A PEDAGOGY OF CULTURE BASED ON
CHINESE STORYTELLING TRADITIONS

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an historical ethnographic study of the Shandong kuaishu (山东快书) storytelling tradition and an ethnographic account of the folk pedagogy of Wu Yanguo, one professional practitioner of the tradition. At times, the intention is to record, describe and analyze the oral tradition of Shandong kuaishu, which has not been recorded in detail in English language scholarly literature. At other times, the purpose is to develop a pedagogical model informed by the experiences and transmission techniques of the community of study. The ultimate goal is to use the knowledge and experience gained in this study to advance our understanding of and ability to achieve advanced levels of Chinese language proficiency and cultural competence. Through a combination of the knowledge gained from written sources, participant observation, and first-hand performance of Shandong kuaishu, this dissertation shows that complex performances of segments of Chinese culture drawn from everyday life can be constructed through a regimen of performance based training. It is intended to serve as one training model that leads to the development of sophisticated cultural competence.
Dedicated to Chih-Hsin Annie Tai
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Any dissertation is a collaborative effort. The completion of this particular one would not have been possible without the emotional, intellectual, and financial support of a diverse group of people and organizations. First, I must thank the members of my dissertation committee. I thank Galal Walker for inspiring and encouraging me to become a Chinese language teacher. I also thank him for giving me the opportunity to work with him as program officer for the US/China Links program. Without the opportunities to live and learn in Shandong that the position afforded, I would not have been operating at a sophisticated enough level of cultural competence in Chinese to have recognized and taken advantage of the opportunity to learn Shandong *kuaishu*. Mari Noda has served as a valued mentor and model teacher to emulate. It was in her classes in the SPEAC intensive Japanese program that I began to understand how the performed culture approach is best implemented. Brainstorming sessions with Professor Noda led to many ideas that shape parts of this dissertation and my current teaching approach. Dorothy Noyes, along with Mark Bender, drew me into the world of folklore and oral traditions and has played a critical role in guiding me to deeper understandings of folklore, ethnography and the fieldwork process. Professor Noyes, with the assistance of Barbara Lloyd and Sheila Bock, also arranged for an opportunity to present and perform Shandong *kuaishu* as part of an Ohio State
University Center for Folklore Studies lecture series. Many of the ideas in this dissertation, in particular the framework for Chapters 3 and 4, were formulated in preparation for that first post-fieldwork presentation. Professor Noyes also spent countless hours of time reading and offering suggestions for revisions that greatly improved the quality of this dissertation. Finally, although not able to participate in the final oral defense because he is conducting fieldwork in minority areas in southwest China, Mark Bender should be recognized as an integral member of the committee. He has played a leading role in shaping my understanding of Chinese oral traditions from the beginning and it was through Mark that I first learned of Shandong *kuaishu*. Professor Bender also provided numerous constructive comments based on careful readings of each chapter of the dissertation.

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Seven other families played an integral role in socializing me into Shandong culture during the apprenticeship period. Two of the families, Dai Rixin and Yang Jie and their wives, were high school classmates of Master Wu so we got together with them regularly in their homes and in local restaurants where they politely (and always encouragingly) endured my performances at the very
early stages of my development. The other five families, Tian Shengwen, Xie Benxin, Wang Enxing, Yin Nan, Master Zhao, and their families, were colleagues and close friends of Master Wu’s from the Qingdao Folk Song and Dance Theatre. All of them welcomed me into Shandong culture with open arms and regularly offered advice and assistance whenever I needed it.

Everyone at the Qingdao Folk Song and Dance Theatre assisted me at some point during my time in Qingdao. In particular, without the support of the Theatre’s leaders, including Party Secretary Cao Shiyong, Assistant Theatre Director Li Lefen, Troupe Leader Shan Guogang, and his wife Sun Jinfeng, I would not have had many opportunities to travel and perform with the various troupes that comprise the Theatre. The Qingdao Municipal Ballad Tellers’ Association, Qingdao Municipal Cultural Union, Shandong Performing Artist Association, and the Shandong Kuaishu Research Association also provided official support that made my apprenticeship possible. In particular, Chairman Hao and General Secretary Xie of the Cultural Union were instrumental in officially inviting me as a visiting scholar and in obtaining visa and residence permits. Section Chief, Qin Ke, of the Qingdao Municipal Public Security Bureau Visa Division, was instrumental in making my stay in Qingdao conform to all local policies. I am grateful for his assistance and encouragement.

A Presidential Fellowship granted by the Graduate School at the Ohio State University enabled me to work full time on this dissertation for the final
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In addition to these people, I owe a heavy debt to many teachers, colleagues and classmates who have influenced my intellectual growth and understanding of Chinese culture. Although it is impossible to mention them all, I am indebted most to Jian Xiaobin of the College of William and Mary, who has been a model, mentor and guide throughout my graduate career. Jin Zhiliang, of Qingdao Ocean University, has played a similar role in the development of my understanding of Shandong culture. He spent many long lunches offering advice during the apprenticeship period. Li Minru, of the National East Asian Language Resource Center at Ohio State, frequently generously offered his time to engage in intellectual discussions about Chinese culture and the Chinese literary tradition, a forum that served as a preliminary sounding board for many ideas in this dissertation. Dr. Li also went out of his way to assist me with many passages of classical Chinese about performance traditions.
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INTRODUCTION

The Need for Advanced Cultural Competence in Chinese

Before moving more deeply into the theoretical background that informs this study, a discussion of the rationale for a culture based foreign language pedagogy is necessary. Since China began reforming its command economy in the early 1980’s, it has undergone economic, social and cultural change at a blinding pace. The once-poor country’s economy and GDP have quadrupled since 1978 enabling it to increasingly become a powerful international player and global trendsetter. In terms of purchasing power parity and foreign direct investment, China is now second only to the US. Simply put, China is where the action is and where it is going to be for some time to come.

This rapid shifting of global economic influence tipping the scales in favor of China has spurred a marked need for speakers of Chinese language and increased interest in learning Chinese as a foreign language. The number of American university students, businesspeople and young professionals studying Chinese has never been greater. The number of Americans studying in China increased by 90% from 2002-2004 and China now ranks as one of the top ten destinations for Americans learning abroad. This is because China is now seen as a job market and Chinese language as a skill that enhances one’s potential to be competitive in a shifting global economy. Yet, with these tremendous increases in
percentages, only 4,737 Americans enrolled in Chinese universities during 2003-4 and the number able to achieve advanced levels of Chinese language competency is even smaller.¹ Contending with the global impact of a China emerging as a modern economic, political, and cultural super state will require numerous Americans with a range of practical experiences in China. Beyond commercial enterprises, there will be a vital need for future leaders in the education, government, public policy, and service sectors of our society who have first-hand knowledge of how China constructs the social fabric of everyday life.

As China becomes the main engine driving the world economy, the Chinese government has been and will continue to seek opportunities to spread Chinese cultural influence. The recent campaign to open Confucius Institutes all over the world is only the beginning of Beijing’s offensive to export Chinese culture and values, a cultural rise described as Beijing’s soft power offensive.²

²See “The Rise of China’s Soft Power” by Joseph Nye, Wall Street Journal Asia, December 29, 2005. Nye points out that while Washington has been concerned with the rise of China’s economic and military power, it has overlooked a more pervasive and more important rise in terms of the realm of global popular culture. He cites examples such as Chinese novelist Gao Xingjian winning China's first Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000, the Chinese film “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” becoming the highest grossing non-English film, NBA star Yao Ming becoming a household name, and China’s preparations to host the 2008 Summer Olympics to support this claim. Nye also shows that the enrollment of foreign students in China has tripled to 110,000 from 36,000 over the past decade, and the number of foreign tourists has increased dramatically to 17 million in 2005. Nye also sees the fact that China has created 26 Confucius Institutes around the world to teach its language and culture, and the reduction of Voice of America Chinese broadcasts to 14 from 19 hours a day coupled with an increase of China Radio International broadcasts in
The competitive consequences are apparent. At the same time that the need for Americans who understand how to interact with Chinese on a professional level has been developing and Beijing has been increasing its global cultural influence, Chinese have been deepening their understanding of western culture and international practice at breakneck speed, creating an ever-growing competitive disadvantage for American professionals. In the 2004-5 academic year, China sent more than 62,000 students to the US, the second largest group from any foreign country, many of them enrolling in the best American universities and professional schools.3 Chinese children now begin learning English during their preschool years and most Chinese businessmen have at least a rudimentary understanding of English, western cultures and international business practices.4

English to 24 hours a day as indications that we would be “foolish” to ignore the rise of China’s soft power.

3 Buchanan, 2005.

4 I contend that despite the fact that many Chinese understandings of the US and American culture are skewed by Hollywood movies, Chinese media and propaganda, and cultural misinterpretation and the number of Chinese who have smoothly integrated themselves into American cultural circles and settings (or have the cultural and linguistic skills and desire to do so) is actually quite small, Chinese knowledge of Americans and American culture, on both the national and individual levels, typically far exceeds that of American knowledge of Chinese and Chinese culture. An informal, superficial survey that I have conducted while teaching or lecturing in both China and the U.S. supports this claim. Over the course of several years, during the first day of classes or during guest lectures, I have asked classes of Chinese students at Yantai University, Qingdao Ocean University, Qingdao University, Zhengzhou University and Shanghai Normal University to write down rudimentary information about the U.S. such as the name of the President, the capital city, the largest city, the economic center, the name of an American company, a business leader, a political leader, a cultural figure, the name of a movie, the name of a pop star (actor, musician, or band), and the number of states. In each case, Chinese students performed at a very high rate with no college student unable to correctly answer all of the questions with the exception of the largest city, which was frequently thought to be Washington, DC, and the number of states. When I conducted a similar survey with my students in six classes at The Ohio State University and at
When dealing with executives from major international companies, almost all professional level interaction is conducted in English and according to Western cultural norms. The lack of significant professional transactions in Chinese by foreign professionals raises many questions. How many Americans deeply understand how decisions are made in Chinese corporations or government offices? How many understand how Chinese professionals approach negotiations of any type? How many can conduct professional level transactions in Chinese and according to Chinese cultural norms? The number is quite small in my estimation. Because of this glaring lack of Americans with equivalent cultural and linguistic skills, when translation is needed, most companies are forced to rely on Chinese consultants and interpreters who speak English. When they have relied on American interpreters, Americans have had less than ideal results. Former President Clinton’s historic nine-day visit to China in June and July of 1998 is a prime example. The visit included the first live television broadcasts of an American president’s speeches in China with American interpreters providing
Chinese translations as well as direct dialogue between Clinton and Beijing University students. Western press and most American diplomats hailed the visit and speeches as great successes while average Chinese, who viewed the speeches with avid interest, discussed afterwards how much of the content did not make sense to them. While interacting with Chinese friends and colleagues at the time, it became rapidly evident to me that while the American interpreters spoke in grammatically correct and linguistically accurate Chinese, their lack of attention to Chinese cultural norms, rhetorical techniques and methods of presentation had left Chinese viewers confused.  

A similar pattern has emerged in the realm of business. When US multinationals conduct operations in China or deal with China on a professional level from their offices in the US, they are most often forced to staff operations with Chinese from abroad (Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong) or Chinese who have been educated in the US to maintain a competitive edge rather than being able to rely on Americans capable of interacting with Chinese on their terms. Senior

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5 Since that time, sophisticated China observers have also reevaluated the results of the visit. See Gregory Kulacki’s “Lost in Translation”, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, vol. 62, no. 3 (May-June 2006) in which he effectively argues that a lack of sophistication in cultural understanding about China continues to cause American government analysts and diplomats to misinterpret Chinese military capabilities and intentions. He states, “They [US government China analysts] apparently lack the basic ability to distinguish an editorial by a junior officer from an official policy statement, or the good sense to distinguish tabloid journalism from credible news reports. Training in social sciences, politics, history, economics, area studies, and international relations cannot alone make up for this deficiency.” Although Kulacki focuses on the inability to accurately assess the credibility of sources resulting from a lack of cultural competence, he makes an effective case for the need for additional resources to be funneled into Chinese language and culture training.
executives of American companies with China operations have commented to me that Americans are not able to “penetrate Chinese insider circles” and do not always know “how things work” in China. In the fall of 2005, when responding to my question about the ideal skill set for managers in their China offices, one executive told me, “It is better to find Chinese who speak English well because they know where Chinese are coming from and we are less likely to get burned that way.”

This state of imbalance of cultural understanding is one of the primary motivations fueling the research that produced this dissertation. Although partially created by the lack of attention, resources and perceived need to understand how to deal with China on Chinese terms (which is dramatically changing with China’s economic emergence), the lack of Americans skilled in Chinese language and culture stems in part from our pedagogical approach to the learning of foreign languages—especially truly foreign languages such as Chinese, partly from traditional notions of what is involved in speaking foreign languages, partially from how we approach learning in general, and, most glaringly from setting low expectations.

**Performed Culture: A Pedagogical Approach**

In 1996, I began working with Galal Walker to create the US/China Links program to address the now urgent need for Americans with advanced skills in Chinese language and culture. On the cutting edge of Chinese language pedagogy,
we began the long-term process of training a cadre of young American professionals who have the high-level language skills combined with cultural expertise necessary to engage Chinese professional counterparts on both Chinese and American terms. Working as program officer for US/Links, I played an integral role in creating a nationally competitive program that provided unique opportunities for students and members of American business communities, who were in the early stages of careers involving China, to study Chinese language and culture while gaining up-to-date knowledge of common Chinese business practices through first-hand experience in Chinese corporate culture.

Our experience taught us that when teaching language, linguistic code and culture cannot be separated as well as that culture is both learned and learnable (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Cole, 1996; Walker, 2000; Walker and Noda, 2000; Shepherd, 2005). Our seven years of US/China Links training, during which we recruited students who had studied years of Chinese in universities across America, time and again, provided us with empirical proof that the pool of Americans able to speak Chinese at the advanced level, although growing, is still quite limited. And, more importantly, it showed us that the range of Americans both culturally competent and capable of speaking advanced levels of Chinese language is narrower still yet. In fact, on several occasions, students in our programs with the best ability to produce Chinese linguistic code and grammatical patterns were the least successful when interacting with Chinese people because
they failed to grasp the importance of an equivalent level of cultural knowledge and understanding. The result was that our program had to invest significant time and resources in relationship repair due to this lack of deep cultural understanding on the part of some of our students.

I prefer to use Erving Goffman’s (1974: 496) term, cultural competence (as opposed to linguistic competence) to describe the ability to navigate cultural interaction at sophisticated levels, what I now see as our primary pedagogical goal.6 Specifically, I employ the term to describe the ability to recognize, interpret, and enact (respond to or generate anew) shared meanings and intentions in ways appropriate in the target culture for typical contexts of interaction. This includes what Goffman describes as ways of framing those interactions as well as the common behaviors (and speech) associated with those contexts and frames. Viewing language learning in this manner assumes that language is part of culture and, thus, linguistic competence is a component of cultural competence. It also renders the abilities to recognize and employ Chinese framing techniques during interaction with Chinese people critical to any learner’s long-term success in the culture (Goffman, 1974). Ways in which these skills are developed is an area in which little analysis or pedagogical resources have been focused, at least in terms of Chinese.

6 Charles Quinn (2003) also uses the notion of cultural competence in a similar way in discussing how to teach reading to non-native learners of Japanese.
In addition to coming to the conclusion that cultural knowledge must inform our pedagogical approach to China, we learned in US/China Links that teaching declarative knowledge about Chinese cultural interaction was insufficient in getting Americans to change their behaviors to adapt to Chinese social situations. It became clear that our training needed to include the behavioral culture and procedural knowledge associated with the contexts we were dealing with. Students could learn a great deal about Chinese social practices without actually being able to participate in them. Thus, coursework placed a heavy emphasis on how to do things in Chinese with Chinese, which, in turn, required an understanding of the Chinese worldview knowledge and cognitive frameworks that inform how everyday tasks are done in China. We came to understand that we had to train our students to operate within the realm of Chinese shared cognitive norms so that they understood how to shape and interpret intentions that Chinese would recognize. We needed to teach them how to experience the world in new ways.

Based on these and other experiences training Americans in Chinese culture and language, Walker and Mari Noda (Walker, 2000 and Walker and Noda, 2000) formulated a theoretical approach to teaching and learning Chinese and Japanese driven by the ideas of *performed culture* and *participating in culture*. In developing an approach that employs performance as a fundamental paradigm,

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7 Americans are not unique in this matter. In our program’s mirror English program that was designed to help Chinese develop similar skills in English, the same held true.
Walker and Noda drew on work in the fields of performance theory and cultural psychology. A brief discussion of some of those influences will help clarify terminology used throughout this dissertation. In the area of performance theory, the primary influences are Dell Hymes, Richard Bauman, and Victor Turner. Dell Hymes defined language as a social construct, with speakers using language to navigate conversations strategically. He also believed there to be a set of conditions that must be satisfied in order for any speech act to be performed correctly. For Hymes (1968), culture orders experience in shared conventional formats (described variously as communicative events and speech events), which provide the contexts within which speech and behavior are interpreted by the participants. In other words, communicative acts always take place as part of larger communicative events that are embedded in communicative contexts. Hymes argued that the use of language identifies a range of possible meanings, while the linguistic context and practices of the linguistic community of users can support a range of meanings. It is the use of language in context, for Hymes, which eliminates meanings from the range of possibilities and isolates the one at hand. Walker and Noda borrow Hymes’ ideas that there are isolatable units of cultural interaction, context plays a critical role in situating meaning, and that meaning is use. In Verbal Art as Performance (1977), Bauman writes, “performance involves a transformation of the basic referential uses of language”, which sets up an “interpretive frame” that informs a particular “way of speaking”
and “situates” all behavior and speech by and for the participants. While situating performances as analyzable units of cultural activity, Bauman’s formulation also implies that cultural meanings generated in performance are dependent upon the broader context of cultural use; that culture provides frameworks for the interpretation of experience. Bauman has also pointed out the critical notions that performances involve a “display of competence” that is “subject to evaluation by an audience”, who “derives enjoyment from the performance.” Finally, Victor Turner (1982) wrote that meaning is generated in the narrative constructed by members of a particular cultural group. Like Hymes and Bauman, Turner understood there to be “structures of experience” fundamental to the study of human interaction. Concerned with social change, he found the unit of analysis to be the “social drama”. In Turner’s terminology, social dramas are the social ground of many narrative types. These narrative types serve as framing devices for memory and meanings are generated in narratives constructed by the group. These narrative meanings are accessed by looking back over a temporal process (memory) and they provide the potentiality of becoming a social being.

For Walker and Noda, who are concerned with developing the skills necessary to converse in a second culture, the fundamental unit of analysis is the performance. According to Walker (2000), culture has patterns and structures that are recognizable, although often only implicitly to its members. That is, we notice this structure when it is ruptured and we become aware of the rules when
someone does not follow them. Nonetheless, in every culture there are recurring, isolatable events that provide the social contexts for participants’ behaviors and shape the construction of shared meanings. These basic frameworks for understanding social interaction are what Walker and Noda call performances. In their view, a performance is a distinct, analyzable unit or segment in the flow of human social activity that has five basic elements: 1) a specified time, 2) a specified place, 3) recognized roles, 4) a script or program, and 5) an audience. A performance can be as simple as a routine greeting or as elaborate as a holiday celebration or a performance of Shandong kuaishu before an audience of thousands. Because performances are both recurrent and patterned, they are learnable. The idea is that cultural learning can be facilitated by isolating the recurrent structures of a given culture and making their patterns and associated behavioral rules explicit.

In Walker and Noda’s rubric “to perform” is to complete a process. It refers to the enactment of segments of a target culture in order to establish recognizable intentions that allow one to accomplish things in the social worlds of that target culture. Simply put, it is doing things in a culture. Rendered more theoretically, it is completing a series of acts in recognized roles and in a prescribed manner (according to a recognized cultural script). For Walker (2000), culture provides the contexts for all of our interactions. Those contexts then provide us with meanings from which to choose. Meanings produce intentions for
us to establish or assign to the actions of others and intentions are what define individuals. And by performing—enacting behaviors, including language, that are associated with a particular segment of culture—we are able to participate in the flow of cultural activity.

Walker and Noda’s *performed culture* and Turner’s *social dramas* both, explicitly or implicitly, forefront the role of memory in apprehending cultural meaning and accessing social realities. For Turner, meaning arises in memory based on shared social experiences that generate narratives about those experiences. For Walker (2000), culture provides the contexts for all of our interactions. Contexts then provide us with meanings from which to choose. Meanings produce intentions for us to establish or assign to the actions of others. We are indoctrinated into social worlds through shared experiences in our culture (or our culture of study) and we construct memories of our experiences that are shaped by the underlying structures of the culture. Meaning is situated in shared social contexts and our knowledge of our social experiences is compiled in memory in story form. For Walker and Noda (2000), cultural knowledge is packaged in and shared through stories. In their model, a story is both the declarative and procedural knowledge that sustains a performance in the target culture and the knowledge of having participated in that performance. As Walker
puts it, “the more target stories we can participate in, the more intelligent we will appear to be in the target culture”.8

To complement the ideas drawn from performance theory, Walker and Noda infused their approach with ideas about learning in the works of cultural psychologists such as Jerome Bruner (1986 and 1990). For Bruner, who was analyzing the way infants learn to use language, culture plays a fundamental role in learning. He argued that parents create the world into which children enter and language learning is embedded in the social activities of a group. Culture, in his view, is a forum for collective cognitive sharing:

“a culture is as much a forum for negotiating and renegotiating meaning and for explicating action as it is a set of rules or specifications for action. Indeed, every culture maintains specialized institutions or occasions for intensifying this “forum-like” feature. Storytelling, theater, science, even jurisprudence are all techniques for intensifying this function—ways of exploring possible worlds out of the context of immediate need.” (1986: 123)

If as Bruner argues, culture is a forum in which meaning is negotiated, the way to access the meanings generated by a culture is through participation in the forum, participation in the negotiation of meanings. For Bruner, we are not born with culture. We have to learn it by participating in the social activities of the target

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8 I take this from Walker’s lectures on performed culture at The Ohio State University. My description of performed culture is heavily influenced by those lectures as well as those on the same topic by Mari Noda.
Arguing against the innate nature of language and the existence of a generative grammar proposed by Noam Chomsky, Bruner (1990: 70-1) states:

“Language is acquired not in the role of spectator but through use. Being ‘exposed’ to a flow of language is not nearly so important as using it in the midst of ‘doing.’ Learning a language, to borrow John Austin’s celebrated phrase, is learning ‘how to do things with words.’ The child is not learning simply what to say but how, where, to whom, and under what circumstances.”

Walker and Noda applied Bruner’s notion of culture as forum for the negotiation of meaning and critical for cognitive development to the East Asian language learning situation. Their model attempts to situate learning within the framework of the interpretive norms of the target culture, which suggests that American learners of Chinese (or any foreign language) must learn how to mean in Chinese. In addition to entailing the learning of grammatical structures and linguistic code, learning to mean in Chinese includes learning how to refer to the world in ways that make sense to Chinese people. Cultural norms help determine who says what to whom as well as how and when they say it. Culture also frames what meanings Chinese listeners hear when Americans speak in Chinese, regardless of what those American speakers intend to mean. If I want to be successful, I cannot just be myself using the Chinese linguistic code. I have to learn how Chinese construct meaning and establish intentions so that I can

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9 According to Noam Chomsky’s (1977) nativist theory, the mechanism of language acquisition formulates from innate processes. It is innate mechanisms that facilitate language acquisition and all children are born with a Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Chomsky argues that children learn rules, not specific verbal associations and responses, and that, in the early stages, children of all cultures acquire language in similar ways with little assistance from parents or caregivers.
interpret the intentions of my Chinese interlocutors and so that I can embed my own intentions in recognizable formats.

For example, when learning to communicate with Chinese as an American, I have to understand how issues of face, hierarchy, reciprocity, and interpersonal relationships affect what is being said or what is left unsaid. There is an ordered hierarchy of interaction that is typically followed (especially in formal and semi-formal contexts). Age and social status determine who speaks first as well as the length of time each speaker takes the floor. If I want to point out to a group of Chinese colleagues the positive aspects of our collaboration, I cannot simply list them one by one as I would with an American colleague. I have to recognize when, how, and with whom it is appropriate to do this. By complimenting the work of one colleague in such a list—an intended face-giving act, I once simultaneously made another colleague lose face by leaving out her contributions.

I also have to inform my interactions with the Chinese value on the interactive quality of “hanxu (含蓄)”, which describes being reserved and indirect in many public contexts. Acting in typical American ways leaves Chinese listeners with a much different feeling (self centered, arrogant, etc.). Moreover, because Chinese expectations place much of the burden of interpretation of meaning on the listener, I have to understand that many Chinese interlocutors are listening intently for what is left unsaid rather than to what is made explicit. This means that in my example my Chinese colleagues were more focused on the aspects of the
collaboration that I failed to mention in order to ascertain when and where I was 
dissatisfied despite the fact that I was not unsatisfied with any of them. The result 
of the intended compliment on the positive aspects of our collaboration was that it 
was interpreted as a criticism of what I left unsaid.

If performed culture is a pedagogical approach, participating in culture is 
the pedagogical goal. Participating in culture, as the term suggests, is taking part 
in target culture social worlds in meaningful ways and in recognized target culture 
roles. In Walker’s (2000) view, it is possible to participate in culture on number 
of levels of sophistication that range from observer to shareholder. Observers, 
spectators, fans and commentators most often engage the abstract meanings and 
declarative knowledge associated with a culture. They deal with reified cultural 
artifacts, the products of a culture. Operating at this level is akin to going to the 
pool to watch a swim meet because you do not get wet. These detached, relatively 
safe ways of engaging culture are not the target in performed culture. Rather, the 
model is designed to produce players, or full-fledged participants in a range of 
target culture performances. To be a player, one must get into the pool at the 
swim meet so that he has the experience of getting wet and understands the 
feeling of being in the water. Players possess the knowledge and skills necessary 
to negotiate at least one performance according to target culture norms and can

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10 See Walker (2000) and Shepherd (2005) for discussions of various cultural roles and levels of 
participation.
participate in target culture performances without significant problems.\textsuperscript{11} Players may not possess all of the knowledge about the target culture a commentator does but is equipped with the knowledge and skills of how to do things associated with the given performance. The player level requires experiential and procedural knowledge and tends to be a deeper level of engagement because it requires the taking of risks, heavy investment, and emotional attachment on the part of the individual.

In sum, the performed culture approach is concerned with facilitating the development of culturally appropriate behaviors (in the target culture rather than the base culture), which include language. The aim of Walker and Noda’s approach is to train students to do Chinese (or Japanese in the case of Noda) things in Chinese (Japanese), which requires significant attention to behavioral and procedural types of knowledge. The method is to structure learning environments and learning experiences around commonly encountered target culture performances within which learners gain experience and rehearse target behaviors by performing them in context, which facilitates the development of memories of new behaviors appropriate in the target culture rather than simply mapping the target culture linguistic code onto base culture structures.

\textsuperscript{11} Walker acknowledges the fact that as a player we can be more or less skilled depending on the type of performance and our experience with that type of performance.
Learning How to Tell Stories in Chinese

While teaching Chinese language and culture using my version of the performed culture approach, I was confronted with a number of questions. How do we learn how to perform second culture? What performances are important in Chinese culture? What should (and shouldn’t) we be performing as foreigners in Chinese culture? How can the performed culture theoretical model be implemented on the practical level in the classroom? That is, how do we train American learners to perform culture? How can our students’ performances be constructed most efficiently? These questions, among others, were what I intended to explore going into the fieldwork portion of my dissertation research. The fieldwork period of my research actually was a series of stretches living and working in Shandong Province from 1995 to 2005 (primarily in the cities of Yantai and Qingdao). I spent one year teaching English at Yantai University in 1995-6. Then, while working with the US/China Links program, I spent five six month periods in Yantai and Qingdao from 1997 to 2002 and made several shorter trips in between. These experiences afforded me the unique opportunity to gain long-term exposure to Shandong culture and interaction patterns before I began focused fieldwork for my dissertation. While compiling a memory of the culture of the region, I learned that the most important social context is the banquet, which revolves around eating, drinking, performance, and the exchange of feelings among participants (Shepherd, 2005). During the course of studying
banquet culture, I discovered that traditional performers were frequently invited to such events because they are particularly adept at creating desired atmospheres. As I came in contact with a range of traditional performance genres, I was drawn to Shandong *kuaishu* storytellers because of their unique ability to enthrall audiences with humorous narratives. After developing friendships with some of the performers, I decided to devote the 2004-5 academic year to learning more about the tradition as an apprentice storyteller. One of my initial goals was to examine how narratives are constructed and used in Chinese culture so that I could apply those techniques in teaching American students how to socialize with Chinese people.\(^\text{12}\)

I entered my apprenticeship as a Chinese storyteller understanding that when people of any culture get together in any type of social gathering, they typically talk about their experiences and the events going on around them (or those they have read about, imagined or dreamed) (Ochs and Capps, 2001). As a result, sociolinguists, students of conversation analysis, scholars of performance theory, proponents of the ethnography of speaking approach, and others who study the ways people talk and move in culture have come to view stories and storytelling as social activities that are ubiquitous features of ordinary

\(^{12}\) Other motivations included understanding how to produce and manipulate meanings in Shandong culture (and by extension in Chinese culture more generally), how to construct authentic cultural performances, how communication is framed and how those frames are keyed, and how to construct and control narrative in Chinese.
conversation (Ochs and Capps, 2001: 1). In examining a formalized artistic tradition of storytelling, I sought to explore the narrative conventions that they had extracted from everyday interaction. In his seminal *The Singer of Tales*, Albert Lord (1960: 22) made the comparison between learning oral traditions and learning language. He said, “the singer is like a child learning words, or anyone learning a language without a school method; except that the language here being learned is the special language of poetry.” His student, John Miles Foley (2002: 127) has also argued that oral poetry “works like language only more so” because it “uses special language to support highly focused and economical communication, taking advantage of implications unique to that language.” Citing Abelson (1975: 276), Holly Mathews (1992: 129) similarly suggests that “literary forms like fairy-tales and myths are an important domain for the study of the organization of cultural knowledge because they represent stylized worlds.”

David Rubin (1995) claims that oral traditions are one stylized mode of memory creation and they are highly practiced traditions that tell organized, coherent stories that are ways of ordering experience and of constructing reality. These comparisons of language and oral traditions focused my attention in the direction of oral traditions as a window on how language works in general and as a means to better understand how we use stories to shape our realities. As I see it, oral traditions, are a fruitful territory for understanding how language, culture and the

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13 See also Bauman (1986) and Langellier and Peterson (2004).
transmission of the two work because they highlight and systematize our 
everyday narrative conventions, and they are deeply rooted in the patterns of our 
cognitive and social interaction.

Richard Bauman (1986: 2) has attempted to bridge the perceived 
gap between oral traditions and everyday storytelling conventions. As he 
explains it, “the symbolic forms we call, folklore have their primary 
existence in the action of people and their roots in social and cultural life.”

For Bauman, oral narrative (and he is looking primarily at everyday 
storytelling) provides an “especially rich focus for the investigation of the 
relationship between oral literature and social life because part of the 
special nature of narrative is to be doubly anchored in human events. That 
is, narratives are keyed both to the events in which they are told and to the 
events that they recount, toward narrative events and narrated events.”

Bauman goes on to suggest that narrative is a primary cognitive 
instrument for making life experience comprehensible (5) and that the 
verbal art forms of a society, if taken as part of larger social and cultural 
systems organizing the social use of language, can inform us a great deal 
about oral uses of language in general (9). Bauman’s (113) take is:

“when one looks to the social practices by which social life is 
accomplished, one finds—with surprising frequency—people telling 
stories to each other, as a means of giving cognitive and emotional 
coherence to experience, constructing and negotiating social identity; 
investing the experiential landscape with moral significance in a way that 
can be brought to bear on human behavior; generating, interpreting, and
transforming the work exp. Narrative is not merely a reflection of culture, or the external charter of social institutions, or the cognitive arena for sorting out the logic of cultural codes, but is constitutive of social life in the act of storytelling.”

Learning from Oral Traditions

As my apprenticeship progressed, my attention shifted to the pedagogical approach my master used to indoctrinate me in the basics of the Shandong kuaishu tradition. It became clear that the pedagogical approach Wu Yanguo was employing produced the intended goals of performed culture: the internalization of narrative-based memories through rehearsal performance. In performing, Shandong kuaishu storytellers both narrate and act out tales about people, places and events that go on in their everyday worlds. These storytellers regularly create and re-create cultural performances and they transmit them from generation to generation. That is, they enact segments of Chinese culture, packaged in a story-based form. Although Shandong kuaishu storytellers perform their tales in a specialized, artistic genre that is now primarily used for the purpose of entertainment, their performances highlight the fundamentals of local storytelling processes. Moreover, they have developed folk pedagogies for how to construct narrative-based performances through more than three hundred years of practice. Therefore, these storytellers offer us a ready-made model for developing the

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14 David Rubin (1995) has argued that oral traditions are one stylized mode of memory creation. He has also stated that they are highly practiced traditions that tell organized, coherent stories that are ways of ordering experience and of constructing reality. They also highlight and systematize our everyday narrative conventions.
ability to perform everyday cultural behaviors and their training, rehearsal and transmission practices model time-tested pedagogies of performance.

In connecting oral traditions and language learning, I am not advocating that all students of Chinese learn a Chinese oral tradition. Rather, I suggest that what Shandong kuaishu performers describe as “solidifying a story, gonggu yige duanzi (巩固一个段子)” is the process of constructing and internalizing long-term memories of enactable segments of Chinese culture and is similar to the fundamental learning processes foreign language learners are confronted with.

Beginning with a verbal script, the storytellers gradually pack meaning into their performances through repeated practice performances each time at increasing sophisticated levels. They carefully isolate and through practice fine tune the performance of chunks of culture that everyone can identify with. Then, they pack cultural meaning into their performances by engaging in repeated cycles of rehearsal, performance, directed feedback, and performance at a higher level. Shandong kuaishu performers internalize cultural artifacts that are bound together in stories by constructing several layers of memory associated with a given performance. These memories are dynamic. The storytellers see any single performance as merely a single point on a long-term trajectory of increasing complexity in their understanding of and ability to deal with a given story. They build their performances over time through a process of repeated performance, feedback (corrective or based on audience reaction), and adjustment. They build
performances beginning by learning a verbal script and a basic story line. Then, through repeated rehearsal-performances, they gradually compile a complex but integrated memory of the performance by adding movements, expressions, voice intonation and inflection, character voices and personalities, moods, and feelings. During each subsequent return to a performance, performers are able to focus on higher level aspects of the performance because layers of memory formed earlier—verbal script, movements, etc.—gradually require less and less conscious attention, freeing up mental faculties to attend to higher level phenomena like intonation, stress, expressions, feelings, and audience interaction.

As I mapped out Master Wu’s pedagogy, I became convinced that his approach was an example of a successful cultural pedagogy in practice that was an effective model for implementing the performed culture approach on the practical level. It showed me that complex cultural performances can be consciously built over time. We do not learn to negotiate sophisticated cultural activities in one shot and we do not stop compiling memory about a type of situation once we have participated in it. Any one performance is merely a point on a larger trajectory as the performer gains competence, knowledge and experience over time. By making explicit his folk pedagogy, I intend to provide one proven pedagogical model for achieving advanced cultural competence, which can be applied to foreign language learning contexts. In addition to this fundamental learning process, the manner in which kuaishu performers first
imitate to perfection the representative performances from the tradition before making any story their own (making any innovative adaptations), their acute attention to dialogic exchanges with audiences, and their techniques for creating performance arenas and performance opportunities all can shed light on everyday language and culture use. The practices of *Shandong kuaishu* performers inform us about, among other things, how memory is used and works, how narrative memory is compiled, how to teach cultural behaviors—movements, expressions—how to generate moods, emotions and feelings among audience members, and how storytelling circles socialize new members. At the same time, the stories themselves grant us access to recognized modes for realizing intentions in the culture while making explicit roles, meanings and intentions commonly found in Chinese culture. Although, as will become apparent in later analysis, *Shandong kuaishu* works as entertainment because it transfigures the commonplace, stories such as *Wu Song Fights the Tiger, Lu Da Gets Rid of the Tyrant* and *Auntie Wee* also tell us the canonical in Shandong. At the same time, the familiar routines found in all of the stories provide us with malleable frameworks for interaction and a means to better draw Chinese narrative under our deliberate control (Bruner, 2002: 4). And the manner in which stories are drawn from everyday interaction sheds light on how we record experience in memory and how those memories shift over time during collaborative interactions with others.
Learning the way Chinese stories are framed and how they are told by professionals also has direct applications for learners of culture because it provides insights into the Chinese worldview in story/narrative format. Understanding the themes around which Chinese stories revolve better equips us to understand Chinese people and culture (Rubin, 1995). On one level, experiencing stories exposes us to the roles, ready made scripts and ways for keying scripts and contexts in the minds of other members of our culture. As such, stories are fruitful ground to find key knowledge and behaviors necessary for interaction. On another level, experiencing stories (telling, hearing, or seeing them enacted), allows us to try them on for size. That is, it provides us with opportunities to try out those roles, scripts, and context-keying mechanisms. These opportunities to assume the various roles found in a culture allow learners to more deeply understand how those roles work. Finally, the stories provide us with equipment with which to participate in Chinese social interactions.

**Chinese Regional Cultures**

It is clear to anyone who has lived or traveled extensively in China that Chinese society is a vast, diverse amalgamation of ethnic groups and cultures especially when considering the border regions where larger concentrations of ethnic minority groups live. This is part of what makes China both a fascinating and complex country. Distinctions in regional subcultures in China can be seen through differing physical appearances, styles of dress, and objects of material
culture such as tools, ornaments and architecture common to particular geographic areas. They can be tasted in eight major Chinese regional cuisines long known in China and that now delight the palates of people around the world. They can also be heard in wide range of languages, dialects, and styles of speaking that complicate communication among Chinese hailing from different locations in China as well as in the diverse forms of music and singing found across the vast country. It would not be a stretch to claim that every place in China is at least a bilingual situation with standard Chinese and at least one local dialect in regular daily use. And, they can be felt in the different ways with which people interact. That is, norms that sustain and frame interactions in Shanghai do not typically lead to social success in Shandong and vice versa. Thus, in most places in China, multiple cultural modes coexist and many Chinese freely switch among them during interaction depending on the identity of their interlocutors.

In recent years, aspects of Chinese regional diversity have found their way into all industries and forms of media as the Chinese Communist Party apparatus has promoted an image of fifty-six distinct ethnic groups harmoniously coexisting

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15 Here regional culture refers to the culture of a particular place or the culture of a community living in a given geographic location. Examples of recognized local cultural groups in China include Qi and Lu (east and west Shandong respectively), Chuan (Sichuan), Yue (Guangdong), Dongbei (northeastern three provinces), Jiangzhe (Jiangsu and Zhejiang) and Xiang (Hunan) among others. Regional culture is also associated with major cities such as that found in Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, and Chongqing.

16 Most Chinese people are capable of at least interacting according to the norms of their local culture and a more generic mainstream Chinese culture associated with the standard Chinese language. Some are fluent in additional regional patterns of interaction.
in the People’s Republic. Recent Western scholarship has also highlighted China’s ethnic diversity by focusing extensive time and resources studying various aspects of China’s ethnic minority cultures (See, among others, Bender, 1982, 2001a, 2001b, 2005 and 2006; Harrell, 1996; Gladney, 1998; Schein, 2000; Meuggler, 2001; and Mackerras, 2003). The work of these scholars has clearly debunked any myth of a monolithic, homogenous Chinese culture among academics. However, despite this growing awareness of cultural and ethnic diversity within China, the fruits of their labor have yet to trickle down to mainstream Western society where the average person knows little about the Han ethnic group, the dominant people that populate China making up more than ninety percent of the total population, let alone anything about the minority groups that make up the cultural periphery. To further complicate the situation, China is significantly more culturally complex than a minority-Han dichotomy suggests. That is, cultural distinctions abound within the Han majority as well as across ethnic divides, particularly across geographic regions.

The tremendous diversity across Han Chinese cultures of which I speak pervades every aspect of life. Among other things, regional distinctions can be found in terms of the means of production, major industries, primary methods of economic livelihood, lifestyles, the type of information that is important, the

\[\text{As Dru Gladney (1998: 11) has argued, ethnic separatism is a major concern of the Communist authorities thus it is in their political interest to promote such a story of ethnic harmony and cultural unity.}\]
amount of information available, how information is passed from person to person, levels of technology, transportation modes, style and quality of education, pace of life, weddings, funerals, burials, birthdays, courting customs, beliefs, worldviews, religions, superstitions, gods, dietary habits, architecture, clothing, norms of etiquette, important holidays and festivals, folk crafts and arts, local products, stories, storytelling traditions, forms of entertainment, eating and drinking ways, literature, music, dance forms, and dramatic and performing arts traditions. The cultural world of different geographic locations in China can vary so dramatically that, as I have suggested elsewhere, it is more useful to think of cultural Chinas than it is to think of a single Chinese culture (Shepherd, 2005: 21-2). The result is that any sophisticated understanding of China must take regional cultural variation into consideration. Yet, despite the historical presence of this diversity, the unique aspects of and distinctions among regional cultures within the Han ethnic majority have not historically been a focus of Western scholarly attention. Recently, as China has continued to open up to the outside world and foreign understandings of China have become increasingly sophisticated, investigating China’s regional culture has become a more prominent area of scholarly concern.18 (See Chung, 1999 and 2000; Fitzgerald, 2002; Goodman, 1986 and 1997; Hendrishke, 1999; and Oakes, 2000)

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18 China’s cultural diversity has long been studied in China although not primarily as an intellectual pursuit. From very early times, Chinese literati wrote about, discussed and recorded regional cultures and characteristics in great detail in diaries, memoirs, prefaces to larger works,
The Shandong Region

Shandong (山东), literally “east (of) mountains”, refers to a geographic, political and cultural region located on the eastern edge of the north China plain and extending outward to form a peninsula that appears on the map to point directly across the Yellow Sea at the center of the Korean Peninsula. The name originates from the area’s location east of the Xiao (崤), Hua (华), or Taihang (太行) mountains (there is historical disagreement about which mountains were the original referent). Prior to the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234), the term referred to the geographic region on the eastern edge of the North China Plain that extends east from the Taihang Mountains to the coast of the Yellow Sea. Covering an area of more than 156,000 square kilometers (slightly smaller than the state of Florida), the region is a mostly flat peninsula bounded on the north by the Bohai Gulf and to the east and south by the Yellow Sea. The eastern half of the peninsula is and miscellaneous essays that were viewed as not worthy of scholarly attention. At times, they did so out of nostalgia for rural life. At others, it was out of political necessity. Chinese literati recorded oral sources on local legends, cults, beliefs, arts, festivals, customs, and language in their miscellaneous writings. The Classic of the Mountains and Seas, shanhaijing (山海经), a collection of brief descriptions of the culture, geography, medicine, rituals, customs, ethnic groups, and mythological figures that made up the world of Chinese antiquity compiled prior to the founding of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE), reveals that cultural and ethnic diversity in China is not a recent phenomenon. Han Dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE) texts provide evidence that literati were cognizant of that diversity. In fact, emperors and officials frequently appropriated aspects of local cultures to improve their ability to rule. Chinese rulers, from very early on, believed that an understanding of the local everyday customs and beliefs of the people would allow them to “transform the folk, hua min (化民)”, facilitate the “administration of the country, zhi guo (治国)”, and “pacify all under heaven, ping tianxia (平天下)”. A primary locus of writings about local culture is the “place gazetteer, difang zhi (地方志)”. Gazetteers compiled local histories, regional borders, weather and climate conditions, the names and locations of mountains and rivers, local products, the structure or local government organizations, economic trends, scientific and social activities, important events, local artistic traditions, and biographies of famous people.
dotted with rolling hills and at 1545 meters above sea level, Mount Tai (泰山), the highest peak in the region, juts out of the flat terrain in the west. Through the course of history, the natural terrain fostered two distinct ways of life that serve as the foundation for two major subcultures in the region. For the most part, the people who live on the flat inland plains live a life rooted in agriculture while the lives of the people who populate the areas along Shandong’s three thousand kilometers of coastline revolve around the sea (fishing, shipping, and various maritime industries). In Shandong, there is a recognized distinction between Shandong and Jiaodong (胶东) cultures. Shandong culture can either refer to the culture of the entire region or to that of the western agricultural lifestyle. Jiaodong culture refers specifically to the coastal way of life associated with the far eastern tip of the Shandong Peninsula, in particular that found around the cities Yantai and Weihai. These two ways of life are reflected in diet, speech (vocabulary, pronunciation, tones and usage), superstitions, customs, holidays and modes of economic production.

In pre-imperial China (roughly sixth century to third century BCE), Shandong was divided into two states: Qi (齐) in the north and east and Lu (鲁) in the south and west. The area occupied by the State of Lu was the home of Confucius and his disciple Mencius, two of China’s most influential philosophers, as well as Sunzi, the military strategist who wrote The Art of War (although only
Confucius served as an official in his homeland). The ideas of these great thinkers have deeply influenced both Shandong and Chinese culture more broadly and because of this all three are cultural icons regularly associated with the region. During imperial times, the Shandong region was controlled by a series of different dynasties of various sizes and strengths. After 1168, when the Jin Dynasty established two military regions in Shandong, the geographic area came to be recognized as a political entity with the area that now forms Shandong Province remaining relatively stable (although under various administrative labels with differing political subdivisions) from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) onward. Throughout this period, the people of Shandong had limited interaction with outside peoples (other than periodic skirmishes with Japanese pirates along the coast) despite the long coast and the fact that the Grand Canal and Yellow River both pass through western Shandong.

This relative isolation changed in November of 1887 when Germany used the pretext of an attack on its missionaries living in western Shandong to occupy the region. Germany was interested in the abundant resources Shandong had to offer, particularly gold and coal as well as the Jiaozhou Bay, one of northern China’s best natural harbors because it does not freeze during the winter months. Another factor that influenced the Germans’ choice was Shandong’s geographic location; on the coast where there was easy access to international transportation routes. The Germans were keenly aware that if they were able connect Shandong
with the main rail line that passed through Jinan, a key inland transportation hub in the west, all of north and central China would be within a few days train ride. A third key factor in the German decision to develop Shandong stemmed from the area’s location in close proximity to mines rich in coal in Zibo to the west and those full of gold in Zhaoyuan to the north.

At a time when imperialist powers were racing to gain concessions from the weakened Qing government, Germany quickly seized the opportunity to legalize their occupation. In 1898, the signing of a treaty with the Qing court transformed the Shandong area into an official colony of Germany. Britain quickly followed by leasing the port city of Weihai, located on the eastern tip of the peninsula. The German treaty was a 99-year lease of Jiaozhou Bay that also included limited rights to build railroads, construct mines and garrison troops in Shandong. The German sphere of activity extended to all of what is now Shandong Province and reached as far south as Port Lianyun in Jiangsu Province. The Germans quickly began building the infrastructure of the region, especially in the city of Qingdao. They did so by laying roads, digging sewers, constructing wharves and buildings, transforming what had been a sparsely populated fishing village and Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) military outpost into a modern port city. The most important German contribution to Shandong’s economic development, however, was the completion of a railroad that extended from Qingdao to the provincial capital at Jinan. This line connected the region with the rest of northern
and central China and provided a link to rail lines leading to all other areas in China. Although to some extent the German occupation was constructive, it also served to stir up Chinese nationalism leading to xenophobic attitudes that fueled responses including the Boxer Uprising that originated among secret societies active in western Shandong.

The German occupation period began a turbulent half-century characterized by repeated cycles of foreign occupation. This repeated contact with foreign cultures stimulated the overall growth of the cities in the eastern portion of the province and widened the cultural gap between east and west Shandong by raising the standard of living in the coastal areas and exposing the people living in those areas to foreign ideas. In November of 1914 the Japanese replaced the Germans as colonial occupants of the area. Initially, the German contingent at Qingdao put up some resistance but after a brief blockade, British and Japanese joint forces took the area. Although all Japanese occupation is now portrayed in a negative light in Communist rhetoric as a result of the second Japanese occupation during World War II, at the time, the Japanese were welcomed by China’s premier, Duan Qirui. Despite the fact that Premier Duan had himself studied in Germany before replacing Yuan Shikai as the leader of China, he was a militarist warlord who needed funding for his regime. At a time when most Chinese saw World War I as a chance for China to regain control of Shandong from the Germans, Duan was under anti-German pressure from abroad with
France, England and the US all seeking every opportunity to reduce German power and influence. In the end, foreign pressure and economic concerns forced Duan to accept loans from Japan in return for agreements giving the Japanese the rights to establish military posts in Shandong.

As a result, when the Germans withdrew in 1919, all of their rights to Shandong were not returned to the Chinese but were turned over to the Japanese instead. The incident sparked feelings of Chinese nationalism and produced anti-foreign responses. Dissatisfied intellectuals and students all over China already involved in an intellectual revolution picked up the cry to get Shandong back. The tide swept China and lead to the well-documented May 4th Movement. The handover led to Japanese-style military rule that lasted until December 10, 1922 when the China North Sea Government finally gained administrative control over Shandong. In April of 1929, after an uneventful seven years, the Nanjing People’s Government took over the reins of control. The new government’s first step was to establish Qingdao as an official treaty port and in July of the same year, the city’s current name first appeared in the official records when the Qingdao Special City was established (Qingdao had previously been known as Jiaoao). In 1938, the brief hiatus of foreign intrusion abruptly ended when Japan once again forcibly occupied the region. On the eve of the Japanese invasion, the local government destroyed several larger factories in an attempt to disable industry. Then, after sinking several large ships in the harbor to deter Japanese use, the
local forces destroyed much of the harbor’s infrastructure. Despite all of these valiant efforts, Qingdao became a key strategic location in Japan’s military operations in northern China during World War II. Even if for their own purposes, the Japanese actively developed the industry of the area so that by the end of Japanese occupation, Shandong had several modern factories producing a wide range of industrial goods such as locomotives, cotton, rubber, chemicals, and dyestuffs.

At the end of World War II, there was another scramble to gain control of the area, this time between the Nationalists and the Communists. Again, forces outside of China intervened. Fearing that the Communist forces might be the first to occupy the key port city of Qingdao upon Japanese withdrawal, the US sent the Seventh Fleet into Qingdao harbor to assure a Nationalist take over. Around 30,000 US troops, mostly engineer groups, were stationed and worked in Qingdao during the Chinese civil war with the number reaching nearly 60,000 for a short period just prior to the Nationalist withdrawal. Many older citizens now regularly share stories of learning English from the American soldiers stationed in the area. Qingdao was “liberated” from Nationalist (and American imperialist) occupation in 1949. A period of relative stability then ensued. From liberation until the end of the 1970’s, Qingdao (with the rest of Shandong following and emulating the city’s successes) continued to steadily develop as an industrial area. Even during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) that halted economic activity in some areas
of China the impact was blunted by the conservative nature of a Shandong culture deeply rooted in Confucian tradition.

In 1981 Qingdao was chosen to be one of fifteen Chinese cities designated as special economic zones. The designation brought with it more economic flexibility and freedom as well as the allocation of large amounts of national resources for the development of the city’s infrastructure. The old city face began to take on a new look as a flurry of economic activity began. In 1984, the national government sent signals that there would not be any regressive policy moves when it adopted measures to hasten economic development in the region by declaring Qingdao one of China’s fourteen “further open” coastal port cities. The opening of Qingdao’s society and economy to outside world allowed local officials and businessmen to further exploit the resources of the region by developing international trade, which created an urban cosmopolitan culture with strong international influence that contrasts sharply with the western agricultural and eastern coastal cultures of the rest of the province.

Currently Shandong is one of China’s twenty-two provinces. It is bordered to the north by Hebei Province, to the west by Henan Province and to the south by Jiangsu Province. Jinan, situated in the heart of the agricultural west, is the political capital. Qingdao, resting on the southeastern coastline, is the economic center. With 92,000,000 people, Shandong is a densely populated

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19 A province in the Chinese context is an administrative unit roughly the size of the state in the US.
region, second largest among all of China’s provinces in terms of total population. For perspective, the populations of Germany, France and Italy are roughly 83,000,000, 59,000,000, and 57,000,000 respectively. Over 99% of these 92,000,000 people are members of the Han ethnic group.

In terms of economy, Shandong is the second largest provincial economy in China and the province is ranked at or near the top in terms of the production of cotton, wheat, gold, diamonds, and petroleum. Every locality in the province is known for some specific product or cultural trait, which serves as a topic of conversation among locals when the city name is mentioned. Qingdao is known for its seafood, textile production and large brand name conglomerates such as Haier (electronics and home appliances), Tsing-tao Beer, Aucama (electronics), Hisense (electronics), and Double Star (shoes), and Hongling (men’s western style suits). Weihai is known for its fishing and shipping related industries (fishing rods, ship building, etc.). Yantai is known for its apples. Laiyang is known for its pears. Qixia is known for its apples and peanuts. Haiyang is known for its cherries. Zibo is known for its ceramics and porcelain wares. Weifang is known for its kites. Taian is known for Mount Tai and Dai Temple. Qufu is known for Confucius. And, so on.

In terms of language, the people living in Shandong speak a range of versions of northern Mandarin Chinese dialects that can be categorized into three major subdialects roughly corresponding with the east-west-Qingdao cultural
divides. One is centered in the northwest area around Jinan. One is found in the Jiaodong Peninsula. And, one is heavily influenced by the speech found in Qingdao. In addition to these three dialect groups, the language spoken in southwest Shandong forms a distinct group that shares characteristics with neighboring Henan Province. Each of these areas, however, is characterized by a range of related subdialects. For example, the linguist Li Xingjie has found seven distinct dialects in the city of Qingdao alone. For the most part these various versions of Shandong speech are mutually intelligible.

**Shandong People**

For the typical Chinese person, regional cultural diversity is a given and regional culture plays a key role in individual identity. The way Chinese people talk about themselves to themselves and to others maintains a regional perspective. Thus, it is customary to categorize people by where they are from with two broad stereotypes existing for northerner and southerner (north and south of the Yangzi River). Northerners are generally seen as conservative, loyal and hospitable while southerners are seen as progressive, calculating and entrepreneurial. The flipside of these broad stereotypes is that northerners are seen by southerners as backwards, slow witted, and stubborn while southerners are seen by northerners as dishonest money lovers who have forgotten their roots. People from Shandong are often seen as the prototype of the northern stereotype. While teaching several

20 In Chinese, local cultural differences are often described as personality traits.
groups of Chinese students over the course of several years of the US/China Links program, we regularly asked our students (the majority of them were from Shandong with the exception of the 2004 group, the majority of whom were from Shanghai) to describe people from various places in China. Positively, people from Shandong were described as “honest and good natured, both hanhou (憨厚) and dunhou (敦厚)”, “plain and simple, both pushi (朴实) and zhipu (质朴)”, “tolerant, kuanrong (宽容)”, “hardworking, qinlao (勤劳)”, “not flashy or extravagant, wuhua (无华)”, “warm and hospitable, reqing haoke (热情好客)”, “candid, tanshuai (坦率)”, “sincere and genuine, zhencheng (真诚)”, “loyal, zhongcheng (忠诚)”, “outspoken and straightforward, haoshuang (豪爽)”, (having a) “tough masculine air, yanggang zhi qi (阳刚之气)”, and “able to drink, neng he jiu (能喝酒)”. Negatively, they were described as “conservative, baoshou (保守)”, “backwards, luohou (落后)”, “hick, tu (土)”, “foolish, sha (傻)”, “stupid/dim-witted, yuchun (愚蠢)” “blind, mangmu (盲目)” “crude, culu (粗鲁)”, boorish, cuye”, and “rough and rugged, both cuguang (粗犷) and cubao (粗暴)”. A person who exhibits the traits associated with this cultural stereotype is called a Shandong “real man, haohan (山东好汉)”. In their own words, a person with these personality traits is looked upon positively and is called “real, candid, and forthright, shizai (实在)” by people from Shandong.
Some of the values people from Shandong take most pride in include loyalty, honesty, friendship, etiquette, hospitality, hierarchy, filial piety and the ability to drink. In Shandong, people do not take friendship lightly. They do not readily interact with strangers but once they make the decision to establish a relationship with someone, they give them their heart, as the local saying goes. Once a relationship is forged, trust and loyalty are paramount. People in Shandong expect friends to “talk personal loyalty, jiang yiqi (讲义气)”; an idea that calls for putting friends before all else including personal needs and even established laws. Friends should never do anything that brings negative consequences upon a friend “bu hui zuo chu duibuqi pengyou de shi (不会做出对不起朋友的事)” and a friend is expected to be willing to cut out two ribs for a friend “wei pengyou liang lei cha dao (为朋友两肋插刀)”. People who go out of their way to make sacrifices for friends are described as “enough (of a) friend, gou pengyou (够朋友)”, one of the highest forms of local praise. Because of the emphasis on shared “feelings, ganqing (感情)” and personal relationships, a local saying goes “when a local townsman meets up with someone from his hometown, tears well up in both eyes, laoxiang jian laoxiang, liang yan lei wang wang (老乡见老乡，两眼泪汪汪)”.  

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21 Talk in this phrase is metaphorical. It actually refers to actions. People from Shandong put little value on talk that is not accompanied by supporting actions.
People from Shandong also have a well developed sense of their cultural history, which includes the Confucian tradition. As a result, in addition to friendship and loyalty, ritual and etiquette are highly valued. Locals regularly describe Shandong as the “Kingdom of Etiquette, liyizhibang (礼仪之邦)” with pride. Thus, there is generally strict adherence to established norms of social etiquette that include a transparent hierarchy, ritual ceremony, and prescribed ways of conducting social relationships. Finding, fitting into, and fulfilling the duties associated with one’s proper societal role are how one contributes to a harmonious society. Social relationships and interaction are maintained through ritual etiquette. As a result, there is significant influence on surface level appearances, face, getting things right, and ceremonial displays. The Shandong code of ritual etiquette is embodied in interactional hierarchy. Not only is hierarchy present, acknowledging it is the means to maintaining harmonious social relationships, a paramount goal among locals. Hierarchy is acknowledged in speech patterns, the use of titles, and actions such as pushing elevator buttons for elders and superiors, deferring decisions and turns at speech to them, offering honored and preferred seating to them, and providing for any and all of their needs. Other values taken from the Confucian tradition include modesty, filial piety, reciprocity, and an emphasis on education.

Finally, any description of Shandong culture and values would be incomplete without the mention of guest hospitality. People from Shandong hold
intense pride for their tradition of the warm treatment of guests. Most are willing to invest heavily in terms of time, money, and other resources to ensure that guests are treated well, well fed, have plenty to drink and are left with positive feelings about Shandong and its people. Most go to great lengths to uphold this tradition, some even going so far as to place heavy burdens on friends and family to commit time or lend money in support. The expectation is to provide the very best conditions (including food, drink and accommodations) for any guest even if that means giving up one’s bed or the clothes off of one’s back. When combined with the Confucian tradition of ritual and etiquette, Shandong hospitality turns gatherings that revolve around eating and drinking into a critically important social context and banqueting into an elaborate ceremonial art form. Add to the mix high cultural values on displays of loyalty, affirmations of relationships, candidness, and the ability to drink and social drinking becomes a survival skill in Shandong.

**Organization and Layout**

In this introduction, I have outlined the need for Americans with sophisticated levels of cultural competence in Chinese, offered some framing ideas that shape the pedagogical approach presented here, and briefly outlined several salient characteristics of Shandong culture. The manner in which I have chosen to present Shandong *kuaishu* in the body of this dissertation is by tracing the progression of my own expanding story of the tradition. Because my
experience gaining competence in Shandong culture and then in the community of
Shandong fast tale storytellers is illustrative of the approach advocated in this
dissertation, first person narrative is the primary authorial mode. The structure of
the text reflects my progression through Walker’s levels of participation in a
culture—from an outside observer, to fan, researcher, and player in Shandong fast
tale performer circles. Each chapter represents a layer in the cycle of compiling a
memory of Shandong fast tale culture, a style which results in a change in
authorial perspective in each chapter to reflect aspects of the tradition as they
came into my conscious awareness, my own evolving persona, and an emerging
competence.

In Chapter 1, I begin by presenting what I learned about Shandong
kuaishu by combing written sources. Chapter 1 traces narrative performance
through the Chinese tradition in order to situate the Shandong kuaishu storytelling
in a broader cultural and historical context. In situating this particular tradition in
this way, I intend to highlight the weight placed on narrative performance and
performance contexts in general in the Chinese tradition. This abbreviated history
of narrative performance in China also serves as a review of a corpus of literature
that deals with narrative, performance, storytelling and oral traditions in China.
From there, Chapter 2 picks up my story as I began experiencing kuaishu as a
spectator. This section is intended to present the types of knowledge that can be
gained about Shandong kuaishu through participant observation, performance
theory analysis and ethnographic reporting. It should become clear to the reader that Shandong *kuaishu* came to life for me in performance. When I became a participant in the events in which *kuaishu* performances were embedded, I gained access to new types of knowledge. Experiencing performances first-hand and engaging in discourse with locals about those performances enabled me to move to a deeper level of understanding by affording me access to performance knowledge and emic understandings of the tradition. The end of the chapter recounts how I gradually was drawn into the action as a participant, which sets up Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 is an ethnographic account of my apprenticeship experience. It presents the regimen of performance Master Wu has developed in order to train new performers and includes descriptions of the primary components of his pedagogical model: individual instruction sessions, performance centered study classes, social practice, live performance experience, and integration into the local community. This section is intended to be a description of the practices of transmission from an inside perspective but can also shed light on how culture is constructed from the inside out. This methodology involved scaffolding the work done in individual training sessions with social experiences that exposed new performers to the surrounding culture in everyday contexts and fostered interaction with community members in common social settings. The individual training sessions were structured so that they require rehearsed performances
followed by collective metacognitive reflection about those performances, which included interactive feedback from the master and other peer learners. These sessions were designed to repeat in cycles in order to allow the learner to solidify (internalize) increasingly complex memories of individual performances and were intermixed with numerous opportunities to perform in live social contexts.

Chapter 4 relates experiences performing live for Chinese audiences and reveals elements of audience aesthetics and contemporary performance environments. It should demonstrate another type of knowledge associated with *kuaishu* can be learned—through performance. Chapter 5 is an examination of the traditional Shandong *kuaishu* repertoire. It details the structural components that are used to build a *kuaishu* story and includes descriptions of story length, content and uses. Chapter 6 discusses the applications of this particular folk pedagogy to second language learning as well as its implications for achieving advanced cultural competence in Chinese.
CHAPTER 1

CONSULTING THE WRITTEN RECORD

Performance Genre: Quyi

Shandong *kuaishu*\(^{22}\) is a Chinese narrative performance tradition with more than one hundred years of history. A first step in understanding what is involved in this long-standing performance tradition is to grapple with Chinese notions of Shandong *kuaishu*. Because of the complexity of the genre and the frequent sharing and borrowing among hundreds of local Chinese performance traditions, Shandong *kuaishu* is described in various contexts as a “narrative and performed art, *quyi* (曲艺),” “storytelling, *shuoshu* (说书),” an “orally performed art, *shuochang yishu* (说唱艺术),” “oral literature, *shuochang wenxue* (说唱文学),” “local drama, *difangxi* (地方戏)\(^{23}\),” “folk literature and art, (民间文艺),”

\(^{22}\) For those not familiar with Chinese, *kuaishu* is pronounced with an initial sound similar to the English ‘k’ sound. When combined with the ‘uai’ sound that follows, it becomes roughly equivalent to the ‘qu’ sound in the English ‘quick’ followed by something close to the English word ‘why’ (“k” + “why” = kuai). *Shu* sounds something like the English word “shoe”.

\(^{23}\) Both “local drama” and “hometown drama” are rare. Most people, scholars, performers and laymen alike, make a clear distinction between *quyi* and local “dramatic traditions, *xiqu* (戏曲).” However, renowned *kuaishu* performer Sun Zhenye (孙镇业) produced and widely distributed *Learn How to Sing Shandong Kuaishu, jiaochang Shandong kuaishu* (教唱山东快书, a "how to" video CD done with the Shandong Culture Multimedia Publishing House (山东文化音像出版社) in 2004. In that production, “hometown drama” was used as a marketing ploy to attract a broader audience. Discussions with people in the Shandong area who are not engaged in performing arts
and “hometown drama, jiaxiangxi (家乡戏).” Some scholars of Chinese oral traditions typically mention Shandong kuaishu as one of the northern Chinese “telling and singing, shuochang (说唱)” art forms that developed in China after the 16th century (Zheng, 1938; Bordahl, 1996 and 2002; Mair, 1997; and Idema, 1997). Others categorize Shandong kuaishu as a form of quyi (曲艺)—literally “melodic arts”, which are a range of more than two hundred Chinese regional performance styles.24 Independently, “qu” generally means “melody”, while “yi” is used to refer to either “arts” or “skills”.25 Since 1949, this two character combination has been used by Chinese researchers and cultural workers to refer to a diverse range of orally performed folk art forms that includes ballad singing, plain storytelling, prosimetric storytelling, comedic dialogues, rhythmic storytelling, lyrical rhymes, comedic skits, and genres that combine elements of revealed that they also occasionally conflate quyi traditions that contain some dramatic elements and xiqu traditions; sometimes using quyi as a label and others using xiqu.

24 Totals depend on the source and the means of classification. The Encyclopedia of Chinese Theatre and Quyi (1983) lists 345 modern types. Geng (1987:11) claimed that there were more than 300 types of quyi in the late 1980s. In 1986, researchers determined that if all genres are counted—both extant and extinct—there have been over 500 genres of quyi in China (Wu, 2002: 96). In a lecture entitled “The Performance and Language of Quyi, quyi de biaoyan he quyi de yuyan (曲艺的表演和曲艺的语言)” given at the Qingdao Fine Arts School in June 2005, Wu Yanguo, chairman of the Qingdao Municipal Ballad Singers’ Association, stated that there are currently 278 active performance genres recognized as quyi.

25 The term quyi has been translated into English variously as “minor dramatic art (Hrdlicka, 1957:83)”; “ballad singing (Qingdao Ballad Singers’ Association)”; “the art of melodies (Bordhal, 1996: 2; Bender, 2003a: 3)” ; “storytelling (in a broad sense ) (Bordahl, 1999: 2)” ; “folk art forms including ballad-singing, storytelling, comic dialogues, and the like (Oxford Concise English-Chinese, Chinese-English Dictionary, 1999)” ; and “performed narrative arts (Bender, 2003a: 3)” based on post-1949 Chinese theoretical practice. Because of the difficulty in capturing all of the meanings inherent in the term quyi, I prefer to retain the Chinese.
some or all of these traditions of performance. These _quyi_ genres vary widely in origins, form, style, language, content, aesthetic appeal, patronage, performance context and process (Bender, 2003a:3). Each tradition provides a different lens through which to understand the values and beliefs of a specific locale in China as each reflects a unique local culture, ways of life, modes of thought (and worldviews) and language. Because of their local nature _quyi_ forms are intimately intertwined with local identities.26

**Characteristics of _quyi_ (曲艺)**

A brief examination of the characteristics of _quyi_ should serve as an introductory framework for the description of Shandong _kuaishu_ that follows.

_Quyi_ is a vague, emergent concept that refers to a cornucopia of sometimes

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26 This includes _quyi_ genres such as _xiangsheng_ (a form of tandem standup comedy similar to Abbott and Costello _Who’s on First_ routine in format), “fast clapper tales, _kuaiban_ (快板)”, and “comedic skits, _xiaopin_ (小品)” as well as local dramatic traditions (including Beijing opera) performed in standard Chinese. It is also true on more than one level. According to the _Encyclopedia of Chinese Theatre and Quyi_ (1983), nearly all of the genres of _quyi_ are local in nature. They list _xiangsheng_ and “rhyming for treasures, _shulaibao_ (数来宝)” (two local Beijing traditions that have spread to other areas of the country through the standard language and China Central Television in the case of _xiangsheng_) as the only genres to have reached a national scope. However, it is clear that these genres are local in origin as well. Moreover, _quyi_ genres take on different shapes in different places (Von Sydow in Dundes, 1999: 138). The manner in which they are performed and appreciated also varies greatly from locale to locale. The genres that are performed in standard Chinese (which were local Beijing—or northern China—traditions originally) actually reflect local versions of the standard language and are often not the most popular among local audiences outside of their base linguistic areas. _Xiangsheng_ as performed in Qingdao varies quite dramatically at times from what may be heard or seen in Beijing _xiangsheng_ even when dealing with the same performer, who may make adjustments to appeal to specific audiences and local conditions. Many genres performed in local dialects are also limited to audiences who can access them linguistically and aesthetically. When in a local cultural context, local _quyi_ genres typically attract larger audiences and have more loyal followers than genres from other areas (Beijing or the northeast) performed in the standard language.
drastically different performance traditions (Foley, 2002) and Chinese scholars have continued to struggle to explain what it is that sets quyi apart from other oral and performance genres.27 Writers with backgrounds as performers tend to

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27 In addition to the diversity of types of performance genres that have been lumped together as quyi, the term quyi itself has carried distinct meanings at different historical points in time. In an often-cited article, Dai Hongsen (1987) traced developments in the meanings associated with the term quyi from the latter part of the Qing Dynasty through the late 1980s. In doing so, he showed that through the early and middle parts of the last century there was a gradual narrowing of the meaning of quyi. The term shifted from a broad category roughly equivalent to “various performed and narrative arts” to a much narrower subset of “narrated and comedic arts”. Dai explained that in the years leading up to the 1949 official decision to separate performed narrative arts from “miscellaneous tricks, zaji (杂技)” (“Acrobatics”, the conventional translation of zaji, is merely one among a tremendous range of “miscellaneous tricks and skills” that make up zaji. Thus, I choose to use a direct translation of the Chinese or simply retain the Chinese term zaji. “Miscellaneous tricks (skills)” is a literal translation of the Chinese term zaji.), in practice, the term quyi was used synonymously with the term zashua (杂耍). “Za” literally means “miscellaneous” while “shua” can mean variously “to play, to perform, to mess around with someone or something, to dupe someone, or to display” depending on context. The combination of the two was used in the sense of “miscellaneous acts” to refer to the performances that together made up vaudeville-like mixed variety shows that traditionally have served as entertainment at holiday celebrations, temple fairs, and bazaars. Zashua included every kind of act from the hundreds of orally performed genres mentioned earlier to zaji, “magic performances, moshu (魔术)”, “martial arts, wushu (武术)”, and instrumental musical performances on instruments such as the erhu, suona, and pipa. At the time, zashua also included performances referred to in Chinese as “mouth skills, kouji (口技)” and “qigong (气功)”. The erhu is a two-stringed, fiddle-like instrument used in Beijing opera orchestras. The suona is a high-pitched, reed instrument that produces a chirpy and cheerful sound. The pipa is a pear-shaped, stringed instrument. Kouji is “vocal mimicry” in the form of sounds (produced solely with the mouth or with whistles, reeds, or other devices) that range from animal and bird calls to any other sound found in the world of everyday life. Performers may mimic the sounds of musical instruments, natural phenomena such as rivers, wind or thunder, or anything man made. Performers now imitate the sounds of trains, cars, airplanes, ships, rockets, tanks, tractors, clocks, guns, cannons and other forms of machinery. Qigong literally means “energy skill” but refers to the cultivation and use of the “vital energy, qi (气)”, which flows throughout our bodies and the universe. Through the effective control of qi—accomplished through breathing, visualization and meditation—practitioners are able to accomplish seemingly impossible feats that can attract large audiences. Performers “bend steel poles with their throats, biaozhiang ci hou (标枪刺喉)”, “dance on shards of glass, bolizha shang tiao’wu (玻璃渣上跳舞)”, break various objects on their heads and contort their bodies in unusual ways. Although zaji and magic are performed to music, they involve little or no speaking, singing, chanting or narrating on the part of the performers. While visiting the Ningjin (Shandong) Zaji School in the fall of 2000, I was able to see young performers being trained in hundreds of skill areas including tumbling, trapeze acts, the juggling of every conceivable object, contortion, tricks
highlight the characteristics associated with the genres they specialize in while they ignore elements of other genres. At the same time, most researchers are limited to a deep understanding of a very small number of traditions, the characteristics of which they project on to the broader category of *quyi*. Moreover, much of the literature about *quyi* is influenced by Chinese cultural norms and national pride. The result is that a great deal of the literature is characterized by

Wu Wenke (2002) has traced the meanings associated with the term *quyi* back even further than the late Qing period finding that during the Zhou Dynasty (11th century-256 BCE) the term appeared in the *Book of Rites* with the meaning “small ability/skill (小技能).” By the time of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the term *quyi* had begun to be used to refer to “handcrafts or arts and crafts, *gongyi* (工艺).” It was not until the end of the Ming (1368-1644) and beginning of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) that the concept of *quyi* began to include artistic performances such as *zaji*. It was at this time that the term gained the connotation of “artistic skill or technique, *jiqiao* (技巧)” that is now inherent in the meaning. Wu shows that, later, during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor (1661-1722), the scholar Li Yu (李渔) stated that *quyi* referred to the creation of “poems, lyrics and theatre, *shici he xiqu* (诗词和戏曲)” and by the time of the writings of Zhang Shanlai (张山来) during the reign of the Jiaqing Emperor (1796-1820), *quyi* had come to mean “artistic performance, *yishu biaoyan* (艺术表演).” According to Wu, by the middle of the Qing Dynasty, *quyi* carried the meaning of “all kinds of miscellaneous performances (什样杂耍)” and by the Republican period (post-1911) the meaning of the combination *quyi* had narrowed to the *zashua* notion described by Dai Hongsen. As evidence, he cites the fact that in 1946, the “Beijing Eternal Spring Drum and Ballad Professional Guild (北京鼓曲长春职业公会)”, which had been the largest and best known *zashua* performance troupe in the capital, changed its name to the “Beijing Quyi Guild (北平曲艺公会)”. Professional guilds and other organizations developed as industrial and commercial centers arose in China. They provided performers with a means to secure regular performance opportunities, controlled the transmission of the skills associated with the tradition, and cared for elderly members (Dong, 1999). The Eternal Spring Guild was established in 1940. The name was reportedly changed because original guild leaders were engaged in anti-Japanese activities that attracted negative attention from authorities. The organization was registered with the “social bureau, *shehui ju* (社会局)” with Wang Wenrui as head and Bai Fengyan as consultant. Guild leaders used profits from performances and membership fees to benefit members in ways such as by purchasing land to bury poor older artisans who could not afford their own burials. At the time, *quyi* still encompassed both what is now *quyi*—only the narrated and humorous oral forms—and what are now classified separately as *zaji* and magic. Wu ends his historical analysis by noting that in 1949 *quyi* was consciously redefined even more narrowly by intellectuals and cultural workers as *shuochang yishu*, while other non-verbal forms such as *zaji* and magic were separated in theoretical categorization schemes.
statements about the tremendous diversity of genres (at least 278 types) and the long historical tradition (dating origins at least to the Song Dynasty and often much earlier). However, because of the complexity and time required to develop intimate familiarity with even a single genre, it is rare for the analysis that follows these claims to explicate more than a handful of quyi types at most. Here, I have selectively drawn from this tradition in order to demonstrate some of the basic characteristics of Shandong kuaishu.

Standard descriptions of quyi in Chinese draw on a small body of theoretical works produced in the 1980s. The most frequently cited sources are the “Dictionary of Chinese Theatre and Quyi (1981) (中国戏剧曲艺词典)” and the “Complete Encyclopedia of Chinese Theatre and Quyi (1983) (中国大百科全书戏曲曲艺)”. The “Encyclopedia” describes quyi as “a type of ‘telling and singing art, shuochang (说唱艺术)’ that is adept at drawing nourishment from other genres of literary art while continuously discarding the old and producing the new.” Another description found in “A Brief History of Oral Traditions (说唱简史)” (China Art Research Academy Quyi Research Division, 1988:1) characterizes quyi in the following way:

“quyi is an art form that tells stories through ‘speaking and/or singing, shuo shuo chang chang (说说唱唱)’, or it can be said that it is mainly storytelling...‘telling and singing arts’. There are some quyi genres, especially some genres that have a strong musical nature, that are also quite suited for expressing feelings. In addition, there are still other telling and singing performances that emphasize among other things
description of scenery, reciting about things, narrating, and reasoning. However, telling stories is the primary form of this type of telling and singing art. In the process of telling stories, they (quyi performances) portray all forms and shades of characters.”

The definition found in *A Brief History* is a frequently cited description of what sets *quyi* apart from other types of traditional performances such as those associated with local dramatic, dance and singing traditions. It highlights the association between the narration of stories—through either singing or speaking modes—and *quyi* traditions. Tao Dun (1985), on the other hand, has argued, “*Quyi* is the three-way combination of language, music, and performance; they are national, ethnic art forms that utilize language as the foundation to tell or sing about characters and stories”. Dai Hongsen (1987) followed this definition with a similar explanation, only altering Tao’s formulation by changing language to literature and allowing for “other factors”. He states, “*Quyi* is a type of comprehensive art that is made up from literature, music, performance and other important factors.” This three-headed monster definition of *quyi* has held sway among Chinese researchers until recently.

Wu Wenke’s (2002:8) work tends to deal with *quyi* in more sophisticated ways than many other works that do not move beyond the descriptive level. In his

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28 Unfortunately, such circular definitions do not go far in enabling us to distinguish *quyi* from either other performance genres or other storytelling traditions not considered to be *quyi*. Thus, scholars have continued to struggle with the definitions of both of the terms *shuochang* and *quyi*. “*A Brief History of Oral Traditions*” provides us with one example of a definition that follows the “*quyi* equals *shuochang*” equation but that actually acknowledges that *shuochang* is much more complex than any simple equation in reality.
descriptions, he, too, follows a language-music-performance triumvirate similar to the one set out by Tao and Dai. However, he has further brought out the fact that many definitions that equate *quyi* with “telling and singing arts” are illogical if the two are actually equivalents because it uses one synonym to define another. He argues that doing so is equivalent to saying, “A is a type of A”. Wu believes that if we do not equate the three terms—“*quyi*”, “telling and singing, *shuochang*”, and “*shuochang yishu*”—there is no problem with such a description because he believes the three are inherently different. In his attempts to distinguish the three terms, Wu (2002: 9) tells us that *shuochang yishu* (his use is similar to the Western notion of oral or verbal art) includes folk: “literature, *wenxue* (文学)”, “tales, *gushi* (故事)”, “jokes, *xiaohua* (笑话)”, “narrative songs, *xushi minge* (叙事民歌)”, “songs and ballads, *geyao* (歌谣)”, “diverse traditions such as the epic genres of China’s minority groups”, and “spontaneous storytelling in conversation”. Wu goes on to explain that all of these genres are orally delivered but are not necessarily *quyi*. Thus, his definition of “*shuochang yishu*” is simply that it is “oral literature”. Wu argues that as art performed on stage, *quyi* differs from spontaneous telling and singing activities, which are not “professionalized, *zhiye* (职业)” or “specialized, *zhuanmen* (专门)” like the oral artistic performances (meaning *quyi*) having a certain degree of ritual and standardization. Thus, for Wu (2002:10) “*shuochang yishu*” is a broader category than *quyi*.
because it includes folk stories and genres that have yet to become institutionalized and have yet to develop systematic ways of presentation or conventionalized sets of aesthetic values. The term *shuochang*, on the other hand, refers to a range of modes of narrative delivery. Following this approach, *quyi*, then is a specific subtype within the general category of *shuochang yishu* and *shuochang* describes the various modes through which *quyi* performers narrate their tales.

Wu (2002:12) defines *quyi* as, “performance art that uses vernacular language and is presented through ‘telling and singing’”. However, in discussing the essence of *quyi*, he goes on to reconfirm the three-pronged definition formulated earlier by Tao and Dai. Wu (2002: 33), too, agrees that literature, music and performance are certainly indispensable factors that make up the arts (of *quyi*). While discussing the role of each, Wu defines literature as an artistic form that uses language and writing to express thought, give expression to feelings, portray imagery, and reflect life. He also argues that other artistic forms besides poetry, prose and novels—specifically theatre, *quyi*, and movies—possess independent value and can be appreciated on a high level. However, he does not

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29 Wu’s use of quotes around *shuochang* here explicitly highlights a four-way distinction in delivery mode that separates genres of *shuochang* arts. The reader should not simply stop at the surface level meaning of the characters “tell, shuo” and “sing, chang” but should understand the term in relation to the four basic modes of delivery found among *quyi* genres that will be discussed shortly.

30 Wu appears to be attempting to legitimize the academic and theoretical investigation of *quyi*. 
go so far as to equate language and literature exactly. He points out what he sees as the fundamental differences between both oral and written language and oral and written literature. For Wu, “oral literature, koutou wenxue (口头文学)” is characterized by 1) collective creation, 2) a feeling of fresh and lively linguistic expression, and 3) variation in transmission (38). Wu also points out the dialectal nature of quyi language (39) but states that this is a given and thus there is no need to point out or expand upon this idea about the local nature of language in quyi. The second of Wu’s three major factors that make up quyi, music, simply means having a rhythm and melody (37) and the third, performance, is the soul of quyi. Performance is the magnet that brings all of the basic characteristics of quyi together and gives them life.

In further delineating some of the basic characteristics of quyi, Wu carefully distinguishes “the arts of narration, xushu (叙述)” from “narration, xushi (叙事)” (47). For him, the latter is a subtype of the former along with “expressing feelings, shuqing (抒情)”, “explaining things or reasoning, shuoli (说理)”, “describing scenery, xiejing (写景)”, “amusing (people), dou le (逗乐)”, and

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31 This fundamental characteristic of quyi is sometimes overlooked by Western scholars because it is a given in Chinese written works about quyi. Mark Bender’s work on Suzhou storytelling is a notable exception. The local nature of meanings and language generated in quyi performances make the task of discussing Chinese quyi quite complex. When talking about Shandong kuaishu or Beijing xiangsheng or Yangzhou pinghua, as researchers, we tend to project meanings and aesthetic values that are generated, maintained and appreciated locally on to genres from other regions. As John Miles Foley (2002) has suggested, “all oral performance genres are local in nature” and need to be analyzed as such.
“reciting about things, *yongwu* (咏物)” (48). Thus, for Wu, *quyi* is not merely storytelling. Rather, storytelling, which he describes as “*jiang gushi* (讲故事)”, is one component involved in *quyi* performances and the two should not be equated. Wu’s example is that *xiangsheng* is not a form of narration, but is a form of joking or spoken comedy. In Wu’s rubric, some types of *quyi* and some *quyi* performances are narration. Some are expressing feelings. Some are intended to amuse. Others are explaining things or reasoning about them. Still others describe scenery. And, finally, some are reciting about things (48). Another fundamental characteristic of *quyi* for Wu is what he labels “*biaoxian* (表现)”. The notion of *biaoxian* can be understood as “performance” in the sense of “bringing something to life or putting something on display” and is used in opposition to the “*zaixian* (在现)” mode, which refers to theatrical performances that are portrayals during which the performer never comes out of character. In *biaoxian* performances, performers assume multiple roles—narrator, performer, and various character roles within the performance—in front of the audience while in *zaixian* performances—as in theatre and movies—characters do not come out of role and the emphasis is on realistic assumption or portrayal of a role (49). A third of Wu’s fundamental characteristics stems from this distinction in types of performances. For him, *quyi* performances are “invented, fictional, or suppositional, *xuni* (虚构)” in that the performer asks the audience to make believe. And, because
generations of performers have assumed multiple roles and had to create these invented worlds over and over again, actions, events, expressions, and feelings have become “conventionalized, chengshihua (程式化)” so that performers rely primarily on symbolism rather than realism (51). Because performers are not always in character roles, they require audiences to imagine the fictional worlds and characters they are inventing through formulaic and symbolic movements, expressions and sounds.

