China is not only among the world’s most ancient literary cultures. She also houses very sophisticated and age-old traditions of oral storytelling, shuoshu 說書. Chinese storytelling—as a profession of entertainment—is a verbal performance art that is described in written sources from the Song dynasty period (960-1279). While knowledge of early storytelling is of a general and fragmentary nature, many individual local storytelling traditions in China today can boast a documented history of 2-400 years.

This article will deal with the genre called pinghua 評話, belonging to the area of the Lower Yangzi River in Jiangsu province and featuring several local sub-genres, based on widely different dialects and performance styles. Here focus is on the variety, Yangzhou pinghua 扬州評話, found in the area around the city of Yangzhou, situated on the junction between the Yangzi River and the Grand Canal.

Until recently scripts, jiaoben 脚本, as aide-mémoire were seldom mentioned among the storytellers of Yangzhou. Storytellers often claimed ‘pure oral transmission’ for their tradition and denied the existence of scripts. Many storyteller families were not in possession of handed-down scripts for their performances. The article discusses the existence/non-existence of scripts, as well as various forms of extant scripts. What are the narrative and linguistic features of traditional storyteller’s scripts from the late Qing and early Republican period, ca 1880-1923? What kind of language style do they reflect? Where are the storytellers’ scripts situated on the evasive borderline between the written and oral mode of language?

Keywords: aide-mémoire, huaben, literacy, orality, oral literature, pinghua, promptbook, script, storytelling, storyteller’s manner, Yangzhou pinghua
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Keywords: aide-mémoire, huaben, literacy, orality, oral literature, pinghua, promptbook, script, storytelling, storyteller’s manner, Yangzhou pinghua

Introduction

China, one of the most ancient literary cultures in the world, is also the home of age-old oral traditions of storytelling, shuoshu 说書. Chinese storytelling—as a profession of entertainment—is a verbal performance art that is described in written sources from late Song (960-1279). In the history of Chinese literature, professional storytelling is a relatively late phenomenon, but as a verbal art of more than a thousand years' continuous oral tradition up to the present, it certainly has an awe-inspiring past. While knowledge of early storytelling is of a general and fragmentary nature, many individual local storytelling traditions in China today can boast a documented history of several hundred years. They are performed in the dialects of their respective home areas, and thus they lend themselves to studies both in historical perspective and in fieldwork among today’s performers. The present article treats the role of written scripts in connection with storytelling in order to discuss literary and linguistic features on the evasive borderline between the written and oral mode of language.

1 In May 2000, together with my friend, the late photographer Jette Ross (1936-2001), I had occasion not only to see, but also to photograph the scripts of some of the old storyteller families in Yangzhou. I wish to express my gratitude to the late Dai Buzhang and to Fei Li who both generously gave us access to their inherited family treasure for research purpose. October 2003 I visited Yangzhou again and collected more information about the scripts with the storytellers who owned them. My sincere thanks also go to Huang Ying, Yangzhou, who has written the character version of the performance by Dai Buzhang from the tape recording. The extract from the performance by Fei Li (Fei Zhengliang) is from a full version, published in Børdahl and Ross 2002. The study was initiated during my research stay at the Danish Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, 2001. The study is part of the project ‘Traditional Oral Culture in the Modern Media World of Asia—The Case of Chinese Storytelling’, financed by the Program for Cultural Studies, The Norwegian Research Council, Oslo.

2 The early professional storytelling was called shuohua 說話 [telling tales]. Later the general concept of storytelling was called shuoshu [telling texts or telling books], while many local genres had names closer to the original name, such as pinghua, a genre name with two different written representations: a) 平話 [plain tale] or b) 評話 [commented tale], cf. Levy 1999.

3 In the present article the word ‘script’ is used in the sense of a text that may serve as aide-mémoire, libretto, or other related purposes vis à vis oral performance. In order to avoid confusion ‘writing system’ or ‘calligraphic style’ is called ‘writing’ or ‘transcription’, not ‘script’.
The study deals with the storytelling genre called **pinghua** 評話, belonging to the area of the Lower Yangzi River in Jiangsu province and featuring several local subgenres, based on different dialects and performance styles. The most prominent are **Hangzhou pinghua** 杭州評話, **Suzhou pinghua** 蘇州評話 and **Yangzhou pinghua** 揚州評話. The mutual similarities between these subgenres of **pinghua**, which are obvious from the descriptions at hand, should, however, not be stressed at the expense of their differences. The question of the role of written scripts must be treated separately for each subgenre, and also within a subgenre do we apparently find a number of variables in the attitude to scripts and their usage/non-usage. Here focus is on the purely spoken (not chanted) kind of storytelling found in the area around the city of Yangzhou. Yangzhou storytelling, **Yangzhou pinghua**, belongs to the best documented traditions and has a particularly important place in the history of storytelling in China at large.

A short description of the performance situation of Yangzhou storytelling is needed to clarify the basic circumstances surrounding the art. There is normally only one performer, the storyteller, **shuoshu xiansheng** 說書先生 [storytelling master]. He tells a long saga, **shu** 書 [text, repertoire, ‘book’], divided into sessions of two-three hours at a time, called ‘a day of storytelling’, **yi tian shu** 一天書. The storyteller returns every day to the teahouse or storyhouse, **shuchang** 書場, where he is engaged, and continues his tale from day to day during a period of two to three months. The themes for the long sagas are based on historical, semi-historical or fictional adventures, and many of the oral sagas have counterparts in China’s traditional popular literature, such as **The Romance of the Three Kingdoms**, **Sanguo yanyi** 三國演義, **Water Margin**, **Shuihu zhuan** 水滸傳, and **Journey to the West**, **Xiyou ji** 西遊記 and other famous novels.

In contrast to other genres of storytelling (storysinging, balladsinging) in Yangzhou and elsewhere, the performer of **Yangzhou pinghua** has no assistant or musical accompaniment. He does not sing, but intermittently he recites poems. Some performances are entirely in prose with no poems, and all performances are predominantly in prose. Even though a certain amount of metric verse, both rhymed and non-rhymed, may occur, the genre is not prosimetric in the usual sense. The storytellers’ prose is, however, an artful kind of prose: passages of patterned prose, involving marked rhythm, assonance and grammatical/semantic parallelism are woven together with other kinds of artful prose, such as lively and individually coloured dialogue. Passages learnt by heart—whether in verse or in prose—alternate with passages of improvisation and recreation in a more free style.

Professional storytelling demands little in the way of scenery and equipment. Sometimes a performance will take place on the spur of the moment and the storyteller may tell an episode from his repertoire almost anywhere and with no props at all. The essential elements of his art are all in his memory and in his linguistic and bodily language. However, the usual setting of **Yangzhou pinghua** is well defined and has special characteristics, including a certain performance style, special speaking registers, and a set of usual requisites. Among the storyteller’s technical vocabulary describing the requisites...

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4 Situated on the junction between the Yangzi River and the Grand Canal, midway between modern Shanghai and Nanjing, Yangzhou is one of the famous old cultural cities of China, formerly of major importance for administration, transport and trade between South and North China.

5 **Yangzhou pinghua** can be traced in historical sources going back to the sixteenth century, and one of the earliest storytellers from the vicinity of Yangzhou, Liu Jingting 柳敬亭 (1587-ca.1670), is considered the ‘ancestor of storytelling’ in China at large, cf. Zhongguo da baike quanshu. Xiqu—Quyi 1983, p. 222, and Børdahl and Ross 2002, pp.61-62.


and the requirements of performance, ‘scripts’ or other kinds of written materials are conspicuously absent.  

Performance, script and the rise of vernacular literature

There are many categories of texts that can be subsumed under the idea of ‘script’. Sometimes certain Chinese terms for ‘script’ (huaben, jiaoben, diben) are translated into English as ‘prompt-book’, a term taken from Western drama, where a prompter sits below the stage in a so-called prompt-box whispering to the performers in case they forget their next line. A script - in the sense of a prompt-book used by a prompter (who is not a character in the play) during performance - is not used for traditional Chinese theatre, and it is unthinkable in the setting of Chinese storytelling. But traditional Chinese theatre did certainly have scripts of other kinds: Some were like the scenarios of Italian commedia dell’arte, rough outlines of plot, characters to enter and exit, and words for the important arias to be sung. The better part of the performance had to be improvised according to style and mannerisms learned during years of training since youth. Other kinds of drama scripts became literary genres, librettos and dramatexts, meant both for the actors’ preparation of performance, for the audience as a guide to understanding the drama during performance, and for reading outside the context of theatrical performance. The most developed form had not only poetry of arias, but also wordings of dialogue in prose more or less completely written out.

What about scripts for storytelling? From a historical perspective, the question is intimately connected with the rise of vernacular fiction in China since the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) periods. It is generally acknowledged that the Chinese short story and novel written in vernacular Chinese, baihua (as opposed to literary or classical Chinese, wenyan) developed in part from the professional art of storytelling, ‘telling tales’, shuohua, that was widespread in the large cities of medieval China during Song. The earliest collections of short stories in vernacular written style, so-called ‘tale books’ or ‘prompt-books’, huaben, date from the thirteenth century, while the
earliest novel-like books, so-called folk books or 'plain tales', Pinghua 平話, are from the thirteenth-fourteenth century. The novel proper, 'chapter divided fiction', zhanghui 章回小説, has come down to us in editions beginning from the sixteenth century. Was there a connection between the early ‘tale books’ and ‘plain tales’ to possible, but non-extant storytellers’ scripts?

It is a prominent feature of Chinese fiction, both short story and novel, baihua xiaoshuo 白話小說, that it is written in the ‘storytelling style’ or ‘storyteller’s manner’, i.e. the narrative form simulates the situation of the storyteller in performance in front of his audience. The ‘simulacrum of oral storytelling’ became more and more developed during the first centuries (thirteenth–seventeenth century), while it was used in a more playful and individually coloured fashion during the later period (eighteenth–nineteenth century). It was often a stereotypical genre convention, but a convention that gave room for ironic distance and meta-narrative reflexion. The development of a ‘storyteller’s manner’ in Chinese popular literature does not in itself prove much about the relationship of the written genres of short story and novel to oral storytelling, but the varying linguistic usage of patterns and markers constituting the framework of the ‘manner’ are nevertheless strong indicators of the interdependence between spoken language and written representation during the centuries of establishment of the vernacular style. The interdisciplinary research on linguistic markers and narratological frameworks has not only contributed to well-founded knowledge about the dating of individual texts among these genres, but also to a whole new conception about the rise of the vernacular literature in China.

