OBITUARY

In Memoriam
Chen Wulou: 1923–1998

No titles for me
let me trust the forces of goodness

Let me strive for the highest ideals
and never smear the dignity of man

Prometheus, boldly despising evil,
I honor and carry in my heart

我沒有顯赫的頭銜
只依靠真善美的力量

我追求高尚的美德
不爲人類的尊嚴抹黑

我崇敬普羅米修斯
勇敢地對邪惡蔑視

Professor Chen Wulou 陳 午樓 of Yangzhou, died on 4 March 1998. With his death we have lost one of the finest scholars in the field of Chinese oral literature, and a man who devoted his life to research on Yangzhou storytelling, folk songs, and other oral arts. The poem above was printed on his visiting card.

Asian Folklore Studies, Volume 57, 1998: 131–139

The late Professor Chen Wulou

Photograph taken by Jette Ross

CHEN WULOU
Yangzhou, China

Old Questions Discussed Anew On *Huaben**

Key words: storytelling—*huaben*—*jiaoben*

THE ARTICLE "On *'huaben'*[storybook]" by Professor Shi Zhecun, published in *Wenshi zhishi* (1988, no. 10), was written in reaction to an article on the definition of *huaben* by the Japanese scholar MASUDA Wataru, published in 1965. Masuda Wataru's article, says Professor Shi, gave rise to an ardent debate among foreign and Taiwanese scholars. He himself had no opportunity to read the articles generated by the debate, and it was not until 1982 that he got to know about them; six more years were to elapse before he finally read a Taiwanese translation of an abstract of Masuda Wataru's article. On the basis of his reading of the abstract, Professor Shi explains that Masuda casts doubt upon the definition of *huaben* introduced by Lu Xun and adopted by scholars in China. He then argues that the word *huaben* means the "booklet" (*diben*) that is used by all kinds of folk storytellers.

I have not read the articles in which Taiwanese and foreign scholars discussed this matter, and I am unable to join in the debate. Nevertheless in 1962, prior to Masuda Wataru's study on *huaben*, I dealt with the problem of the definition of *huaben* in my article "Do Storytellers' Scripts *(jiaoben)* Exist in Storytelling?" It has to be made clear that my explanation is not based on any written sources but on primary material gathered in the course of many years through my own investigation and research, material that may be called "living material."

I hold the idea that both the presence and the absence of *jiaoben* can be found in storytelling. I shall first explain their absence, and then their presence.

At the beginning of the 1950s I interviewed many elderly storytellers, who said unanimously that they did not use *jiaoben,* and that everything they had memorized was "transmitted by mouth and taught from the heart" *(kou chuan xin shou)*. This method of memorizing through oral instruction makes the student learn the expressions and gestures along with every word and every sentence. I myself saw this teaching method several times; in each session, only a few sentences were taught. The method of memorizing

through oral instruction is tough, but it leads to a solid grasp of the fundamental skills. Only when the learning process is completed and the former apprentice starts performing can he bring his individual talent into full play by omitting and/or adding to the story. In this sense *jiaoben* are absent.

There is a sense in which *jiaoben* do exist, though. One kind of *jiaoben* is a manuscript, written mostly into an old-fashioned booklet, on a piece of paper folded into pages, or just in any small exercise book, and such a *jiaoben* belongs to the storytellers alone. Because of the storytellers' limited literacy, there are many altered, wrongly written, or missing characters; furthermore, the characters are scribbled in haste and most difficult to read. Needless to say, the grammar, style, and logic are also poor.

Another kind of *jiaoben* is connected with a small number of relatively highly educated storytellers who were able to put down, in a meticulous *kaishu* handwriting, the full text as they learned it from their master. Of this kind we know *Qian san guo* (The Former Three Kingdoms) by Gu Yutian from the late Qing, the full *San guo* (The Three Kingdoms) by Fei Junliang from the Republic, a part of *Lü mudan* (The Green Peony) by Lang Zhaoxing, who passed away in the 1950s, and others.

As for the first kind of *jiaoben,* I examined some incomplete notation of *Dong Wu zhao qin* (The Eastern State of Wu Lures Liu Bei)[1] that belonged to a certain elderly storyteller who specialized in *San guo*. Li Bo's poem *Zao fa Baidicheng* (Departure from Baidicheng at Dawn) is quoted in his record as follows:

沼池白帝柴芸间 千里江临一日还 两岸原声提不住 青州已过万重山[2]

In one stanza of four seven-syllable verses, there are ten wrong characters. When the storytellers of the former generations created their texts, they included this poem in order to describe the rapid current of the river Yangzi; later on, storytellers recited this poem on the stage without any understanding of its meaning.

Let us look at another passage from the same text:

赵将军起身到房舱在胸前将第一锦裹取出保主人洞房花灯为何摆在胸前因为鹤紧为辱沈怕忘却，赵将军将新书取在手中，临神观看，书信上，信面上注得明白，第一锦裹船抵码头拆看，望两遍记得，外面来人，取火，是，火取来将书信化为丙丁..

