a corollary of this argument is that "only insiders can present culture."<sup>2</sup> I have developed an appreciation for certain Chinese-North American writers and poets who are able to manipulate their particular idiom with grace and power. I am also aware that I do not have the licence to attempt such manipulations myself because while I can identify the skillful use of such devices, I cannot see where the parameters lie as far as integration into my own writing style and culture are concerned, or if indeed that kind of dovetailing can ever be aesthetically successful in reverse. In writing this thesis, I, an outsider with a certain perspective based in part on a degree of insider experience, am unavoidably presenting culture, filtered through my own perceptions, sensitivity and interpretations. However, I do not support the Anglicized glossing-over of any culture, by scholars who are supposed to be, as Preston succinctly points out, **reporting** rather than **creating** texts ("Spellin' " 332).

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<sup>2</sup>Jamie Moreira. Personal communication. 29 Apr 93. I must also credit Jamie for the comment about re-marginalization which appears in the paragraph preceding this citation.

## Ethnopoetry: The Amplification of Artistry

Despite the fact that I attempted to transcribe both carefully and consistently, I am basically unsatisfied with the presentation of the transcribed texts in this thesis. It seems to me that even highly articulate people do not speak in paragraphs or finished lines. The speech of the vast majority of my informants when presented in this way, given that they are mostly passive bearers with varying degrees of second language fluency, looks far more fragmented and hesitant than what can be heard on the tape. Even with the juxtaposition of textural notation, the fact that the speakers, while not often actually telling stories, are sensitive to and able to describe many of the forces at work within the heroine's cultural milieu is not clear to the extent that it could be. I would have preferred to ethnopoetically transcribe all of the texts appearing in this thesis, paying attention to pauses, phrasal markers and patterns. In this way, their "conscious artistry" (Lord, "Merging" 63) might have been able to more fully emerge and my informants might have had their say more eloquently than standard presentation formats allow. However, while the most basic, linear transcription is undoubtedly a time consuming process, ethnopoetic transcription is almost certainly exponentially more so. As yet another example of pragmatic compromise, I have chosen to present an ethnopoetically transcribed text from a male and a female informant. I believe that ethnopoetry holds great potential for the transcription of oral texts in general, and second language performance texts in particular. As mentioned in a previous chapter, Dell Hymes has suggested that the telling of certain narrative genres (i.e., myths) in languages other than the language of tradition serves to decrease or at least mask their authenticity. If that is true, then ethnopoetry, by uncovering the delicate internal structures of composition, could help to bring the inherent traditional aesthetics to the fore. In addition, ethnopoetic transcription

could help to delineate subtle gender differences with respect to the different ways in which men and women "talk story." It has been suggested for example, that female written narratives tend to be more fragmented, at least in Western tradition, because of the exclusion of women in the past from dialectic and other types of formal oratory training (Ong 159, 160). Perhaps these kinds of pervasive, yet underlying gender differences are like generic differences in so far as the "... great majority of these exchanges are so evanescent that they will fail to register on the retina of ethnographic observation, or in native perceptions for that matter" (Dorst 415). This section will be comprised of a discussion of some of the ethnopoetic literature in order to help to define a working "ethnopoetic canon." This will be followed by the two previously mentioned texts, which will also be accompanied by a brief analysis. ¶

Theorists interested in ethnopoetics differ markedly on their definitions of what "ethnopoetics" is, and what the finished text should look like. The final presentation of the ethnopoetically transcribed text is partially dependent upon the methodological strategies used during transcription. Methodology is merely one component however:

The text is being shaped to expressive purpose, as it proceeds, arousing and fulfilling expectations as is the case with all traditional literary form. ... Particles and patterns are made use of; devices such as these condition what can and will be done; but what is done is controlled ultimately by the imagination and artistry of the narrator. ... There will never be a mechanical procedure for recognizing the shape of the result. ... We can come close, but only insofar as we can enter sympathetically into the imagination and artistry that produced the shape, and share a sense of the satisfactions, moment by moment as device accumulates into design (Hymes "Pattern," 24).

Just as there is no "how to" manual for this type of transcription, neither is there any "shared semiotic system" (Akhmanova and Zadornova 66) within verbal art, nor is there complete agreement as to the limits of the scope of ethnopoetic content. Jason states that ethnopoetry

... (oral or folk literature) is understood as being verbal art, transmitted from generation to generation by talented performers in a process of improvisation. A certain literary canon enables this performance.

Not every text passed on by oral tradition has the quality of being oral literature. For an orally transmitted text to be considered "literature," it must possess an artistic form. ... An ethnopoetic work, taken as a whole, encompasses the text, the dramatization of the text (including the kinetic, musical and visual elements) and the audience at the presentation. Each performance of a tale or song is considered a complete piece of ethnopoetry, art in its own right, regardless of other presentations of the same tale or song (5).

I find Jason's emphasis on verbal art too limited for the purposes of my research, especially since I was dealing in the main with people who did not consider themselves to be verbal artists, even in their first language.

Hymes widens the definition to include the patterning of "personal histories" ("Pattern" 20). Much of what my informants gave me can be thought of as a curious mixture of these differing definitions. Their cumulative insights comprise a sort of "oral history of Chinese verbal art," without exactly falling into either category. It is difficult for me to specify the exact nature of the "cultural rhetoric" (Hymes, "Pattern" 14) operating within the words of my informants, but I think that there is a general concern, as I said earlier, with harmony and balance. This statement must be qualified however, since the balance appears to be hermeneutically affected. While both men and women appear to come full circle in the articulation of their opinions concerning the placement of women both within and without the boundaries of traditional narrative as it reflects traditional society, they end up some way off from their original point of departure. Many of my male informants began by extolling the positive attributes - courage, filial piety, devotion, beauty - of particular heroines, then moved into a story or narrative summary and ended with a guarded summation that a true heroine does not seek "equality," since, progressive ideals though they may

be, economic and social equality represent forces with the potential to undermine both the national and familial infrastructure. This is almost in direct contrast to both men's and women's discussions of the exploits of the "ideal" heroine like Hua Mulan, whose efforts are seen as praiseworthy in so far as they keep country and family together, because by refusing acknowledgement Mulan is behaving like a good woman. A good woman may lack ability,<sup>3</sup> or when confronted by the patriarchal social order, at least have the "good sense" to pretend that she does.

Most of my female informants, by comparison, began their stories with a greater degree of reservation in their praises, but as they "got going," were more likely to tell the story not in a way that allowed them to be identified with the heroine, but that connected some aspect of their experience – usually an incident involving separation, hardship or struggle – with hers. Warnings or statements which belied their disapproval of some feature of the heroine's life or actions, were often placed near the middle of the story rather than at the end. Individual Chinese stories seem to end like Chinese banquets. After an adequate time has been allowed for all of the sumptuous delicacies to be ingested, someone announces that the feast is over and everything abruptly ends. Both men and women seemed to end their stories with the kind of closure that characterizes informal performances and gatherings. Women, perhaps because of their greater closeness to the character and subject matter, appeared especially careful not to let associations linger. In one of the ethnopoetically transcribed segments that will follow this discussion, Sun Yongmei ends her story with an English translation of *zhei yang de*: "Something like this!" To me this ending bears a concise resemblance to many Western closures, challenging the hearer to verify the facts by reaffirming that the story was told as completely as the teller's memory would allow, while simultaneously neatly permitting the narrator to disavow

<sup>3</sup> A Chinese proverb which also appears in the Introduction.

himself or herself from any specific responsibility for authenticity.

If balance is indeed a facet of the unconscious, or at least unspoken cultural rhetoric of Chinese folk-literature and therefore also characteristic of the heroine tale, then I would suggest that Lord's model of the annular or ring composition of oral narratives can be applied to the performances that I collected during the course of this research independent of their degree of "story-ness" or informants' literacy levels in either language. Lord suggests that ring composition may in fact be often used by tradition bearers unawares, as a way of focusing on cultural values ("Merging" 63, 64). Building on Ong's argument in *Orality and Literacy* that literacy and print culture effect fundamental changes on human consciousness, the fact that literacy must in some way change a tradition bearer's worldview or precipitate a change of worlds altogether, does not entirely negate traditional ways of composing, expressing and finding meaning in the new world ("Merging" 20-22, 40,41). To illustrate my point, I will present two attempts at ethnopoetic texts, the first from a male, the second from a female informant.<sup>4</sup> Additional commentary will accompany each segment.

The first speaker, Li Zhaopeng, is a student in the Chemistry Department. This segment is interesting in that Li is more assertive in this part of the interview than elsewhere. Li was my student while I was conducting my fieldwork. He is a quiet man, who takes great delight in discussing the minute details of the polymers which form the core of his research. He is in his early thirties, and at the time of this interview, was awaiting news as to whether or not his wife's visa had come through. Perhaps these issues, the patient suffering of his wife, and frustration at the

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<sup>4</sup>The two segments chosen for ethnopoetic analysis exemplify some of the general differences between men's and women's narratives and narrative styles discussed earlier. These two examples are not offered as proof of these differences, they are merely intended to show several of the features that I detected in the comparison of taped interviews with both male and female informants. This section is largely a preliminary technical exercise, but one that I think was useful in that it helped me to find performance data that I originally missed.

oppression of government bureaucracy and other forms of authority were playing on his mind as he spoke.

## Ethnopoetic Transcription of Li's Performance

Oh-

Zhou Wen Jun<sup>5</sup> is

I think is -

is a love story.

Zhou Wen Jun and Sima Xiang Rou.

[SK: I don't know that story.]

I -

the story is taken

Took place in Sichuan Province

Southwest China.

<laughs> I -

I don't think really remember the detail! <laughter, embarrassed>

<pause, when Li speaks again, his tone is serious>

Oh, I think

the Zhou Wen Jun is -

is come from the upper,

the upper class

---

<sup>5</sup>Wang Zhao Jun. Li seems to have mixed up this character's name with Hu Wen Jun.



But she loved  
a man  
who's come from the lower class.  
Her family didn't agree with her,  
But {s}he insist ON - <claps hands together softly>  
on it.  
<pause>  
But when {s}he,  
When she married with <halting> the poor  
poor man,  
and {s}he have to, she have to <more rapidly>  
she had to do some housework.  
But before,  
she never do that.  
But {s}he didn't say nothing  
about that.  
{S}he's glad do that.

The disparity of social status is explicitly contrasted and Li balances a description of the domestic skills that the heroine had to acquire with her previously privileged life before her marriage.

<quiet, reflective,> It's a love story.

<long pause>

That's all.

Li remained detached from the narrative, but his main concern, the injustice inherent in the 'old system,' one which seems to place value on blind obedience – whether to family or the state – is clear. I have found that while many Chinese express a certain reverence for the traditional society, they seem to take a certain delight in those rare instances which describe tradition that can be perpetuated and celebrated without oppression. The heroine marries for love, which breaks with tradition, but lives a contented life involving no small measure of domestic readjustment, which restores tradition but leaves out the aspect of subjugation. He shifts from an opening asking to be excused from further performance to the beginning of the narrative after establishing the heroine's place of origin. Throughout his performance, he claps his hands at points of emphasis, which may be to help compensate for his rather soft voice.

[SK: Of the people you've chosen, which one do you think is the most heroic? Which one is the best one?]

Best one?

Let me see!

Heroic? <long pause> I think, Wu Zi Tian is the best.

[SK: How come, why?]

Oh, {s}he's very, very smart  
than the  
than the other,  
than the other women, and  
he is ambitious politic things. <laughs>

Li was rather less confident in his assertions here than elsewhere. He did not emphasize any one particular word or idea. It is possible, based on his next statement, that while Empress Wu fulfilled one of his criteria - doing something that would be remembered by future generations - she represented the authority that demanded unfailing loyalty.

[SK: How would you define a female hero, what kinds of characteristics would a female hero have to have?]

Oh, {s}he's a, her, the female,

her{o}?

should be do -

do something which is REMEMBERED by,

by the -

by the future people.

By the further people. And - <pause>

they should be LOVE her family,

their family.

I think it's a <halting> human,

human feeling.

Yeah, I think.

It's besides that they should do something, let the other people to remember her. <unclear>

His description of the heroine balances activity and passivity, the heroine must go forward courageously, but always remain connected in some way to the family that she leaves behind.

His main point is articulated with some force. He seems to be indicating that there is some difference between the traditional society endorsed by the institutions, and that of the folk and that the dichotomy is perhaps not entirely fairly represented in the folk-literature.

And it's VERY STRANGE, but in-  
many, many stories about the loyal to the government,  
not -  
to do the good things for the everyday people.  
It's not good.

He goes on to relate his focus back to the position of women, which is slightly shifted from the place in which he started, explaining that Zhao Wen Jun forfeited her socioeconomic position for love. He ends his performance in such way as to suggest that the established structure triumphs in the end, that the heroine merely surrenders her mountain of gold for a dowry which effectively substitutes one burden for another of equal if different weight than the one afforded by her previous status of nobility.

But it's - is, very  
very,  
it's FEW,  
FEW women can -  
can be famous.

You know, you see -  
three <claps hands> four mountains <laughs>  
and on the

on the back of the female in China,  
<spoken very rapidly> in all the China.

[SK: What are they?]

<pause>

The, four mountain.

One is the- <pause>

the government.

The government is a mountain on the everyday people.

Another is religious -

religious *shi de?* <softly> {"It's right, this word?"}

<pause>No, sorry -

I think it's only three mountains.

Yeah, another is this -

is her husband.

Her husband is a mountain

[SK: Oh, I see.]

Prison. <claps hands>

So {s}he suffer much,

Than -

much MORE than her husband.<claps hands>

The husband only two mountains,

but-

the wife,

three mountains.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Li Zhaopeng. 4 June 92. Tape #sk92th-17.

Sun Yongmei is a student in the Computer Science Department at Memorial. She is approximately thirty years old. While she was my student, I noticed that she was able to incorporate gestures very effectively into her public speaking, a skill which transfers, both into her second language narratives, and into Mandarin. She has been a co-host for the Scholars' Association's Chinese New Year activities for the past two years and is judged by her peers to possess a polished diction and graceful presentation style. She is not afraid to speak her mind and appears to be a strong personality. Although speaking to me in English did not trouble her, the stories and their allusions did. Like Li, she had also been trying to bring her husband to Canada, though I am not sure whether she was successful in the end. She also begins by protesting that she cannot recall all of the details of the stories which she chose to tell:

### Ethnopoetic Transcription of Sun's Performance

Yeah. For me. {these stories exemplify heroism}

[SK: Do you know any stories like this?]

Ahh <drawn out>

I don't know the name, but something mix up.

I remember some girl, some.

Oh! I remember one.

A snake

*Bai She Zhuan* -

Do you know this?

[SK: Yeah, "The White Snake," "Lady White."]

<pause> Yeah, she yeah,

[SK: I know a little bit about that story -]

She change.

She is a snake.

Then she feel in love with a man.

She change herself to a beautiful woman.

[SK: But I forget what happened to her ...]

I think,

some very bad guy,

allowed -

guide her husband to watch.

And her husband found that she is a snake.

So the husband AFRAID of.

Her.

Then, GO AWAY!

Don't STAY with her. [SK: And then what did she do?]

Mmm, <singsong> I remember,

I - my memory is not very clear.

I remember, <sound as if catching breath, or wincing> a white <unclear>

guy want to put this snake-

under STONE.

Very BIG STONE.

Don't allowed her go out {a}gain.

Maybe, but maybe after long <drawn out, as for emphasis> time

period of time, this snake can go out.

I don't remember quite clearly, but lot of such stories!

Although Sun's overall degree of expressive fluency can be said to be greater than Li's, it takes her a "dry run" through "White Snake" before she really gets to the main story on which she bases her performance, "Tian Xian Pei." At the time of this interview, Sun had been in Canada for more than half a year, but her husband had not joined her.

<continuing very quickly>

There's also another story called *Tian Xian Pei*

[SK: Haven't heard of that one!]

<Sun laughs> Tian Xian Pei is about a -

I don't know how to say in English.

*Xian nu, zian nu.*

[SK: Like a fairy.]

Yeah, she is from heaven.

She watch a man who is very handsome.

So {s}he flow from the sky,

to -

to the ground to marry this man.

EVEN they live very POOR life,

they are very happy.

But, they give birth to two children, <voice as if warning>

One boy, one girl. But -

The birth of the children seems to be a key point in Sun's narrative. I am uncertain as to whether the definite warning tone to her voice is a tacit condemnation



of the tangible evidence of the misalliance of a celestial and a mortal, or a dramatic device. Her speech at that point reflects a definite contrast rather than complement to the domestic joy described in the stanza previous to the one above.

but the girl,  
this woman's brother come from the heaven,  
and take this young lady BACK to the heavens.  
So-  
her husband,  
take two children to -  
FOLLOW her,  
try to go to Heaven,  
visit her. But -  
HE  
WAS STOPPED < voice very clipped, emphatic >  
by the River of STARS.

Sun leaves the immediate storyline but provides a vivid description that still fits within the overall narrative context.

Do you know River of Stars? <laughs>  
It's a Chinese imagination!  
In the sky,  
sometime you can see SO MANY stars in the sky, it's looks like a river.

So the story said,  
the man is STOPPED in the one side of the river,

and the GIRL –  
the woman is stopped at the other side of river.  
They can NEVER meet again!  
Only on a certain day of one year –  
it's the July 7th.  
In this day they can meet.  
For only one day,  
for one year.  
Only one day for one year.

The separation motif is balanced with that of the initiation of the quest.

[SK: Oh, I think I know this story, but maybe I know a different name,  
*Niu Lang Zhi Nu* {Cowherd and Weaving Maid}.]

Yeah, <laughs> that's true...

[SK asks why she thinks this kind of character is heroic.]

<Sun's voice serious> They want the kind of life they WANT,  
they dreamed about.

They GIVE UP a lot of other things.

Maybe Heaven,

Heaven is a good place to stay, it's rich, comfortable.

But because of the LOVE, they can give up lot of things.

That's great! <voice emphatic, but almost whispering>

I should do –

Like this –

SUCH woman!

I can give up good life in Canadian -<singsong>  
go back to my husband! <laughs>  
Something like this! <laughs><sup>7</sup>

Sun's laughter at the end of a contemporary legend described in the third chapter was taken as evidence of her disbelief. Here, it might be her way of saying that although she admires the courageous sacrifice in the story, in terms of her real-time lived world, such a gesture, to give up her placement in her Master's programme in Computer Science and return to China for the sake of her spouse, would ultimately be looked upon by other members of her culture – for many of whom the chance to study and possibly live abroad represents an opportunity that is not to be taken lightly – as absurd.