As for the oral storytelling of the Song period, the existence of different schools with different repertoires, names and nicknames of performers, the circumstances of the performance, etc is documented in contemporary guidebooks to the pleasure quarters of the cities. The performances as such are of course lost forever, since the only way of preserving them would have been by writing. The origin of the earliest huaben and Pinghua texts is a much disputed question. That there is a connection to oral performance seems generally accepted. The variation among the transmitted texts suggests a number of possibilities. Some texts might have been printed versions of storyteller’s scripts, published more or less in their original manuscript form. Some might have been ‘notations of performances’, i.e. literary men, inspired by oral performances, wrote down the words of the storyteller in a fairly authentic notational form with a view to publication; or the other way round, literary men might have created stories from folklore and hearsay in order to provide scripts for the storytellers’ usage. The novels are also considered to be collected and edited from oral materials, alongside with other sources of influence (drama, historical chronicle).

The circumstances under which oral-related documents are created are often highly obscure. In the words of Liangyan Ge: “The text could be situated at any point along the
line of transition from the oral to the written without being directly used as a promptbook in an actual oral presentation.” The difference between writing/scripting for oneself (aide-mémoire for performances by oneself or by disciples), writing/creating for performers (draft composition to be implemented by professional storytellers), and writing/editing for others (potential readers outside the profession) is not necessarily very clear-cut or distinguishable on the evidence from the written texts handed down. This is part of the reason why the question about early storytelling and its connection to the written legacy of vernacular literature in China is an extremely complicated issue. Whatever the link between early huaben literature and early storytelling, there is a need to distinguish between on the one hand the so-called ‘storyteller’s style’ in huaben, Pinghua and zhanghui xiaoshuo literature and, on the other hand, possible remnants of storytellers’ written scripts, incorporated into the early samples of this literature.

Oral tradition did not die out in China when the thematics were written down in short story form or novel. Just the opposite was the case. From the sixteenth-seventeenth century the novel became a major literary genre, enjoyed by large sections of the population. At the same time storytelling was a thriving occupation. The storytellers continued to tell the story cycles of former times. One theory is that as soon as the novels were written down and published in printed form, they had a fundamental impact on the storytellers’ performances and actually became a kind of public ‘script’ or blueprint for the storytellers, an absolute turning point in the development of the oral repertoires. Another theory is that the publication of the novels did not basically change anything in the storytellers’ practice and habits. They continued their business as before in the orally dominated circles of society, while the books became part of the literary circulation, a kind of sideeffect. The oral transmission was still the basic source of oral tradition, not books.

It is beyond doubt that many of the story cycles performed orally have a rather close relationship to literary sources. In some cases the materials at hand allow a reconstruction of the way borrowing and adaptation between books for reading, performance-related writings and oral performance have taken place—back and forth. What seems clear is that the questions must be formulated so that they can be answered within the specific culture and genre under study. The interesting answers seem to be hidden in the detail rather than in sweeping statements.

Therefore the existence of scripts, their narrative and linguistic structure, and their usage among today’s storytellers may furnish some fresh evidence, not only with a view to the mnemotechnique of the professional storytellers of twentieth century China, but also with a view to the relationship of the early vernacular writings to oral performance.

**STORYTELLER’S SCRIPT IN MODERN TIME**

During the 1920s-50s, as Chinese researchers of literature oriented themselves more and more towards the oral origins of the vernacular stream in Chinese literature, they began to collect and study the still living oral arts. The question whether the storytellers of the twentieth century did or did not have scripts was given much attention in the early 1960s. Chinese folklorists came up with different theories, because they obtained different answers from their informants, the storytellers. Some storytellers said, they did not have

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22 Ge 2001, p.60.
23 The scholarly debate is summarized and clarified in Ge 2001, pp. 29-31, 59-61, 218.
24 This line of thought is widespread among Chinese literary historians, cf. for example Duan Baolin 1990, pp. 74, 86.
25 The various arguments are summarized and discussed in Børdahl 1996, pp.221-243, particularly 223-225.
scripts, *diben* or *jiaoben* 腳本, in fact, many storytellers were stubbornly denying the existence of scripts in their tradition. Others said they did have scripts. Who was right, who was wrong, was anybody lying? And if so, why? And how did storytellers learn their profession? From scripts, or not? It turned out: everybody was right. The storytellers did not have scripts, and—they did have scripts, that is: some storytellers had scripts, others did not have any.27

*Transmitting by the mouth*

Most Yangzhou storytellers, whether from poor conditions or better off—and storytelling was quite often a lucrative profession—would have received the traditional education from master to disciple, called 'transmitting by the mouth and teaching from the heart', *kou chuan xin shou* 口授心授. The young disciples learned their repertoires by listening to and imitating their master. Some storytellers were illiterate or semi-illiterate. Others had some school education. But this had little to say for the education as a storyteller. The art was transmitted solely by oral-aural and visual methods. Gestics and mime were essential ingredients and probably important for memory. However, it must be emphasized that blind children were not infrequently trained as storytellers, even though they might have difficulty in performing the movements.

The traditions were mainly transmitted inside the family from father to son (or nephew or younger brother), but students were also taken in from outside the family following special rules and rites. The child or youngster would study with his father/master every day, being taught at first only one or two sentences a day.28 After listening carefully the disciple would imitate the master's words, tone, gestics and mime, and spend time alone trying to remember and acting it out. The disciple would also follow his master to the storyteller's house every day to observe the performance and wait on his master. Next day he would 'return the story', *huan shu* 還書, in front of his master, and much teaching would be enforced by spanking. Little by little the passages to remember would be enlarged and during the final period, the student would have to remember the whole repertoire of one day of performance (2-3 hours) and 'return' it the following day.29

However, it should be noted that remembering by heart is only the first step in learning storytelling, and the young student is actually taught to retell the story in free prose, not exactly in 'his own words', but in a living language reflecting the style and narrative technique of his master. Only certain passages are really supposed to be memorized by rote. The storytellers' ability to remember long stretches of spoken performance was the reason why they had a taboo against listening to performances by colleagues. This was the customary way to secure the ownership of their repertoire as a family property. The storytellers, in opposition to the general attitude in the Chinese population, were sceptical about books. Among their professional terms we have a couple of expressions showing this attitude:30

*shuo kong shu* 說空書: 'empty storytelling', about a storyteller who has not received the basic training in the tradition from master to disciple, *chen chuan* 真傳 [real tradition], but simply relies on the

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27 Cf. Chen Wulou (pseudonym Si Su) 1962, Chen Wulou 1994 and 1999. In the West, Vena Hdlrickova's pioneer studies contain detailed information on storytellers' education and organisation, conditions of performance and the role of scripts, called 'secret volumes', *miben* 秘本; her research is based on the results of Chinese folklorists 1950s-1962 and personal field work among storytellers of various genres in Northern China in the 1950s, see particularly pp. 226, 229, 232-235, 246. See also Børdahl 1996, pp. 226-229, Bordahl and Ross 2002, pp.78-79.

28 The most detailed description of a Yangzhou storyteller's education is found in Wang Xiaotang 1992.


written novels, and only has learned 'the story line', shu lu zi 書路子. His choice of words is therefore of poor workmanship and his improvisations arbitrary.

shuo si shu 說死書: 'dead storytelling', storytelling based on learning written texts by heart, performance of low standard.

The 'real tradition' is based on oral transmission, and written texts are not part of this education. Yangzhou storytellers see themselves as performers that are independent of written materials and writing. In this sense their art and tradition of transmission was and is 'oral'. However, we can also perceive from the negative terms, mentioned above, that some storytellers must have based themselves on books, and it is a well-known fact that many repertoires were developed from books.

Furthermore, the individual initiative to create orally on the basis of written sources is different from the more 'collective' transmission from generation to generation by oral imitation. I think it is very important to keep in mind that 'a tradition' is full of individual enterprises, and so the collective truth is not necessarily true of every individual storyteller or repertoire.

Some storytellers were lying about scripts, because it was an old custom to keep secret about them for various reasons: Scripts had a function as ritual objects, as revered inheritance, and they were conceived as a family property that needed protection against 'stealing' (copying). You were not allowed to show them to others, especially not to outsiders of the profession and to rivals inside the profession. It would be a sign of great friendship and mutual trust if storytellers exchanged their handed down scripts. It was safest to keep silent about them. The silence about scripts was inborn in the milieu, and several of the storytellers that I have interviewed, said that they wouldn't dare to ask the master if there was a script, so they do not know if he might have had a script. Certainly it was never used in teaching them.

During the 1950s the cultural-political climate was in favour of the Chinese folk traditions, seen as expressions of the art of the people. Storytellers' repertoires were broadcast on radio, and the government supported the transcription of storytellers' repertoires into edited book versions. Government organisations also collected materials for scientific research. The interest of authoritative persons in storytellers' scripts could, however, easily lead to pressure on the owner of such scripts. He might be expected to hand over his interesting documents to the archives of the province, after which he would never have a chance to see them again. This was another reason to keep silent. But during the early 1960s when a big debate over the 'question of scripts' came up, the Chinese political situation was increasingly tense: the Cultural Revolution, where storytellers' traditional repertoires were banned as feudal and anti-socialist, was impending. There were new dangers in the air that would bring almost everybody to keep his mouth shut.

In the 1980-90s the storytellers of Yangzhou were able to take the stage again, and there was a renewed interest and support from official organizations for research and publication of storytellers’ repertoires, based on oral performances or—more seldom—on handed down scripts. The word ‘script’, jiaoben, is openly registered among the storytellers’ terms and given a short explanation in the official list:

'script', jiaoben: storyteller's written copy of his text, shuoshu yiren de shuci diben 說書藝人的書詞底本.

33 Chen Wulou (pseudonym Si Su) 1962, and 1994.
34 Yangzhou quyi zhi 1993, p. 246. The listing of this word is a manifestation that the storytellers of Yangzhou pinghua do have this concept and use this word. But it is not, like many other terms, a specific term of the
In my own research of storyteller’s terms during the early 1990s, I was given a more elaborate explanation, according to which the Yangzhou storytellers’ scripts are divided into two categories:

Storyteller’s written copy of his text. In former times only a few storytellers with a relatively high education were in possession of such a ‘script’. There were generally speaking two kinds of ‘script’: one kind only consisted of a short summary of the story line, the important episodes and the dialogue of the major characters. The other kind was a more detailed notation of the story as told on stage.35

The latter explanation indicates that scripts existed, but were in the possession of only a minority of storytellers; most of them did not own such manuscripts. The scripts are divided into two categories, the summary kind and the more detailed. Nothing is said about the usage of the two kinds or the purpose for writing them and keeping them.

