

The Four Most Popular Folk Tales of China

中国四大民间故事

(英汉对照)

丁祖馨 编写



商務印書館
THE COMMERCIAL PRESS

The Four Most Popular
Folk Tales of China
(English-Chinese)

中国四大民间故事

(英汉对照)

丁祖馨 编写

商 务 印 书 馆

The Commercial Press

2006 年 · 北京

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

中国四大民间故事/丁祖馨编写. —北京: 商务印书馆,
2006

ISBN 7-100-04881-8

I. 中... II. 丁... III. ①英语—汉语—对照读物
②民间故事—作品集—中国—古代 IV. H319.4:I

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2006)第 002804 号

所有权利保留。

未经许可,不得以任何方式使用。

The Four Most Popular Folk Tales of China

(English-Chinese)

中国四大民间故事

(英汉对照)

丁祖馨 编写

商 务 印 书 馆 出 版

(北京王府井大街 36 号 邮政编码 100710)

商 务 印 书 馆 发 行

北京市白帆印务有限公司印刷

ISBN 7-100-04881-8/I·106

2006 年 12 月第 1 版

开本 787 × 960 1/32

2006 年 12 月北京第 1 次印刷

印张 6 1/2

定价:10.00 元

CONTENTS

Preface	1
The Legend of White Snake	16
Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai	47
The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl	70
Meng Jiang Nü	86

Preface

Folklore is a branch of folk literature, which embraces folk tales, ballads, myths and other popular literary works. Folk literature refers to literary works created by a group or a generation of non-professional writers and often polished, improved, or extended by non-professional writers of many generations as shown in the works of Chinese and foreign folk literatures. They were often initiated, led and edited by a prominent talented popular writer. Owing to their catering to the taste of the majority of people in their respective times, these works of folk literature spread far and wide among people, extended and substantiated with new ingredients of their subsequent times such as *A Peacock Flies Southeast*^①, *Meng Jiang Nü*, *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, *The Ballad of Mulan* and *The Legend of White Snake*. Among them, the first was written in the late Han Dynasty (206 B. C. – A. D. 220), but was not finally completed until the Liang Dynasty (ca 540). Both the first and the fourth were written in verse.

The earliest Chinese folk literature which can

2 The Four Most Popular Folk Tales of China

be so far authentically traced, is found in *The Book of Songs*. Most of the poems or ballads in it were derived from works created by the masses collectively. They were collected, selected and edited by educated officials in charge of literature and religion including touring editors and the chief editor, the Taishi, appointed by the Court. Folklore was quite popular in ancient China together with jugglery according to *The History of the Western Han Dynasty*. They provided the upper classes and the common people as well with entertainments indispensable to life in a refined or crude way. Step by step folklore had been improving until its maturity in the Song Dynasty (960 - 1279). In the West, in medieval times, folklore also flourished. Folktales from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or other Greek and Roman classics and European medieval folk tales were told in verse by minstrels. Carrying their harps and other small musical instruments, they sang legends or stories to the accompaniment of a harp. They wandered from place to place or attached themselves to a great household to provide entertainment to people in a similar way as Chinese medieval story-tellers did with their own musical instruments in their times.

Owing to the different courses of the development of the Oriental and the Western culture, Chinese folk literature, since its beginning, had

been subjected to frequent interference from orthodox thinking of slave and feudal societies, in which female slaves and subsequently women in general were regarded merely as breeders of new slaves or sexual playthings under the thumb of man. This placed men and women on a different par and led to the practice of prostitution and the adoption of concubines. In medieval China, a wife could be turned out and sent back home if she failed to produce a son. All such discriminations against women sowed the seeds of so many tragedies in love in China. Brave girls and honest writers would, as often as not, dare to protest against such perverted love and cried for marriage of true love. While orthodox writings based on the Confucian ethical code dared not breathe a word of protest, folk literature did its best to indirectly voice justice of true love though, to some extent, it had to modify its anger under the circumstance by attributing the root of such tragedies in love to fatalism or Buddhist retribution. The aim of the author's rewriting of the four most popular Chinese folk tales is no more than to discard the dross and retain the essential and make the four folk tales remanifest what original splendor they ought to have.

As to heroic epic, it did not very much flourish in China. It was perhaps caused by the then China's being an inland agricultural country short

of business centers and her early advent of feudalism. The stories of heroes and villains of her earliest known history such as King Huang (ca 22nd century B. C.), King Chiyu (ca 22nd century B. C.), King Yu (ca 21st century B. C.), King Jie (ca 16th century B. C.) of the Xia Dynasty, King Tang (ca 16th century B. C.) of the Shang Dynasty (ca 16th century – ca 1046 B. C.), King Zhou (ca 1046 B. C.) of the Shang Dynasty and King Wu (ca 1046 B. C.) of the Zhou Dynasty could have been written into epics and sung among the slave owners of their times in their epics; but they didn't appear by bits and pieces until people read *The Book of the Remote Past of China*, *The Book of Lie Yukou* (ca 350 B. C.), *The Book of History* by Sima Qian (ca 145 B. C. – 87 B. C.) and short segments of remote ancient legends and historical data as scattered in the texts of *Mencius* and *Poetry of the State of Chu* and other ancient scholars. However, the shortage of long epics of the Han nationality is made up for by the epics of China's other nationalities. There are flourishing epics in the Miao, Tibetan and Yi nationalities. The Tibetan epic, *The Life of Gesar*, and *Athma*, a lengthy fascinating narrative poem of the Yi nationality, can be claimed to be among the world's best epics.

