

SUN FANGYOU

and Others

A REFINED ROBBER

*and Other Selected Anecdotal
One-Minute Stories*



A REFINED ROBBER

*and Other Selected Chieftain
One Minute Stories*

江苏工业学院图书馆
藏书章



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

First Edition 2009

ISBN 978-7-119-05910-5

© Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, China, 2009

Published by Foreign Languages Press

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China

<http://www.flp.com.cn>

Distributed by China International Book Trading Corporation

35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing 100044, China

P.O. Box 399, Beijing, China

Printed in the People's Republic of China

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

雅盗：中国当代小小说选：英文 / 孙方友 等著

北京：外文出版社，2009（熊猫丛书）

ISBN 978-7-119-05910-5

I. 雅... II. ①孙...②陈... III. 小小说—作品集—中国—当代—英文 IV. I247.8

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字（2009）第123477号

责任编辑：刘芳念 佟 盟

封面设计：周伟伟

印刷监制：韩少乙

雅盗 中国当代小小说选

孙方友 等 著

陈海燕 等 英译

© 2009 外文出版社

出 版 人：呼宝民

总 编 辑：李振国

出版发行：外文出版社

中国北京百万庄大街24号

邮政编码 100037

<http://www.flp.com.cn>

印 制：求是印务中心

开本：850mm × 1168mm 1/32 印张：4.25

2009年第1版 第1次印刷

（英）

ISBN 978-7-119-05910-5

04000（平）

版权所有 侵权必究

Preface

Literature may reflect the ethos of a country or a nation, while at the same time it can transcend the limits of time and space to most widely resonate a truly universal humanity. Literary works of art that move hearts may even inspire the compassion of strangers toward a people or country...

This "Panda Series" of books, expertly translated into English, compiles the works of well-known modern and contemporary Chinese authors around themes such as the city and the countryside, love and marriage, minority folk stories and historical legends. These works reflect the true spirit and everyday lives of the Chinese people, while widely resonating with their changing spiritual and social horizons.

Published from the 1980s, through more than 100 titles in English, this series continues to open wider the window for readers worldwide to better understand China through its new literature. Many familiar and fond readers await the latest in this "Panda Series." This publication of the "Panda Series" consolidates and looks back at earlier released literary works to draw new readers, while stirring the fond memories of old friends, to let more people share the experiences and views of the Chinese people in recent decades. We express our sincere appreciation to all authors, translators and editors who have engaged in their dedicated and meticulous work over the years to bring out these works. It is their passion and endeavor that have enabled this series to appear now in luminous distinction.

Contents

Foreword	<i>Jiang Zengpei</i>	1
Clay Figurine Master Wang	<i>Sun Fangyou</i>	5
The Lotus Flower Teacups of Chenzhou	<i>Sun Fangyou</i>	12
A Refined Robber	<i>Sun Fangyou</i>	19
The Assassin	<i>Sun Fangyou</i>	25
Lady Cui	<i>Sun Fangyou</i>	32
How a Small Town Loses Its Famous Doctors		
	<i>Ma Baoshan</i>	37
Family Insignia	<i>Hu Chenzhong</i>	41
A Bloody Fan	<i>Cao Dequan</i>	45
Different Circumstances	<i>Ling Dingnian</i>	49
Wanted	<i>Ling Dingnian</i>	53
Folk Prescription	<i>Ling Dingnian</i>	56
The Story of Rou and Shun	<i>Ling Dingnian</i>	59
Longevity Bowl	<i>Ling Dingnian</i>	61
Pill of Rejuvenation	<i>Xie Zhiqiang</i>	65
Footprint	<i>Xie Zhiqiang</i>	68

Eternal Rendezvous	<i>He Liwei</i>	71
The World	<i>Liu Guofang</i>	74
The Troubled Eyes	<i>Liu Guofang</i>	77
A Handful of Fried Rice	<i>Yuan Bingfa</i>	83
On Her Deathbed	<i>Yuan Bingfa</i>	86
Jie's Love Story	<i>Wei Jinshu</i>	89
Imitation	<i>Jin Sheng</i>	92
The Winter Season	<i>Yang Xiaomin</i>	95
Need	<i>Zhou Daxin</i>	99
Fire-Red Maple Leaves	<i>Xu Hang</i>	102
The Thirty-Seventh Stratagem	<i>Chai Ying</i>	106
Letter	<i>Guan Jiyao</i>	112
My Family	<i>Xiu Xiangming</i>	115
A Carpet	<i>Hang Ying</i>	119
Sharing Happiness	<i>Zhang Kehua</i>	123