In English this passage would read somewhat as follows:

> General Zhao rises and enters the cabin Takes out from his breast pocket the first brocade envelope. Protect the master Why are candles displayed in the nuptial chamber In his breast pocket Because of anxiety because of pressure he is afraid he would forget, general Zhao takes the letter in his hands and reads it with concentration, in the letter, in the letter it is clearly stated, he opens the first brocade envelope when the boat arrives to the pier, reads it twice in order to remember it, somebody is coming from outside, he picks up a firebrand, right, he picks up a firebrand in order to burn the letter...

The passages above are quoted from a storyteller's sketchy *jiaoben* that I examined several decades ago. My intent was to learn about the form of *jiaoben,* and not at all to correct the characters written by storytellers who in the past missed out on opportunities to study.

A third kind of *jiaoben* is a synopsis: it records how many episodes the spoken tale has, gives a summary of the story line, and indicates the crises (the most exciting passages) in each episode, where to place which jests, and where to insert verses from the various poetic styles of *shi, ci, ge, fu,* or *zan.* The episodes cover the content of the entire tale, the crises form the artistic structure of the entire tale, and the jests provide the flavor (a humorous theme is essential). These three elements become the pillar of a complete spoken tale. The poetic verses mostly underline the characterization of personages, or play up the atmosphere of the setting, or increase the flavor, or are used as *ruhua* (introductory pieces). For example, in the *Nian yu Guanyin* (The Smashed Jade Guanyin) from the *Jingben tongsu xiaoshuo* collection (Popular Stories from the Metropolitan Editions), more than ten poems describing spring form the introduction and lead into the main story.

The above-mentioned three kinds of *jiaoben* have not come into being without a lot of mutual copying and plagiarism. In the course of time this necessarily led to a certain stereotypic form for some texts and little innovation. Those who did have a creative zest might become famous on the storytellers' stage and win a name for themselves.

Nevertheless, it is not without good reason that the storytellers deny having any *jiaoben* for their performances *(shuci).* They emphasize the principle of "transmitting by mouth and teaching from the heart," which is certainly what they do; they also insist on this in order to establish themselves as the true descendants of a certain famous school of storytelling. When some storytellers admit that they do have *jiaoben* for their performances, they, too, have a good reason for doing so. Such *jiaoben* were usually written

down by former generations for the benefit of their sons and grandsons, and today these are highly valuable research materials. In former times, some storytellers would not admit that they possessed *jiaoben,* even though they in fact did, while others who admitted they had *jiaoben* were not willing to show them to other people; such behavior was caused by the fear of having their art imitated and stolen by outsiders. For them this was a vital matter of protecting their rice bowl. This is the reason for the mystery and taboo surrounding the existence of *jiaoben*.

My research into Yangzhou storytelling has led me to the conclusion that both aspects of *jiaoben,* i.e., their presence as well as their absence, have some truth to them. When they do exist, the *jiaoben* that I know about and have seen personally, by and large correspond to the three kinds mentioned above. Accordingly, it seems quite proper to define *huaben* as "a storyteller's booklet" *(shuohuaren de diben),* and it is not appropriate to come up with other definitions.

Shi Zhecun's article not only argues against the views of Masuda, but at the same time suggests—apropos the doubts that have been raised on the question of the existence of *huaben*—that this concept is a general term and cannot be the designation of a specific literary genre. He also proposes evidence that the noun *"huaben"* was not in use before the early Qing dynasty.

Professor Shi provides arguments to support his view that *huaben* was a "general term" *(tongming)*. He bases his arguments on the *Ducheng ji sheng* (Record of the Splendors of the Capital City) and *Mengliang lu* (Record of the Millet Dream). In the latter the following passage is found:

> The puppet theater has only superficial love stories, fairy tales, chivalry romances and crime stories in the repertoire. Their *huaben* [storybooks, scripts] are either like those of drama *[zaju]* or storytelling *[yaci],* more fiction than fact.

In my humble opinion, scientific research should not aim only at observing names and words, but should pay greater attention to the realities behind them. In the early 1950s I was involved in the development of drama and became acquainted with local drama traditions, such as *mubiaoxi* (scene-plan drama), which was played without a libretto *(juben)* or a director. For every act and scene there was a synopsis, called the "scene plan" *(mubiao)*. Dialogues *(daobai)* and arias *(changci)* had been transmitted for generations and were fixed into formulaic entities. A mountain scenery, a rural landscape, farewell admonitions, greetings, and compliments were all fixed into formulaic verses of unequal length, called "watery verses" *(shuici),* because the contents were rather diluted. The passage from *Mengliang lu,*

quoted by Professor Shi, points perhaps to a genre like *mubiaoxi*. In this respect his explanation seems to accord with the doubtful definition of *huaben* that Masuda Wataru proposed, but it is not necessarily correct. I think that *huaben* should be defined as "a storyteller's booklet," and that it is not necessary to make things more complicated. If there is a need for a "general term," it would be better to use the word *jiaoben* (script); all the booklets of performing arts such as drama and *quyi* (storytelling and ballad singing), whether coarse or fine, may be called *jiaoben*.