**Storytellers without script**

Before discussing the structure and function of the scripts, I should like to present a case of a storyteller family who did not own scripts for their enormous repertoire during the first half of the twentieth century. From the 1950s-1990s their oral repertoires were taken down in writing by folklorists, edited and published as storytellers’ books in large printings for the general readership. Since then a written tradition of the repertoire would begin its existence as reading matter, not only for the general public, but also possibly for new generations of storytellers as aide-memoire.

The education of storytellers by the method of ‘transmitting by mouth and teaching from the heart’, outlined above, was the method used until the 1960s, and the storytellers who in the late 1990s belonged to the mature and elder generation have gone through this experience.36 The traditional pedagogical system was not concerned about written materials or scripts for the education of the young generation; a sceptical and almost hostile attitude to writing and reading, considered dangerous for the ability to remember, was widespread.

The Wang family branch or ‘school’ of storytellers, Wang pai 王派, taking its name from the most famous storyteller in twentieth century China, Wang Shaotang 王少堂 (1889-1968), were tradition bearers of the oral repertoire of the Water Margin sagas, Shuihu 水浒. Yangzhou storytellers of this repertoire are able to establish historically founded master-disciple relationships, ‘hereditary lines’, going back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, and masters from still earlier periods back to the sixteenth century are also known by name and fame. Wang Shaotang, his storyteller son, Wang Xiaotang 王篠堂 (1918-2000), and granddaughter, Wang Litang 王竜堂 (b.1940), received much publicity and scholarly interest during the 1950-60s and again during the 1980-90s. We have more information about the lives and education of the master tellers of this family than about any other performers of Yangzhou storytelling.37 In the autobiographical, biographical and other research material there is, however, no mention of handed down scripts. This is never regarded as exceptional or strange. It is seen as the normal situation for storytellers, and the existence of scripts would be more remarkable.

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36 The young generation, born during and after the Cultural Revolution, has received a very different education, based on class-room training, memorization of written passages from books and oral-aural versions in tape-recordings. However, rehearsals with old masters are also considered important.
Apparently, there was no need of any kind of written materials for their professional art. Wang Shaotang mentions how he witnessed his father training a blind disciple as a storyteller. The fact that this child would not be able to read is not mentioned. The only shortcoming of the blind child that is praised for exceptional capacity of memory and ability of sound imitation is its deliverance of gestures and body movements which it cannot see. It is then taught the movements by feeling with the hands.\footnote{Cf. Wang Shaotang 1979, p. 287. See also Bordahl and Ross 2002, pp.103-165 (Storytellers’ life stories).} Wang Xiaotang who was trained by his father in the 1930s, tells in his autobiographical reminiscences how he sometimes wrote down difficult passages in order to memorize them and escape a severe beating the next day. His father, however, was not pleased. He thought the boy would spoil his memory by writing passages down. In this connection it should be pointed out that the experienced master tellers of this and other schools have repertoires so long that they can tell continuously for about 10-12 months, a couple of hours a day.\footnote{Storytellers of Yangzhou pinghua usually perform for periods of 2-3 months at a time during which period they would tell a complete saga, Cf. Bordahl, Fei Li and Huang Ying 2004. After such a period they would usually, after a holiday, move to another storytellers’ house. In the new place they might tell the same saga or another saga of their repertoire. The complete repertoire of the Wang School consisted of five sagas from the Water Margin cycle of storytelling, and each saga would take 2-3 months of performance. If this repertoire had been written down and published in its full non-edited form, it would correspond to about 40 volumes of 400 pages in English (less in Chinese, because the writing is more compact). The estimate is based on the abridged versions of Yangzhou storytellers’ performances compared to my own registration of living performances, cf Bordahl 1996, p. 58.} 

**Modern storyteller books as aide-mémoire**

During the 1950s two of Wang Shaotang’s *Water Margin* sagas were registered by Chinese folklorists and written down with a view to publication as ‘modern storyteller books’, *xin hua ben* 新話本. They were based on stenographic writing and early phonograph reproductions of the performances of Wang Shaotang. Around the centenary for his birth, the four so-called ‘ten chapter sagas’, *shi hui shu* 十回書, of the Wang school were registered as told by his granddaughter, Wang Litang, and published during the following years, based on taperecordings of her performances. The storyteller books represented notations of oral performances that were in many respects close to the spoken word of the storytellers, even if they were shortened, corrected and edited according to certain principles, aiming for a general Chinese readership.\footnote{Cf. Bordahl 2003, pp. 77-84.} There is little doubt that Wang Shaotang had no scripts for his performances. His son, granddaughter and other disciples might have based themselves to a certain degree on the two published sagas for their later performances.\footnote{Bordahl 1996 treats the degree of similarity and dissimilarity between a number of spoken performances of ‘the same episode’ told by the disciples of Wang Shaotang. It is obvious from this material that the published edition of Wang Shaotang [1959] 1984 is not ‘learned by heart’ for word by word declamation, but this fact alone does not exclude that the disciples of Wang Shaotang might consult the book as a guide and *aide-memoire* for certain passages.} For the performance of the other sagas that were not published during Wang Shaotang’s lifetime, Wang Xiaotang, Wang Litang and the other disciples would not have had any written versions of the repertoire that we know about.

The published versions belong to a special category of written materials with connection to storytelling, but they are not the kind of material that the storytellers call ‘scripts’, *jiaoben*. Nevertheless, they might serve more or less the same purpose. The editors of the book versions mentioned this purpose as one of the aims of their work.\footnote{Cf. Wang Shaotang [1959] 1984, editors’ postscript, p.1111.} This may also actually have been the case, even if it is highly difficult to test and to prove. During my own research I have found only very few indications of such usage. This does
not mean that the storytellers are not aware of these books. The fact that they never mention them as an aid in their work may indicate that books of this kind are indeed not important for the professional artist. But we should also take into consideration the traditional skeptical attitude among storytellers towards books and towards learning from books. Such an attitude may lead to reticence about the use of written materials, whether handed down scripts or other kinds of aide-memoire, such as the modern storytellers’ books.

**Storytellers’ scripts from ca. 1880 to 1923**

If storytellers of this renowned tradition could, apparently, manage without any written scripts, why would some other storyteller families possess such scripts and what kind of function would they serve? During the last ten or more years, the storytellers (or some of them) are not as taciturn about this question as they used to be. I am afraid that it has something to do with defaitism: they cannot hope to save their art or the income of their family by keeping their scripts secret. The old style of life is changing to such a degree that the former importance attributed to their scripts as secret property is evaporating.

Although there is a general consensus that the oral education is the basic training, some storytellers are open about the fact that their forefathers wrote scripts, kept them as a kind of guarantee and left them to following generations. Of the two scripts analysed in the following, one is roughly dated to late Qing, ca. 1880-1910; the other is from the early Republic, the year 1923.

**A script in the tradition of Western Han**

*Transmission of the script*

The oldest script belonged to Dai Buzhang 戴步章 (1925-2003), a highly esteemed master of Yangzhou storytelling. He was the most prominent performer of *Journey to the West* of the Dai school, *Daimen Xiyou ji* 戴門西遊記. Dai Buzhang’s father, Dai Shanzhang 戴善章 (1880-1938), and most of his uncles and brothers were all storytellers, and they specialized in several of the large traditional repertoires and had studied not only with members of the family, but also with other masters. The script contained the handwritten version of the repertoire of Western Han, *Xi Han* 西漢, one of the semi-historical cycles of Yangzhou storytelling with a long history of oral transmission.
The worn pages were covered with characters in stylish calligraphy. According to Dai Buzhang, the script could only be tentatively dated, ca. 1880-1910, since it had been handed down through several generations, but not within the same family. The manuscript was attributed variously to his father's teacher, the storyteller Ren Yongzhang 任永章 (Late Qing–Republic, fl.), and to the teacher of this teacher, Xu Hongzhang 許鴻章 (1847-1905). Ren Yongzhang belonged to the third generation of Yangzhou storytellers of Western Han and Xu Hongzhang to the second generation after the founder Hu Zhaozhang 胡兆章 (ca.1850, fl.). The home-maid binding of the script contained newspaper pages that could be dated to 1912. Ren Yongzhang did not have a son, and therefore he donated the script to his best disciple, Dai Shanzhang. At some point it had been in the possession of the renowned storyteller Fan Zizhang 樊紫章 (1848-1968).  

In his childhood Dai Buzhang often listened to his father’s performances of this saga. After his father’s death in 1938, Dai Buzhang studied Western Han with another master of this repertoire, Jiang Shoushan 江壽山 (1888-1961), but before he started this period of study, he read through the script as a preparation. He had no difficulty in reading the text, because he was already very familiar with the contents. He used the script for memorization of the poems, he said; otherwise he had little use for it. Nevertheless, he pointed out that he himself had made quite a few annotations in the margins of the script, emendations and amplifications. He only performed this saga during some few years in the 1940s and early 1950s. Then he lost interest in it and changed to other repertoires, and so he forgot all the poems. When performing episodes from the Western Han repertoire, he would not be able to remember the poems, so he would just leave them out, he said. And so he did during a performance of the part of the repertoire that corresponded to the passage photographed from the script.

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storytelling we find this theme in five generations of unbroken oral transmission since the first half of the nineteenth century, cf. Yangzhou quyi zhi 1993, pp. 283, 350. Some sources also claim that already Liu Jingting had this theme on his repertoire in the first half of the seventeenth century, cf. Wei Ren and Wei Minghua 1985, p. 15.

47 It is not clear if the script was owned by Fan Zizhang before it was given to Dai Shanzhang, or if this happened already before it was handed down to Ren Yongzhang. In the latter case, this would indicate that the script was older and probably authored by Xu Hongzhang. The imprecise and different explanations I was given between 2000 and 2003 on the authorship and transmission of the script are symptomatic of the attitude to the concept of ‘author’ in storytelling.

48 Storytellers who have owned the script on Western Han, according to the memory of the Dai Family, are marked with an asterix. The table is according to Yangzhou quyi zhi 1993, p.350. Information about the storytellers, ibid. pp. 283, 292, 288, 321; cf also Børdahl and Ross 2002, Life stories.
This script was kept in the family, more for the sake of honouring the forefathers than for its practical use, I was told. Dai Buzhang, however, on this and later occasions treated his ‘family treasure’ with utter nonchalance, banging the dusty and torn volumes onto the table with a loud crash, and telling me several times over that these old things were no use. This comment should, however, in my opinion, by no means be taken at face value. Dai Buzhang belonged to a school of particularly jocular storytelling, and his character and behaviour seemed completely saturated with a deep sense of humour. I would rather tend to explain the fact that I was allowed not only to see, but also to have the script photographed, as a sign of his unusual generosity. His attitude of ‘neglect’ and ‘ridicule’ towards the script, could very well be a way of expressing, albeit with a smile, his deep anxiety for the future of the art of his forefathers.