Forword

Jiang Zengpei

China has many short stories and anecdotes dating from ancient times. Fiction as a part of classical Chinese literature started with the retelling of anecdotes which then gradually developed into novels. The first stories were usually pieces of less than one thousand words, and were very crude and fragmented. With the constant extension of fiction's ruminations concerning complicated social issues, and with improvements in literary expression, the length of many of these anecdotal works gradually outgrew the earlier limits imposed upon the genre, and short stories, novellas and novels appeared. However, anecdotal tales did not vanish, but rather took on more meaningful, refined and concise formats. Since the 13th century there have appeared not only classic novels like *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Outlaws of the Marsh*, *Journey to the West*, *A Dream of Red Mansions* and *The Scholars*, but also the short story masterpiece *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*. These works captured the best points of classic Chinese fiction.

Modern novels and short stories carried on with some of the tradition of classic fiction. In the 1930s, Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, Ye Shengtao and many other new talents wrote short stories of great impact upon Chinese literature. In the late fifties and early sixties anecdotal stories enjoyed a resurgence in popularity, but this interest did not last long because at the time anecdotal stories were still closely tied to short stories and were usually regarded as being part of the same genre, prompting the noted writer Lao She to say, "Anecdotal stories are the shortest of short stories."

It was not until the 1980s that anecdotal stories formed a style of their own, to meet popular demands for shorter writings and to suit the faster rhythms of contemporary life. Many newspapers and magazines started to publish anecdotal stories. From the 1980s to the present, almost one thousand newspapers and magazines have published anecdotal stories. Moreover, two special anecdotal story magazines started publication, *Selected Mini-stories* and *Selected Anecdotal Stories*, and the study of anecdotal story theory began to develop. In 1987, two collections of theses, *A Brief Study of the Art of Anecdotal Stories*, and *On the Art of One-minute Stories*, were published. The unique aesthetic value of anecdotal stories has become more and more obvious. The establishment of the Chinese Anecdotal Stories Association in June of 1992 marked the arrival of anecdotal stories to a place of equality with novels, novellas and short stories. Though anecdotal stories have been comparatively less influential, they have showed the greatest potential. From May of 1993 to May of 1994, the Chinese Anecdotal Stories Association and other Chinese writers' organizations throughout the world sponsored the International Chinese Anecdotal Stories Competition,

with more than thirty newspapers and magazines participating. At the end of 1994 the Chinese Anecdotal Stories Association and the Singapore Writers' Association held the first international symposium on anecdotal stories. From September 1995 to March 1996 fifteen individual anecdotal story collections were recognized by the Chinese Anecdotal Stories Association, showing how far the form had come.

The rapid development of anecdotal stories is borne out by the fact that more and more writers are turning to this form. Many young writers start their careers by creating anecdotal stories. Because the genre is so concise, lifelike and insightful without being verbose, they are finding favour with the media, and many papers now have anecdotal story supplements. With the participation of so many newspapers, magazines and writers, the International Chinese Anecdotal Story Competition has had a great influence on readers. Some writers have now become professional anecdotal story tellers, including Xu Hang, Ling Dingnian, Ma Baoshan, Xie Zhiqiang, Sun Fangyou, Liu Guofang, and Xiu Xiangming. Other well-known writers like Wang Meng and Wang Zengqi are occasionally publishing anecdotal stories. Anecdotal story criticism has developed, and more than twenty books on anecdotal story theory have been published.

Most of the writers included in this collection are master tellers of anecdotal stories in contemporary China. They are keen observers of everyday life and hence very prolific in their writing. What's more important is that they are forming their own artistic style. The stories included in this collection are manifold: some are poetic, some examine the basic emotions of life; some excel in psycho-

analysis, some have rich local flavour; some are plain and natural, others mysterious and bizarre; some are unrestrained, others are gentle; some are depressing, others are humorous. Victor Hugo once noted, "The future belongs to those with style." It might be similarly asserted that the future of anecdotal stories lies with those writers able to imprint their own personal mark upon the form, and use the style of this genre to find their own unique means of expression.