Thus, following Wu’s fundamental characteristics of quyi, we can infer that Shandong kuaishu, as a form of quyi, is a traditional performance art that at various times involves narration, the expression of feelings, recitation about and the explanation of things found in the performers’ everyday worlds, and descriptions of scenery all of which may be intended to amuse audiences. Shandong kuaishu is also an integrated oral art form that combines characteristics of literature, music, and performance. Moreover, the genre has been conventionalized over many years of performance, i.e., a specialized aesthetic code has been developed that facilitates communication between performers and audiences. Fictional events and characters are brought to life through performance in the biaoxian mode and the art form has become institutionalized over time with performers organized in professional associations. Finally, Shandong kuaishu is characterized by a strong local flavor in terms of both content and language.
Performance Mode: *Shuochang* (说唱)

In terms of delivery mode, Shandong *kuai*shu* falls into what is described as the “telling and singing, *shuochang* (说唱)” category of performance traditions.\(^{32}\) Literally, “*shuo* (说)” means “to speak, talk or tell”, while “*chang* (唱)” means “to sing”. As Wu Wenke (2002) has described, together, the two (shuochang) refer to a whole subgroup of orally delivered *quyi* genres. Of that body of traditions only some are spoken. Some are sung. Others are characterized by a combination of the two modes singing and speaking—what are often described in Chinese as “chant-rhyme, *yun*song (韵诵)” genres. Still a fourth type is characterized by alternation between periods of spoken narration and periods of singing—what are know variously in the West as chantefable, prosimetrum, and cantefable (Reichl and Harris, 1997: 1-16).

Although many of the genres that fall into these four categories can be traced back to common origins if one ventures far enough back in time, these distinct subtypes have traveled different paths of development and thus have qualitatively different characteristics. Based on these differing modes of presentation, Wu’s four basic modes are:

1) “told or narrated in plain speech (not prosimetric), *shuo* (说)”,

2) “alternating between telling and singing (prosimetric), *shuochang* (说唱)”,

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\(^{32}\) The term has been translated into English as “the telling and singing arts” (Bender, 1995 and Bordhal, 1996). I prefer to retain the Chinese term here to emphasize a four-way distinction in delivery modes (telling, singing, telling and singing, and sing-telling) that is not reflected by the English “telling and singing”. 
3) “sung (not prosimetric), chang (唱)”, and

4) “a blend of telling and singing (prosimetric only in origins), shuojiyouchang (说间有唱)”.33

For Wu, the primary characteristic that distinguishes quyi genres that are delivered in the “spoken, shuo (说)” mode is that they have no strict musical nature. These include “straight storytelling, pingshu (评书), pinghua (评话),” “comedic dialogues, xiangsheng (相声),” and “jocular skits, xieju (谐剧),” as well as two major subcategories he recognizes based on length of performed content: a) “grand tales, dashu (大书),” which are long narratives that were traditionally performed in episodes over the course of several tellings, and b) “small tales, xiaoshu (小书),” which are shorter tales often of episode length. The “sung, chang (唱)” genres include “drum songs, guqu (鼓曲),” “well-known tunes, paiziqu (牌子曲),” “miscellaneous tunes, zaqu (杂曲)” and a subcategory labeled “singing while moving, zouchang (走唱),” which have elements of zaji like dancing, handkerchief twirling or juggling, as in the “two person stroll, er ren zhuan (二人转)” popular in northeast China and the “three club drum, san bang gu (三棒鼓)” popular in southern China (43). Wu indicates that there is a clear

33 Wu (2002: 116) also later uses a three-way typology to describe contemporary quyi genres based on content: 1) “storytelling types, shuoshu lei (说书类)”, a) “grand tales, dashu (大书)-pingshu, pinghua, b) “small tales, xiaoshu (小书)”-tanci, gushu, yugu daoqing, qinshu, c) “rhythmic tales”-kuaishu, zhubanshu, kuaishu; 2) “ballad singing types, changqu lei (唱曲类)”, a) guqu, paiziqu, zaqu; 3) “comic joking types, xienue lei (谐虐类)”, a) xiangsheng, b) shulaibao, kuaiban, c) dujiaoxi, xieju.
distinction in the Chinese tradition between the “singing” used in shuochang genres and “plain singing”, which is typically called gechang (歌唱) (Wu, 2002: 7). Singing in quyi is stylized and draws heavily from Chinese dramatic traditions (xiqu). Genres that involve performers alternating between periods of narrative speaking and singing, on the other hand, are described by Wu as, “both spoken and sung, you shuo you chang (又说又唱)” and include “Suzhou chantefables, Suzhou tanci (弹词), “drum ballads, gushu (鼓书), “zither tales, qinshu (琴书), “fish drum ballads, yugu (渔鼓), and “Daoist scripture songs, daoqing (道情).”

Shandong kuaishu (along with sister genres Tianjin kuaiban, kuaibanshu, zhubanshu, and shulaibao) falls into Wu’s fourth category; those that involve what “seems like both speaking and singing, sishuosichang (似说似唱)” (44). Described as “rhythmic and rhymed chanting, yunsong (韵诵)” and “rhythmic recitation, yinyong (吟咏)”, this particular type of performance style is a unique subtype of the shuochang arts. Also known as the “rhythmically chanted form, yunsongti (韵诵体)”, this style differs from shuo (speaking) types in that rhyme and rhythm are integral features of performance while shuo forms require neither.34 Yunsong genres are distinct from chang (sung) types because they rarely shift into a full singing registers and when they do, they merely do so for effect—to portray a particular character or to further a given plotline. This feature also

sets Shandong *kuaishu* and all *yunsong* genres apart from *shuochang* (prosimetric) genres. That is, there is no alternation between full singing and spoken narration and what “singing” is done in *yunsong* forms is a chanted style of speech that is always rhymed.\(^3\) Figure 1 on the following page provides a visual of Wu’s four fundamental modes of delivery in *quyi*.

\[^3\] Researchers, performers and observers describe Shandong *kuaishu* differently depending on their experiences with the tradition and on their purposes. Because Shandong *kuaishu* performances exhibit characteristics of several styles of *quyi*, the genre has been included in at least three ways. Based on mode of delivery Wu places Shandong *kuaishu* into the “rhymed chanted” category (*yunsong*). Some scholars of Chinese oral traditions also classify Shandong *kuaishu* as a northern Chinese *shuochang* genre because they see performances as characterized by prosimetrum—alternations between stylized singing and plain speech dialogue (Zheng, 1959; Bordahl, 1996; and Idema, 1997). On the other hand, Shandong *kuaishu* has also been described as a comic joking genre related to *xiangsheng*—one name used for the genre in the 1930s and 40s was “comical fast tales, *huaji kuaishu* (滑稽快书)”—because most modern performances are short, humorous tales. This label is problematic, however, because it doesn’t take into account the tradition’s origins or the fact that performances are not always humorous. In fact, the representative tale in the genre—*Wu Song Fights the Tiger*—is built on suspense rather than humor. Sun Zhenye has also described Shandong fast tales as a “storytelling form of *quyi*, *shuoshu lei* (说书类)” because of its long, traditional tales (*dashu*) in the *Story of Wu Song* style.
Tradition of Performance

Based on available sources, it is safe to date the emergence of Shandong kuaishu to the latter stages of the Ming Dynasty in rural areas of southwestern Shandong with a period of rapid development occurring during the Qing Dynasty. Shandong kuaishu is a performed narrative tradition; one shuochang form of quyi that was born out of a broader culture that valued and fostered the importance of both the performance of music and ritual. Music, song, dance, and ritual were integral parts of traditional Chinese ancestor worship practices from at least the
time of the beginning of the written record. Music and rites, in fact, were integral to both the social and private lives of Chinese during the Zhou Dynasty (10th century-221 BCE). When early texts such as the Book of Rites and those by the philosopher Xunzi refer to “music, yue (乐)”, it is generally understood that yue refers to entire integrated performances that included singing, dancing or bodily movements, and musical accompaniment. According to Xunzi, because music affects peoples’ emotions and is used to express emotions, it is an ideal tool for ruling. Moreover, music is the “most effective means to govern men” and can be utilized to bring harmony to the community. Xunzi’s description of music (integrated performances) points to the important status of performance—of both music and ritual ceremony—in traditional Chinese society. He argued that music unites what is the same and rites distinguish what is different. Xunzi’s writings on music, like many early Confucian writings, also show that these performances, as components of ritual rites, were often integrated social events involving the entire community. Ancestor worship ceremonies, including a community drinking ceremony, well-documented in both the Book of Rites and Xunzi, involved

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36 The Book of Odes, Records of the Grand Historian, the writings of Xunzi, the Book of Rites and the Book of Zhou Etiquette all contain accounts of early ritual practices that contained elements of music, song, and dance.


39 Ibid, p. 120.
integrated musical performances staged by and for local communities. These larger formal activities often required one, all or combinations of sub-event level performances characterized by singing, music, dance, narration, humor, drama and/or other forms of entertainment.

In addition to understanding music as the ideal way to establish social order, early Chinese philosophers believed that music was a means for communicating with the heavens. Thus, it is not surprising that there was a heavy musical component to most court rituals. Cultural performances (in the sense of artistic traditions guided by semiotic aesthetic codes that were put on display for informed audiences) involving music played an integral role in both court ceremony and popular ritual. Performances were linked to and associated with numerous social contexts including:

1) court activities (entertainment, sacrifices, and rituals)

2) holidays, festivals and ancestor worship rituals (examples include the village drinking ceremony, holiday rituals, court-sponsored rituals such as the feng and shan rituals to communicate with Heaven from the top of Mt. Tai, etc.)

3) temple fairs, farmers’ markets and bazaars

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40 Ibid, p. 121.

41 The most notable exception is the philosopher Mozi (480-420 BC), who wrote *Condemnation of Music* (Fei, 1999: 10-13). *Condemnation* was an attack on entertainment forms that challenged the Confucian emphasis on rituals and rites. Although Mozi’s view challenged the role of music in society, his description of what was involved in musical performances closely mirrored those of the Confucian texts. *Condemnation* also shows that musical performance and entertainment were associated with the lavish banquets of the aristocracy (10).

42 Here, “cultural performances” is used following Singer (1972) as cited in Bauman (1977).
4) official banquets for the imperial court and in public settings (eating and drinking events typically involved smaller sub-event-level performances)

5) social banquets in the homes of rich or high status patrons (examples include weddings, banquets, celebrations, holidays, private rituals)

Some performance traditions—those associated with the activities of the court and the literati—were recorded in writing. Others—those engaged in by the common folk—were recorded less frequently. Records dating to the earliest periods primarily reflect those forms linked to entertainment for emperors, high court officials and a rich gentry class. Even with this bias of written, elite history, there is evidence that suggests large numbers of individuals were engaged in performance-related activities at a very early time in China. Several examples can be found in the written record of the period at the end of the Qin and beginning of the Han Dynasties. In discussing the emergence of oral traditions in China, some scholars cite the *Book of Songs* (5th century BCE) and the *Songs of Chu* (3rd century BCE), collections of popular songs and ballads compiled by scholar officials, as evidence of well-developed oral traditions prior to Han Dynasty (Bender, 1998: 250). When combined with the various clay entertainer figurines (dated to the Eastern Han Dynasty) that have been unearthed throughout China since the 1950s, these early, oral-related texts provide evidence for some

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43 Since we are no longer able to “hear the voices of these oral poetries”—we have no video or audio recordings to accompany the early texts—but we are quite certain from their format and characteristics that they were performed orally, they are good examples of the category of oral poetry John Miles Foley (2002: 45) describes as “voices from the past.”

scholars to claim a very early date for the origins of Chinese storytelling, narrative traditions, and performing arts (Li Defang and Yu Tianchi, 1993; Bordahl, 2002). Other scholars believe Xunzi’s “Cheng xiang ci (成相辞)” is the first Chinese oral storytelling tradition recorded in writing (Wu, 2002). These scholars believe that the Chengxiangci text was written either in imitation of a storytelling tradition or a folk song form that was widespread during the Warring

45 Bordahl closely mirrors Chen Ruheng in stating that she does not wish to make the intuitive leap that many Chinese scholars enthusiastically make when dating professional storytelling in China. Thus, she uses Song Dynasty dates (960-1127) as the beginning of professional storytelling in China. Bordahl is clearly focused on what she considers to be “professional storytellers”, a category that does not include either other types of performers—court, amateur, semi-professional, itinerant, seasonal, etc.—or professional performers of anything but a set range of storytelling genres who were active in popular public settings called “entertainment districts, washe (瓦舍)”. Some Chinese scholars, on the other hand, argue that although the written record of washe begins during the Northern Song Dynasty their written descriptions portray well-developed, large-scale entertainment activities and a thriving urban entertainment industry that attracted itinerant performers from rural areas who had been performing their traditions on a much smaller scale for many generations. Wu (2001) Wang (2004) provide evidence that indicates there were numerous performers of oral-related traditions in China who sustained their livelihoods via public and/or court-related performances much earlier than the Song Dynasty. Zang Li (1984) also has pointed out there was a class of professionals who were engaged in storytelling-like activities much earlier than the time of the rise of the Song Dynasty urban entertainment districts. According to Zang, these professionals had the dual role of serving as court advisors and as court entertainers. The major differences among these scholars attempting to date the origins of either storytelling or performance in China are the criteria they use to define their subject of study and their purposes for doing such dating.

46 There are also several Han Dynasty (221 BC-220 AD) texts that contain poetic forms that alternate prose and lyrics or rhymed-verse and prose. Among these, the most notable is the Han “rhapsody or rhyme-prose, fu (府). Fu poetry was characterized by ornate language and the combination of both rhymed verse and prose. Victor Mair (1997:366-7) has noted the Han Dynasty rhyme prose and parallel prose form that followed were indigenous Chinese genres that mixed prose and verse. Unlike the Chinese scholars who cite this source as the origin of such forms in China, Mair does not believe that any of these indigenous genres were either “truly prosimetric” in nature or “played a vital role in the development of the Chinese prosimetrum (367).” The seven-character lines used in Shandong kuaishu are clearly related stylistically to the “seven word poetry, qi yan shi (七言诗)” of the Han dynasty.
States Period (Zang, 1984 and Wu, 2002). The xiang is believed to have been an instrument suggesting a musical element and the text alternated between two distinct formats (lyric and prose). The content of the Chengxiangci told both the principles on how to rule a kingdom (zhiguo de daoli, 治国的道理) and some historical stories (Zang, 1984: 28). The prosimetric pattern modeled in the Chengxiangci is believed by some to be a forerunner of the “transformation texts, bianwen (變文)” that appeared in the Tang Dynasty (618-907). The “Zuo Commentary, zuozhuan (左传), “Records of the Han, hanshu (汉书)”, the “Huainanzi (淮南子)”, the Han Feizi (韩非子)”, and the “Records of the Grand Historian, shiji (史记)” also contain descriptions of a category of entertainer labeled “jester, you (优)”, who performed “farcical acts, huaji (滑稽)” or told “jokes, xiaoyan (笑言)” for the pleasure of emperors and court officials. The

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47 Discoveried early in the 20th century in Dunhuang, bianwen are believed to be the first extended vernacular narratives in China. They were Buddhist tales told by monks or secular stories told by lay entertainers who illustrated their performances with pictures on paper, silk, or on walls (Mair, 1989).

48 Many of these texts also use the term “zhuru (侏儒)” to refer to jesters who were abnormally short (Ouyang, 1994: 28). Other terms used to describe these early performers include: paiyou (俳优), youren (优人), youling (优伶), changyou (唱伶), lingren (伶人), linglun (伶论). According to the written record, you could sing, dance and tell stories and jokes. According to Otto (2001, xviii), the jester was a symbol of physical and verbal dexterity and of freedom from convention and was dressed as a scholar-sage in the Chinese context. The current meaning of the characters you and ling still retain some of this association with intelligence and wit. Otto also delineates numerous sources that illustrate how the jester figure played an influential role in the Chinese court. They include: Wang Guowei’s Records of Jesters’ Words, youyu lu (优语录), Ren Erbei’s (1981) The Collected Sayings of Jesters, youyu ji (优语集), and most significantly Sima Qian’s Records of the Grand Historian. According to Otto, the jester’s role in China was to keep his ruler from folly by using common sense, reason and wit.
most famous of these entertainers were “Jester Zhan⁴⁹, you zhan (优旃)”, “Jester Meng⁵⁰, you meng (优孟)” (Hsu, 1985; Ouyang, 1994; Liao, 1997; and Wu, 2001) and Dongfang Shuo⁵¹ (东方朔).

From the time of the Zhou Dynasty on, music and dance were indispensable elements of ritual ceremony in both Shandong and in the broader context of Chinese culture, and the Confucian Manor (孔府) was the center of ritual activity in Shandong. At the Manor, large numbers of professional musicians and dancers were trained so that they could participate in official ritual ceremonies, including the feng and shan rituals conducted by the emperor (Huang, 1998: 204).⁵² Performers trained at the Manor included both Kong family (the

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⁴⁹ Jester during the Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE).
⁵⁰ Jester to King Zhuangwang of the Kingdom of Chu (613–591 BCE).
⁵¹ According to Ban Gu’s official biography, Dongfang Shuo was a court official who served under the Western Han Emperor Wudi (154-93 BCE).
⁵² The feng and shan sacrifices were rituals conducted by emperors to pay homage to the mountain gods while simultaneously offering sacrifices in exchange for their protection. Emperors who had received the proper auspicious omens performed the sacrifices to signify their authority and mark their assumption of rule. The feng rituals involved the emperor communicating with heaven from atop Mount Tai, while the shan rituals required the emperor to clear a space at the foot of the mountain upon which sacrifices to the Empress of the Earth could be made. According to the Great Complete Mount Tai, the origins of the feng and shan ceremonies can be traced in written history to the period of the first emperor, Qinshihuangdi. They were conducted intermittently until the Song Dynasty when the Emperor Song Zhenzong was the last emperor to perform the rituals. In all, twelve emperors and seventy-two legendary rulers carried out the ceremonies with Han Wudi conducting them most frequently (eight times in twenty-two years). The Taishan Daquan claims that the purpose for the rituals was twofold. First, emperors used the feng and shan ceremonies as a show of force to solidify their position as the rightful ruler of China and that they had the mandate of heaven (signified by the appearance of the proper auspicious signs). Second, the ceremonies were linked to the attainment of immortality.
Confucius surname) members and outstanding folk performers recruited from the surrounding area (205). Thus, Shandong was a major hub of performance activity in pre-modern China (Huang, 1998 and Gao, 1999). One of the first plays known to exist in China had emerged early on in the Qi Kingdom (located in what is now Shandong). Known as *Tapping and Swaying Girl, ta yao niang* (踏摇娘), this play involved roles, a storyline, song, dance, narrated lines, and the “assumption of dramatic roles, *daiyan* (代言)” during performance. By the end of the Tang period, *canjunxi* comedic skits had also developed into a more mature dramatic form known as *zaju*, which became widely popular in Shandong. *Zaju* evolved out of the tradition of performance begun with shamanistic rituals and court sacrifices and later enhanced by hundred acts performances and court jesters and was a dramatic form that utilized song, dance, and narration to tell stories (Xu, 2005).53

By the end of the Zhou and beginning of the Han Dynasty, acrobats, musicians, puppeteers, and dancers were active, along with court jesters, as

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53 In addition to *zaju*, *yuanben* (院本) plays were popular in the northern parts of China. The term *yuanben* is short for *hangyuanzhiben* (行院之本), which literally refers to the scripts used by traveling professional dramatic troupes. *Yuanben* were primarily short, farcical comedies that included some song and dance. They retained the form, roles, style and repertoire of Song *zaju* plays. At the end of the Song period, China was divided when a Jurchen group defeated Northern Song armies and founded a separate dynasty, the Jin (金), in what is now northern China. The dates of the Southern Song Dynasty and the Jin Dynasty thus overlap. The dates most often associated with the Jin are 1115-1234. *Yuanben* were a dramatic style that was popular in Jin controlled areas. By the Yuan Dynasty, *zaju* had completely merged with *yuanben*. During the Yuan, “northern tunes, *beiqu* (北曲)” were called *zaju* and “southern tunes, *nanqu* (南曲)” were called *xiwen* (戏文) (Gao, 1999).
entertainers. Their performances were sometimes found in connection with entertainment presented at court banquets. This quote describes one such banquet scene: “Amid the music of drums and flutes, tumblers, masquers, and dancers were presented for the amusement of the guests. After a short interval, puppets danced to the rhythm of the drums.” (Hsu, 1985: 199-202) During the same period, parades organized for festivals brought elite music and dancing to broader audiences while entertainment centers developed around temples especially during traditional annual festivals.

Other examples of early performers can also be found. For example, Zang Li (1984) believes that the origins of the Chinese shuochang arts are connected with the activities of “blind court advisors, guzhe⁵⁴ (瞽者)” and that their performances were forerunners to performances associated with the Tang transformation texts.⁵⁵ Zang argues that in early Chinese history, many people believed that the blind had special abilities to communicate with heaven and

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⁵⁴ Ouyang Daifa (1994: 26-7) cites a passage from the Rites of Zhou (周礼春官宗伯下) that refers to “gumeng (瞽朦)”, who during the early Zhou Dynasty, held positions in which they performed using various musical instruments. Ouyang (27) also cites a passage from Liu Xiang’s (刘向) “Lienuzhuan (列女传)”, which states that these blind gu musicians not only “recited poetry, songshi (诵诗)” but they also “told of proper matters, dao zheng shi (道正事)”. Ouyang argues that the roaming philosophers of the Warring States period (476-221 BCE) used stories, anecdotes and jokes to clarify, explain and propagate their political and ideological doctrines.

⁵⁵ Zang also cites Liu Xiang’s Lie nu zhuang. He points out that before starting to tell stories to the emperor storytellers prefaced them by reciting poetry or singing songs. This format with the alternation of lyrical poetry and prose stories can be viewed as one source of origin for indigenous prosimetric literature in China.
because of these abilities were known as “knowers of the Heavens, zhitianzhe (知天者)”.

The manner in which they communicated with heaven was through listening to musical rhythms. They used these skills to help emperors and officials predict such things as whether they would be victorious in battle, the best times for planting and harvesting crops, and how to appease angered spirits who were causing droughts, famines or floods. Blind court advisors were also consulted about solar and lunar eclipses as well as other difficult to explain natural phenomena. At the same time as they were serving in an advisory role during political activities, blind advisors used their musical and linguistic skills to entertain emperors and leaders. Zang argues that originally the blind advisors had two functions (to entertain and to provide advice), and, as time passed, their advisory function gradually diminished.56

Court-related events were not the only context for early performance activity. Performance traditions also emerged out of popular activities. During the Warring States period (476-221 BCE), Linzi57 (临淄), the capital of the Qi Kingdom (齐国), had developed into a relatively large urban center with significant commercial activity (Huang, 1998). Accompanying that commercial

56 In some instances blind advisors were also used in the roll of scribe in which they assisted in the recording of official histories despite their blindness. They recited the histories while others assisted them by writing down what they had recited.

57 Linzi was located in what is present day Zibo (淄博).
activity was a burgeoning entertainment industry for rich elite families. Local dramas were one type of entertainment that developed in this period in connection with sacrificial rituals called *nuo wu* (傩舞). The *nuowu* rituals included sacrifice, music and dancing (Gao, 1999). Other performance-related forms found in Shandong at the time included “lute playing, *chui yu* (吹竽)**, “drums and 26-string zither, *gu se* (鼓瑟)**58, “striking the 13-string zither, *ji zhu* (击筑)**59, “cockfighting, *dou ji* (斗鸡)**, “dog racing, *zou quan* (走犬)**, “chess-like games, *liu bo* (六博)**60, and games that required “kicking balls, *ta ju* (蹋鞠)” (Wu, 2001: 8). In the Qingzhou area (central Shandong), a number of stone carvings and tombstones from the Qi period have been unearthed that have intricate depictions of elaborate performances that closely resemble the written descriptions of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) “hundred acts, *bai xi* (百戏)”61. Wu (2001, 12) has found four types of *baixi* performance locations:

1) “imperial open stages, *lu tai* (露台)”,”

2) “indoor guest halls, *ting tang* (厅堂)”,”

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58 The *se* was an ancient zither-like, stringed instrument similar to the contemporary *qin* (琴) that had twenty-five or twenty-six strings.

59 The *zhu* was a thirteen-stringed, *qin*-like instrument played with a bamboo rod.

60 *Bo* was an early type of Chinese chess game that later became associated with gambling.

61 “*Bai*” in this combination means a large number rather than literally “one hundred”. *Baixi* were exhibitions of, among other things, acrobatics, martial arts, song, dance, sporting events, *qigong*, and various tricks and skills.
3) “courtyard guest halls, *dian ting* (殿庭)”, and

4) “squares, *guangchang* (广场)”. 62

The first took place in imperial palaces while the second and third were held in the homes of elite families. The fourth were temporary performance sites set up for major annual festivals. These four contexts were sites that generated and fostered cultural performances in traditional Chinese society and they continue to operate as sustaining mechanisms for a number of traditions into the present time. That is, many performance traditions, including Shandong fast tales, rely on similar contexts for exchange with audiences and as forums that provide opportunities to perform.

Susan Blader (1977: 10) has discussed four primary locations where storytelling took place in traditional China:

1) Buddhist temples,

2) marketplaces,

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62 Liao (1997) uses similar terminology but offers more detailed descriptions of each. Liao claims that during the Han and Wei Dynasties, the *indoor guest hall* context was the most common performance venue. These were performances were part of lavish banquets held to entertain guests and were hosted by gentry families in their homes (27). These small pavilions and stages were constructed within the home compound to provide a site for these banquets and for conducting ancestor worship rites and rituals. These sites were indoor performance arenas. Han hundred acts performances, singing, musical performances, storytelling, and various forms of joking were some of the types of genres performed (28). The *courtyard guest hall* type of performance site was basically the same as the *indoor guest hall* context, only they were moved into the courtyard of the family compound so that guests would be seated and dine within a pavilion and the performers would either perform in the courtyard or on a raised stage across from the guest pavilion (29). The outdoor *square* context became popular during the reign of the emperor Han Wudi, who reportedly enjoying arranging large-scale, outdoor hundred acts performances (30). They were conducted outdoors because of the number of spectators as well as the number and scale of acts.
3) tea houses, and
4) rural bazaars.

I would add the recurring context associated with banquets already mentioned and portrayed in the scene from *Lu Da Disposes of the Tyrant*. Whether they were private banquets for the emperor and his court, in the private homes of high status patrons, or in local eating and drinking establishments like the one depicted in this scene, performances were a regular and integral component of eating and drinking contexts in traditional China. The banquet setting, regardless of physical location, called for entertainment, which often came in the form of singing, dancing, and/or storytelling. Writing during the Song Dynasty about folk life in the capital of Linan, Wu Zimu described how banquets among officials of the Southern Song unfolded. Wu wrote that banquets were not limited in size and all officials were rewarded with food and drink in banquets. He also detailed many activities involved in such events including serving tea and wine, performances and music, serving fresh fruit and nuts, and preparing and consuming medicines to recover from the effects of alcohol.⁶³ Contemporary Shandong fast tale performances function in a similar way as entertainment suitable to the banquet setting.

A sixth type of traditional performance context not highlighted by Blader’s list was associated with the court sponsored celebratory activities (for

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⁶³ This passage appears in Wu’s *Menglianglu*. The edition I consulted is a reprint published in 2004 by Santai Publishing House (三泰出版社). I am grateful for Li Minru’s assistance with the interpretation of this Song Dynasty passage.
holidays, rituals, and entertainment) mentioned earlier, a tradition that has since been continued by the state in modern times. A related seventh context of performance was associated with open public spaces such as those found in squares and parks. People spontaneously gathered in such public spaces to participate in performance events at fixed times (in the evenings after dinner, on weekends, on traditional holidays, etc.). Local clubs of amateur performers, itinerant performers, and aficionados regularly set up makeshift stages in these public areas, often just by marking off a half circle around which audiences would gather, and performed for whatever donations audience members would give. Many local storytelling, *qüyì* and dramatic traditions developed and were sustained through similar activities.\(^{64}\)

\(^{64}\) Parks and squares continue to serve as regular performance arenas in contemporary Chinese society (Foley, 2002). In 2004, while participating in a conference on comparative literature in Zhengzhou, I witnessed a “Henan drama, *yùju* (豫剧)” gathering in the town square. Several hundred people gathered in the square around dusk. Some sat on raised areas of cement while others sat on small stools that they brought with them. The group circled around a small area in which Yu dramas were performed. The event was participatory in that one person would assume a role, sing for a period and then relinquish the stage to another member of the audience who would then assume a role and continue the show. Participants were in street clothes and did not use costumes. The age of the participants ranged from mid-twenties to sixties and seventies. In addition to squares, parks are a confluence area of performances during fair weather seasons in contemporary China. While living in Qingdao in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002, I regularly attended local dramatic performances in Laoshan Park, near a traffic rotary in the Tuandao section of the city, in a square in the Sifang District, and at Haibohe Park. The largest scale and most regular performances occurred in Haibohe Park where the sounds of traditional performances filled the air from nine o’clock in the morning until lunch time on the weekends. On a typical day, several hundred people, the majority of whom were elderly, would attend these park performances. Among other types of performances, I watched and videotaped *Luju* dramas, sword dancing, rice sprout songs, *taijiquan*, *Liuju* dramas, and *Maoqiang* dramas, as well as group and solo performances of every type of traditional musical instrument. I became a regular audience member for one particular group of *Maoqiang* drama performers. This group would arrive in the park around 8:30-9:00 AM to put on their make up and costumes. They did this while sitting on park benches or standing near the site of their makeshift performance area. On every occasion I
Finally, an eighth context in which performances occurred in traditional China was in conjunction with funeral rites. While living in Qingdao during 2004, I visited a friend who lives in Xuejiadao, a small fishing village on the far southwestern outskirts of the Huangdao suburb of Qingdao. While there, we discovered that a neighbor had recently passed away and the family was in the process of conducting funeral rites. We visited their home during what is called the “sending the coffin off, chubin (出殡)” ceremony. The entire village gathered at the home of the deceased on the evening of the ceremony, which began with a Daoist priest presiding over the activities. The deceased, dressed in his best attended, while they were preparing to perform, a middle-aged woman, who always wore the same tattered and dirty blue outfit, arrived shortly after the performers. She interacted with the performers on a first name basis but was not one of them. However, she enacted a ritual that signaled to the people milling about in the park that a performance was about to begin. Her ritual consisted of rolling around on the ground with a cigarette in her mouth. People who had come to watch the performances would inevitably try to convince her to get up off of the dirty ground or would try to get her to sit on a mazha (马扎), which were small, collapsible stools that fans carried with them to the park to sit on. This woman always refused and seemed to relish in the attention that rolling on the dirty ground brought her. She would roll towards audience members who would quickly move away in fear of being touched by the dirty woman. Then she would roll towards another group of audience members, always just missing them but coming close enough to force them to scramble out of their seats and a few steps back. Many audience members scolded her like a child while others commented aloud that she was a “lunatic, fengzi (疯子)”. Still others warned their children to stay away from her. The “crazy lady” performed this ritual shaping the audience into a semi-circle around the spot that the maoqiang performers had chosen as their “stage”. Once the audience was in position, the performance would begin and the “crazy lady” became just another audience member, occasionally drawing attention to herself mid-performance by interacting with audience members or performers. At one such performance in March of 2001, the “crazy lady” approached me as I sat videotaping. She walked up, sat down beside me, and handed me a handful of melon seeds she had taken from an elderly lady—melon seeds were a snack that many audience members ate while watching. She then proceeded to tell me the name of the play being performed, the roles each actor was performing and the terminology that was used to describe various movements on stage. By the end of the day, she had provided me with more information about maoqiang performances than anyone I had met up to that time, including the performers, other audience members, fans I had met, and one researcher who had been researching and writing about maoqiang dramas for five years.
clothes, was placed in a bed along side a large table covered by a white canopy. On the table there were several plates of food, an incense holder with burning incense, pictures of family members, and drinking glasses. After the priest conducted rites in the home (which included the preparation of food and drink—to be consumed by the deceased during his journey to the next world, incense burning and the sprinkling of wine—rituals I was told were intended to chase away evil spirits, and the deceased person’s children kneeling to kowtow three times before the coffin to signify filial piety and bid farewell), a procession led by several horn blowers and drummers marched around the village passing each home and collecting additional village members along the way. Dressed in a white sheet with a white band tied around his head, the deceased person’s eldest son walked in a position immediately behind the musicians and was followed by his siblings in age-rank order. The family members continually cried out loud as the other village members filed in behind causing the snake-like procession to gradually grow in length. We filed in at the rear of the procession, which then marched around the entire village traveling up and down each street sending off the deceased person’s soul before returning to the family home. When we arrived, the remainder of the theatre troupe the family had hired began playing songs of mourning in front of the family residence while additional rites were conducted. The troupe then led family and village members in a second procession to a central intersection in the village where they began performing upbeat pieces of
traditional *Luju* dramas. Hundreds of village members, many carrying small stools to sit on, gathered in a large circle around the performers filling up the street and lining the adjacent doorsteps. The atmosphere then shifted noticeably from solemn mourning to a celebratory and festive occasion as the troupe performed a range of traditional pieces for more than an hour.

In a very similar description of traditional funeral activities in central Shandong, Xu (1998: 592-3) writes that on the day of the funeral, the grieving family invites a “drum and music troupe, *gu yue ban* (鼓乐班)” to set up a small tent outside of the front door of the home where they perform traditional plays such as *Twice Entering the Palace, er jin gong* (二进宫), *Capturing and Releasing Cao Cao, zuo fang Cao* (捉放曹), and *Killing the Family While Fishing, da yu sha jia* (打鱼杀家). The music can typically be heard for several miles and creates a festive atmosphere. Other similar descriptions of funeral practices suggest that rituals and ceremonies have gradually been simplified over time. Thus, more elaborate musical and dramatic performances (probably not storytelling) were likely associated with such contexts in previous time periods.65

In addition to performances that were actually part of the funeral rites, in

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65 According to the *Shandong tongshi ming qing juan*, during the Ming and Qing periods, preparations for *chubin* ceremonies conducted by affluent families included arranging for a “*fengshui* master, *yinyang xiansheng* (阴阳先生)” to select an appropriate burial site, inviting “*blowing and drumming performers, chuigu shou* (吹鼓手)”, selecting pall bearers, and appointing people to conduct traditional rites (332).
Shandong, the grieving family also traditionally arranged a large-scale banquet for friends and relatives following the funeral ceremony. Called “eating white happiness wine, *chi bai xi jiu* (*吃白喜酒*)”, such banquets were elaborate occasions that involved many subevent-level performances.

**Tang Dynasty (618-907) Performance Traditions**

During the Tang Dynasty (618-907), performances related to religious and court activities continued to develop becoming increasingly sophisticated and various types of performers were employed as entertainers in the capital cities of Changan and Luoyang. Dancers, acrobats, drummers, bells, winds and stringed instruments were all recorded as part of elaborate banquet contexts and pageants held for foreign dignitaries.\(^{66}\) Dramatized jokes with political significance performed by solo performers, slapstick comedies called “adjutant plays, *canjunxi* (*参军戏*)”, and “narrative ballets, *gewuju* (*歌舞剧*)” all originated in these early Tang court-sponsored activities (Idema, 1997: 172; and Wu, 2001).

One well-documented type of Tang Dynasty performance associated with temples but not exclusively set in temple fairs is related to what are called “transformation texts, *bianwen* (*变文*)”. Found near Dunhuang in northwestern China, *bianwen texts* suggest the presence of a well-developed tradition of

\(^{66}\) One recorded pageant held for foreign dignitaries in 607 pleased the emperor so much that he ordered performers to be recruited from all over the country so that he could continue to impress important guests and dignitaries. Court music heavily influenced the development of both Chinese dramatic traditions and *shuochang* arts (Wu, 2001). See also Loewe (1968).
professionals—particularly monks and nuns—who specialized in the telling of both sacred and secular tales for lay audiences (Chen, 1936; Zheng, 1938; Dai, 1989; Mair, 1989 and 1997; Idema, 1997; He, 1999; Li, 1999; Bender, 2001a; Wu, 2002 and Bordahl, 2002). These early storytelling activities are believed to have been located in and around temples called miaohui (庙会) and si (寺). Known also as “secular tellings, su jiang (俗讲)”, early temple-centered storytelling activities are seen as the direct ancestors of the “lyrical stories, cihua (词话)”, “all the keys and modes, zhugongdiao (诸宫调)”, “precious scrolls, baojuan (宝卷)”, “chantefables, tanci (弹词)”, and “drum lyrics, guci (鼓词)” performance traditions that emerged later in the Song and Yuan Dynasty periods. Thus, most contemporary Chinese shuochang arts and quyi, including Shandong fast tales, can trace their lineage to this period in Chinese history (Xu and Liu, 1978).67

Many of the sujiang texts were composed based on the Han Dynasty fu structure with five and seven character lines and a large number were prosimetric in nature with periods of singing interspersed with narration accompanied by drawings.68

67 Li Xianfang (2003: 120) suggests that during the Tang Dynasty shuohua referred to storytelling that went on in the imperial court and sujiang described storytelling for the masses that took place at temples.

68 One distinct feature of performance that has been retained from this period is the use of stories intended to “keep (audiences) in their seats (allow audiences to settle in to hear a story), ya zuo wen (压座文)”. These were shorter pieces that performers used to warm up and allow audiences to prepare for the featured tales. Similar performances can be found as part of later “storytellers’ chapbooks, huaben (话本)” called “entering the tale, ruhua (入话)”, in Yuan drama, zaju (杂剧)” called “wedges, xiezi (楔子)”, in Ming chuanqi dramas (传奇), called “home gates, jiamen (家
Originally, this form of oral storytelling was a method to make Buddhist scriptures accessible to the broad populace. By the end of the Tang period, longer fictional stories began being written and all types of tales were told in the same fashion as a form of secular entertainment. As these activities became increasingly secular in nature, storytelling, primarily by monks and monk imitators, spilled into the streets (Wu, 2001: 9). What began as monks reciting saints’ lives and explaining complex scriptures evolved into people of all types telling stories embellished to enhance their entertainment value.

In Shandong, a major “Buddhist festival, fahua hui (法花会)” was reported to have attracted monks and common folk numbering in the hundreds (Shandong tongshi, suiting juan: 194). During the Ming and Qing periods, peasant peddlers joined traders from all parts of the country first making sacrifice and then engaging in trade around important temples. Most of the peddlers who set up temporary seats and stalls at the temple fairs were traders from other parts of the province as well as from around the country. These traveling businessmen and performers “hawked, yaohe (吆喝)” or “called out, jiao mai (叫卖)” the

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69 Idema (1982: 29) also notes the link between traditional annual festivals and public performances by the Northern Song Dynasty.
names of whatever they were selling to get the attention of potential customers.\textsuperscript{70}

One episode in the \textit{Tale of Wu Song} takes place at the East Mountain Temple during the most famous temple fair in Shandong. It is set during Song Dynasty times and effectively creates the feeling of what being at a temple fair in traditional China was like.\textsuperscript{71}

\begin{quote}
This year’s big fair is really great.
There’s a seven-mile long metal goods market,
An eight-mile long lumber exchange.
Nine-mile long sickles are in the northeast corner,
And ten-mile long flowery red ribbons in the southwest corner.
Look due south and you’ll see knifes, handles, and brooms for twenty miles,
And there’s a mule and horse exchange more than twenty miles long.
Right in the center they set up a tower of knives,
And climbing the mountain of knives is a young lady!
Bamboo horses and grass boats running all around,
They’re singing erhuang dramas on four big stages.
They’re singing on four big stages all at once,
Each stage even better than the last.
In the southeast corner, ‘roar’ ‘roar’ they’re taming tigers,
In the northwest corner, monkeys are riding goats.
Without mentioning the exciting things at the fair,
Listen how good the business is.
As for big business, there’s jewelry stores, ginseng stores,
There are gold exchanges complete with small banks.
Wool cloth shops, textile shops,
The Beijing goods store is even more extravagant.
There are tin stores, copper stores, metal goods stores,
All those businesses offer wholesale.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{70} Based on accounts written by Zhou Mi in \textit{Wulin Jiu Shi} (武林旧事), Anne McLaren (1998: 91) has described a form of Song Dynasty performance that evolved out of hawking called “pedlar tales, huolang (货郎)”.

\textsuperscript{71} This is my translation of an excerpt from Gao Yuanjun’s (1997) version of \textit{East Mountain Temple, dong yue miao (东岳庙)}. 
In the center, they set up a tax collection tent,
Big and small businesses all must report their sales.
Whatever it is, the local specialties industry, timber industry,
Miscellaneous goods, miscellaneous grains, or the livestock industry.
All three hundred sixty industries,
Whoever doesn’t report taxes meets with disaster.
I heard that a melon seed seller didn’t report his taxes,
They beat him up and dumped his basket.
There was a shit shoveler, who didn’t report his taxes,
They beat him up and stripped off his clothes.
There was a bean curd seller, who didn’t report his taxes,
‘Snap’ ‘snap’ ‘snap’ they broke his shoulder pole and smashed his vats.72

Just as Wu Song was looking at the temple,
He could hear a ruckus in the tent where people eat.
Someone over here yelled, “Thin pancakes that I just put on.”
Someone over there yelled, “Hot pepper soup just out of the pot.”
“Lamb stuffed buns, three cents each.”
“Five cents for a bowl of warm soy milk.”
Over here someone yelling, “Selling meatballs.”
Over there yelling, “Come! I just took these dumplings out of the water.”
When Wu Song heard this, he thought to himself,
Everyone is bustling around like this just to make a living.
Then Wu Song came to the performance stage,
He lifted his head and saw storytellers, singers, magicians, martial artists;
every kind of performance was represented.
This one ‘bang’ ‘bang’ sang drum ballads,
That one ‘clang’ ‘clang’ tapped songs of the lotus.
A magician pulled out a big bowl,
A martial artist ‘swoosh’ ‘swoosh’ yielded a long spear.
Looking to the south, there was a blue cloth tent,
A snake oil salesman babbling nonsense:
“Salves, salves, get your salves,
This salve comes from Zhenjiang.
For two hundred coppers you can buy a jar,

72 Here Gao’s version of the story shifts to Wu Song’s elder brother Wu Dalang explaining how the corrupt Li family has taken over the temple fair and has made things difficult for everyone in the area. He is trying to talk Wu Song out of going to the temple fair because he knows his brother will get into a fight with the Li’s, which could result in his death. Later, when Wu Dalang fails to convince Wu Song to stay home, Wu Song arrives at the temple fair, and the description resumes.
For four hundred coppers you can buy two. 
It even cures numb joints, 
It can cure the five diseases and seven ailments. 
If you take this home and it doesn’t work, 
You can bring it back and smear it on my face.” (Gao, 1997)

This scene at the East Mountain Temple fair shows the range of social activities associated with traditional temple fairs included: 1) commerce, 2) eating, and 3) entertainment. First, Gao Yuanjun’s humorous version of events indicates that all forms of commerce took place in the temporary marketplaces that sprang up around temples during fair periods. Second, this scene depicts sellers of every conceivable food and drink from pancakes and lamb stuffed buns, to meatballs and dumplings, to hot pepper soup and soy milk. Finally, there was entertainment, which included a range from elaborate stage dramas to tiger taming. Gao’s rendition of this event also explicitly details storytellers, singers, magicians, martial artists, drum ballad singing, and performances of songs of the lotus.

Wang Xuetai (2004: 26) has also written about “itinerant performers, lu qi ren (路岐人)”—literally ‘people of different roads’—who were active prior to the

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73 Three primary types of economic activity took place at temple fairs. First, traders exchanged goods including small-scale agricultural tools, handcrafts, local specialty products and everyday goods. Second, peddlers sold toys and popular local foods. Third, performing artists performed all types of folk genres for the crowds gathered to eat and buy goods. Performances in the Jining area of Shandong included among other things “tricks with knives and weapons, shua dao qiang (耍刀枪)”, martial arts, “magic tricks, xifa (戏法)”, “miscellaneous tricks, zaji (杂技), monkey and small animal tricks, “circus acts, maxi (马戏)”, and “big drum ballads, dagushu (大鼓书)”. Performers either hung a curtain or circled off a small area to serve as their stage. After every couple of performances performers or their representatives circled the crowd taking donations. Fair goers reportedly regularly crowded around various performers to see the action (Shandong tongshi, mingqing juan).
Song Dynasty.  

According to Wang, luqiren were illiterate peasants who roamed from place to place “performing at makeshift performance sites, da ye he (打野呵)”, in the streets, at open spaces around villages, at temples, and in teahouses, inns, taverns, and the manors of social elite. Wang argues that these itinerant performers were engaged in oral performance traditions long before the Tang Dynasty but because an “urban control system, chengfangzhi (成坊制)” prevented peasants living in rural areas from freely entering and taking up residence in urban centers, they had no way to sustain a livelihood if they did enter cities. The result is that their appearance in the written record comes during the Song Dynasty after controls on movement had been relaxed, a policy shift that also led to industrial and commercial development and large-scale urbanization. Wang carefully distinguishes luqiren, itinerant performers, from “storytellers, shuohuaren/shuoshuren (说话人/说书人)”, which he describes as urban residents who performed at market places with fixed performance sites. By the time Shandong fast tales emerged in the Ming Dynasty, both types of performers were

74 Hu Wanchuan (2004: 60) also makes a distinction between luqiren and the shuoshuren that appear during the Song Dynasty.

75 This type of itinerant performer is referred to as “a guest on the rivers and marshes, jianghu ke (江湖客)” and roaming the countryside seeking opportunities to perform is called “out and about running the rivers and marshes, zai waibian pao jianghu (在外边跑江湖)” in the Shandong fast tale Lu Da Disposes of the Tyrant.

76 Wang (2004: 36) offers the characters Yan Poxi and Bai Xiuying from The Water Margin as examples of early performers.
well established. The traditional Shandong fast tale *Lu Da Disposes of the Tyrant*, 
*lu da chu ba* (鲁达除霸) contains a scene in which a female itinerant performer 
enters an inn in search of an opportunity to perform for some of the patrons. This 
scene provides both an excellent description of an itinerant performer who is 
making the move into an urban center and details about the inn/tea house and 
banquet as contexts of performance.77

Idle talk and aimless chatter, we won’t raise, 
I tell a story about the time Lu Da went out west. 
At the age of seventeen, this great hero, 
Worked his way up to sixth rank magistrate, master of a district. 
One day, there was nothing to do at the district office, 
This Lu Da accompanied two brothers drinking some wine. 
The three brothers came to a tavern to drink wine, 
Hmm! When speaking, these three brothers were quite polite. 
“Please, have some wine, my two virtuous younger brothers!” 
“Elder Brother, please have some wine!” 
“Virtuous younger brothers, please…” 
“Elder Brother, please…” 
“Please, ha ha ha ha…” 
Just as the three brothers were drinking wine, 
Holy cow! Out on the big street along came someone courting disaster. 
Don’t think that troublemaker was a real man, 
As it turns out, it was a seventeen-year-old maiden. 
In her left hand, this young lady was carrying a green hand cloth, 
In her right hand, carrying a wooden castanet.

77 This is my translation of an excerpt from Gao Yuanjun’s (1997) version of *Lu Da Disposes of the Tyrant*. I offer this example because as Ge (2001: 153) has stated, “very few detailed descriptions of storytelling scenes can be found in premodern China”. For examples, Ge uses scenes that occur in chapter 51 of *The Water Margin* in which the female storyteller Bai Xiuying performs and in chapter 90 of the same novel in which the heroes Li Kui and Yan Qing listen to a storyteller during Lantern Festival activities. A version of this same scene with significant overlap also appears in the drum ballad *Lu Du Disposes of the Tyrant* that appears in the collection *Traditional Chinese Drum Ballad Essential Rivers*, *Zhongguo chuantong guci jingjiang* (中国传
统鼓词精江) edited by Chen Xin (2003), which suggests the close relationship between the two traditions. The portion that overlaps with the translation here appears on pages 523-525.
There was a worried look on her face as she entered the tavern, ‘Tap’ ‘tap’ ‘tap’ She climbed the thirteen wooden steps. She came up to the front and curtsied, her hands to the side: “I say, would you three gentlemen like to listen to me. You three gentlemen came to drink wine, Petty servant me will sing a little tune to accompany you.” Whoa! Lu Da raised his head to have a look, In front of his eyes, stood a young maiden. This girl, at the oldest, couldn’t be over eighteen, At the youngest, only seventeen. A head of black hair like it was dyed with ink, Her looks were really not bad. Broad on top and narrow on the bottom, a long endless face, Two long eyebrows, narrow and beautiful. On the top, she wore an old blue cloth gown with a chessboard collar, A dog-toothed braid stitched on the front of her gown. On the bottom, she wore Chinese-style parrot-colored green, Hmm! This girl is dressed and made-up really properly. “Hey! Young lady, if you are going to sing, choose the best to sing, I don’t listen to that trashy popular stuff. Sing!” “Oh, yes!” This girl for her first piece sang “The Heroes’ Banquet,” Then she sang “Farewell My Concubine”. In all, she sang three long pieces and two short ones, “Hey, great! Ha ha ha…” It made Lu Da happy as could be, “Hey! Young lady, from your looks, you don’t seem like a wandering artist, Your words and lines are really not bad. Well Sung!” The hero felt in his bag, And pulled out five spare silver coins. He said, “Young lady, take these! Take these home. Buy some firewood, buy some rice, and get some new clothes. You sang really well!” The girl took the silver in her hand, “Hmm…” She turned her head and began to cry. Huh? Crying, the young lady was about to leave, When Lu Da saw this, he became angry as could be: “Young lady, not so fast, Grandpa here has something to ask you.”
Crying, the girl had just taken a step,
When suddenly she heard someone calling from behind her.
Today, I have a mind to turn around,
But, I’m afraid these three don’t have good intentions;
I think if I don’t turn around today,
These three aren’t the kind I should mess with…
“Get back here!”
“Oh, grandpa! You gave me silver but won’t let me go,
Why is it you call me back?”
Lu Da said, “Strange, strange, really strange,
Unusual, unusual, really unusual.
I gave you silver. Why don’t you thank me for your reward?
Why don’t you thank me for the reward I bestowed upon you?
You are out selling your art,
You don’t even understand thanking someone for a reward?
Oh! Is it that you think I gave too little?
Sing! Sing! Sing again and I’ll give you more!
Huh? Never mind whether you thank me or not,
Why did you start to cry when you turned around?
What are you crying about?
If a person isn’t heartbroken, he doesn’t cry,
Tell grandpa what it is.
If you tell the truth, I won’t blame you.
Tell me!”
“Oh! My grandfather, don’t get angry,
Petty slave me has an injustice on her mind.”
“Oh? What injustice? Where does your family live?
What is your family name?
What is your first name?
Why have you come here to sing tunes?
You started crying as soon as I gave you silver, tell it to me according to the facts!”
“Oh, grandfather!
You ask me where I live but my home is far.”
“Where does your family live?”
“My family lives in south Zhi District.”
“What manor?”
“My family lives in Zhi District, Grand Fame Manor.”
“In the city or outside the city?”
“Eight miles north of the city in the Jin Family Market.”
“What is your family name?”
“My great grandfather’s family name is Jin; he’s called Jin Haoshan,
My great grandmother’s family name on their gate was originally Yu.
My ma didn’t have many sons or daughters,
She only gave birth to servant me.”
“Why did you come to this place?”
“There where we’re from, had a drought early in the year,
So, we fled the drought and came to your Shanxi.
Fleeing the drought we arrived at Lu An Manor…” (Gao, 1997)

This scene offers hints about what life might have been like for a performer
attempting to make the move from rural areas to the city. This portrayal also
indicates how this type of performer was literally at the mercy of his or her
audience. At the same time, it shows one place, an inn, that a performer would
likely go to find opportunities to practice her trade.

Another distinct performance context that sprang up towards the end of
the Tang and beginning of the Song was associated with marketplaces. During the
Tang, “residential districts, fang (坊)” were delineated with walls separating each
district. Access and movement in and out of these districts was tightly controlled
causing most commercial activities to be concentrated in the daytime hours at
markets formed near city gates and major thoroughfares called shi (市) or si (肆).
Both itinerant and local performers set up makeshift performance sites near these
markets to take advantage of the large crowds of people attending. But, because
of the restrictions on movement in the early years of the Tang, many
entertainment activities remained limited to palaces, courts, elite households, and
temples (Wu, 2001: 16). As the Tang fell and the Song relaxed these restrictions,
the tradition of outdoor farmers’ markets began to develop even more rapidly (Li, 2003: 120). In the Shandong region, every county had a number of such events that were primarily located at the confluence of large transportation routes. Larger markets reportedly had over one hundred thousand attendees. Yanzhou (兖州) and Dengzhou (登州), in particular, had grown into large urban centers with tens of thousands of traders coming from all directions to trade in silk and cotton at marketplaces called “grass markets, caoshi (草市)” or “open air markets, xushi (虚市).” The types of activities that took place at farmers’ markets mirrored that of temple fairs. Large numbers of merchants gathered to sell their goods attracting hordes of spectators looking to buy things and/or to enjoy good food, entertainment and the lively atmosphere.

78 Farmers’ markets are still a regular occurrence in contemporary Shandong. In May 2005, I traveled with the Qingdao Folk Song and Dance Troupe to Dajijiagou, a remote village near Penglai, where the troupe performed at an annual large scale farmers’ market in front of an audience of more than 35,000 people. Going to a farmers’ market to do business is called “rushing the market, ganji (赶集)” or just “going to the market, shangji (上集).” Going to a farmers’ market for fun is called “strolling the market, guangji (逛集).” Markets gather every five days on calendar dates ending in one and six, two and seven, three and eight or four and nine depending on location. A “big market, daji (大集)” lasts all day, while a “little market, xiaoji (小集)” lasts half a day and spontaneous markets without fixed dates are called “ghost markets, guiji (鬼集)” (Shandong tongshi, mingqing juan).

79 Near present day Jining (济宁).

80 (Shandong tongshi, suiting wudai juan: 171). Caoshi and xushi were later called “farmers’ markets, jishi (集市)”. Dengzhou was called the “city where night never fell, bu ye cheng (不夜城)” because of the high level of commercial and cultural activity that went on during all hours of the day.
Song Dynasty (960-1279) washe (瓦舍)

Besides court-sponsored performances and performances associated with temple fairs and markets, fixed entertainment sites began to appear by the Song Dynasty (960-1279) period. By the beginning of the Song Dynasty, large urban centers with high population densities had developed in several locations in China. The two Song capitals at Bianjing (汴京)—present day Kaifeng—and Linan (临安)—present day Hangzhou—were major cities with large pools of people who had sufficient money and time to enjoy leisure activities. As economic hubs and trading centers, both cities concentrated vast amounts of wealth and goods creating an imbalance between urban and rural areas. The consequent attraction of people from the countryside to urban markets for trading and the pursuit of opportunity created the need for hotels, restaurants, teahouses, larger and more frequent markets including “night markets, yeshi (夜市)”, and various types of entertainment. Large-scale, fixed entertainment centers, known as washe (瓦舍), wazi (瓦子), and goulan (勾栏), were created to meet these needs (Loewe, 1968; Gernet, 1962; Idema, 1982; Huang, 1998; Gao, 1999; and Wu, 2001). Wu describes washe as large-scale, permanent establishments that combined entertainment and market trading activities in a single locale. Goulan were also fixed theatre sites that served as the central architecture situated inside washe. The smallest goulan had more than fifty seats while the largest washe could reportedly
accommodate up to two hundred thousand spectators at one time. *Washe* first appeared in the northern capital Bianjing but quickly spread to Luoyang and many cities surrounding Bianjing. Those that later appeared in the southern capital Hangzhou were described as being ten times the size of those in Bianjing (Wu, 2001).\(^8\) A description of Hangzhou at the time reveals many of the types of entertainment that could be found in *washe* entertainment centers:

> “...the numerous entertainments which the townspeople could enjoy in the streets (jugglers, marionettes, Chinese shadow plays, story-tellers, Acrobats...) and in the ‘pleasure grounds’ in which huge popular theatres were to be found where people of all conditions met and jostled together. There were daily performances there, and exhibitions of dancing, singing, and instrumental music. Hangchow seems to have lived in an atmosphere of continuous feasting. The incessant activity in the streets and markets, the pleasures, the luxury, and the gaiety of the town: all this makes a vivid contrast with the poverty of the countryside and the hard, monotonous and frugal life of the peasants.” (Gernet, 1962: 55)

Another description of Song popular entertainment shows how diverse the performance scene had become including:

> “storytelling, humorous talks, shadow plays, ballads, songs, farce, impersonation of gods and spirits, recitation of saints’ lives, minstrels, jokes, riddles, conjuring, jugglers, puppets, pole climbing, rope dancing, wrestling, mock fights, tumbling, staff, weight lifting, football, bow and arrow, and trained animals, birds and insects.” (Hsu, 1985)

\(^8\) Wu (2001: 26) describes the first *washe* to appear in the new southern capital of Linan as being established to provide entertainment for the large numbers of soldiers in the military who were of northern decent but had moved south in mass after being defeated by the Jurchen armies.
With the appearance of fixed entertainment venues, performance genres proliferated. Although some specialization can be seen among storytellers as early as the Tang bianwen performances, it was not until the Song in the context of washe entertainment districts that large numbers of new performance genres were able to mature and diversify. With the increased numbers of performers and genres came a need for specialization and organization into professional guilds and societies. Wu (2001) has shown that in the case of dramatic traditions

82 Based on descriptions found in Dongjing Menghualu, Chen Ruheng (1979) has written that during the Song Dynasty, performance genres flourished as China’s economy boomed and large urban trading centers emerged. According to Liu Baojin (1987), who cites the same source, in the Northern Song period performance styles included “mixed dramas, zaju (杂剧),” “puppet theatre, kuilei (傀儡),” “shadow plays, yingxi (影戏),” “miscellaneous local dramas, za ban (杂班),” and various “hundred acts performances, baixi jiyi (百戏技艺).” In terms of shuochang arts, there were “small talks, xiaoshuo (小说),” “historical tales, jiangshi (讲史),” “telling dirty jokes, shuo hunhua (说浑话),” “in all the keys and modes, zhugongdiao (诸宫调),” “humorous skits, hesheng (合笙),” “small lyrical songs, xiao chang (小唱),” and a form of hawking called “calling the pot, jiao guozi (叫锅子).” Dramatic, musical, and comedic genres also reached unprecedented heights during the Song with new forms such as short “folk songs, ou (讴)” and longer “tunes, qu (曲)” that utilized everyday speech and filler words. Because they were more flexible than the fu and ci poetry of previous eras, qu songs began to appear in a number of new contexts including the complex dramatic productions called “various modes” or “in all the keys and modes, zhugongdiao (诸宫调)” (Idema, 1982 and 1997; West, 1977: 88). The first term is West’s while the second is Idema’s. Zhugongdiao were long narrative ballads that told ironic love stories in a prosimetric format and were divided into chapters, each with a suspenseful endpoint (Idema, 1997).

Zhugongdiao were also elaborate productions with multiple songs arranged in “song sets, taoshu (套数)” and accompanied by music that included both drums and wooden clappers. After the fall of the Northern Song Dynasty to Jin in 1200, zhugongdiao and the qu forms were replaced by “mixed dramas, zaju (杂剧)” the most widespread form theatre during the Yuan Dynasty period.

See Idema (1974), (1982), and (1997) for more on zhugongdiao. Other performance styles traced to the Song Dynasty washe districts include taozhen (陶真), guzici (鼓子词), yaci (涯词), fazhuan (复赚), tanchangyinyuan (弹唱因缘), and changlingquxiaoci (唱令曲小词) (Xu and Liu, 1978).

83 Ge (2001: 165) describes the storytellers from the Southern Song to the Ming Dynasty periods as a mixed contingent, “in which men of letters mingled with less-educated public entertainers.” Quoting Hu Shiyang, Ge writes that among the storytellers of the Song times, some were professional street performers and others were scholars who had failed to acquire a degree.
performers were already organized into professional associations called “drama groups, xiban (戏班)” and “industry academies, hangyuan (行院)” by the time washe entertainment districts appeared. These organizations were primarily active in larger cities and towns but often traveled to different locations to perform, including in various washe entertainment districts. In addition to these professional organizations, there were also performance groups and academies sponsored by the imperial court called “teaching guilds, jiaofang (教坊)” and “junrongzhi (钧容直)”, government-sponsored performance organizations called “Yamen front music, yaqianyue (衙前乐)” organized “traveling performance groups, luqi xiban (路岐戏班)” and local amateur performance clubs among common folk called “shehuo (社火)”, or literally ‘social fires’. Song teaching guilds expanded on and increased the specialization of musical and performance training that had already begun in Tang Dynasty imperial academies. Junrongzhi were military performance troupes organized to provide music and performances for the emperor when he traveled outside of the imperial compound for official ceremonies or events. Yamen front music referred to government sponsored performance troupes who were maintained to perform for official events but also periodically appeared in washe entertainment sites. Traveling performance groups traveled from place to place performing at various establishments, washe, markets and temple fairs. Shehuo amateur performance groups were organized for local
temple fairs, festivals, and holiday events. Wu argues that during the Song Dynasty, these various types of performance groups that had been operating with little intermingling began to have contact with one another in washe entertainment districts, which created intense competition for performance opportunities.

**Specialization of Performance Styles**

Storytelling is one of the most frequently documented areas where specialization in performance traditions occurred. Early in the Song, “small talks, *xiaoshuo* (小说),” a form of early storytelling, were divided into four major categories: 1) beauties and spirits, 2) pugilism, swordsmanship, swashbucklers, sudden eminence and change of fortune, and 3) combat and warfare (Hsu, 1985). By the end of the Song period, there were storytellers who specialized in tales about the “Three Kingdoms period, *shuo sanfen* (说三分),” those who told about “the Five Dynasties period, *jiang wudai shi* (讲五代史),” those who focused on “love stories, *yanfen* (烟粉),” those who specialized in stories about “strange sprites and monsters, *lingguaiyaoyi* (灵怪妖异),” those who dealt with “crime stories, *gongan* (公案),” and those who exclusively told stories of young lovers called *chuanqi* (传奇).”84 The most popular storytellers specialized in historical

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84Zhou Mi, *Old Matters of the Martial Forrest, Wulin Jiu Shi* (武林旧事) and *Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo baike quanshu* (中国古代小说百科全书): 490. Martial Forrest was once a way to refer to the capital Hangzhou. Citing the *Record of Discussions of a Drunkard, zuiweng tanlu* (醉翁谈录), Ge Liangyan lists eight types of oral stories: *lingguai* (spirits and demons), *yanfen* (rouge and
tales about the Three Kingdoms and Five Dynasties periods (Chen, 1979) but styles particularly popular in northern China were “long sword, *podao* (朴刀)” stories and “cudgel, *ganbang* (杆棒)” stories (these types of stories later became known also as “green forest, *lulin* (绿林)” stories). These were genres that developed out of the *xiaoshuo* tradition in the Northern Song and featured themes about heroes, bandits and robbers. Many were Robin Hood-like tales about heroes who rose up against corrupt officials and the oppressive rich elite (Ge, 2001 and Wang, 2004). Ge Liangyan (2001: 117) believes the heroic story cycles born out of the *xiaoshuo* tradition to be the best context in which to understand the rise of the *Water Margin* cycle of stories. Some accounts even claim that Shi Naian got the inspiration and much of the content for the novel *The Water Margin* while listening to this type of story in the *goulan* context. For my purposes, it is sufficient to understand that the *Water Margin* cycle of stories, from which Shandong fast tales draws its original and primary content, emerged and evolved within the rapidly growing entertainment industry of the late Song Dynasty period.

Storytelling performances had become so widespread by the Song that Chen Ruheng (1979) was able to compile a list of twenty famous storytellers from the Northern Song and one hundred twenty-three from the Southern Song. Because of this popularity, “story clubs, *shuhui* (书会)” and “story societies,
“shushe (书社)” began to be organized among performers, writers and fans.\textsuperscript{85} Shuhui were made up of a diverse group of people ranging from all sorts of low level government officials to doctors, alchemists, folk performers and poor aspiring scholars (Wu, 2001: 97). In these settings, groups of literate and semi-literate writers collaborated with storytellers to record their tales in writing as well as to create new ones. The best writers were known as “storytelling club gentlemen, shuhui xiansheng (书会先生)” (Li, 2003: 121-2). By the second half of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, storytelling clubs in the Song capitals of Kaifeng and Hangzhou had produced large numbers of storyteller “prompt books, huaben (话本)—textualized versions based on oral tales, sometimes in full and others merely in the form of brief notations. Wang (2004: 40) sees the rapid growth of huaben texts during this period as evidence of the popularity of storytelling and the participation in storytelling-related activities by scholars (and educated individuals who had failed the imperial exams). During this same time period, “storytelling houses, shuguan (书馆)” began to be established as sites dedicated solely for storytelling events (Wang, 2004: 40).

\textsuperscript{85} Wu (2001: 96) writes that shuhui were originally unofficial (not government sponsored) gathering places for poor scholars preparing to take the official examinations. These poor scholars had regular contact with traditional performers and gradually began participating in the writing and performance of various tales and styles. He also states that during the Song, shuhui writers primarily participated in the writing of zaju dramas while shushe writers dealt more with xiaoshuo traditions.
Wilt Idema (1982) has shown that in addition to the specialization and proliferation of storytelling genres comedy also developed significantly in the washe entertainment districts of the Song period. Among the comedic forms known to have existed during this period, several share characteristics with Shandong fast tales and may have served as inspiration for the earliest performers. Included among them were “drums and clappers, guban (鼓板)”, parodies of country bumpkins, “humorous lyrical rhymes, lingshua chang (伶耍唱)”, dirty songs, and riddles told while playing a drum and clapper. In his translation of passages from the Record of the Splendors of the Capital City (都城纪胜) written by Nai Deweng in 1247, Idema (1982: 73) includes this description of the dirty song genre:

“This is the singing of little lyrics and shortened qu-style melodies to a drum accompaniment. They drive forth filler words (i.e., meaningless sounds?) and make free use of all the gong and diao modes. They are of the same form as the fruit hawking songs and the singing of comic melodies. Originally, they were found only in the streets and markets, but now often occur in the courts and houses (of good people).”

Amidst the continuing specialization of performance genres, traditions that dealt exclusively with perverted versions of scriptures and classics—shuo hunjing (说诨经)—emerged out of tales that originally revolved around Buddhist saints.

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86 In contemporary parlance this genre is referred to as “hawking, yaohe (吆喝)” and is sometimes included as part of variety shows in the Beijing area. I was able to videotape one performance in Beijing on December 16, 2000 in which the performer demonstrated ways to hawk for more than 130 different products or services from coal to food and haircuts to waste disposal.
and their lives—shuojing (说经). Comedic performances also included “telling dirty tales, shuo hunhua (说诨话)” and “humorous talks and improvisations, hesheng (合笙)”. These humorous performances were generally shorter than the “great tales, dashu (大书)” told by the xiaoshuo raconteurs and often served as transitional pieces between acts in variety shows. The most famous of the telling dirty tales performers and one of the earliest recorded storytellers from Shandong was Zhang Shou (张寿), a Northern Song Dynasty shuo hunhua performer from Yanzhou (Geng, 1986: 18). This form of entertainment is mirrored in the contemporary short performance style—generally two to five minutes—used by most Shandong fast tale performers.

As storytelling styles proliferated and spread from the Song Dynasty on, a number of shuochang art forms became popular across China.89 Northern China

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87 Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo baike quanshu: 490. See also Chen Yang’s (陈旸) Book of Music (乐书), a two hundred volume text written during the Northern Song. One hundred and five of the two hundred volumes are called An Illustrated Discussion of Music, yuetulun (乐图论), which offers detailed descriptions of baixi, zaji, instruments, songs and dance of the period. Idema (1982) describes hesheng (based on a reading of wulin jiu shi) as an impromptu song and dance skit possibly with musical accompaniment and an emphasis on word play. He also notes an earlier version of hesheng as early as the Tang Dynasty.

88 Geng also mentions a well-known Southern Song storyteller from Shandong who went by the name Zhang Silang (张四郎). In Zhongguo quyi yinyue jicheng, Zhang Jun describes Zhang Shou as one of the earliest known performers from Shandong. He notes that Zhang Shou’s performing name was “Zhang the Mountain Man, Zhang Shanren (张山人)” and cites the Song Dynasty scholar Wang Zhuo (王灼), who wrote that during the Xifeng and Yuanyou periods [from 1068-1086] Yanzhou’s Mountain Man used humor while performing in the capital.

89 It was in the post-Song Dynasty period in which two subbranches of shuochang developed. Xu and Liu (1978) describe the two as the “musical, yuequ (乐曲)” and
traditions reflected local cultural values often revolving around heroic themes popularized in the early long sword and cudgel tales. Popular tales included “armored horses and golden daggers, *tiema jinge* (铁马金戈)” or what were adventure stories involving bandits, heroes, fighting and battles. In the refined culture of southern China, stories that dealt with love stories about “scholars and beautiful maidens, *caizi jiaren* (才子佳人)” were more widespread. In the north, “drum lyrics, *guci* (鼓词)” spread rapidly and widely while in the south, *taozhen* and *tanci* became the most popular performance styles. The northern *guci*, often considered ancestors of Shandong fast tales, developed out of a Song Dynasty tradition also called “drum lyrics, *guzici* (鼓子词)” (Fan and Jin, 1992: 185). There were two types of *guzici*, one that involved straight narration with no singing and one that combined singing and narration in a prosimetric style (Wu, 2001: 72). *Guzici* were composed using fixed seven or ten character lines and were frequently performed in *washe* entertainment districts, during banquets

“poetic, *shizan* (诗赞)” branches of Chinese oral literature. In the musical branch, which includes Song Dynasty “lyrical tunes, *cidiao* (词调)”, Jin and Yuan Dynasty “northern songs, *beigu* (北曲)”, Ming and Qing Dynasty “northern and southern songs, *nanbeigu* (南北曲)”, and “songs of the lotus, *lianhualuosai* (莲花落)”, lyrics were determined by “musical beat, *paizi* (拍子)”. Because the words followed the music, musical *shuochang* traditions did not stick to a regular seven syllable line format. The poetic branch, on the other hand, was not characterized by free prose. This style primarily used rhymed verse with fixed line length. Xu and Liu place Song Dynasty *taozhen*, Yuan and Ming “lyrical tales, *cihua* (词话)”, and both Ming and Qing “chantefables, *tanci* (弹词)” and “drum lyrics, *guci* (鼓词)” into this branch, as well as modern *shuochang* forms such as Shandong *kuaishu*. 

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conducted among circles of literati, by itinerant performers at temple fairs and marketplaces, and by amateur performers during festive holiday occasions. Some were written based on existing xiaoshuo stories from the *Three Kingdoms*, *Water Margin*, and “Strange Tales from a Studio, liaozhaizhiyi (聊斋志异)” cycles.90 Others drew their content from Tang Dynasty heroic tales. As time passed, guci further evolved to include one style focused on longer “great tales, dashu (大书)” in which both singing and narration was used. This style of guci retained its original name. A second type that emerged came to be known as “big drum ballad singing, dagu (大鼓)”, to which we will return shortly.91

**Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) Urban Growth**

At the end of the Jin Dynasty and beginning of the Yuan (1279-1368), northern China’s economy developed rapidly during a period of stability and recovery following an extended period of instability caused by war (Wang, 2004:

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90 Vibeke Bordhal (2002) has detailed three major cycles of stories that circulated among Yangzhou pinghua storytellers. They include the *Water Margin*, *Three Kingdoms*, and “*Journey to the West, xiyouji (西游记)*” cycles. These three major cycles, as well as the *Strange Tales* cycle, also circulate in Shandong. The author of the collection of stories that make up the *Strange Tales* text, Pu Songling (1640-1715), was from Zibo in central Shandong. Pu’s collection of unusual tales about ghosts, fairies and strange happenings was reportedly a compilation of location folk tales and ghost stories, which may account for the cycle’s popularity in the Shandong region.

91 By the middle of the Ming Dynasty, localized versions that branched off of the guci form had emerged all over China each distinguished by performance style, structural differences, rhythm-keeping devices, and dialect spoken. These styles included dagu in the north, the chantefable in Suzhou, “bannerman’s Tales, zidishu (子弟书)” among the elite Manchu families in the north, “fan handle tales, zhuizishu (坠子书)” in the Henan area and Shandong fast tales in the Shandong region. Yuan drama also emerged out of this mix of various northern and southern forms.
However, because the ruling Mongol class feared indigenous Han uprisings, they strictly controlled cultural and popular activities. In order to prevent problems from arising out of mass gatherings, they adopted a “forbid and destroy” policy towards many popular performance traditions and limited public performances. In particular, they restricted storytelling performances in marketplaces (Xiao and Liu, 2003: 3). Despite the implementation of such draconian measures, performance traditions that had been popular during the Song Dynasty did not disappear. Washe entertainment districts continued to flourish in urban centers across China especially in the population centers in cities and towns along the Grand Canal that linked Beijing to Hangzhou and cut through western Shandong (Wu, 2001: 29-30). One performance style that flourished in these entertainment centers under Mongol rule was zaju. This was particularly the case in Shandong, where several major washe were located and a large number of famous zaju writers and performers were based.93

Dongping was the major hub of zaju activity in Shandong at the time. The city became known as one of the four zaju centers in China after canals were created to link the city with Jining and Linqing. During the Yuan, two of the most

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92 In particular, the historical tales that had long been popular continued to evolve in the form of “straight storytelling, pinghua (评话)” that has persisted into modern times.

93 Among the more than thirty styles of local drama spawned out of the intermingling of Song Dynasty shuochang traditions and Yuan Dynasty zaju dramas were Shandong liju opera, Henan zhuizi dramas, and Shandong zither tales (Huang, 1998: 202).
famous *zaju* authors in all of China, Gao Wenxiu (高文秀) and Kang Jinzhi (康进之), were active in Dongping as were several elite drama troupes (Huang, 1998 and Gao, 1999). Theatres, which had begun to appear in the Shandong area in Southern Song/Jin times, served as one venue for their performances. Rich families in the area also regularly hired performers to teach their children to sing, play musical instruments and perform *zaju* while at the same time common folk gathered in parks and village meeting places for spontaneous performances. In rural areas, these dramatic performances were participatory with audience members taking turns assuming various roles (Gao, 1999: 4). The *zaju* repertoire of the time included numerous episodic adventure tales and small *Water Margin* stories including one famous piece written by Gao Wenxiu called *The Black Tornado Twice Offers His Head, Hei Xuanfeng shuang xian tou* (黑旋风双献头), which was about the hero Li Kui (李逵), a figure who later was included in the novel *The Water Margin* as one of the one hundred and eight heroes to gather on top of Mount Liang (Gao, 1999; Wang, 2004; and Xu, 2004).95

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94 Theatres were built in Guangrao, Penglai and Changdao during the Xuanhe reign (1119-1126) of the Southern Song.

95 Xu Jinbang (2004: 26) argues that the Dongping *zaju Water Margin* storylines of the Yuan Dynasty were different from the *Water Margin* cycle associated with the *xiaoshuo* tradition. Xu argues that the *zaju Water Margin* tales revolved around individual heroes and their adventures rather than them as a collective. Instead of focusing on the warfare and battles associated with groups of bandits uprising against corrupt officials, *zaju Water Margin* stories reflected individual heroes’ everyday struggles against local tyrants trying to steal their land, money or wives. This is also the format and style of *The Tale of Wu Song*. 
According to Zhou Mi’s *Wulin jiushi*, written in the Yuan Dynasty, there were almost three hundred types of *zaju*, among which nearly half were plays involving song and dance. Another shorter, livelier form of *zaju* was the *cuan* (爨)—literally ‘stove’. 96 Also known as “dancing the stove, *ta cuan* (踏爨)” and “stove playing, *cuang nong* (爨弄)”, *cuan* were performed as opening numbers before *zaju* main events and were integrations of singing, dancing, and the narration of stories and jokes. 97 They were designed to liven up the audience and get them involved in the performance event so they were characterized by strong elements of humor with song and dance as secondary elements but some *cuan* performances did confront politics and mundane everyday events. *Cuan* performances were among the earliest Chinese dramatic forms to combine character roles, storylines, costumes, makeup and props. In each performance, a group of five performers took part with a jester located in the center as the group entered the stage. The *zaju* text *A Peasant Visits A Goulan, zhuangjia bu shi goulan, (庄家不识勾栏)* written by Du Renjie (杜仁杰) (1197-1282), an author from Changqing (present day Jinan, Shandong) who was active around the end of

96 *Cuan* dramas are an example of early ritual-related drama. *Cuan* originally were rituals to the stove god that involved dancing, music, singing, and offerings.

97 Scholars believe that *cuan* performances are what Wu Zimu referred to as “colorful tales, *yan duan* (艳段)” in his *Menglianglu*, a detailed description of life in the Southern Song capital of Linan from 1241-1274.
the Jin and beginning of the Yuan, contains a scene that describes a *cuan* performance in a Shandong *goulan* from a peasant’s perspective:

“After they asked for two hundred coins, they let us pass. We entered the door and sat on a wooden bench. Row after row, layer upon layer, circled the wooden seats. I lifted my head and squinted. It looked like a bell tower. But, squinting again and looking further down, I could see it was a whirlpool of people. I saw several women climb on the stage and sit down. And, they weren’t welcoming the gods and performing the *cuan* rituals. They continuously beat drums and shook their cymbals. A young girl turned several circles just before leading out a group of her companions. Right in the center was the jester wrapped in a small black scarf with an official’s quill stuck in the very top. His entire face was painted grey broken up by streaks of black smeared on. Do you know what he was about to do? On his entire body, from top to bottom, he wore flowered cloth that was really quite tattered. Today they performed a poem and some lyrics. They told a *fu* poem and sang some songs, without a single mistake. With lips from heaven and a mouth from this earth there was none better. I remember there was a lot of eloquent and flowery language. At the very end, he stood up straight and bowed. After the *cuan* performance ended, the *zaju* began.”

Although not a Shandong fast tale performance, this *cuan* performance shows that by the time of the Yuan Dynasty, the chanting of poetry and stories was already a regular practice as were humorous short performances intermixed with longer dramatic acts.

**Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1922) Temple Fairs and Markets**

The Ming and Qing Periods saw significant changes in urban life in western Shandong, which brought with them increased opportunities for traditional performing artists. The Grand Canal that connected northern

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98 I am grateful for the assistance Li Minru provided in interpreting this passage.
and southern China was repaired and further dredged, which dramatically increased the western Shandong region’s capacity to transport goods. As a result, the canal replaced overland and maritime transport as the main artery of the north China plain literally allowing trade to flow more freely. The development spurred by the canal radiated out to the surrounding areas, which soon came to be among the most economically advanced in all of Shandong. Among these areas, two cities stood out in particular, Linqing (临清) and Jining (济宁).99 Both situated on the banks of the Grand Canal, Linqing and Jining reached unprecedented scales of commercial activity. Both cities developed to a level near that of some the largest cities in northern China at the time becoming important confluence points for traders and peddlers.100

Linqing was an average county-level city during the Yuan Dynasty, but by the second year of the reign of the Ming Hongwu Emperor (1369), things had changed significantly. After the reopening of the Grand Canal, the city was moved eight Chinese miles to the confluence point of the canal and the Wei River. From that point on,

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99 Zhangqiu (章丘) also became a relatively large economic and trade hub in southwestern Shandong. Accompanying the economic development was also a thriving entertainment industry.

100 Shandong tongshi suiting juan. Towards the end of Ming and beginning of Qing, Linqing was ravaged by war before being rebuilt. By the Kang Xi (1662-1722) and Qian Long (1736-1796) reigns, the city was once again known as a place that attracted goods from all over the country.
commerce and trade grew at exponential rates. Visitors came to the city from all directions and the city became the central location for grain shipping to a seven-province region. According to the official record, the naturally narrow city saw commerce spill over the walls to the areas outside the city where boats and carts were lined up like scales on a fish.\textsuperscript{101} In Jining, located in the southwest corner of Shandong and situated at the opposite end of the Canal from Linqing, a similar sequence of events led to the growth of a commercial center with a wharf that handled more than eleven thousand grain boats hauling over four million stones of grain annually. A 1719 description of Jining claims that the recorded daily population including carts, boats, peddlers, and tax collectors numbered in the millions.\textsuperscript{102} The city grew so rapidly that the number of “large roadways, \textit{jiequ} (街衢)” increased from forty-five inside the city walls and forty-three outside the city walls during the Kangxi period to sixty-two inside the city walls and one hundred and forty outside the city walls in the Daoguang period (1821-1850). Thus, Jining had also become a major urban center with well-developed outlying suburban areas.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Shandong tongshi, mingqing juan}: 259.

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Shandong tongshi, mingqing juan}: 260. These numbers are more than likely used in an abstract sense meaning “a very large number” rather than an actual count in the millions.

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Shandong tongshi, mingqing juan}: 260-1.
Concurrent with the population and commercial growth experienced in these areas was both an increase in the number of temple fairs and outdoor farmers’ markets and a burgeoning entertainment industry. “Out of town associations, huiguan (会馆)” emerged in these large trading centers. Huiguan were associations of men from particular localities in China who were away from home for business. Huiguan typically had a fixed location at which people from that locality could stay for minimal cost and because they were gathering places for men became a common venue for various performances in styles associated with the area from which the members hailed. In addition to huiguan, markets, wharfs, and temple fairs continued to be regular venues of performance. Many large-scale markets formed along the intersections of the larger roads and near major wharfs in the area and, in Jining, a large temple fair became well known for attracting the best performers from across the country. During the Ming and Qing periods, the influence of Southern performance styles had also worked its way up the canal into the area (Gao, 1999: 9-10).104

104 Prior to this period, “literary establishments, shuyuan (书院)” had also been a confluence point for performers, writers and fans of traditional narrative genres. From the Tang period on, shuyuan were privately owned organizations that served as local libraries as well as places to receive education, participate in intellectual exchanges, or take in traditional performances. During the Ming and Qing, however, shuyuan developed into a locus of more formal intellectual activity. Shuyuan became part of the imperial education system and were officially operated places to train intellectuals to take official examinations. The result was that they became exclusive organizations
Historical accounts of Shandong fast tales trace the origins of the tradition to this historical period when southwest Shandong was a center of commercial and cultural activity. In addition to Shandong fast tales, this environment also spawned “willow dramas, liuzi xi (柳子戏)” that became a popular local tradition in many parts of Shandong and of the “young girl pitch, guiangqiang (姑娘腔)” tradition and the “elbow bone dramas, zhouguzi xi (肘股子戏)”, which evolved into the “flourishing pitch, maoqiang (茂腔)” drama that is now popular in the Jiaozhou area. As storytelling styles proliferated and spread across China, local variations of big drum ballad (dagu) singing became popular in most of northern China, including Shandong.

Hdrlicka (1957) and Catherine Stevens (1974 dissertation) give detailed accounts of the dagu genre. Dagu originated out of the guci tradition in the northern Chinese countryside during the end of the Ming Dynasty. It began appearing in cities during the Guangxu period (1875-1909) of the Qing Dynasty.