Narrative and linguistic structure of the script
A passage from the script of Western Han is reproduced below:

Transcription of a prose passage

漢王览表大喜曰观卿之表足见爲国忠尽心矣。信曰項羽居彭城久未西顾诸侯各散各国俱無准備。正当此時征伐之際，由奈三軍未操各將荒扶陛下料理東歸。代臣操演整齊，自然請駕君臣大喜宴畢出朝。次初六日發炮開門，灯球引道，各將相随至演府廳下拜旗点炮揚威陞起帥旗。元帥坐下各將見畢方歸对伍，怎見威儀。 50

Translation of the extract:

When the King of Han had read the memorial, he was greatly pleased and said:

49 The performance was recorded on 24 October 2003, in the home of Dai Buzhang in Biliuchun street in the old storytellers’ quarter in Yangzhou, transcription and translation, cf. Appendix A.

50 The transcription into computer characters strives to render the characters in the form of the manuscript, i.e. jianti and fanti forms alternate as they do in the handwritten version. However, some characters are written in non-standard forms that do not exist in computer writing. In these cases I have chosen the form that seems closest to the manuscript form.
“My Lord, a glance at your memorial is sufficient proof of your deep loyalty towards our country, indeed!”

Then a banquet with wine was served, and the King of Han said:
“When do you suggest that we should undertake the eastern expedition?”

(Han) Xin said:
“Xiang Yu has settled in the town of Peng. For a long time he has not cared about the western lands. The feudal lords are dispersed in all directions. The various states are totally unprepared for war. This is the right opportunity for launching a punitive expedition. However, our whole army is untrained and our commanders need practice. If Your Majesty plans to return to the east, your servant is surely willing to take on the duty of training and drilling the army.”

They were all, sovereign and subjects, happy with this answer, and thus the banquet was finished and they left the court. On the following day, the sixth of the first month, canons were fired, the gate was opened and lanterns were carried at the head of the procession. General after general marched forward until they arrived at the place in front of the martial arts mansion, where they flourished their flags, fired cannons and showed their military prowess. When the flag of the commander in chief was hoisted, he took his seat. Only then, all the generals took up their position with their troops. What a spectacle, this military ceremony:
[Here follows a long poem in rhymed verses of unequal length]

Analysis of the extract:
From the narrative aspect, the passage contains short third person summaries of action and description (covered narrator) and dialogue in direct speech. The dialogue passages take up more than half of the space. The passage ends with a poem (not translated here), describing the scenery of the military ceremony. The poem is longer than the previous prose section. Poems and other set pieces such as memorandums, letters, etc., are indented in the manuscript, taking up about half the space of the whole script. The narrative prose sections (with dialogue) are generally shorter than the sections of poems and set pieces.

The fact that prose and poetry alternate, as well as the stock phrase before the poem, ‘what a spectacle’, ‘zen jian 怎见’, are features reminiscent of the ‘storyteller’s manner’ as seen in the vernacular fiction since the Ming period, but otherwise the passage is devoid of any such explicit features.

The language of this passage is characterized by a terse literary style, including a number of grammatical markers, pronouns and other vocabulary typical of ‘classical Chinese’, wenyan, (such as: zhi 之, yi 矣, bi 畢, wei 未, he 何, wu 無, nai 奈). The language imitates the style of early historical works, not only in the selection of tag word for ‘he said’ (yue 曰), pronouns of address between the king and his generals (qing 卿, bixia 陛下, jun 君, chen 臣), but also in the monosyllabic staccato rhythm of most phrases and sentences. Four- and six-syllable expressions are dominant. Even if some of the sentences are also possible in MSC and some compounds (zhunbei 准備, duiwu 隊伍) are from modern usage, there are exceedingly few features of modern vernacular, and there is no trace what so ever of Yangzhou dialect grammar.

The passage is written in a style that apparently imitates that of the Shi Ji 史記, as seen in the biography of Han Xin 韓信. It is not copied from this work, however; no full

51 The script in a few rare places uses the standard stock phrase before poems, ‘there is a poem to testify to this’, you shi wei zheng 有詩為證, but otherwise there are none of the usual set of fixed phrases of introduction, connection and conclusion, and no modern equivalents. In Yangzhou pinghua these stock phrases (as well as modern equivalents) are likewise absent, with only rare exception.
52 Sima Qian: Shi Ji, Juan 92, Huayin Hou liezhuan di sanshiyi, Guangzhi shuju, Hong Kong, no date.
sentences are exactly the same, only some expressions. The particular episode is not mentioned in Shi Ji, but there are highly similar episodes.

The handwriting combines characters in jianti and jianti form, and a number of characters are in a form differing from the authorized dictionary form (some part of the character—radical or phonetic—is written with an alternative element, which is not among the current dictionary forms of this character), i.e. fapao 發炮 ‘fire a cannon’, written with an alternant element in the character fa. In a few cases a homonym character is used instead of the usual character for the word, i.e. duiwù 隊伍 (jianti: 隊伍) ‘troops’, written with the common character dui 對 (對) ‘correct, facing’ in stead of dui 隊 ‘team’, and shuài 師 ‘general’, written with an alternative character for shuài 摔 ‘falling’ (two occurrences).

The jianti and unauthorized forms of characters in the script passage are indicators of the general habit of simplification of characters in handwriting at the time. These forms were acceptable, but not completely standardized. Only a few of the characters in the script could be considered ‘errors’, because they reflect only the sound of the word correctly, but not the content, i.e. a different morpheme is used to represent a homonym morpheme. Such cases represent modern ‘loan’ characters, and they are symptoms of writing based on oral performance rather than on written works. 53

Script and performance: Western Han

Next, we shall consider the narrative and linguistic form of a performed version of the same passage. The most conspicuous difference between the script version and the performance is length: the performance covers the same stretch of ‘storyline’ and the same space of ‘story time’ as the script version, but it is about twelve times as long, measured in ‘words’. 54

Dai Buzhang starts this performance with a couplet, not found in the script:

效：涿鹿之心思，依舊詔催風後急。
效：飛熊之入夢，仍然施展子牙才。

Inspiration: Thinking of his defeat in Zhuolu, the Yellow Emperor acted according to old custom and hastily appointed Feng Hou his commander

Inspiration: When King Wen saw the Flying Tiger in his dream, he let his marshal Jiang Ziya give full play to his talents 55

Prologue poems were sometimes, particularly in former times, used to begin the day’s performance, called ‘head of performance’, shutouzi 書頭子. 56 Dai Buzhang’s choice to begin this way is perhaps flavoured by the feeling that he is once again telling one of the

54 Character version and translation of the performance, see Appendix A. We use the Chinese syllable-morpheme corresponding to the written entity of the character, 字, as a measure unit for length.
55 The couplet points to two models of inspiration for the King of Han, Liu Bang, at the time when he appointed Han Xin his commander-in-chief. The first example is about the mythical Yellow Emperor, Huang Di, who after his defeat in Zhuolu, with the help of his general Feng Hou became victorious. The second example refers to King Wen of the Zhou dynasty, who was inspired by the dream of a flying tiger to find the talented general Jiang Ziya 姜子牙, and thus was able to establish the Western Zhou (1066-771).
old repertoires that have not been performed for many decades. In this poem two examples are given of former historical episodes reminiscent of the main idea of the story of the performance.\textsuperscript{57}

The story proper opens with a relatively terse sentence in \textit{wenyan}-coloured style, giving some background information to the episode:\textsuperscript{58}

\textit{My Lordship, a glance at your memorial is sufficient proof of My Lordship’s loyalty towards our country! This is good for the people! Good for the country! Good for us, the King! And good for the civil and military officials! Your Lordship has made a great contribution!}\textsuperscript{59}

This \textit{wenyan}-like style is characterized by the use of certain grammatical markers (\textit{zhi 之}, \textit{bi 畢}, \textit{wu 無}, \textit{wei 未}, \textit{ye 也}),\textsuperscript{60} and certain old-fashioned pronouns and other vocabulary (\textit{he 何}, \textit{wu 吾}, \textit{yan 言}), including terms of address, the same as those of the script or very similar (‘Lordship’, \textit{qingjia 卿家}, in stead of ‘Lord’, \textit{qing 卿}). Four- and six-syllable expressions are frequent in these passages.

\textsuperscript{57}The tradition of providing at the beginning of a tale a couple of moral examples has deep roots in China’s vernacular literature, and is almost obligatory in certain genres. Such prologues might develop into quite lengthy tales, so-called \textit{rubua}, and whether long or short the prologues generally provide anticipatory comment on the main story, which is also the function in the present case, cf. Hanan 1981, p.20. In \textit{Yangzhou pinghua} as a living oral tradition, however, prologue poems or stories are rare, cf. Børdahl 2003, p.80.

\textsuperscript{58}Yangzhou storytellers most often begin their performances ‘in media res’ without any background information, since the audience is usually well versed in the main context of the repertoires, cf Børdahl 2003, p. 81. For this performance Dai Buzhang does however furnish this minimal introduction to set the stage. In the script passage such explanation is obviously unnecessary at the point from where I have selected a random extract.

\textsuperscript{59}Passages in the performance that correspond word by word (or nearly word by word) with passages in the script are underlined in the character version and written in \textit{italics} in the English translation.

\textsuperscript{60}Pronunciation is given in Modern Standard Chinese (MSC) \textit{pinyin} transcription, because we are presently only concerned with the sentence structure, and not with Yangzhou dialect pronunciation. The performance is, however, in Yangzhou dialect (Y), including the various registers that are used by the storytellers of this art. In the following we shall only indicate Yangzhou dialect pronunciation at the places where this is necessary for the argumentation. In such cases Yangzhou dialect pronunciation is written in phonemic notation between oblique bars /    /. The system used is explained in Børdahl 1977 and 1996, pp. 89-83.

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When Liu Bang, the Son of Heaven of the great Han, set up his altar and conferred titles on his officials in the town of Nan Zheng, he appointed Han Xin, the officer of cereals, as Commander-in-chief.

Already in the second period the language switches into the sentence structure of modern Chinese vernacular:

After Han Xin had accepted the post as commander, he started (military) preparations.