But the folktales of China's Han nationality by far had the most readers and listeners. They in-

herited the best part of myths and legends which survived war, fire, and censorship. Unearthed and collected by later scholars in their works such as *Shanhaijing*, *Huainanzi*^② and many other legend books, people came to know more bits of the War between King Huang and King Chiyu, the legend of how Gun and Yu harnessed the huge flood, King Tang's War Against King Jie of the Xia Dynasty, King Wu's War Against King Zhou of the Shang Dynasty and *Lady Chang'é Fleeing to the Moon*^③. The research of ancient folklore and the growth of new folklore, in fact, had never stopped, and reached a new stage in the period of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317 - 420) when Gan Bao's *Stories of Searching for Gods*, Ge Hong's *Miscellaneous Notes on the Western Capital* and other short stories came out. To the old folklore repository were now added such brilliant short stories as *Getting Rid of Three Evils*, *The Legend of Dong Yong*, *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, and *Meng Jiang Nü*.

As in the other fields of literature, e. g. poetry and essays, folklore and stories had also reached a new high in the Tang Dynasty. The folklore of the Tang Dynasty pioneered a new path in the form of short stories and legends in that the plot and conflict were better worked out, thus a big step forward toward modern stories. As a highly-developed medieval society, the Tang Dynasty saw busy

international trade by land and sea. Very many foreign nationals migrated to China, which made Yangzhou not only an embryonic international metropolis but an important seaport as well. In the legends and stories of the Tang Dynasty, the reader will find brown-skinned Arabs and Malaysians and deeds of Nestorian (a branch of Christianity), Indian and Japanese monks. Heroes and heroines in legends and stories were given more human nature. They know what to hate or satirize, and how to love or to be loved as described in *Miss Ren*, a *Fox Spirit* (a legend by Shen Jiji) which is a pioneer of Pu Songling's (1640 - 1715) *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, *A Kunlun Slave*, by Pei Xing, *The Story of the Prefect of Nan-ke* by Li Gongzuo and *The Story of the Miss Yingying* by Yuan Zhen. The legends and stories of the Tang and Song Dynasties provided abundant themes and subject matters for subsequent local operas and story-tellers. For instance, Yuan Zhen's *The Story of Miss Yingying* was adapted to opera first by Mr. Dong, the top examinee at the provincial imperial exam, in the State of Jin (1115 - 1234) and readapted later to Kunqu opera in the Ming Dynasty, and ultimately to Beijing opera and other local operas today.

In the Song Dynasty (960 - 1127), China's urban economy witnessed a fast growth. The old system, under which the localities of trades and

handicraft workshops were fixed as directed by the government, was abolished. Merchants and craftsmen could now set up their stores and workshops almost at any place outside the boundary of palaces or high-ranking officials' mansions. For instance, blacksmiths were no longer confined to particular quarters set aside for them, and piece-goods stores, no longer necessitated to be set up within a particular trading site. And the curfew system was also abolished^④, thus enlivening evening trade as cheerfully described in a famous *ci*-poem by Xin Qiji (1140 - 1207).

East winds blow.
Lanterns glow
Like thousands of trees blossoming,
Like thousands of stars falling.
Gay-hung horses,
Heavy carriages,
Back and forth,
Carrying lovely ladies,
And their sweet scent
All along the road.
Phoenix flutes pipe,
Jade lanterns glitter,
Dances and songs all around,
Throughout the night.
...

(from *To the Tune of Qingyu'an*)

There were quarters called *goulan* set aside specially for popular entertainment, and brothels, which arose to meet the wants of some moneyed people. People sought pleasures or diversions there. Consequently, all sorts of entertaining shows or performances flourished, especially story telling, acrobatics and local operas. Empoverished scholars often co-operated with performers by providing story-telling texts and opera scripts. Story-telling was more popular than ever as described in the following poem by Lu You (1125 - 1210):

Visiting a Neighboring Village by a Small Boat

In the setting sun
Under an ancient willow
At Zhao Village,
Here is an old man
Half blind and with grey hair,
Telling the story of General Cai^⑤
When one is dead
One's life comes to an end.
Who'd care about
Whether right or wrong?
But Cai becomes the Village's talk.