105 Two significant trends in Chinese performance paved the way for the emergence of Shandong fast tales. The first was the continued development and specialization of the storytelling profession including the development of widespread traditions crossing genres that revolved around groups of characters and cycles of storylines. The second major trend that affected the emergence of Shandong fast tales was the continued growth and subsequent specialization of the shuochang arts (Idema 1982, 85).
Because of its rural origins, *dagu* had a very plain and simple style with a strong rural flavor in terms of both language and content. *Dagu* was popular in central and western Shandong as well as the southern part of Hebei and the eastern part of Henan provinces. The Shandong style of *dagu* was originally called the plowshare big drum tradition because performers held two pieces of “plowshares, *lihua pian* (犁铧片)”—later metal and copper versions were crafted—in their left hand as they performed. One performer stood tapping the metal plates (also known as “half moon slivers, *yueya pian*, 月牙片”) together in accompaniment to a goat skin drum that they played with their right hand, while two or three musicians accompanied on the “three stringed banjo, *sanxian* (三弦),” “two-stringed fiddle, *erhu* (二胡)” or “capital fiddle, *jinghu* (京胡).” The lyrics followed basic seven and ten syllable lines and *dagu* was delivered in a prosimetric style with periods of spoken narration intermixed with periods of singing. In modern times, Shandong *dagu* performers began to sing (without periods of narration) “short excerpts, *xiao duan* (小段)” “extracted, *zhaichang* (摘唱)” from longer *guci* tales. The traditional *dagu* “repertoire, *qumu* (曲目)” includes lengthy tales such as the *Cases of Judge Bao, Bao Gong an* (包公案), *The Story of the Western Chamber, xixiangji* (西厢记), and *Cross Slope, shizipo*

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106 Shandong *dagu* is more commonly known as the “plum blossom big drum tradition, *lihua dagu* (梨花大鼓)”. The words for plowshares and plum blossoms are homonyms in the local dialect so the two names are interchangeable.
Longer tales recounted episodes from popular story cycles, love encounters, and heroic sagas. Shorter story hats include “Eighteen Lies, *shi ba che* (十八扯)” and “The Big Truth, *da shihua* (大实话)”. Story hats are simpler, livelier numbers intended to make people laugh and catch the interest of audiences that performers use to “open events, *kaichang* (开场)”. They function in the same manner as the *yazuowen* associated with the transformation texts of the Tang period. Much of the traditional repertoire of Shandong *dagu* overlaps that of Shandong fast tales especially in terms of story hats. Several accounts of early fast tale performances also claim that performers borrowed the idea for rhythm-keeping device, story structure, beats, and some story lines from the big drum tradition.

**The Emergence of Shandong *kuaishu* (山东快书)**

A combination of social and cultural factors has left the actual circumstances surrounding the precise origins of Shandong *kuaishu* hidden in a thick historical fog. First, oral traditions were not viewed as literature or poetry in pre-modern China and thus were not part of the high culture that warranted serious intellectual attention. The result was that very little was systematically documented about these traditions or their performances prior to the modern era. Most information about the origins of Shandong fast tales has been pieced together from a combination of random observations found buried in the memoirs
of intellectual fans of oral traditions and oral histories recounted in interviews with older-generation performers. Second, many early performers were blind, illiterate, or both, a situation which limited their ability to document their knowledge of the tradition in writing. A third factor that limited what we can now find in the historical record about Shandong fast tales was that competition among storytellers was fierce as they depended on their versions of stories and their storytelling techniques for economic livelihood. Idiomatic phrases used by performers such as “(I’d) rather work for pennies than pass on the art, ning bang shi diao qian, bu ba yi lai chuan (宁帮十吊钱，不把艺来传)” and “people of the same profession are the enemy, tonghang shi yuanjia (同行是冤家)” suggest the intensity of rivalries. Accounts of particularly sneaky performers “stealing stories, toushu (偷书)” and of the measures performers adopted in order to prevent their stories from being stolen indicate how fiercely protected story content was. In fact, story content was so valuable that master storytellers withheld much of their content from their own apprentices in fear of creating new rival performers. The sayings “teaching an apprentice will starve the master, jiao hui tudi, e si shifu (教会徒弟，饿死师父)” and “for every three steps, hold back one step, in order to avoid having the apprentice ‘hit’ the master, san bu liu yi bu, mian de tudi da shifu (三步留一步，免得徒弟打师父)” reflect this wariness to share insider knowledge about stories and storytelling techniques even with the closest of
people. The result was that storytelling apprentices were often subjected to strict loyalty tests and were forced to wait long periods of time before they could learn enough to threaten their masters.

These barriers notwithstanding researchers have been able to piece together a rough evolutionary time line for Shandong fast tales. Chinese accounts indicate that it began as a form of spontaneous storytelling among bored peasant farmers in rural areas of southwestern Shandong (around Linqing) during the Ming Dynasty. The beat, pitch and rhythm keeping devices were then picked up and refined by itinerant performers who reportedly sang (begged) for subsistence. As the genre spread and developed, rhythm-keeping devices were added and abandoned, performance techniques were refined, repertoires were expanded and representative master performers began to appear. By looking at

107 Gao (1980); Gao, Yuanjun, Liu, Xuezhi, Liu Hongbin (1982); Liu, Hongbin (2001); Zhang, Jun (1984); and Wang, Jingshou (1985 and 1994). The performing arts were prominent and influential in the popular culture of rural China prior to 1949. A range of storytelling forms with rhythmic or musical accompaniment—quyi—were performed for and by entire communities. Performances were powerful vehicles for the expression and shaping of rural life because they were recurrent community events often combined with other significant social activities such as religious or commercial fairs. Performers, particularly storytellers, served as mediators between the Chinese grand and folk traditions by presenting elements of the great tradition in easily understandable form for the common people (Judd, 1990: 272-3).

108 Many accounts of these early itinerant performers describe them as being blind or having some other handicap that limited their ability to engage in other professions. Thus, these itinerant performers were professional storytellers in the sense that they relied on their performances for subsistence but the art form had yet to become systematized and institutionalized as it did later in modern urban society with performance guilds, a master-apprentice system, performer troupes and organizations and industry standards. Performers would offer their skills in return for a small payment, a couple of meals or a place to stay. In addition to itinerant performers, there were professional, semi-professional, amateur, and seasonal performers with the number of amateurs and semi-professional performers being much larger than the number of professionals (Judd, 1990: 275).
characteristics of the genre, it is clear that Shandong *kuaishu* performers borrowed from several different traditions that were already popular in the Shandong region, in particular, *dagu* — from which the pitch, rhyme scheme, story repertoire and later the rhythm keeping device were taken. Story content was also borrowed from local dramas, and the original rhythm keeping devices, bamboo clappers, were appropriated from the “songs of the lotus flowers, *lianhualao* (莲花落)” tradition, which was a narrative performance tradition that is believed to have emerged with the spread of Buddhist-related storytelling during the Tang Dynasty (Hrdlicka and Hrdlicka, 1999).

For a period of time, what were thought to be three distinct theories of origin elicited from older-generation performers co-existed and circulated among performers, researchers, and connoisseurs. The first is called the Liu Maoji Theory. According to this account, Liu Maoji was an ambitious candidate for the

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109 Other theories have been proposed and for the most part discounted. For example, it has been argued that Shandong fast tales are a storytelling form that evolved out of Song Dynasty “straight storytelling, *pinghua* (评话)” traditions because early performers primarily confined content to heroic tales such as those found in famous novels such as *The Water Margin* and the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. However, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and related stories have never been part of the Shandong fast tales repertoire. At one point, the idea was also raised that the creator of the tradition was Zhao Laozhen. Zhao was a drum ballad performer who changed professions to Wu Laoer. However, older generation performers pointed out that this performer whose real name was Zhao Zhen was an apprentice of Fu Hanzhang and thus could not have been the founder. Finally, some people believe that Shandong fast tales evolved out of a performance tradition called Shandong *laozi* (落子) based on fact that a large portion of both repertoires overlap. They argue thus that fast tales borrowed their early repertoire from that tradition. However, Liu Hongbin (2001) has pointed out that *laozi* performers who later switched to fast tales still had to learn the fast tale repertoire, which means that the story titles might be the same but the stories themselves are different. Liu sees no direct link between *laozi* and the development of fast tales.
“martial examinations, *wuju* (武举)” during the reign of the Wan Li emperor (1573-1620) of the Ming Dynasty.\(^{110}\) Hailing from Linqing in southwestern Shandong, Liu transformed the stories about the folk hero Wu Song that were circulating in rural areas in various forms into lyrical form. He then began performing at temple fairs and outdoor farmers’ markets. Liu sang in the local dialect, performed with a “storyteller’s gown, *dagua* (褂)” draped at an angle so that one shoulder was bare, and used two pieces of “clay tile, *wapian* (瓦片)” that he tapped together to keep rhythm. Liu Maoji also had superb martial arts skills, which he added to battles scenes to liven up his performances. Using the plum blossom big drum ballad tradition framework as a model, Liu created an entirely new style of performance that eventually began to attract large audiences.

A second tale of origin revolved around Zhao Dawei, who was a down and out scholar from Jining during the Xianfeng (1851-1861) reign of the Qing Dynasty. Zhao Dawei reportedly began performing in the Jining area of southwestern Shandong in order to support himself. At first, he was only able to create a few simple “lyrical rhymes, *shunkouliu* (顺口溜)” and did not have enough money to obtain the instruments needed to learn other traditional

\(^{110}\) This story (as well as the one about Zhao Dawei that follows) was actually recounted to Zhang Jun by Ma Liyuan (马礼元), a former performer of the “northern mouth Shandong big drum ballad, *beikou shandong dagu* (北口山东大鼓)” tradition and later a promoter and researcher of *quyi*. In the 1930’s, Ma established and served as chair of the “Association for the Promotion of Folk Arts, *minjian yishu cujinhui* (民间艺术促进会)” in Jinan. He also recorded by hand Gao Yuanjun’s version of *The Tale of Wu Song*. 
performance arts. But, later, when he was at a temple fair, Zhao heard He Laofeng (何老逢), a “northern mouth Shandong big drum ballad, beikou Shandong dagu (北口山东大鼓)” performer singing in a pitch called “squeezing the reins, zuojiangqiang (卒缰腔)”.\(^{111}\) The register, pitch and melody were simple so Zhao learned it from Master He. Later, Zhao created a number of episodes about the hero Wu Song and began to perform them using the metal plowshares from the Shandong big drum ballad tradition to maintain rhythm.

The third story of origin comes from the older generation Shandong fast tale performers Zhou Tongbin (周侗宾) and Fu Yongchang (傅永昌). Their version of the story revolves around Fu Hanzhang (傅汉章), a less-than-successful scholar who practiced a form of oral art at “makeshift performance sites, liaodi (撂地)” in marketplaces in Qufu and later for sailors and passengers along the wharfs of the Grand Canal around Linqing and Jining.\(^{112}\) According to this version, in 1826, a group of thirty-six scholars, who had just failed examinations and were on the road home, were forced by inclement weather to

\(^{111}\) This register of singing is also known as the “old cow tightly squeezing the reins pitch, lao niu dazuojiang diao (老牛大卒缰调)” (Liu, 2001).

\(^{112}\) Qufu, Linqing and Jining are all cities in southwestern Shandong. According to Wei and Lu (2001: 214), liaodi can be summed up as open air performance. In detail, performers circled off an area on the ground, set up several wooden stools, and after each song or performance, performers, or their representatives would collect money from the audience. Those sitting on the stools were required to give a little. Those standing could pay if they wanted to. The performance of Lu drama, flourishing pitch drama, willow drama, and rice sprout songs I observed in Qingdao’s Haibohe Park from 1998 to 2005 unfolded exactly as Wei and Lu describe.
stop over night in Linqing. In order to deal with some of their frustrations, they created *The Tale of Wu Song* based on the *Water Margin* cycle of stories. One of the authors, Li Changqing (李长清), who was from Renping Nangangzi (荏平南岗子), Shandong, took the text they had created home with him. As the story goes, later, when Li and his nephew Fu Hanzhang were traveling in Handan, Shanxi, they ran out of money so Li taught Fu five episodes from *The Tale of Wu Song* that Fu then performed to the accompaniment of a bamboo clapper in front of Guandi Temple (关帝庙) until they had earned enough money to make the trip back to Shandong. When Li Changqing discovered how talented his nephew was at storytelling, he decided to teach him the entire story. Fu spent several years revising, developing, and perfecting the story before he set up a makeshift performance site at the Qufu Confucian Forest Fair (曲阜林门会) in 1839 where he performed for a large and very receptive audience. Thus, according to Zhou Tongbin and Fu Yongchang, Li was the creator of *The Tale of Wu Song* and Fu was the first Shandong fast tale performer.

These three stories of origin competed for a number of years, each claiming to be the authentic description of the “founding father, *kaishan bizu* (开
of Shandong fast tales. However, in recent years, researchers have come to the conclusion that none of these early performers were the founding father of Shandong fast tales. It is now believed that the individuals in these origin tales were representative performers from various stages in the historical evolution of the tradition; each of them having their own strengths and each making their unique contributions to the development of the genre (Liu, 2001). Liu Maoji added the storyteller’s gown and a martial arts framework. Zhao Dawei who had a strong literary and musical background raised the quality of language and added the metal plowshares as rhythm keeping device. Fu improved the level of performance with his unique storytelling abilities. Then, at the 1994 annual meeting of the Shandong Fast Tale Research Association held in Linqing, Cheng Zhanji (程占吉) delivered a paper titled “Linqing and Shandong Fast Tales, linqing yu Shandong kuaishu (临清与山东快书)” in which he linked the origins of “shuo Wu Laoer (telling about Second Brother Wu)” tradition, from which fast tales developed, to still another early performer from Linqing (Liu, 2001: 8). Based on interviews with Zuo Qinghai (左清海), Liu Zhenqing (刘振清), and Chen Lijiang (陈立江), all older-generation performers in Linqing, Cheng argued that the first performer of Wu Laoer was Jian Xinghua (简兴华). Jian was a contemporary of Fu Hanzhang who hailed from Qinghe County. Jian was originally a drum ballad singer known by other performers as “Seventh Grandpa
Jian, *Jian qiye* (简七爷). According to this version of the story, Jian was a drinker who eventually damaged his throat by drinking to excess so he had to switch from singing drum ballads to singing the rhythmically chanted *shulaibao* (rhyming for treasures) style. At first, Jian kept rhythm with clay roofing tiles and “sorghum stalks, *shujiegan* (秫秸秆)”, clacking and tapping simultaneously. Jian later created a rhymed version of the *Water Margin* Wu Song story, which he began performing at temple fairs and markets. Another drum ballad performer named Li Zhanchun (李占春) saw Jian’s performance, liked it, and stole the technique for his own performances. Li used a bamboo clapper in one hand and a piece of wood with metal teeth that he pulled back and forth in the other as musical accompaniment. When Li Changqing and Fu Hanzhang ran out of money in Handan, they had to borrow a bamboo clapper for Fu to use in his performance. According to the group of performers interviewed by Cheng, they borrowed one from Li Zhanchun, which means that Jian Xinghua’s *Wu Laoer* performances predate even Fu Hanzhang and *The Story of Wu Song* was not written by the group of scholars that included Li Changqing.

**Development into the Modern Era**

Regardless of how these various tales of origin are viewed, Shandong fast tales emerged out of a deeply rich tradition of performance. In each of the stories of origin, early performance venues were connected with activities at rural
temples and marketplaces as well as at urban markets and banquets in the homes of rich, elite families. Other early performances were associated with festivals, fairs, and holiday events. Still others occurred during eating and drinking events at inns and teahouses. By the end of the Qing and early years of the Republic (1920s), performers had migrated into urban areas where they performed in the streets, at makeshift performance sites in squares and market places, in out of town associations, at “theatres, xilou (戏楼)”, at “taverns, jiulou (酒楼) and jiusi, (酒肆)”, at “teahouses, chashe (茶社)”, and at “storytelling halls, shuchang (书场)”. In Qingdao, an eastern port city that was emerging as a new urban center spurred by German and Japanese influence, the performance scene developed rapidly after the turn of the century. A central gathering point for performers in the city was called Woodcutter’s Alley, *pichaiyuan* (劈柴院).\textsuperscript{115} Because the alley was connected to the most active section of Qingdao’s commercial district, Zhongshan Road, the buildings and houses were ideally located close to a wide variety of stores and entertainment houses that had been established in the area. In the 1940’s, there were over two hundred stores and shops in the alley and it was always crowded with people. Within the alley, there were six small-scale

\textsuperscript{115}The area was once a small village called Baodao Village (Abalone Island) that had an outdoor market on the street on every 5th and 10th of the month. Just to the west of the market area was a large-scale firewood market called woodcutter’s market. After Qingdao city began to develop, the firewood market went out of business and the name was changed to Jiangning Road but the name stuck with the locals.
performance houses where famous local performers took the stages. Lesser-known and out-of-town performers set up makeshift performance sites outdoors in the alley itself. After the renowned xiangsheng performer Ma Sanli\textsuperscript{116} came to the alley from Beijing in 1932, he was quoted (in a return trip in July 1984) as describing the scene in Woodcutter’s Alley as follows:

“Small vendors and peddlers were all about, storytellers, drum song singers, magicians, doers of various tricks, peddlers of fake medicine, those of all sorts and types were there.” (Wei and Lu, 2001: 214)

By 1933, there were more than thirty-six storytelling houses in Qingdao including those at Hebei Road and Jiangning Road that held regular performances of all types of performance styles including Shandong fast tales. However, once the Japanese invaded Qingdao, they enforced a strict code of “public security” that included closing the city gates after dark in a number of cities in Shandong. They also limited the number of people who could be out at night in urban centers like Qingdao. Because of this, theatres and storytelling houses ran on hard times.

To exacerbate things, the Japanese shut down most storytelling sites following their second occupation of Qingdao in 1938. In this atmosphere, there was a decline in market and fair related activity as well as in public performances, a fact that suggests the critical role of these contexts played in sustaining the traditions.

\textsuperscript{116} While living in Qingdao, Ma Sanli and his partner Liu Baorui were looking for a place to perform but could find no room because the number of performers already active in the alley was so large. A storyteller named Li Laifu felt sorry for them so he made an arrangement to allow the two to perform in his location once he finished each day. Ma was thus able to sustain a living. However, he was not satisfied with the fact that during the best time slots, Li was performing and during the bad time slots, there was no audience. Ma also quickly realized that the liaodi performers were easy targets for local bullies.
Despite these difficult social conditions the period from the 1930s through the 1950s is seen as the golden era of Shandong fast tales. The rapid rise in popularity and influence that Shandong fast tales underwent stemmed in part from the larger historical trend in which traditional performance styles were integrated into the Communist Party propaganda apparatus and partly because of the general lack of alternative entertainment options. Hung (1985 and 1993) and Judd (1990) have shown that although storytelling and the performing arts were prominent and influential in the popular culture of rural China prior to the Communist period, beginning as early as the 1920s, intellectuals and Communist Party officials saw folk traditions as an effective means of reaching the illiterate masses and spreading their ideas to all nooks and crannies of the vast countryside.

In the Chinese literary tradition, the texts generated by orally performed *quyi* performances were not considered to be “literature, *wenxue* (文学)” and thus were not part of the realm of legitimate intellectual activity. As a result they were not systematically collected or recorded until after the May 4th Movement (late 1910s and early 1920s) was well under way. During the May 4th Movement, there developed a considerable interest in folklore collection and anthropological studies among Chinese researchers. Special societies were set up and journals,

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117 Exceptions include the Song dynasty scholar Guo Mao who systematically compiled collections of “children’s songs/folk songs, *yaoyan* (谣言)” and the Ming Dynasty scholar Li Yu who systematically looked at “dramas, *xiqu* (戏曲)” in his “*Xianqing Ouji* (闲情偶寄)”. Li examined one type of performance tradition at one historical time in one particular location. These studies were textually-based and generally focused on things from a sweeping historical perspective. Also, by the Ming dynasty, a number of elite scholars had begun collecting folk songs.
reports, and collectanea were published (Hung, 1985). However, the chaos of war lord dominated China during the 1920s and the two decades of destruction and instability brought on by Word War II and the subsequent Chinese civil war hindered progress in terms of either collection or analysis of many traditional performance genres. Despite this social turmoil, the scholar generally credited with legitimizing the study of oral traditions as literature in China is Zheng Zhenduo (1898-1958). In 1938, Zheng published his *History of Chinese Vernacular Literature, zhongguo su wenxue shi* (中国俗文学史), a highly influential work that established a new field of study made up of everything outside of the traditional molds of poetry and prose. For Zheng (1938: 1), “vernacular literature, *su wenxue* (俗文学)” included traditionally ignored genres such as “novels, *xiaoshuo* (小说)”, “dramas, *xiqu* (戏曲)”, Tang dynasty “transformation texts, *bianwen* (变文)”, “chantefables, *tanci* (弹词)”, folk songs, and Han dynasty ballads.\(^\text{118}\) Zheng (1938: 7) delineated five types of *su wenxue*:


2) “novels, *xiaoshuo* (小说)” specifically those in the form that resembled “storyteller chapbooks, *huaben* (话本)”;

3) “dramas, *xiqu* (戏曲);

\(^{118}\) Zheng (1959:4) stated that “*su wenxue*” had five basic characteristics. For him, *su wenxue* was: 1) of the masses, 2) of anonymous creation, 3) transmitted orally, 4) fresh and “crude, *cubi* (粗鄙)”, and 5) full of imagination and dared to import new things.
4) “prosimetric literature, *jiangchang wenxue* (讲唱文学)”, which Zheng specifically describes as characterized by the alternation of singing and prose\(^{119}\); and

5) “gamelike essays, *youxi wenzhang* (游戏文章)”. Zheng made a great contribution by shifting scholarly attention in the direction of these five types of traditions—that is, shifting attention from Dunhuang vernacular texts to a more national scope. However, because he used literature as his defining criteria, his work was textually-bound and, thus, limited in actual scope. Zheng’s analysis and categorical schemes were both formulated based on written versions of oral traditions. More importantly for the purposes here, although Zheng wrote about some *quyi* genres, he was concerned with vernacular literature rather than quyi as an organizing category (there is overlap but are also significant differences between the two). Thus, *quyi* genres that did not have written traditions associated with them, such as Shandong *kuaishu*, were not included in Zheng’s rubric.

Another exception to the general trend of Chinese intellectuals overlooking oral traditions was Chen Ruheng, who published “A Brief History of Storytelling, *shuoshu xiao shi* (说书小史)” in 1936. Chen’s title suggests he was primarily focused on storytelling genres (as opposed to all *quyi* genres) but, in actuality, he was only concerned with three forms of storytelling distinguished by

\(^{119}\) His examples include “transformation texts, *bianwen* (变文)”, “all the keys and modes, *zhugongdiao* (诸宫调)”, “precious scrolls, *baojuan* (宝卷)”, chantefables, *tanci* (弹词)”, and “drum ballads, *guci* (鼓词)".

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delivery mode. He used “telling (or spoken) tales, *shuoshu* (说书)”; “singing ballads, *changqu* (唱曲)”; and those forms that were characterized by “using both telling and singing, *jiangchangjianyong* (讲唱兼用)” as his framework for analyzing Chinese storytelling. Chen explicitly stated that such a rubric is sufficient to portray all types of storytelling in China and that “chantefables, *pingtan* (评弹)” and “straight storytelling, *pingshu* (评书)” (popular in the Pearl Delta region), were representative of all Chinese storytelling. Due to the fact that Chen’s framework did not account for either minority or northern Chinese oral genres, which do not neatly fit into his three categories, his work should be viewed carefully and as regional in scope rather than representative of all of China (an impossible task). In particular, the “rhyme chanted, *ynsong* (韵诵)” types of *quyi* popular in northern China such as *shulaibao, kuaishu, zidishu* and *kuaibanshu* are unaccounted for in Chen’s work.120 This is perhaps because Chen did not consider these forms to be “storytelling, *shuoshu* (说书)” despite the fact that the performers saw themselves as telling stories. In addition to Zheng and Chen, Zhao Jingshen (1902-1985) played an instrumental role in shifting scholarly study to oral-related genres. He is credited with expanding Zheng’s notion of *su wenxue* to include *quyi* genres. Heavily influenced by British

120 In Chen’s history of storytelling, Shandong *kuaishu* was not mentioned despite the fact that a number of performers had already achieved stage success in areas outside of Shandong by the time of his writing including Qi Yongli and Gao Yuanjun who gained early fame performing in Shanghai and Nanjing.
anthropology (he studied in Europe and translated many key anthropological works into Chinese), Zhao published a number of works covering a limited range of quyi genres during the 1930s. Most contemporary scholars cite these works when discussing either storytelling or quyi.

The Political Appropriation of Performance Traditions

Although many intellectuals active in the 1930s saw traditional performers as “intellectually backward, transmitters of baneful thoughts” and their repertoire as being “tainted with decadent, superstitious, absurd, and harmful traditional ideas that promoted feudal views and ways”, storytellers were the “dominant shapers of local values” and the popularity and mobility of storytelling made it an ideal tool for influencing the beliefs of the common people (Hung, 1993: 405). Thus, the Chinese Communist Party consciously adopted a strategy of sending intellectuals into rural areas to organize performers and direct the development of folk traditions in ways that supported their aims and goals. The CCP began by initiating a movement to go down to the countryside, which was a call to learn from the folk, to imitate peasants’ speech, actions, and clothing, in order to get close to and organize them (Hung, 1993). While still based in the Jiangxi Soviet in the early 1930s, Communist political workers were tasked with collecting local folk songs so that they could be adapted to Communist values (Hung, 1993). During the Yanan era (beginning in 1935 and continuing into the 1940s), the movement was expanded and intensified as folk songs and stories were linked to
nationalism and resistance against the Japanese invaders. During his Talks at the Yanan Conference on Literature and Arts, Mao called for a turn towards native genres and a drive to do more than just collect them. Mao wanted to put folk culture in the service of the socialist revolution. After much debate, Mao’s Talks became Party policy and spurred a major movement that included the creation of writer’s associations under the control and management of the Party. The cultural workers associated with these organizations were tasked with collecting scripts from local dramas, folk songs, paintings, poems, and folk stories so that they could be brought in line with Mao thought. The basic idea was to either reform traditional storytelling and performance traditions or create completely new ones.

According to Hung (1993), in the case of storytelling, the Communist Party approach was three pronged. First, they made recordings of and promoted the works of reformed artists. Second, they mobilized intellectuals to collaborate with traditional storytellers. Third, they completely revised the traditional repertoire. The goal was to encourage storytellers to write new stories but the process became a collaborative effort among cultural workers, writers and performers. Oral and literary forms commingled as every story went through a lengthy period of preparation and revision. Hung provides an example of how the process worked with the case of the blind storyteller, Han Qixiang, and his Communist writer/collaborator, Lin Shan. Hung first shows how a traditional folk artist was transformed into a communist storyteller. Then he argues that this was
not an isolated case but was part of a broader Party-sponsored storytelling campaign in which progressive itinerant actors and storytellers were recruited to serve as role models, levied with continuous accolades and praise, and actively promoted. This model system produced dual effects. First, it helped to sustain the careers of particular performers who were willing to reform. It also gave life to select performers and genres that were conducive to the Party needs by providing them with publicity and much needed resources such as income, notoriety and fame. Hung points out that public celebrations in which government officials participated were used to increase the prestige of the folk artists they wished to promote. The Party also officially organized and sponsored performance competitions and training classes in which celebrated storytellers were converted into teachers who were permitted to collect training fees. At the same time, traditional performances were discouraged or prevented if they were deemed inappropriate or harmful by the Party. Thus, certain performers and traditions were promoted at the expense of others. Moreover, the drive to spread folk arts among the masses also led to a major simplification of art forms and scripts as well as a dramatic loss of expertise as the best performers were not necessarily progressive in thinking.

This drive to link the arts to the needs of the Party was not limited to the realm of storytelling or to any particular area of China. Rather, it was a broad shift in literature and the arts in general. In 1942, the Party initiated a large-scale “rice
sprout song, *yangge* (秧歌)” movement among the masses that marked the beginning of a “marriage” between politics and performing arts (Hung, 1993: 402) and served as a training exercise for government cultural workers. During the implementation of the movement, they learned how best to make the folk arts work for the Party. Based on this experience, they extended the model to local cultural bureaus where performing arts clubs and amateur drama troupes were organized according to local conditions and traditions. In Shandong, Communist cultural workers collaborated with performers from all types of *quyi* and storytelling traditions (including Shandong fast tales) as well as all forms of local drama, musical drama, and poetry. New works reflecting the struggles between Communist troops and Japanese invaders, Communist military life, socialist production, political education, and everyday life in China’s new society appeared in every form. This collaboration led to the systematic creation of a new body of texts that replaced traditional repertoires (Judd, 1990: 289). Old tales were refashioned and new ones were produced that reflected new life, society and values. Traditional fantastic and miraculous tales were replaced with realistic tales of contemporary life. Old heroes such as emperors and generals became peasants and laborers. Superstitions were removed, the Party and socialism were praised, labor heroes were hailed, the status of women was elevated, and the new life of workers, peasants and soldiers was idealized. Stories were simplified and familiar tropes—good vs. evil, rich vs. poor, peasant vs. oppressive aristocracy—became
the norm. The Communist propaganda drive of the 1930s and 40s provided much
needed institutional support for many performance traditions. The CCP and local
governments organized opportunities to perform and helped to spread the
performing arts among most sectors of society. Training (or retraining for many
traditional performers) classes for storytellers and performers were organized that
spread performance genres on a never before seen scale. In addition to spreading
the arts to the countryside, cultural workers were active in the military and
factories where they created amateur soldier and worker drama troupes and
performing arts groups.

The establishment of the People’s Republic brought about a social stability
that allowed for regular performances to be organized once again. It also brought
about a complete overhaul of the social and political environment in which
traditional performers lived and worked. A traditional guild system had provided
protection against outsider access to trade secrets that included performance
techniques and story content; performers themselves fiercely guarded their
primary source of livelihood. The traditions of secrecy from within the ranks of
performers and disdain from the literati on the outside created an environment in
which written texts based on traditional oral performances were not the norm and
little written record of traditional genres existed. In the relatively stable social
environment created by the founding of the People’s Republic, new Party policy
tasked cultural workers with collecting, recording, analyzing and reforming
traditional arts so that they could be brought under Party control and used to advance Party ideals (Judd, 1983 and 1990; Hung, 1993, 1994 and 1996). As a result, written works on various *quyi* genres began to appear in larger numbers during the 1950’s.\textsuperscript{121}

During the 1950s and 60s, extensive oral history projects were launched throughout China that were designed to collect, record and compile textual versions of regional performance traditions (Wilkinson, 2000). Once compiled, these collections were often edited, rearranged, or “cleaned up” ideologically to be published “for the masses”. One periodical that was established as part of this process to promote the spread of *quyi* by making it more accessible was “Tell Tell, Sing Sing, shuoshuo changchang (说说唱唱)”, a monthly edited and published by the Literature and Arts of the Masses Creative Research Association (大众文艺创作研究会编辑). Edited by Li Bozhao (李伯钊) and Zhao Shuli (赵树理), *Shuoshuo changchang* published sixty three issues from 1950 to 1955. Their goal was to spread the telling and singing literature and arts among the masses. More than two hundred *quyi* works (written versions based on *quyi* performances or following generic rules of production associated with those traditions) appeared in the journal’s pages along with other forms of poetry of the masses that was

\textsuperscript{121} Early foreign—particularly European—research also dates to this period. The works of Hrdlickova detail many *quyi* activities and northern Chinese performers of the era including drum ballad singers and straight storytellers.
designed to express the new face and style of the new age socialism. The works that appeared in this journal were not theoretical in nature and the distinguishing characteristic is that they revolved around new stories rather than traditional repertoires, which came to be viewed as feudal and, thus, bad for society.122

In terms of theory, Shen Pengnian (沈彭年) et al (1959) led a group of researchers who determined that there were three major and ten minor categories of quyi. Their three major categories were “telling stories, shuo gushi (说故事)”, “telling jokes, shuo xiaohua (说笑话)” and “singing stories, chang gushi (唱故事).” However, they distinguished two major subcategories of their story singing subtype: “rhyme chanting, yunsong (韵诵)” and “drum songs, guqu (鼓曲).”123 Based on the genres included in each category, it is apparent that Shen et al classified all genres with a clear singing element more generally as “drum songs, guqu (鼓曲)” whether the delivery mode was singing alone or an alternating of

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122 Examples of new (ideologically correct and reflecting class consciousness) Shandong kuaihu works that appeared in Shuoshuo changchang include “Recon Soldier, zhenchabing (侦察兵)” and a radically revised version of “East Mountain Temple, dongyuemiao (东岳庙)”, the opening episode of The Tale of Wu Song.

123 Because of this distinction, some contemporary researchers consider their classification system a five subtype scheme. Adding to the confusion of describing the various theoretical approaches to quyi, this early group of researchers (and many researchers to follow) described their rubric as a four subtype scheme but they delineated five basic categories: 1) telling stories, 2) singing ballads, 3) chanting stories, 4) telling and singing genres, and 5) telling jokes. In this scheme, the drum songs subgroup includes seven subcategories: “big drum ballads, dagu (大鼓)”, “fish drum ballads, yugu (渔鼓)”, “chantefables, tanci (弹词)”, “zither songs, qinshu (琴书)”, “paiziqu (牌子曲)”, “miscellaneous arias, zaqu (杂曲)”, and “strolling and singing, zouchang (走唱)” (Shen et al, 1959; Geng, 1987; Wu, 2002).
singing and speaking. By using joke telling as a subgroup, they also mixed criteria by which they categorized various genres and overlooked the fact that joke telling occurs in nearly every quyi genre.\footnote{Shen et al’s labels hint at a regional bias that plagues many researchers of oral traditions including those dealing with Chinese traditions. Guqu, a northern prosimetric tradition, was used as a label of a primary category, while tanci, a southern prosimetric tradition, was included as a subtype of guqu. This was the exact opposite of the practices of southern China-based researchers such as Chen Ruheng and Zheng Zhenduo, who tended to include dagu as a subtype of tanci. Similar regional and genre-based agendas plague many of the existing works on both quyi and storytelling. In addition to Chen and Zheng, many Beijing-based scholars equate xiangsheng with quyi, over projecting the characteristics of that one genre onto all quyi genres and ignoring sung or chanted types. Researchers from other areas conflate sister genres kuaihua, zuibanhua, and kuaihuabianhua, while Hou Baolin et al (1980) even go so far as to elevate the genre Hou performed to a category by itself in their rubric: 1) xiangsheng, 2) kuaihan kuaihua, 3) guqu, 4) pingshu.} Nonetheless, this classification scheme was adopted by many who followed including the influential folklorist Zhong Jingwen, who later used these divisions in his “Outline of Folk Literature, \textit{minjian wenxue gailun} (民间文学概论)” (Geng, 1987: 11).

In the realm of Shandong kuaishu, Gao Yuanjun became the model performer for the tradition. Gao and Yang Lide had begun working to “clean up” the “unhealthy elements” in the traditional repertoire in 1940. Beginning first as a process of eliminating “foul language, hunkou (荤口)” and pornographic scenes in order to expand audience size to include women, reform was later extended to old customs, superstitions, and feudal ideas as the CCP propaganda machine pushed on through the early years after the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949. By the 1950s, the movement shifted from reform to the creation of a new repertoire of stories that resulted in a wave of “new tales, \textit{xin shu} (新书)” about
life in the People’s Republic after Communist liberation. This wave of tales included *Little Blackie Number Two Gets Married*, *xiao erhei jiehun* (小二黑结婚) and *Production Creates Jobs*, *shengchan jiuye* (生产就业) (Liu, 2001: 19).

Liberation—the Communist Party term for the creation of the People’s Republic—can also be seen as a watershed in both Shandong fast tales and Gao Yuanjun’s career (Wang, 1985). Prior to this period, the art form was a regional phenomenon and Gao, although successful, was a relatively unknown itinerant performer. After liberation, the influence of fast tales spread rapidly and Gao became synonymous with the art form. Gao was able to accomplish this after becoming a performer for the “People’s Liberation Army General Political Department *Quyi Corps*, jiefangjun zong zhengzhibu quyidui (解放军总政治部曲艺队)”. He utilized the institutional and political power afforded by the Political Department to develop a corps of fast tale performers (Gao is said to have trained more than two hundred successful performers) in an organized and systematic way. Gao’s approach revolutionized the transmission of fast tales as an art form transforming the traditional one-on-one master-apprentice system into a class format in which he simultaneously trained large numbers of soldiers. The model for the classes involved first selecting some stories to be used as teaching materials. Written versions of the stories were then given to the students so that they could prepare prior to class by memorizing the verbal script. During class
each student took a turn performing his or her rendition of the target story for the class. After each performance, experienced performers who were serving as instructors and Gao, the master performer, discussed the performance with the group, pointing out strengths, weaknesses, and ways to improve. At the end of the session, Gao demonstrated what the performance should look like and explained key points. It was through a series of these government sponsored “study classes, *xuexi ban* (学习班)” that Gao was able to transform Shandong fast tales from a local tradition into a national phenomenon.\(^{125}\) When Gao Yuanjun went to the front lines in Korea to perform for the troops of China’s Volunteer Army, he began performing tales about modern military heroes to inspire the troops and a series of new tales based on Korean War contexts appeared including *A Truck Full of Sorghum, yi che gaoliangmi (一车高粱米)*, *Three Chickens, san zhi ji (三只鸡)*, *Recon Soldier, zhenchabing (侦察兵)*, *Capturing Prisoners, zhua fulu (抓俘虏)*, and *Recon Hero Han Qifa, zhencha yingxiong Han Qifa (侦察英雄韩起发)* (Liu, 2001: 20). As a result of this close association with the military, many of the new tales appeared first in *People’s Liberation Army Literature and Arts, jiefangjun wenyi (解放军文艺)* and new tale themes reflected every aspect of military life from the hardships experienced on the front lines during the War to

\(^{125}\) According to Liu Hongbin (2001: 20), who assisted Gao with the training classes, initially three training classes were conducted in Liaoning between the end of 1952 and the end of 1953. Each session lasted three to four months and one hundred twenty-three students were in each class.
Resist America and Aid Korea to episodes about craftily outwitting dimwitted and cowardly American soldiers.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Shandong fast tale performances were disrupted and the local performance troupes were disbanded. Performances were limited to politically correct versions, which eliminated a large portion of the traditional repertoire, which was seen to revolve around the feudal character Wu Song. All other traditional tales were banned after being categorized as part of the “four olds, *si jiu* (四旧)” (Gao, 2000: 31). The fast tale tradition was only able to survive by adapting to the historical and political climate of the Cultural Revolution, which included integrating performance techniques and story repertoire from the eight “model plays, *yangbanxi* (样板戏)” that were created as the official Party standard for all art forms (Liu, 2001: 22).

During this period, the revolutionary tales *Li Yuhe Attends a Banquet Before Fighting for Dove Mountain, Li Yuhe fu yan dou Jiushan* (李玉和赴宴斗鸠山)— based on a scene in the model play *The Story of the Red Lantern, hong deng ji* (红灯记), *Skillfully Beheading Luan Ping, zhi kan Luan Ping* (智斩栾平), *Duan Cannon Tower, duan pao lou* (端炮楼), and *Causing a Ruckus in the City, nao xiancheng* (闹县城) were written and performed while the modern Beijing opera play *Doing Battle on the Plains, pingyuan zuo zhan* (平原作战) was adapted in full to the fast tale format. In addition overhauling the traditional repertoire,
individual performers had to adapt to the strict political climate or see their careers end. The influential performer Yang Lide was labeled a rightist and sent to labor in the countryside and Gao Yuanjun suffered a great deal because he was unable to utilize his creativity in performance. Gao described the ten year period as slow suicide (Gao, 2000).

As the political climate calmed towards the end of the Cultural Revolution, fast tales began to make a come back. A number of new, still politically correct stories appeared that received significant radio air time including Urgent Telephone Call, jinji dianhua (紧急电话), Paying for the Tea Pot, pei chahu (赔茶壶), The Beat Patrolman, jietou shaobing (街头哨兵), and Giving Up a Seat, rang zuo (让座) (Liu, 2001: 22). These tales reflect ideal social values as well as the characteristics and actions of model socialist citizens. Once the Gang of Four was removed from power, a complete renaissance occurred in the arts in China. Many traditions that had been banned during the Cultural Revolution spontaneously sprang back up among the common people with Shandong fast tales among them. The Reform and Opening Up policies initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1979 then allowed for the reestablishment of the local performance troupes and quyi groups. Fast tale performances once again began occurring in social banquets among friends, on stage in local theatres, in teahouses, as part of large-scale cultural performances organized by local and national governments,
and as part of small-scale “linking friendship parties, lianyihui (联谊会)” organized in schools, companies and factories. Fast tales were widely performed in the military and at farmers’ markets while stage performances were televised and well-known performers could be regularly heard on the radio. General trends that accompanied this resurgence of fast tales were the shortening of stage performances and an emphasis on humor in new tales that reflected modern life.

Post-Cultural Revolution Cultural Renaissance

A second wave of research on quyi was also spawned by this early 1980s cultural renaissance. The turmoil of political struggle in the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) had limited publications about quyi (and every other traditional art form) for nearly a decade but the artistic relaxation that accompanied the new policies brought about opportunities to publish works about quyi. Following the pattern established by the Communist Party cultural workers from the 1930s to 1950s, many of these early reform era works were collaborations between researchers and illiterate older-generation performers. Some attempted to piece together historical accounts of the origins of traditions that had been neglected in the literary tradition while others were descriptive “how to” books.

In the case of Shandong kuaishu, Zhang Jun, the foremost authority on Shandong performance traditions, began working with older-generation storytellers in the 1950s. He started with drum ballad singers and then went on to
Shandong *kuaishu* and “zither tale *qinshu* (山东琴书)” performers.\(^{126}\) Later, two camps of researchers evolved. One was based in Beijing where Gao Yuanjun collaborated with his students Liu Hongbin and Liu Xuezhi. The other was centered in Shandong and was driven by Zhang Jun, who worked with various performers in the Jinan area. The first theoretical works about Shandong *kuaishu* were produced by Zhang Jun (1981 and 1984), Wang Jingshou (1985), and Gao Yuanjun (1959—with Liu Hongbin, 1960, 1980 and 1982). More recently, Sun Zhenye has taken advantage of his position as Director of the Shandong *Kuaishu* Research Association to publish numerous articles on the performance of Shandong *kuaishu* in *Quyi Magazine* and on the Shandong Provincial Association of *Quyi* Artists website.\(^{127}\) Performers and researchers have collaborated to produce a small number of collections of Shandong *kuaishu* stories, accounts of the tradition’s origins, descriptions of major schools of performers and performance styles, and guide books for performing Shandong *kuaishu*.\(^{128}\)

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\(^{126}\) Sun Yukui also worked with performers Song Zongke, Gao Yuanjun and Liu Tongwu in 1955 to compile a patchwork “complete” version of *The Tale of Wu Song* based on the performances of different segments of the story by each.

\(^{127}\) The URL for the association site is: [www.sdqy.gov.cn](http://www.sdqy.gov.cn)

\(^{128}\) English language research about Shandong *kuaishu* is quite limited. Kate Stevens conducted research on “drum ballads, *dagu* (大鼓)” with performers in Taiwan in the late 1970s and then in Beijing in the early 1980s. While doing this research, she also conducted interviews with Shandong *kuaishu* performers Gao Yuanjun, Liu Sichang and Li Hongji. She also videotaped a number of their Shandong *kuaishu* performances in both Beijing and Shandong. The tapes are on kept at The Ohio State University. According to Stevens, at the time, her access to performances was limited and controlled by the authorities. Her primary interests were recording the stories she heard so that she could translate them into English for her own performances as well as learning
Although this documentation process has been a widespread collective effort within the ranks of Shandong kuaishu performers and researchers, four individuals stand out for the major roles they have played: Gao Yuanjun (高元钧), Zhang Jun (张军), Liu Hongbin (刘洪滨), and Wang Jingshou (王景寿).

With more than two hundred apprentices, Gao (1916-1993) was the most widely known and influential performer, educator, and promoter of Shandong kuaishu. Contemporary accounts credit Gao with drawing on sister performance traditions as well as dramatic traditions to completely overhaul an already existing traditional style of performance. He is also credited with removing dirty language and obscene scenes from traditional kuaishu stories, which combined with the changes in techniques helped to elevate the artistic quality of the tradition. This from the performers the manner in which they had learned the art form when they were young. (Stevens, personal communication)

129 Born in Ningling County, Henan Province, Gao’s real name was Gao Jinshan (高金山). He came from a poor rural family and at seven years old was forced to leave home with his blind older brother to search for a means of subsistence. He began learning various types of performances and became an itinerant performer to support himself and his brother. When he was eleven, they went to Nanjing where he performed at makeshift performance sites along the wharf where he saw Wu Laoer performer Qi Yongli (戚永立) performing. On several occasions, Gao attempted to become Qi’s apprentice but Qi would not accept him so he began learning to perform some Wu Laoer tales on his own. Once he began performing, Guo Yuanshun, another Wu Laoer performer and apprentice of Qi Yongli, took Gao under his wing, began giving him pointers, and eventually became his master. Many years later, Gao was officially accepted as an apprentice by Qi Yongli. After his apprenticeship, Gao began performing in the Nanjing area. He went on to become the single most well-known Shandong kuaishu performer. At various times, Gao also acted as Deputy Chairman of the China Quyi Research Association (中国曲艺研究会副主席), Deputy Chairman of the China Quyi Workers’ Association (中国曲艺工作者协会副主席) and the Deputy Chairman of the China Quyi Performers’ Association (中国曲艺家协会副主席). Several different sources carry this same account of Gao’s life. Parts are included in Zhang (1981), Liu (2001), and Wang (1985). A number of brief articles about Gao also include tidbits about his life including Liu et al (1980), Gu (1982), Xing Ren (1982), Xiao Feng (1992), and Yang (1993).
reform is said to have led to kuaishu’s move from the streets to the stage. In the 1930s, Gao rose to prominence in the Qingdao area by performing at the Green Lotus Pavilion (青莲阁), one of the city’s most prominent entertainment establishments at the time. During the 1940s, Gao collaborated with Liu Baorui performing “comedic dialogues, xiangsheng (相声)” in Xuzhou (western Shandong). During these experiences, Gao borrowed heavily from xiangsheng integrating punch lines and humor techniques into his Shandong kuaishu repertoire, so much so that Gao’s performances were described as “comical fast tales, huaji kuaishu (滑稽快书)” by some observers. He later performed at a number of highly publicized events in Shanghai where intellectuals influential in literature circles such as Guo Moruo, Tian Han, and Hong Shen took note of him.

After World War II, Gao began expanding the traditional repertoire by performing stories about modern life. Once the War to Resist American and Aid Korea (Korean War) broke out, Gao went with the initial troupe of performers sent to entertain the troops on the front lines where he performed tales about war and military life such as A Sorghum and Rice Truck, yi che gaoliang mi (一车高粱米), Three Chickens, san zhi ji (三只鸡), Capturing Prisoners, zhua fulu (抓捕俘虏), Recon Solder, zhencha bing (侦察兵), and The Division Commander Assists the Cook, shizhang bang chu (师长帮厨). From the 1950s on, Gao exerted much of his energy in the area of promoting Shandong kuaishu as well as to developing
a cadre of young performers. To accomplish the latter goal, he conducted a series of study classes in the military and through local and national government culture bureaus. It was through this process that Shandong kuaishu was transformed from a local form of entertainment to a national phenomenon. Because of these efforts, Gao has been credited with being the “father of a generation, yi dai zongshi (一代宗师)” and his name is now synonymous with Shandong kuaishu.130 Beginning in the 1960s, with the assistance of some of his literate apprentices, Gao Yuanjun, published a series of works about Shandong kuaishu, including Fast Tale, Fast Clapper Tale Research, kuaishu, kuaiban yanjiu (快书、快板研究), Experience from Performing Shandong Kuaishu (表演山东快书的经验), A Superficial Discussion of the Art of Shandong Kuaishu (山东快书艺术浅论), Gao Yuanjun Shandong Kuaishu Selections (高元钧山东快书选), and The Tale of Wu Song (武松传).131 Gao’s published writings on Shandong kuaishu are primarily geared towards compiling collections of stories that can be learned and performed as well

130 Gao was not the founder of the genre. Gao’s teachers of the “Telling Second Brother Wu, shuo wu lao er (说武老二)” tradition, Guo Yuanshu and Qi Yongli, were already established performers when he began performing. Little is known about Guo and Qi or the number of other Wu Laoer performers known to be active near the end of Qing Dynasty including Fu Hanzhang, Zhao Zhen, Wu Hongjun, Lu Tongwen, Lu Tongwu, Wei Yuhe, and Yang Xinghua (Liu, 2001). Qi was reportedly one of the most famous and influential of these performers.

131 Gao also published A Leisurely Discussion of Shandong Kuaishu, Shandong kuaishu mantan (山东快书漫谈) and Me and Shandong Kuaishu, wo he Shandong kuaishu (我和山东快书).
as towards providing easy to understand descriptions of performance techniques that can be used as learning materials by beginning performers.

Zhang Jun, on the other hand, is the foremost research authority on Shandong oral traditions. Based in Jinan, the capital city of Shandong Province and home to a number of well-known traditional performers, he worked tirelessly with older-generation performers to document a wide variety of performance traditions. Zhang re-established Shandong *kuaishu* as a topic of research in the 1980’s by publishing a book-length account of the tradition in 1981.132 A small paperback written in collaboration with and based on interviews with Gao Yuanjun, *The Creation and Performance of Shandong Kuaishu, Shandong kuaishu chuangzuo yu yanchang* (山东快书的创作与演唱) details the historical background of the tradition, fundamental structures used by Gao School performers in writing *kuaishu* stories, and many of their basic performance techniques. *Creation and Performance* is cited in all later works that deal with Shandong *kuaishu*. In 1982, Zhang also published the first book-length account of Shandong zither tales, *Shandong Zither Tale Research, Shandong qinshu yanjiu*

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132 In Chinese culture, hierarchy and age dictate interaction patterns. Thus, where a performer fits generationally is quite important. In contemporary society, terms such as “older generation, *lao qianbei* (老前辈)” and “older generation artisan, *lao yiren* (老艺人)” are used to indicate experience and show respect when talking about performers. This was not always the case. Judd (1990) notes that in the 1930s, Party intellectuals invented and used the terms “artists from the masses, *qunzhong yishujia* (群众艺术家)” and “artisan from among the common folk, *minjian yiren* (民间艺人)” to describe folk performers. Such usage was often derogatory suggesting someone uncultured or uneducated in the high culture canon. Prior to the invention of these terms, older generation performers were called “old artisans, *jiu yiren* (旧艺人)”.

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(山东琴书研究), and followed that in 1983 by spearheading the writing of each of the introductions to Shandong dramatic and oral performance traditions for the Comprehensive Encyclopedia of China: Drama and Performing Arts, Zhongguo da baike quanshu xiqu – quyi (中国大百科全书: 戏曲曲艺). Zhang’s account of Shandong kuaishu written for the Comprehensive Encyclopedia is the basic description of Shandong kuaishu cited in numerous other works about storytelling and performance traditions in China. From 1983 to 1989, Zhang led a group of researchers in the collection, recording and analysis of twenty-two forms of quyi found in the Shandong region. That extensive fieldwork project resulted in the publication of the Collection of Chinese Narrative and Performance Music Shandong Edition (中国曲艺音乐集成), the Records of Chinese Quyi, Shandong Volume, Zhongguo quyi zhi, Shandong juan (中国曲艺志，山东卷), and New Evidence on the Origins of Shandong kuaishu, Shandong kuaishu yuanliu xin zheng (山东快书源流新证). In addition to collaborating with Gao Yuanjun, Zhang also worked with the performer Yang Lide (杨立德) to write How to

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133Yang Lide (1923-1994) is the representative performer of the Yang School performers, one of the two major styles of Shandong kuaishu. The other is the Gao School named after Gao Yuanjun. Yang Lide was born in Jinan to a family of Shandong kuaishu performers. Both his father, Yang Fengshan (杨凤山), and his father’s brother, Yang Fengqi (杨风岐), were third generation disciples of the performer Fu Hanzhang (傅汉章) and were well-known Shandong kuaishu performers in Jinan. Yang began performing “comedic dialogues, xiangsheng (相声)” with his uncle as well as Shandong kuaishu at the age of four. From 1929 to 1935, he studied under the performers Yu Chuanbin (于传宾) and Qiu Yongchun (邱永春). He then roamed the province as an itinerant performer for a number of years before returning to Jinan. During the early 1940s, he learned from performers Wu Pingjiang (吴平江), Zhou Tongbin (周同宾), Fu Yongchang (傅永
Perform Shandong kuaishu, zenyang biaoyan Shandong kuaishu (如何表演山东快书), which is modeled on Creation and Performance but focuses on the performance techniques and characteristics of Yang School performers. More recently, in 1997 Zhang and Guo Xuedong published A History of Shandong Quyi, Shandong quyishi (山东曲艺史), which is a historical account of the emergence and evolution of quyi genres found in the Shandong region.134

Wang Jingshou, a professor at Beijing University who conducted extensive research on a number of Chinese storytelling traditions, also regularly conducted fieldwork and interviews with Shandong kuaishu performers during the 1980s.135 In 1985, he published Gao Yuanjun and His Shandong kuaishu, Gao Yuanjun he tade Shandong kuaishu (高元钧和他的山东快书). Using Zhang

昌) and Gao Yuanjun (高元钧) (making him one of the few people to be trained in both Gao and Yang School techniques) while participating in the movement to clean up the traditional repertoire. He also actively performed at locations around Shandong Province including regular appearances on two of Qingdao’s local television stations. Through the 1950s, Yang was variously a member of the “Jiaodong Literary Association Performing Arts Team, jiaodong wenxie quyi dui (胶东文协曲艺队),” the “Shandong Song Dance and Drama Troupe, Shandong gewuju tuan (山东歌舞剧团),” entertained the troops during the Korean War, headed the “Jinan Municipal Performing Arts Team, Jinanshi quyidui (济南市曲艺队),” and made records of his Shandong kuaishu performances in Shanghai. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), Yang was labeled a rightist because of his association with traditional arts and was forced to stop performing while he labored as a worker. Despite this political trouble, Yang supposedly secretly taught several students during this period. After the Reform and Opening Up, Yang was rehabilitated and was allowed to become the “Deputy Chairman of the Shandong Association of Performing Artists, Shandong quyijia xiehui fu zhuxi (山东曲艺家协会副主席).”

134 Guo has also published several recent works on Shandong quyi and Shandong kuaishu based on his and Zhang Jun’s work.

135 Wang also collaborated with Kate Stevens arranging many her fieldwork projects.
Jun’s work as a foundation, Wang expanded research on Shandong kuaishu to produce a comprehensive analysis of the characteristics of Shandong kuaishu stories as well as performance techniques. Wang also published An Outline of Shandong kuaishu, Shandong kuaishu gailun (山东快书概论) in collaboration with the performer Liu Sichang in 1989.

Aside from the work of Zhang Jun and Wang Jingshou, the only scholarly work specifically focused on Shandong kuaishu published in Chinese is that of one of Gao Yuanjun’s apprentices, Liu Hongbin (刘洪滨).136 Liu began as a performer but played an integral role in helping his master conduct Shandong kuaishu training classes while in the military. Liu’s early writings were collaborations with his master Gao Yuanjun, while many of the works attributed to Gao Yuanjun were actually joint efforts with Liu Hongbin and others due to Gao’s limited formal education. In the late 1990s, Liu was central in editing and publishing the collections of Shandong kuaishu stories used as standards by contemporary performers: Selections of Shandong kuaishu Short Humorous Stories, Shandong kuaishu youmo xiaoduan xuan (山东快书幽默小段选) (with Liu Xuezhi, 1995), The Great Complete Collection of China’s Traditional Shandong kuaishu, zhongguo chuantong Shandong kuaishu daquan (中国传统山

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136 Sun Zhenye (孙振业), the current Chairman of the Shandong kuaishu Research Association and another apprentice of Gao Yuanjun, has published a series of articles in Quyi Magazine (曲艺杂志) that are primarily focused on how to perform Shandong kuaishu. Most of what appears in this series of articles can be found in the earlier work of Gao, Zhang, Liu and Wang.
“东快书大全” (with Zhao Lianjia, 1997), and *Essential Selections of China’s Contemporary Shandong kuaishu, zhongguo dangdai Shandong kuaishu xuancui* (中国当代山东快书选萃) (with Zhao Lianjia, 1999). These three compilations are used as learning materials for most new performers and serve as scripts for many contemporary performances. In addition to these story collections, Liu compiled a collection of his own stories called *Mandarin Plates Tied to My Soul, hun xi yuanyangban* (魂系鸳鸯版) and, in 2001, wrote *An Outline of Shandong kuaishu Performance, Shandong kuaishu biaoyan gailun* (山东快书表演概论).

Based on Liu’s many years assisting Gao Yuanjun training Shandong *kuaishu* performers, *An Outline of Shandong kuaishu Performance* is the most recent scholarly work on Shandong *kuaishu*. Liu combines the findings of all of the earlier works on Shandong *kuaishu* in one text to create a comprehensive historical introduction to the tradition. Liu’s primary goal in the book, however, is to provide people interested in learning how to perform Shandong *kuaishu* with a resource to guide their training. Thus, after tracing the evolution of the tradition, Liu lays out the characteristics of performance including detailed explanations of how to use the rhythm keeping device associated with the genre, basic and advanced beat patterns, characteristics of the language, registers of speech, uses of rate of delivery, how to create character voices, how to create scenery and
characters in the minds of audience members, movements, how performers should practice, and proper etiquette for performers.

The works of Gao, Zhang, Wang and Liu provide a fundamental overview of the Shandong *kuai*shu tradition that serves as the entry point for many fans and performers. These works collectively tell us that the term Shandong *kuai*shu is a relatively recent convention that was invented and employed by Gao Yuanjun. In collaboration with cultural workers in Shanghai, Gao selected this “official” name for the genre in 1949 to replace names related to story content such as “Singing the Big Guy, *chang da gezi* (唱大个子)” and “Telling Second Brother Wu, *shuo wu lao er* (说武老二)” that had been in colloquial use previously but that did not explicitly indicate anything about the nature or style of performance (Zhang Jun, 1980; Wang, 1994; Liu Hongbin, 2001). These early labels emerged from the fact that most traditional stories revolved around the cultural hero Wu Song.\(^{137}\) The Wu Song stories were part of a cycle of stories loosely connected to the novels *The Water Margin* and *Plum in the Golden Vase, Jinpingmei* (金瓶梅). These Wu Song stories—also known as Water Margin stories—floated around all parts of

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\(^{137}\) Many Shandong locals believe that Wu Song was a real person. The supposed location where he killed the tiger, Sun View Ridge, *Jingyanggang* (景阳冈), has been turned into a tourist site. A 1999 China Central Television documentary “Wu Song Returns Home, *Wu Song hui guxiang* (武松回故乡)” traced Wu Song’s family to a village in Henan where all village members’ have the surname Wu. Villagers interviewed claimed to have traced family lineage records back to the actual person Wu Song.
China from at least the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) onward.\textsuperscript{138} Fictional tales based loosely on historical figures and events from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) period, the Water Margin stories appeared in local dramas, prose, local storytelling and narrative performance traditions. The most famous of these stories, \textit{Wu Song Fights the Tiger}, \textit{Wu Song da hu} (武松打虎), is seen as the representative Shandong \textit{kuaisu} story that all performers must learn before they can meet the standard of true performer.\textsuperscript{139} The story is set in Song Dynasty (960-1279) China and recounts the legendary exploits of the hero Wu Song, who, after drinking eighteen bowls of wine, encounters a tiger that has been terrorizing the

\textsuperscript{138} Wang Xuetai (2004: 186) has shown that there were many “small ‘Water Margin’, \textit{xiao ‘shuihu’} (小“水浒”)” stories that appeared during the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1206-1368) Dynasties. Wang argues that these story cycles were part of a long-standing tradition and were passed around among “itinerant peasants, \textit{youmin} (游民)” and “vagrants, \textit{liulanghan} (流浪汉)”, who performed in rural areas for a number of years before they were able to move into urban areas when restrictions on peasant movement were lifted after the fall of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). These “small Water Margin” stories that typically revolved around the exploits of a single hero served as the basis for the larger novel \textit{The Water Margin}, which revolves around the adventures of a group of 108 such heroes. Ge Liangyan (2001) makes a similar argument for the marginal origins of the novel and the existence of a complex of Water Margin stories much earlier than the Ming Dynasty when the novel first appeared in print. Both authors cite Luo Ye’s \textit{Records of the Discussions of a Drunkard}, \textit{zuiweng tanlu} (醉翁谈录), which contains references to eight different types of oral stories that were circulating during the Song period. Examples of these shorter hero-based oral tales include “Blue-faced Beast, \textit{qing mian shou} (青面兽)”, a “broadsword, \textit{podao} (朴刀)” tale, which is assumed to be about the hero Yang Zhi; “Flowery Monk, \textit{hua heshang} (花和尚)”, a “staff and cudgel, \textit{ganbang} (杆棒)” tale about the hero Li Kui; and “Sojourner Wu, \textit{wu xing zhe} (武行者)”, a tale about the wandering hero Wu Song. All of these heroes appear in or at least are mentioned in Shandong \textit{kuaisu} stories. The \textit{Tale of Wu Song} covers the exploits of Wu Song and \textit{Lu Da Disposes of the Tyrant} is a famous episode in which Lu Zhishen rips Tiger Zheng, a vile meat shop owner, in half because he had killed a young woman’s parents in order to force her to marry him.

\textsuperscript{139} All professional performers who are employed in government operated performance troupes undergo annual certification testing that involves at least the performance of \textit{Wu Song Fights the Tiger}.  

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people of western Shandong, fights it barehanded and manages to kill it. Early Shandong *kuai*shu performers specialized in tales draw from the larger *Water Margin* cycle of stories, in particular, fifteen episodes that together were called *Tale of Wu Song*. This subcycle of tales, as told by contemporary Shandong *kuai*shu performers, explicitly acknowledges a relationship to the larger *Water Margin* cycle of stories. Gao Yuanjun’s (1997) version of *East Mountain Temple*, the first of the fifteen longer episodes that make up *The Tale of Wu Song*, begins by referencing the one hundred and eight heroes of the *Water Margin* tradition.141

The feudal emperor sits in Bianliang,
While everywhere under heaven armed soldiers are rolling and the people meet with disaster.
Those corrupt officials and dirty mandarins carrying out tyranny,
Evil tyrants and local tyrants really outrageous.
They’ve oppressed the common folk ‘til they can’t even breathe,
It’s as if a thousand pound rock sits right on top of the common people.
Officials have forced the people to revolt, it’s no a lie,
Those heroes and real men each seizing territories.
In the south up rose Fang La,
In the north Tian Hu declared himself king.

140 Depending on the source, authorship of *The Water Margin* is attributed to Shi Naian, Luo Guanzhong or both. The earliest known versions of the text date to the late Ming Dynasty. In the novel, only ten chapters are devoted to Wu Song’s adventures as they are related to activities with the band of heroes associated with the marshes around Mt. Liang in Western Shandong. *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, on the other hand, also known as *Jinpingmei*, was written during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) by an unknown author. The earliest extant version is dated 1617. This novel opens with an account of Wu Song’s fight with the tiger before going on to episodes about Wu Song’s sister-in-law’s adulterous affair with the official Ximen Qing, their plot to murder Wu Song’s older brother, and Wu Song’s eventual revenge by killing his sister-in-law and Ximen Qing. The bulk of the novel, however, deals with the affairs of the Ximen family and does not center on Wu Song. *The Tale of Wu Song* is written in a style that overlaps but does not duplicate the content of either *The Water Margin* or *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, which suggests that it was created after both.

141 This is my translation of an excerpt from Gao Yuanjun’s (1997) version of *East Mountain Temple*, dong yue miao (东岳庙).
At that Huaiqing Manor rose a Great Blade Young Wang Qing,
Chao Gai is king at the top of Mount Liang.
On top of Mount Liang there’s one hundred and eight heroes,
Each one even stronger than the last.
At the head is the Tower Holding King of Heaven called Chao Gai,
And then there’s one Great King called Song Jiang.
Panther Head Lin Chong’s weaponry skills are really good,
Big blade Guan Sheng’s martial skills are fine.
The Beautiful Bearded Prince is called Zhu Tong,
And then there’s a Little Tyrant Zhou Tong.
There’s the White Streak in the Waves called Zhang Shun,
Li Kui’s martial skills are even tougher.
The Mount Liang stronghold even has a few female heroes,
Each one even stronger than the last.
There’s the Female Tiger Auntie Gu,
And Ten Feet of Green, Third Aunt Hu.
You know the one that ran the dirty black shop, right?
Yaksi Sun Erniang.
I have the mind to list them one after another,
But if I said them all, I’m afraid all of you would be annoyed silly.
For the time being I won’t tell about these heroes,
I’m just going to tell you about the real man Second Brother Wu.

(Gao, 1997)

This opening to The Tale of Wu Song shows that, at the very least,
performers see benefit to claiming affiliation with The Water Margin tradition.

Where the Shandong kuaishu tradition varies from others that revolve around The Water Margin cycle is that when the Shandong kuaishu tradition began
performers focused their tales solely on the exploits of the hero Wu Song. The Shandong kuaishu tradition developed and expanded tales about the adventures of Wu Song before and after his meeting with the band of one hundred and eight heroes found in The Water Margin, creating numerous tales some of which were
later textualized in *The Tale of Wu Song*, a fifteen-episode, six hundred-page written version based on the 1950s oral performances of Gao Yuanjun and Lu Tongwu.

In 1949, when Gao Yuanjun was faced with labeling his style of performance for a recording of “Lu Da Disposes of the Tyrant (鲁达除霸)”, which was a tale not about the hero Wu Song, he, along with the help of Shanghai cultural workers, chose Shandong *kuai*shu (山东快书) to reflect the genre’s local Shandong nature, the format of performance, and to indicate its rhythmic nature.\(^{142}\) Shandong refers both to the location of origin—Shandong Province—and to the linguistic dialect in which performances are delivered. Gao chose the Chinese character “fast, kuai (快)” to indicate that delivery in performance is characterized by rapid speech and language that flows smoothly to a steady rhythm without pauses or breaks in the metrical seven or ten syllable lines. The final character, “*shu* (书)”, literally means “story” or “tale”.\(^{143}\) Thus, the new

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142 Wang Jingshou (1994: 205) pointed out that prior to Gao’s emergence, the genre had no fixed name having been referred to prior to that time by numerous names related to story content.

143 In the early Chinese written record, the character “*hua* (话)” (now meaning ‘speech’ or ‘talk’) was used to refer to stories or tales. As time passed and storytelling evolved into a profession, the character “*shu* (书)”, now meaning ‘book’, replaced *hua* and was used to refer to long, orally-narrated tales and professional tellers of tales came to be known as “*shuo shu ren* (说书人)”, literally ‘tell story person’. The earliest use of *hua* to refer to story appears in the “*Broad Records of Heavenly Peace, taiping guangji* (太平广记)” written during the Sui Dynasty (581-618). *Broad Records* contains a passage about a famous storyteller, named Hou Bai (侯白), who was so talented at “telling stories, *shuohua* (说话)” that he regaled the official Yang Su (杨素) and his son with his tales for days at a sitting. Yang Su used the phrase “tell a good story, *shuo yige hao hua*
name Gao selected for the tradition can be rendered literally as “Shandong fast tales”.

By the mid-eighties, the length and number of fast tale performances both had begun to shrink. Audiences became increasingly older and smaller as young people began to be drawn by the lure of mainstream popular “culture from Hong Kong and Taiwan, gangtai wenhua (港台文化)”. Shrinking audiences led to calls for reform within the ranks of Shandong fast tale performers. Attempts were made to standardize the language in order to facilitate access by a broader spectrum of people, elements were borrowed from more widely watched comedy performance styles such as xiangsheng, and efforts were made to create new performance contexts that appeal to younger audiences. One performer, Liu Sichang, created a modern version of Wu Song Fights the Tiger in which Wu Song was armed with machine guns and cannons but also ran into one hundred tigers. To make his movements more realistic, Liu is reported to have gone to the zoo to study tiger movements for hours on end. Liu also eliminated much of the Shandong dialect from his performances, in its place using a language very close to standard Mandarin. However, such reform attempts were generally unsuccessful in

(说一个好话)” to describe Hou Bai’s storytelling. This is an often cited passage in works on Chinese storytelling. See among others Liu (1987: 87); Li and Yu (1993: 58); and Bordhal (1999 and 2002). The use of the term shuoshuren to refer to an organized class of professional storytellers does not appear until much later in the written record.
creating new audiences and the number of performers and performances continued in a steady decline.

The deepening reform of the early 1990s then brought with it an influx of new forms of entertainment that caused audiences for all traditional entertainment forms to shrink even further. Chinese audiences began to gravitate towards the sex, romance, excitement, action and special effects of Western movies and television. By the late 1990’s, when I first came in contact with Shandong fast tales, traditional performing arts had been in decline for an extended period. Seats at opera performances and traditional concerts at Qingdao’s Great Hall of the People were frequently empty or were filled by soldiers and students who were required to attend the performances. Many young people I talked to could not fathom why anyone would be interested in something as old and boring as Shandong fast tales. They described performances to me as slow, boring, hard to understand, and out of touch with the times.
CHAPTER 2

EXPERIENCING FAST TALES AS A SPECTATOR

Initial Contact

Before I attempted to talk with any people from Shandong about fast tales, I was already aware that the tradition existed because I had taken classes on Chinese oral traditions with Mark Bender while completing my MA degree at Ohio State. I had read extensively about the tradition and thought that I had learned a great deal about it, but, as an outside observer, I had yet to experience fast tales on any level other than through contact with the short 1983 translation of “Burning the Candle at Both Ends, liang tou mang (两头忙)” that Kate Stevens (1983) published in Chinoperl Papers. Professor Bender encouraged me to understand Shandong fast tales as a living tradition and emphasized the critical nature of observing live performances as a participant observer in reaching a deeper level of understanding beyond what could be found in the written record. The live context ties together and brings to life the various elements that combine to form a performance. Not only are time, place, script and roles rendered specific in performance but communication between performer and audience takes place and new meanings are generated. That is, the event both generates and frames speech and behaviors for the participants so all meaning is dependent upon how a
particular performance event unfolds. Depending on the participants involved, the occasion at hand, the relationships among the participants, and other factors, performers employ various expressive and rhetorical strategies that may drastically alter the shape and meaning of a particular story. Moreover, meaning in Shandong fast tales are ultimately dependent upon the multisensory experience afforded only in live performance contexts. Examining Shandong fast tales through a performance approach—experiencing performances first-hand and engaging in discourse with locals (i.e., talking to people) about those performances would allow me to move to a deeper level of understanding by providing me with a different type of knowledge than the textually-based understanding that I had gained through reading. I would be able to make observations about fast tales based on having seen someone else’s performances in action, and, by discussing those performances with the participants, I would be able to gain a better grasp on the manner in which Chinese people understand and talk about fast tales, and, ultimately, what that tells us about fast tales and Shandong culture more generally.

144 In performance theory, each verbal art is understood as a unique way of speaking. Bauman (1977) views a performance as an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed with a special interpretive framework and put on display for an audience (Bauman, 1992: 44). For Bauman, a performance sets up a transformation of the referential in which a distinct interpretive frame informs the participants how to understand the speech and actions associated with the event within which it occurs. In addition, performers assume some level of responsibility to their audience for a display of communicative competence and, when successful, performances can enhance the experience in some way for the participants.
Such a performance-oriented approach to ethnographic fieldwork sets its sights on the contexts within which performance events occur rather than solely on the texts generated by performance. It seeks to distinguish various elements and aspects of performance, particularly form and meaning, by situating texts in their broader social and cultural contexts (Bauman, 1977). The method is to explore the dialectic between individual performances and their wider social, cultural and political contexts by studying the “emergence of texts in contexts” rather than the textual products of a culture (Bauman and Briggs, 1990). This method of conducting ethnographic fieldwork seeks to get at what Clifford Geertz (1973) has described as “thick description”, or the interpretation of emic structures of meaning reached through the process of “unpacking performed meaning” (1983: 29). For Geertz (1973: 6), “doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and, so on.” As I would slowly come to realize, ethnographic fieldwork, however, is a much more complex process than this description suggests on the surface. Not only did it require me to ask the right questions about Shandong fast tales in order to obtain useful explanations of performances as well as to elicit information and opinions about the tradition that would shed light on how it works from multiple perspectives—from the varying angles that performers, fans, and observers view them (Bauman, 1977), but, it necessitated that I become skilled at the intricate, multilayered and highly
personal processes involved in the management of human relationships. In order to learn about Shandong fast tales, I had to find, meet, build rapport, and foster relationships with key people in the know about the tradition, who could then serve as guides and mentors to the inner workings of the tradition. This, in turn, forced me to adjust my view of what it was I was actually doing in Shandong. I came to understand that, first and foremost, I was becoming a participant in the local community, and one byproduct of that participation would be my fieldwork projects. That is, before I could learn anything of significance about Shandong fast tales, I had to become a participant in the local cultural community; a

145 My suggestion here is that what is most critical in the early stages of fieldwork, the period in which the foundation for ethnographic study is usually established, is less the subject of study than relationships with people in the local community. Fieldworkers must engage in developing the human relationships they will depend upon throughout their time in the community during these stages. Because of its relation to the overall success of a fieldwork project, there should be more reporting on this stage of early relationship building as well as how human relationships shift—how they are maintained, damaged, and repaired—as time passes. Many ethnographic accounts of fieldwork experiences begin with the moment in which relationships shift to a new level, when a significant breakthrough is made, a style that skips the most critical aspect of any ethnographic fieldwork project: how the fieldworker achieved the conditions that allowed the change to occur. Reaching the point at which they are incorporated or accepted by a group requires intensive personal and emotional involvement on the part of the fieldworker for extended periods of time. Moreover, the process of incorporation is more than simply obtaining contextual knowledge about another culture that will aid in the interviewing or analysis stages. In addition to being a process of acculturation, it is also a period of socialization, or establishing identities, creating working relationships, and laying the foundations for bonds of mutual trust and affinity that will influence the direction and shape of the entire fieldwork project. Approaching ethnographic fieldwork as a mode of interpersonal interaction does not imply an abandonment of traditional folkloric or anthropological materials. Rather, it simply prioritizes the importance of fostering relationships through which rich materials can ultimately be obtained. Before any significant observations can be made, “deep play” knowledge and contexts can be accessed, or “thick description” can occur, the fieldworker must have already integrated himself into the community of study to the extent that he has well-established and functioning interpersonal relationships (Geertz, 1973). In essence, he has to exist as a recognized member of the group (even if he exists as a member with special ‘outsider’ status). Often talked about aspects of fieldwork such as access to materials, entry to settings, gatekeepers, patrons, key informants and contacts, and accessing knowledge deemed important to the community are handled through the interpersonal mode.
recognizable someone, who could be trusted, and whom locals liked and desired to be with.

Becoming someone in the local culture of Qingdao forced me to recalibrate my understandings of nearly everything about life but most importantly I had to adapt to local conceptions of trust, loyalty and friendship. Although I did not know it at the time, I was tested on various things such as whether or not I would talk negatively about people when they were not present, whether or not I would safeguard personal information (such as under-the-table deals, secret affairs, plans to change work units, and the like), and whether I would remember shared bonding experiences. Rather than viewing the people I was interacting with as informants, I had to earnestly see them as people and friends before they were willing to help me. And most importantly, I had to conduct friendship relationships as people in Qingdao do, which meant that I had to show them that I was truly thinking of them when we were not together. This involved calling them nearly every day, not just when I wanted or needed something for my fieldwork. Calling for a daily chat about nothing helped build the interpersonal bonds between us and showed that I actually cared about the people I was dealing with as people. Friendship also included getting small, personalized gifts for people when I took trips out of town--things that people actually needed worked, while useless trinkets and souvenirs without some personal connection did not. Friendship also required asking if others needed me
to do things or get things for them when I was out of town. At times, I took entire suitcases of clothes and food from China to the US and from the US to China for friends and friends of friends, which put me in the difficult situation of having to limit my own belongings. At other times, I also fronted my own money to buy cameras, computers and video cameras for people who wanted me to get them from some out of town location—requesting parties always paid me in full upon delivery. Friends in Qingdao also help one another without waiting for one another to ask for it. The result was that I had to intimately know and monitor every aspect of my friends’ lives in order be able to offer assistance when and where I could. This Shandong style of friendship both fosters deep emotional bonds among friends and necessitates significant emotional investment on the part of all parties. Significant for ethnographers is the fact that the more I invested of my self emotionally (not monetarily) over the course of my fieldwork process, the more people wanted to see me succeed so they went out of their way to help and teach me. As a result, while conducting fieldwork on Shandong fast tales, this human relationship work accounted for the vast majority of my time.

Aside from learning that managing friendships according to the local praxis was a must, I came to understand that a performance approach required me to either get myself invited to the contexts in which Shandong fast tale performances would take place or to create similar events that the performers would want to take part in. In contemporary Shandong, fast tale performances
most frequently occur as components of larger cultural events such as government-sponsored holiday variety shows, local festivals, and banquets. Variety shows and local festivals were easy to negotiate; I simply had to track local cultural events in the newspapers and on television to know when and where such events were taking place. Banquets were much more difficult. Banquets for social and celebratory occasions such as weddings, birthdays, and other important events typically involve insider groups and operate by invitation. Thus, I had to become an insider to specific groups or in some way get invited as a special guest in order to participate, both of which I managed to accomplish at various times. Moreover, once at these events, I had to have the ability to participate because many of these celebratory events are participatory in Shandong culture, meaning that everyone present is expected to partake of and contribute to the atmosphere in some way. This meant that if I was able to manage to get myself invited to such events, I could not attend in the role of passive observer. Rather, I also needed to develop the ability to appropriately participate in and contribute to the events. Since interaction at many Shandong social events is conducted through a range of performance modes including hosting, guesting, eating, drinking, verbal modes (such as complimenting, verbal jousting, joke telling, singing, and storytelling), or any of the traditional shuochang, dramatic, or quyi forms discussed in Chapter 1, I had to exert significant time and energy in to learning to interact in the modes I was most comfortable and adept at before beginning my primary research.
Thus, I learned how good guests and hosts conduct themselves during social interaction, became adept at local drinking customs, imitated the ways locals told stories of their experiences, and regularly practiced jokes and word games that I encountered. I also learned the words to a wide variety of Chinese songs that regularly appear on karaoke song lists, including those of both the popular and revolutionary types, so that I would not be the only participant not singing when the occasion presented itself. While developing this social repertoire, I accepted every opportunity to attend banquets conducted by local friends and acquaintances, regularly organized banquets myself, and made it known that I enjoyed sharing in the festive atmosphere of such events. The result was that I became a regular “escort, peike (陪客)—or someone invited to help entertain the guests—at banquets conducted by local businessmen and government officials.

After succeeding in getting myself regularly invited to banquets and becoming proficient enough at modes of interaction to contribute to the events, I began to ask friends in the area if they had heard of Shandong fast tales. When I first posed the question “What is Shandong fast tales?” in the course of casual talk during a banquet among friends, the response was…

“dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang,
dang di ge, dang di ge, dang di ge dang.
Idle talk and aimless chatter, I’ll tell you no more,
I’m here to tell the story of the hero Second Brother Wu.

146 In Eat Shandong (2005), I detail these modes of banquet participation and interpersonal interaction.
Thus began my firsthand exposure to the Shandong fast tales tradition. No one present at the banquet was a performer but the mere mention of the tradition evoked repeated renditions of what I later learned was a formulaic opening to fast tales that revolve around the cultural hero Wu Song. And, although everyone present was a native of Shandong Province, no one was able to tell me anything more than this opening and that Shandong fast tales were a form of traditional storytelling. As the night progressed, everyone present made at least one attempt to imitate this performance opener using their best rendition of the register of speech used in Shandong fast tales. Every time it was performed, those present immediately burst into laughter.

As time passed and I asked more people around Shandong and in other areas of China, the process repeated itself time and again. Every time I asked if someone had heard of Shandong fast tales, their response included either an enthusiastic dang di ge dang or their best rendition of xian yan sui yu bu duo jiang. Regardless of whether they knew anything else about the genre, Chinese people from Beijing to Shanghai and from Lanzhou to Shandong all knew these opening
lines. I even began to notice the exchange performed on television shows that involved guests from Shandong.147 Hosts would ask, “Where are you from, ni shi na (r) de ren, (你是哪儿的人)?” People from Shandong would typically proudly respond with “I’m from Shandong, wo lai zi Shandong (我来自山东)” or “I’m a Shandong person, wo shi Shandong ren (我是山东人).” Many times they also added references to Shandong’s long tradition of social etiquette calling their home province “the kingdom of etiquette, li yi zhi bang (礼仪之邦)” and/or mention its most famous natives, Confucius and Mencius claiming connections to “the home of Confucius and Mencius, kong meng zhi xiang (孔孟之乡)”. Hosts frequently followed these claims of Shandong identity with, “Oh, dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang… (哦，当嘀咯当，当嘀咯当...)” and then everyone would laugh.148

As I integrated more thoroughly into local Shandong culture, I also began noticing the use of the dialect, beat, and rhythm associated with fast tales during the course of everyday social interactions. Chinese people from other areas of

147 Later, on a January 26, 2005 episode of a China Central Television show set up in the format of the Top Chef reality show, hosts used dang di ge dang as a transition into and out of commercials because one of the contestants was from Shandong.

148 The most prominent example I have seen occurred much later during the 2005 Spring Festival Gala, a nationally televised holiday special that regularly sets ratings standards for China Central Television. Hosts from each of China’s twenty-two provinces, five autonomous regions and four provincial level municipalities took turns putting the best of their local cultures on display. The host from Shandong began her introduction with “Dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang...” and delivered her entire introduction in the register, beat and rhythm of Shandong fast tales.
China used them to evoke images of Shandong people and culture while locals from Shandong called upon them to make identity claims. On numerous occasions, I witnessed similar exchanges enacted during social banquets as unfamiliar parties from different regions of China introduced themselves to one another.\(^\text{149}\) The recurring nature of these enactments suggested to me that the Shandong fast tale tradition is interlinked with shared cultural memories of Shandong, its culture, and its people. What I had discovered was that not only is this a formulaic opening to traditional Shandong fast tale performances, but it is also a cultural artifact\(^\text{150}\) regularly utilized to trigger constellations of mental images and shared meanings among Chinese when discussing Shandong.\(^\text{151}\) The manner in which

\(^{149}\) Banquets are eating and drinking occasions that are the single most important social activity among professionals in Shandong Province. They are the social forum in which relationships are established, maintained and repaired. See Shepherd (2005) for detailed descriptions of such events.

\(^{150}\) Drawing on work conducted by Russian psychologists A. R. Luria and L.S. Vygotsky, Michael Cole (1996) has given us the ideas of cultural artifacts and culture as a pool of artifacts. According to Cole, rather than being material objects, cultural artifacts are simultaneously ideal and conceptual. For Cole, “They are ideal in that their material form has been shaped by their participation in the interactions of which they were previously a part and which they mediate in the present.” (117) He argues that artifacts are the tools we develop to mediate our social worlds and that both human thought and human action are culturally mediated. He equates all means of cultural behavior to artifacts and, following Vygotsky, suggests that they are social in their essence.

\(^{151}\) When these sounds are produced in performance contexts, audiences know that a performance is about to begin. The opening sounds of the copper plates coupled with the formulaic opening phrase function in much the same way as English story openers such as “Once upon a time…”, “Long, long ago…”, and “There once was a…” operate. They initiate a shared interpretive frame (Bauman, 1977) and cue listeners’ shared memories of and about Shandong. These sounds also trigger the processes associated with what John Miles Foley (1995) describes as traditional referentiality. Deeply infused with the flavor and meanings associated with the local culture of Shandong Province, dang di ge dang is an aural example of what Foley (2002) calls “word power” situating the speaker, his speech and his actions within a shared cultural tradition.
these cultural artifacts were used also indicated to me that the Shandong fast tale tradition is seen by Chinese people as representative of the people and culture of the Shandong region. This prominent cultural status afforded to an oral tradition intensified my interest in and desire to learn about how this tradition that seemingly everyone knew of without knowing much about how it actually worked.