Translated by Li Ziliang

Clay Figurine Master Wang

Sun Fangyou

Across the lake in the southeast of Chenzhou city was a single-arched stone bridge, which was exquisitely built with balustrades carved with floral patterns. On one side of the bridge was carved a lifelike red stone dragon, whose head lay facing south. It was because of this stone carving that the bridge was called Golden Dragon Bridge.

According to legend, during the reign of Emperor Renzong (1022-1063) drought struck Chenzhou Prefecture three years in a row. The land was swarmed with famine refugees, with corpses strewn the road sides. The emperor dispatched the fourth brother of the Empress Dowager Cao to Chenzhou to distribute rice to the refugees. But, keen to squeeze the last penny from the people, the man mixed sand with the rice and gave short measures too. He also took girls as his concubines by force, and the people of Chenzhou lived in terror. One day, he beat an old man named Zhang to death, and the man's daughter, Zhang Guiying, went to the capital to sue him at court. Lord

Bao, the prefect of Kaifeng, accepted the case. In disguise he visited Chenzhou to investigate the crime, found the man guilty and sentenced him to death by cutting his body in two with a chopper beside the Golden Dragon Bridge. Blood was spilt on the stone dragon, turning the roots of grass red for ever.

From then on Golden Dragon Bridge became a place where justice was done. Tourists to Chenzhou would invariably visit the bridge but few officials went there. Because this place had been an execution ground, no families settled here except two: the Chens and the Wangs.

For generations the Wangs made a living by making clay figurines. Chenzhou was famous for its clay figures and dogs so lifelike they were nicknamed "living fossils". And the Wangs' clay figurines were among the best. They drew their motifs from the local opera "Lord Bao's Visit to Chenzhou", such as Lord Bao riding on a donkey, Zhang Guiying intercepting Bao's sedan-chair to lodge her grievances, and the emperor's brother-in-law being executed. Usually, visitors to Chenzhou would stop on Golden Dragon Bridge to enjoy the scenery of the vast lake, marvel at the red grass roots and feel the red stone dragon, and then they would invariably come to buy clay figurines as souvenirs from the Wangs' shop.

The material of the business — namely clay — came from Liuzhuang and Jinzhuang villages three *li* to the east of the city. The clay produced there was fine and the figurines made from it never cracked when being dried in the sun. Moreover, they readily took the colour that was applied to them. When the Wangs brought a consignment of clay home they mixed it with water and kneaded it till it became pliable and strong, a process followed by the

moulding, drying and painting of the figures. On fine days — perfect for drying the clay — the Wangs' courtyard would be full of small figures. Once dried they were put into a cellar for colouring on cloudy or rainy days.

"A cellar of clay figurines is worth a bag of grain," the ancestors of the Wangs had said. Naturally they took great pains to ensure that all their products were exquisitely crafted.

The master of this generation of the Wangs was Wang Er, a man in his late forties, with a son and a daughter. Together with his wife, the four of them were all adept at moulding clay figurines, relying not on moulds but on their hands and working to the images in their mind. So all the products were improvised works of varying facial expressions and vividness, some of which had become part of the family heritage. Wang Er was the most skilled in the family. Each time he made a good piece he would not sell it but very carefully put it on a wooden shelf in the inner room, let it dry and then paint it attentively. This custom had been passed down from his ancestors so now the shelf was fully occupied. The collection of masterpieces was an impressive sight. Wang Er took them as "textbooks" for his children. Whenever they had free time he would ask them to observe the masterpieces so that they might learn something and improve their skills.