It is always problematic to define a literary genre or subgenre correctly. In the case of *huaben* the question also implies various phases in the historical development.

In the first place, we have the kind of fiction written by men of letters who imitated the oral literature of storytellers, called *ni huaben* (*ni* means to imitate). Representative of this genre are the *San yan* (Three Words) and *Er pai* (Two Knockings) collections.

In the second place, most of the Ming and Qing fiction that was shaped into the form of novels divided into chapters *(zhanghuiti xiaoshuo)* had their origin in *Pinghua* (folk books);[3] for example, *San guo zhi yanyi* (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms) came from *Shuo san fen* (Storytelling of the Three Divisions), and *Xiyou ji* (Journey to the West) came from *Da Tang Sanyang qu jing shihua* (The Story, with Poems, of How Tripitaka of the Great Tang Fetched the Sutras), etc. Wu Cheng'en and others created such literary works on the basis of folk books and other sources, and they gave them the form of novels divided into chapters. They were meant exclusively for reading and not for storytellers to perform on the stage. These works can only be called fiction *(xiaoshuo),* not *huaben*. However, the "true" fiction transmitted for generations in the form of novels divided into chapters, such as *San guo zhi yanyi, Shuihu zhuan* (Water Margin), *Xiyou ji, Fengshen bang* (The Proclamation of the Enfeoffment of the Gods), *Jingzhong shuo Yue* (The True Tale of Yue Fei), *Pingyao zhuan* (The Subduing of the Monsters), *Qixia wuyi* (Seven Swordsmen and Five Knights)—and perhaps we may also add *Jin Ping Mei cihua* (Jin Ping Mei: The Plum in the Golden Vase)—and others, does still preserve certain stylistic traces from *Pinghua:* each chapter begins with the introductory phrase 'The story goes ... *(hua shuo);* chapter endings stop at the point of a "crisis" *(guanzi)* and after hinting at some exciting outcome, concludes with, "If you want to know what happened later, please, listen to the next episode." There are certain types, sceneries, plots, and expressions, all of a humorous character, as well as formulaic phrases from the folk books, like "the telling is slow, what happened was quick" *(shuo shi chi, na shi kuai);* in addition, we find the formulas for inserting poetry and other versified texts: "there is a poem that testifies to

this" *(you shi wei zheng)* or "later generations praised this in a poem" *(hou ren you shi tan yue)*.

In the third place, when we come to the eighteenth century, the city of Yangzhou on the left bank of the Yangtze was crowded with talented people, among whom were a large number of great masters of the art of storytelling *(pinghua)*. They re-created the stuff of Ming and Qing novels into long *pinghua* tales. The recorded versions of their performances *(shuci jilugao)* were several times longer than the original novels *(xiaoshuo yuanzhu)*, sometimes ten times as long. For example, in the original book of *Shuihu zhuan* the story about Wu Song is about 80,000 characters long, but the tape-recorded version of "Ten Chapters on Wu Song" *(Wu shi hui)* of Yangzhou storytelling is about 1,100,000 characters long, almost fourteen times the length of the original book; the revised version, published later, only goes down to about 800,000 characters. Such recorded versions, whether they are published or not, must be called *huaben,* since it is not appropriate to call them literary fiction *(xiaoshuo)*. Some scholars created the composite term *huaben xiaoshuo* (thus, for example, Professor Hu Shiying in his work *Huaben xiaoshuo gailun* [An Introduction to *Huaben* Fiction]). But such "*huaben* fiction" is actually the same as "storytellers' booklets."

For the above reasons, then, it still seems more appropriate to define *huaben* as "a storyteller's booklet."

(Translated by Lucie Borotová and Vibeke Børdahl)

NOTES

* This article was first published in *Dushu*, Beijing 1994, no. 10, 148–50. (This note and all subsequent notes are the translators'.)

1. Corresponding to chapters 54–55 of the novel *San guo yanyi.*

2. The text should be:

朝辭白帝城彩雲間　千里江陵一日還　兩岸猿聲啼不住　輕舟已過萬重山.

In the bright dawn clouds I left Baidicheng; A thousand li to Jiangling only takes a day. I hear the incessant cry of monkeys from the banks; My light barge has passed countless folds of hills (translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang).

3. We distinguish the homonyms "storytelling" *pinghua* from "folk book" *Pinghua* by writing the latter with a capital "P." It should be noted that the two terms are often used interchangeably. It seems that Chen Wulou uses *Pinghua* in the sense of both "folk book" and "early storytelling."

REFERENCE CITED

MASUDA Wataru 増田 渉

1965 Wabon to iū koto ni tsuite—tsūsetsu (aruiwa teisetsu) e no gimon「話本」ということについて—通説(あるいは定説)への疑問 [Notes on Hua-ben—A doubt about the prevailing opinion] *Jinbun kenkyū* 人文研究 16(5): 22–33.