With all I had gleaned from books and articles, I still knew very little about Shandong fast tales when I traveled to Qingdao as Internship Coordinator for the US/China Links program for the fourth time in 2000. Although I had spent more than two and a half years living in Shandong from 1995 to 1999, I had only actually seen one impromptu fast tale performance in person. When leading a group of interns on a tour of the coastal city of Weihai in August 1999, our local tour guide, Wu Tianran (吴天然), happened to also be a Shandong fast tale performer. During our dinner banquet on the last evening of the trip, Wu gave our group a short impromptu performance at my request. Because he had not expected a group of foreigners to be interested in or able understand a fast tale performance, Wu only performed a very short piece, remained in his seat, and did not have his rhythm keeping Mandarin plates with him. Instead, he used a Chinese soup spoon to tap the beat on his plate as he told his story. This fast tale performance experience left me with more problems than I had anticipated. Although I was familiar with a large portion of the traditional repertoire and had been exposed to the local dialect for an extended period of time while living in the area, the rate of
speech and artistic register made most of Wu’s story incomprehensible to me.\footnote{Later in 2004 while serving as an apprentice storyteller to Wu Yanguo, I learned that the extent to which Shandong dialect is used during performances as well as which Shandong dialect is used as the standard when performing depends on both performer preference and audience composition. Gao Yuanjun, who was from Henan and spent much of his time performing in areas outside of Shandong (Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing and Tianjin among other places) for audiences less familiar with Shandong dialects, standardized much of the language for those audiences and while training large numbers of performers not from Shandong from the 1950s through the early 1990s. Yang Lide, another well-known performer, was primarily active within the borders of Shandong Province, and thus was more concerned with maintaining linguistic authenticity for local audiences whose native languages were some variation of a Shandong dialect. While interacting with storytellers from around the country in 2004-5, it was clear to me that there were several versions of Shandong dialect in use by performers and many performers could identify where other performers hailed from simply by hearing their accent. Performers from the Jinan area of Western Shandong tended to use the Jinan dialect as their model and standard for Shandong dialect. Those from other areas of Shandong relied less heavily on the Jinan dialect and tended to use a more standardized Shandong dialect but with certain characteristics such as particular tones or pronunciation that marked them as being from some other locality in Shandong.}

Moreover, because most of Wu’s audience was comprised of foreign students who understood even less than I did, there was very little reaction to the performance. With the lack of audience response, Wu shifted our attention to jokes and impersonations of famous Chinese political figures and did not return to Shandong fast tales.

My first in-depth contact with Shandong fast tales came one year later when I was again in Qingdao with the US/China Links program. Knowing that I was interested in learning about Shandong fast tales, Du Minghua (杜铭华), a local businessman and friend I had made during the 1999 trip, arranged a banquet at the Blue Ocean Bay Restaurant (碧海湾饭店) in Qingdao on September 20, 2000. Du was himself not familiar with any fast tale performers but was friends with Nian Chuyi (年初一), a Book of Changes Master (a type of fortunetelling...
based on the *Book of Changes*) and an insider in local performance circles. Upon Du’s request, Nian brought Dong Jiancheng (董建成) and Cheng Haijian (程海滨), two local *quyi* performers, to the banquet. Dong, who specializes in imitating regional dialects, is by profession a *xiangsheng* performer but is also a third generation “Gao School, *gao pai* (高派)”¹⁵³ fast tale performer having learned from Gao Yuanjun’s best student, Li Hongji (李鸿基).¹⁵⁴ The banquet took place in a private room located on the top floor of the restaurant, which occupied an older building with European-style architecture and that had the feeling of having been converted from a residence. The room was spacious enough to hold a large round table complete with a glass Lazy Susan set for eight people, a private bathroom, and a large, green L-shaped leather sofa. The door to the room, one

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¹⁵³ The Gao School is one of two major schools of Shandong fast tale performers: the Yang School after Yang Lide and the Gao School after Gao Yuanjun. (Some people include a third Liu School after Liu Sichang but Liu’s influence never reached the scale of either Gao or Yang.) Yang and Gao were contemporaries, friends and rivals. The Gao School is known for its bold style, ridiculous facial expressions, strong and fast-changing rhythms, exaggerated movements, recurrent drollery, and hyperbolic language (Zhang, 1981; Wang, 1985; and Liu, 2001).

¹⁵⁴ Most northern Chinese performance troupes have performers who have been trained in Shandong fast tale performance techniques. Performers trained after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 have often been trained as *quyi* performers, implying a repertoire that includes a broad range of genres, rather than being specialists in a single genre as was the case traditionally. The connotation is that these performers should have some specialty but they should also be capable of performing in a number of genres when the occasion calls for it. As a result, these performers have received some training in multiple genres but not necessarily in depth training in any of them. The repertoire of *quyi* performers typically includes *xiangsheng*, “clapper tales, *kuabian* (快板),” which includes hundreds of local variations, “comedic skits, *xiaopin* (小品),” and Shandong fast tales.
wall, sofa, and table formed a square-shaped open space that would later serve as a stage for performances.

The evening began just as the hundreds of other Shandong banquets I had participated in had with everyone first having hot tea while seated on the couch waiting for the last guests to arrive. After several minutes of small talk, we (initially seven participants) moved to the table, went through an extended seating ritual, and took our seats with Mr. Du as the host, Master Nian as the guest of honor and Dong Jiancheng strategically seated to my left in order to facilitate our interaction. After initial toasts were made, everyone engaged in a series of lively rounds of eating, drinking, joking and chatting. During this phase of interaction, Dong and I exchanged introductions and began small talk that eventually shifted to my interest in Shandong fast tales. When I asked Dong what it was, he explained that it is a form of telling stories and that it is a folk art that involves the artistic telling of stories “with rhyme and to a rhythm, hezhe yayun (合辙押韵)”. When I asked what the difference between fast tales and other storytelling forms such as “straight storytelling, pingshu (评书)” was, Dong reemphasized that fast tales are characterized by rhyme and rhythm and added that there is also a strong musical element that is not found in straight storytelling.

Dong then removed his “Mandarin plates, yuanyangban (鸳鸯板)” from their small leather carrying case and allowed me to hold them for the first time.
Engraved on the lower right corner of one of the half moon-shaped pieces of metal were the characters for “Manufactured and Inspected by the China Shandong Fast Tale Research Association, *Shandong kuaishu yanjiu hui yanzhi* (中华山东快书研究会监制),” indicting that it was an official instrument made to the industry standard specifications. In the literature on fast tales, I had read that the rhythm keeping device was called Mandarin plates so I took the opportunity to ask why. 155 Acting surprised that I knew what they were called, Dong explained that in Chinese culture, “Mandarin ducks, *yuanyang* (鸳鸯)” are symbolic of harmony and interdependency because they are always found in pairs. If one dies, the other soon follows. Since the two metal pieces that make up the *ban* (板) are not connected, they cannot function independently (no sound can be made with only one). Thus, they are referred to jointly as Mandarin plates. The *ban*, as Dong referred to it, was much heavier than I had anticipated and I was not sure what to do with it.

Seeing this, Dong took the opportunity to show me how to hold it by extending his left hand palm up while curling his index and pinky fingers as if he were making a fist as he explained that performers play the *ban* in their left hand. While keeping his middle and ring fingers extended, he then placed the “lower

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155 Other materials and rhythm-keeping devices have been used as the tradition evolved but the current standard *yuanyangban* is made of two independent 4” x 1 1/4” half moon-shaped pieces of copper or brass. In 2006, they could be obtained through the Research Association for approximately one hundred *yuan* (just over $12).
ban, xia ban (下板)” on top of them so that it rested with the straight edge flush against the upper side of the knuckles of the curled index and pinky fingers. Dong told us that the second and third fingers did not move. They only serve to support the lower ban. He then extended his index finger over the top of the lower ban wedging it in at two points—between the back of the index finger and the front of the ring finger and between the front of the ring finger and the back of the pinky—so that it was immobilized. Dong stated that the lower ban must remain motionless while playing as the other half, the “upper ban, shangban (上板)”, was the only thing that moves. He also explained that two thirds of the lower ban should extend below his index finger and one third should appear above it, otherwise no sound will be produced. He then rested the upper ban on top of the same index finger before lowering his thumb to hold it in place. Dong told me that when holding the ban, although the thumb is the only top support, one should not squeeze with the thumb, but should merely extend it out straight gripping just tight enough so that the ban does not slide. Thus, the index finger is the only thing between the upper and lower ban and serves as a fulcrum. With a quick downward snap of the wrist, Dong demonstrated how to play the ban. Dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang, dang di ge, dang di ge, dang di ge dang. I immediately recognized the beat pattern that every person I had asked about Shandong fast tales had tried to imitate in the sharp, clean rapping sound produced by the rapidly whirling pieces of metal. Dong then helped me attempt to hold the ban correctly
and allowed me to try to produce some sort of sound but I was only able to by crudely clanking the two pieces of the ban together with both hands.

In the mean time, the manager of the restaurant, who turned out to be an excellent singer and an acquaintance of the performers, had joined the party and everyone began requesting a performance. Dong and Cheng then stood up, moved to the open space beside the table and began to introduce a xiangsheng routine they were about to perform. The pair opened by acknowledging the other guests and my presence before going into their routine, which revolved around cai homonyms—depending on tone, cai can mean ‘to guess (猜)’, ‘to cut (裁)’, ‘talent (才)’, ‘only, just now or only then (才)’, ‘to pluck (采)’, ‘material (材)’, ‘wealth (财)’, ‘to step on (踩)’, ‘color (彩)’, ‘to pay attention to (睬)’, or ‘vegetable (菜)’. Dong and Cheng’s xiangsheng routine focused primarily on word combinations that included the meaning talent and vegetable. In the primary dou gen (逗哏) role (roughly equivalent to ‘laugh maker’ or ‘joke teller’), Dong told Cheng, who playing the supportive peng gen (捧哏) role (‘laugh/joke supporter’) had assumed the stance of a naive audience member, that he was a cai. Thinking he was being complimented, Cheng pushed out his chest with pride as he asked, “What kind of cai, a ‘person with valuable talents, rencai (人才)’?” Dong followed with, “Higher, gao (高).” Getting excited and a little cocky, Cheng responded with, “Even higher than that? What kind of cai am I, a ‘brilliant
military commander, *shuaicai* (帅才)?” Again, Dong responded, “Higher.”

Acting surprised, Cheng asked, “Even higher than that? A ‘prodigy, *tiancai* (天才)?” Dong still answered, “Higher.” Pretending to be absolutely befuddled, Cheng gave up asking, “Well, then what kind of *cai* am I?” Dong answered with the punch line, “You’re a piece of pickled vegetable, *xiancai* (咸菜)—the two *cai*’s are homonyms but are pronounced with different tones). This opening act was a means to humorously segue into an extended piece in which Dong’s unique ability to imitate local dialects was highlighted. Bringing up the idea of talent allowed them to begin discussing the various talents of *xiangsheng* performers, which included the imitation of dialects. Dong bragged that he could imitate local language from any place in China. Playing the role of skeptic, Cheng then went through a long list of cities including Jiaozhou, Donglicun, Jimo, Rizhao, Henan, Tianjin, and Shanghai, each time testing whether Dong could speak the local dialect. In every case, Dong had a humorous story prepared about someone he knew from the location (sometimes old men, sometimes old ladies, sometimes illiterate peasants), whom he then imitated. As soon as the final punch line was delivered, a wave of robust laughter traveled around the table and the guests rose from their seats with filled glasses to offer toasts to the performers for a successful performance.
After about ten minutes of toasting, chatting and discussions of the routine, Dong Jiancheng once again stood up, this time taking the stage alone. He first announced that he was going to perform the Shandong fast tale “Knucklehead Visits Relatives, *shazi zou qinqi*, (傻子走亲戚)”.

Then, holding the *ban* in his left hand about waist high, Dong began…

*(Narrator’s voice):* The seventh, seventeenth, the twenty-seventh, There once was a knucklehead who went to see some relatives. Tightly gripping something in his hand, out for a stroll he did go, His old lady right behind hollerin’ nervously.

*(Plain speech, woman’s voice):* “Hey, Knucklehead. Knucklehead.”

*(Plain speech, Knucklehead’s country bumpkin voice)* “Hee, hee, hee, I heard ya, I heard ya. What’re ya babblin’ about?”

*(Woman):* “Hey, Knucklehead, when you meet my ma what’ll ya call her?”

*(Knucklehead):* “Hee hee, what’ll I call her? Uh, (I’ll) call her ma-in-law.”

*(Woman):* “How can you call her ma-in-law? Be more civilized and call her mother-in-law.”

*(Knucklehead):* “Hee, hee, hee…call her mother-in-law? As mean as your ma is, she has two names? I can’t remember them all.”

*(Woman):* “If you can’t remember it, I’ll tell you. *Yue* is the character yue in the word moon, up in the sky. *Mu* is the character mu that’s in old hens on the ground.

*(Rhythm and ban resume):* Oh, when we go through the door and see a big red table, You just say, ‘I recognize this table of yours, It was originally made of pear tree wood, Other carpenters couldn’t make one like this, We had to have a carpenter make it to order.”

*(Plain speech, Knucklehead):* “Hee hee hee…we had to have a carpenter make it to order, I got it.”

*(Narrator’s voice with rhythm and ban):* To make a long story short, they arrived, Knucklehead came up to his mother-in-law’s front gate.
As soon as mother-in-law saw her son-in-law, the whole household young and old rushed to greet him.
As soon as that Knucklehead saw this, he welled up with glee,
And with a big grin, said his lines.
(Knucklehead): “Uh, hm…We’re here, we’re here, how are you, how are you, you old hen under the moon.
I recognize this table of yours,
It was originally made of pear tree wood.
Other carpenters couldn’t make one like this,
We had to have a carpenter make it to order.”
(Older woman’s voice, then narrator): “Hmm?” that old mother-in-law thought to herself,
(Mother-in-law): “Oh, everyone says my son-in-law is dumb,
I think he’s sharp as can be.”
(Narrator): Just as mother-in-law was braggin’ away,
From the other room in walked a young girl, his Second Aunt.
In her arms she hugged a pudgy little baby,
She walked right up and said hello.
(Younger woman’s voice): “Hey, Brother-in-law, you’re here.”
(Knucklehead): “Hee hee hee hee…we’re here, we’re here,
How are you, how are you,
You old hen under the moon.
I recognize that little toy you’re hugging,
It was originally made of pear tree wood.
Other carpenters couldn’t make one like this,
We had to have a carpenter make it to order.”
你就说你这个桌子我认得。
它本是个梨木的。
旁的木匠作木料，
咱请了个木匠定做的。”
“请了个木匠定做得。我知道了。”
简单解说来到了，
傻子他来到丈母娘这个大门里。
丈母娘一见女婿到是全家老少迎得急，
傻子一看高了兴。
咧着个大嘴把话提，
“来了，来了，嘿嘿嘿，你好吗，你好吗，
月亮地下个小母鸡。
你那个桌子我认得，
他本是个梨木的。
旁的木匠作木料，
请了个木匠定做的。”
哟，这个老岳母心暗想，
哟，都说俺的女婿傻？
我看他比那精的还精细。
老岳母这里正夸奖，
打屋里走出小孩他二姨。
怀里边儿抱着个胖宝贝儿，
是走向前去把话提。
“吆，姐夫来了。”
“哈哈哈，来了，来了，你好吗，你好吗，月亮地下个小母鸡。
你怀里抱这个玩艺儿我认得，
他本是个梨木的。
旁的木匠做木料，
请了个木匠定做的。

When he finished, Dong bowed before returning to the table amidst an extended burst of laughter. Once again, each participant took turns toasting him for his successful performance. As I watched this first full-length performance, several characteristics of the fast tale tradition became evident to me. First, the
language used was not the same as the everyday local dialect I had heard anywhere in Shandong but was clearly an artistic register (Foley, 2002).

Originally, the language used by fast tale performers had been based on the local dialect in the Linqing (southwestern Shandong) area but the type of language Dong used was an artistic language that drew on the most marked characteristics associated with Shandong speech including its tonal system\textsuperscript{156}, representative vocabulary\textsuperscript{157}, and select pronunciation patterns. Later, while an apprentice fast tale performer, I learned that a significant standardization of the language had been brought about through the government sponsored training classes carried out by Gao Yuanjun from the 1950’s through the 1980’s. The idea behind this move was to create one speech representative of all salient Shandong dialect characteristics as well as a language that retained the Shandong dialect but that also could be easily understood by audiences all over the country. The performer Wu Yanguo later described fast tale language to me as using “the way you chew

\textsuperscript{156} One primary distinguishing characteristic of the language used in Shandong fast tales is its tonal system. When not in combination with other like tones, words spoken with the first tone (平) in standard Mandarin (indicated as a 5 by linguists) have a third tone (214) in fast tale language. Those with the second tone (阳平) in Mandarin (35) are spoken with a fourth tone (51). The standard third tone (上声) shifts to the first tone (5), and the standard fourth tone (去声) rises slightly and then falls sharply (451) in fast tale language (Liu, 2001: 54-5). This tonal system does not match perfectly any Shandong subdialect.

\textsuperscript{157} Select words from a number of Shandong dialects that draw a laugh from audiences for sounding “rural” or “hick” are used by Shandong fast tale performers. Pronouns are one are that stand out in this regard. \textit{An} (俺) and \textit{nen} (恁) are used for ‘I’ and ‘you’ rather than \textit{wo} (我) and \textit{ni} (你). At times short humorous tales hinge on characters within the tales who are from other areas not understanding such vocabulary. In other tales, performers offer extended asides to explain how local vocabulary should be understood. Still other humorous short tales revolve completely around explaining such vocabulary.
(pronounce) your words when speaking standard Chinese, *putonghua de yaozi fangfa* (普通话的咬字方法)" with the "local intonation and tones from Shandong, *Shandong de tu yin tu diao* (山东的土音土调)". In any case, a prominent characteristic that marked Dong’s performance was the rural sound of the language he used.

Dong’s performance also vividly drove home the role of varying speech registers and voices in bringing fast tales to life. To begin with, writings about fast tales had given me the impression that a “single rhyme was maintained throughout a single performance, *yiyundaodi* (一韵到底)” so the large number of unrhymed plain speech portions of Dong’s performance was a mild surprise. Textualizations of fast tale stories had also included lines that were labeled “plain speech, *bai* (白)”, which indicated that the performer or character was talking in a normal speaking register rather than the stylistic one characteristic of Shandong fast tale narrators but in actual performance the amount of time spent speaking in plain speech was much longer than I had anticipated. Moreover, in the textual form, it had not been clear that this also marked speech that was not accompanied
by the *ban* and did not always strictly follow basic rhyme patterns.\textsuperscript{158} As I was exposed to more Shandong fast tale performances, I came to learn that the plain speech label in fast tale texts actually includes an entire range of subregisters, each with specific functions and technical names. Among those functions are: 1) to allow the performer to get into character (Two examples from Dong’s performance are when the wife first appears saying, “Hey, Knucklehead. Knucklehead” and when Knucklehead first enters saying, “Hee, hee, hee, I heard ya, I heard ya. What’re ya babblin’ about?’”), 2) to provide commentary or explanation necessary to further the plot, 3) to introduce characters, time, and elements of the environment that are necessary background information, 4) to allow the audience to hear the thoughts of characters or of the performer (An example occurs during Dong’s performance in the line, “Hmm?” that old mother-

\textsuperscript{158} There are thirteen basic rhymes utilized in the creation of Shandong fast tales. The rhyme groups include: 1) 乜斜 (*ye, xie*) with an end rhyme of ie—also including ue rhymes such as 月 (*yue*); 2) 发花 (*fa, hua*) with an end rhyme of a—also including ia rhymes such as 下 (*xia*); 3) 一七 (*yi, qi*) with an end rhyme of i—this rhyme also includes both the retroflex sounds zhi, chi, shi, and ri as well as the non-retroflex initials ji, ci, si, and zi; 4) 摇条 (*yao, tiao*) with an end rhyme of ao; 5) 中东 (*zhong, dong*) with an end rhyme of eng—this rhyme also includes ing endings such as in 兵 (*bing*); 6) 人辰 (*ren, chen*) with and end rhyme of en—this group also includes un endings such as in 春 (*chun*); 7) 由求 (*you, qiu*) with and end rhyme of ou; 8) 怀来 (*huai, lai*) with an end rhyme of ai; 9) 言前 (*yan, qian*) with and end rhyme of an; 10) 江洋 (*jiang, yang*) with an end rhyme of ang—this group also includes uang endings such as in 庄 (*zhuang*); 11) 梭波 (*suo, bo*) with an end rhyme of o or e as in 车 (*che*); 12) 灰堆 (*hui, hei*) with an end rhyme of ei; and 13) 姑苏 (*gu, su*) with an end rhyme of u.
in-law thought to herself.), or 4) to set up or deliver punch lines.\textsuperscript{159} When utilized for asides or comments by the performer, as the performer, about people or events in the narration, it is called “aside plain speech, pangbai (旁白)”. Pangbai can also be used to extend the plot of the story. Plain speech that is rhymed is called “rhymed plain speech, yunbai (韵白)”. Short, one-word or single-sentence interjections between rhymed lines that retain the original rhythm of the story are called “passerby plain speech, guolu bai (过路白)”—literally ‘crossing the road plain speech’ or “guokou bai (过口白)”. When a performer breaks from the singing rhythm for relatively brief asides, it is called “interspersed plain speech, jia bai (夹白)”. If a performer breaks rhythm to continue the story or add comments of ten or more lines, it is called “long paragraph plain speech, changduanbai (长段白)”, which typically only occurs during low tides in lengthy stories.\textsuperscript{160} When performers directly interact with the audience, it is called “interruption plain speech, cha bai (插白)”. 

\textsuperscript{159} Wang (1994: 210-9) explains these various functions in detail.

\textsuperscript{160} Gao (1982: 90-102) details the different types of plain speech used in Chinese storytelling.
In addition to the plain speech and narrator registers (rhymed and to the basic beat pattern), Dong shifted into a number of different speech registers in order to create the characters in his story. Characters in fast tale stories can be all ages, sizes, and genders and may come from any social strata, educational background, country or region of China. They may also have any type of personality or disposition but they are usually stock characters easily recognizable to audience members as a type of person they may encounter in their everyday lives. Often they play on regional stereotypes of personalities and behaviors. The result is that performers must employ a wide range of regional accents, local dialects, and speech registers. Among those found in Knucklehead visits the Relatives were distinct styles of speech associated with women (Knucklehead’s wife, mother-in-law, aunt) and men (Knucklehead), elderly (mother-in-law) and youthful (wife and aunt) women, and both semi-educated (wife) and uneducated rural peasants (Knucklehead). It was clear from Dong’s performance that vocal mimicry is an integral skill fast tale performers must to master to make their portrayals believable. As the sole performer, the fast tale storyteller must be able to use accurate intonation, inflection, accent, volume, and dialect to reflect a wide
range of character types in a manner that allows audiences to readily distinguish characters without requiring additional explanation. Dong (and other performers) later described the alterations to speech used in creating and developing believable characters as “voice makeovers, *shengyin huazhuang* (声音化妆)” and claimed that in order to be a successful performer one must “be able to sound like anything he or she imitates, *xue shenme xiang shenme* (学什么像什么)”.

Dong Jiancheng’s performance of *Knucklehead Visits the Relatives* also demonstrated that fast tale performers may need to rapidly make multiple voice and role changes during the course of a single tale. Within the span of less than three minutes, Dong assumed the roles of narrator, Knucklehead, the wife, the mother-in-law, and the young aunt. He had pretended to be an illiterate peasant, spoke in three noticeably different female voice pitches, and had adjusted his register of speech, intonation, voice inflection, volume, body language, facial expressions, movements, posture and general demeanor to suit each role. Performers later described this situation to me as “one person playing multiple roles, *yi ren duo jiao* (一人多角)” or as a “one-person play, *yi ren yi tai xi* (一人一台戏)”. This rapid but smooth and distinct switching back and forth among characters and registers of delivery during performance is an example of what Mark Bender has documented in the context of Suzhou storytellers and calls
“shifting” (1989, 1995, 1998, 1999a, and 2003a). With all of this going on and despite the fact that Dong, as performer or narrator, never verbally indicated who he was, the audience, including myself as an observer not intimately familiar with the tradition, had no difficulty understanding who the characters were or who was talking. As is the case of the Suzhou tanci storytelling performances observed by Bender (1998:31), there is no designative formula such as “then so and so said” to inform audience members who is speaking. Dong was able to effectively accomplish the role transitions without losing his audience through the use of culturally coded keys and by communicating in a shared idiomatic “way of speaking” that tapped into the group’s shared cultural memory, what John Miles Foley (2002) calls traditional referentiality (Goffman, 1974 and Bauman, 1977).

First, when Dong announced that he would perform a fast tale and played dang di ge dang on his ban, he initiated a special interpretive frame within which his speech, movements, and facial expressions were to be interpreted (Bateson, 1972; Goffman, 1974; Bauman, 1977; Bender, 1989, 1995, and 1998; and Foley, 2002).\(^{161}\) His introduction functioned as what performance theorists call a *key to performance* because it conveyed an implicit message to the audience to shift

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\(^{161}\) Erving Goffman (1974: 45) developed the notion of behavioral and communicative frames from Gregory Bateson’s notion of play frames or “a structured set of distinctive communicative means to key the performance frame so that communication within that frame will be understood as performance within the community.” Richard Bauman (1977), Barbara Babcock (1977) and Victor Turner (1987) have further developed those ideas applying the notions of frames, frames within frames, and meta-communication to performance events.
interpretation of his speech and actions to a particular specialized code of
communication (Goffman, 1974; Bauman, 1977; Bender, 1989, 1995, and 1998;
and Foley, 2002).\textsuperscript{162} In dealing with textual versions of fast tale stories, it was
sometimes difficult for me to follow when shifts among speakers occurred, even
with the use of quotation marks, but in Dong’s live performance, multiple keys
made such shifts quite distinct. Body language, facial expressions, sound, pitch,
and volume of voice, linguistic register, performer stance, and whether or not the
\textit{ban} accompanied speech all meshed together to clearly distinguish each role.
Dong’s audience was primed to interpret all of these small signals as soon as he keyed the
performance frame so no one stopped him to ask who was who and no one acted
confused during the performance.

In addition to initiating a special interpretive framework for his
performance, Dong performed a story that everyone present knew (with the
exception of the foreign researcher). Each member of the audience brought with
them a vast constellation of cultural meanings and knowledge about the context
that Dong was able to tap into and evoke with movements, facial expressions, and
formulaic language (Foley, 2002). Even if they knew it by another title, everyone
in the audience was familiar with the recurrent “uncultured peasant makes a fool
of himself while visiting his in-laws” scene. Thus, the audience was not listening

\textsuperscript{162} According to Bauman (1977: 16) keys to performance include: 1) special codes, 2) figurative
language, 3) parallelism, 4) special paralinguistic features (such as the sound of the \textit{ban}), 5) special formulas, 5) appeals to tradition, and 6) disclaimers of performance).
to see how the “plotline, liangzi (梁子)” would unfold. They were watching to see what twists Dong could bring about within that stock scene and to enjoy Dong’s rendition of the familiar characters. Besides stock scenes and characters, it was evident from the audience reaction that movements, facial expressions, and sounds have been systematized in a special fast tale aesthetic code. Many of Dong’s movements, expressions, and sounds, were exaggerated and many were symbolic of entire sequences of actions rather than being realistic. That is, Dong used a shared aesthetic code to invite us as members of the audience to “make believe” along with him. In observing Chinese and Japanese storytellers, Hdrlickova (1968b and 1969) has pointed out that there is a “kinetic code without which neither the artist nor audience could properly comprehend the narration.” Fast tale performers make full use of such a kinetic code having stock movements for hands, eyes, body, methods of movement, steps, and facial expressions. Dong employed hand movements to naturally enhance his narration. As the narrator, he frequently extended his index finger upward as if he were explaining something and, when saying numbers, he simultaneously indicated those numbers with traditional Chinese hand signs for numbers. Dong also used hand motions to indicate the movement of characters or action as when the aunt came out to greet Knucklehead he pointed off in the distance (the other room where she was coming from) and then moved his hand in the direction of movement to the space directly in front of him (to indicate that she had entered the room where the rest of the
family was located). Hand movements also provided cues about character gender. For instance, Dong waved his hand with his pinky extended in a demure, feminine manner every time he assumed a female role. When he delivered the line about asking a carpenter to craft the family table, Dong moved both hands back and forth as if he were operating a lathe to indicate that he was talking about a carpenter. Finally, hand movement was combined with stance to create distinct transitions between different characters. When Dong transitioned from within a particular character role back to the narrator role, he raised his hand with the ban while turning slightly to one side before returning to a centered position.

At the same time, Dong utilized his eyes as a keying device that indicated to the audience that a shift in speaker had occurred, that action was taking place in a particular location relative to the performer, to provide information about character appearance, and to draw his audience into the action. He began looking off in distance as he described where the story was taking place. He regularly looked at the audience and then in the direction of on going action as if trying to get us to see what he could see. As the narrator, Dong looked straight ahead, at audience members to draw them in, or at the imagined action. Once in role, he always looked as if he were actually talking to someone standing directly in front of him. When assuming female roles (wife, mother-in-law, aunt), Dong looked slightly up and to his left at approximately a forty-five degree angle. When he entered the role of Knucklehead, he looked slightly down and forty-five degrees
to the right. This projected the feeling that Knucklehead was taller than the women he was speaking to and thus helped distinguish character gender. Moreover, when playing the part of a woman, Dong often looked down as if avoiding eye contact, which matches local traditional behavioral norms. These eye movements allowed Dong to omit phrases such as “Knucklehead said” and “Mother-in-law replied.” Once his first lines were delivered and the role positions were set, the audience could have distinguished roles even if Dong had not been speaking. Shifts in speech register and direction of gaze that mark the transition among roles were supplemented by the concurrent shifts in body direction.163 As the narrator, Dong stood erect with good posture and his body was squared with the audience so that he was always facing them. He turned his entire body to the side when assuming a role but when character movements drew him slightly away from his starting location Dong returned to his original standing position to reset the narrator frame. Dong’s other body movements and facial expressions also reflected character action, gender, mood, and personality. As the wife, he continually arched his back in a feminine stance, frequently turned his face to the side in demure gestures signaling embarrassment, and imitated the characteristics of a feminine walk. As Knucklehead, Dong stuck out his chest when talking, flailed his arms in exaggerated movements, and stumbled rather than walking in a

163 Walls (1977: 185) and Bender (1996: 29) have noted that Chinese storytellers use shifting of the feet to indicate a change in roles.
normal fashion. His exaggerated facial expressions enhanced each role by matching the mood and personality of the character. As Knucklehead, he maintained a silly expression, always laughing and often sticking out his tongue. Every time he assumed the role, laughter spread throughout the room, a clear sign that his portrayal fit a cultural stereotype.

Accompanying the whirl of motion that characterized Dong’s performance were several sonic features (in addition to the linguistic registers already mentioned) that had not been audible in any of the fast tale texts I had encountered previously. The most obvious sonic element of the performance was the sound of the ban. Before the story even began, the performance opened with the familiar beat pattern dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang, dang di ge, dang di ge, dang di ge dang. Once Dong began speaking, he produced a clicking sound by gently tapping the two pieces of the ban together to a four-beat-per-line clip. Since each line comprised seven characters (syllables), the four beats created a meter of two words per beat with the last word in each sentence receiving its own beat. At the end of every other rhymed line, an additional dang di ge dang provided repetitive transitions with Dong striking the first dang as he delivered the last word. Thus, the general beat pattern that repeated throughout was tap, tap, tap, dang di ge dang. This pattern created a strong beat that combined with the internal structure of the story language to generate a rising and falling pattern. Linguistically, every two lines formed a couplet with the first line setting up the
second in either question-answer or topic-comment pairs, a pattern that enhanced the rising and falling rhythm of the *ban* and had the audience tapping their feet. Dong periodically broke up this basic beat pattern to key shifts among characters as well as to indicate transitions in story action. The beat stopped each time Dong entered a character role and resumed either as soon as he reentered the narrator role or when rhymed speech resumed. For instance, as Dong finished Knucklehead’s line, “Hee hee hee…we had to have a carpenter make it to order, I got it”, he reset the basic beat pattern marking both the shift to the narrator role and that the location of the action had shifted from Knucklehead talking with his wife at their home to the mother-in-law’s home. Aside from the sound of the ban, the speech of the characters was embedded within a framework of sounds that characterize natural everyday speech. These “superfluous words, *suiyu* (碎语)” (also known by performers as “small scraps, *xiao lingsui* (小零碎)” or “filler words, *chenzi* (衬字)”) are typically left out of textual versions of fast tale stories but made character speech in Dong’s performance sound more authentic. Some of these sounds marked characters gender such as when Dong, speaking as the wife, added a feminine “Hey, *yao* (喚)” to get Knucklehead’s attention. He used the same technique when playing the part of the mother-in-law and the aunt. Some of the extra sounds also helped establish character personality. An example is when, speaking as Knucklehead, Dong began his lines by laughing in a goofy manner
producing sounds such as *hee, hee, hee* (喝喝喝); *hei* (嘿); and *ha, ha, ha* (哈哈哈). Other superfluous words such as the “*bei* (呗), “*a* (啊), “*en* (嗯), “*ai* (哎), “*o* (噢), and “*yo* (哟)” that preceded or followed character lines were “mood markers, *yuqici* (语气词)” that provided important insights into character thoughts and feelings. The point here is that there are important sound elements to fast tale performances other than just the words that comprise the storyline.

To return to the banquet event in which Dong’s performance was embedded, audience members were all engaged with the fast tale performance to different degrees. Some were sitting with their eyes glued on Dong raptly listening to his tale. Others chatted quietly among themselves. About midway through the performance, a waitress rushed into the room carrying a ringing cell phone that she handed to the manager. The manager then proceeded to take the phone call as we enjoyed Dong’s performance. After Dong had finished and congratulatory toasts had subsided, Master Nian gave palm readings and readings of the characters in participants’ names including one in which he told me that my Chinese surname, Xie (谢), is both auspicious and informative about my personality. He explained that the character is made up of three primary subcomponents, the characters *yan* (讠), *shen* (身), and *cun* (寸). Nian told everyone that the *yan* indicated that I had verbal skills, was cultured and well educated. *Shen* indicated that I have social status and a pleasing physical
appearance. And, cun told him that I was careful, restrained and had a sense of propriety. The character readings were then followed by the women at the event each singing a song using the karaoke machine in the room. The sounds of both popular songs and traditional Beijing opera filled the room until Cheng and Dong performed a second xiangsheng routine. Each of the performances was followed by congratulatory toasts and rounds of eating, drinking, laughing, and talking. The final performance of the night was a second fast tale by Dong Jiancheng. He stood up, moved to the informal stage and asked, “What story should I tell?” The manager requested that he tell Little Wu Pays for the Teapot, xiao wu pei chahu (小吴赔茶壺) but Dong replied that teapots were not interesting, which initiated another round of laughter. He then announced that he would perform a short story called Knucklehead Wants a Baby, shazi yao wawa, (傻子要娃娃). Dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang, dang di ge, dang di ge, dang di ge dang…

(Narrator voice): I’m telling of a girl named Shuhua, This year…
(Plain speech, as Dong himself): Let me first make sure that none of the ladies here are named Shuhua?
(Narrator voice): I’m telling of a girl named Shuhua, This year, she’s not old or young, just eighteen. Her mom and pop planned a colorful affair to marry her off, They found her a husband who was a big knucklehead. The two of them had just been married three days on the dot, When Knucklehead came to Shuhua demanding a tot. (Plain speech, Knucklehead): “Hey, give me a tot. I must have a tot.” (Narrator): Asking this embarrassed Shuhua quite a lot, (Woman’s voice, Shuhua): “Whoa, we’re just married three days on the dot, Where should I go to get you a tot.”
(Narrator): When Knucklehead heard her say she didn’t have one,
(Knucklehead): “If I don’t have a tot, I’ll kill you on the spot!”
(Narrator): He grabbed the butcher knife in his hand,
And off with Shuhua’s noggin he was about to chop.
(Shuhua): “Whoa, in that case, how about this,
You go outside and play in the lot, 
And I’ll get you that tot.”
(Narrator): Out through the front gate Knucklehead did go,
And Shuhua went to their backyard plot,
Where she grabbed a big ol’ duck.
She took it into the house and put in on the bed,
Where she wrapped it in red and tied it in green,
And before long it was bundled tight in a knot.
When Knucklehead came in through the door, he picked it up laughing ha, ha, ha,
(Plain speech, Knucklehead): “My, you had him really fast! 
Hey, why does the kid have such a flat mouth?
And he has mouth full of beady little black teeth,
He’s got two black bean-like eyes,
A long skinny neck and a feathery head.
His baby hair still hasn’t fallen off,
And his toes still haven’t spread.”
(Narrator): Knucklehead laughed all day and was about to give his lips a smack,
When he scared that duck quack, quack, quack!
Hearing this Knucklehead was as happy as could be,
(Knucklehead): “This little baby of ours is really quite smart,
Just out of the womb and he can already say ‘Dad!’
This little kid just called me ‘Dad!’”

咱说了个姑娘叫淑花，
今年不大不小正十八。
她的爹娘贪图彩礼把亲定，
这个找了个女婿是个大傻瓜。
两个人刚刚结婚三天整，
傻小子就跟淑花要娃娃。
“嘿，要娃娃嘛。我得要娃娃。”
是问那个淑花羞答答，
“哟。这刚刚结婚三天整，
我上哪儿给你领娃娃?”
傻小子一听说没有，
“没有娃娃我把你杀！”
一把菜刀拿在手，
要切淑花的脑袋瓜。
“哟。要不这样吧，
你先到门外玩儿一会儿，
俺这就给你要娃娃。”
傻小子前门走出去，
淑花她到后院，
抓了一支大公鸭。
拿到这个屋里放到了炕头上，
红布裹那个绿布扎，
不大一会儿包把好。
傻小子进了门儿是顺手接了过来笑哈哈，
“哎呀，你生得可真快咧！
噢，噢， 孩子怎长得个扁扁嘴？
还长了一口芝麻牙，
长了一对黑豆眼，
细长的个脖子羽脑瓜。
哎哟，身上的胎毛还没褪咧，
哟，那脚拇指还没分叉啦。”
傻小子嘻哈了半天要亲嘴儿，
吓了个公鸭呱呱呱。
傻小子一听高了兴，
“咱这个孩子真机灵，
刚生下来就会叫爸爸。
这个孩子管我叫爸爸！”

This second fast tale performance unfolded in same manner as the first.

Dong stood, took the makeshift stage, announced the title, and began playing the *ban*. The first line followed the same formulaic pattern with the phrase “(I’m) telling (about)…, *shuo le ge* (说了个…)” followed by the character name, and then what he or she was doing. However, this time Dong stopped the performance
mid-sentence to talk to the audience, asking if any of the women present had the same name as the female character in the story. He talked to them as himself, the performer, in normal speech in the Mandarin dialect rather than in the narrator role. This break in the performance frame brought a burst of laughter from everyone present during which Dong resumed playing the ban. One other element that this second performance highlighted was the use of onomatopoeic devices. In the lines “When Knucklehead came in through the door, he picked it up laughing ha, ha, ha” and “When he scared that duck quack, quack, quack”, sounds for laughter and for the quacking sound of a duck were used to enhance the telling of the tale.164

Experiencing the Performances of a Master

This first experience participating in an event that contained Shandong fast tale performances made it clear that such performances can be embedded in larger social events. In this instance, it was the banquet, in which, fast tales were one of a series of subevent performances that both served as entertainment for the participants and as a mode of participation in the activities (Shepherd, 2005). The night unfolded much in the same way a holiday variety show would with xiangsheng, modern opera, karaoke, and palm reading all on the bill. Each performance brought about high tides in the mood and atmosphere of the event.

164 Bender (1998: 33) has noted the use of onomatopoeic devices by Chinese storytellers as keying devices.
with laughter, toasts, and extended verbal exchanges following among the participants. As the banquet came to an end, Dong suggested that we find a place to continue singing karaoke so that he could introduce me to a Shandong fast tale master storyteller. He then called the performer Wu Yanguo (仵延国) asking him to meet us around nine o’clock for a session of karaoke and storytelling. Half of the group then piled into Mr. Du’s car while the other half squeezed into a taxi. We traveled about ten minutes to the Xinghai Entertainment City, xinghai yulecheng (兴海娱乐城), a small nightclub nearby. When we arrived, we were led into a small, dark, musty-smelling room in the basement level of the building. Inside there was a brown, U-shaped leather sofa with a knee-high table in the middle on one side of the room. On the other side, separated by a small, open space was a large television. Several waitresses took drink orders before bringing in multiple bottles of Tsing-tao Beer, small glasses, fruit plates, melon seeds, microphones and song lists for karaoke. Wu Yanguo then arrived with another younger man, who turned out to be a local professional singer. Things got rolling as everyone present took turns singing karaoke while some danced along to the music. Intermixed with the singing, drinking, joke telling, eating, and dancing were three fast tale performances by Wu Yanguo. He performed The Big-footed
Girl, da jiao guniang (大脚姑娘), Second Brother Ma, Ma Erha (马二哈), and Auntie Wee, cuo dasao (矬大嫂).¹⁶⁵

Wu Yanguo’s fast tale performances followed the same pattern of performance that Dong’s had earlier (Bauman, 1977). Each of Wu’s performances was embedded in a larger social event, in this case a post-dinner drinking and karaoke session. And, in each case, Wu announced the performance, struck the familiar dang di ge dang with ban and then began.¹⁶⁶ However, several distinctions were evident immediately. First, Wu held the ban in his right hand rather than the left, which meant that all hand gestures were executed with his empty left hand. Second, Wu held the ban in a much higher position (level with his chest) with his arm bent at the elbow creating an L-shape. Third, the sound Wu produced with the ban was much more pleasing to the ear. It was crisper, had less of a ringing metal sound, and each strike seemed to be more solid. During the course of his performances, Wu also varied beat patterns to match the mood of the story sometimes slowing down, at others increasing speed in order to build


¹⁶⁶ The pattern of introducing a fast tale typically included at least three elements: 1) an acknowledgement of the genre; 2) the title of the tale; and 3) the establishment of the beat with the yuanyangban. Other types of information that I have seen added include are classifications of the type of tale (short, medium, long, traditional, new, humorous), the origin or first performer of the tale, the meaning of the title, an introduction to the protagonist, explanations of information that will be key for later jokes or that may not be understood by a particular audience, and various appeals to tradition (Bauman, 1977 and Foley, 2002).
tension. Moreover, Wu often added a *dang* to the *dang di ge dang* beat pattern so that the beat became *dang dang di ge dang, dang dang di ge dang, dang dang di ge, dang dang di ge dang,* Wu varied this beat pattern with the one Dong had used in a way that enhanced the musical nature of his performances. In addition, the beat in Wu’s performances was noticeably stronger and steadier than Dong’s had been.\(^{167}\) While it had been present in Dong’s performance, the beat clearly drove every aspect of Wu’s performances. The rhythm provided a global organization for the performance integrating movements, facial expressions, and verbal elements while the steady rise and fall emphasized certain locations within lines, particularly the last word in each line (Rubin, 1995). Fourth, Wu’s language was cleaner with each word clearly enunciated, which made things much easier for me as a foreign listener to understand. Fifth, Wu’s performances were filled with emotion. He clearly was injecting every ounce of energy he had into the performance in a way that was palpable to the audience. Finally, Wu’s movements were significantly more graceful and were characterized by smooth, fluid motions.\(^{168}\) Overall, I could see why Dong had called Wu a master fast tale

\(^{167}\) Traditionally, a fast tale performer’s feeling of beat and rhythm was called his “*ban groove, ban cao* (板槓)” (Liu, 2001). When I later visited Wu Yanguo’s home, in a frame on the wall I saw seven large characters that had been written with a traditional Chinese writing brush. The painting, signed by Gao Yuanjun read, “words pure, pitch round, *ban groove steady, zi zheng qiang yuan, ban cao wen* (字正腔圆，板槽稳),” which was an indication of Wu’s natural feeling for the rhythm and beat of fast tales in the eyes of one of his masters.

\(^{168}\) Part of the difference may have been caused by the fact that Dong was imitating a knucklehead peasant but I later learned that Master Wu had spent four years as a professional dancer and that he regularly used that experience to enhance the visual aspects of each movement.
performer as he appeared to be more practiced and his performance was generally more fluid. One indication of Wu’s elevated status among the performers present was their constant deferral to him as well as their repeated attempts to get him to perform. The other performers, as well as other audience members, had to make repeated requests for Wu to perform before he did, and he always did in a seemingly reluctant manner.\textsuperscript{169}

In addition to these stylistic characteristics, three areas of Wu’s performances stood out: his movements, facial expressions, and ability to improvise. In terms of movements, Wu utilized physically demanding gestures and moves that involved his entire body to such an extent that he was drenched with sweat by the end of his third story. Yet, his movements were smooth, natural, and fluid as if he were dancing. To offer a taste of just how many movements were involved, I have added descriptions of each basic movement to the following textualization of Wu’s performance of \textit{The Big-footed Girl}. The description of each movement appears to the right of the verbal line spoken as the movement was executed.

\textsuperscript{169} This elaborate process of request and refusal is an example of what I. Sheldon Posen (1988: 89) has described as “coaxing” in the context of Canadian folk singers.
I’m telling of a girl as dark as a crow, (expression of looking at really ugly person)

She wasn’t that tall, she just made the drum tower look low. (leaning—extends right leg one step out, bending it at the knee, left leg remains straight—to right side looking up as if at a very tall building.)

She was nine feet nine from head to toe, (using left hand holds up hand signal for nine—index finger bent in the first knuckle forming a hook)

And it took nine autumns to make her a shoe. (pointing at foot)

Eight and a half stores ran clean out of cloth, (using left hand holds up hand signal for eight—index finger extended, thumb up, other three fingers curled as if a fist)

And six baskets of needles were broken in two. (using left hand holds up hand signal for six—thumb and pinky extended in Western “hang loose” position)

It was ten years before those shoes were ready to go, (hand signal for ten—closed fist, incredulous look)

She tried them on but with her feet big and the shoes small they just squeezed her toe. (pointing to foot which he lifts off ground, extends arms to indicate large size of feet, brings them together to indicate small size of shoes; then acts as if squeezing foot into a shoe that is too small)

She found a husband nine feet six or so, (leaning while pointing to the right; then hand signal for six—pinky and thumb extended, other three fingers curled)
And he could still turn summersaults inside her shoe. (bringing arms in and scrunching shoulders together twisting back and forth acting as if doing a summersault)

When he got tired, he slept in those shoes, (pointing at audience; then closing eyes, tilting head to the side and pretending to be asleep)

If he got cold he just pulled the shoestrings up over his head. (making motion with left hand of covering head with shoestrings)

The big girl went out to the barn to dump some water, (stepping back looking off in the distance to the left)

She wasn’t paying attention “CRUNCH” (surprised look)

She smashed nine herds of camels and eight head of cow, (increasingly incredulous and frightened expressions, hand signal for nine; then hand signal for eight)

And there were sixty-six big monkeys under there as well. (pointing at imaginary smashed monkeys on the ground)

You ask how big that girl’s feet could be, (smiling returns to centered narrator position)

Whether or not everyone’s heard the reason I don’t now, (extending hand with palm open)

But if her heel were here at our restaurant, (pointing at ground to indicate here)

With a wiggle her toe would be in Guangzhou. (pointing off in distance to right)

Unbelievable! (giving the audience a thumbs up)
In addition to demanding but fluid movements, it was during Wu’s performance of *The Big-footed Girl* that I began to notice subtle shifts in intonation that also keyed the audience. His intonation began at an even, steady level but as the action of the story progressed, Wu adjusted his intonation accordingly including slightly lowering his voice as he said “She wasn’t paying attention” just before yelling, “CRUNCH!” For the couplet that followed (She smashed nine herds of camels and eight head of cow, and there were sixty-six big monkeys under there as well), Wu then adjusted his intonation so that he was speaking in an increasingly excited and increasingly louder voice. He then returned to the even, steady level he had began with to deliver the closing. Wu’s shifts in intonation were also characterized by accompanying exaggerated facial expressions that in combination with the alcohol had his audience laughing so hard their faces had turned red. Although descriptions can in no way replicate Wu’s unparalleled repertoire of facial expressions, I have included here indications of the changes in facial expressions he utilized during his performance of *Auntie Wee*. Again, facial expressions appear to the right of the line from the verbal script that was said while making the expression.
(Narrator voice): I’m telling of an old woman who’s really wee.

(Smiling, eyes wide open, eyebrows raised)

(As performer turning to left to look at audience member) This comrade asked, (turning back to right as the audience member): “What does ‘wee’ mean?”

(Politely asking a question, eyebrows raised)

(Turning back to left as performer): Wee means short, short means low, low means not high.

(Seriously explaining something, excitedly explaining something, explaining something funny, laughing with eyes closed)

(Narrator): I’m telling of an old woman who’s really wee,

(Smiling, eyes wide open, eyebrows raised)

Half a yard of silk wouldn’t cover her knee.

(Silly smile, shaking head)

She can’t even wear half a yard of silk, (Bigger smile)

(So) She uses a thread as a scarf.

(Serious, relating actual events)

Mother-in-law sent her to make dinner,

(Looking to left, watching something in distance; then surprised)

Wow, on her tippy-toes by the stove, she still can’t reach the pots.

(Angry)

When Ma saw this she really got mad, “Wham!”

(Searching for something lost; then worried expression of realization followed by a smile)

Oh, no! One blow knocked her on the floor nowhere to be had.

(Serious)

Posted a letter to her Ma,

(Surprised; then incredulous, increasingly worried, raising eyebrows)

Whoa! Over came Big Brother, Second Brother, Brother Shubai.
The brothers entered the gate and glared:

(In angry peasant voice): “We’re looking for Granny, our little sis’s Ma-in-law.

Find our wee little sister in three days, (Politely giving conditions)
And we’ll write it off complaint free. (Waving hand, friendly)
Don’t find our little sis in three days, (Increasingly agitated)
And we’re going right to the courthouse to solve this melee.” (Pounding chest and then pointing off in the distance, angrily giving ultimatum)

(Narrator): Pops was scared til’ his knees were a knockin’, (Eyes wide open, worried expression)
Ma was so scared she was a shakin.’ (Scared expression)
The whole family waited with fear, (Even more scared)
Then rushed off to find their dear. (Almost crying)
They used the sifter to sift, the winnow to winnow, (Concentrating)
Everything passed through a thick sieve then through the thin one, (Exerting a lot of energy)
And yet she was still nowhere to be. (Confused)

You ask where little Auntie Wee could be? (Seriously explaining)
She’s in that seed shell playin’ poker! (Smiling)
A third element of fast tale performances, one that was highlighted by Wu Yanguo’s three performances, is improvisation or what performers call “xiangua (现挂)”—literally, ‘on the spot, hang’—and “xianzhua (现抓)”—literally, ‘on the spot, grab’. These emic terms refer to the highly valued ability to make adjustments during performance according to location, audience reaction, or performance conditions. In his performance, Wu was constantly consciously seeking opportunities to adapt his rendition to the conditions and context of performance at hand. First, when Wu stood to perform The Big-footed Girl, he began by asking one of the waitresses the name of the nightclub. This was an attempt to improvise based on the name of the restaurant. At the time, I did not know Wu was preparing to improvise and he ultimately did not use the information provided when he asked the question but while watching a performance of the same tale later in 2005, Wu inserted the name of the place we were performing in to the final couplet changing it from “But if her heel were here at our restaurant, with a wiggle, her toe would be in Guangzhou” to “But if her heel were here at Jimo Interior Décor Market, with a wiggle, her toe would be in Guangzhou”. So, fast tale performances are actually carefully crafted, highly practiced routines based on a set scripts. During performance, however, performers attempt to project an image and feeling of spontaneity. What appears

\(^{170}\) Wu Yanguo later explained to me that the term xiangua is short for “hanging (things—as in decorations) on the spot, xiangchang xuangua (现场悬挂)”.
to the audience to be the spontaneous use of elements of the performance environment is actually often a planned, rehearsed technique that has been honed and fine-tuned over the course of many performances. Another example of this type of improvisation occurred as Wu’s performance of Auntie Wee began. He broke the performance frame and stepped out of the narrator role to draw the audience into his performance in a humorous manner. He stood up, assumed the storyteller’s posture, said “How about if I’ll tell a couple of short stories? shuo liang ge xiao duan xing bu xing? (说两个小段行不行?)”, and began to play the ban. Wu then suddenly stopped, looked straight in my direction where I was videotaping, and said, “Are you recording or not? lu le mei you? (录了没有?)” As everyone burst into laughter, Wu turned around with his back to the audience, walked into the corner and leaned against the wall. He then turned back around to face the audience saying, “I’m starting now, kaishi le (开始了)” while looking at me as if I had created a major disruption.

Once the performance resumed, Wu improvised mid-tale by integrating elements of physical humor that utilized objects in the room in order to add drama to his narration. For example, as he said the line “When Ma saw this she really got mad, Wham!”, Wu made a striking motion with his left arm as if he were the mother-in-law hitting Auntie Wee. He then broke frame pretending to look around on the floor for Auntie Wee going even so far as to lift the television set.
that was on a stand beside him to see if she might be underneath. After the audience responded with laughter, he re-established the narrator frame by standing up in his original position and continuing on in the narrator register of speech, “One blow knocked her on the floor nowhere to be had.” After this, Wu manipulated the story and performance frames in a number of other ways as well.\footnote{The idea is that in fast tale performances, there is an overall frame of performance and various sub-frames within that frame. I am using the idea of performance and story frames based on readings of Goffman (1974), Bauman (1977), and Babcock (1977). As a single performance unfolds, performers deftly shift among the various sub-frames in ways that are recognizable to informed audiences. Frame-breaking, or conscious manipulation of and shifting among frames of communication, is a rhetorical strategy frequently utilized to enhance fast tale performances. Referred to as “jumping in, jumping out, tiao jin tiao chu (跳进跳出)” in Chinese, frame-breaking refers to the shifting from one sub-frame of the performance to another such as the shift from the third person narration of events as narrator to dialogue with the audience as the performer. Such frame breaking is used to provide background information, foreshadow important events, for dramatic effect, to build or prime jokes, to introduce characters, to clarify easily misunderstood terms, to appeal to the group’s collective sense of humor, to draw the audience into the performance, to focus audience attention, and to cover up mistakes. The two primary frames fast tale performances are of the here and now of the performance and the constructed story time frame. One type of subframe is what Babcock calls the story within the story.} For example, while performing Auntie Wee, Wu broke frame after the first line to explain a concept critical to correctly understanding the story. After singing the first line to the traditional beat and rhythm, Wu shifted to the plain speech register to ask and then answer the question “What does ‘wee, cuo (矬)’ mean?” He conducted the question and answer exchange as if he were talking to an audience member but did not wait for an audience member to actually respond. Instead, he conducted the entire conversation himself. He quickly assumed the role of an audience member who did not understand before returning to the role of performer to explain the answer. After answering the question, Wu repeated the
refrain with his ban before restarting the story. This exchange seemed to be improvised but was actually a technique designed into the performance to ensure that the term, which can mean either “really, really short” or “short and pudgy” in the local dialect and is not frequently used in Mandarin, is understood correctly by the audience. Wu again used this same technique as he performed Second Brother Ma. He began with an introduction, a refrain on the ban and the first line of narration, “There once was a comrade called Second Brother Ma, shuo le ge tongzhi jiao Ma Erha (说了个同志叫马二哈)”. He then broke frame to ask, as if he were an audience member, who Second Brother Ma was. He then answered the question, “Ma Daha’s little brother” before resuming play on the ban as the audience laughed.172

Finally, the endings of all of Wu’s performances were characterized by a shift from the narrator frame to the performer-audience interaction frame. Wu affected this shift with the use of the pronouns “you, 你”, “you-dialect,恁”, or “you all,你们”. The closing lines of the The Big-footed Girl and Auntie Wee texts provided here are examples. In The Big-footed Girl, Wu shifted to narrator position, expression, intonation, and register of speech to say, “You (plural) ask how big that girl’s feet could be, whether or not everyone’s heard the

172 This usage is an example of John Miles Foley’s (1995) notion of traditional referentiality. Ma Daha is a cultural figure known by all Chinese as a bungling idiot. Wu altered the name calling his character ‘Second Brother Ma’ in order to draw on this collective knowledge so that he did not have to explain character traits. Hearing this, the audience immediately had an image in mind of who Ma Erha was and what his basic characteristics were.
reason I don’t know, but if her heel were here at our restaurant, with a wiggle, her
toe would be in Guangzhou.” Although he was operating in the narrator register,
the use of the plural form of ‘you’ to directly address the audience refocused
interaction to that between himself as a performer and the participants as audience
(Posen, 1988: 64). In Auntie Wee, Wu made similar shifts to deliver the lines,
“You (plural) ask where little Auntie Wee could be, she’s in that seed shell
playin’ poker!” These shifts cued the audience that the performances were nearing
an end and that the punch lines were coming. Wu then ended each performance
with his ban hand raised above his head or with a definitive downward swoop of
the ban arm as he played the final note, visual keys to the audience that the
performance had concluded. Once he finished, applause, laughter and the sound
of congratulatory toasts filled the room. The drinking, singing, and storytelling
that comprised the evening’s event lasted well into the early hours of the morning
before everyone finally returned home.

Learning Audience Expectations

Roughly one month later, I organized a banquet for the performers that I
had met during that first evening so that I could experience more Shandong fast
tale performances. After telling Mr. Du of my desire to hold such an event so that
he could inform the performers, he suggested that I should make the call to Dong
Jiancheng to extend the invitation to ensure that he would accept. He felt that the
performers might refuse if a local person extended the invitation but that it would
be more difficult for them to refuse if the invitation came from a foreigner. Based on Mr. Du’s advice, I called Dong to invite him to the banquet. During the course of the call, I asked Dong where he would like to eat and based upon his recommendation we settled on the Ocean Hotel, Yuanyang jiudian (远洋酒店). Dong said that the food was not the best in Qingdao, but that the private rooms were very large and the sound system for karaoke was among the best, both important considerations for performers. I then asked Dong to invite anyone he thought would like to come and made reservations for a private room that would hold ten people. I asked Mr. Du to be my assistant host and invited two close friends, both from Shandong, to help pull off an authentic banquet.

When Mr. Du, my two friends, “Wheat, Maizi (麦子)”, and “Elephant, Daxiang (大象)”, and I arrived at the restaurant, we found a room that was roughly twice as large as the room I had watched Dong’s earlier performances in. There was a large round wooden table equipped with glass Lazy Susan situated slightly off center so that there was a spacious area between it and the doorway. Along one wall, a television set and two large speakers hung from the ceiling. Small lights were embedded in the ceiling along the border of a large square-shaped raised portion above the table and a large chandelier hung directly above the table. Extra chairs lined the wall underneath the television and speakers just below a traditional Chinese landscape painting. Along the wall beside the door
were several cabinets filled with small plates, teacups, beer and wine glasses, spoons, thermoses filled with hot water and several crates full of large bottles of beer. In the corner next to the door was a large red fire extinguisher. At the other end of the same wall was the door to a private bathroom. In the other corner was a large coat rack. Immediately upon surveying the layout, my friend Wheat was concerned that the location was too extravagant and that I was spending too much money to see these performers. He then made several attempts to convince me to change the location but I insisted that we go ahead as planned.

When the guests arrived, we learned that Dong had brought with him his xiangsheng partner from the previous banquet, Cheng Haijian, Zhu Qi (朱琦), another xiangsheng performer well-known in the area, and a young woman who did not talk much more than the initial introductions. Because the event primarily involved men, cigarette smoke filled the room right from the beginning. As the smoke drifted through the air, we engaged in small talk before performing the traditional seating ritual associated with local banquets during which I arranged for Dong Jiancheng to sit next to me as an honored guest. I opened the banquet by leading three toasts and as we began to eat, Dong informed me that Master Wu had another engagement that had prevented him from being able to attend. He followed this bad news immediately by presenting me with my first ban. He re-demonstrated how to hold it as well as his explanation of where to strike each note: the dang was to struck on the bottom portion of the ban on the down stroke,
the di was to be struck in the same position but was shorter in length, the ge was to be struck on the upper portion of the ban, and the final dang once again was to be struck on the lower portion in the same manner as the first. After demonstrating several times, several participants suggested that Dong perform a story, so he rose out of his seat and moved to the space between the table and the wall. Standing just under the television set, Dong announced that he would perform a short, traditional piece called On the Go from End to End, liang tou mang (两头忙). He emphasized that it was a really old tale and then began 

\[\text{dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang, dang di ge, dang di ge, dang di ge dang...}^{174}\]

(Narrator voice):
Two little houses high on the mountain side,
This family named Li, that one called Zhang.
The Zhang’s had their little prince,
The Li’s had a young lady.
The two families were a social match,
They talked it over and the knot was tied.
In January, the matchmaker made the proposal, in February, he took his wife,
In March, they had a baby boy.
In April, he could crawl, in May, he could walk,
By June, they’d sent him off to school to learn to write.
In July,…in July, I forgot what happened…that’s right,
In July, he was off to Beijing to take the big exam,
In August, he was the top graduate.

\(^{173}\) My description of this overall event is minimal primarily because my role as a participant, particularly as host, limited my ability to focus solely on the performers and their performances. My role as host required me to attend to the needs of the guests and to ensure that everything unfolded smoothly, which included continually refilling everyone’s beer glasses as soon as they became empty, leading toasts, ordering food and drinks, lighting cigarettes for the guests, placing food on their plates, and answering periodic questions from the wait staff.

\(^{174}\) This is an example of what Bauman (1977) calls an appeal to tradition.
In September, he took his post,
In October, he retired to the countryside.
In November, he took ill from unjust blame,
On New Year’s Eve, he was standing by Satan’s side.
You ask how bitter this child’s fate was?
His entire life he never tasted dumpling soup.
You ask what little story I’ve told,
I gave it the name “On the Go from End to End.”

高高山上两间房,
这一家姓李那家姓张。
这个张家有一个大公子,
李家有一个大姑娘。
这两家门当户又对,
是商量商量拜了花堂。
正月里提的媒二月里娶,
三月里有了个小儿郎。
这个孩子，四月会走，五月会爬，
到了六月里送到南学念文章。
七月里。。。七月里怎么回事忘了。噢，对了。。。 
七月里进京去赶考，
八月中了状元郎。
九月里领凭去上任，
到十月告老还了老乡。
十一月得了个冤枉病，
大年三十见了阎王。
你说这孩子命多苦，
一辈子没喝饺子汤。
你要问我说的是个什么段儿，
俺起名叫他两头忙。

I immediately recognized this particular story from Kate Stevens’
translation which I had read before going to China. Knowing the story made it
significantly easier to follow along and allowed me to focus on the other aspects
of Dong’s performance. The tale’s brevity, though, limited the techniques that
Dong had to employ while performing. The first element of the performance that caught my attention was the rhyme pattern. Throughout the short tale, the second line of each couplet ended with a very distinct ang rhyme (fang, zhang, niang, tang, lang, zhang, xiang, wang, tang, duan, and mang) that Dong emphasized by slightly extending the length of each rhymed syllable. The entire framework of the story was built on this system of rhymed couplets with each couplet forming a complete sentence (Finnegan, 1977). Second, Dong used only a single beat pattern with limited movements and no role shifts. The tale consisted only of the third person description of events that were delivered in the narrator register. Dong’s brief performance did however shed light on how some fast tales work in memory. Dong lost his place as he was telling what happened in July so he stopped, the audience laughed, one performer suggested going on to August, and Dong began going through the steps of the tale in a low voice under his breath. Beginning with January, he then said the entire tale under his breath until when he got to July, the line naturally came out. After continuing under his breath through October, he said aloud, “That’s right” and picked the tale back up in July finishing the rest of his performance without further problems. This indicated to me first that Dong was not creating the story in the course of performance but was operating from a memorized script (Lord, 1960 and Finnegan, 1977). Second, it was an example of what Rubin (1995) has described as “getting a running start”, or that the verbal content of an oral tale, once sung, cues in memory the portions
remaining to be sung.\footnote{Shandong fast tale performers are aware of this characteristic of memory. In practice sessions conducted by Wu Yanguo, when one performer could not remember the lines, Wu told another performer to “pass (the story) through the tip of the shoulder, \text{di yi ge jianbangtou} (递一个肩膀头)” to get them going. The process involved another performer reciting the lines up to the point where the lost performer had reached and nearly always led to the lost performer then picking up without problem once they had been assisted with the running start.} Dong was unable to produce the July line or anything that followed until he went back to the beginning and built back up to the same point again, at which time he was able to recall the line as well as all ten lines that followed. Finally, this particular tale was an example of a story that is based on a cultural schema (Bartlett, 1932; Goffman, 1974; Schank and Abelson, 1977; Rubin, 1995; Cole, 1996; and Ochs and Capps, 2001).\footnote{According to Bartlett, schemas are active organizations of past experiences and remembering is an act of cognitive (re)-construction. Thus, schemas are memorial abstracts from experience that allow speakers and listeners to make shared assumptions and draw inferences without explicitly verbalizing all information necessary for communication to occur. As such, schemas are critical structures that facilitate efficient communication.} In fact, two distinct schemas are embedded within one another. An abstract calendar provides the story’s temporal path in which the typical events in a person’s life are embedded. Thus, \textit{On the Go} is both a series of sequences of concrete actions that order experience and a stereotyped causal chain (Rubin, 1995: 25). The story simply rapidly goes through the stages an average person in traditional China typically went through: get married, have children, they learn to crawl, learn to walk, go to school, take the exams, take a position as an official, retire, return home, and die having been unjustly (or justly) accused of corruption. The story is humorous because this cultural script is embedded within the calendar schema so that all of
Thus, in a play on the theme of how short life is, the boy’s life unfolds so quickly that he does not even have enough time to stop and enjoy a bowl of dumpling soup.

After Dong bowed and returned to table, we toasted him and a round of eating, drinking and talking ensued. Then, Dong and Cheng Haijian performed the same *xiangsheng* they had opened the first banquet with. During the course of the small talk period that followed their performance, each of the banquet participants took turns passing the *ban* around the table. Each attempted to play a few notes and say a few lines in the Shandong fast tale narrator register before passing it on to the next person. Cheng was the only person present other than Dong who could actually produce the correct sound with the *ban*. He told the first four lines of *Wu Song Fights the Tiger*:

Idle talk and aimless chatter, I’ll tell you no more,
I’m here to tell of the hero Second Brother Wu.
That Wu Song came to Shao Lin Temple to learn martial arts,
For eight years and more he studied *gongfu*.

闲言碎语不多讲，
表一回好汉武二郎。
那武松学拳来到了少林寺，
功夫练到八年上。

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177 According to Schank and Ableson (1977: 41), scripts, on the other hand, are specific types of schemas. For them, a script is “a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that defines a well-known situation. Katherine Nelson (1986) has described scripts as event schemas that were sequentially organized structures of causally and temporally linked acts with the actors and objects specified in the most general way.
My friend Elephant used his turn with the ban to make up a few lines of a fast tale with me as the hero on a journey to Shandong that he told while he crudely clanked the two pieces of metal together using both hands. This drew extended laughter before Dong accepted an invitation to perform an excerpt from the traditional tale *Wu Song Goes to the Fair, Wu Song gan hui* (武松赶会).

*Dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang, dang di ge, dang di ge, dang di ge dang...*

Idle talk and aimless chatter, I’ll tell you no more, I’m here to tell of the hero Second Brother Wu. That Wu Song studied martial arts at Shao Lin Temple, He practiced his skill for eight years and more. Everything, young lad’s skill, eagle claw power, eng, eng, ya, He’s even cracked his walls with the steel palm. That day, real man Wu Song went back home, That’s not it, that’s that “Fight the Tiger”… This is “Goes to the Fair.” That day real man Wu Song went back home, And met his elder brother Wu Dalang. “Yo, elder brother, if there’s elders, we listen to elders, (When) there’s no elders, we listen to older brothers. Our two elders, mom and pop, both are gone, (If) I’ve got something to say, I’ll discuss it with you.” “OK. Little brother, if you’ve got something to say, say it.” “Yo, elder brother, I’ve heard that East Mountain Temple, Holds a horse and mule fair. I want…little brother…first… Holds a horse and mule fair. I want to go to the fair to check things out.” Oh, as soon as Wu Dalang heard Wu Song was going to the fair, He raced up in front grabbing him by his clothes.

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178 *Wu Song Fights the Tiger, Wu Song Goes to the Fair* and *Lu Da Disposes of the Tyrant* are the three most famous Shandong fast tales and are typically a part of all performers’ repertoires. Because of their status, among performers they are called the “three old stories, *lao san duan* (老三段)"
“My good little brother, (if) you’re thirsty, sister-in-law will boil some water,
(If) you’re hungry sister-in-law will steam some food.
If you’ve nothing to do,
Go into our backyard and practice knife and spear,
Whatever you do, don’t mention going to the fair.
If you go to the fair, I’m afraid you’ll come on hard times.”
“Yo, elder brother, what is this you’re saying.”
What are you saying…you said what…you said what …what are you saying…
“Yo, good little brother, first ahead, first ahead is East Mountain Temple,
It’s just called that East Mountain Temple.
Now it’s…the Li family’s five tigers run the show,
Li…Li…the Li family’s five tigers run the show.
East Mountain Temple has a Li Yuanwai,
(His) five sons all flaunt their might.
The oldest is named ah the oldest…
The oldest… is called Spear is named Li Gui,
The second oldest ‘Flower Knife’ is named Li Gang.
Third oldest has that nickname ‘Lightning Claw Li’,
The fourth oldest is just called ‘Won’t Leak Soup’.
Talk about that fifth oldest being handsome,
He’s got a little stub of a nose and only one eye,
People have granted him the nickname ‘Blind Cannon’.
No matter he’s grown an ugly face,
I’ve heard (if) he brawls, (he) reaches for his fowling piece.
Whoever’s land is next to his,
He just plows and harrows then plants on top.
He sees whose mules and horses are best,
Then, saddles them up and mounts atop.
He sees whose daughters and wives are the prettiest,
He just drags them home and performs the rites.
He kneels to heaven, kneels to earth,
After praying to heaven and earth, (he) enters the nuptial chamber.
(When) one mother come looking for her daughter,
He drug her in calling Mother-in-law.
If they’re willing, the two just go along,
If they’re not, it’s “smack smack” two backhands.
They dispatched an agent to the city to report the crime,
(But) while the agent was on his journey,
It was like lightning, one swift slash of the knife laid open his chest.
My little brother you check your conscience and think things through,
Did he die justly or unjustly."
Wu Dalang from head to tail told it one time,
And enraged that real man Second Brother Wu.
“Elder brother, this talk of yours is off the mark,
Today, I am going to the fair to check things out.
I’ll see what kind of a person is Li Gui,
What kind is Li Gang.
What’s a “Lightning Claw Li,”
What’s a “Won’t Leak Soup.”
I’ll look for that blind little fifth oldest,
And meet with that “Blind Cannon.”
They’re just three heads,
Five or six backs, eight backbones.
They’re just five naturally born sons o’ bitches,
I’ll simply pummel them into a blaze.
Wu Dalang grabbed but didn’t grab firm,
Real man Wu Song left the village.

闲言碎语不多讲，
表一下好汉武二郎。
那武松那个学拳到过少林寺，
他的功夫练到八年上。
什么童子功，鹰爪力嗯嗯呀，
他的墙上裂过铁巴掌。
这一天，好汉武松回到了家，
不是，那是那个“打虎”。。。 “赶会”。。。 
噎，这一天，好汉武松回到了家，
见了大哥武大郎。
“吆，哥，这个有老的咱们从老的，
没有老的从兄长。
咱们二老爹娘都不在，
有话我跟你商量。”
“好，兄弟，有什么话你说。”
“吆，哥，我听说东岳庙，
习了个骡马会。
我想..兄弟...先...
习了个骡马会。
我想到会上去逛逛。”
哎，武大郎一听武松要赶回，
赶上前去拽衣裳。
那个好“兄弟，渴了你嫂去烧水，
饿了你嫂蒸干粮。
你要是没有事儿，
到咱后院儿练刀枪。
千万别去提赶会，
赶会我怕你闹饥荒。
“吆，哥，你这说的什么话?”
什么话...你说的什么话...你说的什么话...什么话...
“吆，好兄弟...先前...先前东岳庙，
就叫那个东岳庙。
现在是...李家五虎霸了行，
李...李...李家五虎霸了行。
东岳庙有一个李员外，
五个儿子自称强。
这个老大名啊老大...老大名枪名李贵，
老二花刀名李刚。
老三那个外号‘劈爪李’，
老四就叫‘不漏汤’。
说那个老五长得俊，
是半拉鼻子一只眼，
是人送外号‘瞎炮仗’。
你别看他那个模样长得丑，
是听说打架摸鸟枪。
这个谁家的地挨着他的地，
他犁粑犁粑顶种上。
他看见谁家骡马好，
背上鞍子就骑上。
看见谁家的姑娘媳妇长得俏，
拉到家里就拜堂。
拜天堂，拜地堂，
拜了个天地入洞房。
人家娘到他家去找闺女，
他拉着人叫丈母娘啊。
你要愿意两拉倒，
不愿意是‘咣咣’的两巴掌。“
人家他差人到那个城里去告状，
他差人赶到路途中，
是劈心一刀大开膛。
我的小兄弟你拍拍良心想一想，
人家死得冤枉不冤枉。
武大郎从头至尾说了一遍，
怒恼了那个好汉武二郎。
“哥，你这个说话不在行，
我今天要到会上去逛逛。
我看看什么样的叫李贵，
什么样的叫李刚。
怎么样的个劈爪李，
怎么样的个不漏汤。
我找找那个瞎小五，
会会那个瞎炮仗。
他就是三个头，
五六个背，
七个肚子，
八脊梁。
他就是生天五个王八蛋，
我干脆揍他们火光。
武大郎一把没拉住，
好汉武松出了庄。

Dong’s performance ended with a bow and the audience politely clapped.

A few toasts were offered and the banquet continued on for another hour of eating, drinking, xiangsheng performances, and talking. I include this performance here primarily because of what occurred after the banquet rather than for the performance itself. Throughout Dong’s performance, I had been completely enthralled. Although I was unable to understand every word, I easily followed the vast majority of the tale and certainly understood the major gist. As a researcher
conducting fieldwork, I was excited because I had been able to videotape an extended performance of a famous traditional tale. But, as Wheat, Elephant and I rode back to Wheat’s small coffee shop in a cab they revealed their disappointment in the evening and displeasure with the performers. I quickly was brought down from the earlier high as I realized that I had been so caught up in understanding the stories and analyzing the performance that I had forgotten to consider how the audience was experiencing things. Wheat bluntly stated that the performers were lowlife “shams, hunzi (混子)” who knew very little about Shandong fast tales. He felt that no one could call themselves a performer if they could not remember the words and continually mixed up stories. He was referring to the fact that in his telling of Wu Song Goes to the Fair, Dong had stopped because he had confused lines from that tale with lines from Wu Song Fights the Tiger. Elephant was more diplomatic saying that the performers simply were not very good at Shandong fast tales. When I asked why, my two friends explained that the performances were supposed to contribute to the atmosphere of the event by creating high tides in the flow of feelings among participants. They told me that when a performer has to stop mid-performance to think of the words

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179 Dong’s later take on the situation was that this was an informal event involving a group of close friends, many of whom were performers preparing to participate in a videotaped performance of The Tale of Wu Song. Thus, it was quite natural for them to practice tales that they had not performed for a long period of time and thus had become rusty with. His primary reason for breaking out a traditional tale that he was not an expert with, however, was that a foreigner had expressed keen interest in the tradition and Dong wanted to show me as much as he could about the tradition.
or tells things out of order, the atmosphere suffers and thus the performance is not successful from their perspective as audience members. For them, successful performances were humorous, engaged the audience and created a “mirthful atmosphere, huoyue qifen (活跃气氛)”180. In their eyes, Dong had failed to accomplish this so what I had thought had been a successful performance did not meet native audience expectations. This experience showed me that there were differing levels of performer competence, that audiences were continuously evaluating performances and performer competence levels, and that both performer and audience competence may affect the atmosphere of a performance (either positively or negatively).181

In addition to shedding light on different levels of performer competence and audience expectations, this experience refocused my attention in terms of fieldwork and forced me to reconsider how to assess informants. Up to this point, I had taken Dong to be the perfect informant, a knowledgeable practitioner of the art from I was studying. However, this experience forced me to realize that I had assigned him too much credibility before I was able to assess which information

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180 I have explained elsewhere the characteristics of a mirthful banquet atmosphere. In brief, a mirthful atmosphere is one that involves a group of individuals sharing an experience of belonging to a whole greater than the sum of its parts. All participants are able to partake of the event and there is the multidirectional exchange of positive feelings among participants that allows a feeling of connectedness to develop. It is similar to what Durkheim described as “collective effervescence”.

181 Hrdlickova (1976: 172) has noted that educated audiences (of Chinese storytelling) expect performances in an established manner of interpretation, but also rate them according to the degree of mastery the artists command. In cases in which a performer’s mastery of the art does not meet the level of expectation of the audience, the atmosphere may be negatively affected.
was reliable, who was providing what information for what reasons, where everyone’s allegiances rested, and what everyone’s motivations were (Jackson, 1987). Dong Jiancheng had been introduced to me as a professional storyteller so I had viewed him as a model and had afforded extra weight to what he said about my subject of study. At the time, he sounded great to me, despite the fact that, in hindsight, I see that even I was able to distinguish that Wu Yanguo was a more skilled performer than he was. Moreover, audiences had reacted with laughter and applause each time he performed. But, without the insider knowledge of how fast tale events worked, I could not assess things with the same degree of precision as my local friends. Later, after I began to understand the keys to performance and reached a level of cultural competence at which I had access to some of the same cultural resources that Wheat and Elephant had, I began to see what they had seen. Dong was not a specialist in Shandong fast tales. He was a *xiangsheng* specialist who had also received some minimal training in fast tales. Despite these revelations, Dong had become a friend and remained an important informant for the remainder of my time in the field. He was the first performer who took the time to interact with me and it was through him that I had met the master storyteller Wu Yanguo. Based on this experience, I simply adjusted my view of the situation by setting my sights more squarely on performers who specialized in Shandong fast tales.
Becoming Part of the Action

During this same time frame, several events further raised my level of awareness in terms of how I was being viewed by the performers I was courting. First, a number of local performers made multiple attempts to recruit me into their ranks. I was invited to some of their homes for dinners in which proposals were made for collaborative performances. I was also invited to attend banquets at which I was introduced to “agents, jingjiren (经纪人)” and famous performers. The agents told me that they had the funds to “package, baozhuang (包装)” me as a performer as well as the know how to “make things happen, caozuo (操作)” for me. The performers wooed me by telling me that they could make me famous if I became either their partner or apprentice. During banquets with performers I was more familiar with, I was also becoming part of the action. At one banquet, when I left the room to use the restroom, a xiangsheng performer followed me. While we were in the bathroom, he told me that we were going to perform a xiangsheng routine when we returned to the banquet room. He then proceeded to tell me my lines in the hallway. He explained the he was going to ask me a series or questions about the names of types of xiangsheng routines and that my job was simply to respond with the set of answers he provided that would build up to the punch line. The routine went like this. My partner would first ask what one person telling a joke was called and I was to respond with a “single mouth, dan kou (单
口)” joke. When he asked what two people telling a joke was called, I was to respond with a “double mouth, shuangkou (双口)” joke. Three people telling a joke was a “three-person joke, san ge ren xiaohua (三个人笑话)”. Four was a “group mouth, qunkou (群口)” joke. One hundred people telling a joke was called “hunting wolves, dalang (打狼)”. One thousand people telling a joke was called “going to the farmers’ market, ganji (赶集)”. And, finally, the punch line was the answer to what is ten thousand people telling a joke, which was “falungong (法轮功)”, a reference to the ten thousand person sit in organized in Tianjin by followers of the falun dafa sect. Once I had the lines down (we were gone for a total of about five minutes), we reentered the room and took our seats. When a momentary pause in the action presented itself, this performer announced that he and I were going to perform, which drew both surprise and a rousing cheer from the other participants. We then performed the routine without hitch with the last punch line evoking a thunderous roar of laughter amidst which everyone at the table raised their glasses in unison to toast us. Discussion then shifted to how a foreigner could possibly know so much about Chinese culture. Some participants (primarily performers) immediately knew that my partner had taught me the routine while we had been out of the room but throughout the rest of the banquet he denied the accusation claiming that I had learned all of their routines just by watching.
From that moment on, I was expected to perform some routine at every banquet I attended that involved any of the ten people who were present or anyone they had told about the evening. In each case, one of the other performers would either feed me my lines in the hallway or whisper them to me at my seat before we stood to perform. This shift in my role, from observer as audience member to a player participating in the action, created several difficulties in terms of fieldwork recording at the same time it opened new doors by deepening the level of my engagement with the other performers (Shepherd, 2005). First, performing created more vivid, longer lasting memories of the events in which I was participating but the stakes had been raised. I had to invest significantly more time to prepare for such events, was unable to sit taking notes in my notebook while others performed, and was forced to take emotional risks while performing. That is, I was putting part of myself out there for evaluation by the group and was sharing a part of myself with the others involved. Each banquet performance presented both an opportunity to learn more about how to perform and to fail in front of members of the community. Having shared experiences with members of the community fostered a feeling of connectedness among us and my emotional investment shifted the general pattern with which other banquet-goers interacted with me by personalizing the interaction. The events and people involved began to mean more to me personally and my interlocutors could sense that. Performing as part of the group was also a revealing act. As my interlocutors began to see that
I was not holding anything back, they too began to share more of themselves with me, telling me not only things about the tradition I was studying but also things about themselves as people. The new pattern of interaction often included expectations to know things that I had no way of actually knowing. It also meant that my performances (both of traditional arts and of everyday speech and behavior more generally) were publicly evaluated and critiqued verbally as part of post-performance banquet small talk. At first, constantly having my behaviors, speech, appearance and performances being discussed (sometimes in a manner as if I were not present) was rather uncomfortable but, after the initial uneasiness, this form of socialization—overt feedback—served as a tap into the audience thought process. My interlocutors were thinking these things as they took in the performances whether they verbalized them or not so the verbalized evaluations became a primary source of information about both audience expectations and local cultural subtleties I would have otherwise been unaware of. Because many of those critiquing me were performers themselves, an entirely new world of meaning began to open up as they began talking to me using performer jargon and started sharing tips for how to successfully pull off performances. This pattern of interactional collaboration also allowed me to begin having access to brief glimpses of performances and the events in which they were embedded from a new perspective, the performer perspective. Interactions were carried out in a similar way until I left Qingdao to return to Columbus at the end of the year.
In the spring of 2001, I once again returned to Qingdao for a short, two-week visit during which I contacted Dong Jiancheng and Wu Yanguo to see if they had the time to meet with me. Once again, I invited them both to a dinner banquet among friends. I also invited Master Nian and his wife because they had been the original connection to Dong Jiancheng. Fortunately, this time Wu accepted. While inviting them, I told both performers to bring along anyone they wanted to bring. Wu told me that he would bring one friend and Dong stated that he would bring two. Mr. Du, who was once again serving as my assistant host, suggested that we try a new restaurant that the manager from the first fast tale banquet I attended had recently moved to. His reasoning was that she could “take care, zhaogu (照顾)” us in terms of price, which meant that she would probably give us a significant discount. The restaurant was not quite as fancy as the Ocean Hotel had been but the interior of the banquet rooms had been recently redecorated and the room the manager had arranged for us had a small anteroom attached to the main room. A circular archway, which later served as a stage for performances, led from an area with a large round table to a small room with a couch, television and karaoke equipment. Master Wu, the guest of honor, sat to my right, while Master Nian, the second honorary guest, sat to my left.