I realize that I have unavoidably brought to these texts a measure of my own interpretation, but the same would be true of the reading of a novel, or even the enacting of the live, improvised "text-script" of the interview. Still, I believe that in presenting the texts in this way, I have enabled the potential for an amplification of "...the aesthetic impact, the specific "chemistry" of the imaginative text" (Akhmanova and Zadornova 68). My methods of presentation are likewise not yet firmly established as personal conventions, but I have done my best to define the expressive space of these texts, their location in the larger social context that their spatial patterns signify. Ethnopoetry I believe, also helps to demonstrate the removal of these tradition bearers from the actual physical locations of their culture and tradition. Many people have remarked to me about the closeness of the Mainland Chinese students here, and despite the hardships of adjustment and separation from spouses and children, they are by and large here by choice. Still, perhaps it often took infor-

<sup>7</sup>SUN Yongmei. 3 June 92. Tape #sk92th-14.

nants awhile to warm up to telling or discussing stories because they had to reach these traditions by bringing the threads up through the matrix of a re-ordered social structure. Once again, the situation faced by these students is not new to others here in Newfoundland:

Once people decide to leave places, culture becomes objectified. In Newfoundland generally, there is increased interest in a select group of items – stories, songs and objects – that are believed to embody the essence of indigenous values. But these items must accumulate meanings even if they are literally “out of place,” where people have ceased to belong to a community – with its network of social values and obligations (Pocius 25).

Perhaps Sylvia, Sun and many of the others are not only looking to see where the words are, but once found, are lingering within these narratives to take in familiar (if sometimes disturbing) sights, and so to let things fall briefly back into “place.”

## **Textual and Spatial Conflict: The Heroine Tale Read Against Bakhtin’s Genre Theory**

This thesis was intended as a “cross-generic exploration of the Chinese heroine tradition.” It is possible however, that each individual heroine tale could be in itself a microcosm of conflating and conflicting genres. In the final stanza of “The Ballad of Hua Mulan,” when Mulan sets the pair of rabbits free to frolic in the garden, she challenges her former commander to determine which of the running animals is the buck and which the doe. This scene is a natural exemplum illustrating the folly of faith in external appearances and specifically in manifestations of gender. The “White Snake” not only contains the “instrumental” (Dorst 415) riddle of the “tallest and the

shortest man" by which "Lady White" finds her future husband, but it also contains the encapsulated quest-novella which describes how "Lady White" and "Little Green" go to Heaven to steal the *ling zi* herb which restores Xu Xian to life. Certain versions of the story of Meng Jiang Nu describe a series of tasks imposed by Meng upon the lecherous Emperor and Meng gets the upper hand in an ending which contains a clever fabliau. In these versions, even though she ostensibly commits suicide by jumping off the memorial platform that she asked the Emperor to build in memory of her deceased husband, she transforms into a school of little silver fish which swim happily away. Before she jumps however, she "gets her own back," by standing on the platform, loudly cursing and defaming the Emperor.

This section involves an application of Bakhtin's theory, as his study of the novel offers several new points for comparative interpretation, the first of which stems from "... his powerful critique of conventional linguistics as opposed to dialogics, that an analysis of the written record of spoken words denudes those words of the very interpersonal, cultural and ideological context that gave them meaning" (Kershner 182). Bakhtin's interest in the "carnavalesque" is also compatible with a study of heroine traditions, since, as has been previously mentioned, the "world-upside-down" is one of the many interpretations of the symbolic meaning of the anomalous figure of the disguised heroine. By looking at the interplay of generic forms within the heroine tale, it may be possible to develop a greater insight into the conflicting dialogue and contradictory messages which may be acting to mask what one would assume *should* be an important part of the function of these narratives, that they serve as expressions of female possibility, victory and escape. In the next part of this discussion, I will use some of Bakhtin's ideas in an exploration of some of the reasons that might account for the persistence of the heroine tradition despite its apparently nonfunctional, or even occasionally "dysfunctional" underground existence.

It appears that for Bakhtin, the most meaningful unit of discourse is speech and the most potentially powerful form of oral discourse is that which is "...infused with popular speech and thus with the heterological, disruptive spirit of "the people," or "the folk" " (Kershner 167). By its design, Bakhtin's theory forces us to appreciate and to

...be aware however, that the consistencies and stabilities central to both analytic and ethnographic genre studies automatically imply the existence of their complements. Generic instabilities and ambiguities constitute a legitimate, though largely neglected, area of genre research (Dorst 413).

By contrast, the inconsistencies in his approach force us to proceed cautiously, since his work, though purporting to capture and express the voice of "the folk" does so through a genre that however "dialogic" or "subversive," is still a predominantly literary one that is inextricably tied to and informed by an extremely detached, elitist canon. Taken to its extreme, Bakhtin's theory becomes its own multivocalic conundrum and the "Bakhtinian circle" taken out of ethnographic context, seems almost to become a self-perpetuating cycle of dialogic confrontation and refutation.

Although Dorst's premise that Bakhtin's ideas on generic interactions can provide a valid perspective for folklorists interested in narrative research, as far as Folklore should be concerned, their application must be tempered with a concern for cultural context:

As his concerns begin with recorded texts, whether literary or collected from oral tradition, Bakhtin's vision of the relationship between genres must be complemented by the recent arguments made on behalf of studying performed genres *in situ* and collecting as much native exegesis as possible (Abrahams 85).

## The Text and Context of "Genre"

It may be necessary to conceptualize the question of the cultural rhetoric of the heroine tale first in terms of an analysis of confrontation between contrastive elements and then as a synthesis of cultural expression of the role and position of women, even if this latter "move" requires an adjustment of previously understood generic categories. Concerning this last possibility, I am not trying to disprove my earlier statements – there are other embedded narrative forms within the various accounts which make up this tradition – but it should be noted that most of the genres where the heroine appears, such as ballads, novelle and märchen, have been so far determined in the "traditional" way, though the use of a type index and other articles which are concerned with genre research. The cultural reality of these tales could be such that their actual emic classification within the ethnic complex defining their existence could point to an entirely different "generic paradigm" under which all of these narratives are actually subsumed.

"Emic" and "etic" are words that some would argue are the province of linguistics and yet they have been borrowed into Folklore quite successfully. I would like to borrow from linguistics again, this time the concepts of *surface structure* and *deep structure*. The next part of this discussion will be mainly concerned with the surface structure provided by the generic interactions which can be found in the texts themselves and which comprise part of the "positive expressive space," what informants telling these stories say that the heroine **actually does**. This will be followed by a re-examination of the "negative expressive space," what informants said these stories **did not do**. I hope that this approach may help to uncover part of the cultural deep structure of this rather elusive "genre."

## Generic Interactions-As-Text: Scratching the Surface of "Positive Space"

For the purposes of this discussion, "positive space" is defined, as in art, as the space occupied by that which can be seen in a given item of expression. According to Dorst, the central interactive conflict in the neck-riddle is one involving time.

The rhetoric of the neck-riddle complex then, is partially a rhetoric of temporality confronting atemporality. At least symbolically, the content of neck-riddles recapitulates this dialogue. The accidental, the absurd, the bizarre: These dominant qualities of neck riddle content suggest a world of pure contingency. It is not just a world in time but the existential world of random, unrepeatable experience; the indeterminate world we articulate into meaning through our narratives. Riddles however, usually trade in the common, the typical, the categorical. They involve the momentary estrangement of the taken-for-granted, that realm of experience so habitual and familiar as to seem inevitable (i.e., timeless). We can read the utter unsolvability of the neck-riddle enigmas, I think, as a symbolic embodiment of two radically incompatible, even diametrically opposed qualities of temporal experience being brought together to engage in a dialogue of mutual commentary (424).

I suggest that the Chinese heroine tradition may establish a rhetoric in a similar way, but along a spatial, rather than a temporal, continuum. In the first chapter, I attempted to show how the essential conflict facing the heroine was one of the choice between freedom and conformity to social norms. Perhaps the different genres which find expression in a given heroine tale, Meng Jiang Nu as novelle and fabliau for example, form "a mutual commentary" on this dilemma which faces the traditional Chinese woman-as-heroine. Likewise, the heroine's fate remains "unsolved," because the elements of freedom and conformity, like two equally cohesive solids or two equally strong forces, meet but one cannot overcome the other. The heroine, at the vortex of these forces, remains motionless until she chooses to sway one way or the other. Even within confirmed "success," or "tragedy" however, there are questions



remaining unanswered. My informants became thoughtful and quiet when I asked: "What happens to Mulan after she gets home?" Sometimes they stated that a "tragic heroine" was actually successful, such as:

F: Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai.

ZX: Yeah, that's right yeah.

F: Is still love story, about woman.

ZX: So to try to get rid of the chain of the old system, that's one kind of also break up, from the old system. Yeah, to encourage some people to do somethings not exactly.

F: To break down the old system.

ZX: Yeah that's right, also some kind of meaning if, at least this kind of story.

[SK: Is Zhu Yingtai a hero, even though she died?]

ZX: <pensive> Yes, I think,

F: I think she was a hero, as break down the old system -<sup>8</sup>

The generic dialogue is ongoing. It seems plausible in traditional China that, armed with certain safeguards – disguise, assistance, talent, luck – a woman could take on a man's role and have the potential to "succeed." Yet when freedom even temporarily confronts the dense matrix of social constraints, it is difficult to say which genre in the dialogue is "victimized" (Dorst 416) and suppressed, or how the heroine's fate is ultimately negotiated.

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<sup>8</sup>ZHOU Zhongxin (m). FAN Chunxia (f). CHEN Zhao (m). 8 June 92. Tape#sk92th-19.

## Cultural Context and the Articulation of "Negative Expressive Space:" Another Look at Genre

Negative space can be defined as the background, or the "empty space" which effectively frames an expressed object. In most traditional Chinese painting, the positive and negative spaces are balanced and of equal importance. When asked what function the heroine tales served in the wider context of Chinese traditional society, most of my informants, both men and women, categorically denied that they had anything to do with the real-life position of women, or that they served as models of conduct:

[SK: Do the stories present a model of behaviour?]

Sylvia and "Ann" <together>: No.

Syl: No, I don't think so.

"Ann": It doesn't related with the girls behaving, nowadays. It's nothing related.

Syl: NO, I don't think so, when I talk about that, no.<sup>9</sup>

"Ann": We don't think this are our example - Syl: Show us how to do.

"Ann": - We have to do this according to what their do. Ah, no. Not according we have to learn, no.

Syl: Yeah, it just tell the story, a beautiful story. Not tell us how to do that and all follow somebody no, nothing like that.<sup>9</sup>

During another interview:

[SK: What do you think would have been traditionally the function of a story like "Wen Chun Gong Zhu" {Princess Wen Chun}, or the

<sup>9</sup>"Ann," Sylvia ZHAO. 22 May 92. Tape #sk92th-10.

stories about women who were heroes because they allowed themselves to have you know, arranged marriages. Would those kinds of stories traditionally, give a message to young women, do you think?]

F: Oh no! <quite forcefully>

[SK: I mean in previous times, or in rural areas where arranged marriages may still go on, or may have recently still gone on.]

F: Don't think so! [SK: Don't think so?] No, different time, - because now have no the same things <ZX: Same situation.> Different time, same people. Young woman, young woman's think the hero, but I think people NO idea about these things.

ZX: I think, in my opinion I think because -

F: I mean this kind no the same things.

ZX: In my opinion I think, what people talk to the children, especially the daughter, the girls, they not talk about that!<sup>10</sup>

If the heroine is seen as a model it is her filial piety and devotion, not her courage that is emphasized:

<talking about Hua Mulan>

XD: ...at the very beginning, Hua Mulan's father, was asked to go the army, not Hua Mulan herself. And Hua Mulan just thinks that her father is too old to go to the army. And her father used to be a general, and she just decided, well, to go to the army, instead of her father. In order just to save his, save her father, and, the trouble, since her father is an old man. And in that sense, well, that's a kind of fe- the kind of respect to the old and to the, the father figure in the family. And the father in the family is more or less like the king in the country. And she just does every- thing to save her father, and it's kind of model for young girls, just to respect their old folks.<sup>11</sup>

"Ren": This Hua Mulan. We mention about her just now and mmm, before she went to the military army, she was just a, a very good daughter. And very obey, obeyant but when, when her father was, mmm, was

<sup>10</sup>ZHOU Zhongxin (m). FAN Chunxia (f). CHEN Zhao (m). 8 June 92. Tape #sk92th-19.

<sup>11</sup>WANG Xuding. 24 June 92. Tape #sk92th-25.

ordered to be a soldier, for the country and she didn't think it's better, it was better for her father to be a soldier. Because, her father was very old at that time and in her family, she had another very, very young brother and she didn't think it was better for young(s) brother to be a soldier as well. So, in that case, she, she had to face the occasion.<sup>12</sup>

Traditional "Cinderella" heroines present a model which reinforces women's traditional roles (Falassi 46). One would tend to assume that the Chinese heroine would fulfill a similar function if she was also traditional, or be passed on via oral tradition from mothers to daughters as expressions of the possibility of female potential. The function of this type of story, both within society in general and for women in particular, *seems* to be unspoken, negatively expressed, as it were, by its absence. Before returning to a summary of my discussion of Bakhtin, I would like to look at this problem of function in greater depth, as it illustrates the dangers of reading too much into Bakhtin and of not seeing the individual private context and gender differences for the public context and cultural differences of the genre.

The foregoing vehement denials were probably intended to ward off a certain foreign devil, at least temporarily. After focusing the better part of an earlier chapter on the tabus of employing direct questions during interviews with Chinese informants, I realize that my artless technique with respect to the handling of this issue must present a glaring methodological contradiction. The preceding discussion illustrates several points. First, it elucidates another similarity between Chinese and Western folklore. Western informants would be likely to deny the function of fairytales as behavioural models and expressions of developmental maturation just as vociferously, yet scholars such as Holbek and Falassi have frequently indicated that the stories do in fact serve these purposes. Informants seem to be saying that the heroine figures do not represent **national** culture heroes and their stories do not directly reference and

<sup>12</sup>"Ren." 20 May 92. Tape #ak92th-09.

find meaning in present-day contexts. Perhaps for certain individual women however, these figures and their adventures were once models, as Fan's aside shows:

F: I think when I was very young, I want to be a soldier! <laughs> I think, I will be in the future, I will be do that, I will do like so-and-so-so! <laughs> I will be a hero!<sup>13</sup>

The heroines represent a diversion from conventional expectations of women's deportment. It is possible that with informants' interpretations of the heroine tradition there is some kind of public/private, official/unofficial conceptual matrix operating which serves to help informants fix their personal and cultural definitions and evaluations of this figure. The public-official definition could be one that is in line with orthodox Confucianism, that the heroine, even as a soldier, is not subordinate in a way that is befitting to women. Public-unofficial definitions might offer a measure of reprieve, as it must be admitted that the heroine does manifest a profound sense of duty to her larger family, her motherland. While the delineation of a category of personal definition called "private-official" may appear oxymoronic if applied to Western informants, in this case its use is appropriate, as it expresses the traditional beliefs articulated and held by many of the informants I encountered during my research, that a "good woman's" first priorities were filial piety, sacrifice, devotion and the passive self-effacement that accompanied such behaviour. Lastly, some women may privately define certain aspects of their own identities by quietly fanning the embers of more rebellious dreams:

[SK asks if "successful" stories inspire or admonish young girls.]

"Ren": I think they have two different aspects on this problems. First, all these stories still be told, modern time. Which means since such long time, people still thought this woman were the better woman even at that time. That's why they told this story generation by generation.

<sup>13</sup>FAN Chunxia (f). 8 June 92. Tape#sk92th-19.

But from the other side I think, some people don't think this women were good women even at that time so they always trying to teach their daughters or their wives, "Don't do like Mu Gui Ying or Hua Mulan, or Meng Li Jiang, whatever." So I think. For me, I like those stories, I, I like, I like to be that kind of woman which means like Hua Mulan. If our country is invaded by some other invaders, I'd like to, I'd like to go to the battlefield, to be a soldier, to be a hero. Because I have to protect our own country, so in this sense, I think it's good for me to know this heroes, to learn from them.<sup>14</sup>

Sometimes, the objectives behind tacit identification with the heroine are not expressed as a desire to rise up and bear arms, but rather to impart an inner resilience strong enough to quell unspoken potential rebellions and uncertainties:

DW: Yes, I like to embody their characteristics, of strength and intelligence, their sort of, their intuition, their, their inner strength, the strength that they call upon, that they draw upon that comes from within their souls. ... And I'd like to have that strength of character, to be able to do what is right for others, even though it may hurt me. So their sense, their feelings, their -not their feelings - their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the sake of many others, or for their principles. That's what impresses me, and I, I'd like to, I don't know if I can, but I like to be like that, and having that much strength in myself to, be able to be willing to put up with the problems or pain in order to fulfill, in order to live up to my own principles, be it, in order to help others, or just, just stick to my guns and not care what anybody else thinks.<sup>15</sup>

The foregoing discussion does not discount the possibility that the heroine's stories might collectively belong to one or several other genres, since these narratives may also have varying degrees of "officiality" inherent in their generic classification. As Holbek has pointed out, the interpretation of folklore from an academic standpoint is to some degree at odds with informants' own subjective analyses, even though in one sense we are striving toward the same goal " ... we are interested in the ways

<sup>14</sup> "Ren." 20 May 92. Tape #sK92th-09.

<sup>15</sup> Donna Wong. 21 June 92. Tape #sk92th-23.

in which narrators interpret their inheritance" ("Interpretation" 188). Throughout this work, I have been trying in my reinterpretations, to construct a map over a rich and breathtaking landscape. As with all such endeavours, the results necessarily lack the depth and variety of the original environments to which the map refers (Holbek, *Interpretation* 190). Though they may sometimes appear sketchy, my intention has been to draw some of the possible generic contours and parameters by which to locate and compare women in Chinese folklore. Further study, like other kinds of exploration and discovery, will help to clarify more of the features of these "new-old worlds," and to contribute to a better understanding of the real and legendary women who inhabit them.

Bakhtin's theory can make a valuable contribution to narrative research, as long as concern for context remains paramount. Commenting on Dorst's discussion of neck-riddles, Abrahams notes that many of these narratives are in fact West Indian trickster tales, or "Anansi stories" (87) which helps to place them back into their culturally-determined context (87). He feels that just as scholars of Bakhtin would benefit from a greater ethnographic emphasis when trying to analyze "the world of the folk," the reverse could also have positive effects:

...that such an approach ... as it is concerned with the underlying representations out of which performed items are somehow generated, would encourage ethnographers of communication and performance to give us not only a profile of the expressive genres (and possibly the events in which the genres recur), but also a consideration of how the informing ideologies of the culture might be mapped onto these representations as well (86).

It is last point that I wish to consider before closing this section.

Abrahams was able to show that for one culture at least, a neck-riddle, or folktale which included an expression of that particular genre, was actually a well-

known form of trickster tale. Up to now, I have essentially taken the surface generic structures "at face value." Similar to the multi-layered meaning of "face" as a social construct in Chinese culture however, it is possible that a deeper examination of the features common to the various narratives belonging to the heroine tradition that I have so far discussed might reveal a different cultural significance. The heroine narratives do not comprise a body of material that can be said to be part of active, public tradition, and on the surface at least, they do not seem to convey any functional import. They are dismissed as "just beautiful stories."

My research into Chinese narrative traditions is ongoing. As previously mentioned, I am working primarily with Liu Bin at the moment, and he has shown a keen interest in this subject. At first he told me that fabliaux have only existed in China since 1949, with the official (Party-endorsed) encouragement of the women's liberation movement. I could not believe that a more ancient tradition did not exist.