However, there is a constant shifting of style, with \textit{wenyan}-like structures occurring mainly in part of the dialogue, imitating the awesome style of the king and his generals:

"觀卿家之表，足見卿家之忠心爲國，於民有利，於國有利，於朕躬有利，於文武官員有利，卿家是大功勞。"
Most of the performance is, however, in modern Chinese, as clearly marked by
pronouns, measures, suffixes, and sentence markers (我, 你, 他, 我们, 我们, 什么, 这个, 那个, 那些, 的, 了, 呢, 嗯, 哦):

什么地方对我们有有利，什么地方于有有害，什么地方于有优先的地方，有特长的地方，什么地方是我们的缺陷、缺点的地方，把这个形势呢完全写到了。

Where were conditions favourable to our state of Han? Where were conditions harmful to the state of Chu? Where were the advantages and strong points of the state of Chu, and where were our own disadvantages and defects? All of this was treated in the memorial.

These portions are characterized as ordinary spoken language, with more repetitions and rewordings of phrases than what is normal in a written/printed text of Modern Standard Chinese (MSC).

When we only observe the oral text as transcribed into Chinese characters, without regard for the pronunciation, we may note that the better part of the text is unmarked for dialect features on the level of morphology, syntax and lexicon. On the phonological level this is completely different, since every syllable of the performance is clearly pronounced in Yangzhou dialect, also the portions with wenyan-like structure. The storyteller does, however, shift between so-called ‘square mouth’, 方口, and ‘round mouth’, 圆口, pronunciation, corresponding to stylistic registers. The pronunciation is therefore dialectal throughout, while the grammatical and stylistic usage changes, in correlation with different sub-dialectal pronunciation variants.61

In the first half of the performance I have not found any structures reflecting Yangzhou dialect grammar, i.e. structures that are not found in MSC or are highly marginal in MSC, while they are common in Yangzhou dialect. However, in the latter part such structures appear not infrequently, such as the following:62 Y.: ‘does not exist’ or ‘cannot’/me’ de/ /没得 or /be’ de/ / 不得 (MSC: meiyou 没有 or bu neng 不能), Y.: ‘from’ /zw/ /走 (MSC: cong), 63 Y.: suffixation with /zr/ 子 and /tw/ 头 in certain nouns, i.e. ‘way of speaking’ /suo’-fa’-zr/ /说子, ‘joking matter’ /uon-ie’-tw/ /玩意头, (MSC: no suffixation with zi or tou, or this suffixation marginal)65 Y.: ‘/kw/ 可 as marker of alternative question’ (MSC: alternative question form V bu V?), 66 Y.: ‘time, while’/ha-xr/ /下子 as verbal measure’ (MSC: verbal measure xia or no verbal measure, xiazi highly infrequent),67 Y.: ‘special usage of coverbal sentences with ‘take’/ba/ /把 and double /ba/, i.e. /ba/ N V/ba/ N V (MSC: coverbal sentences with ba are used in a more restricted way and sentences with double ba contructions are marginal),68 Y.: ‘Good gracious!’ /gue-guae/ /乖乖 (MSC: infrequent interjection, highly frequent in Y.)69

One reason why phrases and expressions, specific for Yangzhou dialect, become more and more frequent as the performance proceeds, could be that the storyteller starts his tale on a slightly more formal note and then, as he gets ‘into the story’ avails himself

62 The examples of Yangzhou dialect grammatical structures are listed in their order of first occurrence in the performed text. All of these structures are described in more detail in Børdahl 1996, Chapter 4, where references to linguistic studies of Yangzhou dialect grammar is given. See also Yangzhou fangyan cidian 1996.
64 Zou is marginal in MSC in this function and sense, while it is frequent in Y.
65 Børdahl 1996, pp.103-105.
66 Ibid. pp. 121-123.
68 Ibid. p. 117.
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more freely of the ‘round mouth’ register. This is used primarily for narration (informal), storyteller’s comment and inner monologue (thoughts of characters), i.e. the non-dialogue portions, called ‘private talk’ (sibai 私白) in the storytellers’ terminology. In this style the flavour of daily colloquial Yangzhou dialect is particularly strong.  

There are no tags in the performance. Direct speech, called ‘public talk’ (guanbai 官白) in the storytellers’ terminology, is indicated mainly by the modulation of the voice to imitate the person speaking (all the persons of this performance are generals, i.e. high status persons (da renwu 大人物), speaking in ‘square mouth’. Pauses, particles and interjections, as well as the contents of the speech, including pronouns and other words of address, are also markers of direct speech.

In direct speech (and occasionally also in some portions of formal narrative) we find sentences and phrases from the script incorporated, as indicated by italics. These wenyancoloured phrases, most of them coined in four- and six-syllable expressions, are explained at great length in the performance, often with a humorous touch. The explanations are part of the informal narration, storyteller’s comment, or the many passages of inner monologue that we find in this fragment.

The passage is told from the perspective of a third-person, omniscient, covert narrator, which is the usual narrator type for Yangzhou pinghua. However, in longer performances the narrator intermittently would speak in the first person as ‘the storyteller’ or ‘I, who tell this story’. We find no such case in the present performance, but we find that the many inserted ‘inner monologues’, representing the thoughts of the king and his general, are sometimes generalized to such a degree that it is difficult to distinguish if the thought is that of the character or that of the storyteller. Here the first person pronoun is frequently used, and these passages may be analyzed as almost equivalent to ‘overt narrative in the first person’, representing the direct opinions of the storyteller as much as those of the character.

Script and performance—discussion
After this preliminary analysis of the language and narrative form of the script and the performance, let us return to the question of the connection between the script and the oral performance and transmission.

By whom and how was the script written down? According to the Dai family the script was written down by one of the forefathers of this school. But nothing is related about how it was written. What kind of literary sources might have been available for this script? Was it copied from other scripts, or based on other kinds of written or printed sources? Was it written exclusively on the basis of memory of oral performance?

Storytellers sometimes copied (or let copy) the scripts of colleagues, if they had particularly good relationships. The present script might be a copy of a still older script. There are, however, no obvious indications of copying. All we know is that the storyteller family who owns this script considers that it is originally written by a storyteller. There is no particular reason to question this view as long as no further information is available. It seems a reasonable presumption that the script was written by a storyteller who was able to perform the Western Han repertoire.

It is further presumed that the poetry and setpieces of the scripts were exact notations of portions that the storytellers should learn by heart. In the Dai family they kept several other scripts, one of them also from the repertoire of Western Han, cf photo below.

70 Dialogue of ordinary characters (xiao renwu 小人物) is also in round mouth register, but in the present passage the speaking characters all belong to the high status group (da renwu 大人物) who speak in square mouth register. Cf. Børdahl 1996, pp.94-98, 196-206.
This script was in a different hand and contained only poems and setpieces. The poems were written in the sequence in which they should be performed, I was told, but there were no prose passages connecting them. Since Dai Buzhang did not want to perform the poetry which he did not remember at the time, my present material does not allow a closer study of the relationship between poetry of script and poetry as performed. It seems, however, fairly safe to infer that the poetry of the present script is derived from the memory of oral performance, but that it is at the same time the part of the oral tradition that is most closely connected to written sources or models. The poetry constitutes the area where the function of a script to ‘freeze’ and conserve the tradition in written form was most crucial.

Apart from the poems that were undoubtedly meant to be quoted by heart as written in the script, was the language of the script close to the language of performance that the storyteller had in mind? The sample material shows that certain dialogue and narrative passages are performed in phrases very close to the script version. Prose sentences from the script are spoken intermittently during performance, but with much commentary and explanation in ordinary daily language to go with them. Bits and slips of “historical chronicle” are thus framed by “translations” into colloquial language. The old-fashioned and laconic utterances of the script may function, in this case, not only as a reminder of the plot development, but also as reservoir of a special language, lending the performance the style and ‘air’ of Han dynasty military conversation. This ingredient adds colour and atmosphere to the performance, otherwise conducted in present-day Yangzhou dialect. The square mouth and round mouth registers of pronunciation give further emphasis to the shifting of high and low style. The terse and stern statements of the script seem to have a counterpart in the accentuated square mouth passages, almost like “sacred lines” to be expounded by the storyteller. The performance, as mentioned above, is more than twelve times longer than the script version. In the present performance, Dai Buzhang uses square mouth pronunciation typically in the passages of quoted military conversation and for the more concise narrative passages. The words
uttered by the King of Han, Liu Bang, are mostly marked as serious and self-important and pronounced with square mouth poise, while the words of Han Xin are spoken in a more self-confident and humorous tone, with only a hint of high-style flavour. These psychological nuances are acted out in mime and voice production, going far beyond any clues of the script.

The style of the script resembles the kind of language found in the typical wenyan passages in the Ming novel Three Kingdoms, San guo yanyi 三國演義, but it has none of the baihua features that occur intermittently throughout the novel. The language of the novel also appears less brief. I would tend to read the passage as very close to the style of Han chronicle, even if the vocabulary and grammatical form do not consistently reflect archaic wenyan. The storyteller who wrote the script might have copied from some former history book for the prose passages (but not Shi Ji), just as the poems may possibly have been copied from verse books. However, being able to write the script, the ‘scripter’ might also be able to create a literary (shumian 書面) text from oral performance. Here we have the important testimony from Dai Buzhang: “In my lifetime there has never been any storyteller who would perform the text in this way. And I do not think it would have been performed like this in former times, either.” If this is taken for granted, then we must presume that the scripter wrote something much more concentrated than the performance he had in mind, and that he applied a style of written language that he found appropriate—not a word by word notation of the language of performance. Whether his words were taken over directly from other sources or were only created in the style of former history and novel, from these alternatives I cannot so far eliminate any. What is more, I do not think that we can rule out the possibility that the scripter actually wrote down the essential wordings of the performance as he knew them from oral tradition. When we observe how Dai Buzhang in 2003 during performance actualizes the important utterances in their old-fashioned garb and envelopes them in ‘storyteller’s comment’ of modern storytelling style, it is tempting to see this as a demonstration of the meaning of the genre-name: ‘commented tale’, pinghua 評話.

Was the style of the script part of the oral tradition, a striving to preserve memorable sentences to pass on, utterances to be incorporated into future performances to give a stamp of time and setting to the vernacular dialectal prose? Or did the sentences of the script represent more haphazard jottings of lines and words, only meant to trigger memory, but of no intrinsic coherence or style? In the present case, the comparison between script and performance seems to suggest rather the first alternative.