In the Yuan Dynasty, story-telling, drama, and singing became even more popular. The Mongol rulers paid more attention to tradesmen than

to scholars. The way for scholars to become officials was obstructed as the Yuan rulers suspended imperial examinations for many years. Scholars and men of letters had to shift along mixing themselves up with story-tellers, actors and actresses who had long been looked down upon as members of lower society. They wrote or polished the story-teller's scripts such as those of stories from the period of the Three Kingdoms and stories of heroes in the peasant-uprisings in southeastern Shandong in the late years of the Northern Song Dynasty. These stories were later rewritten in serial chapters by Luo Guanzhong (?1330 - 1400) and Shi Nai'an (?1296 - ?1370) respectively entitled *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *The Romance of Heroes and Heroines of the Water Margins*. The two romances, together with *A Chinese Buddhist Monk's Pilgrimage to India* by Wu Cheng'en (ca 1500 - 1582) were witnesses to an ever greater prosperity of story-telling in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, which is also substantiated by Yuan Hongdao (1568 - 1610), one of the best poets in the Ming Dynasty, as he described in his poem, *Relishing Mr. Zhu's Water Margin Stories*:

As a child I liked
 Cheerful tales like
 Sima Qian's *Lives of the Humorists*.

Water Margins came later,
More complicated,
More fascinating.
The great Confucian books
Aren't the greatest after all.
Are there any battles described
In *The History*?
But your tales fall dense
As sudden rain,
Yet light as a breeze,
And you fill my ears
And charm them
So I wish to hear only you.

The more thriving towns arose, the more folktales appeared. The younger generations, though still shackled by Confucian ethics, were not satisfied with social reality. The society gap between rich and poor increasingly widened. This could not but be reflected in story-tellers' criticism against the trend of bullying the poor and currying favor with the rich as described in *Zhang Tingxiu Fled to Save His Father*, which appears in Feng Menglong's (1574 - 1646) *Offering a Permanent Warning to People*. The author makes a blunt criticism against the thought of marriage—based on well-matched social status. Squire Wang marries his second daughter Sister Yu to a high-skilled carpenter and adopts him as his heir to in-

herit all his property. This cannot but arouse the jealousy of Zhao Ang, the other son-in-law of Squire Wang's, who marries Wang's elder daughter on well-matched social basis. Zhao tries to drive a wedge between father and daughter by dissuading Squire Wang from marrying Sister Yu to a poor carpenter, which only arouses Squire Wang's roaring laughter, saying, "My worthy son-in-law, don't you worry about the matter. I've already got an idea in my mind. As the old saying has it: A good marriage rests with an intelligent head, and a poor marriage with a grand mansion. For Sister Yu's marriage, I've screened so many young people but none of them are to my liking. Zhang Tingxiu, born of a poor family as he was, he has splendid features. And he readily works hard at reading... How can one put aside such a good choice before one's presence and seek hard a one who is nothing but a drunkard?"

In *Jiang Xingge Sees again the Blouse Sewn with Pearls* included in *Giving an Explicit Warning to People*, we find a story of similar nature. Jiang Xingge, an affluent merchant of Xiangyang, in present-day Hubei Province, has long been absent from home, doing business in Guangdong. His wife, Sanqiao'er, misses him so badly that she is entrapped by an old woman pearl dealer's trick and loses her chastity. At length, Jiang Xingge comes back home and eventually learns the truth.

The two divorce. However, Jiang gives over all valuables totalling sixteen boxfuls to her as a sort of dowry, and both the script-writer and story-teller did not describe the woman as a lewd slut; for they handled the matter from the angle of human nature.

In short, folktales and scripts of story-tellers are all part of the invaluable of the cultural heritage of China. Feng Menglong's "*Three Warnings*", i. e. *Giving an Explicit Warning to People*, *Sounding an Admonishing Warning to People* and *Offering a Permanent Warning to People* should merit great appreciation of the later generations because Feng collected and edited a hundred and twenty ancient folktales of the Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties so that we can read such fascinating folktales today. They are very valuable reminders of Chinese medieval society. The contribution Feng made to the development of Chinese folk literature hence also lies in his ushering in a climax of writing novels and stories in the Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1911). Such famous modern works as *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* by Pu Songling (1640 - 1715), *The Scholars* by Wu Jingzi (1701 - 1754) and *The Dream of the Red Mansion* by Cao Xueqin (? - 1763) were born just under his impetus.

These novels and romances differ from those of the ancient times in that the former direct their

criticism against the societies of their times, and directly challenge the authority of the feudal patriarchal clan system and inequity between men and women. In writing technique, the former pay more attention to the analysis of psychological description and social environment. This caused Chinese fiction to take a big step forward in writing technique before it came in contact with Western fiction. These novels and stories have undoubtedly done much better in bringing forward the shoots of democratic ideas and humanity than their predecessors. They, Feng and his up-and-coming writers, even openly denounce the prevailing Confucianism's ethical code such as the three obediences and four virtues^⑥. In *The Legend of White Snake* (included in *Sounding an Admonishing Warning to People*), Feng even openly and bluntly advocates freedom of marriage and portrays such a rebellious heroine as Bai Suzhen. It is under the impetus of such legends and stories, too, that there appear in the subsequent novels and stories rebellious heroes and heroines like Yingning (a girl born by a fox and a man) in *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, You Sanjie, Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, and Qing Wen in *The Dream of the Red Mansion*.

For a country so abundant with local operas, China has a huge repository of opera scripts, the sources of which mostly come from folktales;