During this time I have been able to ascertain something of the scope of his extensive repertoire and we have developed a "research protocol" (Shostak 229) based on his preferences that would probably shock many writers of fieldwork guides: "You are too QUIET! Please interrupt me, I feel that my performance will be much more natural and much better if you give me some challenge!" When he began thinking about "clever wife, stupid husband" tales, things once again took a military turn, and suddenly Liu was able to tap into a more ancient tradition. The first female fabliau character he mentioned, much to my slack-jawed surprise, was none other than Mu Gui Ying. After all, she **was** much more accomplished as a fighter than her husband. He manages to get himself killed on the battlefield shortly after their marriage.

A fabliau can be defined as a short narrative which focuses on male and female characters cast in stereotypical roles and involves an element of comeuppance or



revenge in the final outcome. Gender in the heroine tradition is as sharply defined as elsewhere in Chinese culture at the outset, it is the introduction of disguise, disclosure or a helper which temporarily subverts and blurs it. If the outcome of a Western fabliau involves individuals acting to bring about the "just deserts" of the deceiving character (a novice who informs on a lecherous abbot, a stupid lover who betrays his hiding place), then it would make sense that in the Chinese genre, the ending tended towards a greater degree of collective determination.

The heroine's destiny is partially a random outcome to the extent that she displays detachment and passivity toward her circumstances, but ultimately the final victory or failure rests in the heroine's ability to play her hand against a stacked deck and crooked dealer, the patriarchal society into which she was born. Confucian social order plays the final ace, unless, like Meng, the heroine has one hiding in her sleeve and she jumps at the chance to use it. If the heroine tradition is indeed part of the fabliau genre, this would help to account for its "underground" status, the fact that although my informants showed great interest in talking to me about it, most of them eventually steered the conversation carefully toward the nature of relationships or the position of contemporary women, and the fact that these stories are not used as models for young girls.

Although an indiscriminate application of Bakhtin's concepts to this tradition might have caused me to err even further on the side of literary analysis than I already have, I have tried to maintain a folkloristic outlook toward this extremely influential body of ideas. In the foregoing section, I have tried, like Liu's story of Qin Liang Yu and the "White Bar Army" presented in a previous chapter, to connect hooks and rings in an effort to scale this formidable mountain. Bakhtin is not the only way to the summit, but his work provides another link in a fuller understanding of Chinese

## **Towards an Understanding of the Relationship Between Orality, Literacy and Print in Folklore: Eastern and Western Views on a "Great Wall"**

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out  
And to whom I was like to give offence.<sup>16</sup>

This section is intended as an exploration of the very complex relationship between oral, written and popular print traditions as they influence the folkloric text in general and Chinese folklore in particular. In my attempts to synthesize some of the extensive but often disparate scholarship which deals with the question of oral and written forms, I have found it necessary to posit a few working assumptions. Although I see differences between these various forms of transmission, there are still strong interconnections between them. Also, I do not see that any one form is any more "fixed" or stable than any other; this is one of the central points that will form the basis of this discussion. Although Stahl's stylistic analysis of oral and written forms is compelling and insightful, from what I know of the history of both Chinese and Western editing and publishing practices, it would appear that the continuum between variability and fixity of text is not quite so straightforward and predictable.

<sup>16</sup>Robert Frost, "Mending Wall," *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, by Edward Connery Latham (Bedford Square, London: Jonathan Cape, 1971) 34.

If however, Stahl's statement is taken in reference to the first two stages of the transmission process, then her argument is both valid and elegant. She says:

The text of an oral narrative is variable simply because it is told many times and each telling is different from any other. A written text is fixed because it is written only once and is not changed even if it is printed or reprinted many times (48).

By contrast, the more literary viewpoint changes the static/dynamic referents:

It has been widely assumed, especially by students of written literature, that folk or oral literature is not only static, but in essence conservative, repetitive and unchanging. By contrast, great oral literature ... is dynamic, innovative and infinitely variable (Lewis 275).

However, as Lewis goes on to say:

This latter {notion regarding the dynamism of literature} is probably a postulated aesthetic ideal; for few works, few authors, break radically with the past: themes recur, structural patterns reappear, styles repeat (275).

There is at least one more stage in the transmission continuum, though I prefer to think of the transmission process more as a cycle. Oral materials which inform written tradition are eventually taken back up into oral tradition, often through the medium of print, and therefore it is possible to make a further distinction, as Ong does, between written "manuscript" and "print" culture. My second working assumption is that in fact, if taken holistically, the relationships between the stages of transmission in both Western and Chinese folklore are actually not as dissimilar as might be supposed on initial contact with Chinese traditional narratives. Oral forms influence the written traditions of both "cultures,"<sup>17</sup> and both are disseminated through print.

<sup>17</sup>I am using this umbrella term here for the sake of brevity and convenience, in full recognition that, like the multiple meanings of the word "community," there are many cultures making up the Western and Chinese macrocosms.

The difference may lie in the fact that because China has had a literate culture for a much longer period of time than the West in general, the "uptake time" or the "absorption rate" of the written/printed materials' return to oral tradition is likely different and may even be, I will venture to say, slightly faster and "metabolically" more efficient.

The final aspect of my perspective on this question can be seen in the phrase "China has *had* . . ." as opposed to "China has *been* a literate culture . . .," because it should be made clear that the spread of literacy has traditionally been equally if not more deliberately elitist and exclusive in China as in the West and was an opportunity essentially reserved, until fairly recent times, for upper class "gentlemen scholars," monks and poor **boys** able to acquire sufficient tutoring to allow them to make good on the provincial and national civil service examinations. Just as many adult Canadians are unable to function adequately in a print environment, China's present population of approximately 1.2 billion people has an illiteracy rate that informants have told me may run as high as forty percent in many rural areas.

## Orality and Literacy: The "Scholars," the "Folk" and the Problems of Chatting Over Only One Side of the Fence

The excerpt from Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" which prefaces this section expresses my feelings about the history of the argument concerning the relative validity and "purity" of oral versus written forms as traditional materials. Although I have read several accounts on either side of the debate, and despite a greater recognition in recent scholarship of a dynamic interplay as opposed to a static dichotomy, I still have some difficulty in fully comprehending what the original fuss was about. This

section will be concerned with an exploration of some of the past and present views on the subject, as expressed by Western scholars. I was unable to find a historical review of the subject from a Chinese writer's perspective, the literature in this regard appears to be strangely silent. Many writers, both Chinese and Western sinologists, acknowledged the importance of written literature and some, such as Hanan and Lu Xun discussed earlier, have pointed to the influence of oral tradition and folkloric materials on writers of vernacular fiction, like Pu Songling and Feng Menglong. Yet, it did not appear to be a contentious issue in the literature, and indeed, my informants do not seem to consider it so either. Scholars writing about it acknowledge its existence, and my informants show an almost reverential deference to published sources, quietly suggesting at the close on an interview that I "go ask other body, and read some book." Some have provided me with what they consider to be suitable citations, while others have actually lent me books to read. One evening early last semester, I excitedly told Chen that I had finished transcribing the interview which included him, Fan, Zhou and myself. He looked thoughtful for a moment and said in a measured tone: "You had better to read some book because perhaps the stories we told you were not - completely." I explained about the processes of annotating and comparative analysis. "Oh, that's good," he said, visibly relieved and smiling. "Then you will get the REAL story!" This next part of this "story" then, will of necessity reflect a Western perspective, but I hope to be able to draw some parallels that will be applicable to the complicated nature of Chinese folklore, though to what degree it will reflect either the cultural reality or the completeness of the scope of interactions in Chinese narrative traditions I cannot say at this point.

Early in my research, I tried to look for "purely oral" heroine stories, but by the time I had "fixed" my thesis proposal, I realized that my search to uncover a storehouse of hidden Chinese oral tradition here in Newfoundland was fruitless

and misguided. The relationship between oral and written forms on the traditions of cultures that have been affected by literacy appears to evolve into exactly that, a give and take between different means to the similar end of culturally-informed communication (Lewis 272). In some Western tradition, orality permeated literacy, but the reciprocal exchange was slow to develop (Lord "Merging" 40, 41). In his work on Slavic Muslim and Christian epic poetry, Lord notes:

We know that oral traditional poetry existed in its own world in those centuries, but the two worlds were separate. The world of written literature on occasion showed that it knew the other world . . . but the denizens of that world seem to have been unaffected by the world of written literature, because they did not read, or, more important, belong to the elite class. Strangely enough, it was that class and that world of literacy that used the world of orality, thus creating a bridge between the two worlds and not vice versa ("Merging" 23).

With the proliferation of printed media, oral tradition was also drawn upon as source material. Several researchers, such as Dugaw and Bowden, have commented on the practice of broadside printers who went into rural areas in order to collect the songs that people "were fond of singing," and from these collected lyrics and tunes created new works for sale that, because they were based on a kind of current "Billboard" top listing of "the folk," were seen as more likely to appeal to popular taste (Dugaw, "Interface" 87-89).

As I mentioned earlier, this process is paralleled in Chinese vernacular fiction, as writers of folk novels were also reported to collect stories from peasants to use in their works. Perhaps it can be hypothesized that with respect to Chinese folklore the reciprocal path back into oral tradition was also slow to develop, but that it had a considerable headstart as compared to its Western counterpart. It is likely in both instances, as Lord suggests, that this had to do with illiteracy and economic hardship. If one is living hand-to-mouth, one has little time to learn to read, and

little money with which to buy books. That does not necessarily exclude some level of participation and enjoyment of storytelling, however. As Liu Bin recently wrote to me:

My grandmother told me how exciting it was when she was in a Tea-restaurant watching and listening to a storytelling. One of the person who told the stories was called 'the King of the Quiet Street'. 'Each time when he stopped at a very critical moment of the story,' my grandmother said, 'I could not relax and have a rest in the interval.' My grandmother was illiterate. (So was my grandfather. However he had a perfect sense of direction that prevent him from betraying his country as I would.) But I learned the most knowledge from her. Storytelling is a very important way for people to learn knowledge. (especially for those who are in developing countries like China). Some day, I will introduce your research into China.<sup>18</sup>

Liu Bin is the only one of my informants who so far talks about his peasant ancestors and he does so with great pride. All of my informants have been careful to indicate to me that in considering this topic, I must be concerned with bridging two very different worlds, the rural and the urban, and it is the relationship – or separation – between these two worlds that is the more significant influence on Chinese folklore, according to the tradition bearers that I had the opportunity to sample. It can be argued quite rightly that my research is not representative, that I was looking "for a folk among the scholars," and trying to be the mouthpiece of an elite group. Yet, my thesis has been focusing on the extent of a particular narrative tradition as it exists in Newfoundland, and I would therefore argue that the majority of my informants are

<sup>18</sup>13 May 93. Electronic mail correspondence. Original orthography and syntax preserved. The reference to his grandfather's sense of direction is based on his grandmother's stories of how his grandfather was employed by the army to move the markstones at night further into Korea. It should be noted that of all the gifts he may have inherited from his tale-telling Manchurian ancestors, directional sense is not one of them. I introduced him into a local storytelling group to which I belong as a gesture of thanks, but after an evening of driving back via some of the most circuitous routes possible in St. John's, I rather impatiently suggested that had he been the bourneshifter, Korea would be a larger country today. He smiled and seemed pleased that I was finally developing the ability to challenge his performance.

in a very real sense "liminal folk." As foreign students in the university and within the larger context of local society, they find themselves both reconstructing and being simultaneously redefined by newly imposed, unseen barriers of language, race, culture and the pervasive cultural displacement that comes with change, both at home and away. Early last spring I used contemporary legends in a conversation class, and students generated many similar stories from China. They became extremely excited and one female linguistics graduate student told me: "This is really important! You should publish a book, nobody knows our Chinese stories here." I have been engaged in a search to help them find a voice, and have discovered many voices, probably because I have found many "folk," with a few genuine artists among them. This study is also trying to reconcile what appears to be synchronic research with a long diachronic, literate history. But, the collection, as well as the discoveries have been ongoing and dynamic, and it has been a source of fascination for me to see how the traditions have been evolving and changing both side by side and in conjunction with my own changing perceptions and status in relation to my informants. There is undeniably a literary tradition that the folk dialogue does not penetrate, but it finds parallels as well with many Western cultures that have developed distinctive literary and scholarly languages for its expression (Lord 44). Because this singularly "high culture" tradition is in classical Chinese, it is inaccessible to the folk here, which includes myself and my informants.

As I stated earlier, my informants do not find the oral-written dichotomy to be a going concern, in fact when questioned about it, they dismissed the distinction as arbitrary and unimportant. Perhaps the issue is solely a Western academic construction which originally was intended as a classification device to be applied to the several products of a complex process, but which became a kind of analytic touchstone to measure the "purity" or "volatility" of a given item of folklore. Move-



ment towards a removal, or at least a straddling of the fence, has allowed meaningful scholarly exchange to proceed and researchers are acknowledging that perhaps, in this case, borrowing again from Frost, "good fences" did not "make good neighbours."

Orality is not an ideal, and never was. To approach it positively is not to advocate it as a permanent state for any culture. Literacy opens possibilities to the word and to human existence unimaginable without writing. Oral cultures today value oral traditions ... but I have never encountered or heard of an oral culture that does not want to achieve literacy as soon as possible. Yet orality is not despicable. It produces creations beyond the reach of literates. ... Nor is orality ever completely eradicable: reading a text oralizes it.<sup>19</sup> Both orality and the growth of literacy out of orality are necessary for the evolution of consciousness (175).

Foley echoes a similar opinion and addresses the negative effects that the oral-written separation has had on academic discourse:

...oral traditions are phenomena fully as complex as their literary counterparts; that within each tradition, there are many genres, each of which will exhibit different (though related) rules for composition; that literacy can play a role in the composition and reception of "oral poetry."<sup>20</sup> In many cases, however, the lines have been drawn as harshly on the oralist's as on the literary critic's side, and out-of-date polemics ... still block the path toward a more finely tuned poetics and a realistic aesthetics (143).

It strikes me that many Westerners who lack familiarity with Chinese folklore may in fact be confronting it in a fashion that resembles a beginning ESL student, as a mysterious text with which they have no personal history and to which they do

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<sup>19</sup>Nor, I would argue is a written text ever orality-free. When Ong writes (I resist the urge to type "says" here) that he has "never heard of an oral culture ..." he may well mean that he has never read of a full-scale rejection of literacy, and when I present an e-mail message from an informant, I find myself correcting "told" for "wrote."

<sup>20</sup>Lord and others have noted that literacy, even "second-hand" (in which a literate listener reads a text of a song or poem to an artist, who then creates a performance based on the "oralized" written text) can have positive effects on certain kinds of verbal art. In a similar way, Xuding mentioned to me that after he learned how to read, his interest in folk-literature increased, and the stories became "even more fascinating."

not try to bring any past experience, because they may feel as "illiterate" with the folklore as they do with the language.

To return momentarily to a Bakhtinian frame, it is almost as if this conflict has already been resolved within Chinese folklore because it long ago constructed its own "genre." From what my informants have been saying, it is as if the dialogue between oral written and print forms in Chinese folklore is a kind of chain tale: *Behind every good Chinese story, there is a book. Behind that book there are earlier ones - purloined, edited, borrowed, recreated - and condensed into the chap-literature, the prompt-books. Within each prompt-book, there are great stories awaiting the narrator's touch. Within every good storyteller, there is a story. Behind every good Chinese story, there is a book.* In the final section, I would like to look at the influence of print and the distribution of printed sources on the shaping of tradition.

## **The Print Versus the Press: Fixed and Fluid Forms and the Search for the Intrepid "Carabandi"**

I have tried to show that oral and written forms contain aspects of stability and variation. Print by contrast, has been credited with a much greater degree of permanence and resistance to creative change. As Ong and others have pointed out however, print cannot be a completely closed system, as it is still a medium for language expression (169). In this section I would like to try to show how the process and the press seem to have become interchangeable. Using the metaphor of an old fashioned press, while small blocks of type may be fixed into a plate and locked into a press and the text resulting from that printing run may be identical for any number of copies, the interpretation of the text has the potential to change with each person

who reads it, and this will in turn affect the recreations of both oral traditions and subsequent printed texts.

For example, a broadside based on versions collected in rural areas and previous printed lyrics that sold well may go to press with certain anomalies. There may be evidence of typographic errors, influence from the printer's own idiolect of English or notions of "poetic licence," or the text may even contain non-English words whose meaning has been lost or was never fully explained. These inexpensive, popular printings should distribute themselves fairly easily within a given population, who – not overly given to annotating or verifying typographic accuracy – might well sing the songs and pass them on to others with all aberrations intact, changing some to fit with their own perceptions of what should be part of the text. In some instances, as with an orally transmitted broadside, other new "errors" may creep into the text, as a result of such factors as oral comprehension affected by hearing deficits or other aspects of receptive processing, since listening is as much an active process as speaking. This "comedy of errors" which influences a text may create entirely new variants, all of which contribute to the creativity of the oral performance tradition and thus make print an integral part of the dynamic process of transmission. Print, orality, and literacy, here referring to manuscript culture which acknowledges *intertextuality*, "... a literary and psychological commonplace: a text cannot be created simply out of lived experience" (Ong 133), all borrow from tradition and all have static and changing elements. It can be argued that a printed text cannot reorganize itself, and so it is fixed. However, a written manuscript cannot change itself without the editor or author making revisions, and the lines of a story, poem or song once performed cannot be retracted within the context of the same performance, even though they do not leave behind a tangible record.

The preceding scenario is also based on other printed accounts, and it is to the work of some of these scholars that I would like to now turn my attention. Print is more "fixed" perhaps than other modes of transmission by virtue of the fact that the commodification of its products necessarily "fixes" it to considerations of popular preference and "the bottom line." As Slater observes in her study of Brazilian pilgrim narratives, the "creative composer" deliberately selects motifs and themes from an established oral canon, according to the current informal or even unspoken aesthetics of popular tradition:

Furthermore, while it is true that the *folhetos* are printed verse compositions, it would be a mistake to assume that the *literatura de condel* is simply a collection of texts. Because of their public's high degree of illiteracy, poets have always relied heavily on oral performances. Not only may they modify words or whole stanzas to suit the audience of the moment, but they routinely introduce prose aside called *trancas* or *chaves* which may double or even triple the time required for reading the verses themselves. These interjections are crucial to the success of a given story (219).

Dugaw has also looked at this process, in terms of the influence of commercial ballad printers. She goes on to argue for a widening of the inclusive definition of "tradition":

When ballads have been changed or rendered the same, whether orally or in print, those individuals who were responsible exerted a conscious or unconscious selectivity, which operates within the confines of something we might call "popular taste" . . . we folklorists might productively revise our notions of the "oralness" of tradition. All facets of traditions - commercial and non commercial, written, printed and oral - need to be thoroughly investigated and represented ("Interface" 89, 103).