A SCRIPT IN THE TRADITION OF THREE KINGDOMS

Transmission of the script

Our second example is a passage from a script written by Fei Junliang 費駿良 (1891-1952), father of Fei Zhengliang 費正良 (b. 1931), the present owner of the script. Fei Junliang belonged to a generation of famous storytellers who were disciples of Wu Guoliang 吳國良 (1872-1944) from the Wu School of Three Kingdoms (Wupai San guo 呉派三國). The Three Kingdoms tradition, just like the Water Margin and Western Han traditions, has very old roots in Yangzhou storytelling.76

74 The storytellers make no secret of the fact that poems were taken from all kinds of sources and used for storytelling as need be. See also the previous note.

75 Fei Zhengliang is the artist’s name of Fei Li. As a storyteller he uses this name, as a writer and researcher he uses the latter name. Besides his contributions on the history of Yangzhou storytelling, Fei Li has edited a substantial part of his father’s repertoires into modern storyteller books, cf bibliography in Børdahl and Ross 2002.

76 The theme of Three Kingdoms belongs to the oldest in the history of Chinese storytelling. In the sources on storytelling during the Song dynasty, storytellers who told this theme, called ‘Telling about the
Fei Junliang had better education than most storytellers of his time, and he organized and run a private school for many years, besides his activities as a professional storyteller. He was originally an aficionado of storytelling who at the age of thirty-two was accepted as a disciple of Wu Guoliang. During his apprenticeship in 1923 he, as was the custom, listened to his master's performance every day and—something that was rare—developed the habit of writing every night a summary of the day’s episode as he remembered it.\textsuperscript{77}

\textbf{Fig 2}

\textit{Wu School of \textsc{Three Kingdoms} \textsuperscript{78}}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{llll}
Wu Shaoliang——& Jin Huiliang \\
Wu Guoliang—& Xu Muliang \\
Wu Liangsun \\
Xu Boliang—& Xu Youliang——& Jiang Qingliang \\
Lin Zhengliang \\
Sun Jinliang \\
Fei Junliang* —& Fei Zhengliang* \\
Hong Junsheng*
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

According to Fei Li (Zhengliang), his father wrote as fast as possible, with no concern for anything but his own ability to learn and remember. He used a kind of stenographic writing with lots of simple substituting characters. This was his way of memorizing and practicing the repertoire, and his notebook was only meant for his private use. Only much later in life did Fei Junliang let his son and other disciples see these notes at some point of their education, but this was not the original purpose. Publishing was out of the question during those days, and his father had absolutely no thought of writing for such purpose.\textsuperscript{79}

After the death of his father, Fei Li became engaged in the work that was undertaken in China on a large scale since the 1950s to preserve the storytellers’ tradition in book form. Fei Li used on the one hand his father’s scripts, on the other hand his own education as an oral storyteller, to create book versions of the oral repertoire. Here the purpose was neither to preserve the original form of the scripts, nor to preserve the authentic form of the oral performance, but to rewrite the material into romances for a reading audience: The published work should retain as much of the oral style as was considered artistically successful amplification, ‘embroidering’, but dialectal wording that was not easily understood elsewhere in the country must be left out or changed into MSC. Also in many other respects would the work be adapted to the genre conventions\textsuperscript{79}

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of the *xin huaben* and organized according to principles of logic, coherence and modern stylistics, as well as to the political and moral climate of the time.  

*Narrative and linguistic structure of the script*

A passage from the script, written in a notebook with the title ‘Brocade heart and embroidered mouth’, *jin xin xiu kou* 錦心繡口, ‘Former Volume’, *Qian ce*, i.e. ‘Former Three Kingdoms’, is reproduced below:  

![Image of a notebook page]

**Photos by Jette Ross, 9 May 2000**

**Transcription of a prose passage**

分付摆酒, 武帝入席, 曹操陪坐, 当在巡酒上肴, 手下飽啖战飯, 有人上來禀丞相, 弯下颜良索战, 知道了, 退了, 又來了, 颜良正場罵战, 知道了, 退了, 接連五六次, 曹操不動色, 武帝一望, 奇怪, 敵人正場索战, 理所當然, 点將開兵, 不能在塊陪我闲谈, 言談不在只一刻, 等到——既把我请得来。何方老实些同我说明。再一想。明白, 我才到的。他请我开兵。未免不近人情, 他不好意思開口, 我何不体贴他, 向他讨令下山去会颜良, 再一想不能, 没说他不是请我動手, 回我一句不敢勞駕, 那一來才下不去, 等我來用句话引他下子。丞相到此。開兵几次。只有一次, 颜良刀伤两元降将, 宋现, 未续, 後来张许徐夏, 四将下山传战颜良, 亦復未能取圣, 只匹夫勇不可当, (五) 关某亦復早已闻名。——虽闻其名, 未見其人。  

**Translation of the extract**

**[He] ordered:**

“Feasting!”

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80 Cf. Fei Junliang and Fei Li 1986, Preface p. 4-5

81 In the Yangzhou storytellers’ inside jargon, the *Three Kingdoms* repertoire, consisting of the ‘former’, ‘middle’ and ‘later’ *Three Kingdoms*, is called: ‘Former Volume’, *Qian ce*, ‘Fire Volume’, *Yan ce* 焱冊 (great fires play a major role in this part of *Three Kingdoms*), and ‘Later Volume’, *Hou ce* 後冊, communication from Fei Li, November 2003.

82 The passage is rendered in jianti and fanti forms according to the usage of the manuscript. Irregular forms are given in the form closest to the manuscript form. The symbol ∞ reflects the habit of Fei Junliang to write double circles in the margin to emphasize the important passages. Personal communication from Fei Li, October 2003.
God of War (Guan Yu) took his seat. Cao Cao entertained him. The orderlies sent round the wine and served the dishes. The soldiers ate to their heart’s content. Somebody came up to report to the Prime Minister:

“Yan Liang stands at the foot of the hill and challenges us!”

“I know! Withdraw!”

He came again:

“Yan Liang stands in the middle of the ring and swears at us!”

“I know! Withdraw!”

[This happened] five or six times. Cao Cao did not change his mien. When God of War saw it, [he thought]: ‘Strange! His enemy stands in the ring and swears [at him.] As a matter of course [he should] order [one of his] generals [to get] into battle. [He] cannot sit here and chat with me! Chatting is not suitable at this moment! Let’s wait and see. --- Since he has invited me over, why doesn’t he behave more sincerely and explain [the situation] to me?’ [He] thought again. ‘Oh, I see! I have just arrived. He wants to ask me to go into battle. [Therefore he] must rely on friendship, and so he is embarrassed to [take the initiative and] open his mouth. Why should I not show him consideration? [I can] ask him for the order to go down the hill and meet Yan Liang.’ [But then he] thought about it again: ‘No, it does not work! Probably he will not ask me to get into action, but he will just answer me: “[I do] not dare to oblige [you]!” And then [I] cannot go down. [I] know! Let me try to lure him a bit!:

“Prime Minister! [Since you] came here, how many times have you gone into battle?”

“There was a time, when Yan Liang beheaded two of my lower generals, Song Xian and Wei Xu. Later [I] entrusted the four generals, Zhang, Xu, Xu and Xia, to go down the hill and engage Yan Liang. Again and again they have failed to come out victorious! That fellow is too valiant for any to face.”

“[I], a certain person called Guan, have heard of his fame again and again. ---Although [I] have heard his name, [I] have never seen him in person.”

Analysis of the extract:
The passage contains mainly dialogue and monologue (with inserted dialogue), with a few phrases of third person summaries of action (covered narrator). Dialogue and monologue are not marked in any way; there are no tags or punctuation markers for this purpose. It can only be deduced from the content of each sentence, the use of pronouns, etc.

The script contains no poetry or other set pieces, and the text runs in full columns without indentation or other special features of layout. Only prose passages are taken down in the notebook, while poems, according to Fei Li, are kept in another script booklet. There are no stock phrases, taoyu, to indicate the places where poems should be inserted, but at certain points of division of the tale, couplets, duilian, are inserted. This latter feature seems to be the only reminiscence of a ‘storyteller’s manner’, otherwise the script is so ‘naked’ in style that none of the usual components of the ‘manner’ are reflected.

Apart from a few words of decidedly wenyan flavour (wei 未, yifu 亦復, qi 其), and a number of four- or six-character expressions (chengxiang dao ci, kai bing ji ci 丞相 到此，開兵 几次; yifu wei neng qu sheng 亦復未能取聖; yong bu ke dang 勇不可當; sui wen qi ming, wei jian qi ren 虽聞其名，未見其人), the passage is entirely in vernacular Chinese, as is marked by the use of the pronouns wo 我, tu 他, the determinatives zhe 這 (written

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83 According to Fei Li, storytellers of his father’s generation had a taboo against speaking the name of Guan Yu, because he was a god. So they called him God of War.

84 The phrase ‘too valiant for any to face’ yong bu ke dang 勇不可當, is found in the Yan Liang episode of San guo yanyi. This is the only expression in common between the script and the novel. As we shall see later, the phrase is not used in the matching oral performance.
The style is compressed, a staccato sequence of verbal predicates, frequently lacking an explicit subject and/or object, as shown by the square parentheses in the translation. In both classical and modern Chinese such sentence structure is fully possible, but in classical literary Chinese the sentence without subject is more frequent. The compressed nature of most sentences may reflect the wish to condense the notation of the performance, furnishing only the barest linguistic message by which to aid the recall for a future performance of the same episode. However, this way of writing also furnishes the passage with a certain old-fashioned and imposing style, natural to a tale about the wars of old.

The handwriting uses predominantly the jianti form of characters, but also many fanti forms, apparently without any precise system. A large number of characters are written with homonym (or almost homonym) characters in stead of the usual characters for the word, i.e. jenfu吩咐 ‘order’, written fenfu分付; dangbai當差 ‘orderly’, written dàngchāi; zai在 ‘in’, /zae kuae/; ze'ie'ke' only刻, /ze' ie' ke'/; yuan员 ‘measure word for general’, written 元; proper names Song Xian宋憲, written 宋现; Wei Xu魏續, written 萬續; qu sheng取勝 ‘win a victory’, written 取圣; interjection wu ‘Ahem’, written 五. Many of the loan characters are obviously based on pronunciation in Yangzhou dialect, where they are true homonyms or at least close in sound, while this is sometimes not so obvious in MSC.

The scripter displays an individual habit of fast notation for personal use. The loan characters can hardly be considered ‘errors’, because this way of shorthand is used throughout the passage. They are obviously signs of oral perceptions, because they are based on Yangzhou pronunciation. It is not probable that the storyteller did not know the correct characters, since he was a school teacher of considerable education. He was simply saving himself some time and trouble by writing more simple characters, only to assist his memory of the wordings.