The banquet unfolded in the same pattern as the previous ones had with rounds of eating, toasting, and talking broken up by a series of performances. Dong Jiancheng performed a dirty joke based on pronunciation in the Shaanxi
regional dialect, Dong and one of his guests performed the cai xiangsheng routine, and several traditional songs were sung including excerpts from famous Beijing opera arias. During the xiangsheng performance, Master Nian’s wife began talking to me about the xiangsheng performer from Canada who uses the performing name “Great Mountain, dashan (大山)”, and whom she had met while in Beijing. As we were talking, Master Wu signaled for me to stop talking, scolded me with a nod of the head and a facial expression of disapproval, and mouthed for me to pay attention during other people’s performances. Then, when it was my turn, I struggled through a rusty version of what by this time had become my standard xiangsheng routine with Dong Jiancheng and the two xiangsheng performers he had brought along. During my performance, audience members shouted out things that I said incorrectly and Master Wu even stood up, interrupting the performance, to show me how a particular line should have been delivered. When the performance was over, a long discussion of my body language ensued in which several performers took turns demonstrating what I had done incorrectly and offering options for improving the performance (I had not known what to do with my hands while delivering the lines so they had been “too busy” in the performers’ eyes.). All of the participants at the event also began teaching me how to say things in the local dialect during small talk in between performances. After another xiangsheng routine by two of the other performers, Wu Yanguo accepted my request to perform a fast tale. As he stood to perform,
one of the performers shouted out, “Knucklehead Visits the Relatives”. Ignoring the request, Wu turned facing my direction where I was videotaping and said, “Are you ready yet?” This drew a round of laughter from everyone who had been at the previous session in which he had broken frame to ask if I was taping. As the laughter filled the room, Wu began. *Dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang, dang dang di ge, dang dang di ge, dang dang di ge dang...*

I’m telling of an old woman who’s really wee,  
Half a yard of silk wouldn’t cover her knee.  
She can’t even wear half a yard of silk,  
(So) She uses a thread as a scarf.  
Mother-in-law sent her to make dinner,  
Wow, on her tippy-toes by the stove, she still can’t reach the pots.  
When Ma saw this she really got mad,  
“Wham!”  
One blow knocked her on the floor nowhere to be had.  
Posted a letter to her Ma,  
Whoa! Over came Big Brother, Second Brother, Brother Shubai.  
The brothers entered the gate and glared:  
“We’re looking for  
Granny, our little sis’s Ma-in-law.  
Find our wee little sister in three days,  
And we’ll write it off complaint free.  
Don’t find our little sis in three days,  
And we’re going right to the courthouse to solve this melee.”  
Older brother was scared til’ his knees were a knockin’,  
Ma was so scared she was a shakin.’  
The whole family waited with fear,  
Then rushed off to find their dear.  
They used the sifter to sift, the winnow to winnow,  
Everything passed through a thick sieve then through the thin one,  
And yet she was still nowhere to be.  
You ask where little Auntie Wee could be?  
She’s in that seed shell playin’ poker!
说了位大嫂她实在矬，
浑身穿不上半分罗。
半分罗裙穿不上，
拿一根几头绳当围脖。
这一天，矬大嫂到那厨房去做饭，
咭！跐那个锅台够不着锅。
婆母娘一看有了气，
“包”
一巴掌打到了地下找不着。
给她娘家送了个信儿，
咭！来了她大哥二哥叔伯哥哥。
个个进门把眼瞪：
“叫了一声大娘，妹妹的婆婆。
你三天找俺的个矬妹妹，
一笔勾销没话说。
三天找不着矬妹妹，
俺跟你法院去解决。”
哥哥吓得个嘚得战，
婆婆吓得个战哆嗦。
一家人家都害怕，
急忙去找女娇娥。
筛子筛，簸萁簸，
过完粗箩过细箩。
还没找着！
你们要问矬大嫂哪里去？
她在那瓜子壳里打扑克。

Wu’s performance of Auntie Wee initiated another round of drinking, joking and eating that lasted for an extended period. Another xiangsheng routine then broke up the several small group discussions that had developed around the table. That performance was followed immediately by another fast tale performance by Master Wu. This time, Wu stood, tucked in his shirt, straightened his hair, raised his ban and said to me, “Are you ready?” After I informed him
that I was, Wu announced the tale, “Shandong fast tale short story The Big Truth, Shandong kuaishu xiao duanr da shi hua (山东快书小段儿《大实话》)” and began. Dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang, dang dang di ge, dang dang di ge, dang dang di ge dang... He then suddenly stopped, looked at me with a puzzled expression, and turned to the person seated to his right, “He isn’t recording yet.”

Laughter filled the room as Wu turned to another person saying, “He’s daydreaming. Wait a little bit.” This caused the volume and intensity of the laughter to elevate to an even higher level as Wu walked around the room before resuming his original position. When the audience had calmed down, he re-announced the tale and began playing the basic beat on the ban as he rotated his ban hand in a circle in front of him. While he was playing, one of the other performers yelled out, “Handsome, shuai (帅)!” Dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang, dang dang di ge, dang dang di ge, dang dang di ge dang...

In January, the New Year’s party’s all but done,
New Year’s Day is the year’s day one.
After the first, then it’s the second,
After the second, it becomes the third.
January fifteen is the middle of the month,
It’s sixty days from Spring Festival til the Winter Meal.
In February the days get long,
If you want to eat fine rice, you’ve got to sift out the chaff.
Of the five grains, the biggest are beans,
Dried grass isn’t as long as a sorghum stalk.
When the sun comes out, it shines on the west wall,
And to the west of the west wall there’s shade after all.
In local temples, there are small ghosts,
In Prince Guan Temple, there’s Zhou Cang.
Feudal society had its emperor,
During the age of emperors there were princesses.
Dad’s dad is called grandma,
Are you recording or not? I got the words wrong.
Dad’s dad is called grandpa,
Mom’s mom is called grandma.
Buy a small mule that’s got four legs,
You say is it strange or not, his tail grows on the tip of his ass.
In March, March the third,
When it rains hard, it’s sure to be a cloudy day.
Tile houses don’t compare to a big high rise,
Dry pancakes aren’t as tasty as steamed buns.
In April, April the eighth,
Go in your front door and you’ll have arrived at home.
If two old men are talking, one’s dad will be older,
His brother’s wife is a woman. She’s a woman!
If you don’t believe what I’ve said,
Why don’t you rub it, rub it, your nose certainly points towards the ground.

正月里，过罢了年，
大年初一头一天。
过完了初一就是初二，
过罢初二到初三。
正月十五半个月，
春到寒食六十天。
二月里天就长，
要吃细米簸净了糠。
五谷杂粮豆子大，
秆草没有秫秸长。
太阳一出照西墙，
西墙西边有阴凉。
土地庙里有小鬼儿，
关公庙里有周仓。
封建社会有皇上，
有皇上的年头有娘娘。
这个爹的个爹叫娘娘，
录了没有？说错了。
爹的个爹叫爷爷，
娘的个娘，这么叫姥娘。
买一头小驴四条腿儿，
你说怪不怪，把那尾巴长在了后腚上。
三月里三月三，
下大雨，准阴天。
瓦屋没有楼好看，
锅饼没有馍馍暄。
四月里四月八，
进去自己大门儿到了家。
爷俩个说话他爹大，
他嫂嫂是个娘们儿家。是个娘们儿家。
我说这话你不信，
你摸摸吧，摸摸吧，
你的鼻子大头准朝下。

This tale revolved around a framework formed by the script of the
traditional lunar calendar. Within that framework, a string of cultural truths was
offered to the audience, thus, the name *The Big Truth*. Each line related a cultural
given or common sense statement of fact: the first lunar month follows Chinese
New Year; New Year’s day is the first day of the year; when the first ends, it is
the second; after the second day ends, it is the third; the fifteenth of January is the
mid-point of the month; it is exactly sixty days between the Spring Festival and
the Winter Meal holiday; the days begin to get longer in February; to get fine rice,
you must sift out the chaff; beans are the biggest of the traditional five grains (rice,
millet, sorghum, wheat, and lentils); dried grass is shorter than a sorghum stalk;
when the sun comes out, it shines on the west wall of a traditional courtyard style
home because it rises in the east; because the sun is to the east of the west wall, a
shadow is cast to the west of the wall; there are lesser spirits worshiped in local
temples; Prince Guan Temple is where the famous general Guan Yu from the
novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is worshipped. Zhou Cang was a character in the novel who became Guan Yu’s trusted body guard. When Guan Yu was killed by Sun Quan, Zhou Cang committed suicide to show his loyalty. Thus, he is protecting Guan Yu in the next world and is worshiped in the same temple; emperors ruled feudal society; emperors had multiple princesses and concubines; your father’s father is your grandfather; your mother’s mother is your grandmother; if you happened to buy a mule, it would probably have four legs and his tail would probably be located on its behind; March the third (a traditional holiday on which ancestors are worshiped) is in March; on days when it rains hard, it is typically cloudy; tile houses are looked down upon as old and inferior to high rise apartments; *guobing*, a type of fried dough that is eaten as a staple food in many areas of Shandong, is not as sweet or well liked as steamed buns, another Shandong staple food; the eighth of April (another traditional holiday on the lunar calendar marking the end of spring and the beginning of summer) is in April; you have to go through your front door to arrive at home; unless they are brothers or the their fathers are twins, one of every two men will have a father that is older than the other (age established hierarchical position in traditional society); wives are always women; and all noses (at least in the Chinese view of things) point towards the ground.

During Wu Yanguo’s performance of *The Big Truth*, he had used improvisation to hide a mistake in the verbal script. When he delivered the line
“Dad’s dad is called grandpa”, he accidentally misspoke saying instead, “Dad’s dad is called grandma.” Before most of the audience had realized he had made a mistake, he stopped, looked at me and asked, “Are you recording or not?” Not realizing what had happened, some of the participants in the banquet laughed while others told him to stop playing around and to continue on. Wu turned to one performer and quickly, half-under-his-breath said, “I got the words wrong.” He then picked the story back up with the beginning of the line he had said incorrectly. After this banquet, I began noticing such improvisations to cover up mistakes in other performances. Experienced performers would find a way to distract the audience by focusing their attention on something other than what was being said before resuming the performance. Other than Wu’s periods of improvisation, the line that drew the biggest laugh from the audience came in the couplet “Buy a small mule that’s got four legs, you say is it strange or not, his tail grows on the tip of his ass.” At the time, I was not sure why everyone thought this line was so hilarious. When I asked, the only response was more intense laughter. I came to learn later that it was the use of local dialect, one of the most prominent aspects of fast tale performances. The word ding was used meaning “ass”. Typically considered foul language that should not be used in more formal contexts, ding carries with it a rural, hick feeling, which is what caused the audience to laugh when they heard it. As I began learning fast tales and interacting with Wu Yanguo more regularly, I discovered he frequently used ding
(in multiple combinations) and similar rural swear words during the course of social interaction simply to evoke laughter. In every context, such usages caused his interlocutors to burst into laughter. This clued me in on the fact that fast tale performers were not just telling stories. They were entertaining people with stories carefully rendered in humorous ways. The word *ding* had been carefully selected because it evoked such a reaction from audiences and was an example of one type of speech play used to transform otherwise mundane narration into a humorous high point in the story. Wu’s performances on that evening also demonstrated that fast tale performers engage their audiences in an exchange of feelings during performance. Wu was not merely telling a story to a passive audience. He went out of his way during each performance to make the audience feel as if he was sharing his innermost thoughts with them. In a natural manner, Wu used facial expressions, body language, elements of the environment, and parts of the verbal script, such as the word *ding*, which one would only typically use with the most inner circle friends and relatives, to naturally project the image that he was having an intimate conversation with close friends. Audience members commented that what set Wu’s performances apart from other fast tale performers was that they were

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182 John Holmes McDowell (1992: 139-144) defines speech play as the creative disposition of language resources or the manipulation of formal features and processes of language to achieve a striking restructuring of familiar discourse alignments. Fast tale performances are characterized by extensive use of elements of speech play such as puns, plays on words, allusion, and hyperbole.
“intimate and familiar, *qinique* (亲切)”. On this evening, the festivities lasted well into the middle of the night. After dinner ended, part of the group then went on to another restaurant to have bowls of hot porridge, which were supposed to “wake us up from the effects of the alcohol, *xingjiu* (醒酒)” we had consumed. I arrived back at my hotel room as the sun was coming up in the east.

In the summer of 2002, I returned to Qingdao as Resident Director of an intermediate study abroad program Ohio State conducted in collaboration with Qingdao University. While managing classes and extra curricular activities for sixteen American students who had never been to China, I had little time to interact with performers but was able to catch one stage performance at the Illusion Theatre, *meng huan juchang* (梦幻剧场), a five-hundred seat facility that regularly hosted *quyi* performances. The variety show that the packed house enjoyed that day included a *xiangsheng* routine by Dong Jiancheng and Zhu Qi as well as Wu Yanguo’s Shandong fast tales. I arrived late for the show but just in time to catch Dong and Zhu’s performance. Afterwards, I approached Master Wu and Dong Jiancheng to let them know I was back in town and to see if we could get together some time. They agreed to another banquet, so I made arrangements for a room at the *Ocean Pleasant Dream Restaurant, haimengyuan da jiudian* (海
梦圆大酒店), a newly opened, upscale restaurant that many locals had told me was “hot, huo (火)”. I went to the restaurant two hours before the event so that I could inspect the room and arrange our menu. I selected the most spacious room they had available so that there was ample room for performances. The room was large enough to hold two tables for fifteen people but only had one that was located slightly off center to the right side of the room so there was a large open space on the other that could serve as a stage. The room was also equipped with a television, karaoke equipment, a stereo, and speakers. The guests at the event included Master Nian and his wife, Dong Jiancheng, Wu Yanguo, and Ma Qingyun, a local Beijing opera performer accompanied by a male friend. Mr. Du served as my assistant host and brought along one of his business associates as well as his office assistant, Xue Hui. I brought Chih-Hsin Annie Tai, who had been helping with the Qingdao study abroad program, and four of our students (Gil Breunhoffer, Aaron Paris, Michael Kou, and Siddhartha Jayanthi). I thought the American students could help entertain the guests and at the same time the students could experience the traditional performances that typically characterize these events.

The event unfolded in a quite unusual manner when compared to other banquets I had been to previously. It was a mirthful occasion in which old friends gathered together after a period of separation and a series of performances were intermixed between strips of toasting, drinking, talking and eating. However, both
the performers’ language and behavior changed noticeably. First, there was very little local dialect used, presumably because they had made the assumption that the American students would not understand what was being said. Second, the performers were much more reserved in their speech during the small talk portions of the event (fewer jokes, more politeness mechanisms were used, etc.) because they were less familiar with many of the participants. And, third, performances were less participatory and interactive. That is, the performers performed as if they were on stage removed from the audience. There seemed at times to be an almost palpable barrier between performer and audience. As soon as the performers finished each performance, they turned to me and asked me to translate and/or explain what they had done for the students rather than engaging in congratulatory toasts and small talk.

Nonetheless, the day’s performances included a karaoke version of a western opera aria, rather than one from Beijing opera, several palm readings and fortune telling sessions by Master Nian, the cai xiangsheng routine by Dong Jiancheng and I, and three fast tales by Master Wu (Second Brother Ma, Auntie Wee, and Making Pants, zuo kuzi (做裤子)). When it came time for Dong and me to perform, I thought that we would use one of the standard routines I had performed previously but Dong wanted to perform his cai routine to show off his command of local dialects. Although I had never been taught the verbal script of Dong’s cai routine, all of the performers and audience members who had been
present at previous banquets assumed that I could perform it because I had seen it at those earlier banquets. I hesitated and was skeptical because I had not consciously attempted to memorize the routine but, knowing the negative effects refusing to participate in the festivities would have, I agreed and we began performing. Surprisingly, each time Dong offered a cue, the lines that followed immediately came to me and I was able to pull off the performance, although not nearly as smoothly as the professional xiangsheng performers had been able to. However, I had been so preoccupied with remembering the lines that I had forgotten about body language and facial expressions. As soon as Dong and I finished performing and before we were able to return to our seats, Master Wu stood to demonstrate what I had been doing incorrectly (I was not looking at the audience and my hands were swinging around aimlessly). He and Dong then demonstrated what the performance should have looked like, stopping to emphasize hand positions and facial expressions. Once the instructional session ended, the banquet resumed with eating, chatting and performances alternating. At one point, because my students were not participating in the festivities, the performers began asking for one of them to sing a karaoke song. The students bashfully declined until Chih-Hsin Annie Tai suggested that Gil Breunhoffer, who was in a rock band back in Columbus, sing Joan Jett’s I Love Rock and Roll. He hesitated because it was sung by a woman, but eventually agreed when she convinced him that what he sounded like was not what mattered, performing was.
As he sang, the Chinese participants all clapped along even though they were not familiar with the song or the beat and did not understand the words. When Gil finished, all of the Chinese participants rose with full glasses in hand to offer him congratulatory toasts. Then, the male participants began offering cigarettes to Gil (he had been actively offering cigarettes to them prior to this point) and continued to actively drink and talk with him. It was if he was a participant in the event who had just arrived.

When it came time for Master Wu to perform, he reached into his leather briefcase, pulled out his long, brown “storyteller’s gown, dagua (大褂)” and proceeded to dress in front of the group as he explained that he would wear the dagua in order to allow the foreign participants in the audience to get the feel of a real performance. He then requested that I translate the story for the English speaking audience after he completed his performance. His rendition of Second Brother Ma unfolded as follows.

Explain it, ok?
Ao, ao, ao, ao, ao, ao….
Is it ok? Start now?
Dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang, dang dang di ge, dang dang di ge, dang dang di ge dang...
I’m telling of a comrade called Second Brother Ma,
This comrade asked, “What’s called Second Brother Ma?” Ma Daha’s little brother.
Dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang, dang di ge, dang di ge, dang di ge dang...
I’m telling of a comrade called Second Brother Ma,
One day, he was holding a shaving knife about to shave his beard.
There was this fly that was really annoying,
It landed on the tip of his nose crawling to and fro.
Second Brother Ma itched so bad he couldn’t take it,
He wiggled his eyes, ears, lips, nose and tongue to shoo it away.
Using kind of vigor...(demonstrating with facial expressions)
That fly just couldn’t stand without a sway,
It could only spread his wings, then, flew away.
Second Brother Ma picked up the knife and again cut his beard,
When that fly for the second time came to flirt with him.
He thought to himself “You little bastard,
If I don’t slaughter you today,
This beard of mine will never get shaved.”
See him there holding that knife,
Little by little inching it forward,
His mind set on killing that fly.
Just then, you hear “swoosh” the knife swipes by,
The tip of his nose was chopped into an itty, bitty stub.
He hurt so bad he had to grab his nose,
The knife in his hand dropped by his toes.
You say how much of a fluke could things be,
He was wearing flip flops, his tootsies all free.
You could only hear the sound “ker plunk”,
Ah, his big toe was missing a chunk.
He picked it up and pressed it to his nose,
Yes, he stitched it all up where it neatly froze.
He applied herbal oils and rubbed on balms,
Then grabbed a bandage and dressed the wound.
It wasn’t but a few days and he was really perking up,
Second Brother Ma wasn’t ashamed at all to be an expert at regenerative surgery.
There was just one troubling matter,
He often had to trim his toenail on the tip of his nose.

解释解释好吗?
嗷嗷嗷嗷嗷...
可以吧？开始了？
说一位同志叫马二哈，
这位同志问了，“怎么叫马二哈?” 马大哈的弟弟。
说一位同志叫马二哈，
这一天拿着把剃头刀子把胡子刮。 有一个苍蝇真可气，
落到他鼻子尖儿上来回爬。
马二哈痒痒的实在受不了，
五官末位只搬家。
这个劲儿的...
这个苍蝇实在站不稳，
只好把翅膀一扑拉，飞走了。
马二哈拿起刀子又刮胡儿，
这个苍蝇二次又来挑逗他。
他心想兔宰子儿，
“我今天要不宰了你，
我这个胡子儿没法刮。”
你看他拿着把剃头刀子，
一点儿一点儿往前凑，
一心要把那苍蝇杀。
就听见“刷”一刀开过去，
鼻子尖儿削这么小半拉。
他疼了个只顾握鼻子，
手里头刀子掉地下。
你说这事儿有多巧，
穿着个拖鞋还光脚丫。
就听见“喀嚓”一声响，
哎，脚趾头剁掉了小半拉。
他捡起了就往鼻子上安，
掖丝合缝正对茬儿。
这个擦药水抹药膏，
拿过了绷带就包扎。
没过几天儿他可真长活了，
马二哈可不愧是再植手术的老专家。
可就是有一点儿太麻烦了，
得经常在鼻子尖儿上剪指甲。

Once Master Wu bowed, signaling the end of the performance, the flow of the banquet was disrupted as he again requested that I translate for the students.

As I did, the other participants sat silently listening even though most of them
have not studied English. Once I was finished, toasting and small talk broke the eerie silence. Towards the end of the banquet, Wu rose again, this time in his street clothes without the *dagua*. He quickly said there was no need to translate this tale and began performing *Making Pants*, *zuo kuzi* (做裤子). *Dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang, dang di ge, dang di ge, dang di ge dang...*

I'm telling of an old lady who was really careless,
She was making pants for her husband to wear.
After forty-five days, a month and a half,
She finished making the pants but there was only one pant leg.
Her husband brought them over to try them on,
What! He gave them a heave, in one pull, he pulled them over his head.
“Hey, mother of my kid, what kind of pants are these you’ve made?
One pant leg, wearing these, how to expect me to leave the house?”
“Hey, father of my kid, I have only been married to you for seven or eight years,
How am I supposed to know how many legs you have?”

说了位大嫂真粗心儿,
给她丈夫做裤子儿。
四十五天个半月,
做完裤子儿一条腿儿。
她的丈夫拿过来试一试,
嗬！使劲儿一提提过脑门儿。
“吆。孩儿他娘，你这是做的什么裤子儿，
一条腿儿，穿上叫我怎么出门儿。”
“吆，孩儿他爹，俺跟你结婚才七八年，
谁能知道你几条腿儿。

When he finished, toasts ensued and Wu whispered to me that there were some “yellow, *huangse* (黄色)” connotations contained in this short tale so it was best not to explain it to the young students. The color yellow signifies dirty or
pornographic ideas, images or material in Chinese culture. Thus, Wu was referring to the punch line “How am I supposed to know how many legs you have?” that carries insinuations about the male anatomy and mild sexual connotations. The day’s festivities ended as my students and I saw each guest off in cabs or their own cars.

Up to this point in my fieldwork, learning about Shandong fast tales as a participant had required me to “leave my seat in the balcony” in order to participate in larger social events (banquets) in which they were embedded (Noyes, 2003: 28). This had forced me to make emotional and physical investments (and financial ones) but was worth the rewards as I had accomplished much of what is involved in ethnographic fieldwork. That is, I had been able to acquire new knowledge that enabled me understand or produce acceptable behavior in terms of Shandong culture (Agar, 1974: 4). My investments had enabled me to unravel some of the multilayered meanings generated in and by the events and I had learned how to participate in the events both as an informed spectator and as a semi-competent performer (in the sense of participant in banquets in the roles of guest, escort, or host). I had developed the skills necessary to be a good banquet participant and had discovered that most of the behaviors found in banquet room were useful in other contexts. I found myself applying many banquet room behaviors and interaction strategies during interactions in a wide range of settings and contexts outside the banquet room. I
had learned how to acknowledge hierarchy, use titles and fictive kinship forms of
address, when and how to defer turns at talk, what it meant to approach
interaction from an affective stance, the importance of social etiquette, the local
emphasis placed on proper conduct—doing the right things, the right way, at the
right time, with the right people, how to recognize in group and out group patterns
of interaction, the importance of social harmony and face work, how to operate in
a culture that views all people as relational beings, how reciprocity functions in
the local culture, how to participate in the social exchange of feelings, how to
generate and sustain feelings among interlocutors, and how to generate shared
experiences in Shandong culture among other things. Most importantly, however,
I had developed deep, lasting friendships with the people I was interacting with.
They frequently called me to inquire about me and my needs and they went out of
their way to assist in my adaptation to local society. All of this was in addition to
beginning to understand how fast tales and fast tale performances work, as well as
what and how they mean.

However, I still felt limited in what I could do and what I knew about how fast
tales mean. I could deftly interpret them and report about them in detail but was
unable to produce them on my own. The experiences performing xiangsheng had
vividly shown me that there was another layer of meanings beyond what I had
reached in terms of Shandong fast tales. Performing had created detailed personal
memories of how xiangsheng work at the same time it had evoked instruction and
explanation from my interlocutors that deepened my understanding of the events. And, performing had moved interaction to a more personal level with that group of performers. Moreover, the experience of performing other xiangsheng routines (combined with having watched Dong’s performances) had enabled me to handle a new routine with relative ease, although it was not performed entirely in an appropriate manner. When it came to fast tales, I was still dealing primarily with observed, descriptive and declarative knowledge. There was still a wide gap between that type of knowledge and the world of meanings that was available from the performer perspective. And, it was clear to me that knowledge transactions remained entirely one-directional—performers explained what was happening and what things meant. I still did not know how to produce meanings in their world on my own. That is, although I could understand many of the meanings generated in fast tale performances, I had not internalized the ability to independently generate recognizable meanings appropriate for such contexts. Thus, I decided to learn fast tales from the performer perspective.
CHAPTER 3

LEARNING TO PERFORM SHANDONG FAST TALES

Introduction

Although conducting ethnographic fieldwork and analysis of Shandong fast tales as a participant observer enabled me to unpack some of the performed meanings generated by and associated with the tradition, I wanted to understand things from the other direction, from the performer’s perspective. I wanted to get an insider’s look at how they packed meaning into their performances (Geertz, 1983: 29). To do this, I would have to learn how to perform the tales myself. My research had made me well aware of the declining state of the tradition so I had no delusions of making a living as a professional Shandong fast tale performer. Rather, my primary motivations were pedagogical. My primary goal going in was to map out and make explicit the pedagogical approach that Shandong fast tale storytellers use to pass on their tradition to see what could be applied to teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

My initial hypothesis was that Shandong fast tale storytellers developed enactable segments of culture that were held together by a unifying storyline, a process that paralleled what is described as compiling cultural memories in the performed culture approach to teaching language we were developing at Ohio
State (See Introduction). The storytellers first carefully isolate recurrent stereotypical events and personality types in their everyday worlds. Then, through rehearsal they internalize the knowledge and behaviors associated with each segment of culture they choose to perform in a process of continual fine tuning and adjustment. Other motivations included understanding how to produce and manipulate meanings in Shandong culture (and by extension in Chinese culture more generally), how to construct authentic cultural performances, how communication is framed and how those frames are keyed, and how to construct and control narrative in Chinese.

Becoming a Shandong fast tale performer required a significant investment in time to learn to play the *ban* and to actually speak a second dialect of Chinese (to this point, although I had lived in Shandong for many years and could understand many of the local variations of Shandong dialects, I always spoke in Mandarin). It also required me to memorize long narratives, learn stock movements and facial expressions, and develop a thick skin. More importantly in terms of my research interests, becoming a performer forced me to go through the process of integrating myself into a local Shandong subculture (a tightly knit circle of traditional artisans). As I was learning the art form, I was socialized into a new community. Thus, this chapter is in part a map of the processes involved in learning to perform Shandong fast tales. At the same time it traces the trajectory I traveled from outsider to functional member of the community.
Finding a Master

The first thing I had to do in order to become a performer was find a teacher. In China, there are four basic ways to learn a traditional skill or art form. First, one can take “the wild road, ye luzi (野路子)”, or learn on his or her own. For obvious reasons, this route was not suited for the purposes of understanding how the tradition is passed on from one generation to the next. Second, one can pay to participate in one of the short-term study classes periodically offered by local or national performance associations. Again, this format was not conducive to my goals as I did not think it was realistic to think that I could learn enough of a new language in a two to three week period to be able to gain access to insider perspectives. Third, one can attend an “art school or academy, yishu xuexiao, xueyuan (艺术学校，学院)”. Attending a contemporary art academy involves entrance exams, formal classes, and tuition but I decided against this path primarily because I had read that the traditional master-apprentice format most older-generation fast tale performers had learned through was more effective than modern performance schools. Performers in Qingdao had also told me that most performers seek out multiple teachers over the course of their careers in order to improve their skills, gain fame or achieve legitimacy. They described teachers they had learned from for short periods of time as “teachers, laoshi (老师)” while they referred to the teachers who had gotten them started in their art form as
“enlightening/initiating teachers, qimeng laoshi (启蒙老师)”. These figures were clearly distinguished from the figures most influential in their development as performers, who were called “masters, shifu (师父)”.\textsuperscript{184} I decided that for my purposes, an apprenticeship with a recognized master would be an ideal manner in which to examine the construction, learning and transmission of culture.

Finding a teacher is typically done by word of mouth. Once a teacher is located, prospective students utilize third-party go-betweens to make arrangements for an initial meeting. The person who serves as a go-between, called a “recommending teacher, yinjianshi (引荐师)”, is someone who knows both parties (teacher and student) and can vouch for the qualities and background of the student. The closer the relationship the recommending teacher has with the master storyteller, the higher the likelihood the master will accept the student. Initial meetings are often conducted during the course of a banquet arranged and paid for by the prospective student or his or her family. At minimum, the prospective student, recommending teacher, and teacher attend. Often, however,

\textsuperscript{184} The term shifu (师父) has Buddhist origins and is still used as a polite form of address for Buddhist monks and nuns. This term is not to be confused with the homonym shifu (师傅), which refers to someone who has gained experience and specialized knowledge in a skill or trade. The first character in both combinations is the same “teacher, shi (师)”. In master teacher of a traditional art from shifu, the second character is “father, fu (父)” and signifies the relationship between teacher and student has shifted beyond that of the typical teacher and student. In master of a trade shifu, the second character is fu (傅), which refers to one who is responsible for passing on the skills of a trade. In everyday speech, the two terms are indistinguishable because they are homonyms and in contemporary writing the two are often used interchangeably. However, performers continually pointed out to me the distinction whenever they used the term. They would stop immediately after saying the word, add “that is the shifu with the character for father in it”, and move on with whatever they were saying.
the teacher’s wife is invited and one or both of the student’s parents attend. During the course of the initial meeting, the prospective student must make a request to be accepted as a student and often puts any skills or talents they have on display for evaluation by the teacher. The process may also involve the negotiation of some form of tuition and the prospective teacher can accept or decline. By the time I began thinking about learning Shandong fast tales, I already knew several performers but was most familiar with Dong Jiancheng and Master Wu. I had also been recruited by several famous performers of oral traditions, including Shandong fast tales, who were based in other cities in China. Friends had explained to me that many performers viewed having a foreign apprentice both as a status symbol that would raise their position relative to their peers and as a way to attract a broader audience. A friend from Jinan, the provincial capital of Shandong, who had been a visiting scholar at Ohio State, had also offered to introduce me to master fast tale storytellers in that area. Thus, as a foreigner, I had the luxury of choosing a master, something young Chinese wishing to learn traditional art forms typically do not have.

Although I had opportunities to learn from just about any performer, I wanted to learn from Wu Yanguo from the beginning. First, I had purchased and watched VCD’s of the most famous Shandong fast tale performers in all of China, but personally liked Master Wu’s performances better than any others I had seen. His facial expressions were unparalleled, his ban had a distinct sound, the beat
and rhythm of his performances was more pronounced than any I had heard, and
every audience I had seen him perform for reacted to him in a way that they did
not react for other traditional performances. More importantly, I had observed
Master Wu explaining things to others on occasion and was quite certain that he
both loved what he was doing and teaching others about it. His patience and
enthusiasm when explaining things to others signaled to me that he was genuinely
interested in teaching others about the genre. Most importantly, I liked Master Wu
as a person. He was fun to be around. He seemed to always be laughing and
joking but serious about his profession. I could not guarantee that I could find
someone that I felt so naturally comfortable with if I went somewhere else, so I
chose Wu Yanguo. However, I had to also convince Master Wu to choose me so I
asked several friends in the Qingdao area how to raise the subject of becoming an
apprentice with him. Nearly everyone I talked to told me to just ask him because
they were confident that he would readily agree but several also suggested that I
do things in a culturally appropriate manner. They suggested I conduct a banquet
in which I officially broached the subject in front of a group of people who could
serve as witnesses.

On September 14, 2004, I invited Master Wu to dinner at the Ocean
Pleasant Dream Restaurant in Qingdao. Present were Master Wu, my friend Mr.
Du, Mr. Du’s assistant Xue Hui, my Chinese older sister Li Ying, Book of
Changes Master Nian, who had been my initial connection to Master Wu, and
Master Wu’s close friend Xie Benxin. Prior to the banquet, I went out of my way to ensure that we had the best room available as well as the finest food and drink in order to please Master Wu. Once he arrived, I arranged for him to sit in the seat of honor. We began with three traditional toasts and the banquet was underway. During the course of small talk, I announced to Master Wu my desire to learn to perform Shandong fast tales from him. He then explained to me what the traditional master-apprentice relationship meant saying that it was an intensely close relationship in which the two parties live together for an extended period “sleeping on the same bed”. Master Wu explained the distinction between a “master of a trade, shifu (师傅)” and a “master teacher, shifu (师父)” and that the latter must accept an apprentice into his family as a son. In doing so, Master Wu quoted a line from the Analects of Confucius that sums up the relationship between master and apprentice: “A master for a day is a father for life, yi ri wei shi, zhong sheng wei fu (一日为师，终生为父)”. He also made a clear distinction between “students, xuesheng (学生)”, from who masters could accept tuition or other forms of payment, and “apprentices, tudi (徒弟)”, from who masters could not accept so much as a penny.\(^{185}\) After explaining these expectations, Master Wu went out of his way to ensure that we had the best room available as well as the finest food and drink in order to please Master Wu. Once he arrived, I arranged for him to sit in the seat of honor. We began with three traditional toasts and the banquet was underway. During the course of small talk, I announced to Master Wu my desire to learn to perform Shandong fast tales from him. He then explained to me what the traditional master-apprentice relationship meant saying that it was an intensely close relationship in which the two parties live together for an extended period “sleeping on the same bed”. Master Wu explained the distinction between a “master of a trade, shifu (师傅)” and a “master teacher, shifu (师父)” and that the latter must accept an apprentice into his family as a son. In doing so, Master Wu quoted a line from the Analects of Confucius that sums up the relationship between master and apprentice: “A master for a day is a father for life, yi ri wei shi, zhong sheng wei fu (一日为师，终生为父)”. He also made a clear distinction between “students, xuesheng (学生)”, from who masters could accept tuition or other forms of payment, and “apprentices, tudi (徒弟)”, from who masters could not accept so much as a penny.\(^{185}\) After explaining these expectations, Master Wu

\(^{185}\) The fact that I could not pay Master Wu for his help added tremendous pressure to work hard to learn what he was teaching me. I also had to continually find ways to repay him and to make my presence welcome. Among other things, I regularly made VCD copies of all of the videotapes I made of his and other troupe members’ performances, took pictures and developed copies for him and his friends, bought a cell phone for his wife because he said that he wanted to surprise her with a new phone, served as a private English tutor for Tian Yi, the daughter of his colleague Tian
agreed to accept me as an apprentice and everyone present offered congratulatory
toasts. As the mood of the event reached a mirthful peak, Master Wu rose from
his seat to perform. After announcing that he would perform the tale *Getting a
Shot*, he began. *Dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang, dang di ge, dang di ge, dang di
ge dang*...

(Narrator voice):
At the hospital Zhao Xiaolan was a nurse,
Her skills were bad and she wasn’t well versed.
It was clear to all, she didn’t like to study and she didn’t rehearse.
One day it was her turn on duty in the injection ward,
Whoa, along came a patient named Big Old Shan.
Big Old Shan, was up there in years,
He’d caught a cold and to bronchitis it turned.
He was like this: (Wheezing sounds.)
Big Old Shan came to the injection ward,
And at the door he turned in his patient card.
Zhao Xiaolan picked up the card and looked with care,
The more she looked, the more it seemed rare.

(Nurse Zhao voice):
“Hee, hee, hee. Hee, hee, hee. What a name!”

(Aside as performer):
What was his name? Big Old Shan’s name was Shan Guorui. What three
characters? ‘Shan’ is the ‘dan’ in the word ‘work unit,’ but in the list of
one hundred most common names, it is read ‘shan.’ ‘Guo’ is the ‘guo’ in
the word ‘nation,’ but here it was simplified, he had drawn a square. ‘Rui’
is the ‘rui’ in Dong Cunrui’s name.

(Narrator voice):
Zhao Xiaolan just misread the characters turning Shan Guorui into
“Breathing Through One hole.”

Shengwen (as well as the children of several of his other performer friends), and worked as a
substitute English teacher at a local middle school as a favor to his younger sister.
(Nurse Zhao voice):
“Breathing Through One Hole…. Breathing Through One Hole…. Breathing Through One Hole….”

(Narrator Voice):
Big Old Shan thought, “Who is she calling? Could she be calling me?”
He looked around and there was no one left but him.

(Old Shan voice):
“She’s really calling me?”

(Nurse Zhao voice):
“Breathing Through One Hole!”

(Narrator voice):
All at once it hit Big Old Shan.

(Old Shan thinking to himself voice):
This place is a hospital after all,
At the hospital they don’t call patient names,
It’s the ailment they call.
What I’ve caught is bronchitis after all,
Bronchitis must be called breathing through one hole.

(Old Shan normal voice):
“Doctor, I’m here. Coming, coming. Doctor, are you calling me?”

(Nurse Zhao voice):
“Oh, are you Breathing Through One Hole?”

(Old Shan voice):
“Doctor, I am breathing through one hole.”

(Nurse Zhao voice):
“Getting a shot?”

(Old Shan voice):
“Doctor, I’m getting a shot. Where do you think I should have it?”

(Nurse Zhao voice):
“On your rutt.”
(Old Shan voice):
“Rutt? Doctor, rutt? Rutt? Doctor, where is the rutt?”

(Nurse Zhao voice):
“Look, it’s right here.” (Pointing at her behind)

(Old Shan voice):
“Doctor, this is called the butt, how could it be called a rutt?”

(Nurse Zhao voice):
If I say it’s a rutt, it’s a rutt,
This case of yours is really a pain,
Lie down!”

(Old Shan voice):
“Ok, ok, ok.”

(Narrator voice):
Zhao Xiaolan whipped out her pen,
And drew a circle on Old Shan’s bum.
While she was at it, she grabbed the syringe.

(Nurse Zhao voice):
“Don’t move, I tell you, if you move, it’s easy for things to get dangerous!
Lie still, lie still, lie still, lie still, lie still, lie still! (Stabbing Old Shan in
the rear end with the syringe) If I tell you to lie still, lie still! See, I forgot
to put in the medicine. This time when I tell you to lie still, I tell you, if I
don’t get it in the circle it could be dangerous, you know! Lie still, lie still,
lie still, lie still, lie still! (Again stabbing Old Shan in the rear) I’m sorry, it
was a little high! (Stabbing him again) I’m sorry, it was a little low!
(Stabbing him again) Sorry, damn it! (Stabbing him again) I’m sorry, this
time it was to the right! (Stabbing him repeatedly in rapid fire succession)
Hee, hee, hee. Hee, hee, hee.”

(Old Shan voice):
“Oooowwww!”

(Narrator voice):
Big Old Shan hurt so bad he couldn’t lie still,
He grabbed his butt and could only yell.
(Old Shan voice):
"Jeeze, stop it, stop it! I came here sick just wanting a shot,
How is it you turned it in to target practice!
Oooh! No more shots. No more shots. No more shots. No more shots."

医院的个护士赵小兰，
她的技术不高文化浅。
明明四季那个水平低,
一不学这个二不钻。
这一天注射室值班儿轮到了她，
唉，来了个病号大老单。
大老单，岁数大，
感冒后得了气管炎。
这个尽儿的：....（呼吸的声音）
大老单来到了注射室，
门口放下注射单。
赵小兰拿过单子留神看，
越看心里越稀罕。
“呵呵呵，呵呵呵，叫个什么名!”
叫什么名啊！大老单叫单国瑞，哪三字呀？“单”是单位的单，在百家姓上念“单。”“国”是国家的“国，”在这里简化了，写了个方块儿。“瑞”是董存瑞的“瑞。”赵小兰净念错别字儿。把“单国瑞”念成了“单口喘。”
“单口喘，单口喘，单口喘。”
大老单一想，“叫谁呀。还能叫我吗？看看旁边儿没别人啦。她真叫我吗？”
“单口喘！”
大老单一想明白了。
人家这个地方是医院，
医院里边儿不叫人名叫病名。
我患的个本是气管炎，
气管炎可不是单口喘吗。
“医生，来了，来了，来了，医生，叫我吗？”
“吆，你叫单口喘呀？”
“医生，我是单口喘，”
“打针呀？”
“医生，打针，你看打哪儿？”
“臀 (读 diàn) 部。”
“臀部, 医生, 臀部, 臀部? 医生, 你看臀部在哪儿?”
“看着, 这儿, 这儿, 这儿.”
“医生, 这叫臀部, 怎么能叫臀部?”
“我说臀部就是臀部, 你这个病号真讨厌, 趴下!”
“好, 好, 好.”
赵小兰拿出了圆珠笔, 在老单腚上画了个圈儿.
顺手拿过了注射器.
“别动, 我告诉你说, 一动容易出危险啊! 趴平点儿, 趴平点儿, 趴平点儿, 趴平点儿, 趴平点儿, 趴平点儿! 叫你趴平点儿, 趴平点儿! 看看没灌药水儿. 这会儿, 叫你趴平点儿, 告诉你说打出圈儿出危险啊! 趴平点儿, 趴平点儿, 趴平点儿, 趴平点儿, 趴平点儿! 叫你趴平点儿, 趴平点儿! 对不起, 靠上了. 对不起, 靠下了. 对不起, 气死我了! 对不起, 又靠右了! 呵呵呵!”
“嗷!”
大老单疼得个受不住了, 捂着个屁股直叫唤.
“哎呀, 别着了, 别着了! 原是看病来打针, 你怎么拿这个当射箭! 哦! 不打了. 不打了, 不打了, 不打了.”

As the incompetent Nurse Zhao continued to miss her target, audience members called out, “That’s ten shots!” and “I couldn’t stand it!” The life-like sounds of Old Shan wheezing, Nurse Zhao filling the syringe (with a little extra medicine squirting out into her eye), and of Nurse Zhao crudely jamming the needle into Old Shan’s behind had the group rolling in laughter, literally. Mr. Du nearly fell off of his chair and one of the women leaned on the table covering her face and resting her head in her arms as she shook with laughter. As the performance came to an end, the roaring laughter filling the room came to a crescendo that was followed by several rounds of congratulatory toasts. As the
mood calmed, small talk ensued and discussion shifted to Master Wu’s rendition of Nurse Zhao. Several audience members commented that what they had found so humorous (in addition to the storyline) was the scene that involved of a burly (Wu weighs well over two hundred pounds), nearly six-foot man, talking and acting like a woman. As the evening wore on, Master Wu enthralled the audience with another fast tale performance and with a qigong demonstration. Master Wu’s qigong demonstration involved bending his thumb and index finger backwards until they touched his forearm in a manner that allowed no crack to remain between his fingers and the back of his hand, a sight that had everyone present cringing. This performance was also followed by congratulatory toasts and another round of conversational exchange. The banquet came to a close with Master Wu telling me to call him to make arrangements to begin the formal learning process. The next day, I immediately called Master Wu to make

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186 Wu has been described as both sounding and looking like Wu Song, the cultural hero he often plays, because of his imposing size.

187 While serving as his apprentice (2004-5), I witnessed Wu Yanguo regularly performing qigong in various offstage contexts such as conferences, banquets, and meetings. His typical repertoire included moving one tooth to a position in his mouth behind other teeth so that it appeared to have disappeared. He did so without actually removing the tooth from his gums and having allowed audience members to inspect his teeth before and after performances to see if they were false. He also performed various magic tricks including making objects appear to pass through one ear and out the other, making coins appear to pass through napkins and tables, and guessing the numbers on a pair of dice placed in a small box by a volunteer from the audience. Although Master Wu sees Shandong fast tale storytelling as his primary profession, one of the reasons he has become known as an “expert in quyi, quyijia (曲艺家)” is because of his ability to perform multiple art forms including kuaiban, xiaopin, xiangsheng, qigong, and magic.
arrangements to meet. He suggested that we meet in my hotel room at the Free Bird Hotel, ziyou niao (自由鸟).\(^{188}\)

**Learning the Basic Skills**

On day one of my training, Master Wu called around eight in the morning to tell me he would arrive within an hour. I straightened up the room and anxiously awaited his arrival. Exactly one hour later, there was a knock at the door. When I opened the door, Master Wu entered the room and immediately began teaching. As he removed a small, brown book from his shoulder bag, he informed me that step one was to learn my lineage. He then opened the roughly four by eight inch “lineage book, jiapu (家谱)” to show me a collection of name cards, complete with pictures, for all performers officially recognized in the Gao School of Shandong fast tales. Roughly one hundred performers were arranged in chronological order according to the date of their acceptance into the school.\(^{189}\) Master Wu then told me about key performers as we looked at their pictures, beginning with the founder of the school, Gao Yuanjun. He passed on the tale of how Gao had been a poor itinerant performer who had been rejected as an apprentice to Qi Yongli three times before finally being accepted. He told me that

\(^{188}\) I chose the *Free Bird* because it has apartment-style rooms equipped with small kitchen areas and I was able to negotiate a relatively inexpensive price for a long-term stay.

\(^{189}\) Master Wu explained that there were at the time more than one thousand Shandong fast tale performers active in China but that only a small number were officially recognized in the Gao School lineage.
Gao, who was now my “great grandfather, shi zeng yeye (师曾爷爷)”, had learned from Qi Yongli and had trained more than two hundred apprentices over the years. Of those two hundred apprentices, the best eighteen were called the “eighteen pine trees, shi ba ke qingsong (十八棵青松)”. With great pride and reverence, Master Wu then added that the most talented performer out of those eighteen pines was his master, and now my “grandfather, shi yeye (师爷爷)”, Li Hongji (李鸿基). After explaining that I should address performers of my grandfather’s generation as “uncle, shishu (师叔)”, he went on to tell at length of Li’s performances at the Great Hall of the People as well as of how unrivaled Li was as a performer. Master Wu then said that he had learned from both Gao and Li but that because Gao was already too old to perform some of the necessary movements when he was learning, Li was his primary teacher. Master Wu also said that Li had four other apprentices in Qingdao—Yan Chengshan (闫成山), Li Bingjie (李炳杰), Zhao Leping (赵乐平) and Dong Jiancheng (董建城), but had declared Wu the “apprentice in charge of passing on the tradition, zhangmen dizi (掌门弟子)”, which meant that much of the instruction for the four brothers under Master Li had been entrusted to Wu. He then explained terms of address that I

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190 The term Shi zeng yeye is comprised of the character shi for master, zeng indicating three generations and yeye for grandfather so literally it is Master Grandfather and refers to one’s master’s master’s master. All of the other kinship terms used as titles and forms of address among performers also contain the character shi for master although I leave that out in the English translation.
would need to know including for male performers of his generation: “uncle, *shishu* (師叔)”; for female performers of his generation: “aunt, *shigu* (師姑)”; for male performers of my generation who had begun learning before me (even if they were actually younger than me): “elder brother, *shige* (師哥)”; for female performers of my generation who began learning before me: “elder sister, *shijie* (師姐)”; for male performers of my generation who began learning after me: “younger brother, *shidi* (師弟)”; for female performers who began learning after me: “younger sister, *shimei* (師妹)”; and for his wife: “mother, *shimu* (師母)”.

After tracing my lineage, Master Wu then said, “If you’re going to study Shandong fast tales, you first must learn to play the *ban.*” After explaining that in the performance of fast tales, speaking is primary and the *ban* is secondary, he said, “Without the *ban,* it’s not fast tales.” Master Wu then told me that I needed to be prepared to endure hours of boring, bitter practice to learn to play because it typically takes about forty-five days of hard practice to learn to play the *ban.* For proof, he extended his right hand to show me the large callus that had developed on the back of his right pinky from playing the *ban.* He bragged, “It is the biggest callus in all of China”, which by extension meant that he had practiced

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191 Master Wu told me that he arrived at this number by calculating the number of two hour classes it normally took a new learner to develop the basic *ban* skills. He teaches beginner classes on Saturday mornings from roughly nine to eleven thirty. According to Wu, as long as a student practices during the week in between these classes, he can have them playing the *ban* after five or six class sessions (roughly six weeks).
the ban more than any other fast tale performer. Next, Master Wu patiently showed me step-by-step the proper manner in which to hold the ban, called the “position, zishi (姿势)” (see Chapter 2 for a description). He said that although he was a “lefty, zuopiezi (左撇子)”, which meant that he used his left hand to perform and his right hand to play the ban, the standard among performers was to use the left hand to play the ban and the right hand to perform. He insisted that I learn in the standard manner using the left hand saying that if I learned any other way people would think that he had taught me incorrectly. He then picked up his ban and mine, one in each hand, and began playing the basic beat pattern simultaneously with both hands to demonstrate that he could actually use either hand. After covering the grip, Master Wu then demonstrated the proper position in which to hold the ban arm while playing, which is chest high with the elbow bent as if you are “hugging the moon, huaizhong baoyue (怀中抱月)”.

Master Wu then moved on to what he called the “essential lyric, yaoling (要令)” used to mark the basic beat pattern. “Dang di ge dang, dang di ge dang, dang di ge, dang di ge, dang di ge dang”, he slowly chanted breaking each syllable down. He had me repeat it after him several times at the exact beat and

192 While interacting with other fast tale performers, I learned that discussions about and comparisons of calluses were common especially when older performers encountered someone in the early learning stages. When Master Wu would tell performers that I had just begun to learn how to play the ban, performers frequently asked to see my hand to see how hard I was working. Several older performers then went on to regale me with stories about their fingers bleeding and of wrapping their fingers with various types of materials in order to be able to continue to practice.
pace so that I understood the length of each sound. We did this until he was convinced I had the yaoling down. Master Wu told me to concentrate first on correctly producing the initial dang. Once I could accurately produce that sound, I could then move on to di. After I could play both of those notes, I was to focus on the di ge combination before finally putting it together. He went on to explain that since fast tales typically have seven character lines, the dang of dang di ge dang should be “pressed, ya (压)” on top of the last word in each line. He told me that this was the basic beat pattern and that once I could accurately produce it, he would teach me others. To foreshadow what was to come and to make sure that I

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193 The stress pattern of seven character sentences typically breaks the larger line-length unit down into three subunits in a two-two-three framework. For example, the opening line of Wu Song Fights the Tiger is “Idle talk and aimless chatter, I’ll tell you no more, xian yan sui yu bu duo jiang (闲言碎语不多讲)”. In this case, the first two syllables xian yan (idle words) become a stress unit with a brief pause following. The second two syllables sui yu (superfluous language) then form a separate stress unit followed by another pause before the final stress unit bu duo jiang (verb negation marker, too much tell). There are other possible stress patterns but the two-two-three combination is the most common. Although the seven character line is the fundamental metrical structure that organizes fast tale lyrics, sentences of varying length also occur, especially during plain speech segments in which characters are engaged in dialogue, the narrator is offering extended description, or the performer as himself if engaged in commentary or exchange with the audience. When the number of syllables in a line changes concurrent stress shifts are made in delivery. A typical six character line has two fundamental parts so that the first three and last three syllables are said together as distinct units. For example, in the line “Speak few words, talk firm will, hua shao shuo, lun gangqiang (话少说论刚强)”, there is a noticeable pause between ‘words’ and ‘talk’. In eight character lines, the subunits are often divided in a three-two-three pattern. An example can be found in the second line of Wu Song Fights the Tiger. “I’m here to tell the story of the hero Second Brother Wu, biao yi biao hao han Wu Erlang, (表一表好汉武二郎)”. The Chinese in this line is broken down so that biao yi biao, hao han, and Wu Erlang are distinct units with slight pauses in between. A translation that captures the beat would be something like, “I’ll narrate, hero, Wu Erlang.” Ten character lines generally follow a three-four-three pattern. Thus, the line “I’m telling about the twentieth of the last month of the year, passed the middle of the month, shuo de shi layue er shi ban yue duo (说的是腊月二十半月多)” is divided into the subunits: 1) shuo de shi, 2) layue ershi, and 3) ban yue duo. These examples come from Liu Hongbin (2001: 68-116). Liu lists five basic sentence patterns.
understood each of these beat patterns, Master Wu wrote the four “basic ways of playing (the ban), jiben dafa (基本打法)” down in my notebook. They are as follows:

1) “single beat pattern, dan dian shi (单点式)”:

当的咯当。当的咯当。当的咯，当的咯，当的咯当。
dang di ge dang. dang di ge dang. dang di ge, dang di ge, dang di ge dang.

2) “small flower beat, xiao hua dian (小花点)”:

的咯当。
di ge dang.

3) “flower beat pattern, hua dian shi (花点式)”:

当当的咯当。当当的咯当。当当的咯，当当的咯，当当的咯当。
dang dang di ge dang. dang dang di ge dang. dang dang di ge, dang dang di ge dang.

4) “blended beat, hunhe dian (混合点)”

The blended beat pattern is simply a mix of the other three beat patterns. The single beat pattern, also known as a “small pass through the gate, xiao guo men (小过门)”, is used to link the two lines of a couplet in fast tales. It also allows the performer enough time to “steal a breath, touqi (偷气)” (Liu, 2001).\(^{194}\) The small flower beat is used in situations in which the rate of delivery does not allow

\(^{194}\) It is referred to as ‘stealing’ because breathing should not be a visible aspect of a Shandong fast tale performance. During a class for intermediate learners, Master Wu warned, “If the audience sees you breathe while signing fast tales, you are wrong.” He then compared breathing in singing fast to tales to breathing while singing a song saying that one should deeply take in air, hold it in the diaphragm, and gradually release it as necessary.
enough time for the more extended single beat pattern such as in tense action scenes. An example is when the tiger first appears in *Wu Song Fights the Tiger*. The description of the tiger is delivered at such a fast rate of speech that the single beat pattern would interfere with building suspense so each line of description is followed simply with a *di ge dang* rather than with the full *dang di ge dang*. When explaining the uses of the small flower beat, Master Wu also told me of an innovation that he has brought into Shandong fast tales. He uses a slower, more distinct version of this beat pattern when characters are in deep thought and describes the usage as “pondering points, *sisuo dian* (思索点)”. An example occurs in *Wu Song Fights the Tiger* when Wu Song first sees a sign hanging in front of an inn that reads “Three bowls and you can’t cross the ridge”. Upon seeing the sign, Wu Song is puzzled. He pauses for a moment to consider what the sign means: Huh? Wu Song thought, “What does ‘Three bowls and you can’t cross the ridge’ mean?” During the pause, Master Wu slowly plays *di ge dang* twice as he imitates Wu Song in deep thought before continuing on with, “Oh! This little wine seller is making up lies…” The flower beat pattern is used both to mix up beat patterns and to open performances. Called a “great pass through the gate, *da guo men* (大过门)”, the flower beat pattern signals to the audience that a performance is about to begin. One of the original purposes of the *ban* was to attract the attention of passersby amidst the noisy bustle of markets and temple fairs. To demonstrate this point, Master Wu withdrew a large bamboo clapper
from his shoulder bag. He explained that the function of the larger clapper was to attract attention while the function of the smaller copper ban was to maintain rhythm. He then began playing the two (large bamboo clapper in his left hand and copper ban in his right) simultaneously as he told the beginning of a tale that was set on a day so hot that you could use a rock from along side the road to iron your clothes.  

Master Wu then explained that the beat set at the beginning of a performance is critical because a performer’s rate of speech follows this initial beat pattern set with the ban. When I asked how to keep the same rhythm throughout, he answered, “I have a ban in my heart, wo xin li you yi fu ban (我心里有一副板).” He said that the best performers are the performers who constantly change the beat and pace within a performance but at the same time maintain the fundamental rhythm. According to Master Wu, the beat was inside of him so he did not need to use any techniques to sustain the fundamental rhythm but some inexperienced performers tap their foot as they sing while others “touch ban, dian ban (点板)”, or click the two pieces of the ban together lightly in order to keep the beat. He suggested that I use one of these methods in the beginning until I was

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195 Although this “attention grabbing” function no longer is necessary in most performance contexts, all performances begin with at least one small pass through the gate. More skilled performers use a great pass through the gate to show off their skill with the ban. In addition to allowing the audience to settle in for the performance, the use of a guo men to initiate a fast tale performance sets the pace of the beat that will be maintained throughout the tale (Liu, 2001).
able to develop a feel for the rhythm but warned that these gimmicks mark an immature performer.

After having me practice the proper grip and motion to play dang, Master Wu then removed a brand new set of bamboo clappers from his shoulder bag. On the outside of the larger clapper and on the inside leaf of the smaller clapper was written my Chinese name. As he handed them to me, he said, “While you learn Shandong fast tales, you might as well learn fast clapper tales. The ban is much easier to learn.” He then taught me the proper grip before demonstrating how to play each type of clapper. Playing this instrument involves a basic seven-beat pattern that Master Wu continually counted out loud as he clacked away, “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven.” He showed me how the larger two-slat clapper was held in the left hand and was used

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196 A wide range of regional performance styles exist in China that share similar features with Shandong fast tales, in particular the fast and/or rhythmic speech. “Fast clapper tales, kuaibanshu (快板书),” is one such sister genre that is well developed in the Tianjin and Beijing areas. Although clearly related, Shandong fast tales and kuaibanshu are independently formed genres distinguishable in terms of: origins—kuaibanshu developed this century out of a genre called “rhyming for treasures, shulaibao (数来宝)”; story content—kuaibanshu did not solely revolve around the Wu Song story cycles in the early stages of its evolution; rhyme patterns—kuaibanshu changes rhyme within a given story segment, often after every couplet; beat patterns—kuaibanshu uses a standard seven or eight count beat with stress on beats one, four and seven; rhythm-keeping devices—kuaibanshu performers use one large clapper, called a guada ban (呱嗒板), made of two bamboo slats tied together with a piece of yarn, in their left hand and one smaller castanet-like device, called a jiezi (节子), which is made of five small bamboo slats tied together with six small coin-shaped pieces of copper between the outside four slats, in their right hand; and dialect spoken—kuaibanshu performers use either standard Chinese or the Tianjin dialect, which sometimes calls for the use of different rhyme schemes. A fundamental difference between fast tale and kuaibanshu performances is that kuaibanshu performers have both hands occupied with rhythm keeping devices while fast tale performers only have one hand occupied. This distinction leads to more emphasis on movements that support narrative activity in fast tales. Most importantly to Shandong fast tale performers, however, is that fast clapper tales emerged later than and under the direct influence of the already existing fast tale tradition.
to strike a single loud “clack” on beats one, four, and seven. The smaller five-slat castanet was held in the right hand and maintained a constant beat striking on each count. He then taught me a short ditty to practice the bamboo clapper beat and rhythm with. It went like this:

Playin’ the clapper brings me joy,  
Beneath the stage crowds of people.  
Good acts follow one after one,  
This time it’s my turn to speak.  
I’m an amateur kuaiban fan,  
Studied kuaiban half a year.  
Didn’t learn anything else,  
Learned to brag about myself.

打起了竹板儿乐呵呵,  
台下的观众人很多。  
好节目是一个挨一个,  
这回轮到我来说。  
我是个业余快板的爱好者,  
学快板儿也就是半年多。  
别的没学会,  
学会了自个儿夸自个儿。

After he finished, Master Wu told me a seven or eight minute excerpt from *Wu Song Fights the Tiger* while seated at the small table in my room. Although he did not stand, Master Wu did play the *ban* and performed many of the movements involved. He also assumed the role of Wu Song complete with voice and facial expressions. I sat watching, trying to follow the story and to get a feel for the rhythm at the same time. As I began floating off into the world of Wu Song, he stopped, rose, and began collecting his things. He said that the grip and the *yaoling* were all I needed to practice on my own and now everything was up to me. As he left, Master Wu said that he would be in touch to check up on my progress. I spent the rest of the day practicing in my room. I alternated between playing the copper *ban* and the bamboo clappers. It was clear right from the beginning that although the bamboo clappers looked more complex because both
hands were moving simultaneously, it was actually much easier to master. I could produce the basic sound with each hand individually after only a short period of practice. The only difficulty would be coordinating the motion of the two hands. The copper *ban* was a different story. I spent most of the afternoon without producing a single *dang*. This initial stage was quite frustrating because Master Wu’s approach was to allow me to discover how the *ban* works primarily on my own (with periodic nudges in the right direction).

My individual practice continued for a little more than two weeks. I practiced alone in my room (as much as my fingers could take) between the hours of eight and eleven thirty in the morning and from two thirty to six thirty in the afternoon. I was afraid to wake anyone up in the morning, during their noonday naps, or in the evening so I spent much of those hours either reading fast tale stories or interacting with friends in the area. Master Wu came by every couple of days to check on my progress. The visits followed a distinct pattern. Master Wu would say, “Play the *ban* for me so I can see whether or not you are doing it correctly.” I would play one or two notes. He would stop me to tell me I was not producing the correct sound. He then would ask, “Have you practiced?” He would make adjustments to the way I was holding the *ban* and would watch me practice for thirty or forty minutes as he told me that I was not putting in enough practice time. As I practiced, he would tell me stories of practicing for six or eight hours straight without stopping to eat when he was first learning. He said that he
practiced so much that his father told him that he was crazy. After he was sure that I was holding the *ban* correctly, Master Wu would then leave me to practice alone. After the first couple of weeks of individual practice, Master Wu came to my room for practice one morning. After correcting my grip and telling me that I had made some progress because I could correctly produce the initial *dang*, he told me that having me live in the Free Bird Hotel was not convenient for him. He had to drive twenty minutes to get there so he had made arrangements for me to live at another hotel near to where he worked. The following day, I moved to the Garden of Abundant Happiness Restaurant, *yi sheng yuan da jiu dian* (怡盛苑大酒店), a small dining establishment located on Guangrao Road, which is situated in a less affluent section of the city where few foreigners visit or live.

**Building a Performance: Individual Sessions**

On the third day I was at Abundant Happiness, Master Wu called me first thing in the morning to tell me that we would have class in an hour. When he arrived, Master Wu had two female students with him. One, who appeared to be in her twenties, he said, was learning fast clapper tales from him in order to participate in an upcoming talent competition. The other, also in her twenties, was learning how to perform a magic trick for the same competition. Throughout the course of the morning, I came to learn that both actually worked as travel agents and tour guides for a local travel agency and were assigned the task of
participating in a province wide tour guide competition of which the talent display was one component. The day’s class began with Master Wu teaching the inside secrets to a magic trick in which he used a red cloth napkin to make a three inch drinking glass disappear. When Master Wu demonstrated, it appeared that the glass had really disappeared. When the young tour guide tried, the glass remained in plain sight. As he laughed at her, Master Wu showed her two or three times slowly how to flip the glass over so that it was hidden behind the cloth and then had her practice on her own on the side.

He then turned his attention to the other tour guide, Zhang Bei (张蓓), who would eventually become my “little sister, shimei (师妹)” and close friend. “Let me see you play the ban,” he began. She played the bamboo clapper for about two and a half minutes. She went through a routine that she had obviously been working on for some time before Master Wu took a few moments to correct small errors such as the height of her hands, where she was looking, her facial expression, how she was standing, and the order in which she completed various steps in the routine. He then taught her a new element to add to her repertoire. It was called “horse hooves, ma ti (马蹄)” and involved dragging the moving smaller castanet over the larger clacker so that the sound produced resembled the sound of a horse trotting. After slowing things down in order to demonstrate how to produce the sound, he had Zhang Bei practice on the side as well. Master Wu
then checked my progress with the ban. After I finished, he told me that I finally had the right motion but that the beat was still not correct. The dang was not long enough. He then had me practice on the side as he shifted among the three of us periodically offering comments and demonstrating what we were doing incorrectly.

After about two hours, Master Wu told us that the class was over. As we were packing up for the day, Master Wu gave Zhang Bei and me written scripts for nine stories we were to memorize. He said that they were our “basic skills, jiben gong (基本功)” and that all of them could be performed in either the fast tale or the fast clapper tale style. The stories included Wino, jiumi (酒迷), The Confused County Magistrate, hutu xianguan (糊涂县官), Selling Me, mai wo (卖我), A Nest of Liu’s, yi wo liu (一窝溜), Boasting, shuo da hua (说大话), Auntie Wee, cuo dao sao (矬大嫂), The Big-footed Girl, da jiao guniang (大脚姑娘), Fear, pa (怕), and The Big Truth, dashihua (大实话). He chose these stories because they were short, were part of a widely recognized traditional repertoire, and in the case of Fear, Wino, The Confused County Magistrate, Selling Me, and A Nest of Liu’s were tongue twisters. Master Wu said that learning to tell these stories was intended to practice our “lip skills, zui pizi gongfu (嘴皮子功夫)”.

When class ended, Master Wu drove Zhang Bei and me to a nearby restaurant for lunch, during which I learned two of his favorite foods are tripe and
pinpan (拼盘), a cold dish constituted of a mixture of jelly-like noodles made from crushed beans and strips of dried bean curd. When lunch ended, Master Wu took me back to the restaurant where I immediately began using my dictionary to look up every character in the stories Master Wu had given me so that I was sure that I understood the content and knew the exact tone of each word. I began memorizing them by repeating as much of them as possible out loud without looking at the script. I also wrote the stories out in Chinese several times in order to help solidify them in memory. In between memorization drills, I practiced the ban and the bamboo clappers. I finally began producing a weak version of dang di ge dang with the copper ban but at first could only sustain it for a few seconds before I would lose my grip. Actually producing a sound motivated me, however, and I spent several hours trying to increase the length of time I could keep the beat going. First, I made it to forty-five seconds, then one minute, and then two minutes. For the next few weeks, I continued to extend the time until I was able to sustain it for more than thirty minutes at a time.

Towards the end of November, the pipes below the sink in my room at Abundant Happiness began to leak hot water. We then spent the next week with Master Wu driving me from place to place looking at hotels, hostels and rooms for rent. Each time Master Wu would announce who he was, explain that I was a poor student learning a traditional Chinese art, and negotiate the best price he could get. We finally decided upon the Plentiful Smooth Prosperity Hotel, feng
shun xing binguăn (丰顺兴宾馆), which was located on the second floor of a new building at No. 25 University Road above a cafeteria-style restaurant and a bookstore. Master Wu and I both liked the location, only a two-minute walk to the east to Wu’s home, and the price was reasonable at sixty RMB per day ($7.26). Once I moved into the Plentiful Smooth Prosperity, life became much easier as I developed a level of comfort in my surroundings and the amount of contact I had with Master Wu increased dramatically. He often stopped by to check on me on his way to work in the morning and he regularly brought food and coworkers to my room for fun-filled lunch sessions. During lunch hours, the restaurant on the first floor of the building filled to capacity with students from the No. 39 Middle School that was located just down the street so our laughter did not disturb anyone. When Master Wu got tired, he told me when to wake him up and took naps on the extra bed. In the evenings, I walked to Master Wu’s nearly every day for dinner.

Beginning with the first class at Abundant Happiness, Master Wu started conducting all of his classes for older individual students in my room. Each time, he called in advance to tell me the time and which student would be coming so that I could prepare. Among the students that came were two women in the military (one in the army and one in the navy) who were learning fast clapper tales so that they could participate in base performances. One group of students learned fast clapper tales so that they could perform at a company outing. Several college students learned fast clapper tales so that they could perform for school
events. Two high school girls learned fast clapper tales to use for “talent display, 
caiyi zhanshi (才艺展示)” components of college or academy entrance exams.

One female college student learned fast clapper tales because she saw it as a way
to break the monotony of college study. A couple of students learned fast clapper
tales in order to perform for holiday parties. And, several students learned fast
clapper tales because they were in similar situations to that of the two tour guides.
That is, they had to learn some sort of talent as part of their professional
evaluations. One man in his forties learned to perform a Shandong fast tale to use
as his talent for the television show “Avenue of the Stars, xingguang dadao (星光
大道)”, an American-idol format reality competition show aired on China Central
Television.

Master Wu conducted each of these adult sessions following a set format
that was clearly based on the structure established by Gao Yuanjun in the 1950’s.
He selected stories for the students to learn, gave them written scripts to learn on
their own, and used class time as focused rehearsal sessions. The student would
perform on the ban (either bamboo or copper, but the vast majority of older
students were learning fast clapper tales so it was usually bamboo). After they
finished, Master Wu pointed out things to work on before demonstrating a new
element to add to the routine. Once he had checked the ban, the next step was to
have the student perform a story. Depending on what point the student was at in
the process of building a performance, this involved reading the words out loud, reciting the words out loud with Master Wu correcting pronunciation, stress, and intonation; combining the words and ban (ban he kou he qi lai 板和口合起来); “arranging movements, pai dongzuo (排动作)”; “managing characters, renwu chuli (人物处理)”, which included “voice makeovers, shengyin huazhuang (声音化妆)”; and finally arranging “padded speech, dian hua (垫话)”, or the speech a performer says before or in between stories during a live performance. Once the student finished their rendition, Master Wu pointed out his or her errors, had him or her repeat things correctly, and then added the next element of performance (combining words and ban, movements, character personalities, etc.). After having the student attempt a run through with the new element, Master Wu typically offered his rendition of the story so the he or she had a model. This process of crafting a performance routine, layer by layer, always followed a trajectory of deepening complexity that began with the ban, moved on to the story, and finally proceeded to full-blown performance with each of the three major layers comprising of several component layers. Each time the student successfully added a new element to his or her performance, Master Wu had them perform again as he refocused their attention on a different element of the performance. More generally, Master Wu also ensured that the students first lived up to the tradition, i.e. could perform using traditionally recognized techniques and then
began encouraging them to add elements of their own personality to make the story their own. During one session, he told us that during a student’s first year of study, a performance should look exactly like his or her master’s. “As soon as you see it, you know it is Li Hongji’s apprentice. It looks just like him.” By the second year of study, when audiences see the student’s performance, they should immediately recognize it as a Gao School performance. “He’s probably Wu Yanguo’s apprentice. It’s definitely Gao School style.” And, by the third year of study, the student should have developed his or her own style while still retaining the “master’s shadows, shifu de yingzi (师父的影子)”. “You should travel a unique road. Add some of your own things.”

Over the course of the year, Master Wu shared numerous aspects of his knowledge about and experience performing Shandong fast tales with his students. Here are a few snapshots to show the types of things Master Wu talked about as well as the unique way he went about conveying his messages. In one session while discussing the use of the ban, Master Wu demonstrated the two most common methods of striking the ban: 1) “tossing the ban, shan ban (闪板)” and 2) “raising the ban, (顶板)”. In tossing the ban, one first turns the ban hand in an

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197 In addition to ding ban and shan ban, Liu (2001) lists eight other styles of striking the ban all of which are labeled with verbs that describe actions similar to the motion involved. They include “pounding, qiangban (抢板)”; “yielding, rang ban (让板)”; “chasing, gan ban (赶板)”; “removing (as in digging in one’s pocket or purse to remove something from within), tao ban (掏板)”; “pulling, chen ban (抻)”; “pausing, cun ban (寸板)”; “dropping, zhuai ban (坠板)”; and “scattering, san ban (散板)".
upward motion before snapping the wrist in a downward striking motion (as if you were tossing something to the floor). Master Wu explained that this method can be used anywhere within a sentence but that it was most commonly used to begin sentences and when delivering lines in an “ornery, qiaopi (俏皮)” register.

“Like this. Oh, so clever! Oh, so ingenious!” Master Wu said as he demonstrated the technique. Raising the ban is also used to begin a line and involves the opposite motion. The note is struck with a downward snap of the wrist that is followed by pulling the hand upward (as if lifting something up). On another occasion, he told us, “Once you integrate a flower beat pattern into your repertoire, you can’t get rid of it even if you want to. If it’s not there you have a feeling that something is missing.” As he said this last sentence, Master Wu began looking around the room and checking his pockets for the flower beat that was missing. When he described the process of learning a fast tale, Master Wu urged us to, “First, thoroughly understand it. Chew it up completely. Swallow it. Digest it. And, then it will slowly travel into your brain.” As he told us, he used his hand simulate putting something in his mouth, chewed it several times, swallowed loudly, sighed as if satisfied, and sat back in deep thought.

Once when a student had gone through a story so quickly that her movements could not keep up with the words, Master Wu imitated fast, unintelligible speech for about thirty seconds (a stretch of utterances that included a jumble of Chinese, Russian, and the two English sentences he knew how to say)
before saying, “You said it too quickly. We couldn’t hear clearly what you were saying meant. Fast tales aren’t always said fast.” When she finished a second, slower but monotone rendition, Master Wu, in his best monotone, said, “Iiiit waaaaas tooooo flaaaaat. Iiiiiif yooooou taaaaalk liiiike thiiiiis, the auuuudience wiiiiill faaaaall aasleeeeeeep.” When he finished, he closed his eyes and imitated snoring sounds. When another student did not clearly distinguish between her narrator voice and one of her character voices (the character was engaged in angry dialogue just before the narrator picked description of the events back up so when she delivered the narrator description, she was still using an angry tone of voice), Master Wu stood up saying, “Characters are characters and the narrator is the narrator. When narrating, you have to use a friendly tone of voice. (in narrator voice) Idle talk and aimless chatter, I’ll tell you no more. I’m here to tell the story of the hero Second Brother Wu. That Wu Song came to Shao Lin Temple to learn martial arts, for eight years and more he studied gongfu. (in normal speech) When you enter a character, you have to use the character voice. (in Wu Song voice) Innkeeper, bring some wine!!!! (in normal speech) You can’t say (in Wu Song voice), ‘Audience, are you listening or not?!?!?!?! Xie Bode, are you listening or not?!?!?!?!’”

In one session in which Zhang Bei and I were learning to tell the story Boasting, Master Wu showed us how to distinguish different moods of a character
within a story and how to build tension over the course of a story. The story goes like this…

(narrator voice, calm and friendly):
   Just last Saturday, I went to the suburbs.
   I saw a grasshopper and a cricket. The two of them were there a boastin’.
   This grasshopper said:

   (grasshopper voice, chuckling, looking to left):
   “Hey, south of the mountain, I ate a spangled tiger in just one bite.”

(narrator voice, facing center):
   That cricket said:

   (cricket voice, raising eyebrows, looking up and to right):
   “Oh yeah, north of the mountain, I ate two big donkeys in just one gulp.”

(narrator voice, facing center):
   This grasshopper said:

   (rolling up his sleeves, in a louder, more forceful grasshopper voice, ending with a smug “so there” expression on face)
   “I rolled up my whiskers and uprooted a big, ten thousand year old pine tree.”

(narrator voice, facing center):
   That cricket said:

   (higher pitched, slightly more agitated cricket voice):
   “Well, I just stuck out my legs and kicked over a giant mountain turning it into plains.”

(narrator voice, facing center):
   This grasshopper said:

   (nearly yelling grasshopper voice, ending with arms folded across chest in a defiant stance):
   “All the birds in the air and beasts on the ground are under my control.”

\[I\] have placed descriptions of techniques Master Wu used to evoke various mood shifts while demonstrating what they story should sound like in parentheses.
(narrator voice, facing center):
That cricket said:

(excited cricket voice, head bobbing up and down forcefully):
“Hm, I don’t worry about things that fly in the air, run on the ground, float in the river, or jump in the grass. I make the rules for them all.”

(calm, friendly narrator voice, to contrast with the upcoming climactic ending): Just as these two characters were there a boasting.

(tension building in voice) Suddenly we heard him from straight to the east,
That cucke, cucke, cucke, that cluck, cluck, cluck, and that cockle doodle do,
A big colorful rooster flew right up.
You want to know how fierce that rooster was.
(increased volume) “Gulp” in one bite he swallowed the grasshopper right into his belly.
Seeing this, the cricket became furious.
He opened his mouth, scolding and cursing the rooster:

(cricket voice, shouting at the top of lungs):
“Hey! You listen to me my rooster!
You shouldn’t have eaten my aunt and uncle south of the mountain.
You ate my aunts to the north of the mountain.
Four ounces of cotton, you check it out yourself.
(pounding chest and throwing head back) Grandpa Cricket isn’t someone you should be messin’ with,
Today you fell into my hands, and now,
The two of us are gonna see who’s top and who’s bottom, higher and lower.”

(narrator voice, building pace and increasing tension):
The more the little cricket said, the madder he got, and the braver he became.
He stamped his feet, ground his teeth, stroked his beard, jumped forward, and he too became chicken feed.

說星期天, 我到郊区.
瞧见了一个蝈蝈儿跟蛐蛐儿, 是它俩在那儿吹牛皮.
这个蝈蝈儿说: “嘿, 我在南山一口就吃了一只斑斓虎.”
那个蛐蛐儿说: “咳! 我在北山一口就吃了两匹大叫驴.”
这个蝈蝈儿说: “我卷卷须拔掉了万年大松树.”
那个蛐蛐儿说: “嗡, 我伸伸腿踹倒了高山变了平地啦.”
这个蝈蝈儿说: “飞禽走兽得数我管.”
那个蛐蛐儿说: “嘿! 我不管那天上飞的, 地上跑地, 河里浮的, 草坷里蹦的, 我都给他们立规矩.”
正是这两个家伙在这儿说大话.
猛听得他这正东方,
那个咕咕咕, 那个哏哏哏和那个咕噜噜噜噜,
飞来了一只鸬花大公鸡.
您说这个公鸡有多愣.
“捅” 的一口把蝈蝈儿吞到肚子里.
小蛐蛐儿一见有了气.
开言有语骂公鸡: “呔! 我的公鸡呀,
你不该南山吃了我的亲娘舅, 
北山吃了我的姑姑姨, 
四两棉花你访一访吧, 
蛐蛐爷爷不是一个好惹的, 
今天你碰在我的手, 
咱俩得分个上下与高低.”
小蛐蛐越说越恼越有气, 蹬蹬腿, 磨磨牙,捋捋须呀, 往前一蹦, 嗖, 也喂了鸡.

When Zhang Bei finished her rendition of the tale, Master Wu told her that she had to distinguish between “boasting, chui niu pi (吹牛皮)”—literally ‘blowing cow hide’—and “losing your temper, fa huo (发火)”—literally ‘emitting fire’. He explained that within this story are several layers of mood shifts. In the beginning, the grasshopper and the cricket are engaged in friendly boasting. With each exchange, they try to one-up one another with each becoming increasingly more excited. By the end of the story, when the cricket confronts the rooster, he has
completely lost his temper. The result is that in performance each line of this exchange should be delivered in a manner that reflects this deepening shift through mood levels. Without getting out of his seat, Master Wu then performed his rendition of the story. When he finished, Master Wu said, “Try to find this feeling.” Then he reminded us that our expressions, movements, and ban must all match the mood of the character even as it may shift. In the next session on the same story, Master Wu refocused our attention on the higher level aspect of becoming the characters in the story. After Zhang Bei performed, he told her, “You have to completely break out of this style of person you are; completely breaking this young girl frame. That’s not as difficult as Xie Bode completely breaking his foreigner frame.”

**Integrating New Students**

During the course of these classes, Master Wu also gradually integrated me into the flow of things. At first, he never called on me to perform in front of the other students so I sat watching and videotaping (he only had me perform during individual sessions). Each time, he simply checked my ban and then

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199 In addition to the classes he held for other students, Master Wu met with me every day to check my progress with the ban, to answer my questions about the stories I was learning, to correct my language, to tell me stories just for fun, and to record stories for me on video so that I had a linguistic model to imitate. He explicitly told me that he would not allow Chinese students to video tape him in this manner. It was in these individual sessions that we focused our attention on building two specific performances: *Auntie Wee*, and *The Big-footed Girl*, which became my initial repertoire. *Auntie Wee* was my main act and *The Big-footed Girl* was a back up in case an audience asked me to perform a second tale.
went on to the other students. After a few weeks, he began discussing the students’ performances with me as they finished, pointing out different elements of their performances to me as well as the positive and negative qualities of each performer. Later, Master Wu began asking me to evaluate the students’ performances as soon as they had finished, so I gradually began developing the ability to talk about the different aspects of a performance. After a few weeks of this pattern, he began having me jointly tell stories with him. He said the first line and I followed with the next alternating back and forth until the story was finished. As we did this, he spent significant time correcting my pronunciation and helping me make the transition from Mandarin to Shandong dialect, a process called “turning your mouth upside down, daokou (倒口)”.

Finally, during one session at Plentiful Smooth Prosperity, Master Wu said, “Come on, Xie Bode, it’s your turn.” I was nervous because it was my first turn at performing in front of the other adult performers so I chose the shortest story I knew, the story hat *On the Go* that I had seen Dong Jiancheng perform several years earlier. I stood up, bowed to my audience of three (Master Wu, Zhang Bei and another female student), and offered my best rendition. When I bowed to end the performance, everyone laughed as they offered a polite round of applause. The female classmate said, “He can actually tell a joke.” Zhang Bei followed with, “I never thought Older Brother would actually get up and perform.” Master Wu offered this assessment, “This is a big breakthrough but you forgot the
movements, your feet were pure chaos, and the foreign flavor was too thick.” Nonetheless, from that point on, I was expected to perform during every type of class I was involved in and Master Wu evaluated those performances in a very similar way to the way he did with his other students.

Later, as I observed Master Wu integrate other new students into his training sessions, it became clear to me that his pedagogical approach was to first allow the student to observe how classes were conducted. During this stage, he made his expectations for student preparation and classroom performance clear by using more experienced students. He followed this initial period by engaging the new student in a metadiscourse about the performances of other students so that they had to carefully observe and analyze the performances of their peers and so that they could develop the ability to talk about those performances. Once the new student was able to talk about peer performances, Master Wu had the students perform. He scaffolded the performances of weaker students by collaborating with them in the initial stages but always moved them towards independent performance as quickly as possible.

While going through this process with me, it seemed as though Master Wu was searching for an effective method to deal with the foreign learner. It was clear that he meticulously thought out his pedagogical approach but he made constant adjustments based on my performance (or lack of adequate performance). He also frequently told me he was experimenting with me. In the early phase of training,
Master Wu clearly adopted an approach that involved accommodating my needs. He never critiqued my performances in front of others and was generally positive when he evaluated my attempts at the ban or at performing. He also went out of his way to simplify everything from explanations of how to play the ban to the verbal scripts of stories. During this phase, the pace of training basically moved at whatever pace I wanted it to go at and, in terms of his inner circle, I was still on the outside looking in. After the first month and a half, however, in what appeared to me to be a loss of patience with my slow progress, Master Wu shifted into a highly critical approach in which he pointed out what I was doing incorrectly only in front of others. He began using psychological tactics that I had observed him using with his other students such as humiliation, embarrassment, and loss of face to motivate me. At first, this shift was quite unsettling for me after having been coddled for so long. Once I was able to get over the initial shock though, I was able to see rapid progress in my performance skills and I began to realize that Master Wu was simply treating me more like his other students than he had been initially.