In her analysis, Bowden notes that the changes in printed versions of the "Wife of Bath," reflect shifts in religious ideology as well as verse structure and diction. Bowden posits a significant amount of change as coming from the printer, either as a result of inadvertently humming a different tune, or as a conscious desire to use

the press as a pulpit, and print tracts rather than tunes. Bowden states that the ballad is a broadside, whose original allegorical tone probably finds its antecedents in sources such as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and fabliaux about clever peasants who argue that they should be allowed to enter Heaven precisely because of their poverty, the same grounds by which St. Peter tries to deny them entry (42). In the good Wife's case, she counters accusations of a loose lifestyle by recounting the litany of the sins of all of the saints who try unsuccessfully to drive her away. She finally uses Christ's own parables to plead her case before him and thereby become one of the elect. Bowden's discussion and accompanying notes include several versions that bear a strong resemblance to a "Pilgrim's Progress" kind of storyline and one that seems singularly Presbyterian, in which the "voice of the folk" seems to be holding forth in a heavy Scottish brogue (46, appendix).

Lord also underscores the importance of chapbooks and other printed ephemera to the Muslim and Christian epic song traditions.

A number of published books and brochures bridge the two worlds for those who wish to read them. These are the several popularly printed songbooks, frequently small paperbacks, sometimes containing only one song, a few pages. . . . This group of varied texts is one of the most important manifestations in the area of south Slavic oral traditional epic for the merging of the two worlds of orality and literacy. . . . Since the songs themselves are from the world of orality, they were wholly accessible to its citizens, who indeed created them. In spite of the fact that they are written down and can be read, they belong to the world of orality. So they are now accessible to the world of literacy, to which they were not accessible until they were written down and published ("Merging" 40, 50).

Similarly, the availability of cheap, readily accessible printed texts has exerted and continues to exert a profound influence on Chinese folklore.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup>At the start of one of our recent interviews, Liu Bin, apologizing for his tardiness, said that he had been reading a *hāa ben* (prompt book) or "special storyteller's book" before our scheduled

Before I close this discussion, I would like to try and place this question in a local context. Recently, I was at a small, private gathering at the home of Ms. Janet Story. One of the other guests there was Anita Best, who was trying to figure out the linguistic origins and meaning of a word in a ballad that she had learned from her late father-in-law, Pius Power. In the song, an animal<sup>22</sup> eats a "carabandi." She put the question to Rita Kindal, a graduate student in Anthropology who was also present at this party. Although Rita is of Italian origin and fluent in that language, she had no idea about the word, but suggested that maybe it was a corset or possibly a cummerbund. Anita paused. "Carabandi, carabandi," she said with careful stress and deliberate enunciation, "Well, Pius used to say he thought it was 'an intimate piece of lady's underwear.' " She went on to say that she really enjoyed the song. Since the unknown article was defined in Pius' imagination so that it made sense to his performance, I have little doubt that I will hear Anita singing of "carabandis" in the not too distant future.

Regardless of the mode of transmission by which Mr. Power learned the ballad, or whether the piece of clothing will be immortalized in a printed collection of Anita's songs is unimportant. It is part of the traditional performance of that particular song, and its lexical obscurity does not impede or detract from that performance. Perhaps it is one of the side effects of literacy that we become possessed by a relentless search for etymons and origins. There are doubtless innumerable "carabandis" in Chinese folk literature as well. One intriguing "snipe hunt" that I was recently involved in began with Liu Bin's vivid description of the young cowherd who finds the broken sword at the foot of Jiu Li Mountain, a weapon that had been brandished in an ancient

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interview and so he had "a lot of stories to tell," and would not be confounded by sudden blanks in his memory, which indeed proved to be the case.

<sup>22</sup>At the risk of "committing errors to print," I will venture to say that it was either a goat, a cow or a donkey, some cloven-hoofed animal not possessed of a fussy appetite.

conflict. I wanted to re-read that section of *Water Margin* and as the chapters are often indexed according to confrontations which take place at certain geographical landmarks in Shan Dong province, I was sure that the mountain would not be difficult to find. When I was unable to find it, I asked Liu Bin if he could recall the relevant episode in greater detail, so that I would have more to go on in my search. He could not remember, but was certain that it was in that novel. Out of tongue-in-cheek deference for his main storytelling rival, he suggested that I speak to Wang Xuding, as he comes from Shan Dong and was therefore closer to the intrigues of the robbers on the marsh as a point of birthright. Xuding also knew nothing of the episode. At this point, I am quite sure that the episode is not to be found in *Water Margin*, but that it probably exists in print, **somewhere**.

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to analyse several of the problems surrounding the various "texts" which comprise this thesis. I have looked at issues relating to textual representation through transcription, both using a modified "standard" set of techniques, as well as ethnopoeetry in order to better define some of the traditional patterns of composition that I believe can still exist within the second language performance of a highly literate passive tradition bearer. That latter analysis provides some insight into certain gender-related differences which may be generalizable to other narrators' performances. I have evaluated the pros and cons of the application of Bakhtin's genre theory to the heroine tradition and although it requires continued study, I am looking at the possible need for generic reclassification based on the apparent function of these stories within Chinese culture. I also examined some of

the similarities and differences between the oral-written-(print)-oral cycle as it has developed in both Western and Chinese traditions and scholarship, as well as the important role of popular print media in the transmission process. I would like to end this chapter by quoting from two scholars who sum up my general viewpoint regarding the "interface question:"

It is an intriguing question whether the world of literacy has as great a difficulty in comprehending the world of orality as we have found that the world of orality has in understanding the world of literacy. The gap is felt on both sides. The subject is central to the problem of the relation of the two worlds and requires more study than it has had. It is the accessibility of the products of the world of orality to the world of literacy that is important (Lord, "Merging" 50).

Analysis based on oral/written or another false dichotomy is not merely misleading. It is wrong. Verbal art must be analysed as both text and performance, not as one or the other. And we are all the folk (Bowden 53).



## Conclusion

I was not sure then whether or not I would ever be back. I had learned a great deal – a college education that couldn't be found in books. I had acquired a new language, a new way of life, fought with many doubts and hardships. As the holy man at Chu Li Chang had said, everything today is in preparation for another time (Ewen 43).

In keeping with the Chinese cultural aesthetic of harmony, this thesis must end the way that it began, with the words of my grandmother. This passage is in reference to her return to Canada in 1937. She would go back to China a year later, accompanying Dr. Bethune, and would stay until after his death. At the time of this particular homecoming, she would have been almost exactly my age now, and she must have felt the same sensation of being between worlds that I have felt and still now feel.

My original intention was that this segment would comprise a chapter that would balance the literary emphasis of the first chapter with the closing words of my informants. Some of them will "step up to the mike" shortly, and one thing that will be noticed is that although my questions are quite direct, men and women show little hesitation in holding forth about their concerns regarding the changing place of women in modern Chinese society. I think this may be because of the fact that while my presence gave them a voice, it provided something of a sounding board as well.

As I have stated several times, the heroine's conflict is waged individually by Chinese women and Western women as well. We are all haunted by the same ghosts. In the West, we dress them up differently, call them different names and banish them by different rituals. Our heroines, our ghosts, our hopes and fears all vanish into wispy mists and echoes, but return unbidden when needed. Even fear is needed sometimes, to herald the birth of courage. And we never quite divest our respective ghosts of all their masks, for if we did, we would be staring down our own reflections.

The central conflict that runs through the entire heroine tradition, the choice between freedom and individual fulfilment and the acceptance of a subordinate, domestic role, is the same one faced by contemporary Chinese women. The former choice carries with it an element of danger and the unknown. The heroine who chooses this option extricates herself from the network of *guan xi*, the informal, understood family and personal connections which are necessary for survival and protection but which constrain her within rigid parameters of filial obligation. Once free of that structure however, she may experience even greater success, at least temporarily. She may also discover that instead of somersaulting through worlds, she is in fact freefalling without a net.

Many of these young women seem to opt for the Western solution and try "to have it all," to balance home, family, research and career. Achieving this kind of tenuous harmony is difficult, even under the most ideal economic and social conditions. I think that it would be safe to say that in China it is only rarely, if at all, that such conditions ever present themselves to the average woman, such that she is likewise in a position to take advantage of them. I would like to address these issues further, first looking at some of the effects of recent economic reforms and then their social implications in a society that is still to a large extent proudly wrapped in tradition.

In between these two forces, there is the influence of the popular culture media, which I will also briefly consider, as it plays an integral role in linking both economic and social factors, being literally in the business of selling ideal images to modern women.

## **The High Cost of Equality: Women's Changing Positions in the Workplace**

Under economic reform, many sectors of China's economy are presently booming, but women are experiencing various degrees of discrimination in the workplace because of the high costs of paid maternity leave, daycare and medical insurance for children, which is covered by the mother's work unit. Since many industries are no longer state operated or heavily subsidized, it becomes economically more feasible to hire men wherever possible. Although there are some local initiatives underway in developed urban centers that are designed to help combat this trend, women in China are finding that post-Liberation equality is becoming increasingly fixed to fluctuating profit margins. It is still frequently the case that women do not have, or possibly do not take the same educational opportunities as men, and yet **officially** everyone must be paid according to the same scale and have the same opportunities for incentives and benefits. **Unofficially** however, the same opportunities for advancement are by and large not available to women. Although it is fairly common to find women in middle management positions, or even as heads of departments or universities, it is still a rarity to find them holding top commissions.

During a discussion of the problems of discrimination facing Western and Chinese women, "Ann," a 30 year-old masters candidate in Computer Science, whose spouse I presume, is still in China (since "Ann" lives in single graduate housing at the

university), was quite philosophical about the changing perceptions of women's roles and seemed to think that absolute equality was not necessarily the ideal, especially in cases where women were paid as much as more highly trained men:

[SK asks if it is difficult for contemporary Chinese women to succeed.]

"Ann": They will face more difficulties than, than male, definitely. Because at same time of working, of doing their research, they had to take care of their family. The, take care of the children, the parents, they do much more housework than they husband, husbands. And also the tra(n)ditional society, tra(n)ditional, traditional - what? Traditional value? Are still affects current society.

I asked her to talk more about this idea and the discussion turned to Western conceptions and practices concerning the issues of women's liberation, non-traditional occupations, pay equity and so on.

"Ann": As I know, maybe this is the first time. No, away before that time {1949}, woman usually stay in the home, do not, they didn't go out to work. The husband will raise the family and work. But after 1949, the Communist Party publish, - not publish - give anyway, a set of new regulations, yeah which is specified, specifies that woman should have work chance and the same education, get same education and in Chinese city, everyone is entitled to go out to work, so almost all woman which in their working age, or <laughs> who are in their working age, are encouraged to go out to work. It's kind of revolution. Yeah, but I think this kind of change maybe cause a cause a both good result, or bad result. The good way is the woman - how to say - you can't see too much things such as people are beat by the husband, the people, the woman are beat by the husband happened anymore. Can't say that, anymore, after woman get same pay, they will, they feel much better and their positions automatically are raised. And, part of bad result is the less efficiency of working, happened everywhere. ...Because everyone is working, so and everyone gets same pay. No matter your working ability is less or higher. Cause the woman usually gets less education than man. But they do the same work. Of men doing. So obviously sometime they couldn't do the work as good as man. But they still are put in that position, to do that work. So, it's cost, you can say it's cost some of the less efficiency in the working. Because there more emphasize in woman liberation, not work efficiency.

That's what I think.<sup>23</sup>

Many of my male informants seem to combine these ideas and present a much more traditional outlook. Although they agree that equality is admirable, it would be less of a strain on the GNP, available job openings, company profits and rush hour if women would just "do like in Japan," and stay at home. I will present a few of their opinions below. I think that, in all fairness, many of the men are experiencing difficulty in adjusting to the rapid changes in China as well. I know several of them who are presently in "reworked" marriages and who have extremely talented and independent wives. Though they all express regret that the position of women in traditional China was very low, they are not sure that such a rapid isostatic rebound is the best way to restore or establish balance. As I said earlier, Liu Bin thinks that fabliaux have really only existed as a genre in Chinese folklore since the inception of the women's liberation movement after 1949. He sees the position of men in the private domestic sphere and the public "face-saving" arena to be rather like the following anecdote, which he told me, but which I am presenting here in paraphrase:

A man tells his cronies that he had a big argument with his wife the night before. They are all interested in knowing the outcome, since the woman is reputed to have something of a termagant streak. The man says confidently: "Oh, no problem, by the end of the evening, she was on her knees." His friends stare at him in astonishment. He finishes, a little sheepishly: "Yes, well, it was the only way she could see me to talk to me. I was hiding under the bed."

In contrast to "Ann's" statement that wife abuse has decreased because of the amelioration of economic conditions for women, one of my male informants, a Ph.D. student in Physics, suggested that women in lower positions often use the work place for pursuits **other** than working, among them gossiping, knitting and the discussion of

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<sup>23</sup>Ann.\*27 May 92. Tape #sk92th-11.

domestic problems. He believes that this has negative effects on the country's overall productivity. It should be noted that "Ann" and the informant whose speech follows here, Duanxiang, both say that spousal abuse is not often heard about, but that does not necessarily mean, unfortunately, that it is not a more frequent occurrence. Both informants are speaking of lower middle-class, moderately educated workers.<sup>24</sup>

DX: Ok, so I just talk, and introduce some daytime's looting {routine} for the woman in China. Before I came here, I was Engineer in a factory. In this factory is, is manufacture the <unclear> detective, detector. So there are one workshop. In this workshop since the work is very light and the condition is working, the air condition, situation. So, most of the workers are womans. Mmm, these womans are, the work is very convenient and most of time, most of the time, these works, lad-, female works are just finish a short time, if eight hours work, they are only work about two hours. So rest of six hours, they are just chatting. Chat together. Since I have left China, over two years, the situation now I don't know, but at that time most of them, what their discuss is the how to buy the cheap things in the store and how to buy some colourful coat and some decorations and also, but I don't know here - the Canadian woman is, whether like this or not. They always like to talk the the secret things, especially for mans and female, males and females. If they say "Oh, two people will become boyfriend and girlfriend," they will be very interesting to chat or discuss these things. Sometime even there, during the work time they're do some, their homework, you know. Knit, knit some [SK: Sweaters.] Sweaters, yeah. Even do some, sewing some coat and the shirt, you know. This is, they are most of topic. And so for these woman, the standard in Shanghai, can say this is ordinary people, can say. Since for these, if a educated woman, they'll also talk these things but, maybe their very close relation, they will talk these things. If not very close relation, they will, they will not talk these things. Just you know talk these formal. According to Chinese tradition, if you talk some sex or something like that, it's not, not good, especially for woman.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup>I have come to a first-hand understanding that there has always existed a strong interdiction within the intellectual class to refrain from the discussion of domestic matters outside the family. Liu Bin told me that it was dishonorable for a man to beat a woman, because she is weaker. He also said that the difference between the rural and urban manifestations of this particularly dark "tradition" is that, in some regions of China, peasant men will go to the square to boast about such exploits, while in the upper and educated classes private things are not mentioned. Again and this time regrettably, Western parallels to Chinese tradition exist in this regard as well.

<sup>25</sup>WANG Duanxiang. 11 June 92. Tape #sk92th-21.

Duanxiang was quite candid about holding forth on "private topics" during my interview with him. He went on to outline suitable subjects for the "small talk" of educated women, and gave a highly entertaining exemplum on the differences between northern and southern women. As far as he has been able to make out, northern women are more straightforward, southern women are more delicate and subtle in their speech and behaviour. While these latter traits may be desirable when one is seeking romance, they do not necessarily make for honest business transactions. He illustrated his classification with several stories of shopping expeditions in the south during which he was taken in by the wiles of southern shop clerks and hawkers. He kept returning to the factory setting as the focal point of his narration and as many of his descriptions of working-class domesticity are echoed elsewhere in this chapter, I will not reproduce them here. I will however, let Duanxiang discuss the way in which the female factory workers as a kind of occupational "community" handle the topic of wife assault:

DX: So the most of topic of these and these female workers, another topic is careful about their childrens. Since this factory, this workshop has a about twenty, about twenty female workers Most of them are married, so they will talk something, how to care for children and even sometime argue with husband, they will also tell the people. They, the woman will, will be very please, pleasure to talk. They are, if they argue with husband, they will, they strong, not strong actually, sound strong, they husband, they will be very happy, they'll tell other colleagues. They very happy to talk these things. And if sometimes, these wife is, argue with husband, sometimes was beaten by husband. But the situation is not, not very often. But they also will tell other colleagues. These colleague will give some idea, to teach her how to do that, how to against the husband, something like these.<sup>26</sup>

The next two informants, Li Zhaopeng (whose narrative was ethnopoetically transcribed in the previous chapter) and Wang Youliang, are both graduate students

<sup>26</sup>WANG Duanxiang. 11 June 92. Tape #sk92th-21.

in the Department of Chemistry. Li's M.Sc. work is in the area of polymer chemistry and Wang is completing a Ph.D. in theoretical chemistry. Li's family arrived late last summer, but I am not sure about Wang's current domestic situation. Both men look at some of the same issues that Duanxiang discussed, and ultimately draw similar conclusions, that a "good woman's" place should be that of the *nei ren* - the wife within. Otherwise, the country's continued prosperity is threatened by an overabundance of inefficient female workers, and the products of their unofficial cottage industry. Having once tried to purchase a train ticket just as "the machines went down," I can verify their claims. In that instance, while the handwritten receipt books showed little activity, sweaters were indeed fashioned at a most prodigious rate.

Following their segments, I will present one more male speaker in this section. I apologize for the length of some of the transcriptions here, but it can be seen from their rather sudden verbosity that this was a topic of great interest to the men, who were eager to present their views and were not in the least daunted by the presence of a Western female researcher. I have included segments from several male informants in an attempt to show the extent to which concern for tradition continues to inform the men's attitudes:

[SK: Would you say that in contemporary China today the place of women is becoming less traditional?]

Li: I think after the 1949 the some, situation has changed. The women, we call the women "half of the sky." Is half is the man, is half is the women. So they are equal. But nowadays, I think it become worse. Because you know some university prefer the, the male than the female and if some one find, they find a job, the employment, the employment center prefer men. Because, I think it's there is some REAL reason. Because the female should take her family and take her baby, something. But in China, everyman have the equal, her will have the the equal salary. No different between the men and the women. But they do, do little things, than the male, but they receive the same, salary, so the unit, the work unit, didn't want, didn't like them. Some change



should be, should be done. Because the salary is not, is not decide by the work unit, it's only by the by the government. But the work unit should make money, should make the, do the benefits, so it don't like the, I don't like the woman. It's my opinion <laughs>.<sup>27</sup>

WYL: But in Chinese tradition, we just think, how to say, [SK: Filial piety.] fill-all, <approximating> filial piety, is MOST important for woman, yeah. <laughs> But, some woman, only can follow what he be asked to do, but he didn't have some idea. He cannot do anything independent, yeah, so. But for, but Mu Gui Ying, she can, also, she can do very good to follow her, her husband, or her family, it's, the order. This is the, so first it's she's, she's GOOD, <laughs> and she have a strong ability. So this is another thing, it's many woman may be have not this ability. I mean, and now we just call *de cai* someone just said, in Chinese tradition we have, maybe, it's not bad, it's not good, some of this. But I still, maybe I personally I still prefer this woman! <laughs> ... Someone just said, if the woman go out from home, herself, has some ability to do something independently for the soc, social work, or, that's so, maybe he just so cannot so bad so good, well, for the family. <laughs> This in tradition. But now I think there's still someone think about it but maybe this is, this is true. You know in Japan, there's many woman, if he got she I know you, maybe now it's not, all the case, but still has some is, a woman who married, she just go, quit, give up her job, to serve <laughs><sup>28</sup>

Lu Weiyang is completing a graduate degree in medicine. His commentary is in response to my inquiry about the real-life warrior woman, Qiu Jin.<sup>29</sup>

Lu: Qiu Jin! Qiu Jin, I don't think, have concern about that. [SK: You don't think what?] I don't think a woman can beaten a man. You know especially of course, not of course, she not beat with a common man. Must be a general. So I think it's not. Modern weapon, of course you can do some, maybe you can compare with a man. But you know a lady usually is weak,{weak} his energy is weak than a man. How can I, you imagine a woman can beaten a man? <laughs> so I think, it must be a story I think.