One year a Western priest came to the city of Chenzhou. He had blue eyes and blond hair and spoke fluent Chinese. Soon after his arrival he learned of the Wangs' clay figurines. One day, while visiting Golden Dragon Bridge, he called in on the Wangs, saying he wanted to buy a few figurines. Wang Er greeted him warmly and showed him a set. The priest seemed very interested in

oriental folk arts and was reluctant to put any back. Having bought several sets, he asked, "I would like to buy your family's very best figurines. Is that possible?" Seeing Wang Er shake his head, he continued, "Could you just let me have a look?" Wang Er agreed, and ushered him into the inner room, where he pulled aside the shabby curtain. What he saw on the shelf rooted the man to the spot, his jaw dropped open. He carefully picked up a figure made early in the Ming Dynasty, and fondled it with affection. Finally he pleaded with Wang Er to sell him the entire hoard. Wang Er shook his head and said seriously, "These are my family's treasures. I wouldn't sell them even if I were starving to death!"

"I can offer a high price!" The priest's green eyes shone. "You'll make a fortune."

Wang Er laughed. "I wouldn't sell them even if you offered me a mountain of gold! We don't do this for money."

"Then for what?" asked the priest, perplexed.

"For a living," said Wang Er proudly, "and for satisfying the desire to exercise my skill. Do you understand? My hands itch to mould something everyday. If I sold them to you I would lose my soul. How could a man live without his soul?"

The priest was disappointed at his words. He shot several greedy glances at the treasures and left reluctantly.

At midnight several days later, a gang of bandits came from the lake and broke into the Wangs' house. They looked here and there but could not find the treasured clay figures. The leader of the bandits demanded, "Where did you put your ancestors' clay figures?" Wang Er snickered, "They are in this house." Hearing this the bandits

searched once more but found nothing. The leader became furious and threatened, "I will kill you if you don't tell us!" Wang Er laughed, saying, "If you kill me you won't ever be able to find them. But, if you tell me who hired you I will tell you the hiding place." Hesitating for a moment, the leader said the name of the priest. Wang Er cursed and said, "I put them among the common figurines. You use your own judgement to choose!" The bandits were of course unable to tell the difference. Day was breaking, so they left, taking Wang Er's son as hostage. They ordered Wang Er to exchange the real figures for his son, otherwise his son's blood would dye the water of the lake red.

With no way out, Wang Er was forced to hand the family treasures over to the bandits. When his son was set free and arrived back home, he complained to his father about his letting the figures go. But Wang Er was delighted and said with affection, "That you're willing to die for the clay figurines proves that you've mastered the genuine spirits of the Wang family."

That day, Wang Er went to the priest and said, "I've decided to sell those clay figurines."

Surprised and perplexed, the priest asked, "But I heard that they were stolen. What do you intend to sell?"

"Those were fakes," said Wang Er, smiling cunningly. "I won't hide the fact from you. I know I'll lose those genuine ones sooner or later, so I want to sell them. Do you want them or not?"

The priest looked at Wang Er suspiciously. After considering the matter for a long time, he finally agreed to have a look at the goods on offer the following day. That night, the priest had a message passed to the bandits,

"I've paid you for a pile of fakes."

At the words, the bandits cursed the priest for being hypocritical and dumped all the clay figures into the lake.

The next day, the priest went to Wang Er, asking to see the goods straight away. Wang Er agreed and took him in a boat all the way to where the bandits had dumped the figures.

Here was the depth of the vast lake. Dense reeds and cattails wavered; water birds flew up and down as leisurely as clouds, their cries filling the air. The water here was so clean that the bottom was visible at a glance. Fish could be seen swimming here and there; ducks dived into the water pursuing food. When the surface of the water regained its usual calm, countless clay figurines could be seen lying at the bottom, brighter and more vivid than before.

"Look," Wang Er said, pointing to the clay figurines, "all are here." Seeing the figurines had all been destroyed, the priest realised that Wang Er had tricked him. He felt as if thunder suddenly clanked right over head. He cried bitterly, his hands covering his pale face.

Moved by his tears, Wang Er asked, "Do you really like these clay figurines?"

Pounding his chest with fists, the man howled, "Art! It is art! I've never thought to make a profit from them."

Wang Er sat there in stunned silence. After a long time he took off his coat, jumped into the water, salvaged three sets and presented them to the man, saying, "These are for you."

The man accepted the clay figurines as if in a trance, his mouth open wide. He was surprised to find the clay figurines still intact even after being immersed in water for a whole day. He had imagined that they would have been