**Building a Performance: Study Classes**

These adult study sessions occupied much of our daytime hours from Tuesday to Friday. Master Wu had Party meetings at work on Monday so did not typically schedule classes on that day. On the weekends, Master Wu spent his time teaching children in his home. On Saturday and Sunday mornings, he
conducted three study classes for differing age group and ability levels. On Saturday mornings, Master Wu began at nine o’clock with his “young class, xiao ban (小班)”. This class of around eight to ten students was comprised of children aged four to eight who were just beginning (only two were females). Master Wu started these students off by teaching them how to play the bamboo clapper used in fast clapper tales. Once they developed the ability to play, he began teaching them short traditional story hats. Because they were so young, he spent much of his time just getting them through an entire performance. He also actively involved their parents, who sat in the rear of the room during each class. On several occasions, Master Wu taught parents the basic grip and manner of playing so that they could manage their child’s practice time. After the young class ended, it was time for the “intermediate class, zhongban (中班). Another eight to ten students, who were slightly older, roughly eight to twelve years old, and more advanced in ability level constituted this group (again only two were female). By this time, most of them were highly proficient with the bamboo clapper and had built several short fast clapper tale performances. Thus, Master Wu focused most of their time on learning to play the copper ban. Although they, too, were primarily focused on story hats, this group’s performances were more sophisticated. By the end of my year following Master Wu, this group had also begun to build short story performances that involved characters and short dialogue. With this group of older students, Master Wu included more complex
movements and worked on developing more precise pronunciation and rhythm. On Sunday, Master Wu conducted his “older class, da ban (大班)”, which was made up of eight male students (five of whom regularly attended), who were all middle and high school students who had been studying with him for several years. This group of students spent the entire year I was in Qingdao building their performances of Wu Song Fights the Tiger. The older class students were experienced performers who were highly proficient with both the bamboo and copper ban. They had already developed a repertoire of fifteen or so short performances.

All three classes were held at Master Wu’s home in his dining room. Master Wu’s home was located on the sixth floor of an apartment building and occupied the top two floors of the building. Entering the front door on the lower level of his home, one faces a wooden staircase that leads to the second level. To the right is the master bedroom with a full bathroom in between. On the left, at a slight angle, is the dining room, which also doubled as Master Wu’s classroom. For classes, he moves the large table and chairs so that there is a large open space for students and their parents to sit on small, round stools. To the far left and separated from the dining room by a large wooden hutch is the living room. A large sofa lines one wall resting directly across from a modern entertainment center upon which rests a large screen television, a stereo system, and karaoke equipment. In between is a large, square coffee table decorated corner to corner.
with pictures of Master Wu performing, him with his students, or his favorite students performing. On one wall hangs a rectangular picture of the China Quyi Association members and on the other are pictures of Master Wu performing as well as the framed characters ban cao wen written by Gao Yuanjun.

During classes, parents and grandparents sat in chairs that lined the back wall of the dining room while students sat on stools in two rows directly in front of them. Between the students and the other wall was a large open space that served as the performance area. Master Wu sat on a stool to the left side of the room in front of the China cabinet where he could take notes in his grade/attendance book. As Master Wu conducted classes, his wife often watched television in the master bedroom as if she were oblivious to the commotion in the dining room but I quickly learned that she was always keenly listening to each performance as she periodically came into the dining room to offer comments about students’ performances. She also occasionally walked through the dining room behind whoever was performing to enter the kitchen through the door in the wall that served as a backdrop for the performances (usually on her way to prepare lunch). My position for many of these classes was seated on a stool on the raised landing of the staircase so that I could videotape all of the performances. In these classes, as was the case in the adult sessions, I was merely an observer at first. As I progressed, Master Wu began talking to me about the students’ performances as soon as they finished. Then, he began to have me evaluate their
performances out loud in front of the group. Finally, he began having me perform when all of the other students had finished.  

**Attendance, Recapping Previous Classes, Checking Ban （板）**

Once class began, Master Wu first took attendance, which he meticulously recorded in a notebook. If students were absent, he scolded them for missing class, asked them why they had missed, and said that he would call their parents to have a talk with them if they missed again. If they were late, they had to stand in front of the group, explain why they were late, and endure Master Wu’s criticisms.  

After role was taken, Master Wu recapped the progress of each student by reading out loud his notes from the previous class. Once the recap was completed, Master Wu checked the ban. Beginning with the student who had performed at the highest level in the previous class and continuing on in rank order to the student with the weakest ban skills, Master Wu had each student take a turn standing up in front of the group (students always faced the rest of the class as if they were the audience and bowed before beginning) to play the ban in the “eight positions, ba wei (八位)” of the ban.  

First, they played a small pass through the gate with

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200 This was the case in the intermediate and older classes. I only performed once for the younger class because the students became too restless and distracted with my foreign presence actively involved. When I sat silently in the corner, Master Wu was able to get them to forget about me for periods of time, so I only periodically attended the younger class but attended every session of the intermediate and older classes.

201 This *ba wei* is short for “eight positions, ba ge weizhi (八个位置)” and should not be confused with the *ba wei* described later that refers to the angle (shaped like the Chinese character for the
their arm completely extended to the left. Then they repeated the pass with their arm extended across their body to the right (without breaking rhythm or stopping to adjust the ban). Third, they raised their ban arm straight above their head to play a small pass. Fourth, the ban arm was dropped straight down where they played a pass with it to the side of their leg. Fifth, the ban arm was folded behind the back as if standing in the military position of parade rest so that the student had to play a pass behind his or her back. Sixth, with the ban arm straight, several small passes were played as the ban arm was rotated in a clockwise circle. Seventh, the same motion was repeated in a counterclockwise circle. The final position was the normal hugging the moon position. Master Wu explained that these eight positions covered all of the manners a performer might have to hold the ban during the course of a performance. Positions one and two might be used if a character was holding an object, such as a knife, in the hand. Position four might be needed if a story involved military personnel who had to stand at attention while talking to superiors. Position five, behind the back, was used when playing old men or women. Positions six and seven were used to add flair to performances or to play an extended pass while waiting for audience applause to die down.

As the students played the ban, Master Wu also pointed out things such as the cleanliness of the student’s ban. When one student’s ban was dirty, he asked,
“What have you been doing with your ban?” As the parents laughed and the student stood there with a puzzled look on his face, Master Wu told the student to polish his ban using sandpaper or toothpaste and a brush. He then went on to say that how one takes care of the ban reflects on the kind of person and the kind of performer you are. A shiny ban reflects a performer with pride and one who pays attention to minute details, while a dirty ban reflects a lazy performer. During this portion of the class, Master Wu often corrected posture and stance as well. He required all students to first ding bu (丁步), which was arranging the feet with the right foot slightly behind the left with the heel of the left foot pointed at the instep of the right foot at roughly a forty-five degree angle or in the shape of the Chinese character ding (丁). He frequently reminded them (especially the younger and intermediate groups) how to assume a confident erect performer’s posture with their backs straight and shoulders back. One major pet peeve for Master Wu was slouching. He frequently criticized students for “slouching, ha yao (哈腰)” saying that it marked a lazy performer. Sometimes when students slouched, he stood up next to them, assumed an exaggerated slouching position, turned his head to the side, stuck out his tongue and began telling a story in the most ridiculously lazy voice he could create. Other times, he walked up behind the slouching student, grabbed him or her by the shoulder with one hand and pushed them in the lower
back with the other so that they were standing erect. He also frequently made fun of other Shandong fast tale performers who slouched.

Students bowed on every occasion before playing the *ban* or performing even if Master Wu stopped them mid-story to correct something, which meant that they had to begin over. To begin any type of performance, students always looked straight ahead. Master Wu taught them that this was the standard narrator stance. When assuming character roles, students turned their heads right or left at forty-five degree angles. Master Wu cautioned them to never turn their heads more than forty-five degrees because the audience would then not be able to see their facial expressions. The two character role angles (forty-five degrees to the right for the first character to appear and forty-five degrees to the left for subsequent characters) formed a zone within which all movement should occur called the “eight space, *ba wei* (八位)” because the shape resembles the Chinese character for eight (八). If a student turned too far to either direction, Master Wu told them their eight space was too big. If they did not turn far enough to clearly distinguish between characters and narrator, he told them it was too small.

After each time a student played the ban or performed for the group, Master Wu forced him or her (or the group as a whole) to think reflexively about their own performance. This is a typical exchange. Master Wu, “How do you think you played?” Student, “I didn’t have a good enough grip. The *ban* kept sliding.” Master Wu, “Do it one more time. This time everyone else pick out his
shortcomings.” The student went on to play the eight positions on the ban again. When he finished, every other student had his or her hand raised. Master Wu called on each one. They pointed out exactly when the student missed a note or beat, when the student had to adjust the ban in the hand, when the sound of the ban was too weak, when it was too dull, and when there was too much ringing echo. Master Wu used this format to help students learn from watching the performances of their peers and had them engage in post-performance assessments of their (and those of their peers) performances to foster thinking about them on the metacognitive level. As each student played the ban over the course of a class, Master Wu pointed out a different aspect of playing the ban when discussing each student’s performance. When students had obviously not practiced, Master Wu called them out in front of their peers such as in the following exchange between Master Wu and an intermediate class student:

“Did you practice?”
“Yeah.”
“How much did you practice?”
“Well, I had a lot of homework this week and we went to grandpa’s house…”
“So, you didn’t practice?”
“No.”
“Did you take a shit this week?”
“Yes.”
“You can practice while on the toilet can’t you?”
“Yes.”

As is apparent from this example, Master Wu always offered his evaluations of student performance in a manner that exerted significant pressure to increase the
amount of time students spent practicing. He used humor to both relax the students and to put pressure on them at the same time. Moreover, his comments typically focused on what students were not doing correctly. With the exception of the older class students, Master Wu rarely pointed out what students were doing well and he always made the student he was evaluating stand facing the rest of the class as he critiqued them. He also constantly compared the students and fostered competition among them. He did this by announcing who was in the lead (who had performed at the highest level), who was in second, and on through to the worst student. Then he would tell the leader not to get too cocky and would encourage those falling behind to work hard so that they could surpass the current leader.

**Learning the Words**

After checking the *ban*, Master Wu had students perform the story of the week in front of the other students following the same post-performance evaluation process. However, when the students were performing, he also frequently stopped them as they made mistakes so that he could point them out to the entire group. He would then have the student begin the performance anew. When it was time to learn a new story, Master Wu first passed out copies of a typed verbal script. After allowing the students a few minutes to look at the script, Master Wu read the story out loud as the students looked at their scripts. Once he had read it one time, he led them in a group choral “reading”. That is, he read a
line out loud and then the students repeated the line as a group. Often times the
students could not actually read the characters in the script so were relying
primarily on aural skills. Next, the students read the story together with each
student saying one sentence out loud and rotating around the room. This type of
practice was called “word flow, liu ci (流词)”. As the words flowed, Master Wu
made students repeat lines when their intonation was “too flat, tai ping le (太平
了)”, when their pronunciation was incorrect, or if he felt the students had
misinterpreted the story. To offer a feel for the sound of the unique, dedicated
linguistic register taught by Master Wu, here I have included a transliteration of
the fast tale Auntie Wee. The transliteration is based on the language used by

202 All of Master Wu’s students were born and raised in Shandong Province so their command of
the local dialect, especially among the younger students who had yet to begin school, was actually
better than their command of standard Chinese. Nonetheless, they did not have a command of the
artistic language used in Shandong fast tales so Master Wu had to continually correct their
pronunciation and tones in the early stages of learning a new story.

203 Liu (2001) has written that the emerging standard for Shandong fast tale language is the Jinan
dialect. Many influential performers that I observed during my time as an apprentice, including
Sun Zhenye, the Chairman of the Shandong Fast Tale Research Association, and Wu Hanqing,
one of Gao Yuanjun’s more famous apprentices, use a version of the Jinan dialect while
performing fast tales and thus model the language Liu describes. However, while listening to
Shandong fast tale performers from other areas of China, it was clear that there are multiple
versions of fast tale language. Performers I listened to from Beijing, Henan, Zibo, Tianjin, Yantai,
and Qingdao all employed slightly different versions of Shandong dialect to perform fast tales.
The original dialect used in fast tales was based on speech in the Linqing area of Shandong and as
audiences shrank during the 1980’s, a decision was made among influential fast performers to
standardize the language used in fast tales in order to make them accessible to people from other
areas of China. Thus, Master Wu taught his students that to perform fast tales directly in the Jinan
dialect was incorrect and would limit their audiences to people from the Jinan area.

301
Master Wu while teaching his intermediate level students and generally follows the standard *Hanyu Pinyin* Romanization system.204

1  shuǒ liao wèi dà sāo shì zài cuò,
zhēi wèi tōngzhi wèn le, “cuò shì shènme yìsi?”
cuò jiushi āi. āi jiushi dī. dī jiushi bù gāo(r).
shuǒ liao wèi dàsāo shì zài cuò,

5  hùn shēn chuǎn bú shàng bān fèn de lùo.
bān fèn de lùqūn(r) chūān bú shàng,
nà le gēn(r) tóushēng(r) dāng wèi bō.
zhè yì tiān, pò mǔ niàng jiào tā qu zúo fān,
huō! tā ci zhe nà guōtái gòu bu zhāo guō.

10 pò mǔ niàng yì kàn yōu le qì,
bào(r)! yì bā zhāng, dā dào liao dì xìa zhāo bu zhúo le.
gēi tā niàng jià sòng le gè xìn(r),

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204 Although using the Hanyu Pinyin Romanization system facilitates transliteration, it also presents two major problems. First, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the tone values in Shandong dialects differ slightly from those found in standard Mandarin, which the Hanyu Pinyin system is based on. The tones indicated here are Shandong dialect tones rather than standard tones. Second, some key pronunciations do not occur in Mandarin such as a distinction between what are call “pointed, *jian* (尖)” and “rounded, *tuan*, (圆)” sounds in Chinese. Pointed sounds are produced with the tongue gently touching the gums behind the upper teeth while the rounded sounds are produced with the tongue gently touching the back of the upper teeth. Words Romanized using Hanyu Pinyin that begin with *z*, *c*, *s*, *j*, *q*, *x*, or *r* and followed by *i* or *u* are affected sounds. This subtle pointed-rounded distinction has been lost in Mandarin but remains in most Shandong dialects. Thus, the word *jiu* in line two, pointed sound, actually has would be better rendered *ziu*. The *jiao* in line seven is an example of a rounded sound and sounds the same as the Mandarin sound. *Xia* in line ten is a pointed sound and sounds more like *sia*. *Xīn* in line eleven is a pointed sound and sounds like *sin*. *Jīn* in line thirteen is the pointed sound *zin*. *Jiao* in line fourteen is the rounded sound *jiao*. *Xiao* in line sixteen is the pointed sound *siao*. *Jie* and *jue* in line eighteen are rounded sounds. *Xī* in line nineteen is the pointed sound *si*. Other than tonal differences and the pointed-rounded distinction the difference with the Hanyu Pinyin system is that the *ue* vowel sound is pronounced as a homonym with the *o* vowel sound so that the word *jue* in line eighteen sounds like *júo*, which is not an option in the Pinyin system, rather than *jue*. Master Wu did not teach his young students this distinction so that their sound was clear, distinct and easily understood. He said that the Jinan dialect characteristics, including the pointed-rounded distinction, were “too local, *tài tu le* (太土了)”—literally ‘too much dirt’—for performances in other areas, and, thus, too hick. He did, however, adjust the amount of ‘dirt’ that he included in his own performances depending on the audience. When he performed in Jinan, Zoucheng, Dongying, Penglai, Jimo, Pingdu, and other areas that he perceived to be less urban and sophisticated, he used a much thicker accent with many local characteristics. When he performed in theatres, for Chinese from other areas of China, or in larger urban areas such as Qingdao, the language he used was significantly closer to standard Chinese.
After one flow through the words, Master Wu typically repeated the story an additional time. As he was going through the story this time, Master Wu often stopped to elaborate on easily misunderstood portions. To elaborate, he sometimes offered explanation but more frequently tried to create distinct images for the students to work with so he assumed character roles and acted out certain scenes and actions. Once the students had moved on to more sophisticated levels of the performance, Master Wu then used these images to remind students of key points or to help the students understand feelings they were trying to evoke. The following week the students were then expected to have memorized the story when they came to class.
Combining the Words with the *Ban* and Adding Movements

During the first class after the students learned the words to a new story, each one took a turn performing in front of the group, first without the *ban*, and then combining the *ban* and the words. Some of the better students skipped the first step and proceeded directly to a simple performance combining the words and *ban*. These initial attempts often involved stopping and starting, misspeaking, self-correction, and interjected comments from Master Wu about pronunciation, intonation, stress, tones, and when and when not to play *ban*. For example, he told the students not to play the *ban* after lines leading into plain speech. As the students began returning to the performance at increasingly sophisticated levels, Master Wu began “arranging movements, *pai dongzuo* (排動作)” by slowly demonstrating each movement. After demonstrating how to execute each movement, he required students to stand all together in a row in front of the class. They then chorally made a pass through the story, without the *ban*, simply focusing on the movements. Master Wu stood in front of them physically correcting hand positions, head angles and any other incorrect movement always emphasizing that all movements needed to be crisp but had to be beautiful and flow. When students misinterpreted movements, he assumed a character role to act out the unclear portion of the story, a process which always drew laughter from both the students and the parents observing in the rear. He always created vivid images with which the students could base their understandings of each
movement and each segment of the story. When he finished his demonstrations, Master Wu typically told the students to, “Try to find this feeling.” Once he was confident that the students could execute the movements, Master Wu had the group perform the story in unison so that he could watch them combine the movements, words, and ban. This combination process typically took several passes through the story as students associated movements with the verbal script in memory and worked out the timing of exactly when to begin each movement. If during the group practice, a student unconsciously added a movement that was acceptable or desirable, Master Wu pointed it out to the rest of the group. The remainder of the class would then be spent performing so that students each had several opportunities to integrate the various aspects of performance into a unit. During this period, students also began attempts to infuse their performances with rhythm and beat.

**Adding Facial Expressions and Creating Characters**

The next class following the integration of movements began as the others with a check of the ban followed by individual student performances complete with movements. As Master Wu evaluated the performances, however, he then gradually began pointing out facial expressions and aspects of character roles. Assuming that the students had the words, ban and movements down, he shifted their attention to “developing characters, renwuchuli (人物处理)”, including voice makeovers, facial expressions, and body language, which Master Wu
encouraged the students to practice at home in front of a mirror. In the course of his explanations, he pointed out seven basic feelings that Gao Yuanjun emphasized in his teachings, which were “happiness, xi (喜)”, “anger, nu (怒)”, “worry, you (忧)”, “deep thought, si (思)”, “sorrow, bei (悲)”, “fear, kong (恐)”, and “surprise, jing (惊)”. Master Wu repeatedly told the students that these were only the tip of the iceberg and that they would actually need to be able to evoke many more feelings (any that they might encounter in everyday life) with facial expressions and body language. It was during these sessions that Master Wu also explained the importance of the storyteller’s eyes. He seized every opportunity to point out examples of how and when to use the eyes to draw an audience into a story frequently saying, “You have to make the audience see what you see just with your eyes” and that the storyteller’s eyes, specifically the yanshen (眼神), which also includes the entire facial expression of a performer, are a “window to his soul”.

Solidifying a Story

From this point on in the students’ training, classes involved them “polishing, runse (润色)” and refining their performances in a process Master Wu described as “solidifying a story, gonggu yige duanzi (巩固一个段子)”. Through repeated performances followed by constructive feedback and subsequent adjustments, the students were internalizing a complex weave of layered
memories that together formed the basis for integrated performances that could later be recalled and manipulated in varying performance environments. The memories the students created (based on my experience as one of the students) were similar to what Lauri Honko has described as mental text, or “an organized structure of relevant conscious and unconscious material present in a singer’s mind” (Bender, 2003a: 73). The performance memories we created were always emergent (dynamic), shifting as we repeated the stories, watched other students perform, listened to Master Wu’s comments, watched his performances, had live performance experiences, or encountered similar situations in everyday life. Thus, any given performance, whether it was a rehearsal in the classroom at Master Wu’s, a live performance during a banquet, or a formal stage performance in front of an audience of thirty thousand people, was merely a single point on the life trajectory of the performance in our memories. And, Master Wu made this explicit by fostering our abilities to metacognitively and reflexively think and talk about our performances of a given story.

Through this reflexive evaluation work, we became acutely aware of every aspect of our own performances and were constantly seeking ways to make adjustments to improve the quality of those performances. Moreover, Master Wu taught us to do this from both an egotistical and a broader macro-performance perspective. That is, we became acutely aware of everything we were doing during a performance from when we breathed to how we pronounced each word,
to each movement of our body, to the beat we created with the *ban*. The basic solidified performance memories Master Wu helped us to construct included the verbal script of the story, formulas and themes that frequently occurred in a range of fast tales, expressive techniques such as the standard expressions and movements Master Wu taught us, physical movements associated with a particular story or that were stock movements generally used in fast tale performances, character personalities that we had created or watched others create, and experiences from live performances of the story in which we saw, heard, and felt audience reactions, as well as memories of things we had done correctly, mistakes we had made, and aspects of the performance that worked particularly well during other performances.

These layers of the performance memory had to be thoroughly solidified (internalized) in the subconscious memory so that they did not interfere with actual performance because, as Master Wu also taught us, during performance, we had to focus our conscious attention on aspects of the performance event as a whole including elements of the physical environment, audience composition, mood, and reactions, and details about how the event was unfolding so that we could integrate aspects of the event at hand into our performances. During actual performance, the internalized layers of memory were cued in different ways. Sometimes they were cued by the performance environment. Other aspects of the memory were cued by images. Still others, they were cued by the verbal script.
The beat and rhythm cued other elements of the memory as did the assumption of particular character roles, physical movements, sounds, facial expressions, and audience reactions.

**Singing Fast Tales**

During the course of my observation of and participation in Master Wu’s classes, several important characteristics that I have yet to mention here came to the surface. For example, in one session in which he had me tell *Auntie Wee*, Master Wu stopped me mid-sentence saying, “You don’t want to tell fast tales, you want to sing fast tales.” He was referring to the mode of delivery that lies somewhere between singing and talking. Master Wu went on to describe the differences among the acts of reading a story, telling a story (both using regular speech to tell one and artistically telling one as in the *pingshu* genre), reciting poetry, the singing of a song and singing in fast tales. Master Wu stated, “Fast tales have a melodic sound to them along with the rhyme and rhythm.” He then related a story to us about how his Master, Li Hongji, had explained this characteristic to him. The example Li had used was that one must imagine that he is carrying two buckets of water—each suspended on opposite ends of a pole that rests on his shoulders. It is as if while carrying these two buckets of water, he then must dance back and forth lightly without dumping a drop of the water that is in either bucket. After finishing this story, Master Wu turned to me saying, “Your
buckets are already half empty.” On another occasion during one of the older class sessions, Master Wu offered this detailed description of Shandong fast tales:

“Shandong fast tales is narrating stories and events. One must explain things clearly, but that is not it. What makes it different from other art forms is you want to make everybody (listening to you) hear the melodic flavor and the musical rhythm. You need to have (facial) expressions. Your movements should be beautiful and the sound of your voice should be beautiful. Using the combination of these things I need to make the audience feel as though I have grabbed a hold your soul and make you itch to the point where you can’t take it any more. If I am listening and I have to pee, I want to finish listening (to this story) before I get up to pee. Piss! I just peed in my pants. It grabs your soul, scratches your whole body, stimulating you, thoroughly satisfying a craving. This part (in the story) seizes your heart.”

**Fast Tales Are Not Always Fast**

During many of the older classes, Master Wu also spent time trying to slow students down. He repeatedly preached to us that the “fast, kuai (快)” in fast tales does not mean fast but rather refers to speech that flows to a steady rhythm. In Master Wu’s view, to be a good fast tale performer one must frequently change speeds to match the mood of the characters and action in the story. Master Wu told us, “You make the audience feel tension in a story by changing your intonation, through your facial expressions, with body movements, or with the ban, not by talking faster. This is especially important when telling ‘great tales, da shu (大书)’. It’s like running a marathon. You set out at a steady pace and keep that same pace all the way through to the finish line. If you start out too quickly…Idle talk and aimless chatter, I’ll tell you no more, I’m here to tell the
story of the hero Second Brother Wu... you won’t even make it up the mountain to see the tiger.” To make his point, while offering this example, Master Wu told the first seven or eight lines of Wu Song Fights the Tiger as fast as he could speak. Then, he began slowing down as he acted as if he were running out of energy until he stood looking up from the bottom of the imaginary Sun View Ridge panting and unable to continue on.

**Singing Feelings**

In another particularly memorable older class session, Master Wu had the four students who were present review the words to *Wu Song Fights the Tiger* using the word flow technique described earlier. The four students sat side-by-side in chairs along the back wall of the classroom passing the words from one to the next. For the first ten minutes of the story, things were uneventful as the students rapidly went through the verbal script. Then they ran into a snag when none of them could remember the next line. They took turns getting a running start but seemed to have reached a dead end as no one could remember the words. After a nearly two-minute pause, one of the students finally remembered the line and they continued on (actually he had not really remembered the line accurately, he merely fudged things so that they could get through the exercise). As the students were completing this exercise, Master Wu was busy doing something in the living room and appeared to not be paying close attention.
When the students finally finished, Master Wu picked up his *ban* as he slowly walked back in to the dining room. “What was that?” he calmly said. “One, there was no mood. Two, there were no tones. Three, there were no feelings. Four, there was no substance. Five, you forgot the words. What’s this *pei ah en, pei ah en*? Who taught you that? PEI! AAAAAHHHH! EEENN! PEI! AAAAAHHHH! EEENNN!” As Master Wu dramatically enacted this scene in which Wu Song is pounding on the tiger’s face with his clenched fist, his voice echoed in the room. He then straightened his hair and began explaining that most fast tale teachers no longer perform for their students during class. As he rolled up his sleeves, he said, “Other teachers give you the script, point out your mistakes, and play a VCD of other fast tale performers to give you ideas about how to perform. They very rarely get up and perform an entire story complete with all aspects of the performance.” He then began playing the *ban*. What followed was one of my favorite fast tale performances of *Wu Song Fights the Tiger* that I have experienced to date. Master Wu seemed to disappear as the narrator drew us into the world of Yanggu County. In his place appeared the most lifelike Wu Song any of us had seen. As Wu Song bellowed, “INNNKEEEPER, BRRRIIINNNGGG MEEEE SOME WINE!” the hair on my neck stood up, goose bumps covered my arms and incredulous expressions were frozen on the faces of the other students. The sound of Wu Song’s voice reverberated through
the house bringing Master Wu’s wife in from the master bedroom to watch. When Master Wu finished his performance, he said, “This is fast tales.”

**Getting to Know Master Wu**

Saturday morning classes always ended at lunch time and Master Wu had me stay afterwards to have lunch with him, his wife and his son. It was during this interaction time that our relationship began to move to a deeper level. Master Wu began revealing things about his self to me in the stories he told over lunch. I learned that his son, Wu Xiang (仵翔), had learned Shandong fast tales from his father and was now a performer for the Qingdao Municipal Performing Arts Troupe. I learned that he loves to drink Tsing-tao Beer and occasionally likes to have a bit of Erguotou or Wuliangye liquor with lunch. He also revealed that he was born in Qingdao on June 16th, 1950. His parents were from Penglai to the north but Master Wu was born and raised in Qingdao. He began learning fast tales in 1967 when he was a student at the Qingdao Number 39 Middle School. It was during the Cultural Revolution when school leaders chose children to be part of the “propaganda team, xuanchuan dui (宣传队)”. After graduating, Master Wu became a “spoken drama, huaju (话剧)” performer for a large-scale production that lasted for one year from 1969 to 1970. Then he became a worker in the Qingdao Automotive Manufacturing Factory where he stayed from 1970 until 1973. In 1973, Master Wu became a driver for the Shandong Foreign Trade Metal
and Mining Import Export Company. He drove large trucks locally and long
distance for them until 1981. All throughout this time, Master Wu continued
performing Shandong fast tales, fast clapper tales, and other forms of quyi as an
amateur. In 1979, Master Wu entered the Gao School of performers when he was
officially accepted by Li Hongji as his apprentice. Master Wu frequently told me
stories about his master, his master’s performances, and his visits to Master Wu’s
home in Qingdao. From 1981 to 1985, Master Wu served as the head of the
Foreign Economic Department’s Qingdao Retirement Home vehicle pool.
Through the early and mid-eighties, Master Wu continued participating in all
types of quyi-related activities receiving numerous awards for his Shandong fast
tale performances. In 1985, he began driving cabs for the Qingdao Municipal
Tourism Auto Company, a job he maintained until 1995 when he was invited to
work for a year as a “creative writer, chuangzuoyuan (创作员)” at the Qingdao
Municipal Workers’ Culture Palace. While at the Culture Palace, Master Wu
wrote numerous quyi pieces, including several Shandong fast tales that received
awards and were published in influential journals and magazines such as Quyi. In
the late eighties and early nineties, Master Wu performed traditional Shandong
fast tales with his master Li Hongji for programs nationally televised on China
Central Television. For three years at the end of the nineties, Master Wu also
worked as the manager of an advertising agency where he utilized his quyi skills
and techniques to write ad jingles and perform in television ads. In 2000, Master
Wu became the Chairman of the Qingdao *Quyi* Artists Association and moved to the Qingdao Municipal Mass Art House where he worked as a performer in the Literature and Arts Department. A year later, Master Wu moved to the Qingdao Municipal Ethnic Art Theatre where he was a performer during my time as an apprentice.
Soaking Up the Local Culture

At the same time Master Wu began to integrate me into the small group classes for adults during the week and study classes for children on the weekend, he slowly began to incorporate social experiences into my learning process. He explained that in the traditional master-apprentice system, the apprentice lived with the master as a member of his family and followed him everywhere he went. The apprentice’s job was to attend to the master’s needs such as carrying his bag, pouring tea for him, folding his storyteller’s gown, and anything else the master told him to do. At the same time, the apprentice was to imitate everything the master did both while performing and during daily life. He described this initial period as a “soaking, xuntao (熏陶)” process; one in which the apprentice gradually gained knowledge and experience by watching carefully and listening attentively. When I asked about this usage of xuntao, Master Wu gave me the example of hanging a piece of meat in a smoke house. After a period of time, the meat gradually soaks up the smoke, which changes the flavor of the meat making it tastier. Master Wu told me that he was doing the same thing with me and that my job was to imitate everything he did. Master Wu started this soaking process
with lunches at his home with his family. Then he supplemented that interaction by regularly inviting his coworkers to my hotel room for lunch. Eventually, he also started periodically inviting me to go along with him when he was invited to banquets so that I would have additional exposure to local culture and language as well as opportunities for small-scale live performances. In terms of those performances, Master Wu also pushed me along a gradient from highly controlled (individual performances for him, then performances for other students in the classroom setting) to increasingly less controlled contexts, first by adding small-scale public performances with close associates who were in the know and thus could provide useful feedback. Later, he began arranging opportunities to perform in banquets in front of small live audiences of people I was not familiar with before finally pushing me on to the stage for large-scale public performances. By the end of the first three months of my apprenticeship, banquets had become my primary training ground as we were invited to social banquets every day (at times we attended multiple lunch and dinner banquets in the same day).

Master Wu taught me the language and the basic skills of Shandong fast tales in our class sessions but, as the cultural site in which both Master Wu and I most frequently performed, the banquet setting was the arena in which I learned how to perform Shandong fast tales. It was through banquet performances that the stories I was learning became solidified in long-term memory and the different layers of each performance merged as integrated units. Performing in the banquet
setting also allowed me to learn how to interact with audiences, to experiment with improvisation in context, and to develop a level of comfort performing in front of live audiences. As Master Wu put it, “The only way to learn how to perform is to repeatedly face audiences.” Through the act of performing, the performer compiles experience about what works, what does not work, and what evokes the best responses from audiences. Master Wu explains the role of such less formal performances in developing a performance in this way:

“A performer must practice, over and over, how to ‘stuff a story, zhuang duan (装段),’ or take a story and stuff it into your stomach. You have to understand it on multiple levels. You have to completely eat it; chew it up, swallow it, and digest it before you face an audience. But, before the story is yours and before you perform on stage, you have to ‘bungle two performances, za liang chang (砸两场)—literally smash two sites’. You have to practice it many times before audiences in small places in the community or among friends.”

Banquet performances then were a mechanism for learning about audience reactions and expectations. Master Wu told me to carefully watch audience reactions during and after each performance and to listen carefully to what audience members say immediately after performances so that I could continually refine and polish each part of each story.

In addition to being a setting in which to refine performances, Master Wu sees the banquet, and, more specifically, social interaction, as a key element of any quyi performer’s training. “Quyi comes from the common folk. It comes from the masses. It is intimately linked with life. To learn to perform any kind of quyi well, you must first dive deeply into life. Directly insert yourself among the
masses. Become one with them.” He urged me to carefully watch people; to watch how people sit, watch how they stand, and even watch how they hold a cigarette or tea cup. He told me to watch all different types of people for expressions, movements, and body language that could be drawn on while assuming character roles. For the same reason, he also said to carefully listen to the people we were interacting with; to what they say, how they say it, and how other people react to what they say. He told me that watching was only the first step, however. Next, I needed to go home, stand in front of a mirror and imitate the behaviors, expressions, and ways of talking that I was observing. Only then would I be able to inject feelings and life into my stories.

Everyday social interaction, according to Master Wu, was not only a source for movements, expressions and sounds, but was also the primary source for characters and storylines. With that in mind, it was critical that I become intimately familiar with everyday life of the common folk in Shandong if I was going to successfully portray it in my performances. He said that fast tales deal with the commonplace; stock characters and events that everyone can relate with that are “extrapolated, yanyi (演义)” from everyday life experiences. Thus, everything that we did became story content, although the story form was typically altered and exaggerated to include humorous punch lines called baofu (包袱)—literally “a bundle wrapped in cloth”.

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On most occasions when Master Wu created social events for us to participate in, he asked for the host’s permission to bring along his foreign apprentice when the invitation was extended. In some instances, however, I was an unannounced surprise that he brought along to liven up the event. In the early weeks of my social practicum, Master Wu’s invitations were sporadic so I spent a good deal of my time in the evenings sitting around hoping that he would call. When he did call, he typically told me the time he would pick me up and either that I would be eating dinner with him or that we had an “activity, huodong (活动)”. Once at a social banquet, Master Wu announced my presence by telling everyone present, “This is my foreign apprentice, zhe shi wo yang tudi (这是我洋徒弟)” or “This is my American apprentice, zhe shi wo Meiguo tudi (这是我美国徒弟)”. Discussions would then ensue about me as if I were not present, with Master Wu doing all of the talking for me. Although I was less involved than I

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205 Master Wu was the creator of social events in a number of ways. He created some events by making the arrangements himself such as when he called friends to participate in a dinner party for a colleague’s birthday. In many other situations, however, he did not actively make such arrangements. That is, his position as an entertainer and his reputation as a storyteller created many social opportunities for us. That is, locals frequently invited him to participate in social events in which they were in the initiating parties.

206 We were frequently invited to social banquets for both lunch and dinner but lunch events were less frequent, smaller in scale, shorter in length, and unfolded with less intensity than dinner banquets.

207 This manner of interaction unfolded in a manner similar to the way I observed parents talking about their children. Introductions were made, the child verbally acknowledged the adult and then subsequent discussion was carried on about them with them present but without their participation (Shepherd, 2005).
had been in previous social interactions, these early opportunities to observe from the sidelines were quite informative in that they allowed me to see and hear how Master Wu and others perceived my presence in Shandong. In nearly every situation, one of Master Wu’s interlocutors would ask what I was doing in China. Master Wu regularly responded by boasting, “Big Mountain learned xiangsheng from Jiang Kun. He wants to learn Shandong fast tales from me” as if he were showing off a trophy he had been awarded. The identity that I had worked so hard to construct over several years living in Shandong did not exist in Master Wu’s social circles and he was carefully constructing a new one for me that was intimately linked with his. As our identities merged and I became Wu Yanguo’s nameless foreign apprentice, he had me carry his shoulder bag wherever we went and asked for it at least once during each engagement. I spoke only when Master Wu gave cues for me to take a turn at talk, drank when Master Wu told me to drink, refilled his tea and beer glasses when they were empty, and kissed him on

208 As Michael Jones (1980) has written, a fieldworker must explain his or her presence in their culture of study. During my previous visits to Shandong, I had established a particular identity acceptable in the target culture—foreign teacher—so my role and identity were clear although I had to reestablish this identity each time I encountered new circles of Chinese people. During my apprenticeship, Master Wu and I had to collaborate to construct a new role and identity because I was no longer in the role of foreign teacher and foreigners had not previously assumed the role of Shandong fast tale performer. We had to repeat this process of identity establishment every time we interacted with Chinese we had not met.

209 Big Mountain is the Chinese performing name of Mark Roswell, a Canadian xiangsheng performer and television personality in China.
the cheek in front of every group of interlocutors we encountered, a display of the
closeness of our relationship and my feelings for him as my new father.210

Once Master Wu’s acquaintances learned that he had an American
apprentice, they began calling him to invite the two of us to dinner so that their
children could practice English with me. This caused my role to shift to a slightly
more active one. Rather than sitting quietly as Master Wu did all of the talking,
interacting and performing, I began having short conversations in English with
children as the other guests watched. Many children were embarrassed to speak
with me and a number were unable to do anything more than tell me their name,
nationality, age, and grade in school, but, nonetheless, parents regularly forced
their children to approach me, use whatever English they had learned to that point,
and then asked me to evaluate their English abilities in front of the group. After
the “English performance check” was over, normal banquet activities would then
resume. As we participated in more banquet events, Master Wu also began
integrating short performances by me into the fold. He did this by setting the stage
two or three times during the course of each event so that I could “wow” the
participants with my Mandarin. Then, he would have me repeat phrases after him
in the Shandong dialect to make them chuckle. In every situation, Master Wu
initiated the performance either by saying something funny for me to repeat (such

210 Master Wu frequently discussed the importance of the father son relationship between master
and apprentice with me. He also showed me entries in his diary in which he did not refer to me by
name but rather only by either “foreign son, yang er (洋儿)” or “apprentice son, tu er (徒儿)”.

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as “Ma’s ass, niang de ge ding (娘的个腚)” or by asking me a question that he knew I knew the answer to (such as, “What does lianjin (连襟) mean?” Lianjin is a term that refers to the relationship between two sisters’ husbands). I then performed on cue as if I were Master Wu’s performing monkey.

Gradually, this type of collaboration expanded in scope to include the fast tale story hats I was learning. Master Wu and I began jointly telling stories while remaining seated. He opened by saying a line from whatever story he wanted me to tell. Then, I followed with the next line in the story. We then alternated lines until we finished the story. Over the course of the first two months I was learning with Master Wu, we jointly told many of the stories that he had selected as my jibengong but he repeatedly chose Auntie Wee, The Big-footed Girl, Fear, The Big Truth, and On the Go so that I had to say them together with him to his beat and cadence literally on hundreds of occasions. After a period of joint storytelling, Master Wu began fading into the background only interjecting if I could not remember the words or if I made a mistake until we reached the point where he only told the first line while I completed the story. At the same time as I was undergoing this verbal training, Master Wu regularly told people that I was just learning how to play the ban, a disclaimer of performance which always led to his instructions for me to stand and play for our interlocutors so that they could see
how I was progressing.²¹¹ I then would stand, assume the proper performer’s stance, and play four or five small passes through the gate. Once I had finished, Master Wu critiqued my play before taking the stage to perform always saying, “This is what it should sound like.”

As we began having repeat encounters with people, the cultural soaking process intensified as my training became a community effort. Hosts began explicitly asking Master Wu to bring me along (because my foreign presence added interest to the events according to Master Wu) and the number of banquets we attended increased dramatically. And, as people got more familiar with me, they all became my teachers. Some of our interlocutors tried to educate me about Chinese and Shandong cultural norms. Some took it upon themselves to teach me how to say things in the local dialect (even though the dialect spoken in Qingdao varies greatly from the one used in Shandong fast tales). Others told me jokes or stories that I could adapt to the fast tale format. Still others offered to be critical audience members so that I could get additional live practice. In particular, seven families played an integral role in socializing me. Two of the families, Dai Rixin (戴日新) and Yang Jie (杨杰) and their wives, were high school classmates of Master Wu so we got together with them regularly in their homes and in local restaurants where they politely (and always encouragingly) endured several of my

²¹¹ At this point in my training, he always kept the ban and the verbal script separate while in public.
performances at the very early stages of my development. The other five families, Tian Shengwen (田胜温), Xie Benxin (解本新), Wang Enxing (王恩兴), Yin Nan (尹楠), Master Zhao (赵师傅) and their families, were colleagues and close friends of Master Wu’s from the Qingdao Folk Song and Dance Theatre. This circle of friends not only participated in my fast tale training and general socialization in Shandong culture, they became my inner circle and emotional support network as well.

Creating Performance Opportunities

During the course of my socialization into Shandong performance circles, the first characteristic of fast tale performances that began to sink in was that because of the art form’s simple format (single performer who needs nothing but his ban to perform), any location and situation can be turned into a performance arena by a skilled performer (Foley, 2002). Upon reaching this realization, I began focusing my attention on recognizing when and how opportunities to perform were created. In some situations, such as when we were at theatres or were on a proscenium stage, the location itself afforded the opportunity while in others, such as when we performed as part of variety shows or holiday events, the event created the opportunity to take the stage. These types of performance

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212 Tian is the head of the Stage Production Team, while Xie works for Tian. Wang is an Assistant Troupe Leader, fu tuanzhang (副团长) and a Luju performer. Yin Nan is professional Chinese flautist. Wang’s wife, Shi Ping (史平) is also a well-known Luju performer and Yin’s wife is a singer in the troupe.
opportunities were generally created through performer and patron networks. Circles of performers of all types of traditional art forms keep in regular contact with one another exchanging information about upcoming performances in their area.\textsuperscript{213} On the patron level, performers regularly foster and maintain relationships with troupe leaders, government officials, businessmen, and military leaders in their area as well as in other cities who make decisions or control resources used to fund cultural performances so that they are able to remain on the performance circuit.

However, in most instances, the participants in the larger event in which fast tales were situated had to take measures to key one another that it was time for a fast tale performance. For example, because of his status as an established performer, hosts and guests at banquets often requested that Master Wu perform by saying, “Why don’t you bring on a story, \textit{lai ge duanzi ba} (来个段子吧)”. In situations in which the participants were less familiar with Master Wu or when he simply had the urge to perform, Master Wu created the opportunity himself. Master Wu facilitated the shift from everyday situation to fast tale performance by first choosing a target in his audience. Then, he created a shared attentional frame with the participants in the event. That is, he did something to draw the attention

\textsuperscript{213} This opportunity exchange is reciprocal and works on a personal level. Because such opportunities lead to the accumulation of social capital (status, name recognition and/or income) they are also highly-valued commodities. Thus, performers actively pass on such opportunities (usually only to performers of genres other than the one they themselves specialize in) when they arise in order to ensure that they will in turn be informed of other future opportunities.
of everyone in his immediate vicinity in his direction, a task which Master Wu was a master at accomplishing.\textsuperscript{214} For example, on one occasion when we were having a simple, informal meal at a small restaurant, Master Wu reached across to the table next to ours to take a dumpling off of a stranger’s plate as he said, “Can I have a dumpling?” He then contorted his face into a ridiculous expression as he exaggerated his chewing motion. As the shocked strangers laughed at his expression, one of them said, “You’re really funny. You look like a quyi performer.” After establishing his identity as a performer, Master Wu then began joking with them in a loud voice so that everyone in the restaurant turned in our direction. Once he had their attention, he began telling a fast tale as he rose from his seat and withdrew his ban from his pocket. When he finished his story, all of the patrons applauded and their discussion shifted to Wu Yanguo’s identity.

Another time while riding the train from Qingdao to Jinan, Master Wu continually knocked the hat off of the head of the man sitting across the isle from us. Every time he did, he clumsily fumbled with the hat as he returned it to the man’s head while delivering an exaggerated apology with crazy facial expressions so that everyone knew he had done it purposely and in good natured fun. As he continued to joke with the man in a loud voice, everyone in the train car turned in our

\textsuperscript{214} Master Wu’s ability to draw attention to himself in humorous ways actually relieved some of the burden of being a foreigner in Chinese culture from my shoulders. Although my physical appearance drew looks and attention prior to Master Wu taking the stage, all attention shifted to him as soon as he began his routine.
direction. As they did, murmurs about there being a performer on board traveled around the car and he began telling a short humorous tale that drew a round of applause from everyone on board.215

While in Dongying for a stage performance216 sponsored by the China Net Com Group (中国网络通信集团), Master Wu had the late night munchies while we were sitting in our hotel room after the performance.217 He said, “Let’s go get

215 This incident occurred on September 29th as we traveled to Jinan to participate in the annual Shandong Fast Tale Research Association meeting. We were traveling with five Shandong fast tale performers representing Qingdao (In addition to Master Wu, Li Bingjie, Yan Chengshan, Zhao Leping, and Hu Yanshan were with us. In all, several hundred fast tale performers from around China gathered in Jinan for the two-day event held October 30th and 31st, 2004. While listening to the keynote address delivered by Chairman Sun Zhenye, Master Wu whispered to me that he was going to have me address the members of the association so I should think about what I wanted to say. He then quickly scribbled what I should say on the back of a piece of paper in handwriting that I could not read. When Chairman Sun finished and there was a break in the action, Wu stood, announced that he had an American apprentice, that I had officially been accepted as an apprentice on October 23rd, and said that I had requested to say a few words. I then stood, rambled something about wanting to learn as much as I could from each of them about my favorite art form, told them that it was too early in my training to perform but that I would in the future, and sat down. After some polite applause, the members of the association divided into subcommittees to vote on nominations for various awards including those for lifetime achievement and outstanding contributors to the field in the areas of performance, writing, theory, and education. While at the meeting, I had the opportunity to speak with a number of famous performers. Older-generation performers who were very welcoming and supportive of me and my choice to learn how to perform fast tales included Liu Hongbin, Chen Yong, Yang Mingyang, Wu Hanqing, Sun Guangrui, and Zhou Jianlun. Two other performers who were particularly helpful and spent time explaining aspects of fast tale performance to me were Zhang Jie and Ma Shixing.

216 The Dongying CNC event was part of a training session for eight hundred mid-level managers. The company organized a variety show for them to attend during the evening of their weekend of training. The bill included traditional dance, choral song and dance skits, Shandong bangzi (山东梆子)—a local sung dramatic tradition, Shandong fast tale storytelling, Lu drama, and “clapper tale dramatic skits, kuaibanju (快板剧).”

217 Once Master Wu was convinced of my commitment to do whatever it would take to learn fast tales, he took me along for all of his performances. We traveled by train, bus, and car (sometimes his own and others in cars sent to pick us up) to a range of cities in Shandong for his performances at events sponsored by corporations, local governments, or military units. Occasionally, he also introduced me as his foreign apprentice and had me take the stage to greet the audience as I did on
some snacks and beer.” We then went down to see if the first floor restaurant was still open but when we arrived a server told us that the kitchen was closed. As Master Wu inquired about whether there were any stores or restaurants within walking distance, several young cooks and wait staff circled around a small host station. Master Wu then went into action. He began playfully teasing one of the waitresses and using silly facial expressions, which drew laughter and the comment, “You’re really interesting.” As if on cue, Master Wu then began a ban-less rendition of Auntie Wee. When he finished, all of the staff were laughing and several comments were made about Master Wu being a professional quyi performer. He then removed his name card holder from his pocket, distributed a card to each member of his audience, and introduced himself. This led one of the young cooks to offer to prepare some cold dishes for us as he told a waitress to sell us some beer.

**Smashing Performances**

In the first half of November, Master Wu began inviting his colleagues and other performers to have lunch with us in my hotel room. He usually called as they were leaving the Theatre to tell me they would arrive shortly as soon as they

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December 12th at the Xiazhuang Township Government Building. There were about two hundred people assembled at nine in the morning for the Winter Season New Recruit Happy Send Off Party Cultural Performance. Master Wu had me tell the audience (made up of mostly new recruits and their families) that I had served in the US Army and that serving one’s country was a glorious and honorable thing to do before he took the stage to perform *The Beat Patrolman* and *Knucklehead Visits the Relatives*. Afterwards we had a lunch with several soldiers that occupied three banquet rooms in another level of the building.
had time to stop for takeout food at a nearby restaurant. Once they arrived, a foot stool became our table and disposable chopsticks turned into bottle openers as we ate, drank, and they recounted each morning’s events. On the first occasion that Master Wu did this, he brought Xie Benxin, Dong Jiancheng, and Daqing, a friend who had performed fast tales as an amateur during the seventies and eighties. Rather than eating in my room the first day, Master Wu parked his car on the sidewalk in front of the hotel and we walked one block to a small one-room restaurant that sits next to his apartment building. We sat at one of the four small wooden tables, ordered our food, and began drinking fresh draft beer (the choice beverage among locals in Qingdao). When talk shifted to my progress, Master Wu told me to perform *Auntie Wee* for the group while seated. After I said each line, Master Wu stopped me to correct my pronunciation. Everyone else present offered their models of the sounds and tones I was producing incorrectly. When we finally reached the end of the story, he then asked everyone for their opinions of my performance. Each offered some insight from their own perspective before Master Wu reiterated a point he had made earlier in my training, “You don’t tell fast tales, you sing fast tales. Like this…*Idle talk and aimless chatter, I’ll tell you no more, I’m here to tell the story of the hero Second Brother Wu.*” He then went on to explain how the punch line in *Auntie Wee* works in a formulaic manner (Lord, 1960). After this first lunch performance, we began holding lunch in my room and my lunch time performances became a regular part of our routine. After
a few months of this pattern, many dinners and post performance parties also gravitated to my room. By the end of my year of fieldwork, the scale and frequency of these get togethers had increased to the point that I moved to a two-room, two-bath suite at the Oriental Hotel partly in order to accommodate the number of performers, officials and troupe-members who attended.218

Climbing on to the Stage

On November 20th, 2004, I was unexpectedly thrust into my first full-blown stage performance. I had traveled with the Theatre’s Folk Song and Dance Troupe six hours by bus to Zoucheng in southwest Shandong for what I understood to be another soaking experience at a large-scale performance at a local theatre. When we arrived, everyone filed off the bus into a large, nine hundred-seat, bi-level theatre. The stage crew began unloading the trucks that had followed along behind the bus and the performers walked to a hotel about a block from the theatre to rest up before the performance. Master Wu and I sat in front row seats watching the crew set up and chatting with the manager of the theatre and the head of the local culture bureau. After they informed us that the evening’s

218 The decision to move to the Oriental Hotel from the Plentiful Smooth Prosperity Hotel was actually initiated at ten thirty on an evening in March. As I was sleeping alone in my hotel room, there was a knock at the door. When I opened the door, a surprised (to see a foreigner) police officer was standing in the doorway. He said that he was conducting a routine search and that the hotel did not have a permit to house foreigners (a fact that no one at the hotel had mentioned when I checked in several months earlier) so I would have to move out the next morning. Although through personal connections Master Wu was able to get around this legal problem, I felt uncomfortable enough in breaking the law to move to the much more expensive Oriental. Once at the Oriental, the scale of our performer get togethers increased dramatically because of the size and location (eleventh floor, overlooking Qingdao Bay) of the room. Master Wu also took advantage of the nice conditions by frequently coming by to take hot showers.
show was sold out, Master Wu and I walked to the hotel where we laid down on our beds to take a pre-performance nap since the performance was not to begin until seven thirty and it was only four in the afternoon. At about six forty-five, Troupe Leader Shan came to our room to get me. He had me go with him to his room where we sat chatting for a few minutes before he told me that he was going to have me be one of the emcees for the event. When I nervously told him that I was not ready, he said that it would be an easy task of simply “announcing the acts, bao jiemu (报节目)”. As I nervously searched for excuses to escape the unexpected performance, I realized that I was not dressed well enough to appear on stage. When I pointed this out to him, Troupe Leader Shan said, “No problem. You can wear my clothes. We are about the same size.” We then traded clothes and he wrote out what I was to say for the first act on a small scrap of paper. He said all of the other acts would just follow the same pattern with only adjustments for the name of the performer and the type of performance. When I asked if I could see the official line up for the evening’s variety show, he said, “It hasn’t been finalized yet. We’ll tell you before you go on stage”.219 By this time it was

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219 The contemporary version of the variety show may include music (traditional, pop, folk, and rock—by solo artists or by entire bands), dance (traditional, modern, even break and street dancing), singing (choral, solo, or duo performances of traditional, operatic, popular, revolutionary, and folk music), zaji, magic, martial arts, qigong, local dramas, storytelling, comedic skits, and xiangsheng. This performance format requires some performers to double as “emcees, zhuchiren (主持人)” who introduce the troupe, come on between acts to announce acts, and end of the show. Billed variously as “literature and art performances, wenyi yanchu (文艺演出)”, “literature and art galas, wenyi wanhu (文艺晚会)”, “performance gala, lianhuan wanhu (联欢晚会)”, “large-scale song and dance galas, daxing ge wu wanhu (大型歌舞晚会)”, “mass cultural activities, qunzhong
time to go back to the theatre for the show. We went backstage where I stood nervously going over my lines in my head. I was then introduced to my co-host (and Troupe Leader Shan’s wife), Sun Jinfeng. She joked and chatted with me trying to get me to relax until it was time to go on. Just before I walked out on stage, Troupe Leader Shan asked me if I was ready to tell a story. As I told him no in a panic, the curtain opened, the lights went on, we walked out before the nine hundred person audience, and Sun began the introduction of the evening’s variety show. I simply played off of what Sun said until it was time for me to announce the first act. As I finished announcing a dance by the troupe’s dance team and we walked back stage, there was an eerie silence in the theatre in place of the normal round of applause. Backstage the other performers joked with me that the audience was so shocked that a foreigner was hosting the event in Chinese that they had forgotten to clap. As the night wore on I gradually became more comfortable being on stage and no major problems arose although my later attempt to speak in Shandong dialect was less than successful. As we rode the bus home, Troupe Leader Shan and Sun Jinfeng told me that I was now the troupe’s new emcee.

This event marked a major shift in both my training and my role with the Theatre troupes. When traveling with Master Wu for individual performances, he

wenhua huodong (群众文化活动)”, and “literature and arts on the square, guangchang wenyi (广场文艺)”, contemporary variety shows have become the format through which most audiences come in contact with traditional performances genres.
began having me perform on stage as well. In the beginning, he had me only perform a five-minute, two-story act consisting of Auntie Wee followed by The Big-footed Girl. And, at first I did not appear on the bill. Master Wu simply had me plan as if I were going to perform every time and then when we arrived at a performance would convince the organizers to slip me in between acts or would allow me to use three or four minutes of his allotted time. In every instance, he was able to convince the organizers to include me in the show. Over the course of my apprenticeship, we performed at farmers’ markets, rural bazaars, government sponsored holiday and cultural activities, wedding banquets, birthday parties, company outings, conferences, military bases, schools, and to entertain construction workers among other stage settings. While traveling with the Theatre’s three troupes to rural areas to “send culture to the countryside, wenhua xia xiang (文化下乡)”, troupe leaders also worked hard to integrate me into each show. There were a few occasions, however, in which time did not allow for an additional act so I simply watched from backstage or videotaped from the side of the stage.

During the first few occasions in which I appeared on stage, emcees introduced my act without a name. I then gradually evolved into “American flavored Shandong fast tales, you Meigu kou wei de Shandong kuaishu (有美国口味儿的山东快书)”. I always performed immediately before Master Wu took
the stage so he included an introduction to me in his padded speech. In the
introduction, he always drew a chuckle from the audience by telling them,
“Leading a foreign apprentice like this is not easy, dai zheme yige yang tudi bu
rongyi (带这么一个洋徒弟不容易)” before drawing a round of applause by
adding, “He performed well today give him a round of applause, ta jintian
biaoyan bucuo, gei dianr zhangsheng (他今天表演不错给点儿掌声)” After
several performances that followed this pattern and more emcees began to learn
who I was, they started to introduce me as “Wu Yanguo’s foreign apprentice, Wu
Yanguo de yang tudi (仵延国的洋徒弟)”. When hosts realized that I could
interact with them in Chinese on stage, they began asking me my name in front of
the audience after I took the stage. Because my Chinese name, Xie Bode, which is
a transliteration of Shepherd, sounds similar to the phrase “unwilling to part with,
shebude (舍不得)”, some emcees also began introducing me in this humorous
way.220 Later, as emcees made attempts to include more information about me in

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220 Gong Luyang (龚鲁阳), one emcee that I had the opportunity to work with several times,
became a type of mentor for me helping me learn how to relax on stage and how to interact with
the audience. He knew that I was nervous when I first got on stage so he always joked with me
about my name and appearance to get me relaxed. He frequently used the Shebude name to bridge
the gap with audiences and said things like, “This fast tale performer looks a little strange”, “This
performer looks like Marlon Brando”, “Look at the size of this performer and look at that nose” to
draw laughs from the audience and to get me interacting with him and the crowd. He also taught
me an important skill called “inciting feelings (煽情)” that I later integrated into every act. It was
the process of drawing the audience into the performance by doing or saying something to make
them want to see and hear more. An example is building up your performance by asking if the
audience wants to hear it and then saying there was not enough applause so you are going to leave.
After my third stage performance in which Gong was the emcee, while backstage he told several
performers that I was getting “more and more slippery, yue lai yue hua (越来越滑)” because I had
their introductions, I was introduced in a range of ways including as the American fast tale performer from Texas (although I am from Ohio), “Big Ocean, da hai (大海)” (as opposed to the Canadian xiangsheng performer Big Mountain), and “A De (阿德)”, which was the official performing name granted to me by Master Wu when I became a member of the Qingdao Ballad Singers’ Association. By early December, word that Wu Yanguo had a foreign apprentice had traveled among Qingdao performer circles and invitations for the two of us to perform both for banquets and on stage drove us at a hectic pace. Master Wu and I came to the conclusion that given my still rudimentary grasp of fast tales and shaky ability to play the ban, it might be advantageous to take a break so that I could get more practice under my belt before actually diving full force into the performance world. He advised me to tell everyone that I had to go home to the US to be with my family for Christmas to avoid angering my parents, an excuse Master Wu said no Chinese person could take issue with. On December 16th, I left Qingdao for two weeks.

begun to play off of his cues to draw even more laughs out of the audience. All of my most successful performances came during events in which Gong served as the host.

221 Master Wu chose A De based on the last character in my Chinese De. Adding the A syllable before the last character in a person’s first name is a common form of address that marks familiarity and intimacy. It is frequently used when addressing family members.
Turning Real Life Experiences into Quyi (曲艺)

Upon my return in January, I encountered some visa problems that led to a series of interesting situations that eventually were turned into a regularly shared story among local performers in Qingdao. It is also a humorous example that shows one way in which quyi performances are created: by storifying real life experiences. Master Wu referred to this process as “extrapolation, yanyi (演绎)”

Yanyi involves using real events and real people as a starting point for a story but through modifications, embellishment, and the addition of punch lines, constructing an entirely new tale that fits the quyi mold. When I re-entered China, I was given a thirty day visa, even though, at the time, I had requested a ninety day one. Realizing that I would have to change my visa status quickly or cut my apprenticeship short, I began talking to people about how to get an extension immediately after my arrival in Qingdao. I talked to several people at local schools to see if they could add me as a token teacher for the period of my apprenticeship as well as to the heads of local companies to see if they could

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222 This process has been referred to variously as “the storification process” (Aylett, 2000) and the “storification of memory” (Clark, 2000). I understand and refer to the internalization of experience in memory in storied formats as “the storification of experience.” We storify—situate speech, behavior and events into narrative formats—all of our experiences when we record them in memory and as we share them with others. Once we storify an experience (or part of one)—fit speech and behavior into a story, we are able to make informed assumptions about the situation and people at hand as well as formulate predictions about what will be said or done next. With a story in mind, we are able to take action. Without a story to tie random speech and behavior together, we are lost. More specifically, once we know the story, we can make predictions and assumptions about who is involved, what will likely happen, when things will occur, where they will occur, why they will happen in a particular way, and how to interpret them.
“hire” me as an interpreter. In the end, Master Wu decided it would be best to be honest and simply go to the Visa Section of the Public Security Bureau to explain our situation. He was convinced that with his charisma he could convince anyone of anything.

When we arrived in the crowded PSB office, we waited in line for several minutes before a young female officer called us. When we explained that I was an apprentice storyteller learning Shandong fast tales, she looked at us incredulously before turning to a coworker, “What kind of visa should a foreign apprentice storyteller apply for?” The second officer gave us a puzzled look and did not respond. Several officers discussed the situation but no one knew how to handle the situation because it had never occurred before so they called the section chief down from his upstairs office. As we waited in chairs along the wall in the lobby, I studied the PSB Visa Section roster posted on the wall. It had each officer’s picture, rank and name. Just as I was looking at the section chief’s picture, I saw him walking towards the area we had just been in so I tapped Master Wu on the shoulder and pointed to the picture and name on the wall. He immediately stood up and as he walked briskly to the counter called out in a friendly voice, “Qin Nan. Section Chief Qin Nan.” Section Chief Qin was taken aback at first as he looked at Master Wu trying to determine where they knew one another from. Master Wu then introduced himself and explained the situation to him. He quickly and firmly told us that I could only obtain a one month extension to my visa and that there
were no exceptions to the rule. He then stopped and said, “You’re studying Shandong fast tales? Why don’t you bring on a story (lai yi ge duan zi, 来一个段子吧)”? There, in the middle of the lobby of the PSB, with about sixty people of various nationalities waiting in lines, I started telling Auntie Wee. Dang di ge dang, dang di ge, dang di ge dang di ge dang...

It’s said there’s an old woman who’s really wee,
Half a yard of silk wouldn’t cover her knee.
She can’t even wear half a yard of silk,
She uses a thread as a scarf.
Mother-in-law sent her to make dinner,
Wow, on her tippy-toes by the stove, she still can’t reach the pots.
When Ma saw this she really got mad…

“OK, I'll give you six months,” Section Chief Qin interrupted. He went on to explain that we would have to include with our application a letter from the Municipal Cultural Union (shi wen lian, 市文联) that detailed my situation. We thanked Section Chief Qin, exchanged business cards and promises to keep in touch and were on our way. In the car on the way across town to the wenlian offices, Master Wu was pessimistic about our chances of obtaining such a letter because as he explained, “In Chinese culture, most government officials are reluctant to take on such a burden of responsibility.” He advised me to keep quiet and let him do the talking.

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223 The wenlian is an official organization governing the ten major cultural and artistic associations including artists, photographers, performing artists, calligraphers, etc.
When we arrived, we went to see the general secretary on the first floor. Master Wu introduced him as General Secretary Xie and explained my situation. His reaction to our request was exactly what Master Wu had predicted. He stated that the *wenlian* could not take responsibility for me. He said that if something happened to me while in China, they would really have trouble. Master Wu then said, “Sing him a story.” I took out my *ban* and began a poor rendition of *Auntie Wee*. He actually listened all the way through to the end. When I finished, General Secretary Xie said, “Wait a minute” and he left the room for several minutes. After he left, Master Wu said that he was upstairs talking to the Vice Chairman. When he returned to the room, he told us to follow him and escorted us to the vice chairman’s third floor office. After brief greetings and small talk, Vice Chairman Hao said, “Tell me a story.” For the third time in less than an hour, I performed my best rendition of *Auntie Wee*. When I got done, he picked up the phone and called the *wenlian*’s Foreign Affairs Office. He told the person on the other end to officially invite me as a guest of the *wenlian*. He then told me that I would have to perform at several upcoming engagements arranged by the *wenlian*, which we quickly agreed to do. Vice Chairman Hao also explained to us that we would have to register at the local police substation where I would be living.

As soon as the secretaries at the *wenlian* had completed a letter of invitation, we were off to the Jiangsu Road Police Substation. Once outside the substation, Master Wu again instructed me to let him do the talking. However,
while the officers were filling out my paperwork, they began directly asking me questions because they had seen in the letter of invitation that I was there to learn how to tell fast tales. “You’re learning fast tales? Can you tell us a story?” one officer asked. So, I performed *Auntie Wee* for the twenty officers who had gathered around. When I got done, my audience offered some courteous applause and Master Wu went on to tell one of his better stories. Minutes later, we were out the door with all of the official documentation that we needed.

Although a funny story that is quite revealing about how to accomplish things in Chinese culture in its own right, the purpose of including this example is to show what happened after the initial experience. That is, to show how Master Wu turned that sequence of experiences into a story that was shared again and again on numerous subsequent occasions. Later that day while at a banquet among friends, Master Wu reconstructed the events for the consumption of the others who had not been along so that they too could vicariously share in the experience. Although it followed the same general plot line, his rendition of the day’s events was slightly different from what I had committed to memory as it emphasized his critical role in obtaining a positive outcome. He had noticed Section Chief Qin’s picture on the wall and his charm had been what turned the tide in each situation in which we thought we had met a dead end. The reaction of the others present to Master Wu’s tale was a loud burst of laughter and continued discussion of the details.
As time went on and we shared the experience with more groups of people, Master Wu, who began with a more first-person descriptive account of the events that had occurred, gradually began to make subtle adjustments to the plot line based on who was present in the audience. At each subsequent retelling, he would add little details or delete certain uninteresting things. He even sometimes changed the order of events just slightly to make it a better story (most often to make it more memorable or funnier). The visa story grew and evolved like the proverbial big fish story, continuously increasing in the amount of dramatization. Early descriptive retellings gradually began to include quotes of what each character had said such as, “Then the Vice Chairman said, ‘Tell me a story.’” Before long, Master Wu began omitting aspects of the narrator’s role by directly assuming the roles of those characters, giving them voices and mimicking their facial expressions and personalities. His portrayals of me as the dumb foreigner completely unaware of what was going on usually evoked the best responses. As Master Wu’s renditions of the characters were almost always overly exaggerated (in order to have their best effect on the audience), he would then inevitably have to draw me in as a co-narrator to verify and add legitimacy when audience members were skeptical or questioned his version of the events. As the story took on a life of its own and began to be repeated, some people began requesting us to tell it while others started telling their own versions. The tale of our visa experience became a part of the repertoire of tales told among the performers and
their friends. The story was used repeatedly both for its humorous effect and as a means for friends to reminisce and share past experiences. It became an ever changing and evolving artifact we no longer had sole authorship or control over as it merged into the collective memory of those who came in contact with it.

**Learning from Audience Response**

Later in January, members of the *wenlian* met to recap the 2004 year and welcome in the spring of 2005. The members were treated to a large-scale banquet at a local hotel and a twenty-two act variety show that included choral singing, poetry recitations, riddle guessing games, male and female solo singing, comedic skits, magic acts, and a short fashion show. The performers were all members of at least one of the *wenlian*’s ten artistic associations. I was invited to attend and my fast tale performance was inserted into the middle of the program. When we arrived at the event and I realized the scale of the event (there were several hundred performers, artists, and cultural workers in the audience), I began to get nervous. Master Wu immediately sensed my nervousness so he tried to get my mind on other things by joking with me and several *wenlian* members. “Don’t take things so seriously. This is just for fun,” he said. Nonetheless, the fact that everyone in the audience was well-versed in traditional culture and intimately familiar with both fast tales and the stories I was about to perform had my stomach in knots. While waiting to go on, I hid in a small banquet room behind the stage, where I went over my lines and practiced each of the movements. When
it was time for me to go on, Master Wu first took the small stage to introduce me. I then performed wearing a sweater and slacks rather than the traditional storyteller’s gown. During the performance, some of the nuances of stage performances created difficulties for me. Up to this point, when we had performed on stage, we had always had cordless microphones that we hid under our clothing but at the wenlian performance there was only a single fixed microphone set up in the middle of the stage. To make matters worse, it was not fixed at a level suitable for someone over six feet tall. I had to lean over just to be heard. As I began performing, my first movement took me away from the microphone so the audience could not hear what I was saying and I immediately realized that I would have to reduce my zone of movement to keep my mouth as close to the microphone as possible. As the performance progressed, the microphone, which was adjustable, slowly slid further down making it increasingly difficult for me to be heard. In my battle to stay close to the microphone, I forgot to play the ban in several places. When I finished my performance, the audience politely applauded but I knew that the overall performance had been one of my worst to date and was particularly embarrassed about the lack of movements and ban in the story.

However, the aspects of the performance that the audience was actually paying attention to came out during the dinner banquet that followed. The first post-performance feedback was that the “foreign flavor came out, yang weir chu lai le (洋味儿出来了)” in my language. When I asked Master Wu what parts I
had said incorrectly, he responded by saying, “I can’t say precisely. Every sentence had one or two words. It sounded ‘messy, luan (乱)’. You can’t fake the language. Most people can’t tell whether the ban or movements are correct or not. And, your legs were ‘messy, luan (乱)’.” He then turned to a wenlian leader saying, “You have to teach foreigners. They have no stage presence.” As the dinner went on, several wenlian members stopped by our table to talk with Master Wu and to congratulate me on my performance. Each time, they offered comments about my performance. One told Master Wu, “His eight space is too big.” Several commented on how inaccurate my Shandong dialect was to which Master Wu responded by saying that I had only been learning for a short period of time. Some of them commented that my story was a combination of standard Chinese, Shandong dialect and English. One member who was trying to offer constructive advice told me that in the beginning of the story my Shandong dialect was “too authentic, tai di dao le (太地道了)” so when I made mistakes later in the story they were quite pronounced. He then went on to tell Master Wu that it would no longer be interesting to watch me if they couldn’t hear my foreign accent at all. He suggested that I had to intentionally negotiate a balance between actually doing these performances like they are supposed to be done and taking advantage of my foreigner status. The vast majority of post performance feedback revolved around the sound of the language, which suggested both the importance
of a particular kind of sound and that I had not yet developed the ability to produce that sound.

Over the next few weeks, we had many opportunities to perform in banquets and on Chinese New Year’s Day (February 9), I got an opportunity to make another attempt at a stage performance. The day before the performance, Master Wu told me that I would be performing on stage as part of a variety show to be performed in Qingdao’s May 4th Square for Chinese New Year’s Day festivities and would appear on local television. He then worked with me on the final trappings required for a formal stage performance of fast tales. He first went over what I should say as “padded speech, dian hua (垫话)” before I began telling my first story. He explained that normally the purpose of padded speech was to “make the atmosphere of the event more lively, ba qifen nong de geng jia honghuo (把气氛弄得更加红火)—literally ‘red fire’” but that for the formal context of New Year’s Day stage performance at which the city leaders would be present, I should be more reserved. He suggested that I first wish everyone a happy and prosperous new year before saying, “Next I’ll present the Shandong fast tale Auntie Wee, xia bian gei dajia xian yi duanr Shandong kuaishu cuo da sao (下边给大家献一段儿山东快书《矬大嫂》.” He then told me that I had to wear a storyteller’s gown for this type of performance but since we did not have time to have one made I would have to wear his. He first showed me the proper
way to fold the gown, then had me try it on (it was about eight inches too short so my shoes and pant legs stuck out at the bottom). Next, he taught me how to use the sleeves to enhance the appearance of my movements before having me practice both of the stories I was to perform several times with the gown on. Finally, he told me that because it was very cold (in the 20’s F) and I would be performing outdoors, I should take some time to practice playing the ban outside so that I could get used to playing in cold conditions.

We then walked as a family (Master Wu, his wife, his son and I) to his mother-in-law’s house for a traditional “New Year’s Eve meal, nian ye fan (年夜饭)”. All of my mother’s (Master Wu’s wife Wang Ren) brothers and sisters, their wives, husbands and children had gathered at home for the event. The men and children sat around for a long period of smoking and talking while the women prepared the meal. Then, after everyone gathered around the family alter to offer prayers and sacrifices to their ancestors, the action moved to two large tables full of food and drink that had been set up in the living room in front of the television. We then ate dumplings, drank beer and watched the Chinese New Year’s Gala variety show on China Central Television. After dinner, the men and children went outside to set off firecrackers. Some time after ten o’clock, I left so that I could return to my hotel room to get rested up for my big performance. However, the sound of firecrackers outside my window kept me awake until well after two in the morning.
At 6:58 AM the next morning, the sound of firecrackers woke me up. I quickly showered, got dressed, put on Master Wu’s storyteller’s gown, and went outside to practice. It was snowing outside and was the coldest it had been all year. At eight o’clock, Master Wu drove up, I got in his car, and we drove to May 4th Square. The wind was whipping off the ocean and across the square where several hundred people had braved the cold to sit outdoors for the performances. The day’s bill included a fourteen-act variety show that was made up of traditional songs, traditional and modern dance, group drum music, my fast tale storytelling, popular music, comedic skits, and xiangsheng. We went into a small heated room under the stage where most of the performers were huddled drinking hot tea while waiting to go on. I got dressed and began practicing my stories as Master Wu, who was not performing, talked with the xiangsheng performer Zhu Qi and another fast tale performer named Zhang Qiming. Then, I heard the emcee say, “Next we have a special act for you today. The American Xie Bode is here to perform the Shandong fast tale Auntie Wee for everyone.”

I climbed the stairs to the stage as the audience applauded. I forgot everything Master Wu had suggested that I say other than to wish everyone a happy New Year so I improvised to get to the story. As I began, the audience sat silently staring back at me as snow flakes fell around us. It was so cold that I could hardly move the copper ban, which had suddenly gotten extremely cold, and I began to get the feeling that it was not going to be a stellar performance.
However, when I stepped out of the narrator role to explain the meaning of ‘wee’, the audience laughed and applauded. Then, as the story progressed and I said, “When Ma saw this she really got mad, wham” and made the motion of the mother-in-law hitting Auntie Wee, everyone laughed and applauded as they were supposed to. I could see Master Wu, Zhu Qi, and Zhang Qiming standing in the front of the crowd smiling. The positive crowd reaction gave me confidence and the rest of the performance turned out better than I had anticipated. As I was leaving the stage, the crowd applauded again and several people cried out, “Tell another story!” When I got back stage, several reporters from local television and radio stations surrounded Master Wu and me, all wanting to interview us. After about fifteen minutes of questions, Master Wu ended things by saying it was too cold to be outside and we left.

As we made our way back to his car, the heads of several local cultural offices, performance troupes, and theatres stopped us to talk to Master Wu about me. Several of them extended invitations for the two of us to perform at upcoming events. When we were finally alone, Master Wu said, “Now, it’s time to ‘expand our influence, kuo da yingxiang (扩大影响)’”. He then critiqued my performance saying that I had made a “great break through, da tupo (大突破)” and that my performance was the best I had ever done. He also told me that I had made tremendous progress and that what I did that morning actually looked a little bit (and he emphasized only a little bit) like a real fast tale performance for the first
time. Then he told me not to get cocky. He said that my performance still lacked both facial expressions and movements and that I had forgotten to play the *ban* near the end of the second story. He also said that my beat and rhythm were not strong enough yet and I had mixed up two lines in the second story.

Later that evening, after having another traditional family meal at Master Wu’s mother-in-law’s home, we were invited to the home of a woman who had been a famous and influential actor in the 30’s and 40’s. While there my cell phone began ringing every few minutes as friends called me to tell me to turn on the television because clips from the performance were being aired on the evening news.\(^{224}\) This led to requests for me to perform at our banquet. I again performed *Auntie Wee* but this time the audience was highly critical. Many of them were older performers who quickly pointed out that I still had a long way to go. Among other things, they pointed out that all of my movements were not crisp, my expressions were late, my transition from one character to another was not distinct enough, and that towards the end of my stories my *ban* sounded off tone. The one

\(^{224}\) At the time, we were guests in the home of a friend so we did not see what was aired but a friend at a local theatre managed to tape the entire performance when it aired so Master Wu and I reviewed the tape together several days later during an individual session. Another friend called to tell me that my picture and a short introduction had appeared in the New Year’s Day addition of the *Qingdao News* and a friend who drives a taxi called to say that he had heard a post-performance interview with me on the radio. All of this coincided with the release of a feature article on me in the local *Huabao* magazine. The result was that waitresses at restaurants began asking if I was a performer, strangers on buses asked if I was the American who was learning fast tales, and one man on a flight from Qingdao to Shanghai stood up to announce loudly to everyone on the plane that I was a Shandong fast tale performer. This of course led to a short impromptu on board performance just before take off. During this trip and in every subsequent flight that I took in China, when passing through security, questions about my *ban* arose. When I explained that it was used in Shandong storytelling, the security personnel always requested that I perform for them so I frequently delivered impromptu performances in airport security lines.
positive post-performance comment they offered was that I did an excellent job of *xianzhua*, or using things in the performance environment to personalize the story (I had looked under plates and the table for Auntie Wee when she was lost).

Over the next few days, Master Wu decided that it was time for me to get my own storyteller’s gown made so he took me across town to a seamstress who had agreed to make two gowns for me by hand. While she was taking my measurements, she repeatedly told us that no one would waste their time making storyteller’s gowns anymore because making them takes too much time during which they could be making several smaller pieces of clothing that would make significantly more money. She made it clear that the only reason she was willing to make two for me was that her son had learned fast tales from Master Wu. She charged me 500 yuan for the two gowns, which both Master Wu and the seamstress repeatedly told me was merely the cost of the material and Master Wu and I took her and her son out to dinner to express our thanks. The next day, Master Wu then took me to a local department store to buy the only pair of “old men’s shoes, *zhangren xie* (丈人鞋)” that they had to complete my costume.

As my apprenticeship moved through the end of February and into March, the schedule of individual classes and lunches with Master Wu and his colleagues on weekdays, dinner banquets in the evenings, and study classes on the weekends was further jammed with more formal stage performances as well as larger-scale events such as wedding banquets. My first experience performing at a wedding
banquet at the Yellow Sea Hotel broke a pattern of increasingly effective performances as I completely flopped. As I told *The Big-footed Girl*, the several hundred guests stopped listening and went on with their other banquet activities. As soon as my performance ended, Master Wu and I left even before the remainder of the variety of acts had been completed. While in the car on the way home, Master Wu told me not to worry about the failure too much. Master Wu explained that in performing fast tales, the most important thing is to connect with the audience in an “exchange of feelings, *ganqing jiaoliu* (感情交流)” and that I had failed to make such a connection that day. His assessment was that I was not familiar with the wedding context and thus did not know how to connect with an audience at that type of event. He then went through the steps in the connection process as he sees them. First, one chooses a target in the audience. Next, by evoking emotions, injecting feelings into the performance, and using the eyes the performer “seizes a hold, *zhuazhu* (抓住)” of the audience drawing them in more deeply. Finally, the performer “shrinks the distance, *ba juli la jin* (把距离拉近)” between himself and the audience with his intonation, facial expressions, and techniques for tailoring the performance to that particular audience and event. Most importantly, according to Master Wu, is that a story must “come from within the heart, *fazi neixin* (发自内心)” rather than being mechanical or recited rote from memory as he described my wedding performance.
The fact that I was performing fast tales in an incorrect manner continually evoked such key knowledge about how the genre works. For example, my performance at a birthday party for the performer Zhang Qiming’s mother elicited elements of fast tale aesthetics from all of the participants of the event. The lunch banquet, held to celebrate Zhang’s mother’s 78th birthday, took place in a lavish banquet room that was decorated in red for the happy occasion. Zhang’s mother had been a fan of fast tales for many years and said she was looking forward to hearing Master Wu’s performance of *Wu Song Fights the Tiger*. The banquet opened with a large birthday cake placed in the center of the Lazy Susan. Candles were lit and the eight participants sang happy birthday before the cake was cut and we ate it with our chopsticks. Once the cake was eaten, the banquet followed typical banquet protocol. The repast included a twenty dish meal with several fish, longevity noodles, numerous bottles of beer, birthday cigars for the men, and frequent toasts to wish the birthday woman longevity.

When Master Wu informed the participants that I was learning to perform fast tales, both Zhang and his mother requested that I perform a tale for her birthday. After opening with some padded speech that included birthday wishes, I performed *Auntie Wee*, which drew applause and a positive reaction from everyone at the banquet. Master Wu then took the stage to perform a feeling-packed rendition of *Wu Song Fights the Tiger*. About two minutes into the performances, Master Wu suddenly stopped, turned to the side and said, “My
throat can’t take it. I’ve had a cold for three days.” Recognizing the disclaimer of performance, Zhang quickly urged him to continue on. “I can’t hit the high notes,” Master Wu added as he picked the story back up exactly where he had left off. Zhang’s mother stared intently at Master Wu as he performed frequently laughing at his facial expressions. The performance brought the atmosphere to a high point with loud applause, shouts of “Good, hao (好)”, and a round of congratulatory toasts.

Zhang’s mother then requested that I tell another story. My second performance was not as effective as the first had been but ultimately evoked an informative discussion of fast tale aesthetics. When I finished performing, Master Wu asked Zhang’s mother what she thought. At first, she had little reaction but after thinking about things for a bit, she told everyone that it did not sound right. She said that when telling the second story, my “mouth was late, kou dun (口顿)”, a comment that elicited a long discussion about the sound of fast tales. The conclusion was that my rhythm and words were correct but there was a slight half beat delay after the sound of the ban and before the next sentence began. Zhang and Master Wu told us that most people could not have heard such a problem implying that Zhang’s mother was a fast tale connoisseur. To the expert ear, however, such a slight pause creates an “unsmooth, bu shun (不顺)” or “not flowing, bu liuchang (不流畅)” sound. Master Wu explained that a key
characteristic of *quyi* language is its “coherence, *lianguanxing* (连贯性)”, or its feeling of everything being connected in terms of meaning, beat, rhyme, rhythm, flow, and intonation.

After a few more rounds of drinking and eating, Zhang’s mother and father left to take their afternoon nap. Master Wu, Zhang Qiming, Zhu Qi, the fast tale performer Zhao Leping, two businessmen who were friends of Zhang, and I remained at the restaurant after seeing them off. The focus of the event then shifted to a serious drinking session that lasted several hours and included *qigong* performances by Master Wu. During the course of the discussion the *xiangsheng* performer Zhu Qi, who was sitting next to me leaned over to ask, “How many acts do you have now, *ni jige huo le* (你有几个活了)?” *Huo* literally can mean “to live” or “a product” but in this usage refers to the number of *quyi* acts a performer has developed. This manner of asking insinuated that he recognized me on some level as a performer and led to a discussion of my performances. All of the performers present then began offering suggestions on areas that I needed to improve upon. They included that my eight space was still too big, my foreign accent was still present, my feet were messy, and my *ban* was not “solid, *cishi* (打得不太瓷实)” . They told me that in terms of *quyi*, although I was very skilled at interacting with the audience such as by using the eyes to draw people in and by improvising based on the performance environment, I was not quite there yet.
They said that my ban was “very steady, hen wen (很稳)” like my master’s but that occasionally the sound “floated, piao (飘)” (meaning that it was too long with a metal ringing) or was “mute, ya (哑)” (meaning that it was too short and abrupt). In terms of language, they also said that I had not yet integrated intonation shifts to indicate speaker mood so sometimes I sounded mechanical.