<sup>27</sup>Li Zhaopeng. 4 June 92. Tape #sk92th-17.

<sup>28</sup>WANG Youliang. 4 June 92. Tape #sk92th-18.

<sup>29</sup>She was an upper-class divorcee who trained in Japan and fought with Sun Yat-Sen's troops. She was killed in battle and appears to have followed the Chinese tradition of having been a "warrior-poet," as some of her published work is still available.

[SK: How would you define a female heroine?]

Lu: Oh, yes, that's a question, I think. I think, I'm a traditional Chinese people. So, a lot of opinion, my opinion, is traditional opinion. [SK: *Da nan zi zhu yi*.] {basically, "male chauvinist"} No, no, no. Not a, I'm not a *da nan zi zhu yi*! <voice slightly perturbed, then laughs> Usually my wife can control me, hah. <chuckles> No, no. I think I can, usually I can willing to help, any lady, . . . But I think, why's in Chinese, in Chinese history, not a lot of woman become emperor, or. Of course, the man is famous. A lot of man, is famous. Only several, not, you can say <picks up deck of playing cards> only this people is famous, but not very famer, {famous} some people. I think that's because Chinese culture. According to Chinese culture, a woman, should do woman's business. Woman's business only it's care of the family, her husband and her child. Her children. So the woman, not haven't opportunity to do more important thing.<sup>30</sup>

Before I move on to Lu's last point, the impact of success on women's domestic roles, I would like to briefly talk about the role of popular culture media, specifically television, on the shaping of women's perceptions of themselves and their placement in society.

### Keeping Face in a Jar: The Role of Popular Culture in the Commodification of Femininity

Not surprisingly, one of the first areas to experience rapid growth and diversification after the first economic reforms widened China's domestic base of material goods was the advertising industry. In one of my ESL classes, we did a unit on advertising – jargon, slogans, visual messages – and students were extremely enthusiastic about writing and producing their own "spots." They asked me many questions

<sup>30</sup>LU Weiyang, 3 June 92. Tape #sk92th-16.

about how Western commercials differed from Chinese ones. I saw two main differences: scheduling and content. At the time that I was teaching in Beijing, during the 90-91 academic year, commercials were played in rerun blocks, sometimes lasting for up to half an hour. The advertising industry had not, at that time, caught on to the power of suggestion and its correlation with "impulse buying," and therefore Chinese television did not inundate viewers with beer ads in the late afternoon, or cereal ads on Saturday mornings. One possible advantage of this, depending upon your perspective, was that the television could be shut off during the extended "station break," and turned on later, with no danger that the next feature show would be interrupted. The other side of that was, if you *liked* commercials, you could "get a good dose of them" all at once. When I detail the content, it will not be difficult to see why many of my male students and informants, both there and here describe the commercial runs as their "favourite programmes."

The content of television advertisements in China in the early 90s reminded me of commercial footage from the 1950s and 1960s that I had seen from various PBS documentaries on the subject, especially with regard to the portrayal of women. While there seemed to be a preponderance of "longevity cold medicine" spots which featured middle aged and older male actors, there was also a definite agenda to "sell a bill of goods" to young women, slightly scaled down perhaps from Mustang convertibles and Calvin Klein jeans. The commercials visually conveyed messages like, *Ride a "Flying Pigeon" bicycle, and all the young men will chase after you.*, and sometimes verbally promised that *If you use Peony Face Cream, your skin will stay young and lovely and he will love you forever.* A Western professor who attributes much of the impetus for the initial fervor of the Chinese women's movements to Mao's widow, Jiang Qing, had this to say about the effects of television:

PH: So in a peculiar sort of way, where in the mainstream press you

find, you get letters to the editor, you get short stories, you get films which really reflect rather badly a kind of regressive tendency in terms of the idea of the proper role of the woman is at home and it doesn't matter, actually the most progressive thing would be that men could earn enough money that women wouldn't have to work and those kinds of things are being said. People are reacting to it, they're debating it but at least they're able to say it, they couldn't say it before. The other thing that seems somewhat regressive to me - I won't say somewhat it actually APPALLS me- is television is completely filled with ads for cosmetics [SK : Oh, I know!] OH! It's just revolting! And all these pictures of women trying to be pretty for men and stuff that would not be acceptable when I was there in the 70s, it would have been rejected as putting women down in no uncertain terms and now it's treated as sort of that's all very modern and this sort of stuff.

<telephone rings>

So we were just talking about television and you know I consider that to be a very regressive tendency and I think that it's having a bad influence in the sense that there are, particularly among very young women a lot of them are really getting into I think a fairly shallow conception of themselves, and their goals and I find it quite sad. They're very different from the women we were teaching in the <interference> seventies, early eighties in the university. But I don't know how to interpret it.<sup>31</sup>

Many of the young women that I interviewed and taught were acutely aware of the difficult paradox involved in the need to be a thick-skinned scholar, but only to the extent that it did not mar one's external complexion. In the following segment, "Ren" had been discussing an example of a person whom she felt was an example of a contemporary heroine, an electrical engineer who was the president of a well-known university. Suddenly, Sylvia began asking questions about the woman's family life. "Ren" became rather evasive and quiet, and I wanted to see if I could get them to expand on this subject in more general terms. Their mutual negotiation of this topic shows initial differences in their private official and unofficial interpretations of

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<sup>31</sup>Dr. Pat HOWARD. 5 May 92. Tape #sk92th-08

the concept of "heroine," as discussed in the previous chapter. At that time, they were both single and well on their way to establishing themselves in their respective disciplines. I have left the interaction intact, because by the end of the conversation they have come together again, possibly in recognition that they will soon be facing the same hard choices:

[SK: addresses Sylvia about her question into the state of "Madame Wei's" family life.]

Syl: I mean, you know in China, <unclear> nice, - how to say it? - Liberated. But, women is, - how can say that, - women <pause> still difficult to <Mandarin term, whispered, unclear>

"Ren": I think, according to, according to Chinese saying if women is stronger or better than their husbands in their work, in their study we think this womans are rebellious. Okay.

Syl: Yeah and also I mean if a women are -

"Ren": <interjecting, masks the last part of Sylvia's comment> So they may not have successful families.

Syl: Very good in her courses, then most of them, their families are not very, their families are not very happy. I mean, the husbands and the wives can get along each other.

[SK: So then, if you are a female scholar today and you want a happy family, you have to be willing to fail? Or to do a little bit poorly, more poorly than your husband.]

<"Ren" and Sylvia sigh in unison.>

Syl: It's hard to say. I think they, they be more strong, and be stronger, then face more difficulties then as successful. <R begins to interject> male.

"Ren": Usually husbands don't feel good if their wives perform better in their work. You know.

[SK: Is there a fear among Chinese girls today that if you really succeed to a very high level, then you will destroy your chances of finding a good

husband cause you'll scare all the men away ...]

"Ren": Sort of.

[SK requests elaboration by using example of departments, male classmates.]

"Ren": Yes, that's true. Actually, most of my Chinese friends in our Faculty, are all afraid of me. I don't know why. I used to asked them: "Why you feel, you feel afraid like, afraid of me?" They just say, "Well, because we couldn't do as good as you in all the courses." And every time they think a WOMAN did better than us, they don't feel good. That's why they're afraid of me. So, they even -

Syl: But I think if we can do the best, why not we height ourselves, I mean we can do that, right? [SK: Mmmhmm.]

<further discussion of tradition, fame for self; Hua Mulan brought up again>

Syl: But is, I think it's hard to say. I mean, right now, I don't think all the women can, can be more independent. I mean, like we choose boyfriends. They always want to find someone who is more successful, or more stronger than us. So I think that the traditional concept, traditional opinions also - how to say, - also exist.

Yeah. I receive letter from my closest friend yesterday. She is very contradictive, right? On one hand, she'll transfer to work on the Ph.D., but in another hand, her boyfriend is very angry and upset about that. So she doesn't know how to do. She wants to be successful in her research field. But also wants to be a very good wife. [SK: Is she married now?] No, in this Fall. [SK: She's engaged.] Engaged, yeah. So, she always feel very unhappy about this, because it's difficult for her to balance them. [SK: Could it ever be difficult for you to balance these things?] <interference, people coming up side stairs, repairing structures outside residence> Yeah. This happened before, when I, before I come here, it's true. I have to, I had to choose one, I mean, a family or study, you know, going abroad. Actually I DID that. That's it.

[SK addresses same question to Ren.]

"Ren": Yeah, the higher <intermittent sighs, speech very slow> the low possibility, well, the less possibility I can get a good husband. But

it's up to myself. If I keep searching, I think I can find the one I do want...

Syl: And in the mean time we're getting old and older. <laughter>

"Ren": I hope someday, I could wake up and find how important the marriage is to me and I can concentrate on <laughs> finding a good husband.<sup>32</sup>

In the next section, I will discuss some of the social factors which impact upon the ability of women to pursue individual goals.

## The Hidden Costs of Success: Losing the Family

As I have already shown, the perfectly "successful" heroine is epitomized by the character of Hua Mulan, who finally lays down her arms to return to her family. "Family," or at least the concept of it, remains one of the strongest cohesive influences and sources of tradition in Chinese society. Individual economic or academic success is often seen as something that comes at the expense of femininity or family stability:

< previously talking about not being able to predict what would happen in Tian An Men, given the apparent apathy of the students and the emerging "me generation" of the mid 1980's>

PH: ...I just came back from doing research in Li Jiang and where we're looking at the development of cooperatives and the prospects particularly one area is handicraft production in women, and I had a number of discussions with women. Many of whom were saying things like: "What I don't like about the reforms is that, in order to make it, under the economic reforms, you have to, you have to have a really high commodity-consciousness and that means you have to be REALLY GOOD AT SELLING THINGS and you have to produce a product, you have to get on the street, you've got to sell it, you have to be very

<sup>32</sup>"Ren," Sylvia ZHAO. 20 May 92. Tape #sk92th-09.

aggressive and I'm just not that kind of person and besides, I DON'T WANT TO LOSE MY FAMILY." A lot of women kept saying that, you know, "*Bu yao gū jiā*", kept saying that and saying that if you are very active, then that means that you lose your family, you can't have that special relation with your family.<sup>33</sup>

It appears from the preceding excerpts that while a young woman can make the choice to attain a high level of individual achievement when she is **single**, marriage automatically requires her to subordinate many of her goals to those of her husband in order to maintain harmony in the relationship. Hongbing gives a contemporary example of a "perfect woman" who seems able to walk a straight path between and within all of her different worlds. Both she and "Suchan" suggest that the ability to manage this could have something to do with the supportiveness of a woman's partner, but seem to feel that if she is not "loved enough to be supported" with independence, then a woman's domestic position should not be forfeited over her personal accomplishments:

[SK: Can a woman be a hero without a family?]

SC: I will say this. I think, you mean whether is a female hero, usually alone or may by herself? Alone, couldn't have a family or something, or is hard to have family, because she doesn't time take care of them? In some things that true, because if you want successful in your career or something you must stand apart of that. So you cannot like usually you marry then get children, take care of family, all have a, doing that things take the time, right. So that something that's true but not absolutely like that. Some woman famous <unclear> have very good family, like the principal of McMaster University, she's the presidents of the McMaster University, but she has very good family. She's very successful scientist. To depend on, depend on her abilities, right I think mainly and her characters also. And whether is lucky or something. If you're lucky got the guy can understand you and support you, you can, if you're not luck-y, <singsong, emphasized> you may loss! <laughs><sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup>Dr. Pat HOWARD. 5 May 92. Tape #sk92th-08

<sup>34</sup>"Suchan." 1 June 92. Tape #sk92th-13.



In her commentary, Hongbing does not focus on the impact of social change in China as much as the changes experienced by transplanted wives and families **here**. Passivity and resignation seem to accompany a different, more widely known syndrome, culture shock:

[SK asks about female scholars in male-dominated disciplines.]

HB:<sup>35</sup> This for me I think still nothing special. Still, I can feel comfortable. But, like at this time, this period, before you get marriage, or just before you have children, you just say compete with man, after when have to have children, after that just go back, go home, should go home, like this is so conservative, the society. Because you have to like, look behind. So and this <pause> like especially for a foreigner, nobody can help you, so. But no I think, before I came here, when I was in China, I take for granted like a woman, can compete with man because in China all the woman work and if the woman be a professor, oh, people can take this fact. But, after I came here, saw so many housewives here and even like the Chinese woman, because, maybe because, what they learned cannot fit here and maybe they English is poorer, so, they have to stay at home. So still like this idea, or conception of woman, maybe woman just SUPPOSED to stay at home. So have this and thinking this way now! Before I came I have no this ideal! In China, no woman stay home so, <laughs> like somethings, maybe I I CAN DO IT, or maybe I think <voice softens> "Oh, just let, let the man do it." I'm supposed to do some other things.<sup>36</sup>

Her ideal "SuperWoman" turned out to be a young Canadian professor. Hongbing spoke of this individual's success, intelligence and grace with great admiration. Her words however, contained a warning against the possibility that women, in the pursuit of Western-style success, might risk burning their bridges – both straight and crooked – behind them:

HB: Yes, I think, if you like, try hard enough, {to be successful} yes, some people have luck, they're lucky, they've got good husband, they can support her. She could be {successful}. ... Still like keep

<sup>35</sup> As a point of clarification, Hongbing was single at the time of this interview. Later in one part of this segment, she speaks as though she is already married.

<sup>36</sup> ZHANG Hongbing. 1 June 92. Tape #sk92th-12.

the female, like female feature. And still like, be very successful in their own profession. I think so. Some people some women, be just, <unclear> and losed their family. That's not worthed it, that's not life! <laughs><sup>37</sup>

While there may not be "a thousand schools of thought" contending to be the dominant voice on this issue, I believe that I have clearly shown that informants hold a wide range of opinions on the status and problems of women in Chinese society. Here perhaps more than anywhere else in this thesis, men and women show the greatest divergence in content and style as to how they "talk story." Women's statements remain far more fragmentary, while the men seem to be able to speak at length about the topic. Perhaps the women used the interviews not so much as a forum in which to "sound off" their opinions, but to sound them out, to articulate them in an attempt to find expression for their own private feelings of present and potential displacement.

As I have said several times, they are between worlds and, perhaps even more than their male colleagues, represent a marginalized group. It is possible that in asking them these questions, I was unintentionally making them confront the uncertainty and fear that if they did not somehow learn to balance their traditional worlds in the context of the "New World" in which they now live, they would lose their already precarious and hard-won footholds on the academic mountains that they are now climbing. In so doing, they would also lose face, faith and spouse, the mountains, as Li said, that they carry in their ascent. In the second chapter, I described how "breakthrough into performance" could be seen as something which involved "testing the faces" of a story throughout the telling. It may be that this kind of non-linear simultaneity is part of the Chinese cultural and communicative rhetoric. Without going so far as to suggest that the women were giving me "the real story" on this

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<sup>37</sup>ZHANG Hongbing. 1 June 92. Tape #sk92th-12.

while the men were not, it is conceivable that in "talking story" on these subjects, the women were more actively trying to discover and reconcile what is real, what this all **means** for them. In the next section, I will discuss some of the possible meanings and places that this work could have in Folklore and several other related areas.

## Potential Contributions of the Present Work

This section will be concerned with a discussion of the articulation of the potential "expressive space" for this thesis within the larger discourse of Folklore and the other disciplines into which this work overlaps – Comparative Literature, Asian Studies and Women's Studies. Finding a place for this study does not entail the establishment of a fixed locale, rather it represents the negotiation of a movable "line of best fit." I have attempted to present this work as something that is grounded in past scholarship but not merely as an exercise in the careful replication of it. I have tried to extend the scope of this work into issues of current relevance and future possibility. Like the heroine syndrome itself, I suspect that this research will have a cyclical progress if it has one at all, though it is my wish that it should re-emerge, also like the tradition it examines, stronger and wiser after each recession. This can only come about as the result of the work of others, I can only say what I have done and how I would have retraced my steps had I this "Long March" to do over.

First, concerning the discipline of Folklore, this study has enriched the extant scholarship of a little known narrative tradition, drawing parallels with research into relevant Western material. Where these threads have ended, I have posited some original interpretations which I think have helped to stitch this work together.

I have also explored some of the dynamics of cross-cultural fieldwork methodology as they related to my research. Although I made many blunders along the way, I think that I caught up most of my mistakes, potential biases and other extraneous variables in an honest fashion. If, by the time they come to the end of their reading, I have convinced researchers who are aspiring to enter this complex field that no **single** "Chinese community" exists, and that the term itself should be discarded for ones which express greater demographic precision for each particular research situation, then I have accomplished something that is of no passing significance.

By making use of a body of research into storytelling which samples widely from a range of what might be called "classical articles," I have been able to show that several of the processes are similar. While many of the stories are complex and possibly "exotic" according to Western aesthetics, their transmission and performance, as my grandmother would say, "ain't necessarily so."

In addition, I have attempted to demystify some aspects of the oral-written-(print)-oral transmission cycle. There are many areas in Chinese folklore that would benefit from Western analytical perspectives and approaches and Western scholars could learn a great deal from the different genres which comprise the corpus of Chinese folklore. In order to initiate and facilitate this kind of mutual, ongoing exchange, researchers must be willing to emphasize the similarities, rather than the differences in the various ways in which these stories and traditions are preserved and carried on. I feel as well that ethnopoetic transcription of second language texts holds promise as a means to more clearly articulate at least some of the nuances, if not the overall structure of the cultural rhetoric and artistry infused into the words of all tradition bearers. Ethnopoetry may help to make the words of a passive tradition bearer clear; for a genuine storyteller, it may help to bring out and polish their natural brilliance.

The remainder of this section will outline some of the possible contributions and connections between this thesis and the other disciplines previously mentioned. The remarks that follow are not intended in a spirit of prescriptivism, I am attempting to elaborate on ways in which the methodology underlying this work could inform other fields in a complementary fashion. All domains have their own particular theoretical and practical shortcomings; I choose to work under the auspices of this field because I find that it provides the most suitable equipment for my personal scholarly quest.