Script and performance: FORMER THREE KINGDOMS

Since 1996 I had in my collections a performance by Fei Zhengliang (artist name of Fei Li) containing the passage concerned. The portion corresponding to the extract from the script occurs a few minutes after the beginning of the performance. Not unexpectedly, the performance is considerably longer than the version in the script, in this case four times longer measured in ‘words’, i.e. characters.

The narrator type is in principle the same as that of the first example as usual in Yangzhou pinghua. However, there are subtle differences. In this stretch of performance we find particularly intricate patterns of embedded speech and thought (speech quoted

86 The character 在 Y/zae/ is not a perfect homonym for 差 Y/cae/, but closer in sound than the corresponding pronunciations in MSC: zai versus chai. In the following we register several such examples of ‘loan characters’ that are not perfect homonyms. I shall add the pronunciation in Yangzhou dialect in the footnotes.
87 餐 Y/caen/, 奉 Y/taen/.
88 道 Y/ze’/, 只 Y/ze’/.
90 The portion of the performance corresponding to the extract from the script is rendered in Chinese characters and English translation in Appendix B.
in dialogue or in thought), but the inner monologue is clearly assigned to one or the other of the protagonists and there is no doubt about where the thought or speech belongs. Therefore these passages do not function as pseudo-commentary for the storyteller as narrator, something that happened in the performance passage from Western Han. The few passages of storyteller’s comment in the extract from the Three Kingdoms performance belong to the kind of ‘simulated conversation with the audience’, 自問自答, and there are no lengthy explanations of the kind found in the Western Han performance.

The performance, as well as the script, is devoid of stock-phrases, and poems or other set pieces are lacking. In my collection of Fei Li’s performances, poems are comparatively rare, and as we have noticed, there are no poems inserted in the script. The part of the performance that we are considering, just like the script, consists mainly of dialogue and inner monologue linked by a few sentences of summary and storyteller’s comment. ‘Square mouth’ register is used only sparingly, namely in the most formal parts of the conversation between the two high-status characters, Cao Cao and Guan Yu, as well as in their inner reproduction of former conversations. Otherwise the performance is conducted in ‘round mouth’ register of modern Yangzhou vernacular, and this is also the mode of speech used for rendering the inner thought of the protagonists.

At the beginning of the passage we witness how the attendant of Cao Cao repeatedly reports the actions of the great general Yan Liang, while Cao Cao only utters the shortest possible orders:

Dialogue is indicated by modulation of voice, by use of pronouns and sentence particles, as well as the contents of the utterance, not by tags such as ‘he said’, ‘he thought’, etc. Here we notice that the script is similar to the oral tradition in providing no explicit frame for dialogue or monologue versus narration. The lack of tag words is a general characteristic of performed Yangzhou storytelling, something that is often changed by editors of book versions, but is consistently kept in Fei Li’s edited version of his father’s written and oral heritage. In modern printed books shifting between dialogue and narration is, however, set off by modern punctuation and quotation marks, like that used for the transcription in Appendix B.

When Cao Cao and Guan Yu talk together, they express themselves in short and formal utterances, spoken in ‘square mouth’ register:

Now the two of them were sitting in the big tent and drinking, when they heard a great noise in front of the mountain: ‘A-a-a-a-a-a-h!’ An attendant rushed into the big tent: ‘Diddledli-diddledli-diddledli...’ and knelt down on one knee:

“Report...! Our Prime Minister is informed that Yan Liang is standing at the foot of the mountain and urging for battle.”
“Know! Withdraw!”

91 Passages in the performance that correspond word by word (or nearly word by word) with passages in the script are underlined in the character version and written in italics in the English translation.
Vibeke Børdahl: Storytellers' Scripts

“Please, drink a cup, my general!”
“Please, Prime Minister!”

The conversation between Cao Cao and Guan Yu is sometimes coloured by markedly wenyan style, spoken in ‘square mouth’ register:

“請問丞相，大兵到此，開兵幾次？”
“將軍若問，開兵一次。”
“勝負如何？”
“將軍勿用提起，先是宋憲，魏續二將下崗雙雙陣亡，後來如此如此，令他等四將下崗也未能取勝，至今還令止罷戰。”

“I should like to ask the Prime Minister, after your men arrived here, how many times have they engaged in combat?”
“Since you ask this question, my general, they have engaged in combat once.”
“How was the outcome?”
“Don’t mention it, my general. First my two generals Song Xian and Wei Xu went down the mountain and both of them fell in battle. After that things have been only so-so. Now four other generals have gone down, but none of them have been able to win a battle. Up to now we are in a cease-fire.”

In such passages we find a few typical grammatical markers of wenyan style, such as: zhi 之, wei 未, wu 勿, qi 其.

Inner monologue constitutes the better part of the extract. Both Cao Cao and Guan Yu are thinking hard during this meal, and their thoughts are generally rendered in ‘round mouth’ register. Sometimes, however, they recall former sentences spoken by their adversary, and then formal language in wenyan style and ‘square mouth’ register surfaces inside the relaxed everyday language of their inner voice:

‘…唉喂，不能。我上次見他討過差咧，他回我是“些許微末之事”，用不著我。這時候你曉得他有沒得計策对付顏良呢？說不定他有了妙計了，我一開口討差，他還是回我這句話，“些許微末之事”，那一來我不難為情嗎？唔，對。他如居心要請我姓關的幫忙，他自然會開口來請我。你不開口，我最好還是暫時不開口為妙。’

‘Oh, no, that won’t do. Last time we met, and I asked him for a task, he answered me: “This is a mere trifle!” He didn’t need me. How can one tell if he has a smart plan this time for handling Yan Liang? Who can tell if he has such a plan? As soon as I open my mouth and ask him for the task, he may retort once again: “This is a mere trifle!” And will that perhaps not be still another embarrassment for me? Absolutely! If he really intends to invite me, Guan Yu, to help out, he will of course open his mouth and invite me. If you do not open your mouth, it is better that I do not open mine either for the time being.’

Sentences containing grammatical features specific to the Yangzhou dialect occur not infrequently throughout the performance in the ‘round mouth’ passages, i.e.: Y.: ‘does not exist’ or ‘cannot’/me de/ 沒得 or /be de/ 不得; Y.: ‘/kw/ 可 as marker of alternative question’; Y.: ‘/haze/ 下子 as verbal measure’; 93 Y.: ‘toward’/ca sia/ 朝 as high frequency

93 The grammatical structures just mentioned are also found in the performance by Dai Buzhang, cf. the section describing his performance. In the following we shall only briefly point out the dialectal structures found in the performance and give the reference in Børdahl 1996 where they are described. Dialectal structures that are also found in the script version are underlined.

26
preposition; \(^{94}\) Y.: ‘here’ and ‘there’ /ze'-kuæ/ 這塊 and /la-kuæ/ 那塊; \(^{95}\) Y.: ‘why’ /zo st/做事; \(^{96}\) Y.: ‘off, away’ /-te’/ 掉 as high-frequency resultative complement; \(^{97}\) ‘oh, dear’ /i-ue/ 嘿喂 as high-frequency exclamation; \(^{98}\) ‘who’ /la-ie'-gw/ 哪一個 as pronoun in the form of DM compound; \(^{99}\) As we have seen, some of the same dialectal structures were found in the script.

Script and performance—discussion

It is beyond doubt that the present script is really written by the father of Fei Li. Moreover, we have second hand knowledge about the circumstances of its creation as told by Fei Li, according to what he knew from his own father. In this script we have no reason to look for direct literary sources (but indirect sources, for example from the novel *Three Kingdoms*, or from drama and other performance genres, are of course fully possible).

The analysis of the sample text corroborates the information that the text was written in stenographic fashion in an attempt to grasp as much of the recent performance as would be necessary for the scriptwriter to reproduce/recreate the episode in his following rehearsal (or for his own future public performance). In the novel, the entire episode of Guan Yu and Yan Liang is told in less than 400 characters, while it is more than ten times longer as told by Fei Li in 1996. In *Three Kingdoms* there is no passage with the same contents as that found in the extract from the script or the performance. In the script there is, however, a single phrase, i.e. ‘too valiant for any to face’, which is identical with the text in the novel. This expression is not used in the performance.\(^{100}\) Both script and performance testify to the high degree of textual independence of the *Yangzhou pinghua* tradition vis à vis the written heritage of the novel.

In the performance some of the vocabulary and expressions from the script turn up, as mentioned, but not longer passages. The telegraphic style of the script, where subjects and objects are implicit, seldom explicit, is not a general characteristic of the spoken performance being far more explicit in this regard, but in the dialogue of the two main characters we find a tendency towards the same short and abrupt utterances as in the script. Therefore this feature of the script is not necessarily only a kind of shorthand, but it may function also as a marker of spoken style in imitation of the military leaders. It is precisely some of the short commands and concise exchanges of Cao Cao and Guan Yu that are similar in script and performance.

Significantly, dialect features peep through here and there, a strong indication of the closeness between the script text and the oral tradition from which it was taken down. It is also a sign of the scriptwriter’s willingness to write ‘from the ear’, in stead of basing himself on a model of normative written style. His use of substitute characters, reflecting homonyms of his dialect rather than homonyms of MSC, is further evidence in this direction. The text of the script does not necessarily depend only on what was said by his master on the day of performance. It may just as well represent what Fei Junliang, the disciple and scriptwriter, had incorporated into his memory together with

\(^{100}\) According to Fei Li, dialogue from *Three Kingdoms* is at times rendered *verbatim* by his father in the script. Considering the circumstances under which the script was written, it seems reasonable that these phrases were taken down in writing according to the spoken performance of the master. However, it is also possible that Fei Junliang added such wordings from his memory of the novel, while writing his personal manual.
his present competence in the art. What is found in the script may be more recreation than reproduction, which is also true of the traces of dialect grammar: their origin in the original performer (the master) or in the writer of the script (the disciple) cannot be verified. All we can say is that the same dialect features are found in the performance given three quarters of a century later by his son.

The comparison between script and performance shows that the discrepancy between the two is of a different kind from that of the first example from Western Han. We saw how the text of the script in Western Han was to a certain degree preserved in the performance and how the latter functioned as a kind of exposition and exegesis of fixed phrases handed down from ‘history’. The Three Kingdoms script, on the other hand, represents a drastically shortened summary of spoken/heard words. What is here recorded in writing is not ‘memorable wordings of former times’, but rather bits and pieces of the master’s actually performed words as remembered, with memorable and less memorable utterances jotted down.