The theme of the event’s discussion however became what they felt was the most important characteristic for quyi performers to have, “stage presence, taiyuan (台缘)—literally ‘stage fate’”. To clarify what they meant, the performers offered several examples of performers who had taiyuan and those who did not. The idea was that a performer needs to be able to walk on to a stage and have the audience like him before he says or does anything. Through his appearance, mannerisms, and facial expressions, a performer with taiyuan projects a familiar, intimate, and likeable image. Throughout a given performance then performers with taiyuan are able to make audiences like them as performers, as the characters they portray and as people. They used Gao Yuanjun as an example saying that when he arrived on stage he looked at all sections of the audience making each audience member feel as though he were talking directly to and with him or her. The discussions, performances and drinking continued on until dinner time when we had to leave for another banquet.
Becoming a Performer

During a March 31st banquet at the Jindu Good Friend Restaurant in Qingdao involving eight of Master Wu’s high school classmates, the way audiences reacted to my performances began to shift. The banquet began as all other banquets did with introductions, ritual seating, formal toasts, eating and talking, though the intensity of the drinking and the crudeness of the language were both at extremely high levels because everyone present was male and was intimately familiar with the other participants. After thirty minutes of guzzling down full glasses of beer, the participants asked me to perform a story. As I was standing up to perform, two participants ran out of the banquet room yelling for the manager and all of the staff to come into the room to watch. About twenty-five restaurant staff then filed into the room. I performed Auntie Wee for them because it was my most refined performance. They laughed and applauded when I stepped out of the narrator role to explain the meaning of ‘wee’, chuckled and applauded when I could not find Auntie Wee under the table, laughed loudly when, as Auntie Wee’s older brother, I screamed that we would go to court to settle the matter, clapped along to the beat as I built to the climax, roared in laughter when pretended to be exhausted from searching for Auntie Wee with a sifter, and called out “Good, hao (好)” as I finished. Everyone stood with filled glasses of beer toasting me one by one as they congratulated me on a successful performance. When the toasting died down, Master Wu performed The Big-footed
Girl after connecting the content of our two stories with the padded speech he had taught me to use (he told them that I had told a story about an aunt who was too small so he would make her bigger). When he bowed, everyone offered congratulatory toasts and the wait staff left the room. The banquet then resumed the normal pattern of eating and toasting. During the course of the interaction, several of the participants toasted Master Wu for having accomplished the great feat of teaching a foreigner to perform Shandong fast tales. Yang Jie, who had seen me perform the same story numerous times before, also described the tremendous progress I had made to the group. He told them that the only problem that I had now was that there were no pauses so the overall performance seemed a little rushed. Then, the focus of the evening shifted to reminiscing about high school times.

A week later, Master Wu and I traveled with the Theatre’s Lu Drama Troupe to Pingdu, a satellite city located an hour north of Qingdao, for their performance for the 70th Anniversary of the Long March. The troupe performed twice, once in the morning and once in the afternoon, for more than one thousand high school students each time. After the second performance ended, my teacher and I were invited to a banquet hosted by the Vice Mayor and several local big wigs in local government and business. We entered after the banquet had been underway for some time and it was immediately apparent that the atmosphere was quite intense. The host toasted us three times before we sat down. Each time, we
completely emptied our filled glasses of beer. Then, before we even moved our chopsticks, Master Wu and I drank two toasts with each person at the table, which meant that before eating anything, we had already had twenty-three glasses of beer to drink. Rounds of eating and toasting then began. Before long, the vice mayor, a fan of fast tales, requested Master Wu to perform so he stood and performed the story “Schlocky, cimao (疵毛)”, which is a semi-yellow tale about how decadent modern television programs have become.

Immediately after congratulatory toasts had subsided, the Vice Mayor requested that I perform. Although I had by this time developed a small repertoire of seven or eight stories, I decided to stick with my standard Auntie Wee because I was afraid that the large amount of alcohol we had consumed would hinder the performance of anything not deeply internalized. As I performed, the participants at the banquet tapped their feet, tapped their hands on the table, or clapped their hands along with the beat I created. I broke the beat to jump in and out of character roles and the audience laughed loudly at all the right times. When I delivered the final punch line, the whole room exploded in laughter (I am sure mostly because of the alcohol) and in unison everyone stood up with filled glasses in hand to toast me. After I had drank with each of them, Master Wu stood with his filled glass in hand. I thought that he was going to propose a toast to the group but he turned to me, “Xie Bode, what’s wrong with you? You’ve gone mad, Xie Bode ni zenme le? ni fa feng le (谢博德你怎么了？你发疯了)”
As I stood with him with my glass raised, he then touched our two glasses together before drinking the entire glass in one gulp. He then refilled his own glass (I always refilled his glass for him but on this occasion he insisted that he do so) as I quickly grabbed another bottle to fill my own. Master Wu then toasted me a second time as he told me that the process of passing on the art of Shandong fast tales was complete. He said that there were no small mistakes in my performance and that even an expert would say that it was Shandong fast tales. “You completely drew everyone in with your voice, movements and expressions. You made us feel the beat as well as the mood of the characters. And, your performance changed the atmosphere in the room allowing everyone to experience a ‘high tide, gao chao (高潮).’” After we finished the second glass of beer, Master Wu refilled his glass a third time as he told me that one cannot toast an even number of times and one toast is simply not enough. He then toasted me a third time saying that the beer in the glass represented the feelings between us. Master Wu then sat down and began to cry. The vice mayor quickly handed him some napkins to wipe the tears and everyone tried to recapture the mirthful atmosphere that had filled the room earlier. Gradually the normal banquet pattern resumed. Once the banquet ended, it was off to karaoke and multiple fast tale performances by both Master Wu and me. By the time the participants had had enough storytelling it was almost 2:30 AM so they drove us to a hotel and arranged rooms for us. When everyone else left, Master Wu pointed out
everything that I had done incorrectly in my performances that evening and then we went to sleep.

Through the month of April, I began to have repeated successful performances in the banquet context but had yet to reach the same level on stage. It was not until the week of May 1st, when we performed on stage multiple times every day for events associated with the May 1st Labor Day holiday that audiences reacted in a similar fashion during a stage performance. On May 1st, 2005, we traveled six hours by bus to Dajijiagou Village, a remote town between Yantai and Penglai, where the Folk Song and Dance Troupe performed a variety show for more than 35,000 people for their local “annual bazaar, nian da ji (年大集)”. The following day we traveled with the Folk Music Troupe to Jimo, a small city forty minutes north of Qingdao, where we performed for the grand opening of a home décor market. As soon as the show ended, Master Wu, the emcee Gong Luyang, and I climbed into a car that had been sent for us by the Jinkou Township government. The driver drove us the thirty minutes to a large, walled outdoor complex in Jinkou where two flatbed tractor trailers had been set up as a stage for a large-scale performance that was to take place in the evening. Stage crews were setting up large speakers and lighting fixtures. Performers were milling around behind the trucks, and a few hundred people had already gathered in front of the stage. The organizer of the event then took the three of us to a nearby building where we washed up before entering a banquet room. We were introduced to
Wang Furen (王福仁), a famous traditional Chinese pipe instrument musician, two singers and two dancers. Mr. Wang sat next to me and began sharing his stage experiences with me. He offered advice on how to keep one’s self relaxed while in front of large audiences and told of his forty years playing the suona, sheng, and dizi as we ate a large meal prepared for the performers.

Following dinner, we moved back outside where there were now thousands of people gathered in front of the stage. We went back to the car that was parked behind the stage where we rested for about an hour. As we sat in the car, waves of people continued to flow into the compound from every direction. As the sun set, the crowd began to form a large U-shape and then began to spill around the sides of the stage until it was almost completely surrounded. Members of the crowd walked among the performers and several people approached me to ask what I would be performing. As we began to be engulfed by the crowd, local police officers moved in with ropes to cordon off a small area behind the stage. Master Wu, Gong Luyang, Wang Furen, and I stood together chatting about the upcoming performance. Mr. Wang kept encouraging me and offering advice on how to deal with nerves as he could tell I was getting nervous as the crowd continued to grow. Troupe Leader Shan then arrived from another performance he had been at earlier in the day. He told us that he had also been invited to sing a solo at the Jinkou performance and that the show organizers had intentionally invited performers from troupes all over the province in order to create an
interesting and star-studded line up. It would include modern and traditional
dance, male and female solo vocalists, choral singing, Mr. Wang’s pipe
performances, a “dramatic skit, xiju xiaopin (戏剧小品)”, and Shandong fast tale
performances by Master Wu and me.

By the time the lights went on, local television stations had set up
cameras around the stage and more than 30,000 people had packed themselves
into the area around the stage. Gong Luyang and a female host opened the show
and were followed by traditional Chinese dancers. Backstage, Master Wu and I
put on our storyteller’s gowns, Troupe Leader Shan warmed up his voice, and Mr.
Wang tuned his instruments. After two more acts, it was time for Mr. Wang to
take the stage. He treated the crowd to a ten-minute performance on multiple
instruments. As he climbed down the ladder that led to the stage, Mr. Wang shook
my hand, wished me a successful performance and fell over. Everyone rushed to
his side to see what had happened and medical personnel were called immediately.
As I climbed the ladder to the stage, they were attending to Mr. Wang. Gong
Luyang then introduced me and I walked out before the bright lights and the
flicker of camera flashes. As the audience applauded, I could only see a sea of
thousands of smiling faces. As I began performing, the crowd began clapping. It
was an amazing feeling watching 30,000 people cheering and clapping along as I
told the story. They laughed exactly when I wanted them to and a special
electricity filled the air. I could feel the connection with the crowd that I had felt
only in the banquet setting previously. When I had finished Auntie Wee, which is all they had me scheduled to tell, the crowd began screaming for me to tell another story as I looked to Gong Luyang. He nodded for me to remain on stage so I went into the padded speech mode. I told them how special the day was and how small Auntie Wee was. Then, I told them that she was too small so I would make her bigger just for them. I then went into my rendition of The Big-footed Girl. Before I knew it, I was bowing to end my performance and could barely remember having begun the story.\textsuperscript{225} I could see smiles on the faces of the people in the front rows and could hear people yelling, “Good” and “Tell another story!” As I left the stage, Master Wu walked passed me on his way to take the stage. He grabbed my arm, “Fantastic, bang (棒)!”

I had little time to enjoy my best performance as the other performers informed me that the medical personnel had been unable to save Mr. Wang. He had passed away minutes earlier of a heart attack. As Master Wu stirred the crowd into an even more frenzied state with his performance of Knucklehead Visits the Relatives, members of the crowd circled around asking for autographs. After Master Wu climbed off the stage, Troupe Leader Shan went on. A number of performers offered congratulatory comments and said that Mr. Wang’s spirit had helped me change the atmosphere of the event. Several more people from the

\textsuperscript{225} This experience is an example of what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990: 4) has described as flow, or a rare optimal experience of total physical and conscious involvement; “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter”.

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audience then crowded around asking questions and talking to us about fast tales. When Troupe Leader Shan had left the stage, we fought our way through the mob to his car. We then left for the hospital where Mr. Wang had been taken. We waited there at the hospital until the early hours of the morning when Mr. Wang’s son arrived from out of town. We then endured a long, silent ride back to Qingdao.

The next morning, I rode with the Folk Music Troupe to Jimo for my first stage performance without Master Wu. He had been invited to a separate performance sponsored by the Qingdao Municipal Construction Commission for a large audience of construction workers. During earlier trips, other performers had maintained a certain distance and always interacted with me through Master Wu. While on the bus to Jimo and once there all of the other performers actively interacted with me backstage. They joked with me and asked me numerous questions about the US, learning fast tales, and Master Wu. Before going on stage, the troupe leader told me to play things by ear. He said to perform a couple of stories, see how the audience reacted, and then continue on stage as long as I liked if the audience was responding well. I began with *Auntie Wee* and *The Big-footed Girl* before going on to several more stories. I finally left the stage when my mouth was too dry to continue. As I left the stage, a crowd of people rushed along beside me asking me questions as I tried to make it to the performer dressing room. So much attention was being paid to me that the audience was not focused on the next act so I had to remain hidden from the audience until the show ended.
While hiding backstage, Master Wu called to tell me that the leaders of the Construction Commission were holding a banquet to thank the performers from his performance and had sent a car to take me there so that they could see my performance as well. A short while later the car arrived and I left for Qingdao.

The Jimo performance marked the first time I performed without Master Wu present. After that point, I began to receive invitations to perform on my own. The following weekend, I was invited to perform for a wedding banquet with more than four hundred guests. Then, on May 27th, the leader of the Dongying Lu Drama Troupe invited me to perform at the “2005 Singing at the Mouth of the Yellow River People’s Cultural Activity on the Square”, a variety show sponsored by China Net Com and organized by the local government cultural bureau. Troupe Leader Zhang was a close friend of Master Wu and had learned that my mother and sister had come to Qingdao to visit so he arranged for the performance and sent a car three hours across the province to pick us up. Both Master Wu and I performed fast tales as part of a ten-act show that also included two traditional dance acts, Peking opera, zaji—a torch juggler, two Lu drama performances—minus traditional make up and costume, a female solo singer, a magic act, and a comedic skit. When we had finished performing, I was given my first earnings as a storyteller and was instructed not to tell any other performers how much I was paid, including Master Wu.
Before leaving Qingdao in July, Master Wu and I performed several more times in a variety of contexts and he sat me down to tell me that what he had been teaching me during the apprenticeship was not just a traditional art form but a way of life. He said that he hoped that I was “learning ethics and art simultaneously, de yi shuang xin (德艺双馨)”. As he explained what he meant, Master Wu told me that I should have been “learning how to be a good person, xue hui zuo ren (学会做人)” and how to be a member of a community. A fast tale performer does things for other people. He brings happiness to everyone, gei dajia dai lai kuai le (给大家带来快乐)”. Most importantly, he stressed that the father-son relationship and expectations that we had established would not end when the apprenticeship period ended but would last for life. At the end of June, 2005, Master Wu held a going away banquet that officially ended my apprenticeship experience.
CHAPTER 5

THE SHANDONG FAST TALE REPERTOIRE

Formal Components of a Fast Tale

As a form of quyi, the art of Shandong fast tales is a narrative performance tradition, a form of performative storytelling. Its practitioners build narrative worlds for their audiences to consume and participate in by combining conventionalized movements and facial expressions, the sound and rhythm of their ban, verbal scripts, and a range of expressive techniques. As was explained in Chapter 1, the Chinese name for fast tales is comprised of the two character compound kuai (fast) and shu (book). In Chapters 2 and 3, it was shown that in the context of fast tales, kuai does not exclusively mean a fast rate of speech, but rather refers to the smooth, rhythmic, flowing speech with which performers narrate their tales. The second character, shu, according to Gao Yuanjun (1982: 4), means “story, gushi (故事)”. As he described them, fast tales are stories that involve characters and events. Performers “tell about characters, shuo renwu (说人物)” and “put stories on display, biao gushi (表故事)” to create vivid and lively
stories with didactic meaning. One famous fast tale describes the fundamental components that make up any fast tale story. It goes like this…

An Old Man Pulling a Lamb

This time I’m going to tell about a really short story. It’ll live up to its name as a short story. Although I say it’s a short story, it has a head. It has a tail. It has characters. It has content. This is a small story that I don’t lightly give in and sing. Listen:

There once was an old man pulling a lamb,
A one sentence short story, just this long.
It’s over.

Most fast tales are more developed and not this simple as this one brief tale but this serves as a convenient example to illustrate some of the fundamental
differences.

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226 The shuo-biao distinction is similar to the distinction between diegesis and mimesis in Western narrative scholarship (Bauman, 1986: 65). The shuo aspect of fast tales is diegetic while the biao aspect is mimetic. However, all Gao School fast tales are a combination of the two modes of presentation. Thus, reading and experiencing (seeing and hearing) fast tales generate two distinct types of knowledge and are two drastically different types of experiences. While Gao School performers place extra emphasis on the biao aspect of performances, Yang School performers place heavier emphasis on the shuo aspect.

227 I heard this story several times while in Shandong. The version I have presented here comes from Zhongguo chuantong Shandong kuaishu daquan. Liu Hongbin and Zhao Lianjia, eds. 1997: 610.
components that comprise fast tale stories. The plain speech that is used to set up the story explicitly lists these components: the head, the tail, characters, and content. What is called the head of a story is the beginning of the story. In this case it is “There once was an old man pulling a lamb.” The Chinese introduction follows the introductory formula “I’m telling of + character name/type + what he or she is doing” pointed out in several short fast tales in Chapter 2. The tail refers to the story’s ending. Here, it is the punch line “A one sentence short story, just this long.” In addition to a beginning and ending, the story must involve at least one character. Here it is the old man. Content, the final component listed in the introduction, also known as the “waist, yao (腰)” of the story, refers to the middle or action of the story. In this case it is “pulling a lamb”. When combined with the plain speech introductory set up, these components make up a fast tale story. In addition to the four explicitly listed components—head, tail, characters, and content—two additional structural components are typically needed to make the story work as a fast tale.

First, there must be a punch line (called a “bundle, baofu (包袱)” because the audience cannot see what is inside until it is “opened, zha (扎)” or “exploded, zha (炸)”—meaning when it is revealed to the audience by the performer). Baofu can be situated in the language chosen to tell the story, as in the tale Getting A Shot (Chapter 3) when Old Shan thinks that “breathing through one hole” is a
medical term for bronchitis when actually Nurse Zhao is mispronouncing his name and in the story hat *The Big Truth* that utilizes a humorous term *ding* from the local dialect (Chapter 2). They can also appear in narrator or performer commentary, as in the cases of Dong Jiancheng asking his audience if there was anyone present who had the same name as the main character Shuhua while telling *Knucklehead Wants A Baby* (Chapter 2), Wu Yanguo stopping his performances to ask if the video camera was rolling during several different stories (Chapter 2), and when the performer explained the Chinese characters in Old Shan’s name during Wu Yanguo’s rendition of the story *Getting A Shot* (Chapter 3). *Baofu* can be embedded in the speech of the narrator, characters, or performer as well. An example of a *baofu* situated in narrator speech occurs in the opening couplet of *The Big-footed Girl* (Chapter 2). The narrator begins by saying, “I’m telling of a girl as dark as a crow. She wasn’t that tall, she just made the drum tower look low.” Audiences laughed every time they heard how dark the girl was because of the way it is expressed and the second line operates as a type of humor generating “irony, *fanhua* (反话)” because the narrator follows his statement that the girl is not that tall by saying that she makes a drum tower—typically two or three story structures—look low. Examples of *baofu* located in character speech occur in *Knucklehead Visits the Relatives* (Chapter 2), both when Knucklehead says, “Hee, hee, hee…call her mother-in-law? As mean as your ma is, she has two names? I can’t remember them all” and when he mixes up what he
is supposed to say about his in-law’s new table with a compliment about the baby:  
“Hee hee hee hee…we’re here, we’re here. How are you? How are you? You old  
hen under the moon. I recognize that little toy you’re hugging. It was originally  
made of pear tree wood. Other carpenters couldn’t make one like this. We had to  
have a carpenter make it to order.” Another occurs in Knucklehead Wants A Baby  
(Chapter 2) when Knucklehead does not realize that he is holding a duck: “My,  
you had him really fast! Hey, why does the kid have such a flat mouth? And he  
has mouth full of beady little black teeth. He’s got two black bean-like eyes. A  
long skinny neck and a feathery head. His baby hair still hasn’t fallen off. And his  
toes still haven’t spread.” Baofu in performer speech appear in pre-story padded  
speech, asides to the audience in which commentary about characters or story  
action are made, and when the performer makes adjustments to tailor a  
performance to a specific location or audience.  

In addition to speech related baofu, some are also hidden in the actions of  
characters. Examples include when Second Brother Ma picks up his toe and puts  
it where his nose should have been in Second Brother Ma (Chapter 2), when the  
family uses both a winnow and a sifter during their search for Auntie Wee in  
Auntie Wee (Chapter 2), and when Nurse Zhao squirts medicine into her eye while  
filling the syringe, pats Old Shan on the rear end just before sticking him with the  
needle, and stabs him repeatedly because she misses the circle she has drawn on  
his behind in Getting A Shot (Chapter 3). The facial expressions of either
characters or the performer can also be used to create *baofu* such as when Second Brother Ma looks cross-eyed at the fly on his nose, then contorts his face trying to shoo it away in *Second Brother Ma* (Chapter 2). Finally, the manner in which story action is arranged can also generate *baofu*. Using the same story as an example, the sequence of actions of the fly landing on Second Brother Ma’s nose, his trying to kill it with a shaving knife, cutting off his nose, dropping the knife in pain, and cutting off his toe contains a series of smaller *baofu* that sets up the final major one in which he attaches his toe to his face. Any combination of these elements can also be used to create *baofu*.

To return to the example of *An Old Man Pulling a Lamb*, line two “A one sentence short story, just this long” functions as the *baofu* of the story. It works only when combined with the final major component of fast tales, called a “button, *kouzi* (扣子)”. Here the plain speech set up functions as a *kouzi* setting audience expectations up for a short story involving more action than just an old man pulling a lamb. Fast tales always include at least one major *kouzi*, called a “big button, *da kou* (大扣)” and may involve an unlimited number of “small buttons, *xiao kou* (小扣)” (Liu, 2001). According to Liu (2001: 154-160) the notion of *kouzi* has two levels of meaning. First, it is like a string of buttons that keeps audiences tied in their seats. Every story segment ends at the point when an old conflict is resolved (or known problem is solved) and a new conflict arises (or
problem is presented to the audience). This creates an element of suspense that snares the audience so they want to keep listening. In Chinese storyteller parlance, this state is described as “without chance, it cannot be a story, *wu qiao bu cheng shu* (无巧不成书).” Second, it refers to the storyteller’s ability to snare the “strings of the listeners’ hearts”. In other words, by strategically arranging *kouzi*, the storyteller creates a situation in which the audience cannot figure out exactly what will happen next. Thus, the story develops in a way so that events outside of their expectations but within the realm of reason continue to occur so that the suspense of wanting to know what will happen next draws them further into the story. Finally, the humor in the example story here is generated in the mismatch of the set up expectations what actually is revealed in the *baofu*—that the story is really only one sentence long.228

As I have become increasingly conversant in the fast tale tradition, I have learned that some fast tales, particularly story hats like *The Big Truth* (Chapter 2), do not tell stories at all but are only collections of cultural information organized around familiar scripts touched up with a few humorous twists and word plays that function as *baofu*. This type of fast tale is an example of the type of *quyi* mentioned in Chapter 1 that Wu Wenke (2002: 48) describes as “reciting about things, *yongwu* (咏物)”. Similar types of fast tales that simply relate a single

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228 As should be evident from the descriptions of fast tale performances in Chapters 2 and 3, fast tales also always involve a performer who brings the tale to life for an audience by assuming the role of omniscient narrator and all characters that appear in the story.
principle are examples of Wu’s “explaining things or reasoning, *shuoli* (说理)” and those that merely describe places are examples of his “describing scenery, *xiejing* (写景)”. Other fast tales, such as *On the Go* (Chapter 2), are undeveloped stories that involve a limited number of characters and action. This type of fast tale is a type of “narration, *xushi* (叙事)” and is designed to either “express feelings, *shuqing* (抒情)” or “amuse (people), *dou le* (逗乐)”. In addition to these types of fast tales, a large portion of the stories I have encountered develop one central character personality rather than a plotline. Master Wu’s rendition of *Auntie Wee* (Chapter 2) functions in this manner. Experiencing this tale a second time (related in Chapter 2) allowed me to focus on aspects of the performance other than just the verbal script. The first thing that struck me at the time was the clear role of imagery. By combining realistic and codified symbolic movements and facial expressions with the verbal script, Wu created a series of images in the audience members’ minds that together built the exaggerated character Auntie Wee (Rubin, 1995: 39). Specifically, each of the lines “half a yard of silk wouldn’t cover her knee”, “uses a thread as a scarf”, “on her tippy-toes by the stove, she still can’t reach the pots”, “used a sifter to sift, the winnow to winnow”, and “in that seed shell playin’ poker” were imageable actions drawn from everyday life. Wu then exaggerated them by normal standards
When combined together and supplemented by Wu’s movements and facial expressions, they created a vivid image of just how short Auntie Wee really was. The lines, “older brother was scared til’ his knees were a knockin’”, and “ma was so scared she was a shakin’” worked in a similar way to show the audience just how scared they were by the threat made by Auntie Wee’s older brother. Longer, fast tales such as *Wu Song Fights the Tiger* may contain several of these smaller types of fast tales and thus are generally more complex. Plotlines are developed with vivid description offered by an omniscient narrator but are typically episodic in nature and tend to revolve around one (or a few) central character(s) and one central event or conflict (Gao, 1982).

Regardless of which of these types of structural arrangement is utilized, fast tale stories tend to be constructed following a particular pattern. Although there may first be descriptions of story time, location, and setting, the first major section of a developed fast tale is the appearance of the primary character. Through metaphor, irony, exaggeration or comparison, performers create a vivid

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229 This is also an example of what Elliot Oring (2003) has described as the humor of incongruity. Wu began with a typical everyday script as well as a recognizable stock character from the local tradition so that everyone shared expectations for what would happen and what that person would be like. He then put a twist on both how the context unfolded and what that person was like. The humor was generated in the incongruity between the audience’s expectations and Wu’s actual portrayal.

230 As I continued to experience other fast tale performances after this early encounter with *Auntie Wee*, this use of exaggerated imagery to portray characters was repeated again and again by many performers. In 2005, while discussing fast tales with Troupe Leader Shan while riding the troupe bus from Qingdao to Penglai, Shan, a singer by trade, expressed the opinion that fast tales were nothing more than exaggeration and imagery.
image of their protagonist. Then, performers leave deep impressions of this initial image in the minds of audiences using all available expressive means. The goal is to enable audiences to see, feel, and hear the individual as if they were living and present. For the sake of simplicity, take the tale *Auntie Wee* from Chapter 2 as an example. After Auntie Wee appears in the first line of the tale, lines two, three and four are exaggerated comparisons that construct a vivid image of a woman so small she uses a piece of thread for a scarf. Once the protagonist has appeared, a series of foils typically enhances the image of the character (the number depends on the length of the story). In the case of *Auntie Wee*, she is sent to the kitchen to make dinner but cannot reach the pots on the stove even when standing on her toes. Then, a central conflict, the big button of the story in Chinese storyteller parlance, initiates all subsequent action. In *Auntie Wee*, we are given the ordinary situation of a mother-in-law telling her daughter-in-law to make dinner. When she does not have dinner ready quickly enough, the mother-in-law becomes angry and backhands her, again part of an ordinary cultural script. Then there is a sudden, unexpected twist of the situation and the story is under way. When the mother-in-law hits Auntie Wee, she knocks her on the floor where no one can find her because she is so small. Following the big button, the story action flows in a series of attempts to resolve the problem. With each failure to solve the problem—additional small buttons—the tension increases. The result is that Shandong fast tale plots rarely develop in a straight line, rather the story develops
in waves rising with each attempt to resolve the conflict and dipping as the attempt fails (Gao, 1982; Wang, 1985; and Liu, 2001). In Auntie Wee, the family first sends a letter to Auntie Wee’s family but that results in the males in her family making a trip to the in-laws’ home where they give the three-days-or-else ultimatum. The tension in the story builds to a climax during the subsequent search for Auntie Wee, which along the way produces hilarious images of the family using sifters and winnows to go through everything on the family floor trying to find her. Just when it seems that she will not be found, the major baofu is delivered. Auntie Wee was not lost at all. She was in a melon seed playing poker all along. Plot lines must have a logical flow to the sequence of actions to retain audience interest but the general sequence of fast tales follows this pattern: appearance of the protagonist, enhancing the image of the protagonist, a big button, a series of small buttons (attempts to resolve the conflict), waves of increasing tension building to a climax, and a major baofu.

**Tale Length**

In terms of length, fast tales are differentiated into several subcategories ranging from the longest great tales, which are collections of smaller related episodic tales, to the shortest story hats, which, as the example An Old Man Pulling a Lamb shows, can be as short as a few lines. The fifteen “chapter, huimu (回目)” Tale of Wu Song briefly introduced in Chapter 1 is the most famous example of a great tale. Each huimu is comprised of one to four episodic
“segments, *duanzi* (段子)—literally, ‘paragraph’, or ‘a segment of speech’”, a term now used colloquially to refer to any single story. *The Tale of Wu Song* is described as a “long-length great tale, *changpian dashu* (长篇大书)” because it consists of at least twelve *huimu*. Fast tales that are made up of two or more *huimu* are called “middle-length great tales, *zhongpian dashu* (中篇大书)”, while one *huimu*-length fast tales are called a “single (episode) segments, *dan duan* (单段)” because they are independent stories that are not part of a larger cycle. *Dan duan* typically are three to four hundred lines in length and last around fifteen minutes when performed. *Lu Da Disposes of the Tyrant*, introduced in Chapter 1, is an example of this type of fast tale. Other famous *dan duan* include *Li Kui Steals Fish* and *Creating a Big Ruckus at the Ma Family Store.*\(^{231}\)

*Duans* (segments) are further subdivided in terms of length into “small, *xiao* (小)”, “medium, *zhong* (中)”, and “large, *da* (大)”.\(^{232}\) Each performer’s

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\(^{231}\) *Lu Da Disposes of the Tyrant* was originally five *huimu* in length: 1) Lu Da and his friends are drinking at the inn; 2) the itinerant performer Ms. Jin arrives, talks with the innkeeper, and goes to the upper level of the inn; 3) Jin and Lu meet, she performs for him, she tells him her story, and Lu agrees to avenge her parents; 4) Tiger Zheng appears; and 5) Lu goes to the meat shop where the fight between the two occurs (Wang, 1985). It was later shortened by Gao Yuanjun to three *huimu* that build tension and create Lu’s gradual mood shifts towards outright anger. These were retained to build suspense because if Lu simply goes to the meat shop and the two fight, the story would not be interesting (the two have fought already and Lu whipped Zheng’s tail). In the final *huimu*, suspense is also intensified through the clash of Lu and Zheng’s personalities. When Lu fails in his attempts to instigate a fight, there is a temporary lull as he leaves the meat shop. This serves as a contrast to set up the climax that follows when he reenters the shop the second time to kill Zheng.

\(^{232}\) Vibeke Bordahl (1996: 25) notes similar divisions and terminology in the Yangzhou storytelling tradition. Likewise, Mark Bender (1989; 1995; 1998; and 2003a) has found such
repertoire is unique. Some specialize in a single story. Some performers specialize in small *duan*, while others specialize in big *duan*. Three stories that are basic to most performers’ repertoires are *Wu Song Fights the Tiger, East Mountain Temple*, and *Lu Da Disposes of the Tyrant*. Large *duan*, also called middle-length great tales, range from one hundred to four hundred lines and last up to twenty-five to thirty minutes in performance. The stories *Wu Song Fights the Tiger* and *East Mountain Temple* discussed in Chapter 1 are examples of traditional big *duan*. Medium *duan*, on the other hand, are around one hundred lines in length and range from four to seven minutes in terms of performance. *The Beat Patrolman* mentioned in Chapter 3 is an example although it is also often included in small *duan* collections because, at around ninety lines in length, it borders on being a long small *duan* and a short medium *duan*. It is small *duan*, however, that comprise the bulk of the fast tale repertoire outside of *The Tale of Wu Song*. Examples of small *duan* included here are *Auntie Wee, The Big-footed* divisions and similar terminology in the Suzhou *tanci* tradition. Contemporary Shandong fast tale performances are becoming increasingly shorter in order to adapt to modern contexts and audiences. Most public performances are now limited to several two to five minute small tales because they are often part of a larger program of entertainment. See Liu Hongbin’s (1996) “*jicheng chuantong yangchang biduan,*” *Quyi*, Number 11: 34.233 In performance situations calls for it, longer stories can be further divided at natural break points. Performers occasionally extract short segments that they are particularly good at to perform in situations in which they have time constraints This is called “singing extractions, *zhaichang* (摘唱)”. Dong Jiancheng’s version of *East Mountain Temple* recounted in Chapter 2 is an example. Also, Wu Yanguo frequently performed the first five to seven minutes of *Wu Song Fights the Tiger* during banquets because that context requires shorter performances to sustain the flow of the larger event. He typically stopped just after Wu Song first appears in the story. When teaching the story, he divided the tale into ten sub-segments that ended at natural pauses in the action. Each of the sub-segments can be performed as independent performances.

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Girl, Getting a Shot, Second Brother Ma, Knucklehead Visits the Relatives, Knucklehead Wants a Baby, Boasting, Making Pants, and An Old Man Pulling a Lamb. Small duan are typically less than seven minutes in length but include character roles and story action. The shortest small duan, such as Fear, On the Go, and The Big Truth that appear in Chapter 2, are called story hats. As was mentioned in the discussions of Tang transformation texts and Shandong drum ballads in Chapter 1, story hats are short, simple but lively numbers intended to amuse and catch the interest of audiences. They are used to “open events, kaichang (开场)” with the dual purposes of allowing the audience to settle in and enabling the performer to warm up before the “main tale, zhengshu (正书)”. Thus, many story hats last less than two minutes when performed and merely involve third person description and no (or undeveloped) plot lines.

Because the big duan of The Tale of Wu Song were traditionally the main event, most begin with the stock phrases that were transitions from the story hats or padded speech that opened performance events. They include both “(I’ll) Say few words, (let’s) discuss staunch will, hua xiao shuo, lun gang qiang (话少说, 论刚强)” and the formula I repeatedly encountered when asking about fast tales, “Idle talk and aimless chatter, I’ll tell you no more. I’m here to tell the story of the hero Second Brother Wu”. 234 Such formulaic openers are one marked

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234 According to Albert Lord (1960: 30), a formula is, “A group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.” Lord suggested
characteristic of Shandong fast tale big *duan* that distinguishes them from small *duan*. Because many traditional Shandong fast tale big *duan* were extracted from the great tale *The Tale of Wu Song*, they begin and end with stock phrases that originally linked internal the segments of the larger tale.235 Examples of opening formulas from big *duan* in the *Tale of Wu Song* include:

“Picking up the tale from last time, telling the next chapter (书接上回说下章)”

“The last time in the tale (I) told...(episode name, ending action, hero involved) (上回书说了)”

“(I’m) Again, telling of the hero Second Brother Wu (再说好汉武二郎)”

“(I’m) Again, performing the hero Second Brother Wu (再表表好汉武二郎)”

“Picking up the tale from the last time and telling on (书接上回往下说)”

“In last time’s story, I performed…(episode name or ending action) (上回书我表得是)”

“Linking up with the last time and telling the next chapter (接连着上回说下章)”

that formulas helped audiences to follow along and aided in the singers’ rapid composition in performance.

235 The exceptions are the opening and closing *huimu* of the tale. *East Mountain Temple*, the opening *huimu* (translated in Chapter 1), begins by linking *The Tale of Wu Song* to the larger Water Margin story cycle. *Double Dragon Mountain*, on the other hand, begins with the following announcement that it is the final *huimu* in *The Tale of Wu Song*:

The Tale of Wu Song isn’t really long,
Telling this segment we’ve arrived at the end.
The tale at the end is even more lively,
What we’re performing is the great battle between Wu Song and the Flowery Monk.
“Continuing, (I’ll) again tell of Second Brother Wu (接着再说武二郎)”
“The last time what the story told was…(main action) (上回书说得是)”
“The last time the story told up to…(ending action) (上回书说到)”
“Once again returning to…(ending action or location) (再回到)”
“Quickly picking up from last time and telling the next chapter (紧接上回说下章)”

Likewise, endings of big duan are similarly formulaic. Examples of ending formulas from big duan in the Tale of Wu Song include:

“Come next time and (I’ll) again pick up (the story) (下一回来再接上)”
“In the next time (I) tell the tale, (I’ll) again pick up (the story) (下一回书里再接上)”
“This time Wu Song…(main action or episode name). The next time, Wu Song… (upcoming main action or episode name) (这一回武松..., 到下回武松...)”
“If you listen on, you’ll know… (往下听，你就知道...)”
“The next time...(action or episode name) (下回)”
“In the next segment, (I’ll) again pick up (the story) (下一段里再接上)”
“(After we) rest a bit and catch (our) breath, (we’ll) again pick up (the story) (歇歇喘喘再接上)”
“Again pick up when...(action or location name) (...再接上)”
“We’ll again tell (the rest) of the story in the next time (下回书里咱再说)”
“If you want to see Wu Song… (action), (I’ll) pick up next time (要看武松…，下一回再接上)”

As in most oral traditions, formulas are not limited to openings and closings in fast tales.236 The inventory of basic building blocks that writers and performers use to create fast tales includes repetitive words, phrases, characters, scenes, and themes (Foley, 2002).237 Fast tales are full of repetitions of all types including instances in which narrative description repeats in slightly altered word form in order to keep audiences following changing scenes or rapid action. For example, in the opening segment of

236 Although not the focus of this study, Shandong fast tales are packed with different types of formulaic language. For example, certain ideas are always expressed only in special ways regardless of the story. When characters see something that evokes an emotion, performers utilize the formula, “As soon as CHARACTER NAME heard/saw this, he/she was as happy/angry as can be.” To express that a character quickly reacts to the events unfolding in a story, performers use, “When CHARACTER NAME heard/saw this, he/she didn’t delay.” An example of a formula that uses language no longer used in everyday speech can be found in the structure “ADJECTIVE + de huang (得慌)”. This formula is used as an intensifier meaning ‘extremely’. It is no longer used in colloquial speech in either Mandarin or the Shandong dialect. Typically, the adverb “very, hen (很)” is used in place of the de huang structure. An example of formula that has shifted over time is the phrase “swords, bows, and spears, dao gong qiang (刀弓枪)”. Traditionally, it was used when performers were describing groups of people who had armed themselves regardless of the type of weapon. Most contemporary performers have dropped bows from the formula changing it to “swords and spears”. In contemporary Mandarin, the word qiang now refers to ‘guns’ rather than spears. When I asked about this change, one young performer laughed as he said, “No one uses bows any more.” Older performers say that bows must be retained in order for the story to be realistic. Changes have also occurred over time as performers have made adjustments to make stories conform to actual real life conditions. For example, when describing the location of Sun View Ridge, the site of Wu Song’s encounter with the tiger, older performers told that it was situated to the east of Zhangqiu Town, “To the east there’s a Sun View Ridge, dong bian you yi ge Jing yang gang (东边有一个景阳岗)” while younger performers have changed the location to the west of Zhangqiu Town because that places the encounter on the darker, scarier side of the mountain.

237 Writers are not always performers and performers are not always writers. Separate award categories exist in most quyi competitions for both.
"Wu Song Fights the Tiger", the following lines are repeated in this rephrased manner:

Doing a number on the Li family five tyrants.
Back home he snuffed out the Li’s five tigers, those tyrants…

Wu Song called three times in a row without reply,
He called three times in a row without anyone asking why.

And again during the rapid action of the fight scene, the actions of the two participants, Wu Song and the tiger, are repeated continuously. The structure of the repetition often follows the pattern of stating the action in the final line of a couplet before repeating (in a slightly rephrased form) the same action in the first line of the next couplet. When the tiger first charges Wu Song, he dodges to one side with the tiger landing next to him. Both the action of dodging and landing are repeated in back to back lines. The description unfolds as follows:

That Wu Song shouted, “How fierce!”
As he quickly dodged to one side.
Wu Song dodged to the side,
As the tiger landed in the middle of the ground.
That tiger pounced without landing on Second Brother Wu,
And could only think to its self…
This form of rephrased repetition also frequently occurs after character thoughts, feelings, or minor action breaks the flow of action. The final line of narrated action is then repeated in order to pick the main action of the story back up. An example occurs in the following section of *Wu Song Fights the Tiger*.

**That tiger three times was unable to catch Second Brother Wu,**

Then the tiger got scared.

“Trouble. Today, I’ve got a problem!”

Wu Song’s mouth said he wasn’t scared,

But in his heart he was a little worried:

He raised up his staff about to strike,

He just forgot he was tall and his arms were long;

He raised the staff and swung to strike,

CRACK! The staff hit a tree branch;

CRACK! It snapped in two,

The piece left in his hand only a foot long.

Angered, Wu Song stomped his foot:

I told you not to get scared and you had to get scared!

What are you afraid of?

**That tiger three times in a row was unable to catch Second Brother Wu,**

It just heard the sound CRACK! ring in its ears:

In addition to formulaic phrases and repetition, larger formulaic units are critical resources for the Shandong fast tale performer. John Miles Foley (2002: 111) has described such units as “words”, or “ready-made bytes of traditional language” that are “systematically similar to other instances, but adjusted to harmonize with its immediate surroundings.” Foley’s examples of larger “words” include the arming of a hero, assembly, caparisoning a horse, and traveling to a destination. The most frequently occurring larger “word” found throughout *The
Tale of Wu Song is a set description of the hero Wu Song. In every instance in which any character first sees Wu Song, the following description ensues.

He looked at Wu Song standing there at seven feet two,
Shoulders when spread exuding power,
His head bigger than a rice scoop,
Those eyes when opened wide like cowbells,
His arms as thick as the rafters above,
When he made a fist his leathery hands like the head of a hammer,
The palm of his hand as big as a winnow,
His fingers, oh, as long as wooden clubs.
As long as wooden clubs!

The large amount of repetition and frequent occurrence of formulas and larger “words” in Shandong fast tales should not foster the impression that fast tales are mechanical and boring however. Much of the repetition only becomes repetition when performances are flattened into the textual format (Bender, 2003a). That is, many lines that appear to be mere repetition in a textual format are actually quite different when they come to life in full blown performance. For example, when Wu Song enters the inn in Wu Song Fights the Tiger, he calls out four times for the innkeeper to bring him some wine. In textual format, all for lines are identical. “Innkeeper, bring some wine, jiujia na jiu lai (酒家， 拿酒来)”.

In performance, on the other hand, all four are delivered with different intonation, volume, rate of speech, facial expressions and movements that indicate four distinct mood shifts through which the hero Wu Song undergoes. At first, Wu Song politely says, “Innkeeper, bring some wine.” He is tired from his long journey and is in a good mood knowing that in a matter of moments he will be
able to quench his thirst with fine wine. When there is no response, Wu Song repeats the phrase, “Innkeeper, bring some wine?” This time, Wu Song does so in a questioning tone and in at a slightly higher volume. He has a questioning look on his face as he does not understand why no one has responded to his initial request. When there is no response to his second request, Wu Song begins to become perturbed. With an annoyed look on his face, Wu Song then repeats the line again, “Innkeeper, bring some wine!” The third time, Wu Song shouts his request loud enough to be heard anywhere in the inn. The narrator then interjects to explain that the innkeeper is busy in the rear and the server boy has gone out back to the outhouse. This interjection serves to build the suspense as Wu Song’s mood shifts from annoyance to out right anger. When there is no response to his third request, Wu Song pounds his fist on the table as he bellows at the top of his lungs, “INNKEEPER! BRIIIIIIIIIIIIIIING SOME WINE!” As Wu Song bellows, the inn’s rafters shake and the innkeeper thinks a thunderstorm has moved into the area. When delivering this line, fast tale performers borrow a Beijing opera technique in drawing the word “bring” out in an almost song-like bellow. Thus, although these four instances of the line “Innkeeper, bring some wine” are textually identical, they are rendered distinct in performance through various expressive means. While teaching his students this section of the story, Wu Yanguo spent several classes on just these four sentences, working with them to develop distinctions and to evoke the appropriate mood for each. He taught his
students that if the lines were the same in performance, they were not successful as fast tale performers. A similar example occurs later in the same story when Wu Song again twice asks for more wine and the innkeeper twice asks if Wu Song can still drink more. During this exchange, Wu Song’s speech and behavior increasingly show the effects of the alcohol and the innkeeper becomes increasingly amazed at the amount Wu Song can consume so that intonation, volume, rate and quality of speech (slurred vs. normal speech), facial expressions, and movements distinguish the lines in performance.

**Tale Content**

In terms of thematic content, contemporary Shandong fast tales can be about anything. Stories are performed about the people, places and events that go on in the world of the performers. Story composers draw on every aspect of daily life in Shandong as well as a shared cultural tradition. They select stock characters and recurrent everyday happenings that every member of the culture can readily identify with and relate to such as getting a shot, visiting relatives, or shaving as seen in the example stories in Chapters 2 and 3. Nonetheless, fast tales are generally situated in two broad categories of tales: “traditional, chuantong (传统)” and “modern, xiandai (现代)” depending on when the tales were composed. Roughly speaking, traditional tales were composed prior to the Japanese invasion in the 1930’s while modern tales were composed since the founding of the
People’s Republic in 1949. Thus, they tend to recount events that have happened in modern China but occasionally deal with events that occurred prior to 1949.

Some story lines, such as those in the Tale of Wu Song and Lu Da Disposes of the Tyrant have been drawn from the larger cultural and literary traditions. These fast tales are culturally shared stories the authorship of which is generally assumed to be collective by Chinese (Finnegan, 1977). Others have been adapted from folk songs and folk tales such as Wu Yanguo’s tale The Legend of Split Rock Mouth, pi shi kou de chuanshuo (劈石口的传说), which was adapted to the fast tale format from a written version of a local Qingdao folk tale about the origins of the place name Split Rock Mouth. As was mentioned in Chapter 2, many themes of traditional story hats revolve around cultural scripts, while traditional small duan are often characterized by humorous twists on cultural themes such as social and family hierarchy, filial piety, and carefully managing interpersonal relationships during daily life in pre-modern China.

Traditional big duan are typically episodic in nature and deal with the exploits of cultural heroes such as Wu Song and Lu Da. Themes include social injustice, battles between good and evil, and heroes battling corrupt officials. These tales always involve a hero, described as a “real man, hao han (好汉)”, who is starkly contrasted with one or more evil protagonist, generally corrupt
government officials or members of the rich gentry class. Hao han, who generally have been forced to the fringe of society by some gross injustice, always encounter one or more weaker members of society who are being bullied or oppressed by an evil antagonist. What makes them hao han, in addition to their considerable fighting skills (either in martial arts or with various traditional weapons) and ability to consume prodigious amounts of food and wine, is that they always fight to defend the downtrodden from the abuse of societal bullies. When hao han encounter an unjust situation, they are moved by their strong will and sense of justice to fight for the weak and topple evil. This Robinhood-esque characteristic is described in the tales themselves as “fighting inequality along the road, lu da bu ping (路打不平)” and hao han are said to “like fighting to right inequality, ai da bao bu ping (爱打抱不平)”.

Modern fast tales revolve around a broader range of themes including daily life, politics, society, military life, local customs, human relationships, and encounters with foreigners. The fast tales produced in the 1950’s were called “new, xin (新)” fast tales as they dealt with aspects of life in modern socialist

238 Hao han, literally means ‘good man’, and has been translated as ‘good guy’, ‘bloke’, ‘mate’, ‘hero’, and ‘tough guy’ (Jenner, 1992: 203-208). In my view, none of these and all of these are adequate translations of the concept of hao han. As W. J. F. Jenner notes, the hao han of tradition had considerable fighting skills and was never averse to a good rumble. Jenner also points out that the hao han of literary tradition lived by a code of “brotherhood, yi qi (义气)” and fought for honor. They were independent, unattached men who had little time for books or scholars and less time for sex and women. C. T. Hsia has argued that the hao han is distinguished by generosity, “their readiness to befriend and protect all potential members of the heroic community.” He also suggests the importance of camaraderie among hao han (Hsia, 1968: 75-114).
China rather than traditional heroic themes. The socialist heroes of this type of tale come from one of the three valued classes of society—workers, peasants, or soldiers—and do not necessarily fight for injustice (although they sometimes do against rightists, corrupt officials and imperialist invaders) but rather are models of society who give up their seats on the bus to the elderly, go out of their way to help others when in need, and sacrifice themselves for the good of the nation. Those modern stories written prior to the Reform and Opening Up tend to reflect a life rooted in agricultural production while those written since the 1990’s often reflect aspects of urban life.

Many modern duan were written by cultural workers tasked with specific political goals in mind as well and thus have political themes such as attacking the falungong movement, promoting reunification with Taiwan, and glorifying the Olympics. This official influence on fast tale writing has also generated a large number of tales that are designed to promote didactic meanings. This type of tale typically ends with a lesson or moral for the listener to ponder. Examples include A Dialogue Between Two Pigs, zhu duihua (猪对话) and There Was a Young Guy Like This, you zheme yi wei qingnian (有这么一位青年). In the former, two pigs complain that the food they are being served is not as high in quality as in previous times. The two ultimately vow to eat as much and as well as possible so that they can be canned and exported to a foreign country. The tale is a metaphor for the waste and extravagance associated with banquets. In the latter tale, a
young man sees a pretty girl while walking down the street. He goes out of his way to get the girl to become his girlfriend, telling her that he would do anything for her including devoting his life to her and throwing himself in front of a car to save her. As the young man is trying to seduce the girl, she remains silent. Finally, when the young man thinks that he has won her over, she opens her mouth and mumbles unintelligibly as if she were mute. When the young man discovers she is a mute, he immediately changes his tune hurriedly leaving the scene. As he walks away, the girl sighs in relief and chuckles, “Hm, when dealing with this kind of person, you have to use measures like these.” The narrator then ends the tale by explicitly pointing out the moral of the tale, “I’ve finished telling this little story. For the young women present, it’s worth studying. If you run into this kind of situation, don’t avoid trying this trick.”

One other distinction made in terms of story content is that between “dirty mouth, hunkou, (荤口)” or “yellow, huang (黄)” tales and “clean mouth, jingkou (净口)” tales. Hunkou duanzi are reported to have been widespread prior to the 1940’s but were told less frequently as women began attending performances. In terms of Shandong fast tales, dirty mouth stories were banned during the 1950’s and Gao Yuanjun is credited with having “cleaned up” many traditional duanzi so that they could be performed for wider audiences (Wang, 1985 and

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239 Perry Link (1986) has written about dirty mouth in xiangsheng preferring the term ‘non-vegetarian’ over dirty. Bordahl (1996: 35) has noted their presence in Yangzhou storytelling traditions and Bender (1989; 1995) has found them in the Suzhou tanci tradition.
1994; and Xue, 1987). However, dirty mouth tales have not been eliminated. Most performers have at least one tale in their repertoire that contains foul language and/or sexual connotations that they can break out when the occasion calls for it (banquets among men, performances for soldiers, etc.). Experienced, fast tale performers can also adapt clean mouth tales to make them sound more dirty when necessary using a technique called “suspended mouth, guakou (挂口)”. Guakou is a type of improvisation that can be employed depending on audience composition. I observed one performance in the banquet setting that included seven male and one female audience members. When the female participant left the room during the course of the performance, the performer broke frame by asking the audience, “Is she gone?” When he proceeded, he shifted to his hunkou version of the same duan. The characters and overall plot line remained the same but a distinct change in language and humor were evident. The characters in the story began using foul language and the hero suddenly became preoccupied with relieving his pent up sexual frustration.240

Tale Uses

When preparing for performances, Shandong fast tale performers carefully select story content that is appropriate for the audience and occasion at hand. In general, fast tales serve the function of generating the desired mirthful atmospheres associated with social gatherings and holiday festivities but different

240Wang (1994: 208) has written about the use of this technique in xiangsheng.
themes are suitable for certain audiences and work best with particular types of audiences. For instance, a tale such as *There Was a Young Guy Like* is usually performed for audiences comprised mostly of women. When audiences are made up of soldiers or police officers, performers rely on tales such as *The Beat Patrolman* or *Capturing Prisoners*. *Knucklehead Visits the Relatives* and *Knucklehead Wants a Baby* contain themes that revolve around rural life so they are frequently performed at farmers’ markets, rural bazaars and for stage performances in rural areas while the story that *The Big Truth* is used for New Year’s or other holiday celebration performances. The idea is to tailor story content to suit both the occasion of the event and the composition of the audience. One Shandong fast tale that is suitable for nearly every type of occasion and audience found in Shandong is the standard *Wu Song Fights the Tiger*.

*Wu Song Fights the Tiger* is the most widely recognized and performed Shandong fast tale. The tale is popular with all audiences in Shandong because the antagonist, Wu Song, embodies the ideal Shandong real man personality type. It was made the standard measuring stick for Shandong fast tale performers by Gao Yuanjun. Audiences all over China can also identify with the story because it follows a general storyline found in the larger cultural and literary traditions. Variations of the tale are regularly performed by local dramatic troupes, storytellers and *quyi* performers around China while the most famous versions of the story appear in chapter twenty-three of the novel *The Water Margin* and in the
introductory section of the novel *Plum in the Golden Vase*. Set in Song Dynasty times (960-1279), *Wu Song Fights the Tiger* recounts the legendary tale of Wu Song encountering a man-eating tiger on the slopes of Sun View Ridge. Wu Song is on a long journey home to visit his elder brother, Wu Dalang, when he comes across a small inn at the base the ridge. He enters the inn to quench his thirst with fine spirits and fill his stomach with fresh beef. In a humorous exchange between two starkly contrasted characters (the physically imposing and strong-willed Wu Song and a diminutive, easily frightened innkeeper), Wu Song repeatedly demands more wine despite the innkeeper’s warnings of the wine’s potency. After drinking his fill (eighteen bowls in the fast tale version), Wu Song starts to leave on his way to cross the mountain when a second exchange with the innkeeper ensues. The innkeeper repeatedly warns that there is a ferocious, man-eating tiger on the loose on the mountain and urges Wu Song to spend the night in the inn. Wu Song thinks he is being swindled, so he brashly claims that he is not afraid of any tiger before heading up the mountain where he ultimately encounters, battles, and kills the king of beasts. Although it only involves three characters (Wu Song, the innkeeper, and the personified tiger), the Shandong fast tale version of this tale embodies the ideal traditional story packed with action, suspense, drinking, and fighting. A strong-willed, filial hero (Wu Song is on his way to visit his elder brother, who has replaced their deceased father as the head of the family) exhibits tremendous bravery and courage in the face of the evil, violent antagonist (the
tiger). In the end, the hero overcomes the evil and saves the helpless common folk from disaster. Following are my English translation of the story as taught to me by Master Wu and the Chinese textualization on which the translation is based.

**The Shandong fast tale Wu Song Fights the Tiger**

*As taught by Wu Yanguo. Transcribed and translated by Eric Shepherd*

Idle talk and aimless chatter, I’ll tell you no more,  
I’m here to tell the story of the hero Second Brother Wu.  
That Wu Song went off to Shao Lin Temple to learn martial arts,  
For eight years and more he studied gongfu.  
When he got back home he caused a ruckus at Dong Yue Temple,  
Doing a number on the Li family five tyrants.  
Back home he snuffed out the Li’s five tigers, those tyrants,  
But the hero was too lazy to go to court so he fled to the countryside.  
He stayed at the Chai family manor for one full year,  
Where he came to know Shandong’s hero named Song Jiang.  
He declared Song Jiang his blood uncle,  
Filling the place of his father and mother.  
One day, Wu Song was missing home,  
He could only think of going home to see his family.  
He said goodbye to the two heroes Song Jiang and Chai Jin,  
And put his bundle on his shoulders.  
In his hand he carried a staff,  
And along the big road he hurried off.  
Day by day he walked only looking forward to the next,  
When one day he came to the border of Yanggu County.  
Yanggu County oversaw Zhangqiu Town,  
To the West of Zhangqiu Town there was Sun View Ridge.  
Wu Song arrived at Zhangqiu Town,  
Looking to the north of the road he sized things up.  
He looked to the north of the road and carefully scanned,  
Shwooh, the wind blew and the scent of liquor wafted all around.  
On that side was written, “Smell the liquor and you’re one third drunk.”  
On that side was written, “Open a keg and the aroma carries for ten miles.”  
In the middle hung a big sign,
On it was written, “Three bowls and you can’t cross the ridge.”
Huh? Wu Song thought, “What does ‘Three bowls and you can’t cross the ridge’ mean?”
“Oh!” This little wine seller is making up lies,
I, Wu Song, was born a drinker,
I’ll go inside and give their good wine a try.
The hero Wu Song walked inside,
He looked inside and sized things up.
A lone table placed in the center,
Two chairs to each side.
The hero Wu Song looked to both sides and carefully scanned,
Hey! A whole row of pure wine kegs!
A whole row of pure wine kegs!
Wu Song placed his bundle on the tabletop,
Then leaned his staff against the wall.
“Innkeeper, bring some wine.” “Innkeeper, bring some wine.” “Innkeeper, bring some wine!”
Wu Song called three times in a row without reply,
He called three times in a row without anyone asking why.
At that time of day, business was slow,
The innkeeper was busy in the rear.
There was also a young server that wasn’t around,
Oooh, his stomach hurt and he had the runs, he was off in the John.
Wu Song called three times in a row without anyone asking why:
He pounded the table and began to cry,
“INNKEEPER! BRIIIIIIIING SOME WINE!”
Whoa! Bellowing like this is no problem at all,
Oh dear mother, his voice rocked the whole building leaving it a swayin’!
Creak, creak, dirt fell down from above,
The place shook so hard those kegs swayed to and fro’, the creaking sound filled his ears.
The innkeeper came out and carefully scanned:
“What was that?….frightening, what’s the ruckus, is it raining?
No, it’s not raining.
Was it thunder?
No, that wasn’t thunder. What the hel…”
“Oh!” My dear mother, how did this brut get so big:
He looked at Wu Song standing there at seven feet two,
Shoulders when spread exuding power,
His head bigger than a rice scoop,
Those eyes when opened wide like cowbells,
His arms as thick as the rafters above,
When he made a fist his leathery hands like the head of a hammer,
The palm of his hand as big as a winnow,
His fingers, oh, as long as wooden clubs.
As long as wooden clubs!

“Hero, my sire, what will you drink? What will you eat?
Give me your order and I’ll fulfill it at once.”
“What wines do you have? What foods do you have? List them in detail, one by one.”

“Yes, Hero, my sire, you want to drink wine!
If you want to drink wine, there’s Scholar Red and Grape Dew,
Then there’s one called Sorghum Yellow,
Then there’s one called Hit the Floor When You Walk Out the Door,
Then there’s one called Aroma that Penetrates the Bottle;
If you want to eat food, there’s beef,
The taste of our beef is really top notch;
If you want to eat something dry, there’s baked buns,
If you want to eat something wet, there’s noodles and soup….”

Wu Song said: “Cut me five pounds of beef! Bring a lot of your best wine.”
“Yes, sir!”
The innkeeper cut five pounds of the best beef,
And hurriedly put two bowls of good wine on the table.
That Wu Song raised this bowl and downed it all,
Raised that bowl and drank the last drop:
“Ahhh! Good wine! Innkeeper, bring some wine!”
“Hero, my sire, why don’t you eat. You can’t drink any more of this wine!”
“Huh? Why can’t I drink any more?”

“There’s a sign at the door on which is clearly written:
‘Three bowls and you can’t cross the ridge’.”
What does ‘Three bowls and you can’t cross the ridge’ mean?”

“Hero, my sire, it’s that to our west there’s a Sun View Ridge.
Whoa! What a big mountain forest it is!
No matter how much you can drink,
you can’t finish three bowls of our wine before you’ll pass out drunk at the foot of Sun View Ridge.
This is what ‘Three bowls and you can’t cross the ridge’ means!”
“Hmp! As for alcohol tolerance, there’s big and there’s small.
I am able to drink a lot.
You just bring more of that good wine!”
“Yes, it was only because you can drink a lot that I served you two bowls.
The average person only drinks bowl or a half bowl.
You drank two bowls all at once.
That’s no a small amount!
Hero, my sire, have something to eat.
No matter what, you cannot drink any more of this wine!”
“What?! I don’t owe you money,
I’m not buying on credit,
What is the reason you won’t serve me good wine?
If you bring me good wine, we’ll call it even,
If you don’t bring me good wine…”
“Hero, my sire, what’ll happen if I don’t bring wine?”
“If you don’t bring wine, 
I’ll beat you with my fist two times!”
The innkeeper thought to himself: How many times?
Two blows with that fist?
Don’t tell me you’ll hit me two times with that fist.
Wham! One blow and I’ll visit my great grandmother.
The innkeeper brought out two more bowls of wine,
That Wu Song, in two breaths, again drank every drop:
“Innkeeper, bring some wine!”
“You still can drink?!”
The innkeeper again served two bowls of wine,
That Wu Song, in two breaths, again drank every drop!
“Bring some wine!”
“What! You still can drink? Can you stand that much?.....”
That Wu Song, one gulp after another, drank eighteen bowls,
And without realizing it, ate every bite of the five pounds of beef!
That wasn’t all.
Taking a drink of wine, eating a bite of food;
Eating a bite of food, taking a drink of wine,
He drank eighteen bowls of good wine,
And ate every bite of five pounds of beef.
He also ate two big buns,
Drank two bowls of soup,
Wiped his mouth and spoke:
“Innkeeper.”
“My sire!”
“How many bowls and you can’t cross the ridge?”
“Th…th…three bowls and you can’t c…c…cross the ridge.”
“How many did I drink?”
“You drank, two bowls in the front,
Two in the back,
Two on the left,
Two on the right,
Another two bowls and another two bowls;
Pile them all up and all together you drank eighteen bowls of wine!”
“My upper body isn’t swaying!”
“You can really drink!”
“My lower body isn’t rocking!”
“You could drink an ocean!”
“What about that ‘Three bowls and you can’t cross the ridge’ sign?”
“Hero, my sire, I brought that in a while ago.
I put it in the back and won’t dare hang it again.”
“Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! I can drink. Hang the sign as usual. Add up the bill!”
“Hero, my sire, it’s all added it up already.
It’s not a lot and not too little, three thousand.”
Wu Song opened his bundle,
Paid for the wine,
Tied up his bundle,
Shouldered it,
Picked up his staff,
And said, “Innkeeper!”
“Hero, my sire?”
“Until we meet again.”
Wu Song took a large step, about to leave,
When the innkeeper grabbed his clothes from behind:
“Hero, my sire!”
“Huh?”
“Where are you going?”
“Today, I’m going to cross Sun View Ridge!”
“Aaah! Hero, my sire, Sun View Ridge can’t be crossed!”
Hearing this Wu Song was confused as heck:
“Why can’t Sun View Ridge be crossed?”
“Hero, my sire, listen as I tell you:
A ferocious tiger has appeared on Sun View Ridge,
This tiger’s the king of beasts.
He eats travelers as they pass by,
And throws their left over bones along the roadside.
Since this tiger appeared,
The common folk of this area have met disaster:
He ate until even in three’s and five’s we don’t dare go out,
He ate until in eight’s or ten’s we carry swords and spears,
He ate until those outside the fort all ran inside,
He ate until those living in small villages raced for big ones,  
The Yanggu County magistrate dispatched people to kill the tiger!  
But many people were all killed by the tiger.  
Now, in all four directions, notices have been posted,  
Morning, noon, and afternoon,  
During these three time slots it’s permitted to cross the ridge.  
Morning, noon, and afternoon,  
Within these three time slots you must cross the ridge,  
Ten people make a team,  
All must carry swords and spears.  
If you cross the ridge all alone,  
When you get there, you are certain to be eaten by the tiger!  
Now, it’s already after three in the afternoon,  
If you ask me, you should just stay in my inn.”  
“Oh? If I stay your inn, then I won’t be afraid of the tiger?”  
“Hero, my sire, listen as I tell you:  
In our town, there are more than twenty young lads,  
By day they sleep until the sun goes down;  
As soon as it’s dark, they patrol around the outskirts of town,  
Every one of them carrying swords and spears;  
If they hear a sound outside,  
The deafening sound of gongs and drums fills the air.  
The tiger doesn’t dare come into our town,  
He doesn’t dare kill anyone here.  
“Oh! You see that I can really drink,  
You see my appetite is huge.  
So you tell me to stay in your inn,  
Oh! You want to earn more of my good silver.”  
“Hmph! What kind of talk is that?  
I tell you with kind words and nice speech,  
You shouldn’t use mean words and cold speech to hurt me!  
If you want to leave, just leave,  
I don’t care if you feed tigers or if you feed the wolves.”  
“Innkeeper, I have ability.  
I have a staff.  
If I run into a ferocious tiger, I’ll take him on!  
If I am able to dispose of the tiger,  
It would help relieve the local folk of their disaster!”  
“That’s even better!”  
“Until we meet again!”  
“You’re really going?”
“What kind of talk is that?!”
That Wu Song with one burst of energy walked five miles,
He felt his whole body was hot as can be:
“Oooh! So hot! Open up my shirt and then go on….”
Wu Song turned to look,
There was a large tree along side of the road.
A big chunk of the bark was scraped away,
Every character and every column was written well.
Wu Song approached and read,
Huh! Exactly as the innkeeper said:
Ha, ha, ha….this is the innkeeper and restaurant owners up to no good,
They scare the good travelers and businessmen who pass on this road.
Those with no guts see this and they’re afraid,
So they go back and stay in his inn.
What tiger! What wolves!
Who’s afraid there are tigers and wolves on the mountain ridge!
That Wu Song walked three more miles,
He went ahead where he arrived at Sun View Ridge:
Whoa! What a big mountain forest!
Here he saw there was a temple to mountain spirits,
At the gate to the temple there was posted a large notice;
A notice, a Yanggu County notice!
Wu Song approached and read:
Ah! There’s really a ferocious tiger on the mountain pass:
Yanggu County notices couldn’t be fake.
If I don’t dispose of this tiger,
The tiger will always kill people!
I’ll grit my steel-like teeth and continue climbing,
I’ll see how tough that tiger is!
That Wu Song walked another half mile,
Where he saw a big, long, flat rock along the roadside:
“It’s still early, rest a bit, then go on!”
That Wu Song put his bundle on the flat rock,
Then leaned his staff against a tree:
“Rest a bit.”
That Wu Song laid down and just began to rest,
Holy cow,
From the backside of the mountain ROAR leapt out a ferocious tiger, the king of beasts.
That tiger “roaring” like this is no problem,
It just rocked the tree branches and leaves ‘til they swayed like crazy!
It startled Wu Song who followed the sound and carefully scanned:
“What was that?”
Whoa! Big sucker, that ferocious tiger was really something:
That tiger was a full six and a half feet tall,
It was eight feet long and solid as a rock.
It was able to leap eight feet forwards scaring the wits out of people,
And when it crouched back, it sent people scrambling.
The stripes on its body were one against another,
One stripe black and one stripe yellow.
Blood pan mouth as big as a winnow,
Two eyes when opened like tea vats.
On its forehead there was one character…
Three horizontal strokes, one vertical, it’s read ‘king’!
As soon as Wu Song saw that there was really a tiger,
The cold sweat from his entire body soaked his clothes.
Eighteen bowls of good wine “Pssst!” flowed out of his pores.
There wasn’t a bit left.
As soon as Wu Song saw that the tiger had come,
He told himself: Don’t be frightened!
Getting scared is useless….
Yeah! I’ll see how tough this tiger is after all!
As soon as that tiger saw Second Brother Wu,
Ha! In his mind was happy as could be:
Oh! This big guy is not little at all!
Two meals and I couldn’t finish eating him….
Two meals and I couldn’t eat all of him!
If it couldn’t eat all of him in two meals, could the man stand it?
That tiger suddenly leapt forward,
Racing straight for Second Brother Wu.
That Wu Song shouted, “How fierce!”
As he quickly dodged to one side.
Wu Song dodged to the side,
As the tiger landed in the middle of the ground.
That tiger pounced without landing on Second Brother Wu,
And could only think to its self:
Huh? The human? Where did the human go?
I usually don’t have to expend this much energy when I eat people,
Then what is the reason I have to today?
Really!
Usually when people see a tiger they’re scared limp,
They just cover their faces and yell for ma,
As the tiger eats with even more vigor,
Lifting up its neck MUNCH, MUNCH savoring the taste as it swallows.
It thought it was just an average person that had come along today!
How could it know the hero Second Brother Wu had come along?
That Wu Song had just dodged to the side,
When he saw the tiger’s waist WHOOSH! swiftly raise up…
SWOOSH! it attacked again,
SWOOP! Wu Song again dodged to the side.
That tiger THUMP! missed striking Second Brother Wu,
ROAR! It twisted its tail up like a fighting spear;
It swept it upwards from the edge of the ground,
And again raced straight for the hero Second Brother Wu.
That Wu Song shouted, “How fierce!”
BOING! He leapt eight feet if he leapt an inch.
That tiger three times was unable to catch Second Brother Wu,
Then the tiger got scared.
“Trouble. Today, I’ve got a problem!”
Wu Song’s mouth said he wasn’t scared,
But in his heart he was a little worried:
He raised up his staff about to strike,
He just forgot he was tall and his arms were long;
He raised the staff and swung to strike,
CRACK! The staff hit a tree branch;
CRACK! It snapped in two,
The piece left in his hand only a foot long.
Angered, Wu Song stomped his foot:
I told you not to get scared and you had to get scared!
What are you afraid of?
That tiger three times in a row was unable to catch Second Brother Wu,
It just heard the sound CRACK! ring in its ears:
He was going to beat me?
Oh! If I don’t eat him, he wants to beat me.
Well, I’m not going to stand for it!
That tiger fiercely leapt forward,
Made a big turn and again raced straight for the hero Second Brother Wu.
Wu Song saw that this time it was coming even more ferociously,
And if he dodged again, this time he would probably get maimed;
In the midst of the urgent situation, he had a sudden stroke of genius and backed up,
DENG! DENG! DENG! DENG! He backed up ten steps if a step at all;
Wu Song backed up ten steps,
And the tiger landed in the middle of the ground.
Not even a foot away from Wu Song,
When Wu Song saw this, he was happy as could be:
That Wu Song raced eight steps as if he were chasing a toad and quickly climbed on top,
With two hands, he seized the tiger’s throat;
With both shoulders, he used a thousand pounds of force:
Hmmph! He pressed the tiger down on the middle of the ground.
The tiger had never been at such a disadvantage,
It just felt a tremendous pressure on its neck:
“Hm!” Pressing down like that, the tiger’s front paws went into the ground, and it began to speak:
“I’m not going to do this!”
“Not doing it is not an option!”
“I’ve got to get up!”
“Why don’t you enjoy yourself for a while!”
“I’m not comfortable!”
“If you’re comfortable, then I’m a gonner!”
The tiger raised up three times.
Wu Song pressed down three times.
They didn’t know how much force they used,
The tiger’s front paws went into the ground half a foot if at all.
Wu Song thought: If he keeps pushing up like this and I keep pressing down like this, after a while, if I can’t overpower him, I’ll still feed the tiger!
When he thought to there,
Wu Song used his left shoulder and with all his might held it tight,
Raised his right arm with all his power;
Aimed for the tiger’s back bone,
And landed a vicious leathery hammer head:
“AAAYAA!”
“ROOOAAAAR!”
“AAAYAA!”
“ROOOAAAAR!”
“AAAAYAA!”
“ROOOAAAAR!”
After that Wu Song struck three times, he held the tiger steady,
Raised his foot and BAM! BAM! BAM! just kicked that tiger right in the face;
After he pounded and kicked for a while,
Blood oozed from the tiger’s nostrils.
Wu Song killed the tiger,
Leaving his good name to be spread across the world.
Wu Song killed the tiger,
And really wore me out.

景阳冈武松打虎

闲言碎语不多讲，
表一回好汉武二郎。
那武松学拳到过少林寺，
功夫练到八年上。
回家去大闹东岳庙，
李家的五个恶霸被他伤。
在家打死李家五虎那恶霸，
这位好汉懒打官司奔了外乡。
在那柴家庄住了一年整，
结识了山东的好汉叫宋江。
他跟宋江拜了仁兄弟儿，
亚塞那一爹一个娘。
这一天好汉武松把家里想，
一心想回家去探望。
辞别了宋江柴进二位好汉，
把包袱背到了肩膀上。
手里头拿着一条哨棒，
顺着个大道走慌张。
无非是走了今日盼明日，
这一天来到了阳谷县这个地界上。
阳谷县代管张丘镇，
张丘镇西边儿有一个景阳冈。
武松来到了张丘镇，
照着路北一打量。
照着路北留神看，
喔，风刮酒幌这个乱晃荡；
这一边写了："闻酒三分醉"，
那边儿写："开坛十里香"。
当中间儿立着个大牌子，
上写着："三碗不过冈"！
"啊！"武松想：什么叫"三碗不过冈"？
“噢!”小小的那个酒铺说话狂。
俺武松生来爱喝酒，
我到里边把那个好酒尝。
好汉武松往里走，
照着里边儿一打量：
有张桌，当中放，
两把椅子列两旁。
好汉武松照着两边儿留神看，
一拉溜的净酒缸！
一拉溜的净酒缸！
这武松把包袱放到了桌子上，
就把哨棒立靠墙：
“酒家，拿酒来。酒家，拿酒来。酒家，拿酒来！”
这武松连喊三声没人来搭话，
这时候买卖少哇，
掌柜的就在后边儿忙。
有一个小伙计儿还不在，
肚子疼拉稀，上了茅房。
这武松连喊三声没人来搭话，
把桌子一拍开了腔：
“酒家！拿酒来！”
呦！大喊一声不要紧儿，
我的娘哎，直震得房子乱晃荡！
哗哗啦啦直掉土，
只震得那酒缸嗡！嗡！嗡！嗡啦嗡的震耳旁。
嗡啦嗡的震耳旁。
酒家出来留神看：
“啥动静？怪吓人的？下雨？没下雨。打雷？没打雷。啥动静儿怪吓人的？
“啊！”我的娘哎，这个大个咋长这么长；
他看武松身子高大一丈二，
两膀扎开有力量。
脑袋瓜子赛柳斗，
把那两眼一瞪象铃铛。
胳膊好象房上的棂，
皮拳一攥象铁夯。
巴掌一伸簸箕大，
手指头噗噗楞楞棒槌长。 
噗噗楞楞棒槌长。 
“好汉爷，吃什么酒？要什么菜？吩咐出来办快当。” 
武松说：“有什么酒？有什么菜？一一从头说端详！” 
“是！好汉爷，要喝酒哇！要喝酒有状元红、葡萄露， 
还有一种是烧黄， 
还有一种出门倒， 
还有一种透瓶香； 
要吃菜，有牛肉， 
咱的个牛肉味道强； 
要吃干的有大饼， 
要喝稀的有面汤。。。。。
武松说：“给我切五斤牛肉！多拿好酒。” 
“是啦！” 
酒家切了五斤好牛肉， 
又把两碗好酒忙摆上。 
这武松端起这碗喝了个净， 
“不错！” 
端起那碗喝了个光： 
“啊！好酒！酒家，拿酒来！” 
“好汉爷，吃饭吧。这酒不能再喝啦！” 
“噢！为什么不能再喝啦？” 
“门口有牌子写得清楚：三碗不过冈。” 
“什么叫‘三碗不过冈’?” 
“好汉爷，在我们西边儿有个景阳冈， 
嗬！好大的山林哪！ 
你再大的酒量， 
喝不了我们三碗酒， 
就要醉倒在景阳冈下。 
这就叫‘三碗不过冈!’” 
“哎，这酒量有大有小，我是能饮， 
你就多拿好酒!” 
“是啊，正因为你能饮，我才给你端了两碗， 
平常人也就喝个一碗半碗的，
你这一下子喝了两碗,可不算少哇！
好汉爷,吃饭吧,
这酒是无论如何不能再喝了啦！
“啊?!不欠你的钱,
不赊你的帐,
你不拿好酒为哪桩?
你要拿酒两拉倒,
不拿酒。。。
“好汉爷,不拿酒,怎么的?”
“不拿酒，我就揍你两巴掌!”
“几巴掌？别说揍我两巴掌，
“包儿”！一巴掌见了俺五老娘啦！”
酒家又摆两碗酒，
这武松两气儿又喝溜溜光：
“拿酒来！”
“你还喝呀？！”
酒家又摆两碗酒，
这武松两气儿又喝溜溜光！
“拿酒来！”
“啊！你还喝呀？你受得了吗？。。。
这武松一连气儿喝了十八碗，
没留神，把五斤牛肉都吃光！
这还不光，
他喝口酒，吃口菜，
吃口菜，喝口酒，
十八碗好酒都喝完了，
五斤牛肉也吃光了，
又吃了两张大饼，
喝了两碗面汤，
他把嘴这么一摸擦：
“酒家”
“好汉爷!”
“几碗不过冈?”
“三碗不过冈.”
“我喝了多少?”
“你喝了前两碗，
后两碗，
左两碗，
右两碗，
端了两碗，
又两碗，
归拢包堆，
一共喝了十八碗酒!”
“我上身不摇!”
“你真能饮哪!”
“我下身不晃!”
“你是海量!”
“那你那 三碗不过冈 牌子哪?”
“好汉爷, 这不是早拿进来了吗, 放在门后边, 再也不敢挂了.”
“哈, 哈, 哈, 哈……我是能饮, 牌子照挂, 算帐!”
“好汉爷, 早算好了, 不多不少三钱银子.”
武松解开包袱，
付了酒钱，
把包袱系好，
往肩架上一挎，
哨棒一拿：
“酒家!”
“好汉爷?!”
“再会.”
武松迈步刚要走，
酒家后边儿拽衣裳：
“好汉爷!”
“嗯?”
“哪里去?”
“今天要过景阳冈!”
“啊! 好汉爷, 景阳冈上走不得啦!”
这个武松闻听愕得慌：
“为什么景阳冈上不能走?”
“好汉爷爷听细详：
景阳冈上出了猛虎，
老虎它是兽中王，
行人路过它吃掉，
剩下的骨头扔道旁。
这里的百姓遭了殃：
只吃得三个五个不敢走，
只吃得十个八个带刀枪，
只吃得寨外就往寨里跑，
只吃得小庄无奈奔了大庄，
阳谷县县大老爷差人去打虎！
好多人都被老虎伤。
现在四乡贴告示啦，
巳，午，未三个时辰许过冈。
巳，午，未三个时辰之内把冈过，
十个人算一队，
个个都带刀和枪。
你单人要是把冈过，
到那里准被老虎伤！
现在未时已过啦，
依我说，你就住到俺店房：
“噢？住到你店里就不怕虎了吗？”
“好汉爷爷听俺讲：
俺们镇上有二十多个年轻小伙子，
白天睡到落太阳；
天一黑出来围着个镇店转，
个个都带刀和枪；
要是外边有动静，
锣鼓喧天就嚷嚷。
老虎不敢进咱的镇，
它就不敢把人伤。
“噢！你看着我的个酒量大，
你看着我的饭量强。
叫我住到你店上，
噢！想多赚我的好银两。”
“唉！你这是说的什么话？
俺好言好语对你讲，
你不该恶言冷语把俺伤！
你要走，你就走，
我管你喂虎你喂狼”
“哎，酒家！我有本领，我有哨棒，
遇见猛虎跟它干一场！

我要是能把虎除掉，
也好给这方百姓除灾殃！
“那更好啦！”
“再会！”
“你真要走哇？”
“什么话！”
这武松一鼓劲儿走了五里地，
觉摸着身上热得慌：
“啊！好热呀！敞开怀再走。。。。。
武松这边一扭脸儿，
见一棵大树在路旁。树皮刮去一大块，
字字行行写得强。
武松近前这么一念，
哎！跟酒家说的一个样：哈。。。。。这是开饭馆和开店的发的坏，吓唬过路的好客商。
胆小的一见害了怕，回去好住在他店上。
哎！什么虎！什么狼！哪怕虎狼在山冈！
这武松又走三里地，前行来到了景阳冈：嗬！好大的山林哪！
这边看有座山神庙，庙门口贴着告示一大张：
告示，阳谷县的告示！
武松近前这么一念：。。。。。
啊！真有猛虎在山冈：阳谷县的告示假不了哇。
哎！我要是不把虎除掉，老虎总要把人伤！
一咬钢牙往上上，
我倒看老虎怎样强！
这武松又走半里地，
见一块条子大石在道旁：
天气还早，歇歇再走！
这武松把包袱放在石条上，
又把哨棒立树旁；
歇会儿。
这武松躺下刚歇息，
可了不得啦，
山背后“哞儿”的声蹿出了猛虎兽中王。
这只虎“哞儿”的一声不要紧，
只震的树枝、树叶乱晃荡！
惊起武松顺着声音留神看：
什么动静？
嗬！好家伙，这只猛虎真不瓤：
这只虎高着足有六尺半，
长着八尺还硬棒。
前蹿八尺惊人胆，
后坐一丈令人忙。
身上的花纹一道挨一道，
一道黑来一道黄。
血盆口一张簸箕大，
两眼一瞪象茶缸。
脑门儿上边有一个字．．．
三横一竖就念“王！”
武松一看真有虎，
一身冷汗湿衣裳。
十八碗好酒顺着汗毛眼都出来了。
武松一见虎来到，
暗叫自己：先别慌！
怕也怕不得．．．
哎！我倒看老虎怎样强！
这只虎一见武老二，
耶！打本心眼儿里喜得慌：
耶嗨！这个大个还不小嘞！
两顿我都吃不完．．．
两顿我还吃不了哪！
它两顿吃不了，这人能受得了也！
这只虎往前猛一蹿，
直奔好汉武二郎。
武松喊了一声：“好厉害！”
急忙闪身躲一旁。
武松闪身躲过去，
老虎扑到地当央。
这只虎一扑没扑着武老二，
它心里不住得暗思量：
耶！人呢？人儿哪去啦？
我平常吃人没有费过这么大的劲儿，
那么今天为的哪一桩？
可不是嘛！
平常人一见老虎吓酥啦，
把脸儿一捂叫了娘，
老虎吃着更带劲儿拉，
掐着个脖子哞啊哞啊吃得香。
它以为今天来的还是平常人哪！
哪知道来了个好汉武二郎。
这武松刚刚躲过去，
只见老虎的腰呼地一声往上扬。。。。
“夸”地一声打过来，
“夸哒”武松又闪身躲一旁。
这只虎“夸哒”没有打着武老二，
“哞儿”！它把尾巴一拧象杆枪；
兜着个地皮往上扫，
又直奔好汉武二郎。
这武松喊了声“好厉害！”
“蹭”！蹿出了八尺还不瓤。
这只虎三下没有扑着武老二，
老虎这里着了慌啦。
老虎说：“要坏事啊，今天要麻烦呀！”
武松嘴说不害怕，
心里头可是有点慌：
他抄起哨棒他就打，
他就忘了他个子高来胳膊长；
抡丈起来往下打，
“喀嚓”！哨棒担在了树杈上；
喀嚓一声担断了，
手里还剩几把长。
气的武松一跺脚；
不叫你慌你偏慌！
你慌得什么呀。
这只虎一连三下没有扑着武老二，
只听得喀嚓一声响耳旁：
怎么要揍我呀！
噢！我吃不了他，
他想揍我呀，
那我不干呀！
这只虎往前猛一蹿，
大转身又直奔好汉武二郎。
武松看这次来的更是猛，
再闪恐怕被它伤；
急中生智往后退，
“噔噔噔”！退出十步还不瓤；
武松退出了十几步，
老虎扑到了地当央。
离武松还有尺把远，
武松一见喜得慌：
这武松八步赶蟾忙按住，
两手掐住虎脖腔；
两膀用上千斤力：
“嗯”！就把老虎摁到了地当央。
老虎没有吃过这个亏呀，
就觉得脖子上边儿压得慌；
哎！怎么往下压呀，老虎的前爪一入地，
它就说：
老虎说：我不干啊！
武松说：你不干可不行啊！
老虎说：我得起来呀！
武松说：你先讲究一会吧！
老虎说：我不受哇！
武松说：你好受，你好受我就完啦！
老虎往上起三起，
武松往下摁三摁。
也不知道他俩的劲头有多大，
老虎的前爪入地半尺还不瓤。
武松想：它老这么往上起，我老这么往下摁，
时间长了我的劲头膘不过它，我还不得喂老虎吗！
想到此，武松把左膀一使劲，
腾出了右膀有力量；
照着老虎后脊梁，
恶狠狠地皮锤夯：
“啊。。。。嘿！”
“哗儿”！
“啊。。。。嘿！”
“哗儿”！
“啊。。。。嘿！”
“哗儿。。。。。"
这武松打罢三下又按住，
抬起脚“呗儿呗儿呗儿”，直踢老虎面门上；
拳打脚踢这么一阵，
这只虎鼻子眼里冒血浆。
武松打死一只虎，
留下美名天下扬。
武松打死一只虎，
把我累得可真够呛。
CHAPTER 6

A PEDAGOGY OF SHANDONG FAST TALES

Introduction

Chapter 3 detailed how Master Wu Yanguo goes about teaching Shandong fast tales to beginning learners while Chapter 4 provided examples of the results of this approach. This chapter maps out his approach with particular emphasis on the elements relevant to the teaching of language and culture. His model demonstrates that complex cultural performances, drawn from everyday life, can be consciously built and learned over time and that any single performance is merely a single point on a long-term trajectory of increasing complexity. Using Master Wu’s regimen of performance, novice Shandong fast tale performers construct elaborate performances by building layered memories through repeated rehearsal performances followed by guided feedback. This regimen of performance based training leads to the deep internalization of integrated memories of and the fluid automatization of behaviors (and speech) associated with enactable chunks of Chinese behavioral culture. Through the cyclical (re)-presentation of target knowledge and skills (the same information is presented at different times and in different ways) and repetitive cycles of increasingly sophisticated guided rehearsal, Master Wu assisted learners in their attempts to
develop and internalize new cultural behaviors appropriate for their target story (fit roles and context) that could then be used fluidly and naturally later for live performances or when contexts evoked them. At the same time, Master Wu’s approach highlights the roles of contextualized learning, imagery, and emotion in memory compilation.