In reading articles that are described as dealing with folkloristic perspectives or folkloric content from the disciplines of both Comparative Literature and Asian Studies, I frequently find that the "folk" appear to be conspicuously absent. In my opinion, such articles could be greatly enhanced and enlivened if researchers could include the words of some of the tradition bearers along with those of the various texts in their analyses. Although this is not always possible in disciplines outside of Folklore, such an approach has merit to the extent that it would enable contemporary scholars to examine both past and present traditional meanings in these works. Unfortunately in academia generally, "tradition" often refers to the established conventions of the intellectual elite, rather than the customs, beliefs and narratives of the people from whom the material derived its original significance, and for whom it still has meaning. Writers analysing Chinese folklore should bear in mind that the term for "folklorist" in Mandarin, *wen shu zue jia* signifies "one who is expert in the study of the stories of a culture." Whether those "stories" are actual texts, beliefs, festival customs, foodways or any other form of traditional expression is immaterial, in order to properly study these phenomena it is necessary to make more than passing reference to the individuals who make up and participate in the cultural milieu.

One of the most difficult things that I have had to try and do in this thesis is to balance the informing discourses upon which this study is at least partly theoretically predicated. While a purely literary approach to analysis allows for a detailed reading of the text, it runs the risk of ignoring the human dimension which imparts to that text layers of dynamic variation. This actually helps to make the global text, as an expression of the culture's worldview, more lasting than a written work whose permanence is assured only until it either becomes or is exposed as the palimpsest of another manuscript which is in turn assumed to be possessed of greater literary merit and therefore a higher degree of "ideal stability" over time and space. To reiterate one of the central themes of Ong's work, however, manuscripts do not come out of nowhere, they arise from lived experience. Writers' lived experiences, both real and created, do not come from vacuums, they arise from interactions with significant, though possibly voiceless, others. Folklore locates the extraordinary in those everyday interactions, and thus helps to sharpen the focus, to borrow again from Dorst, of "the retina of ethnographic perception." An understanding of folklore methodology could give literary scholars who are writing "literary ethnography" additional ways in which to organize, analyse and present their perceptions.

The final point that I want to make is the most difficult for me to put into words. In describing the scope and perspective of my thesis to others, I have been told that I am writing "feminist ethnography." I have difficulty with that label for several reasons. For one thing, it has been my experience that women can be treated as less than equals by other women in the name of feminism. If you are not a feminist, you are willingly offering yourself up to be sold down the river. It is true that feminist scholarship has been instrumental in drawing attention to the fact that women everywhere continue to be marginalized in many spheres. We must be careful not to remarginalize ourselves through the value judgements and stereotypes that can

go with labelling, and with being excluded, by choice, design or circumstance, from what those labels signify. In trying to find my own voice, I have been sensitive to the fact that I must not consciously stifle or tone down any other. Women whose lives are more closely tied to traditional roles seem to be sometimes downplayed or not given their due in the literature. If they are already oppressed, we have no right to increase their burden. While feminist approaches in Folklore and Women's Studies should be among the hundred flowers that bloom, they should not, like Empress Wu in Liu's anecdote, exile any other female-spirit for the insubordination of failing to bloom on time in order to keep up with the rest of the garden. In the final section, I would like to summarize what I discovered during the course of this research, what I **think** I was able to give my informants, and how I think the study of this narrative tradition has deepened my understanding and appreciation of a few truly courageous individuals.

## Where the Stories End, and the Dreams Begin

The title of this section comes from a passage in *The Woman Warrior* in which Kingston describes listening to her mother's stories until she fell asleep (19). Perhaps a better title for this section would substitute "tradition" for "stories" and "life" for "dreams," because it seems to me now as this project draws to a close, that the heroine is once again receding. Yet, as I have suggested, the heroine, like other aspects of Chinese tradition, is never far from the women who have to live with decisions like those she makes. The main thing that I discovered about this character and her various stories is that it is the very hidden, concealed nature of this tradition which sustains it, like a silkworm's cocoon. When finally exposed and unravelled, it

provides the good, strong stuff of which stories are made. The heroine returns with every young woman who faces the challenge of independence, and then sacrifices for the sake of parents, village, love, companionship, or even social propriety:

After I grew up, I heard the chant of Fa Mu Lan, the girl who took her father's place in battle. Instantly I remembered that as a child I followed my mother about the house, the two of us singing about how Fa Mu Lan fought gloriously and returned alive from war to settle in the village. I had forgotten this chant that was once mine, given me by my mother, who may not have known its power to remind. She said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman (Kingston 20).

Because I was studying an aspect of tradition, I believe that I was able to provide students with familiar, non-threatening topics for discussion as a kind of forum in which to express their ideas and concerns. Because their understanding of their folklore is an integral part of their understanding of their culture, I was able to get them talking about subjects outside their disciplines, and as they did so for the most part with enthusiasm and at least comprehensibility if not fluency, I believe that I was able to give most of them a slight confidence boost. Had I had more opportunities to use this aspect of folklore as a communicative activity through more and repeated individual and group interviews, I may have further assisted the students to improve their speaking skills (Compton 66). For my older informants, and younger, second generation Chinese like Donna, I was not only someone to talk to, but someone who would serve as a non-evaluative index of how much they remembered and could make sense of as being relevant to their own lives, a sort of absorbing mirror that at the same time reflected how much of the tradition had remained alive within them. I have tried to be a voice for them and tried to tell their stories, which are not unlike my own.



I would have like to spend longer at these stories, and I would have liked this particular one to have had a happy ending. I believe that these stories are alive, but I do not know if that is because I have stared at them so long as to detect spurious movement, or if "talking story" about them has breathed life into them prematurely, before they would naturally emerge for these young women or their daughters within the patterns of tradition in their respective lives. In one passage in her book, Kingston describes a maternal aunt who brings traditional *jian zhi*, or cutout paper dolls as gifts for the children:

She was holding up a paper warrior-saint and he was all intricacies and light. ... his open hand had been cut out finger by finger. Through the spaces you could see light and the room and each other. "Oh, there's more. There's more," said Moon Orchid happily. She picked up another paper cutout and blew on it. It was the scholar who always carries a fan; her breath shook its blue feathers. His brush and quill and rolls tied with ribbon jutted out of lace vases. "And more" - an orange warrior-poet with sword and scroll; a purple knight with doily armor, holes for scales; a wonderful archer on a red horse with a mane like fire; a modern communist worker with proud gold hammer; a girl Communist soldier with pink pigtails and a pink rifle. "And this is Fa Mu Lan," she said. "She was a woman warrior, and really existed." Fa Mu Lan was green and beautiful, and her robes whirled out as she drew her sword (120, 121).

Perhaps this work too is an exercise in chasing "intricacies and light," but as the patterns of the heroine have been stirred into unfolding, I have seen myself and my informants, "...light and the room and each other."

Hongbing and Sylvia have married. "Ren" has gone to another university for her doctorate. Others will leave soon. I pass "Ann" in the hallways, she is revising. One whose stories I was not able to hear, Yi Hong, was accidentally killed. Husbands and wives and children have come, and have also been refused entry. I am now single. As my grandmother was fond of saying: "It's a great life, if you don't weaken." Life,

and tradition, including that of the heroine, go on.

This thesis has attempted to take many stories about a particular character and put them together so that they create a single story about the real lives and worlds of a few people. It is possible that I have not been completely successful in the synthesis and that there are actually two stories here, or perhaps more. On the one hand, I have completed a microcosmic study of cultural experience, on the other I have looked at issues that are mainly constructions of academic theory. It seems to me that neither story has a definite ending. It is not for me to say if it has been done well, only that I have done my best. Like any story which chronicles maturation, it is possible that this story will change as my perspectives are also transformed by further study and experience. Shortly after my initial separation last autumn, one of my former students saw me in the local supermarket. No words passed between us then, but later he told me that I was young, and there would be time enough to understand.

*Zhei yang de.*

Something like this.

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# Appendix

## The Stories and Their Tellers

"Before" and "After" Versions: Donna WONG

### "The White Snake"<sup>38</sup>

Donna's parents were from the Tai Shan area of Guang Dong Province in Southern China, not far from present-day Canton. Donna was born and raised in central Newfoundland. She can speak her mother's dialect and the customs that she knows are in the very weave of the pattern of her daily life. Yet, she sees the fragile, gossamer threads of the brocade that is her heritage fraying under the onslaught of mainstream culture. She will often say that something has a story behind it, but too far behind her to be easily retrieved. My grandmother once told me that some southern Chinese have a custom that resembles the one Kingston describes as being

<sup>38</sup>A-T 411 *The King and the Lamia*. Some of the dominant motifs found in this tale are: A2441. *Causes of animal's gait or walk*; D391. *Transformation; serpent to person*; H580. *Enigmatic statements*; T111. *Marriage of mortal with supernatural being*. See Jan and Yvonne Walls, *West Lake: A Collection of Folktales*. (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1980) 182-186.

protection against the Sitting Ghost. There is a belief that it is necessary to "chant a child back" and pull lightly on the earlobe when the child falls, sneezes or is frightened. This ensures that the soul is not damaged. Donna, having fallen "safely" out of reach of the old ways, hears the chants but faintly now, experiencing what she perceives as the loss of culture like the gentle dimming of aged sight.

While she does not profess to be a storyteller, Donna has a repertoire that consists of a few well-developed wonder tales, and for her personally, the "White Snake" seems to hold special significance. The first version that appears here was collected in October of 1991 as part of a folktale annotation project that I was doing as a course requirement. Perhaps as a result of that project, Donna and I found ourselves discussing other versions of the "White Snake" that I had discovered. She read other printed accounts with great interest. She incorporated details of those versions into her retelling of the story the following summer. I should mention that Donna's narrative had very few real pauses and the only pattern that I can see to the pauses that are in her story is that she stopped momentarily when she thought that she might have gotten some details or a part of a sequence mixed up. She mentioned later that the *West Lake* collection of tales was a book that she had bought while in China and devoured because of a scarcity of other English-language reading material. Her version matches the one given in that collection almost exactly, with the exception of a few connecting details which serve to clarify the overall structure and plot. She seemed to be aware of these omissions, however, by indicating parenthetically that she was not sure of certain facts. She held her head straight and looked down for most of the first interview, except when she was "stuck." In those instances, she paused, looked up and then down and away. When she was back on track, she resumed her upright posture, eyes once again slightly downcast. The details which she omitted in her first telling include: the reason Lady White had tea with the gods was because

she had been invited to the Immortal Peach Ball given by the Queen Mother of the Western Skies; her husband put an additive into the wine that was supposed to be a protective elixir against snakes; the magic plant that she stole was a fungus and she was apprehended first by a crane, rather than by a stork. The scheming monk, Fa Hai (Great Ocean Spirit), steals the magical trappings of a mendicant from the Buddha, a staff, cloak and a golden begging bowl which he transforms into a tiara and sells to Lady White's husband, who wants to buy his wife something pretty to wear for the holiday. It is by means of this tiara that Fa Hai subdues Lady White temporarily. She puts it on, it sticks fast and tightens so that she develops a terrible headache and turns back into a snake.<sup>39</sup> The reason that the vanquished Fa Hai dives headlong into a hapless crustacean is because Little Black takes a hairpin, turns it into a banner and waves the seabed dry. In most printed versions, with the exception of the one found in the *West Lake* collection, the couple are permanently separated. Here are her versions of this tale:

DW: I went to China when I was twelve and I first heard that story there. Whether it was from my mother or one of the tour leaders, I'm not sure. But I saw a movie of it in China and I read the story in China. Its a story of the White Snake. O.K., there was this white snake and she is cultivating herself, saving up her years, learning magic. So far she has 500 years. Which is not enough to make, to give her enough magic or strength to turn herself into a person, which is what she wants. So, it was during a festival I'm not sure which one and a god came down from the heavens and started selling dumplings. The dumplings were magic dumplings and he started selling the large ones cheaply and the smaller ones <pause> less expensively. But the smaller ones were more expensive, so people thought he was sort of crazy. But he sold all his large ones and this little boy came and he was hungry. So since all the large dumplings were sold, his grandfather had to buy him a smaller one, a smaller, more expensive one. And this particular one had, it was an immortal dumpling. It had the power of immortality. So the

<sup>39</sup>See Sian-tek Lim, *Folk Tales From China* (New York: The John Day Company, 1944) 143 and Yin-lin C. Chin, Yetta B. Center and Mildred Ross, *Traditional Chinese Folktales* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1989) 42.

boy was about to take the dumpling and put it into his mouth. And it jumped into his mouth and down into his stomach. For three days the boy did not crave anything and the grandfather was extremely worried. So he brought the boy back to the god disguised as a merchant. And he, the god, laughed, turned the boy upside down with his feet and the dumpling rolled out, of his mouth, in full. The snake happened to stick her head out and the dumpling rolled, rolled down to her and she swallowed it. She swallowed the dumpling and this added an extra 500 years to her magic, so she now had the ability to turn into a person. She did turn into a person. She turned into a very beautiful woman dressed in white silk clothing. She <pause> she somehow got up to the heavens, where <pause> where she had tea with the gods, I'm not sure how she got up there. But she did have tea with the gods and she heard one guy tell a story of the little boy with the dumpling. And she went up to the god after. And she asked him if she could find this boy, because he would be very interesting to observe, for her. The god laughed and said the time she had spent up in heaven had now had now that so many years had passed on earth and the boy was now a young man. She felt her heart flutter and she asked the god where she could find him. He said to find the shortest and the tallest person, tallest man that she could find. She went back down to Earth and was very puzzled by the riddle. When she went back down to Heaven, she saw an old man with a black snake. The black snake looked very sad and she asked the old man what he was going to do with the black snake. He said: "I'm going to kill it and sell its gall bladder." The snake looked so sad and because she herself was a snake she had pity for it. So she bought the snake from the old man and with her magic turned the black snake into a young girl. The young girl went with "Lady White" as she called herself and her name she called herself "Sister Black" and referred to Lady White as her elder sister. The came upon a festival, another festival. I think before this Lady White had told her little sister about the riddle that the god had told her. And the little sister managed to solve the riddle - for she saw a man, sitting on a tree branch, therefore he was the tallest man. But everybody was walking over his shadow, therefore he was also the shortest man. So Lady White was looking at him and then suddenly a thunderstorm appeared, a thunderstorm came. And they were all and everybody, everybody was rushing around with their, rushing trying to grab for shelter. Lady White and her little sister came upon this boat and they asked the man if they could take shelter on the boat. The old man looked, looked doubtful at first, but then the younger man, which was the once-small boy who'd swallowed the dumpling of immortality came out from behind him and said they could take shelter in the boat. In this way Lady White and the man fell in love, met and fell in love and they got married. This was all well

and good, they moved to another town, another village and they set up a pharmacist's shop and they gave free medicine to the poor villagers and they became very famous in this way. Now they were very happy, but on the Dragon Boat Festival something happened. She was a white snake and it was a very difficult time for her during this festival to remain in her human form, as it was for her little sister. She sent her little sister away and she said that she had enough magic to remain in her human form. However, she was pregnant, which made her a little bit weaker and her husband insisted that she drink some wine for the holidays. And she drank the wine and she suddenly felt very sick. She ran to her bed and the bed was draped, so she closed the drapes. And her husband ran after her to see what had happened - and he opened the drapes - and he saw a white snake. He fell back in shock and was dead. After awhile she turned back into a human woman. Her little sister came back. She decided to go up to the Heavens and steal a magic plant to revive her husband. So she stole the plant, was caught by a god, was caught by a stork, a god came and wanted to punish her, but she begged him so much not to, to save her husband, that he let her go. She took the plant, brewed soup from it, gave it to her husband, her husband was revived. After that, her husband did not go near her for a few days because of what had happened. Her little sister decided to talk to her husband, convince him that there was no snake and that her elder sister was really just a human being. He believed her. This was all well and good and they lived happily for a time. Then another barrier came. A turtle who lived under the Buddha for a great many years, decided that he had cultivated enough magic - he had learned enough magic from the Buddha - to turn himself into a human being, which he did. And he stole from the Buddha some magic articles, I forgot what they were and he went to the same village as where Lady White and her husband lived. He saw how popular they were, got very jealous and decided to put a stop to it. He saw Lady White, knew that she was a snake and decided to tell her husband. Her husband didn't believe her, didn't believe him so he kidnapped the husband <pause> no no no wait he didn't kidnap the husband, he changed Lady White back into a snake. And he took Lady White, caged her up, and brought him, brought her, in her snake form, to his temple, where he was trying to force her husband to become a monk under him. This went on for a few years. Her little sister had escaped and for a few years had trained herself, had cultivated enough magic to go and fight the monk, the old, bad monk. And so they had a fight. She freed Lady White from her cage. Lady White joined in the fight and they both fought the monk. The monk was so afraid that he jumped into a, into the stomach of a crab. And Lady White, her sister and her husband lived happily ever after and the reason why crabs walk sideways is because the monk dove

into the crab to hide from Lady White. And because of his crookedness, the crab cannot walk straight for the rest of his life. So that's the end of the legend.