In addition to these benefits, Master Wu’s pedagogical model foregrounds the social nature of learning and the role of practical experience in developing new sets of skills. Master Wu’s way of teaching suggests that the acquisition of cultural skills is best accomplished through a pedagogical structure that involves support scaffolding that is systematically built into and removed from the learning process. When applied to learning Chinese as a foreign language, this model can be used by instructors to train learners to develop target culture memories, which can then serve as the basis for sophisticated cultural interaction.

**Stories as Cognitive Tools**

Master Wu’s pedagogy accords with Jerome Bruner’s (2002) notion that learning is best done in story format. Bruner (Bruner, 1990, 1996 and 2002) posits that narrative activity is constitutive of cultural life. It is the means with which we construct and maintain social life and stories are mental structures that provide us with canonical models through which to interpret our worlds. The sharing of stories creates what Bruner (2002: 25) calls an interpretive community that promotes cultural cohesion. When sustained over the long term, stories of this
type become what Turner (1982) described as cultural root paradigms, the fundamental values and beliefs that drive cultural activity in a particular place. Because they function in this way (they tell us what the world should be like), they exhibit what Bruner (1986, 1990, and 2002) calls the feature of canonicality. In this sense, the stories of a culture are the locus and conduit of its social and cultural praxis. Stories may even attain the status of myth as in the case of stories of the origin of cultural groups.

Bruner (2002: 34-5) has argued that stories are highly particularized and localized narrative templates that we generalize, stylize, and manipulate to fit with what we know about the world. Drawing on Michael Tomasello’s (1999) work, Bruner suggests that our capacity for intersubjectivity (mind reading, or the ability to read each other’s intentions and mental states) is a precondition for our collective life in culture (16). He writes that collective life would not be possible were it not for our human capacity to organize and communicate experience in a narrative form. According to Bruner, “it is the conventionalization of narrative that converts individual experience into collective coin which can be circulated, as it were, on a base wider than a merely interpersonal one.” What is critical for our purposes is that 1) story, in this sense, provides us with one means through which to map out the normative aspects of a culture, 2) they provide us with models of and for accepted social action, and 3) they delineate the bounds of what and how we can be as social beings. Stories are templates of experience that serve as
conventional models that explicitly show us what is easily and frequently
cognized and communicated in any community (Shore, 1998). By filling in
informational gaps, they allow us to contextualize behavior and speech that would
otherwise seem random or haphazard. They situate behavior by tying together
thematically what would otherwise be random contexts. The idea is that we all
have internal story interpreters, whether it is in the form of anatomical wiring that
organizes incoming data in narrative modules or homunculi in our head who
organize our experiences into stories for us (Dennet, 1991). Whatever the case
may be, we storify—situate speech, behavior and events into narrative formats—
all of our experiences when we record (or update) them in memory and as we
share them with others in the way Master Wu created the tale of our experience at
the visa office. Once we storify an experience (or part of one), we are able to
make informed assumptions about the situation and people at hand. We can then
formulate predictions about what will be said or done next. With a story in mind,
we are able to take action. Without a story to tie random speech and behavior
together, we are lost. Once we know the story, we can make predictions and
assumptions about who is involved, what is likely to happen, when and in what

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241 I am paraphrasing Brad Shore as quoted by Yu Li (2003: 93). Shore was describing the role of
culture, which he stated, “provides a stock of conventional models that have a powerful effect on
what is easily cognized and readily communicated in a community.” (Shore, 1998: 31) My
understanding is that these conventional models found in culture are in narrative, or story, format.
order things will occur, where they will occur, why they will happen in a particular way, and how to interpret them.

Moreover, as Master Wu’s approach shows, stories can be useful tools for memory construction. That is, stories are not just contextualizing frameworks for on-going social encounters. They contextualize speech and behavior that have already taken place, that may take place in the future, or that could possibly take place. At the same time, they lessen the burden on our memory. As our primary structures for memory, both personal and group, narrative is a fundamental mode of cognition that allows us to share our experiences and memories within our culture. The structured memories of our cultural experiences, our mental stories equip us to move beyond any single event, on the individual plane, as well as when we share our experiences with others. The memory of having experienced a particular story informs subsequent action within the culture when encountering similar situations. We continually add to our personal stories and our storied memories expand as our experience with similar situations and people grows. The way we share our knowledge with others in our culture is by telling stories to or with them.
About this fundamental role of storytelling in memory construction, Roger Schank (1995: 2) writes:

“the role of story telling and story understanding is far more significant in human memory than simply being an example of one kind of human interaction. The reason that humans constantly relate stories to each other is that stories is all they have to relate. Or, to put this another way, when it comes to interaction in language, all of our knowledge is contained in stories and the mechanisms to construct them and retrieve them.”

In *Tell Me a Story* (1990), Schank succinctly summarizes the theoretical foundation that underlies one of the arguments put forth in this dissertation: stories about one’s experiences, and the experiences of others, are the fundamental constituents of human memory, knowledge, and social communication. In building his case, Schank lays out four fundamental propositions:

1) virtually all human knowledge is based on stories constructed around past experiences;

2) new experiences are interpreted in terms of old stories;

3) the content of story memories depends on whether and how they are told to others, and these reconstituted memories form the basis of the individual's “remembered self”; and

4) shared story memories within social groups define particular social selves, which may bolster or compete with individual remembered selves.

What Schank shows us, as do Turner and Bruner, is that our knowledge and memory are structured in narratives that are generated during experience, a fact that locates creating experiences in target culture social situations on center stage for language pedagogues. This means that we storify (make sense of) each
of our experiences by fitting them into a familiar story and we “record” those experiences in our memories in story form so that they are well organized and easily accessible. Schank’s work also informs us that we use the stories we know and have encountered (our base culture defined story memories) to interpret new experiences, which means that our default mechanisms for interpreting what we encounter in a new culture draw on different versions of the world (from those of the target culture) that may create gaps of understanding. Another way of putting it is that the only thing we have to make sense of new experiences is our memories of past experiences (or the stories we have heard others tell or that we have come in contact with in our base cultures via media such as written texts, movies, television, dramas, and other electronic media). When we encounter something new, we make sense of it by applying (fitting it into) similar old stories, in a process of constant updating and recreating. As Schank points out, we continually and constantly reconstruct our memories and rewrite our mental stories for ourselves and for different audiences while we use them to understand and define who we are to ourselves and to others. This means that, as Paul Eakin’s (1999) work on autobiography shows, although *who* we are is partially defined by the stories others tell about us, we are to a large extent the stories we tell to ourselves and to others. Thus, the self is something that is constructed socially with stories and storytelling is a mode of participation in any social world.
Both Bruner and Schank have effectively argued that our memories are stored, received, retrieved and shared in the form of stories. But, just how does storied memory work? Schank (1990) postulates that, rather than being a storehouse of decontextualized information, our memories are workhouses where we store, create, and recreate meaningful stories (case examples) that we use to solve problems we encounter. Schank uses script theory as the basis for understanding how the workhouse of memory operates. He describes memory as a dynamic set of processes and memories as rooted in episodic experience. This simply means that memory is organized around personal experiences rather than semantic categories. Nor is it fixed or static. We generate scripts, or generalized episodes, based on particular types of experiences, which are what allow us to make the inferences necessary to negotiate a particular situation by filling in information gaps. A dynamic model of memory suggests that events are understood in terms of scripts, plans and other knowledge structures, as well as relevant previous experiences. That memory is dynamic might run counter to our folk beliefs about how memory works but nonetheless is a powerful notion because it accounts for change over time. Scripts are what allow us to make the inferences necessary to negotiate a particular situation by filling in information gaps. Schank (1990) argues that memory is a workhouse rather than a storehouse because we don’t just store things in our memory to be accessed later unchanged. Every time we use memory, we change it. We update it. As when we hit ‘refresh’
on our internet browsers, some things remain the same, others are lost and still others are added. As Schank suggests, memory is both a place where we store knowledge and a place where we process it. Our memories constantly evolve over time as we add new layers to them based on new experiences.

To borrow Schank’s example, when we go to a restaurant, we are able to make predictions about what we will find, what people will do, and what they will say because we have stored a restaurant script based on previous restaurant experiences. Schank and Ableson (1977) developed the notion of script from Bartlett’s (1932) work on schemas and applied it to the generalized story formats we use to make sense of frequently occurring everyday events. Bartlett held that schemas are active organizations of past experiences and that remembering is an act of cognitive (re)-construction. Thus, schemas are memorial abstracts from experience that allow speakers and listeners to make shared assumptions and draw inferences without explicitly verbalizing all information necessary for communication to occur. As such, schemas are critical structures that facilitate efficient communication.

According to Schank and Ableson (1977: 41), scripts, on the other hand, are specific types of schemas. For them, a script is “a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that defines a well-known situation.”242 Similarly, Michael

242 Katherine Nelson (1982, 1986) has described scripts as event schemas that were sequentially organized structures of causally and temporally linked acts with the actors and objects specified in the most general way.
Cole (1996: 126) says that scripts are event schemas that specify the people who appropriately participate in an event, the social roles they play, the objects they use, and the sequence of actions and causal relations that apply. David Rubin (1995: 27) describes how we use scripts best, “they are the things we learn to omit from conversation because the other person already knows them. It is, therefore, the deviations from these everyday scripts that are more likely to be recalled.” This pool of “given” knowledge, the shared scripts of a culture, can be omitted during everyday communication because it is shared by all members of a culture.

243 Scripts are pervasive in everyday interaction. In American culture, we like to think that we are all original and that we are all individuals but careful observation of everyday encounters reveals how scripted much of our behavior really is. Introductions, everyday greetings, leave taking, small talk with strangers, inviting someone to dinner, and making and answering telephone calls, to mention but a few examples, are all scripted encounters that follow surprisingly narrow established cultural patterns. How often do we deviate from: “Jim, this is Jane. Jane, this is Jim.”, “How are you today.”, “I’ve got to get going.”, “It sure is a nice day.”, “We should get together for dinner sometime.”, “Hello?”, or “This is Eric.”? And, when we do deviate from the normal script, we remember the deviation and immediately tell our listeners something about the situation and/or ourselves. Even acts and situations that seem much more complex such as complimenting others, apologizing, accepting apologies, stating our opinions and expressing concern for others all have culturally established underlying scripts that vary only slightly from one situation to the next. Although we might choose different words, Americans typically compliment things rather than physical attributes. Americans often feel the need to verbalize apologies to clear the air and we also verbalize our acceptance of those apologies. And, when offering our opinions, I think most Americans do so in a manner that seems quite direct to people from other cultures. The scripts for these seemingly mundane acts are quite different in the realm of Chinese culture. Chinese regularly compliment (and/or comment on) physical attributes, they rarely verbalize apologies, and they tend to either couch their opinions in “we” terms, blunt them by first complimenting the opinions of others, or discount them by offering disclaimers about the validity or quality of those opinions. There are two points here. First, culture defines the scripts that we follow to carry out the most basic of everyday encounters. Second, we all subconsciously use these shared scripts to make sense of our interactions. We do things the way they are normally done by those around us even when we think we are being original.
and is what often separates natives from non-natives.\textsuperscript{244} One reason is because it is not normally made explicit in pedagogical materials and when it is, pedagogical programs do not always involve measures that force learners to internalize such knowledge so that it can be immediately recognized and deftly employed during real life interaction. However, it is precisely this body of “givens” not normally made available to learners that allows the natives of the culture to efficiently and effectively interact with one another. Our knowledge of how to act and how others will act in given stereotypical situations is all contained in script form. Thus, if we regularly use scripts to situate and make sense of our experiences in our own culture and scripts are culturally constructed and culturally specific, it

\textsuperscript{244} It should be noted that scripts involve much more than just verbal habits and the ordering of information and events. When we access a script, we invoke a constellation of information and meanings as a whole, including actions, objects, speech, smells, feelings, and intentions associated with that script whether or not they are made explicit. Members of every culture have considerable knowledge about the kinds of routine activities that scripts describe and they use this knowledge to make inferences about speech and behavior as well as to frame their expectations about what will occur. To continue with the example of a restaurant script, we know the conditions and activities that constitute a restaurant script and their typical sequence, and we know the usual characters and props, so we can make inferences about what is happening and what will happen next. That means, when we recognize that we are in a restaurant, we can make informed assumptions about the time of the event (it is probably breakfast, lunch or dinner time), the purpose of the encounter (it will be something that can be associated with eating contexts in the culture), what roles individual participants may have (there will probably be hosts or hostesses, chefs, servers, and someone will probably be a host while there might be others who are guests), what objects we might see (plates, glasses, serving trays, forks, knives, chopsticks, and various foods and beverages), what we will be doing (we know we will not be playing tennis), what we might hear (the clank of pots and pans, the crash of dropped dishes, the calling out of orders, we might be asked how many are in our party, and we will be asked what we would like to eat and drink), what people may do (someone may make a recommendation about a particularly tasty dish, people will be eating and drinking, and someone will have to pay), and what scents may find their way into our olfactory system (we will smell various foods, we may smell candles, and we might smell smoke if smoking is still permitted in that locality). Much of the contextual information we need to situate our own speech and actions is all invoked when we access the restaurant script so our attentional faculties are freed to focus on the specifics of the particular restaurant and the particular occasion at hand. It is the variations from the normal script then that catch our attention.
seems that learning the scripts of the target cultures we wish to learn would greatly enhance our ability to make sense of our surroundings and our experiences in those surroundings from an emic perspective. The fact that this knowledge is organized in narrative form (scripts, schemas and stories) also offers the possibility for it to be made accessible to the learner. By isolating the most commonly occurring scripts and stories of a culture, we can begin to organize training plans around them. This is now done in some language classrooms by organizing lessons around frequently encountered contexts such as going to a restaurant, buying things, first encounters, visiting a friend, mailing a letter, and the like. Most often this is done because the fundamental scripts of a culture are naturally occurring modules of culture. The key point for language teachers and learners is that scripts enable us to efficiently assess what is going on around us so that our attentional faculties are free to focus on the unique aspects of the engagement at hand. And, as Schank (1990) has shown, each culture has shared scripts that are established means for interpreting frequently encountered situations and involve sets of expectations about what will happen next in well-understood situations.

At the same time scripts are constellations of meaning that enable us to contextualize action, they provide us structures to cue recall of past experiences because, as David Rubin (1995) has noted, they are stereotyped sequences of actions that constitute causal chains and their function is to preserve the order of
events in memory. What scripts do for us is that they lighten the burden on our
memory and attention by allowing us to store recurrent events as units. This
mental chunking assists us in our attention and memory processing because
scripts are remembered as generalized wholes, which permits us to store and
manipulate significantly larger amounts of information. We do not have to
remember everything about a strip of interaction because we already have
developed basic frameworks for how that particular type of encounter usually
occurs. We just make mental additions or adjustments for the specifics at hand.

Scripts are abstracts, generalizations about social and cultural encounters. They
tell us what to expect in certain stereotypical situations. We use stories, on the
other hand, to attach faces, places, and emotions to specific events. This means
that in addition to being powerful social and cognitive equipment we use to open
our realities up to ourselves and others (Schank, 1995: 44), stories are used to
personalize experiences, which makes them more memorable (Schacter, 1996).
Stories are powerful memory tools because they package values, emotion and
perspective. Equally important, stories are powerful memory tools because they
provide us with many indices with which to access the knowledge of our
experiences (Schank, 1995). And, finally, stories are powerful memory tools
because they personalize meaning by anchoring it in the familiar (Bruner, 1996).
Storied Lessons

Although never stated in such terms, Master Wu based his regimen of performance the idea that memory is dynamic and the stories he taught were typically structured around scripts drawn from everyday life. Each of Master Wu’s classes was structured around a particular story script, which served as content and goal performance for the session. A single story provided a theme that contextualized each performance making the knowledge and behaviors associated with that performance fit together as a unified whole. Master Wu’s use of story based lessons mirrors the teaching model used in the performed culture approach recounted in the introduction. To resummarize, the gist of the performed culture conception of story is that the conventional narrative structures of a cultural group—their stories—are the material with which we construct and share meaning as cultural beings, and, thus, are critical tools necessary for integrating into any social world. As artifacts generated and shared in target culture social communities, stories are fundamental cognitive tools that can be exploited to aid learners in achieving advanced levels of both linguistic and cultural proficiency.

We need stories because they provide both cognitive formats (the structures we use to organize our thoughts, experiences, behavior, intentions and memories) and models (ready-made, tested ways of understanding the world as well as proven

245 Occasionally multiple stories were handled in a single session when Master Wu wanted students to review previously learned content or when he decided to have story sharing events in which each student performed a story of his or her choice for the rest of the group.
plans of action) for participation in any cultural world (Bruner, 2002). Packed with critical contextual information and conduits of embedded cultural meanings, stories are the fundamental units with which we interact socially, and, as such, should be a focal unit of cultural and linguistic analysis. Stories, in this sense, are intimately connected with performance. They are the knowledge we generated through performance and how we record a given performance in memory. At the same time they are the equipment we use to make sense of and participate in any performance of culture.

We can use these bundles of communicative information to guide our movement within a culture and to structure our classroom activities to prepare students for participation in real life events since each culture’s stereotypical social interactions are packaged in story format. However, as Walker and Noda (2000) tell us, “to function in a foreign culture an individual must draw on inculcated default memories of that culture rather than relying on a dialectic between base and target cultures”. In other words, we need to not only generate shared stories of events experienced with members of the target culture, but we also must access the *pre-me* memories of a culture, or the stories already circulating among the native members of the culture before we enter the picture. We need to learn the shared group memories and stock stories that allow members of the target culture to generate, situate, and share meanings. And, as Walker and Noda argue, doing this is not a process of merely mapping the target culture onto
our preexisting base culture stories. The idea is that we need to construct memories of the events we find in the target foreign culture by participating in those events, sharing experiences with the other participants, generating shared meanings and stories of those events and by learning the background stories that shape and define the world of the members of the culture.

Master Wu was able to facilitate this process by creating social experiences for his students. His students compile memories (internalize) of everyday stories including associated language and behaviors by participating in on going social interaction at the same time they are engaged in formal training. He instituted a two-tiered learning program that mixed structured rehearsal with social practice. Before, during and after the social events, Master Wu guided his students’ understandings and interpretations of those events by engaging them in metadiscourse about the events. Similarly, language learners who are trained in the performed culture approach compile their memories by enacting culturally coded behaviors in contexts that are structured around recurring scripts drawn from the culture of study. Like Master Wu, in the US\China Links program, we supplemented these formal rehearsal performances by creating opportunities for our students to participate in real world social events involving natives of the target culture. In formal classroom sessions, we discussed and rehearsed the language, behaviors and strategies students were likely to need to negotiate social encounters during practicum periods. For social practice, we arranged for students
to have intern positions in Chinese companies, organizations and government offices in the local area where we were based in China so that they had real world experiences within which to try out what we were rehearsing in class. We also regularly arranged opportunities for our students to interact with Chinese in social situations outside of class (students toured companies, went to banquets with local professionals, and participated in local cultural events).

In both pedagogical approaches, stories operate on multiple levels and thus can be used in a number of ways. In addition to being sources of information about a culture, stories, as traditional scholars of narrative have shown, are structured recapitulations of experience. They are abstracts of cultural contexts and cultural activity containing everyday schemas and scripts that offer normative models of behavior while they map out cultural themes, norms and values. Stories in this sense operate top down as contextualizing mechanisms. They allow us to fill in information gaps when we do not have access to all of the information (a state we are always in while operating in a second culture), which helps us to situate strings of words and sentences contextually, providing them with an overarching structure and imbuing them with meaning. Stories, in the formal lessons of both approaches, are utilized as the string (theme, plotline) that ties what would otherwise be a series of random contexts together. A story, in this sense, is both the memory we construct of a single performance and the shared narratives we generate about group experiences in culture.
As Master Wu and Walker and Noda have shown, because we use stories as the structure with which we make sense of our experiences, they can be exploited as contextualization tools during instruction. For Master Wu, stories served as models of and for behavior. For Walker and Noda, they also operate as templates of experience and structured chunks of cultural activity that are employed as organizing principles for classroom interaction. In practice, this does not require an instructor to tell stories to or with his or her students; nor is it some form of story presentation (verbal, visual or other format), although it may involve the telling and presentation of stories at times. Rather it primarily involves evoking a particular story that situates a certain sequence of causally-linked events contextually and requires the performance of target behaviors (including language) to navigate those events. Master Wu built stories in the minds of his students by evoking vivid imagery and feelings in his students, the use of humor, assuming various character roles, and mimicking student behavior.

In Master Wu’s system, learners memorized the story on their own before class so that contact time with him was maximized as a performance laboratory that revolved around rehearsal performances by the students with feedback from the master. The memorization of the verbal script provided the foundation for all that took place in the classroom and students who did not have the script down were unable to benefit from time with the master. Having the fundamental script memorized heightened students’ feel for the intricacies of the language involved
and potential moves within the stories even when Master Wu suggested alterations during actual performance. Walker and Noda utilize a similar approach in requiring students to learn the verbal and behavioral scripts associated with a lesson’s target story contexts by doing drills on their own with audio tapes or an interactive CD-ROM prior to class. The result in both cases is that when students come to class (meet with their teacher), the expectation for all parties is that there will be a story to perform. Since students have already learned the linguistic elements and cultural scripts used to construct the story prior to class, instructors do not need to spend time explaining things. They simply use visual props or verbal and behavioral cues appropriate in the target culture to evoke the story in the minds of the students. It is a matter of laying out the critical elements of the story so that the students can then use them to quickly mentally re-construct it during class.

The typical elements of a story-based language lesson include, first, the cast of characters including who the participants are, their relationships to one another, and their roles. Thus, the students know what character role they will assume as well as who the other characters will be and what interpersonal

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246 In the early stages of this type of language training, students must be coached look for, metacognitively process, and utilize story elements and information to enhance their performances. This can be accomplished by overtly co-constructing meta-narratives about the story as a class prior to performance, through post-performance metanarration, and by engaging in reflexive post-story-performance group re-construction of the story. This fosters and encourages valuable context and story building strategies at the same time it provides review and reinforcement of target content.
relationships are in effect. Second, there needs to be contextual information about the time, place and situation at hand. This important background information allows students to make decisions about choice of language and behavior. Third, this kind of story has a point or purpose. In other words, there needs to be a clear, logical, culturally authentic, and relevant storyline or theme. The storyline defines the set of shared expectations that govern how the sequence of events should unfold at the same time it indicates to the learners both what perspective they will experience the story from and what their goals will be. Thus, when combined with cast and situation, and, if effectively maintained, the storyline imbues classroom performance with significance. Fourth, storied lessons involve a series of problems that require the students to perform that lesson’s target behaviors. This is the big button in fast tale parlance or the complicating element that gets the action of the lesson (story) underway. In the language classroom, the students have visited a local bookstore where they have forty Chinese dollars to buy their textbook, a notebook and some pens but the clerk is busy straightening up behind the counter. They have just arrived at an airport in China for the first time and need to get to a local university on their own. Or, they are on a street corner waiting for a bus and a stranger approaches them to ask for directions. Whatever the story may be, there needs to be an element included that offers a problem for the students to solve and requires them to perform using what they find in their environment. They need to search their inventories of verbal and behavioral
scripts to find polite ways of getting someone’s attention in a store. They need to utilize their abilities to ask a stranger for directions. Or, they have to call upon their knowledge of giving directions to react when the stranger inquires. To work as a story, the lesson must have at least one big button (complicating action) but ideally there is a series of smaller buttons that operate as transitional mechanisms between scenes just as in a Shandong fast tale. Finally, this type of story has to have a logical ending. The component scenes of a story may be stretched out to cover the period of several class hours but the action must come to a close at a point where it normally would in that given type of situation. The student completes his or her purchase at the bookstore and departs, arrives at the destination university, or the bus arrives at the stop.

For an example, a group of instructors used the story of “entertaining a visiting Chinese scholar” to structure a classroom session in the 2006 Summer Programs East Asian Concentration (SPEAC) language program at the Ohio State University. 247 Since the target contexts for a sequence of lessons included first encounters, small talk among new acquaintances, exchanging biographical information, going to a restaurant to eat together, ordering and paying for food, and taking leave of someone (and all that go with each linguistically and

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247 Most classroom sessions in the SPEAC language programs are designed to revolve around one particular story. In the SPEAC Teacher Training Program, Mari Noda trains teachers of East Asian languages in methods of creating and implementing stories as an instructional mode. The example story script offered here was a joint collaboration of all of the 2006 Chinese language teacher trainees. It was based on a script submitted by Yang Jia.
behaviorally), we formulated a story to tie these random contexts together and instill student participation with meaning and purpose. In our story, students were given a visual cue indicating that Professor Lin of Qinghua University is visiting Ohio State today, they are to meet her at her hotel, and will be her student tour guide for the day. A student was called on to perform and the instructor (or another student) took the part of Professor Lin reading a newspaper while waiting in the hotel lobby. Drawing on their default memories of how this kind of situation works, the verbal scripts and cultural schemas learned to be associated with this type of situation, and the storyline provided, the students then had to perform in the story context.

The story got underway when the student performing identified the situation and approached Professor Lin with a self-introduction. Once the identification was made and introductions were completed, a second complicating action was presented with a picture of a car parked outside the hotel lobby. This prop (that included all necessary information) was used to evoke the students’

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248 This particular story was designed for a unit test situation but could easily be implemented as a typical hour-long class.

249 The hotel lobby was simulated by placing a small paper placard with “reception” written on it on an overhead projector centered in the front of the classroom. Two desks were place in front of this “reception desk” and students were required to enter through a doorway marked with tape of the floor.

250 If some element of the story is missing, if the student is unsuccessful at re-constructing the target story, or if the student is unable to apply what they have learned, the instructor must provide additional cues that clarify or better evoke story. This can be accomplished by ad libbing, altering the story until the student recognizes the storyline and is able to react to the complicating action, or by calling on another student to serve as a model performer.
scripts for talking about cars in Chinese including information and vocabulary about makes, models, years of production, and costs. After a few moments, car talk was completed and the two characters got into the car to begin their drive from the hotel to the campus. While in the car the story was maintained by doing what we normally do while riding in cars, i.e. engaging in small talk. This scene in the story offered the student the opportunity to display their ability to offer and elicit biographical information from a new acquaintance. The scene ended and the context shifted to the OSU campus when the student’s attention was shifted towards a sign reading “Ohio State Founded in 1870”. This also primed the student for scripts that deal with the description of and opinions about universities and campuses, which allowed instructors to elicit large numbers (student enrollment, number of graduate students, number of undergraduates, etc.) in context. The next scene change was brought about by with a note that indicated that the student and Professor Lin were to meet with a Professor Li for lunch at 11:30 AM in restaurant on nearby High Street. This prompted the students to check and deal with time in Chinese while it afforded the opportunity to discuss distance and location (how far away the restaurant was located as well as where it was located in relation to where the participants were at). After walking to the

251When we conducted this lesson in the 2006 SPEAC program, the car was four desks arranged in a square somewhat resembling the seating arrangements in an automobile. One desk was equipped with a cardboard steering wheel and four wheels made of paper plates wrapped in foil were taped to the outsides of the desk legs.
restaurant, another physical location in the classroom, the students had to call upon their restaurant scripts to negotiate seating as well as to order and discuss food. The final complication called for the student to take leave of Professor Lin in a culturally appropriate manner, including indicating a desire for future interaction and the exchange of contact information. The student was cued that the meal was over and it was time for class with a simulated toll of the clock (we used a ring on a cell phone).252

252 The use of story to structure class is not limited to language classes or to language classes focused on speaking, listening, and interaction. I have structured survey courses on Chinese culture as well as ones intended to target reading and writing in a similar fashion. For reading classes, it was particularly effective. Like the speaking class described here, the entire class can be embedded in a story. The way I structured a second year reading class was to assign a story for a given class. The students then read the assigned story on their own outside of class. They were to first go through the text listening to an audio tape/file of the story to get a feel for the aural dimensions of the text before going back through the story to look up all characters/words that they do not know. The expectation was for them to come to class with a grasp of the basic plotline. We then began each class with a collaborative group reconstruction of the story (without the students looking at textual version of story). One student was called upon to begin the narration of the story in his or her own words. After this first student narrated as much of the story as they could (or if he or she got stuck), other students were called upon to pick up, contribute to or embellish the initial telling. At the same time this group narration developed student ability to deal with large chunks of Chinese, this allowed for an easy check of student understandings of the story. After the initial group narration, we then returned to the beginning of the story for an actual reading. As students took turn reading (in character roles), I helped deepen their understanding of the passages by provide images to go with certain character emotions, movements, and the like. As we went through the story, I attempted to foster a metacognitive approach to the text by asking questions that they should be asking themselves as they read. By doing so, I made competent reader strategies explicit for the students and modeled what they should be doing when dealing with the text. During this period, I also clarified difficult areas and answered student questions before moving on to a series of comprehension questions. These comprehension questions were quite focused because the students had already demonstrated what they did not understand in their narration and group reading. They were also an exercise in memory because students could not refer to their texts while answering. Finally, we returned to the narration of the story at a higher level. Students closed their books and reconstructed a more elaborate version of the story using what they had learned in the group reading. Their homework assignment was then to write a summary of the story in their words.
As Aylett (2000:3) has pointed out, stories have been used by educators for centuries. Traditionally, the primary mode of story use by both philosophers and teachers was one directional: teachers telling the stories to students. The student role was that of the passive audience. As our understanding of learning processes has expanded and technology has developed to allow new techniques, educators have begun to show stories to students (whether that is having students read a piece of literature, watch a documentary, or listen to audio programs), which allows them to appreciate the story on another level. This mode of story instruction is frequently the backbone of cultural and literary studies. In this mode, the instructor’s role shifts from telling stories to telling stories and guiding students’ understanding of stories. In the realms of language pedagogy, business education and political science, instructors have found the benefit of role play and simulation activities that allow students to experience stories on still another level, first hand. In this mode, focus shifts to issues of authenticity and ability to imitate real world people, organizations, and events. The role of the instructor becomes story evoking, story construction, and story maintenance. What I am suggesting here is that for a student of a foreign language to become someone in their culture of study, they must be able to engage stories in all of these modes and they must also be able to produce and evoke them on their own. When learning to participate in a foreign culture, we must be able understand natives of the target culture when they tell stories. We also need to be able to deal with stories
captured in various forms of media (print, visual, audio, and electronic) and should be able to negotiate meanings about those stories in discussions with natives of the target culture. More importantly, we have to be able to participate first hand in on-going target culture stories and we need to have the ability to evoke the right story in the minds of our interlocutors for each situation at hand. Traditional role play activities and simulation games have typically only required us as learners to deal with existing stories. If language learners are to fully integrate into existing cultural communities, they must also be able to produce stories themselves, which means, in turn, that as language pedagogues, our instructional design must include training students to tell stories that are recognized and can be appreciated in the target culture.

Stories that are drawn from the target culture provide us with existing bundles of knowledge that not only have clearly defined characters (the roles of those involved including all of their biographical information), settings (time, place), and scripts (what can and is said or done in like situations), but they also contain logical sequences of events (what is said or done to/by whom and in what order) and the sociocultural information (possible intentions, reasons for doing things, cultural norms, potential goals, plans and outcomes, plausible script adaptations) necessary to know how and when to act or react. Even more importantly, stories carry feelings and emotions attached to them that generalized scripts do not. There are characters to identify with. There are ones to be
empathized with. There are characters to like and others to be disliked. As Holland, Jenkins, and Squire (2003: 38) have put it, “narratives have the peculiar quality of making readers (players, viewers, interactors) care a great deal about the events they represent. Everyone has had the experience of being lost in a story…” This quality of storied experience—vividness—enhances learning by helping us create more permanent memories.

In the learning setting, stories can be enacted as simulations of real world events that allow learners to rehearse speech and behaviors that they will ultimately need to employ in a safer, more controlled environment. Utilizing a story as the underlying plan for a language class provides learners with the framework they need to understand what is going on by limiting the amount of information presented and restricting learner attention to the story at hand. At the same time, enacting and maintaining that story throughout the class forces learners to maintain a distinct mode of interaction that is different from their base culture modes of interaction. The unfolding plotline of the story requires learners to continually cognitively process what is going on and allows for exploration and experimentation to take place (they can attempt to take the story in different directions based on what they have learned). Students must attempt to figure out what the context of the story is rather than waiting on the teacher to tell it to them, which fosters the recognition of target culture contexts, problem solving abilities in target culture ways, and skills for handling variation within contexts. Based on
my observations of Master Wu’s classes and my experience applying his
techniques to the language learning setting, when engaged in a story based on a
memorized script, students typically naturally begin expanding on the basic story
script using things that they have learned in the past.

Using stories in this manner as the organizing structure for each classroom
session allows the instructor to situate generalized event schemas more globally in
cultural activities at the same time it personalizes the experience for the students
by adding a specific cast of characters. Not only is this more realistic interaction,
it more closely resembles the ways in which we construct meaning during social
interaction. It packages target culture experiences episodically, which facilitates
memory construction. This type of approach also fundamentally changes the roles
of both the instructor and the student by shifting attention from the presentation
and reception of knowledge to the orchestration of and participation in meaning-
making story experiences. This type of learning experience is more memorable
because the act of performing in the story action affords the students the personal
experience needed to initiate memory building processes. It generates memory
construction, which leads to the internalization of knowledge. Furthermore, one of
the functions of stories is to organize large chunks of linguistic and cultural
information into a structured unit. As a result, learning through performance in
cultural stories is more memorable for the students because they have more
indices with which to store and access the information involved. Rather than
remembering all of the individual words, phrases and sentences that comprise the story, students remember the story as a unit.

Teaching larger, complex chunks of discourse rather than focusing on the building blocks with which these units are comprised may seem to some to be putting the ox before the cart. They would argue that narratives are too complex for anyone other than natives or nonnative learners already operating at sophisticated levels in the target language. They would suggest that learners must build up from the pieces and parts level (vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar). The argument presented here is not one calling for instructors to do away with types of instruction that target grammar, lexicon, or phonology. These types of learning are critical in the overall development of cultural competence as well and should not be discarded. Rather, although it may appear counterintuitive at first, the suggestion is that these building blocks should be learned as parts of the larger discursive units within which they are embedded. Learning the building blocks of language as parts of more complex discursive wholes not only creates contextual associations to critical information about use and meaning but it also generates multiple links in memory that allow these building blocks to be internalized in memory over the long term. As Merlin Donald (2001: 296) puts it, “Words and grammars are merely the entry-level skills without which narrative traditions could not exist, but once they are acquired, they are secondary to the stories themselves.”
In addition to these benefits, stories package common, acceptable ways and goals of social interaction (ways of realizing particular intentions) as well as interactional perspectives. Participating in an on-going story puts us in a live context—not always completely authentic but live nonetheless, which allows us to experience a strip of cultural activity as a whole from which we can then construct memories that can be drawn upon in subsequent situations. In this way, experience in target culture stories allows us to work out meanings in use. It gives us the opportunity to figure out how things work, how actions are typically sequenced and how behavior shifts with context and perspective in the target culture, all in a controlled structure. Furthermore, the complications that sustain a storyline set up purposes and create goals for the students to achieve. Rather than performing just to perform, which yields less than ideal results, students are learning how to accomplish particular, recognized and acceptable goals in the target culture. They are getting rehearsal at meaning-making in context. Finally, while storied learning sets up explicit models for how to do particular things in the target culture, it simultaneously creates opportunities to instruct and correct behavior. Students must take action to deal with the complications structured into the story and in doing so often rely on base culture modes of interaction, which can lead to unacceptable or awkward behavior that would hinder successful movement within the target culture. By drawing out the behavior in the context of
a story, instructors have the chance to point out behavioral aspects of communication that would otherwise not emerge.

At the same time, this type of instructional model fosters experimentation with intersubjectivity. That is, it allows students assume different roles and see interaction from different perspectives, which is key to both cognitive development and the acquisition of language (Bruner, 1996 and 2002 and Tomasello, 1999). This aspect of learning through storied lessons permits us to see explicitly what the boundaries are in the target culture for who, what and how we can be. It gives us what Eakin would call models of selves to emulate.

Because storied classes draw learners in to story worlds, they have the opportunity to become familiar with the characters and their roles, which tends to retain their interest (a point which cannot be overlooked by educators in our current attention deficit world warped by media) and offers them the chance to develop a sense of that kind of person over the course of a sequence of events. Storied lessons enable learners to take on avatairal perspectives on their own in simulations of basic modes of real life experiences (Rehak, 2003). That is, learners can assume various story roles (like assuming the role of a player in a video game), which is critical in gaining a sense of how different roles work in the target culture. The simulation of real time events elicits behaviors and responses that the learners will need to perform in real life and thus functions as a rehearsal of target behaviors in context, which simultaneously enables students to learn
what types of contexts they will encounter in the target culture. This adds an ergodic (physical) aspect to the learning process that increases links to memory by expanding learning beyond merely a mental plane (Aarseth, 1997). The story format also affords opportunities for the instructor to vary the mode of presentation and to design progressively difficult tasks, which further maintain student interest.

In the case of Shandong fast tale learners, once they had demonstrated a rudimentary understanding of and ability to talk about fast tale performances, Master Wu engaged them in collaborative performances that familiarized them with the underlying storyline. Master Wu initiated joint attentional scenes with his students that took them along the storyline and called upon knowledge learned previously (the story content learned outside of class). He took actions to sustain the performance only as long as necessary and gradually increased the role of the student until they were performing independently. The vividness and imagery Master Wu helped the learners to associate with the stories left long lasting memories of the verbal script and movements connected with them. Because they followed storylines and involved characters engaged in interesting actions, the stories drew learners into microworlds that they began to find compelling. The learners began to identify with and care about the characters and often lost track of their physical surroundings. Experiencing the stories (telling, hearing, or seeing them enacted) exposed learners to the roles, ready made scripts and ways for
keying scripts and contexts in the minds of other members of the culture.

Experiencing stories also provided learners with opportunities to try out those roles, scripts, and context-keying mechanisms in an environment in which real world consequences were lowered. Assuming the various roles of characters in the stories was a way for learners to expand their cognitive repertoires because it required novice performers to carefully observe the behaviors of various categories of people so that they could imitate those behaviors in performance. By putting themselves in the mental shoes of someone else, novice performers learned the conventional uses of a range of cultural artifacts including stock characters, scenes, themes, movements, language and expressions (Tomasello, 1999).

**Master Wu’s Regimen of Performance**

For Wu Yanguo, learning to perform Shandong fast tales involves developing fundamental skills through individual practice, building performances based on individual stories through guided rehearsal, practicing those performances in front of live audiences and participating in local culture. I see it as a process of constructing and internalizing long-term memories of enactable segments of Chinese culture. As detailed in Chapter 3, Master Wu’s training regimen began with individual sessions designed to focus on the fundamental skills necessary to perform Shandong fast tales: basic story lines and how to play the *ban*. After demonstrating the fundamentals of playing the *ban*, Master Wu
allowed new learners to discover, on their own, the intricacies of playing through hours of individual practice. Once this process was underway, Master Wu also initiated (and then managed) several concurrent learning processes that were geared towards developing the various component skills used in fast tale performances. These learning processes included the conscious construction of story-based performances, the fostering of his learning approach, the development of a metadiscourse about fast tale performance, and the enculturation of the learner into local cultural circles (he took conscious measures to facilitate learners’ integration into social circles). Master Wu began this phase of the learning process by arranging opportunities for the learner to be exposed to the training environment so that he or she could become acclimated to his or her surroundings. During this period (in both individual study sessions and study classes), he actively pointed out prominent features of learning environments and training procedures to orient the learner to the training environment and to familiarize them with the training process and expectations. Although he did not always state that this was what he was doing, Master Wu always began by defining a training goal. He or the learner selected a goal stage performance that served as the training goal. The type of audience, occasion the performance was associated with, and where it would occur were all then factored into the training process. If learners, did not have a goal performance, Master Wu provided them
with his own model performance to emulate saying afterwards, “This is what you want to be able to do” or “This is where you are going”.

**Metarefection: Learning to Monitor Performance**

After the period of orientation to training and goal setting, while individual practice of basic skills continued, training sessions followed a cyclical pattern: model performance, learner rehearsal performance, directed feedback, learner adjustment, and re-performance at a higher level of sophistication. During this phase, Master Wu engaged new learners in a metadiscourse about fast tale performances so that they could develop the ability to talk about both fast tales and their performance. James Gee (2003: 23) argues that for active (experiencing the world in new ways, forming new affiliations, and preparation for future learning) and critical (learning to think of semiotic domains as design spaces that manipulate us in certain ways and that we can manipulate in certain ways) learning to occur, learners need to not only know how to understand and produce meanings in a particular semiotic domain that are recognizable to those affiliated with the domain, but they also need to know how to think about the domain at a meta-level as a complex system of interrelated parts. Master Wu’s approach factored in this characteristic of learning. By pointing out aspects of the performances of more accomplished peer learners such as, “his eight space was too large” and “her *ban* is very steady”, Master Wu brought target performance elements into the conscious awareness of the new learners. Then, he asked new
learners to evaluate the performances of their peers. “What did you think of her performance,” “What mistakes did he make,” or “What did she do well,” he typically asked. In this way, new performers were guided in how to learn from the performances of their peers in a form of cultural sharing. At the same time he fostered this exocentric view of performance (view of performance from without taking into consideration audience reactions to performances), he taught the learners how to analyze and monitor their own performances from an egocentric (from their perspective and focused on what they were doing) perspective by asking them to evaluate their own performances immediately afterwards. “How do you think you did?” “What mistakes did you make?” “What would you change?”

Through this metareflection, Master Wu focused the attention of learners making them hyperaware of each aspect of their own performances as well as well as those of their peers. This metacognitive monitoring of performance not only heightened student awareness of the target performances, it fostered learner metacognitive review of performance and performance related knowledge as well as the ability to mentally multitask. Jerome Bruner (1966: 53) has written that instruction is a provisional state that should have as its goal creating a self-sufficient learner. He says, “Any regimen of correction carries the danger that the learner may become permanently dependent upon the tutor’s correction.” Thus, instruction should enable the learner to take over the corrective function himself
in order to eliminate the need for the “perpetual presence of the teacher”. Master Wu’s technique of developing a metacognitive awareness of performance and ability on the part of the learner to evaluate one’s own and the performances of others enabled novice performers to eventually take over their own correction monitoring. Heightened awareness of performance from a more global level also led to innovative learner moves and the use of strategies during rehearsal performances. On a practical level, forcing students to actively monitor all performances increased their sources of learning (their classmates inevitably made mistakes or acceptable innovations that they may not have on their own and vice versa) and kept learners involved while others were performing (they had to pay attention because they knew Master Wu would ask for their comments).

When applied to the language learning setting, Master Wu’s technique of metareflexion on performance enhances students understanding of the contexts, forces them to review previously learned content, heightens their awareness of the speech, behaviors and actions of their interlocutors, and shifts their attention from an egocentric perspective to one focused on monitoring the speech and behavior of others. This aspect of communication is absolutely critical for American learners in the context of Chinese culture because of the significant emphasis placed on attention to the speech, behavior, intentions and needs of others.
Imitative Learning

With each new story, Master Wu always began by modeling performance so that his students could then imitate his performance. His willingness to and enthusiasm towards regularly performing collaboratively with and as a model for his students demonstrated for the students that performing, re-performing and refining performances were desired behaviors. By imitating their master’s every move, including what he did in everyday life, young fast tale learners began to enter into the world of performer circles. Michael Tomasello (1999: 81) has suggested that becoming a member of a culture means learning some new things from other people. He has shown that at roughly nine months of age infants begin to reproduce adult’s intentional actions by imitating them. This “imitative learning”, as Tomasello describes it, represents infants’ initial entry into the cultural world around them in the sense that they then can begin to learn from adults or more accurately through adults in cognitively significant ways (83). Tomasello has shown that this process of entry into the cultural world takes nine months with active instruction from adults and regular imitative learning on the part of the child (91).

253 Entry into meaning was much more pronounced in my case as a foreign learner who had access to many fewer local cultural meanings and a less developed memory of local culture than young native performers. They, too, had to enter into a new subcultural domain but brought with them highly sophisticated abilities to participate in and deeply ingrained understandings of local cultural practices.
In Master Wu’s system, there was a shorter span of time because he was dealing with individuals who already had the capacity to actively participate in local culture but there was no timetable. He monitors learner performance, making adjustments to the amount of burden they assume as necessary. When combined with the periodic social experiences, the imitative element also exposed learners to mechanisms for keying contexts and for capturing and retaining the attention of audience members, important interaction resources. In any case, through his behavior inside and outside the classroom, Master Wu modeled an approach to interaction in the local culture that included examples for successful ways realize certain intentions, modes for completing certain acts, and techniques for managing human relationships. As his apprentice, I can attest to finding myself doing things (both in fast tale performances and in everyday interaction) as I had seen Master Wu do them (and saying the things he said as he said them) when I was not with him, especially at times when I encountered situations and people I was less familiar with.

In his work on human consciousness, Donald (2001: 28) makes similar points to those made by Tomasello pointing out that without a very efficient capacity for imitation, the dissemination of complex skills (like Shandong fast tales or a foreign language) and cultural conventions would not be possible. Donald sees mimetic learning (joint attention, taking turns, and various non-verbal communicative skills) as essential to the language acquisition process and
as the basis of skilled rehearsal (what he describes as a previous act mimed, over and over, to improve it). For Donald, mimesis is “the result of evolving better conscious control over action.” The way he puts it, “Skill results from rehearsal, systematic improvement, and the chaining of mimetic acts into hierarchies. Thus, to learn to play tennis, we must master a number of elementary action chains and then piece them together into a very complex contingent arrangement, so that the right action will result on very short notice in every possible future situation (264).” Master Wu’s regimen is an example of mimetic learning put into practice. The cycle of performance he creates with his learners hinges upon mimetic learning from the very initial stages. The suggestion here is that mimetic learning is not only essential in developing complex skills such as the ability to play tennis or to perform art forms like Shandong fast tales. It is also fundamental to learning the complex skill of communicating in a foreign culture. When applied to the language learning setting, this requires a reformulation of the teacher’s role. Rather than disseminator of knowledge, the foreign language teacher becomes model, collaborative performer and coach. He or she must orchestrate contexts that facilitate mimetic learning, model how to handle those contexts, take part in (assume various roles in) rehearsal performances of those contexts, and provide feedback based on student performances.
Building and Removing Scaffolding

In his accounts of the early language learning of children, Jerome Bruner describes the work that parents do to support the child’s learning process such as creating contexts, guiding understanding and adjusting speech (baby talk) to suit the developmental ability level of the child. Bruner calls such pedagogical support work “scaffolding”. In his view, scaffolding is the process of transferring skill, whereby an adult supports a child in learning a new task and gradually withdraws as the child develops the skills necessary to handle a given task. Scaffolding, in this sense, is characterized by the gradual withdrawal of adult control and support as a function of children’s increasing mastery of a particular task. Bruner’s “scaffolding” metaphor has in recent years been extended to refer to all types of interactional (and pedagogical) support for children (and learners), most often in the form of adult-child dialogue that is initiated and structured by adults to maximize the child’s cognitive growth (Clay and Cazden, 1990).

Master Wu was at least implicitly aware of the role of scaffolding in learning. He consciously used scaffolding activities to supplement training and practice sessions. During the initial phases of training, Master Wu regularly scaffolded student performance by tightly controlling the contexts of learner performances and in guiding them to talk about performances. He also scaffolded learning by jointly telling stories with learners (Master Wu telling a line and the

254 See Ferguson (1977) and Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) for studies on parental uses of baby talk.
learner following with the next, alternating every other line until the story is completed) and by utilizing the word flow exercise described in Chapter 3. At times, scaffolding involved Master Wu describing or enacting scenes to create images that clarified context or difficult to understand meanings found in stories. At others, it involved the use of humor to make the verbal script more memorable for the learner. Sometimes it involved Master Wu assuming a role within a given context. Other times it involved the use of props (such as his cell phone, grade book, and other various objects found in his home) to generate a context or the use of other techniques (including Master Wu doing things to help students visualize desired or undesired behaviors such as imitating poor student posture) to get the students to visualize a context as a coach would with an athlete. Finally, scaffolding, in the context of fast tale training sessions, included Master Wu stopping learner performances to provide informational feedback or to model accurate performance.

Bruner’s word choice, scaffolding, and Master Wu’s implementation techniques reveal two aspects of cognitive development important for foreign language pedagogues to note. First, learners cannot develop new cognitive (including linguistic) skills alone. They must have some sort of support system. Parents consciously build scaffolding into their routines that support the learning efforts of their children, especially in the early stages of development. This is how parents socialize their children. There is both explicit and implicit instruction and
parents regularly take steps to enculturate children into the world of the family, or, when a single child is involved, build the family world around the child. Bruner calls all of these scaffolding, socialization, enculturation and pedagogical activities the child’s Language Acquisition Support System (LASS). In the case of fast tale training, Master Wu structured and guided novice performance practice sessions. Even when utilizing discovery learning techniques, he first ensured learners had the equipment (grip of the ban and kouling) necessary to be able to learn without his presence.

Second, is the temporary nature of the support mechanisms engaged in by parents with their children and Master Wu with his students. These activities are geared towards helping children (or Master Wu’s learners) develop their own cognitive skills and cease when the children demonstrate that they are able to handle particular situations. Many language pedagogues spend countless hours developing props, drills, exercises and classroom activities that are designed to serve as scaffolding to assist students in developing skills that they will later need in real life contexts of interaction. Many also adapt their rate of speech, complexity of lexicon and other aspects of language use and interaction in ways that mirror parental use of baby talk in order to facilitate student understanding. But, while no one would argue that most parents do not continue baby talk beyond the point where it is necessary to facilitate learning—mothers do not usually talk to eight or nine year old children in the same way that they talk to
babies—many language teachers fail to remove scaffolding from their teaching approaches and materials as student skill levels increase in sophistication. In many of the language classes I have observed, teachers rarely talk to students in the same manner that they talk to other natives in real communicative situations, even when the students have developed advanced linguistic capacities. Moreover, significant amounts of pedagogical resources are exhausted on converting target culture artifacts into formats easily accessible to non-natives rather than on assisting learners to acquire the skills that allow them to access those target culture artifacts on their own. The result is that when learners interact with non-teachers who do not adjust their behavior in a similar fashion—i.e., use scaffolding techniques or accommodate learners by simplifying interaction and lowering expectations—they encounter significant difficulties because they have not developed the necessary skills to handle such situations. Regardless of how well designed scaffolding activities are, learners must ultimately negotiate the gaps between scaffolded artifacts and real target culture artifacts once they are out of pedagogical environments.

Master Wu was cognizant of this temporary nature of scaffolding activities as he continually adjusted both the amount and type of assistance he provided learners as they developed new skills. The primary indication of this awareness is that as the training process progressed Master Wu gradually faded into the background and performances shifted to independent performances by the
learners. As his role gradually shifted from co-performer to facilitator, Master Wu changed learning contexts in such a way as to put more and more performance burden on the learner. That is, he continually created contexts that required learners to participate in activities at the edge of or slightly beyond their competence level with his assistance or with the assistance of their more skilled classmates. He also continually adjusted demands on the learner so that they were always engaged in challenging but doable tasks that required less and less assistance from him.

Layered Memory, Spiraling Competence

Donald (2001: 6) has argued that we can only know things by making them conscious and we must draw upon limited conscious capacity to carry out virtually any complex mental activity including most forms of learning. According to Donald (23), we cannot retain complete conscious control of what we attend to especially in a stimulating environment. As Donald (2001: 90) puts it:

“Automatization is the corollary of enhanced consciousness, a necessary complement of advanced self-governance, which is associated with an increased capacity for learning. The superplastic brains of rapid learners have to store their immense amount of knowledge, and as they store more and more learned algorithms, they must relieve these of any need for detailed conscious regulation. If we had to call on conscious capacity to manage all of our acquired knowledge and procedures, the result would be inevitable overload and a severe limitation on our ultimate capacity.”

For Donald (69), automatization is “the end result of a process of repeated sessions of rehearsal and evaluation, which rely heavily on conscious
supervision” and metacognition—self-evaluation, inner speech, the ability to self-supervise activities—is a prerequisite for modifying behavior. According to Donald, metacognition is what enables us to extend awareness beyond what is immediately in front of us; something we have to do when engaged in any conversation in any language. He likens it to a surveillance system or a “metacognitive governor” that allows us to mentally multitask (the ability to think about or do several things at the same time) and argues that metacognition is “a kind of elevated self-awareness that involves an ability to monitor our own minds and to monitor our own monitoring” (84). Donald states that all “skilled rehearsal involves self-reflective and self-evaluative operations” that “do not take place without conscious supervision” (89). We must develop deep automaticities for most of our thought and behavior so that we do not experience attentional overload. The example he uses is the musician.

“When professional pianists play, they cannot afford to become overly conscious of their fingering or the specific notes of the passage they are playing, particularly the more rapid ones. That kind of self-consciousness is paralyzing. They have to automatize those difficult passages, or they will make major mistakes. The same rule applies to speaking.” (Donald, 2001: 26)

This process of developing deep automaticities is what Walker and Noda refer to as compiling a memory of culture (detailed in the introduction). The ability to competently interact in a second culture does not magically emerge when a learned is exposed to knowledge about a culture and it does not develop with a single exposure to live cultural events. It is a long, time consuming process of
repeated experiences that add layers of knowledge in memory. As Walker and Noda argue and as Master Wu’s model shows, this process can be facilitated in learning environments.

Master Wu fosters deep automaticities through repeated sessions of focused conscious attention on various aspects of a fast tale performance and his feedback loop brings new elements into the conscious awareness of his learners. As his students continued to solidify their stories through subsequent re-rehearsal performances, he reintroduced things he had previously covered in new ways. The repeated performance of each story forced students to regularly practice the underlying verbal script as well as fundamental structures and skills at the same time they were gradually compiling a complex but integrated memory of the performance by adding new layers to it (movements, expressions, voice intonation and inflection, character voices and personalities, moods, and feelings). During each subsequent return to a performance, Master Wu refocused learner attention on higher level aspects of the performance. He was able to do so because the layers of memory formed earlier—verbal script, movements, etc.—required less and less conscious attention, which freed up mental faculties to attend to higher level phenomena. The basic layers of performance memory Master Wu had novice performers focus on included:

1) the ban, including beat patterns and rhythm

2) a verbal script
3) a layer combining the verbal script with musical accompaniment

4) movements

5) facial expressions

6) character construction, including voice makeovers, voice intonation and inflection, personalities, and moods

7) feelings

In creating these layered memories, Master Wu was utilizing what James Gee (2003: 69) calls a cycle of automatization. Through repeated practice of fundamental aspects of performance, learners developed a routinized mastery of performance skills, which Master Wu then helped them to undo to achieve a higher level of competence. That is, when he pointed out new aspects of a performance for learners to integrate, they had to relearn the entire performance and develop a new routinized mastery of the performance with the new element. This spiraling competence and routinization of target skills created deep automaticities for basic skills and verbal scripts, while the physical act of performing offered opportunities for muscular realization of the verbal script (Donald, 2001). In other words, learning by doing stimulated all of the learners’ senses and involved physical movement both of which increased sources of learning and strengthened links to memory for the learning activity. In performance, the distinct layers of memory became integrated into one recallable unit. The performance in context format also allowed Master Wu to observe and
assess both learners’ behaviors and strategies in action, which afforded him the opportunity to initiate a structured feedback loop to guide learner progress.

When coupled with the theoretical arguments of Donald, Walker and Noda, and Gee, Master Wu’s practical example provides strong evidence that suggests we should be treating language teaching the way we treat the teaching of other complex skills such as sports, music, dance and traditional art forms. This approach can easily be implemented in the language classroom even in the initial stages of learning. For example, when teaching a first year Chinese class on greetings, students can be required to memorize the verbal script of a dialogue between two strangers. During class performance, the first attempts at performance can focus on the accurate production of the verbal script. Instruction should not stop at this rudimentary level, however. In subsequent rehearsal performances, student attention can be shifted to accurate tones, fluency with accuracy, smooth intonation, body movements and appropriate behavioral culture, facial expressions, social roles, moods, and personalities.

**Informational Feedback**

Feedback is an integral part of any learning environment. In general, Master Wu’s approach to feedback was syncretic. He varied feedback mode, style and content for all learners and tailored feedback to each individual student, instructional goals, and the context at hand. Master Wu mixed positive feedback with harsh criticisms and direct comparisons with other learners. Sometimes he
allowed learners to obtain feedback from the internal structure of the events (by watching his own model performances or the performances of peers and by allowing the learner to elicit audience feedback during live performances). At others he provided verbal feedback by directly stating what the student had done well or poorly. One technique that he frequently used to motivate students was to praise their performances while talking to others present such as parents, grandparents, classmates, or audience members at live performances rather than directly offering praise to the student. He also mixed in regular behavioral feedback by modeling correct behavior or by demonstrating what a learner was doing so that he or she and others could see what was desirable or undesirable. Along with this type of behavioral feedback, Master Wu made physical feedback a regular component of training sessions. When learners performed well, he patted them on the back or slapped them lightly on the cheek as he offered verbal praise. When they performed particularly well, he rewarded them by asking them to kiss him on the cheek in front of the class. Master Wu supplemented these types of feedback by offering reinforcement with nods, smiles, applause, and other displays of attention as well as through his own behavior (excitedly jumping out of his chair, etc.) or lack of response.

Master Wu’s model suggests though that the type of feedback affects training outcomes. First, Master Wu’s feedback loop isolated target skills upon which learners could focus their attention. During re-rehearsal, he often had
students return to the same thing (skill, phrase, movement, etc.) at a higher level of awareness despite student protests that they “already knew” that element or had “already done” that performance. With each return to a performance, Master Wu drew student attention to new aspects of the performance by bringing them into conscious awareness. As previously encountered knowledge became solidified in memory through practice in context, learner attentional faculties were freed up to deal with the new elements pointed out by Master Wu. When talking about playing the ban, Master Wu described this process as “moving things from the conscious to the subconscious”. He said that one must practice the ban until the act of playing no longer occupies one’s conscious attention. Later, as the students got the words down, Master Wu corrected their tones, intonation, interpretation of meanings, facial expressions, movements and so on. This required him to continually reassess and redefine learning goals for each student so that he could customize their progression of difficulty. The idea was that the expectation for what each student could and did do was slightly different although Master Wu did not always make this known to the students.

Second, Master Wu always made it a priority to provide feedback immediately after performance while the memory of the performance was still fresh and before the learner forgot what he or she had done. He also reinforced personal progress already made by the learner. Rather than focusing learner attention on what they could not do, he regularly pointed out what they were now
able to do that they previously could not. For example, while learning to play the
ban, the first time I produced the flower beat during the performance of a story,
Master Wu excitedly yelled, “Look you’re playing a flower beat!” Actually, the
overall performance was not that good. Much of my attention was on producing
the new beat pattern rather than on other aspects of the performance. Nonetheless,
his positive reinforcement of my attempts to expand my repertoire was motivating.

Third, Master Wu always provided clear, informational feedback or
designed training activities that generated such feedback. He told them exactly
what to correct, he had them practice in front of mirrors so that they could see
their own facial expressions and movements, and he had them watch the video
tapes I was making of their performances. By informational, I mean that Master
Wu provided specific, relevant information that the student could use to improve
their performance (White, 1959). Master Wu was as specific as possible, only
correcting the learner when he could tell them exactly what needed correction:
what words sounded slightly off, what movement was not crisp enough, what
expression or movement was not perfectly timed, and where intonation, tones, and
pronunciation problems were evident. Students then knew exactly what to focus
their attention on when re-performing. The importance of this form of specific,
informational feedback actually only became clear to me as I was teaching
Chinese to Americans after my apprenticeship. American learners who had yet to
develop the ability to monitor their own performances did not know what they
were not doing correctly, especially in the case of incorrect tones. When I corrected them using very specific information (the tone on ‘x’ is a third tone, not a second tone), they were then able to make adjustments. Otherwise, they did not know what the problem was. Master Wu’s final step, always having the students re-perform after feedback, was also quite effective in improving learner performance. This element of Master Wu’s feedback is often missing from our language classrooms but should be emphasized. It is not enough to have students perform and provide them with feedback because deep learning and behavioral adjustments only occur when the student has the opportunity to re-perform after having received the directed feedback.

Fourth, Master Wu created frequent opportunities for novice performers to have successful performances, which in turn generated motivation intrinsically. Master Wu did this with his students by having them perform for their peers, parents and grandparents who were observing classes, or any visitor who came to study classes. With his apprentices, he accomplished this by arranging for them to accompany him to lunches, dinners, and other social events (as well as to his own performances once the apprentice was working at a more sophisticated level). In these social situations, Master Wu created the opportunity for the student to perform in a way that he knew they could be successful. That is, while in live situations in front of others, he rarely had learners try newer stories or use recently learned skills. He encouraged students when they made attempts to do so.
on their own and he scaffolded apprentice performance as necessary but he framed such performances in a way as to highlight things the apprentice could already do well. He did this because feedback that fostered intrinsic motivation was often more effective, although he did not state it in these terms. For Master Wu, variety in feedback was important so he occasionally used all forms. However, extrinsic rewards such as money, prizes, deadlines, surveillance (he occasionally threatened to call students’ parents to have them monitor practice), or threats of punishment were used less frequently, while intrinsically motivating activities were regularly used. This type of intrinsic motivation can easily be integrated to enhance existing language programs. Students can be required to locate and speak with a native speaker outside of class, non-teacher natives can occasionally be invited to visit classes, and students can be coached on when, where, and how to locate Chinese in the local community.

**Cycle of Training**

As has been detailed thus far, Master Wu’s cycle of training begins with a period of acclimation and the teaching of fundamentals skills. That is followed by a period of performance rehearsal in which the learner is guided into a metadiscourse about performance. A model of goal performance is then presented by the master or another skilled performer. Learners are then given a verbal script to memorize. Training then continues with repeated cycles of learner performance followed by directed informational feedback and learner adjustment so that each
element critical for performance is moved into and then out of conscious focus.

The first ten steps in the process of building a performance are listed here:

**Cycle of Training**

1) period of acclimation and practice of fundamental skills
2) foster metadiscourse about performance (ability to talk about)
3) model performance (by master or skilled performers)
4) memorization of verbal script
5) learner performance
6) directed informational feedback
7) learner adjustment
8) repeat performance at a more sophisticated level
9) directed informational feedback
10) learner adjustment
As learners’ performances became more automatic and sophisticated, Master Wu initiated phase two of his training regimen by arranging opportunities for live performances before small audiences. In the beginning, many of these live performances were collaborative but they always gradually shifted to independent performances by the learner. These experiences generated audience feedback, explicit or implicit (applause, praise, lack of etc.) that allowed learners to make further refinements to their performances. The cycle then repeated for the same and new stories. The four steps in this phase of training were as follows:

1) performance for live small audiences (collaborative, then independent)
2) audience feedback (explicit or implicit)
3) learner adjustment
4) repeat cycle

Creating Social Experiences

In their book, *The Experience Economy*, Pine and Gilmore (1999) argue for a shift to an experience economy, one that involves companies staging experiences for their customers that involve them in unfolding stories (like that in a theme park) and engage them in personal and memorable ways. They suggest that staging transforming experiences (that change us in some way) organized around particular themes yield longer lasting memories. Master Wu has never read Pine and Gilmore’s book, but during the second major phase of his training
regimen, his role clearly shifted from model and guide to that of an experience orchestrator. He first equipped his students to learn from social experiences by teaching them how to talk about them as well as what and how to observe the events. Then he created opportunities for his apprentices to perform in front of live audiences, to practice in front of small groups of people, and to have experiences in the local culture that left lasting memories. Afterwards, he coached his students through post-experience metacognitive review and analysis of those experiences.

Master Wu’s bungling performances and period of soaking up culture demonstrate that learning experiences in a culture can be orchestrated and that guided participation in cultural activities is instructional. Through these experiences, Master Wu’s students learned about the contexts in which fast tales occur, were able to observe the behaviors and speech of other participants, and had the chance to observe the next step they were to take in their own performances (in Master Wu’s model performances). This approach also demonstrates that being exposed to such experiences is not enough to facilitate the development of new skills or long lasting memories. Master Wu took the next step by having the students learn by doing things themselves. He created opportunities in which the students could take risks (perform at the edge of their

255 This is what teachers are both in the classroom where they create a 48 minute Chinese experience (whether they realize it or not, that is the Chinese experience for most students) and in study abroad which is much more obvious when every aspect of life has to be accounted for.
level of competence) in real world contexts where consequences were lowered (he scaffolded their performances when they broke down and arranged audiences of familiar people at first). During these experiences, his students had opportunities to try out what they had learned in multiple settings; opportunities to transfer what they had learned to varying contexts, which solidified learning content in memory and deepened their understanding of how to use what they were learning. The live experiences in culture also allowed Master Wu’s students to experiment, make discoveries on their own, and to have both successful and unsuccessful performances, which fostered intrinsic motivation. His learners were able to use target behaviors while participating in the production of performance elements already under control, which regularly showed them their growing mastery of performance related skills (signaled their on going achievements). At the same time, they were able to see what they still needed to learn. By plugging his apprentices into the local community in this way, Master Wu also increased their sources of learning because everyone around them then became potential teachers.

Master Wu’s model demonstrates the critical nature of social experience in learning and suggests an important role for study abroad in the foreign language learning process. Students learning Chinese must have opportunities to gain experience during social interaction to supplement their classroom learning or they will not move beyond rudimentary levels of competence. Moreover, study abroad experiences must be carefully orchestrated to foster deep learning. That is,
the study abroad component of a successful language program cannot be a place where students go to do what they do in the regular language classroom, nor should it be a summer vacation that requires students to only engage the target culture in the role of tourist. Social experiences can and should also be integrated into a language program during the period of formal instruction before study abroad begins. Measures can be taken to generate experiences in local Chinese communities in a students’ home country and instructors can orchestrate students’ integration into those communities as part of a program of instruction.

**Training for Autonomy**

The experience of Shandong fast tale storytellers shows us how a rigorous regimen of performance that includes repetitive cycles of increasingly sophisticated guided rehearsal, scaffolded performance in real life cultural experiences supported by directed informational feedback, and subsequent rehearsal is a proven method through which to deeply internalize memories of enactable segments of culture. Fast tale learners constructed integrated memories of their performances through repeated rehearsal over time. Then, through social experiences created by Master Wu, they further refined and elaborated their performances. Rather than disseminating knowledge, Master Wu saw what he was doing as teaching an approach to life, which students could then imitate and apply after the formal learning period ended. He required his students to first live up to
the expectations of the tradition and then to develop their own style but, first, and foremost, Master Wu was teaching his students a way of doing things, a methodology for developing one’s own performances. The goal of his training was to produce Shandong fast tale performers, individuals who could independently produce meanings in a particular way of speaking that evoked positive audience responses.

To achieve that goal, he taught his students the skills they would need to learn on their own from their surrounding environment as well as the strategies needed to be effective learners of culture on their own. Master Wu understood that novices to any specialized domain of knowledge have to learn how to learn in that domain. Following this approach, in the initial stages of any learning situation, the role of the teacher should include teaching smart learning, or showing the most effective and efficient methods for developing desired skills. Master Wu guided his students and built them up through a gradual shift from scaffolded to independent performance and interaction but the ultimate responsibility for learning was placed squarely on the shoulders of the student. As a model, guide, coach, motivator, and fan, Master Wu offered his students a way of learning that organized and prioritized their training, which ultimately improved their economy of study. Because what the students were learning were principles for effective learning, they were
able to develop their own performance skills and eventually did not need to have their master present to perform.

Along their path of development, Master Wu orchestrated experiences that led them in new directions and stretched their skills. His multiphase approach accounted for the fact that gaps exist between most training environments and real world performance contexts while student transitions to live performances showed that if target skills have not been used in training, they may not be easily called upon once in full blown performance. He supplemented formal classroom study classes with out-of-class social experiences in which the students could participate, which allowed discovery learning to take place. Equally important, he not only orchestrated such experiences but he showed them how to learn from and how to evaluate such experiences so that they could eventually do so on their own by imitating his approach. His training program involved regular structured feedback that was informational in nature and he continuously refocused learner attention on new aspects of each performance but he did so in a way that permitted learners to have both successful and unsuccessful performance experiences, which fostered intrinsic motivation. By fostering a metanarrative and metareflection about performance by his students, he equipped them with the tools necessary to become autonomous from his instruction.
Master Wu’s pedagogy mirrors the performed culture approach of Walker and Noda (or the other way around depending on one’s perspective). Both pedagogical approaches have as their goal creating independent production of complex skills. In the case of Master Wu, it is Shandong fast tale performers. For Walker and Noda, it is independent producers of East Asian languages who have high levels of cultural competence. The idea that we should be training students that do not need us to accompany them everywhere they go seems quite simple but this first requires us as language teachers to equip them with the skills they need to learn from target culture environments on their own as well as the capability to monitor their own performances.

**Becoming Part of a Cognitive Collective**

Master Wu’s pedagogy of Shandong fast tales suggests that as teachers and learners of culture, we should shift our attention from linguistic structures and grammatical rules to becoming part of a community, a participant in a community of practice (Lave, 1991). Regardless of how well we understand a grammatical system, it is the social nature of language use and the social functions of language that determine our success within a cultural community. The ability to use language appropriately within the contexts of a culture is a prerequisite to successful social interaction. This means that learners must participate in social activities (whether they be simulated classroom scenarios, rehearsal performances,
or live in-culture events similar to those orchestrated by Master Wu) if they are to
develop the ability to use a language. Bruner’s work shows us that without social
interaction in the target language, pedagogical materials, classroom drills, and
homework will yield, at best, limited results. It suggests that language learning
materials need to be organized around or embedded within social/cultural contexts
of use, drills need to be linked to use in a social/cultural context, and learners
need to be given opportunities to interact in the social contexts of the target
culture outside of class.

Master Wu’s social experiences functioned in this manner, as culturally-
organized, joint activities that incorporated learners into the scene as novice
participants. Michael Cole (1996: 206) has argued that this type of joint activity is
one necessary ingredient in language acquisition. The point here is that although
anthropologists and folklorists can document and analyze cultural patterns and
behavior, and bodies of abstract knowledge about such practices can be generated,
the ability to generate meanings within such complicated webs of norms, rules
and meaning inform those analyses and are what have allowed these individuals
to reach the point where they can reflect on the cultural groups they describe in an
abstract manner. The ability to negotiate those meanings however cannot be
gained solely by reading such accounts. It can only be achieved through the joint
negotiation of meanings in practice and through first-hand trial and error
experience.
By integrating his apprentices into local social circles, Master Wu made them part of a cognitive community. By showing them how to enlist the members of that community in their learning process, Master Wu equipped his students to achieve the deepest levels of understanding about and highest levels of sophistication in their performances. What this shows us is that when conceptual learning is understood as a collaborative enterprise, culture, as a forum, becomes the focus of pedagogical attention. It is the locus of social learning. Children learn through dialogue with adults, who provide props and guide them. Likewise, foreign language learners need to engage in dialogue with members of the target culture, or at least with culturally competent non-natives, who can coach them and facilitate the acquisition of new meanings. Simply put, Americans who want to learn Chinese at advanced levels need to learn how to mean in Chinese, which is a communal activity accomplished in collaboration with Chinese people. We need our students to become both consumers of and producers of Chinese modes of thinking and doing but we need to first equip them with the skills to do that on their own once we remove the scaffolding we build into our pedagogical activities. Learners must also be able to enlist members of the target culture,

256 I borrow the useful idea of consumers and producers of meaning from James Gee (2003: 15). While discussing the need to develop literacy in a variety of domains, Gee states, “One can know a good deal about a social practice—such as arguing before the Supreme Court, carrying out an experiment in nuclear physics, or memorializing an event in gang history through graffiti—without actually being able to participate in the social practice. But knowing about a social practice always involves recognizing various ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, knowing, and using various objects and technologies that constitute the social practice.” Gee goes on to argue, “While you don’t need to be able to enact a particular social practice (e.g., play basketball or argue before a court) to be able to understand texts from or about that social practice, you
who are not necessarily trained in language pedagogy, in their learning processes. They also must know how to enlist the help of others, who are not necessarily pre-disposed to interacting on friendly terms with Americans, to enculturate them.

As is the case with parent-child exchanges, these processes of enculturation typically begin as controlled dyadic interaction and the social-interactional constraints provided by everyday activities serve as formats (Bruner, 1982). That simply means that learners begin doing things to and with members of the target culture in simple dyadic exchanges such as greetings, buying things, and giving/getting directions. These culturally scripted activities can and do serve as rule-bound microcosms of human interaction. As a parent takes a child out into the community, introducing people, places and things in a controlled manner, the child’s cultural environment continually expands and through guided interaction, the child’s role in that environment gradually increases. Master Wu did the same as he included his apprentices in everyday social activities, introduced friends and acquaintances, and showed them how to participate in such activities. In second culture contexts, we expand our cultural circles by participating in cultural performances. We may begin with a simple performance found in a particular location such as buying things at a local shop. But, as we develop a comfort level with that group of people and that type of performance, we may expand by...
moving on to a larger surrounding market place, and gradually then move on to context after context, performance type after performance type gaining experience and compiling memories of those experiences.

In his book *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition*, Michael Tomasello (1999) argues, “it is historical and ontogenetic processes, not any specialized biological adaptations directly, that have done the actual work in creating many if not all of the most distinctive and important cognitive products and processes of the species homo sapiens (11).” Tomasello suggests that language learning results only from general cognitive abilities and the interaction between learners and their surrounding communities. For Tomasello, human cultural learning is possible because humans developed the ability to understand their conspecifics as intentional beings like themselves, what he describes as “putting yourself in the mental shoes of someone else (6).” This uniquely human ability to identify with other humans’ intentional and mental states is what sets us apart from other species and what provided the foundation for the emergence of what he calls a “cognitive collectivity”. This, in turn, “enabled new forms of cultural learning and sociogenesis, which led to cultural artifacts and behavioral traditions that accumulate modifications over historical time.” The idea is that once capable of recognizing likeminded intentional beings, humans began using the cultural symbols and artifacts they were able to construct to participate in collective cognitive and social activities. These activities and artifacts then became
conventionalized as they were passed from generation to generation. In Tomasello’s view, culture sets the context for cognitive development of children in two ways. It provides a cognitive habitus within which that development can occur and it is the source of active instruction from adults. Imitative learning coupled with active instruction from adults facilitates the infant’s acquisition of the cultural and linguistic skills necessary to participate in the surrounding social world. So, for Tomasello, like Bruner and Cole, becoming a member of a culture means learning new things with and through other competent members of the culture over an extended period of time. What Tomasello’s argument adds is that the uniquely human social-cognitive ability to participate in culture has no direct causal genetic connection to our ancestors but rather should be understood as a process that takes many months and years to unfold as children at various stages of development interact with their physical and social environments.

Like Bruner, Tomasello tells us that “children learn new words in the on-going flow of social interaction in which they and the adult are trying to do things (113).” Echoing Bruner, he argues that children are able to participate in a cognitive collectivity from about nine to twelve months of age when they first begin to make attempts to share attention with and to imitatively learn from and through their conspecifics.257 For Tomasello, human children use cultural learning

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257 Tomasello argues that the fact that humans began engaging in joint-attentional activities indicates the development of an emergent understanding of others as intentional agents. This emergence of joint attention
skills to acquire linguistic and other communicative symbols, which enable them to access “ways previous generations in a social group have found it useful to categorize and construe the world for purposes of interpersonal communication (8).” Tomasello believes that:

“human children grow up in the midst of these socially and historically constituted artifacts and traditions, which enables them to benefit form the accumulated knowledge and skills of their social groups, acquire and use perspectively-based cognitive representations in the form of linguistic symbols and, internalize certain types of discourse interactions into skills of metacognition, representational description and dialogic thinking (10).”

Tomasello’s theoretical work and Master Wu’s practical example explicitly show that there is a particular type of environment in which learning occurs and that the traditions of the larger social group (the activities and artifacts in the cultural environment that have become conventionalized as they were passed from generation to generation) affect that learning—we use the experience of others in our social group to gain competence in the ways of the group. If we do this to learn how to communicate in our native cultures, it should provide insights for learning non-native cultures as well. The suggestion is that we need to learn the shared ideas, artifacts, and skills valued by and frequently found in the target culture that shape patterns and rules of discourse. And, as we do subconsciously in our own base cultures, we must develop the ability to think about these on the metacognitive level.

can be seen now in younger infants as they engage in dyadic relations with objects and with other humans in turn taking styles (62).
Relationship-Oriented Learning

If we are going to learn from and through others, we need to first recognize their intentions and intentional states, an ability that must be developed with extended interaction in social exchanges with other culturally competent people. And, we cannot simply use the patterns and cues found in our base culture; the rules and patterns of intentional work are culturally defined. As learners, we need to recognize what intentions are possible differ depending on the cultural environment we are in. Moreover, after recognizing the fact that they can differ, we need to be trained on situations in which they differ from our base culture, how to interpret those intentions according to target culture norms, how to establish our own intentions in target culture ways, and what the raw materials of intention building look like in the target culture in order to be able to begin to learn from the environment and through the locals. This is a strong argument for a pedagogical approach that focuses both on the social norms of particular places and one that incorporates the development of interpersonal relationships into basic language learning strategies. It also suggests that foreign language instruction would be most efficient if it combined interaction with the target culture environment and directed instruction from members of that culture. First, learners must make members of the target culture—Chinese in this case—see value in them as individuals so that they actively engage in enculturation and socialization processes that incorporate the new member into the community social world.
Second, the individual learner must calibrate both his/her behaviors and cognitive orientation in order to sync with the members and norms of the new culture so that she or he can actively participate in target culture events in modes recognized and accepted by that group (Hall, 1966, 1976; Shepherd, 2005).

The idea is that to access deep levels of cultural meaning, at the same time the learner adjusts his cultural behavior by thinking, “If I were in their shoes…”; he or she needs to make experienced members of the target culture want to put themselves in his or her shoes and tell him or her, “If I were in your shoes….” Simply put, no matter what our American cultural myths tell us about individualism and doing it on our own, and no matter how many people insist they have learned foreign languages all on their own, learning a foreign language to the point of a sophisticated capacity to be able to communicate in a second culture is a collaborative endeavor. We cannot do it on our own.

By establishing, maintaining, and repairing human relationships in culturally appropriate ways, learners will be more successful at reaching sophisticated levels than those who do not. By focusing on relationships, learners can build learning networks of peers and mentors who can carry learning well beyond any program of formal instruction. Fostering emotional and functional support networks not only facilitates understanding but also increases one’s ability to move in the target culture. According to this view, the learner must actively construct a persona in the target culture by making acculturating
moves—he or she must adjust cognitively and behaviorally while engaging in shared meaning-making activities with target culture community members. At the same time, learners must enlist mentors—people competent in the target culture—who take steps to enculturate—socialize—the learner in the norms and expectations of the group during the course of shared experiences. Cultural mentors are not necessarily engaged in a teaching-related profession but can be any competent member of the target culture with whom a learner develops a special relationship of trust and confidence. The mentor-protégé relationship is a special relationship that is vital to any outsider’s ultimate success in integrating into a new group. Mentors are not teachers but are generally viewed as wise and trusted counselors on how to handle life situations so they are typically more experienced people who derive pleasure from helping younger, less-experienced individuals. Mentors are trusted coaches who know and understand the learner, including his or her strengths and weaknesses. From the learner perspective, the mentor is not just someone who gives you advice, but is someone whose advice you follow. The idea is that instruction highlighting strategies that evoke active instruction from target culture members would best prepare learners to participate in those environments.

Moreover, as the Shandong fast tale training model suggests, these two processes—acculturation and enculturation—cannot take place in a vacuum if deep-level meaning making is to occur. They must occur in the midst of
accomplishing specific tasks within larger cultural activities. Every sociocultural environment, every community, has created cultural mechanisms—institutions, ideas, practices, activities, myths, stories—that generate and sustain the salient meanings binding the constituents of that community. While gaining experience negotiating new meanings with members of target culture communities, language learners must also develop the ability to access and interact with these cultural mechanisms as well as the meanings they sustain. Learners then must construct memories based on these new experiences in target culture activities that are framed by the target culture rather than basing them solely on past base culture experiences. At the same time they are compiling these new memories, learners must also access the old memories of the target culture because all behavioral actions by any community members, including speech, thought, and more complex social moves, are informed by a history of shared experiences, a cultural tradition. To access these shared traditions we must learn the pool of stories that the given culture already knows and tells. Learning the shared pool of stories that sustain a group’s social interactions involves developing the abilities to understand and appreciate the stories others tell. It also involves developing the abilities to participate in the group’s on-going social stories. And, critical for our purposes, it includes generating new stories that conform to formats recognizable to the members of the group. Equally important if we want to integrate into a
particular social group, we must learn how to evoke appropriate stories at appropriate times through the performance of culture.

If we think of the process of learning foreign languages as the process of learning to participate in an on-going cognitive collectivity, learners do not need to merely memorize word lists, sentences and grammatical patterns without a purpose or context. The purpose becomes developing the ability to recognize and participate in the cognitive collectivity of the target culture, which may be drastically different from that of his or her base culture, and the contexts come from the activities and traditions of the target culture itself. Becoming a participant in the cognitive collectivity of the target culture can be accomplished by becoming conversant in the use of the intentions and artifacts of the target culture community. Thus, our goal as instructors should mirror Master Wu’s approach of creating target culture experiences within which learners have opportunities to be exposed to and that require them to engage the members, artifacts, and traditions that make up that culture. By participating in target culture community activities, learners are exposed to opportunities to develop the ability to manipulate the symbols and artifacts of the target culture in conventional ways while accomplishing specific tasks in collaboration with members of the target culture. Such experiences serve as a foundation for memories used in subsequent
interactions and the symbols and artifacts constitute much of the backdrop within which all intentions and actions are interpreted.

However, entry into on-going cognitive systems does not guarantee cognitive development. Learners must also develop the capacity to participate in those new cognitive systems. For deep-level learning to occur and long-term target culture memories to be internalized, learners must have target culture experiences that force them to exchange and negotiate meanings and intentions with members of the target culture. This means that learners need to understand how to, as Tomasello describes, share attention with members of target culture communities as well as understand how to learn from and through conspecifics. This calls for a focus on how relationships are developed and maintained in the target culture, something rarely explicitly associated with language learning. I suggest that learners must develop lasting and meaningful relationships with members of the target culture community in order to both participate in their social activities and to enlist them in their learning processes if they are to reach advanced levels of language use and cultural understanding.


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