### Donna's Retelling of the "White Snake"

DW: Alright, well the story of "White Snake," well, in the book that I read it in, the story's called "Lady White," and this is a story. It's a love story. There is this magical white snake, and, in order to obtain power, she has to train herself. And so far she's been training herself for 500 years. Which is sort of good, but in order to transform herself into different shapes, she has to have 1,000 years training. Okay, so she's under a bridge. I'm not sure where this takes place I think it's in Hangchow, I'm not sure, right now. I'm pretty sure it's somewhere near West Lake, in China. At the same time she's training herself to, to obtain more magical power, there, the Dragon Boat Festival has come, no there is this guy, this god from Heaven. And he has transformed himself into a pedlar, no, a seller of dumplings. And he's very strange to the people because he sells his large dumplings for less than he does the small dumplings. And the people at first think he's strange, but then they say, "Hey, well if he's going to do this, why not take advantage of him." So he sells all his big dumplings, and there's a big crowd around him. And he's just sold his last big dumpling. So this man and his grandson come along. And his grandson sees the big crowd, wants to know what's going on. Sees the dumplings, and immediately begs his grandfather to buy him one. There are no big dumplings left the grandfather has to buy his grandson a small one. The god says, "Okay, we'll do something nice for this boy, or maybe not so nice." He takes the dumpling, blows on it, it rolls around, and it hops in, <becomes animated> the dumpling magically hops in to the boy's mouth. And he swallows it whole. They leave, but the boy doesn't want anything to eat for the next three days and nights. His grandfather's terribly worried. Brings him back to the pedlar and <pause> and the pedlar says, the pedlar, the god. Takes the boy, turns him upside down, shakes him, and the dumpling rolls out of the boy's mouth, whole. The White Snake is curious about the goings-on of the human beings, so occasionally she'll poke her head, out from under the bridge and look around. At this point, the dumpling rolls, rolls down on the ground. She opens her mouth, and swallows the dumpling. The dumpling is a pill of immortality and has added 500 years to her magical cultivation. She

therefore has a thousand years, and therefore she can transform herself into a human being, which is what she wants to be. You mentioned adventure? That's what she wanted, adventure. So she transforms herself into a beautiful lady, dressed in white silk, therefore "Lady White." At this point she will descend up into the Heavens, and go to the Queen Mother's Immortal Peach party. And the Queen Mother comments on her extreme beauty. And at the Immortal Peach party, the god who was a pedlar down on Earth, is up there telling the story to the other gods and goddesses about what happened to the little boy. Lady White hears this and IMMEDIATELY recognizes the boy, well, the story of the boy and the <pause> pill. And goes up to the god after the other gods have left him, asks him about the boy, where she can find him and the god laughs and says "He's not a boy now. Your short trip to Heaven has lasted eighteen years. He's a grown man." Her heart goes a-flutter, and then she asks him, asks the god where she can find him. He tells her the basic place, the basic location, which I forget. But he gives her a riddle: "Well, he's the, both the shortest and the tallest man that you see." And then he laughs and leaves her. She descends down to earth, and travels for a little bit. She comes upon an old man, with a little black snake. And the snake looks at her, I suppose they know that they're both snakes and she takes pity on the little black snake and says, to the old fellow: "Well what are you going to do with that snake?" "Well, I'm going to cut it up and sell the gall bladder," says the old man. And she takes pity on the snake and says: "Well, sell it to me." Okay, so the guy sells it to her. She takes the snake and transforms it into her, into a young girl, "Little Black." And Little Black and Lady White go, go travel around as sisters. Little Black notices that Lady White keeps looking at men <laughs, voice rises in volume, but not pitch> Well, yes! Wonders what's going on and Lady White tells her the story of how SHE became transformed, and how she wants to find this young boy whose now a young man. And tells her the riddle of both the youngest and tallest man. At this point, I think they are in Hangchow. And, or Nanking. And they and it's the Dragon Boat Festival, and so, lot of celebrations are going on. And Little Black looks up and there is this guy in a tree, sitting, looking at all the celebrations. Watching the celebrations. And she says: "There's your tallest and shortest man," And Lady White looks at her and says; "What?" And Little Black says "Look, he's in the tall, he's in the tree, therefore he's taller than anybody else. But his shadow falls on the ground and everybody walks over the shadow, so therefore he's the shortest man." And Lady White says "Yes, that's true." And looks at him, saw that he has a very nice, honest face, and her heart gives another little flutter. Okay, suddenly a rainstorm comes, comes up, the young man jumps down, runs, and they both, Lady White,



Little Black and the young man, run towards the same boat. And he allows Lady White and Little Black to share the boat with him, to get to wherever they're going. And they began to talk. And the, the <pause> proprietor of the boat starts singing a lovesong. And so at this point the story would cut off, and we jump ahead in time. And we just go past. And so Lady White and the young man have now been married, they've fallen in love, they got married. He's living with his sister, and he doesn't like living with his sister and his family, he wants to be on his own. So they discuss things, Lady White and this young man and they decide to open a drugstore. And it's a very nice drugstore, they give free, free medicine to the poor, and whoever can't afford it. And so they open this drugstore, the drugstore becomes very successful. Because Lady White is very knowledgeable in different medicines, she's very knowledgeable in magic. So the drugstore becomes very successful. And they live a happy life. At this same time, elsewhere, there is this turtle. And this turtle lives under, close to the Buddha. And has learned from hearing, from listening to the Buddha, different magic spells and has OBTAINED enough magic spells to transform himself into a monk. And he's a very dark monk. A very evil monk. And after he has transformed himself, he STOLE something from the Buddha, I think it was a wishing-bowl or something. I think he stole three things from the Buddha, and went off. And he notices the drugstore. He's travelling a little bit, and he notices the drugstore in the city. And he goes into the drugstore, sees this as, sees the drugstore's success, and then goes, and then sees Lady White behind the counter. He himself is a transformed spirit. And he sees Lady White, KNOWS she's a snake, and in order, either for his own sense of power, or in order to protect, or what he thinks is protecting the people, he takes aside the Lady White's husband, and, and says: "Look, your wife is a snake. And why don't you come with me and become a student-monk, under me?" Lady White's husband looks at him, says: "You're wrong, you're crazy, go away." He goes away, and for awhile there, he acts strange around Lady White. But after some time, he acts normal around her. Lady White is pregnant, and this is also during the Dragon Boat Festival. Lady White is pregnant, and in order to celebrate the festival and the pregnancy, Lady White's husband mixed reegler {realgar} in with her wine, to celebrate. And reegler will make Lady White weak, and perhaps weak enough so that her human form will change back into her snake form. The Dragon Boat Festival also has difficulties for Lady White and Little Black because of the moon, and the date, on the calendar. So Lady White has already sent Little Black off, into the mountains so that, if she DOES transform, nobody will know. But Lady White says: "Look, I have 1,000 cultivation, I can handle this." And she probably could have but her husband made her drink the wine with the reegler in it.

Lady White gets sick, gets sick, and her husband goes, and she runs off to the bed, closes the curtain, and her husband gets really worried, follows her <voice gathers momentum> opens curtain, sees a white snake coiled on the bed, screams and faints. Okay, he isn't dead. Lady White wakes up sometime after, and, and sees her husband. Little Black comes in too, and sees her husband, and starts crying. But then Little Black says "HEY, you know, straighten yourself up, we got to think of something to do." And Lady White says: "Yes, okay, I'll think of something to do." She puts her head down to her husband's chest, feels some warmth, and says: "He can still be saved." So she goes up into the heavens, or, a magic mountain, and steals a magic fungus. And a stork or something catches her, and tries to punish her for stealing the magic fungus from the mountain. But the god comes down, asks her what she wants it for, she pleads with the god. The god takes pity on her, sends her back down to earth, she boils some soup or something, gives it to her husband, her husband, her husband awakens from his fainting spell, his very strong fainting spell, and PHYSICALLY he's alright. But he, he avoids Lady White. Little Black asks him what's wrong. He says: "Nothing, I'm just doing the books." This is one day, a few days later. And Little Black looks at him and says: "That's how you're doing the books?" And she points at the books that he's holding and it's an almanac. And so he says: "Look, look, this is what happened." And he describes the story of the white, of discovering the White Snake coiled on the bed. Lady White comes down and says: "YES! That must be a dragon bearing good luck for our future." And her husband's so relieved that Lady White did see this snake too, that he says, "Okay, it must have been the dragon, bearing good luck on our household." So Lady White, her husband and Little Black live happily for a short time. Lady White gives birth to a healthy boy. And the monk comes back, and sees that the drugstore is still doing well, and that Lady White is still there. Takes the husband, and says: "Look, you're wife is an evil spirit, leave her." He says no. The monk says, "Okay, I'll leave," and he wants to leave and think about some plans to take away Lady White's husband from Lady White. After this, is the one, it's either 100 days after the son is born, or one month after the son is born. And they have a special birthday party for him. And during this time, Lady White's husband sees how beautiful she is, they have moved, I think it's because they were trying to run away from the monk. I've forgotten some details, and they have left all their jewelry in their old home. So, he poked his head outside the window, there is a pedlar outside, selling jewelry. And he sees this gorgeous crown, a phoenix crown and he buys it, and puts it on Lady White's head, for the party. And she suddenly gets a very bad headache. The tiara {tiara and crown?} gets tighter and tighter around her head, and she

gets sicker and sicker. And the pedlar happens to be the old monk. He swoops in, Her headache becomes <pause> really bad, the crown gets tighter and tighter and it soon forces her to transform herself back into a snake. She, the monk <pause> takes the snake, and puts it, he puts it in a case, takes the case and says: "I'm going to, like bury it and watch over it, to make sure she doesn't get out." Leaves, but before this Lady White's husband takes their son, shows Lady White (in the form of the snake) their son, and cries. And the monk goes off. Some time passes, Little Black has trained herself in the, has gone off to the mountains after this has happened, trained herself, cultivating more magic power. And cultivating her fighting skills. And she goes to wherever the monk is, starts fighting him, and they fight for about three days. At this point, the monk is getting tired, and somehow she frees Lady White from her encasement. Lady White transforms herself back into a woman and they both start fighting the monk. So the monk getting very tired, sees a crab. No I think they fight at bottom of West Lake, Somehow West Lake drains and he jumps into the belly of a crab. And the crab used to walk in straight lines, walk back and forth. But, a crab, as you know, walks side to side, and the Chinese say the reason because of this was because after the monk has jumped inside the crab, the crab walks sideways because the monk is so crooked, this made the crab crooked. So it walks side to side. Lady White and Little Black find Lady White's husband and they live happily ever after. So that's basically the story.<sup>40</sup>

### Xuding's Version of the "White Snake"

Xuding was born in Bo Xin County, Shan Dong Province, P.R. China. He has lived in the Maritimes and Newfoundland for several years while doing graduate work in English. He is presently writing his Ph.D. dissertation and works as a tutor at the English as a Second Language Resource Centre at Memorial University. He is married and has two young daughters. He grew up in a predominantly rural environment, and has loved folktales and folk-literature since childhood. His version of the "White Snake" story is a more typical example of "Thunder Peak Pagoda,"

<sup>40</sup>Donna WONG. 21 June 92. Tape #sk92th-23.

as it opens with the two snakes together from the first moment of transformation. Xuding's repertoire includes wonder tales that highlight themes of filial piety and loyalty. This may account for his framing of the story around the *Qing Ming* rather than the Dragon Boat Festival. In his tale, it is the devotion and upright character shown by the snake's son that finally frees her from her imprisonment:

XD: I know "White Snake," very well, although I don't remember every details, every detail of the story, I know the major, part of the story. And "White Snake," is popular in China, probably everyone knows it. It's a legend, or it's part of a – it's not fairytales because White Snake is not a fairy. This legend is magic, it's a kind of, imagination. Now, White Snake, why the snake is white? According to Chinese tradition, a snake has ten thousand years age, can become white. And one thousand can becomes blue. Or green. And that's why and the story of White Snake, there are TWO snakes there, one is white, one is green, or one is blue, and according to Chinese *Xiao Qing* and *qing* well, I think it's green yeah. *Qing* can be translated literally "green."

Well, this two whites, two snakes and they and the Chinese term is called /xiu liang/ it means a kind of a toi- toist {Taoist} vocab, expression , or Buddhist expression. I mean it's Taoist expression. You just spent many many times there, to purify yourself. And to learn the pure knowledge, then you becomes able, or capable, and the more you learn and the more you practice, and the more you you are, are capable doing things. So the white snake there about ten thousand years. And she can do a lot things now, and the green snake, she was there about thousand years. And one day and they just think that they want to go to some place to see human beings, what they are doing! <voice changes, becomes "crafty"> And since they, they have stayed in the deep mountain for many, many years, thousands of years, they can do whatever they, they wish to. And they just change into human figures and they both snakes they change into beautiful woman. And they go to Hangzhou. And Hangzhou is a very famous city in China, from history to now, was one of the most, beautiful cities in China and there is a poet who wrote about the city, it says that: "In Heaven there is Paradise/On earth there is Hangzhou and Suzhou." So, this two snakes, they just changed into human figures, beautiful women – woman figures and they go to Hangzhou. The time was just a Chinese Festival called "Pure Bright," [SK: "Qing Ming,"] yeah, Qing Ming, "Clear and Bright," a festival just to wash- to worship your ancestors and you go to the graves, it's called "Clean the graves," well actually

you just bring paper money or, you bring food for your ancestors. And they visit Hangzhou, and there is a very famous lake there, called West Lake. Of course, a lot of people just are going back and forth to the graveyard, to show their worship, and to sweep the, the graves or the tombs for their ancestors. And the young man, the hero, of that story called Xu Xian. And he just finished sweeping the graves for his ancestor, and he comes back and he just walked there, and suddenly the White Snake and notice him, and they want to talk to him, but at the same time and they KNOW according to tradition women, are not supposed to talk to men directly.

Well, different people tell different stories at this point. Some people say that at that moment a shower just comes and some people just say the shower is just formed by White Snake herself! But no matter what, but there is a shower! Because of the shower, and everyone tried to go under a tree or to some kind of roof to avoid the shower, and Xu Xian and this two snakes they just come into, well, wait a minute. I think Xu Xian has an umbrella, something like that. Or White Snake has an umbrella, whatever. I don't remember quite well, there is umbrella there and they just come under one umbrella that's why they get in touch with each other they talk to each other. And White Snake instantly falls in love with Xu Xian. And Xu Xian was a salesclerk, well it's owner of a shop, to sell things, was very prosperous shop. And they just get in touch with each other and they know each other and Xu Xian invite them to his shop. And gradually and they just not only the White Snake and Xu Xian himself also falls in love with the beautiful lady which is just the White snake, but at this point, the GREEN snake, is strongly against it and she just said, "Well, it's not wise to fall in love with a human being," and she doesn't agree with White Snake. But White Snake, is deeply in love and just couldn't, well, go away and finally they got married. And they got married, and they have very happy life. For for awhile. But one day, a monk, a very famous monk called Fa Hai and he just pauses by the shop, and he instantly noticed that there is something strange about the house. And he goes in and he just talk to, to Xu Xian, and he just tells him that "You have something, you have some, devils or demon in your house, you should be careful!" And Xu Xian just laughs at it: "It's nonsense! I don't have anything, like that, my shop is prosperous and we have good business and we have good family and we have happy life." And he doesn't believe it! <voice rises> But Fa Hai and he just doesn't want to let, let things go, like that. And he comes back and tells Xu Xian many, many times "You should be careful, your wife is not human being, your wife is a it's a snake!" Well, Fa Hai is a famous monk, and he also well studied and purified himself, that kind of Buddhist learning and knows demons

who just be changed into human figures and he instantly noticed that Xu Xian's wife is a snake, it's not human being, and he tells him that. Well, finally Fa Hai said: "If you don't believe well, try to have a drink with your wife and just get her drunk and then you will see."

And so, it's time for Moon Festival, it's called in China also called autumn, mid-Autumn Festival. And mid-Autumn Festival is the time for family reunions. And every, everyone in the family will gather together, to have celebrations, and to watch the full moon, it's the full moon. So, at that night, Xu Xian just invite his wife and he invite the Green Snake, who is the servant of the White Snake now, and the servant -girl. And to have drinks and the Green Snake, well, because she's not in love, and she knows clearly that and they are not supposed to drink if they do -

<tape cuts>

XD: And Green Snake just give some advices to White Snake "Don't drink too much." But White Snake was too happy, was deeply in love. And she just, was too much just, was too happy to just ignore the invitations her husband and she just drinks one cup after another one glass after another. Finally she got drunk and she said she has to go to bed. And she just went to bed, and Xu Xian didn't go to bed at the same time, but after after awhile, and when Xu Xian wanted to go bed and he just- well there are curtains around the bed in China at that time, and he just look into the curtains, and find a white snake there! And Xu Xian was fainted! He was shocked, was fainted, and said <clears throat> scared to death. <coughs> and after that and Xu Xian just believed that his wife is not a human being it's er SNAKE. He just couldn't live with her anymore and he believes Fa Hai is right. Then and he left home and he just stay with Fa Hai. But White Snake the next day, just try to tell her husband how much and she loved him, and "It's perfectly alright, and there's no harm, although originally I was a snake, but I'm a human being now." And Xu Xian was too scared just to talk to her. And stay in the temple of Fa Hai, and finally, and White Snake tells Xu Xian that well, she's pregnant. And for the sake of the unborn child "Well, don't leave me, and I need you, and so don't go." But Xu Xian's too scared and finally he left, and he just stay in the temple and the Green snake, she was FURIOUS at Xu Xian. She said: "Well, my sister is very good to you, and she does everything for you and she loves you, and she doesn't deserve this kind of well, treatment! And you should stay at home and you shouldn't go to the temple!" And they just, at first they try to negotiate with the monk, Fa Hai, but Fa Hai just refused to give Xu Xian back, and just

keeps him in his temple. And finally and Green Snake gets furious and they just get the sea just swell up and they have water, and they just call water monsters like turtles, or crabs or lobsters, or any kind, they just all of them becomes soldiers or generals, and they tried to fight against the monks in the temple. <voice quiets, enunciation becomes very clipped> And White Snake, oh not White Snake, Green Snake just tried to flood the temple to get Xu Xian back. Well, because the monk also is very learnt scholar and he knows magic. While the water just goes up, and the temple goes up too! So the temple is never flooded, but they have lot of fighting there and finally and White Snake got wounded. And they have to withdraw. Well, by the way, I forgot one event in the in the, in the story. Before the flooding of the temple. Well, while Xu Xian was fainted by the drinking, and Xu Xian got sick, and there is no way that doctors can just cure him, and no way to do it, unless the two snakes will go to some place called "Fairy -" "Fairyland," to get some magic herbs there. can cure Xu Xian. <clears throat> And White Snake and Green Snake and they just go to that "Fairyland" to try to get the herb for Xu Xian. But, at that time, a god whose in charge of that "Fairyland," and just has two guards there, this two guards are very courageous, they are two heroes. They are unbeatable! And no one can conquer them, and White Snake and Green Snake and they just steal into the garden and get the herb, but the guards there find them! And the guards of course, don't want them go away, and they just fight against them. And White Snake, because and she was pregnant, and she just couldn't win the battle both of them couldn't win the battle. And I don't remember very well, White Snake was probably slightly wounded by the two guards and Green Snake just escaped. But finally and White Snake just appealed to the god, who is in charge of the garden, said: "Well, I desperately need this herb to cure my husband," and she told the whole story to the god who is in charge. And finally the god, just let her go and with the herb. And they came back and they brews the herb and boiled the herb and then well drank the soup of the herb and become well again. But Xu Xian no longer believes White Snake <unclear> and he left her for the temple and then the battle of the temple. Well, after the battle, White Snake was wounded and they couldn't wine- win the battle and finally and they lost the battle. And the monk, with a magic object, well, like a bowl, on a abacus, and just through that bowl and at first there were golden rays and White Snake <radio interference> is just in the middle of all these golden rays, and others could go in and come out, but not White Snake. and she couldn't come out. And she just stayed there. Suddenly and that becomes a tower, so that's the tower still in Hangzhou, according to legend there, called *Lei Feng Ta* {Thunder Peak Pagoda}. And the Green Snake, and he, she escaped. Of course

she wants to to just to REVENGE herself on the monk. And she just goes back to the mountains, and does more purif- purity and studying and try to learn more magic there and so she can save White Snake. And white Snake stay in the tower for many many years, but she give birth to a baby. And the baby finally becomes a a very learned scholar and she, becomes a young man and then the young man goes to the capital of the country and pass the Imperial examination becomes an official. But when he becomes an official at that time. But you becomes an official, at that time, your supposed to come back and just sweep the grave of your ancestors, your parents. At that moment, while he was sweeping the graves, the young man just asked his father, "You know, which grave is my mother's grave?" And Xu Xian just couldn't tell him, but he has to and he told the young man that originally, the everything, he told the young man everything. And the young man was very sad, and just weeped, at the tower. And, there are two legends about the tower. One just says that while the young man was weeping and the tower was fall down and White Snake was set free, but she just takes a piece of cloud and just goes away to her moun- mountains. And she will stay in her mountain. This is one, legend. Another legend says that Green Snake and because she just studied enough magic, and she comes back, and get her revenge. And just broke the, the tower, and just saved White Snake's life. And beat the monk. That's the the end of the story.<sup>41</sup>

#### **"The Story of Loyang Bridge": Quanshun LIU**

Quanshun Liu is in his mid-forties and originally hails from Fujian Province. He is working on a Ph.D. in Biology part-time at Memorial and lives in downtown St. John's with his wife, son and two daughters. Prior to coming to St. John's to take up a position in a local research firm, he studied at the University of Victoria. He learned "The Story of Loyang Bridge" from his father and was extremely pleased when I asked him to tell it to me.

The story is very detailed and this may be a reflection of Quan's fondness for

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<sup>41</sup>WANG Xuding. 26 June 92. Tape #sk92th-26.



his home region. He recently returned to his *lao jia* {paternal birthplace} to visit and to accompany his two daughters back to Canada as they had finally received their visas and exit permits. The tale type for this story is Ting 1534G *Exactng a Promise From the Emperor*.<sup>42</sup> It seems to me that Quan momentarily identified with the Emperor who refused to grant the hero permission to return to his own county as an official and take the princess far away. While the Emperor is symbolic of bureaucratic authority, perhaps Quan felt some empathy for a character who was also a father facing separation from his child. Quan knows several regional folktales, and though he does not consider himself a storyteller, partially on account of his southern, non-standard accent, if he is encouraged to "bring a story home," he does it with quiet grace and style:

LQ: Also the one story my father talk about the story, that's really happen in my hometown as well! That story is, we have one place called Loyang, but in China, actually we got two Loyang. One is in the central China, the Loyang is pretty famous one, they always have old capital in Loyang. My hometown Loyang is, that's of course a small one, but they got a pretty famous for the Loyang villa, mm, Bridge. The bridge is the old, ancient bridge, almost one thousand years old. And now still stand. Ha! This is a marvel, - how to call - the marvella - arche, [SK: Architecture.] architecture and when those things there. So that and now the bridge, that's the government protect the bridge itself as a historical relic. But they have the story for that, for the bridge! This, is that.

Before the bridge was, was built in that, the people always use a valley, small valley? To, to, as a transportation to send the people back and forth and to cross the river. But the river at that time was so deep. And now, seem to be not that deep. But before that, actually it's that deep. And reason, for the last several years, we discover one of the sink, sinking boat and really many deep and cover with the mud. And in the bottom of the river. Riverbed. So that, the river, that's that's a I think it is about 1 miles apart. But the bridge at the time, one thousand years ago, is no so easy to build! Even they are able to build it, it's not so easy to stand there for almost one thousand years. That

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<sup>42</sup>See A-T 1534 *Series of Clever Unjust Decisions*.

bridge STILL there. What's the material the use? They use a stone. But at that time, just not so, the technical are not so, so, developed. But that's just, how can they put all the the HUGE piece of stone to build these things? This no so easy. Until now <speech quickens> people just, can't fully figure out. How can they put the foundation? And how can they, move all these huge stone and build whole things there and it's just not so easy for people! And at that time it so deep! And then, they become the story tell, always getting certain help from the Chinese god, to help them to to build this.

And this story. Just one pregnant woman and take the ferry, cross the river. And then, they catch the storm. And catch the storm the boat you see is full with people. And almost turn over. And then he, they they heard some, someone and just someone, talk to the, talk over their in the sky, someone talk about just like the god, or some of this god(n)ess talk about, it's just to criticise them. Because Chinese treat the storm, or things cause by certain kind of evil, so that, because god just tell the evil. "Calm down! Don't make any trouble to to them, to the boat." Because they got the, they think this is one of the future great men will come out from that lady there. "So don't make any trouble, calm down!" <voice placating> And then they calm down, no trouble. And the whole boat, just look, people look around, "Who is the, the mother of the future great men?" And then only one lady is pregnant. And that lady just can't, can't believe that! And then just say something like this: "If my son will be the future great person and I will, I will persuade him to build a bridge across this river, let people to walk around, not take the boat." And this is just, just a promise. And then the kid, when he grow up, seem to be at firstly not so clever. His name is Chai. Chai Dan. Not so clever. And, they buy several of the private tutor to teach him, seem to be not so easy! <laughs> To got the good score. And one day, when he reach about 16 and this, the LAST tutor to him, there seemed to be not make much progress. And, but, he seem to be, this time seem to be so sorry about himself. And when the tutor will go, because just feel so TIRED to teach one kid! He never become clever to, to learn something. But he was sorry to leave, but the kid just following him and send him, see him away, off. And the, the tutor, in China they pay more attention to the Chinese literature. And the tutor just like to make the final effort to test his student. Whether he can gotten better now and just make some something like this. Because in China, always have something just, give you one sentence and you can following another sentence, can match it, the sentence, it's called *dai zi*, *Dai*. So the tutor just saw that one mounting, one mounting called "Oven Mounting." {mountain} It's a, the name is a Hu Gong Shan. He said, "Why the mounting, the

Oven Mounting, without a bell, without bell?" This just as a question, why the, why oven mounting without bell. But this kid, you know <chuckles> had become so clever and just re, respond so fast, because at that be, under that, at the foot there, of the mounting, they have the river, and they call "Wide Mouth," the river, the place called "Wide Mouth." But this kid just "Why the Wide Mouth without tongue?" So this is the, without bell and without tongue. That's just match well. And the tutor feel <straightening suddenly, as if surprised, voice changes> "Oh! This, getting so clever!" So, just return and teach him. And then he got a, he pass-all exam in the first place and then and got the in China that's every year in the country, in some of the county, they hold the exam, just, when the people pass the exam, they can call *xu cai* But and then they pass the exam and they's higher level in the province and then they can call *ji yin* Ji yin. That's just different language. Just like here there's a bachelor degree, master degree and doctor degree. But but that, when they pass the exam in the capital capital capital and then call *jin shi*. But the *jin shi*, that's a when *jin shi* they become the highest point as a scholar. Rank. But the first three guy if they are lucky, they can first three, the first one *zhong yan*, then and then the *bang yan*. *Zhong yan* is first place, among the *jin shi*. *Jin shi* is every three year for the the general exam in the whole country. And they choose three hundred sixty. And then the first three the first one. The first one is *zhong yan*. And second, *bang yan* and third one is *tan hua*. And this three guy and the first one. But the first one they always will be, if he still single, single man and if the Emperor has his his daughter, the princess will marry to this *zhong yan*. Always. Or the Emperor's just like a nephew or something like this - niece, or some of his relative, the daughter, they will marry to this, this guy because he always got the top, top in the scholar consideration. So this guy, pass the final, the country-wide exam and got *zhong yan*. And the Emperor, actually at that time has, he has a daughter, so almost the marry-age. And marry to this guy. And marry to this guy they seem to be, they just have their own honeymoon? In the capital city. But, in China, the people are so obeyed to their parents. Because his mother always tell him about the story of before he was born and have the trouble. And he promise to, whenever he thanking god for the bright future and just the higher rank <interference> of the official will spend the effort to build the bridge. And then, really, he has a *zhong yan*. And how to return home? He think, about. Day and night think about, "I will make my mind to return home. I will not stay in the capital city in the palace." With the his, just his princess. But he can't return home! But he can't discuss these things with his wife. But, one day, he try to do these things. Make a trip, trick. He use the honey, honey? To write things on the wall of the palace <makes brushstrokes in air> and

write down his name, "Chai Dan, Chai Dan. Return home to be an officer there." But <laughs> this is some trick idea! Because honey, when write on there, use the brush, write on there and all the small ant, ants all climb there! And then become the character there! And the Emperor, walking along and what something huh?! <changes voice to imitate startled monarch> Some of character write down on the wall! and read, pretty loud: "Chai Dan, Chai Dan, return home as an official." and this guy just hide some place, and running out and kneel down and just say thank you to, to the Emperor. Ah, Emperor just feel so, so surprised. "I just recite, I just read some of the character on the wall! But I not real from my mind I will allow allow you to return home and bring my daughter away. NO!" But, at that point, in the feudalism system the Emperor not supposed to speak anything liar. And when you speak it, you have to put it in the real, true. So that's, this guy just have the Emperor feel regretted what he's read something there. But, he can't return. That point, no return. And has to let his daughter with this, this zhong yan <voice mocking disapproval> return home. And as a governor of our city, that's Chenzhou. And start to build a bridge. And how can he build a bridge? All like this become the and now the people just talk something, got help, from the god. Because they can't got enough money to build a bridge, how to do this. And one of the god is called Guan Yin P'u Sa. And Guan Yin P'u Sa tried to help him. And Guan Yin P'u Sa turn to be just change herself as a many beautiful lady. And sitting at the, on the the boat. And the boat many, a little far from the shor(t). And put the note there, whenever, whoever can use the money, coin, to hit that, the lady and the lady will marry him. So this, <chuckle> a lot of people just use the coin! Throw at the boat. And then the boat full with money. And then change another boat - : <tape cuts>

So the Emperor also allow him just without pay the tax for three years, to save the money for the bridge, because this is a huge project. So and how to build the foundation of the bridge? And the people talk about these things, because the gods discuss this things and negotiate these things with the person control the sea water, always call "Long Wang. Dragon, the dragon. [SK: "The dragon king."] Yeah. So ask Long Wang withdraw all the sea water away. So that all the ground come up. And then they set the foundation. But where they, where they got all the BIG stone? And this also handled by another god, or god(n)ess so to, to use all the the things just use it, it's just like the WHOLE mounting! mountain They can carry around and, and bring to there. So and now we still have some of those things there. The mounting, who rolls the stone there? And they got their final message they already finish, complete the bridge, needn't use anymore of the

stone! <chuckles> so they god or god(n)ess just feel "Oh, relax! Just sit down there and leave all the big pile of stone still there." That's not finished, but they no need anymore. Sitting there. Also have a other story.

Because they, they have a lot of employee, to build a bridge. But where they can got enough food? Or enough food and meat and fish? And the god, Guan Yin P'u Sa and also just change some, because the god is so powerful. They change something, and to let people got more than enough food to eat. More than enough fish to eat! So in the sea, now they got some of the fish, just half of them, just like flatfish, flounder? And they make a story about this because the people just eat half of them and throw half of them to the sea and then they become live, and become the flatfish and some other things there, and different shape of the fish, because people eat some and still giving some, throw to the sea and have different species there. But won't talk about this!

And the bridge is finally finish and people so happy, and now people can walk through and can use the car through and until now, they still can use the car and now there's modern car through the bridge. There so huge! And they built, it's so, at that point, people can design the bridge it's wonderful. Because they have to design the not just for the regular bridge in land, this in the sea water! They have to consider of the current and the tide. The tide will throw it away. But people can design all these things and how to carry the huge piece of rock to there! It's so huge! <voice rises in surprise> They build something each one, just like a small boat. In the water, on the water. Just a, above the water. But that just reduce the, reduce the pressure from the tide. This thing. So the tide reduced, no so easy to against and to damage and now about seven of the pile still there. Still stand pretty well there. But it trusted for this, this *zhong yan*, this someone work in the capital. Just sure the *zhong yan* is corruption! But he talk something about this, it's a another bridge beside, near the capital and one guy just got one year free of the tax, and build the bridge. But he build the bridge have some trick, build this shape <makes arc with hand> bridge. So that guys to talk something bad to the *zhong yan*, this just to tell the Emperor, "Oh, we build the one bridge! You can't see from this side to that side! We only got one year's tax free! But, that, that guy, in build the *zhong yan*, build the bridges, got three years tax free! He must have some corruption!" Because the Emperor needed to control their system they still pretty hard on this corruption. And send one of his official to investigate all these case. And the officer seem to be, went to the other bridge and see <voice changes, subdued> "Oh, that, that's right. I can't see from this side to that side." Because the bridge

built this way <makes arc> You <chuckles> you can't see this side from that side. But Loyang Bridge is STRAIGHT, even there's more than one miles, they still can see through the other side, so that until they return to the capital and tell the Emperor, "That's right!" And then this *zhong yan* called to the Capital and killed. And after killed <chuckles> there's not much things can do, they find out there's some people not tell the true. Because that small bridge, just so narrow, use the different shape. You can't see from this side to <chuckles> that side because there's the central part is so high!. High up there, you can't see. It's just small one. But that bridge Loyang is so HUGE! But this guy lose, his life, Yeah <chuckles>. But people still remember him, at least now, a lot of talking about this, it's a miss, mystery, but anyway, that's a wonder, wonderful archi, archit-ecture. Yeah, in the world! I can think, there have some place in the book just have several sentence talking about this bridge. Yeah, the book, it's just the wonder in China. So.<sup>43</sup>

#### A Small Company of Martial Maids: LIU Bin

Liu Bin is thirty years old and was raised in Beijing by his grandmother, who was a peasant woman of Manchurian descent. Liu is the acclaimed storyteller on campus and has a great love for folk and classical literature and ancient Chinese history, especially accounts dealing with military valor. He is a graduate student in the Engineering faculty, and is currently completing his thesis on ice mechanics. He describes himself however, as a "man who is always living in the past," and laments that he did not pursue studies in Chinese literature. Sometimes, he identifies with Zhou Chu, a rascally Jack-figure whose great strength makes him something of a nuisance, but who reforms in order to help people. In the third story he makes reference to this character. He is an accomplished singer of Beijing opera, and can recite many classical poems. He has few people to tell his stories to. Other students

<sup>43</sup>LIU Quanshun. 3 June 92. Tape #sk92th-15.

feel that there are not enough hours in the day to accommodate his repertoire. He acquired the reputation of being able to "tell tales until dawn" shortly after his arrival.

The three stories below are examples of the kinds of heroine tales he told me. The type for "The Lovely Scholar" which follows first is Ting 884A *A Girl Disguised as a Man Marries the Princess*,<sup>44</sup> while "Qin Liang Yu" and the film synopsis are both variations of A-T 884B *The Girl as Soldier*.

### "The Lovely Scholar"

LB: It's a <unclear> opera "Zhuang Yuan Mei" This is uh, yeah. Actually, she wanted to save her brother. Her brother was misunderstood by the, by the Emperor. And so she took the examination. If you get the best score, you will be *zhuang yuan* First position. You will be assigned to a high post, as high as a province-governor. So, she took the high position ... And the Emperor, before the Emperor assigned her to a province-governor, the Emperor want her to marry one of the Emperor's daughters. A princess <laughs> And, the marriage was not to be - was not necessary to be discussed by the Emperor and somebody else. So the Emperor announce the marriage, and, the female scholar and the princess was asked to live together the night after the announcement. And I think the female scholar cannot hide anymore. And he, SHE <laughs> she tell, she told the Princess the truth. She said: "I can make my brother substitute me! <Yeah, laughs> My brother is very handsome and my brother was very good officer. He was misunderstood by the Emperor." And the Princess is very kind, and Princess told the story to the Emperor. So the Emperor knows every truth, knows everything and make the female scholar's BROTHER to be the, to be his son-in-law. The Emperor's son-in-law is a kind of high post of officer.<sup>45</sup>

### Qin Liang Yu

LB: And Qin Liang Yu lived at the end of the Ming Dynasty. ... Qin Liang Yu finally became a *zhong bing*, a general, general commander of the military forces. He used to command the forces staying in the Shang

<sup>44</sup>See A-T 884A *A Girl Disguised as a Man is Wooed by the Queen*.

<sup>45</sup>LIU Bin. 27 Feb 93. Tape #sk93th-39.

Hai Guan <voice rising in tone> to fight with MY ancestor <laughs> Manchurian. The Later Jin ... At that time, the Manchurian called themselves "Later Jin." .... He was from Si Chuan Province, Zhong County. A very beautiful county, very remote area. A big river flowing across her village. When she was young, she practice fighting with her two brothers. And she married a military general. Ma Tian Cheng. And her husband died in the battle with gangsters. After her husband died, she became the general. ... When the Manchurians attacked the Shang Hai Guan, the Ming Dynasty Emperor ask her to go to Shang Hai Guan to fight with the Manchurians ... Her army is called "White Bar Army" because the gun of her soldiers are made by a white wood. ... And there is a small hook in front, in one end of the gun and there is a ring in the other end of the gun. And when the soldiers climb the mountain, the first one, the second one can use the front hook, to put the front hook into the back ring and they climb, all the soldiers one-by-one climb the mountain.<sup>46</sup>

### Synopsis of "The Soldiering Youth"

LB: I saw a Chinese movie when I was in University, the name of the movie is "The Youth in Warfare," *Zheng Hu Zhong de Qing Jun.*"

It happened in 1949, no 1948. Before the Liberation of Chinese people. During the Chinese civil war <pause> Still I got some terminology problem! A soldier of, a soldier in, she is not a army, not liberation, People's Liberation Army soldier She was a <LIN interjecting: "Min ming - ah?"> Yes, how to say ... [SK helps to establish that she was a volunteer reservist.] She was a volunteer of the Chinese Liberation, People's Liberation Army. And in one battle, her father and other volunteers were all died and there's only one left, her left. ... She was alive, she is the only one survive in this severe battle and the army soldier took over their battle ground and the People's Liberation Army soldier didn't recognize just that she was a female. And she was recruited. And, according, based on her experience, she was promoted to be a deputy platoon head. ... and her disguise herself to be a man. She wanted revenge, I think. Because her father and her colleagues, all the volunteers are died. And she, the first thing she was recruited the first she had to do was make her hair cut <laughs>. And this was very difficult for her to do and she hid this for some while and finally she cut the long hair herself and she became a soldier. She was very clever, and although she was not strong enough to compare

<sup>46</sup>LIU Bin. 27 Feb 93. Tape #sk93th-39.



with her new colleagues, but she was very clever and the AT FIRST the head of the platoon didn't respect her very much. Because this head is simple-minded and (s)he was very brave - like Zhou Chu, I told the story last time! - He was very brave and he was very strong, he didn't he didn't respect this new, seems weak, deputy platoon head and after several battles all the other colleagues and the head of the platoon found that this deputy platoon was very clever. And is a talent commander ...most of the soldiers in this platoon would listen to the deputy platoon head. They got along very well and some very funny things happen. Because they, they have to sleep all the platoon soldiers ...in one very big house. And sometimes the head of the platoon sometimes get up, got up in the night and very little shirt and the deputy platoon leader very embarrassed <laughs> and shouted to him: "WHAT ARE YOU DOING THERE?" And he said <voice sheepish> "Nothing, nothing! Is very cold! Is very comfortable!" So <clears throat> in one of the battle ...the platoon was, the soldiers of this platoon has been surrounded by the enemy soldiers and the head of the platoon would not listen to the deputy platoon's suggestion. So they were in a very bad situation, very crucial situation. and this deputy platoon <coughs> was wounded. Because she wanted to attract the enemy's fire. She was wounded and finally they escaped from the enemy's hands. And the platoon head ...carried the deputy platoon head to the hospital and in the hospital, the doctors found the secret ...When the head visit her in hospital the armed force commander told him that "Your assistant, your assistant is a female." He was very shied. Because he think she is clever, she is braver than him.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup>LIU Bin, LIN Yude. 27 Feb 93. Tape #ak93th-39.