The linguistic flexibility of prose narration in Yangzhou pinghua is demonstrated once again in this small sample of script and performance. Apart from poetry and set pieces, memorization by heart is foreign to this tradition, where prose constitutes by far the larger portion of each performance. The Three Kingdoms script obviously does not invite to learning by rote. Written as a personal aide-memoire, it appears as a truly transient genre, flimsily mediating the oral and written modes of language.

CLOSING REMARKS

The two scripts we have examined have certain features in common. Both are narrative texts rather than mere lists of topics or synopses. However, the above analysis of a prose section from each script shows that they are both extremely brief, not only with a view to the corresponding performances, but also considered as independent texts. Even though the Western Han script is written in a fairly coherent, if highly old-fashioned style it is telescopic and offers so little ‘filling’ that it would seem indigestible for any uninitiated reader. It would be difficult to imagine a person who would enjoy reading the script for its own sake. The same holds true in the case of the Three Kingdoms script, but for different reasons. In this script the incoherent and abrupt jottings of performed words have probably served their purpose as triggers of memory. But for a person who was not trained in the oral tradition of the repertoire the text would give little help. Both scripts could only be used for recall by persons who were already well schooled in the oral transmission. Their format appears natural for the storytelling profession where reading and writing used to be infrequent and secondary activities.

In their linguistic form the two scripts are clearly different from each other. The older script is written in a wenyan-like style, with no dialectal features. The younger is written in a much more vernacular style, including structures of typical Yangzhou dialect grammar, in spite of the fact that it also treats military conversation conducted in imposing and commanding high style. The difference in written style might be an early testimony to the growing influence of vernacular Chinese, baihua, resulting in the language reform of the early decades of twentieth century China, where literary Chinese, wenyan, was superseded by the vernacular as the new normative written medium. The new norm did not, however, encourage the writing of dialect. It is plausible that the two scripts were conceived through different mechanisms: the scriptwriter of the older script was condensing into literary style the main contents of the repertoire, while the scripter of

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101 In the translation of the script, I have aimed to give the meaning of the passage in normal English, rather than literal translation. Punctuation and quotation marks are further added, something that makes the text far more readable and far less casual than it is in the original manuscript form.
the younger was reflecting in rapid succession his immediate recollections of spoken words and sentences.

The use of ‘vulgar characters’, suzi 俗字 (non-authoritative forms or ‘loans’) is often explained as a sign of the ‘lack of culture’, meiyu wenhua 没有文化, (low education) of the storytellers who made such ‘errors’ based on the sound of the words they tried to commit to paper. From the sample texts under study, the ‘loan characters’ (homonyms or close homonyms) can be plausibly explained as intentional shorthand, rather than misunderstanding or unintentional miswriting of the oral performance they reflect. At the same time, such writing habit attests to the close connection between the written specimen and an oral source, in particular when the homonyms reflect dialect pronunciation.

None of the two samples can be envisaged as ‘notational scripts’ in the sense of careful and complete registrations of oral performances as spoken. The purpose of the written version was not to get published for a reading audience, but to help stabilize the oral tradition and prevent extinction. But this kind of script was not actually used for educating the next generation of storytellers, but might occasionally be consulted by storytellers who already had the basic training. Therefore, though the scripts were generally not used for training the young storytellers, they seem to have had a not unimportant function as handbooks where the mature storyteller could look up passages and lines of plot when his memory failed him. However, we must emphasize that such usage is little talked about by the storytellers and they have no terms for it, though they have a rich technical vocabulary on their art.102 They do not regularly use scripts when preparing the day’s performance, but rely on mental concentration and meditation, for which they do have a special term, ‘to warm up the story’, wushu 暖書.103

As mentioned at the outset, the existence and usage of storyteller’s scripts are interesting with a view to a deeper understanding of the role of writing and written influence in the oral traditions of storytelling, from a contemporary as well as a historical perspective. Written scripts play a different and much more extensive role in some other present-day orally performed genres, such as Suzhou chantefable, Suzhou tanci 蘇州彈詞.104 Yet, in other genres, where this problem has been treated in depth, the use of scripts is far more sporadic,105 just as is the case in Yangzhou storytelling. Apparently the dependency on written scripts is growing as the general educational level is raised. Yangzhou storytellers, as we have seen, are sceptical about this development. Traditional education of ‘oral transmission and teaching from the heart’ is still seen as the backbone of the art, the absolute precondition for its continuation.

This attitude does not imply that the Yangzhou storytellers have resisted the governmental efforts to have their repertoires transformed into reading materials, the new storytellers’ books, xin huaben. Quite the opposite: The recording and editing of their stories into anthologies of single performances or thick volumes of their roman-fleuve repertoires has been accepted as a great honour to their tradition. The edited volumes have little in common with the storytellers’ own tradition of scripts, as we have noticed

102 Official lists of Yangzhou storytellers’ professional terms were published from 1993 and later, cf Yangzhou quyi zhi 1993. I began to collect my own lists of storytellers’ terms from 1989 and published my first list in 1996, cf. Børdahl 1996. There is of course the possibility that the storytellers still prefer to keep a certain number of expressions secret, just like they kept their scripts secret in former times.


above, and they also deviate in many aspects from the oral performances. Most storytellers participated in their capacity as the master tellers whose words were taken down via various kinds of recording. The so-called ‘storyteller’s manner’ as defined with a view to the novel and short story of traditional Chinese fiction had a deep impact on the way the xin huaben were edited and presented to a readership of the whole country.

Conversely, the narrative forms of both extracts from the scripts are almost completely devoid of the characteristics of the ‘storyteller’s manner’. Apart from the expression ‘what a spectacle’ zen jian, introducing a poem in the Western Han script, and the fact that this script contains both prose and poetry in alternation, the other prominent features of the ‘manner’ are lacking. None of the two scriptwriters apparently had any interest in adapting to a ‘reader’s taste’ or write more than the absolute minimum deemed necessary for the preservation of the repertoire, not for future ‘readers’, but for future performers.

It is not presently possible to define the two scripts under discussion as ‘typical’ or ‘representative’ of all scripts of Yangzhou storytelling. On the other hand, there is no reason to see them as exceptional, apart from the fact that scripts as such were marginal in the tradition. The analysis of their narrative and linguistic form versus the oral performances of the same episodes gives a picture that seems highly consistent with the traditional customs of transmission of the art and the pedagogy applied in the milieu of masters and disciples, i.e. the emphasis put on oral and aural teaching and imitation, rather than learning by heart from written materials.

Comparing these very items and their corresponding performances, their function as a precarious ‘life line’ of the oral tradition, a true aide-memoire, emerges in high relief. By way of conclusion it is tempting to speculate once more on the old ‘prompt-book theory’ about a connection between early vernacular fiction and storytellers’ scripts. As mentioned, early samples of short stories, huaben, and folkbooks, Pinghua, dated from late Song to early Ming, are sometimes claimed to be printed versions copied from storytellers’ ‘prompt-books’ or scripts. On the background of the case study of two scripts of Yangzhou storytelling from ca. 1880-1923, considering their extremely laconic style—‘cut to the bone’—one would wonder if any of the early pieces of Pinghua or huaben fiction that have been considered candidates as ‘storyteller’s scripts’ would really qualify as such? The short-winded and completely unadorned style of the Yangzhou scripts, bordering on the incoherent and sketchy, the almost total absence of ‘storyteller style’ of narrative markers or simulated communication with the audience; these are pertinent features in perfect harmony with the actual usage of the scripts. Our findings would fit better with the view that the early huaben fiction as transmitted to our time has gone through considerable literary rewriting and layout adaptation before being printed, a format that would seem unnecessary and superfluous in scripts for a living performance

106 Cf. Børdahl 2003, pp.76-84.
107 Only in exceptional cases did the storytellers themselves participate as editors of their own repertoires. The storyteller and editor Fei Li, whose script is investigated in this article, belongs, however, among these few.
108 The most obvious characteristics are: ‘division into sessions’ hui, 回; overt narrator, ‘storyteller’, shuohuade, 說話的; narrator’s comment, pingjie 評解, and simulated dialogue, ziwen zida 自問自答; stock phrases, tanyu 套語 (‘the story says’ hua shuo 話說, ‘meanwhile let us tell’ qie shuo 且說, ‘the story divides in two’ hua fen liang tou 話分兩頭, etc). Cf. Idema 1974, p.23-24, 70; and Bordahl 2003, pp.68-72.
tradition. 109 The literary rewriting might, on the other hand, be closer in many aspects than any eventual scripts to the actual oral performance of the time.110

In the field of oral literature in China, the diffusion between written and oral culture is a topic of endless ramification and stratification. The relationship between script and performance is one such aspect. The relationship between script as aide-mémoire for performance, and as draft for literary rewriting and editing into reading matter is another. While the question of the relationship between early huaben literature and storytelling has been thoroughly treated from many aspects, the handed down storytellers’ own scripts that are accessible in our time, have so far received but little scholarly interest. My hope is that this essay may serve as a point of departure for more extensive studies along these lines.

References


109 The Sanguo zhi Pinghua [Folkbook of Three Kingdoms], 1321-23 AD, is certainly textually compressed and has a style reminiscent of the western Han script, but a far remove from the Three Kingdoms script. The episode ‘Lord Guan kills Yan Liang’, Guan Gong ci Yan Liang 關公刺顏良, in the folkbook contains the meeting between Cao Cao and Guan Yu before the fighting, but the conversation between the two as rendered in the script and played out in the Yangzhou pinghua performance, has no equivalent in either novel or folkbook, cf. Sanguo zhi Pinghua 1976, p. 34. The Pinghua edition manifests quite a few of the features of the ‘storyteller’s manner’ as found in the huaben fiction at large, cf. Riffin pp.150-155. With a text of this early age, the question is if the narrative markers were ‘original’ in the sense of being written down from oral habits, or if they were already at this stage essentially markers of a written style found suitable for that type of reading matter. There are several features of the Pinghua text that point to the editor’s care to present the story to a readership: the insertion of pictures in the upper third of the page, the text labels inserted into the pictures, the text-dividing labels with ‘titles’ of episodes printed in white-on-black patches into the running text. The announcements of poems, ‘there is a poem to testify to this’ you shi wei zheng 詩曰, are likewise written in white-on-black, appearing in the same way as the ‘titles’. The stock-phrases, ‘the story says’ hua shuo, ‘now let us tell’ que shuo 說起, ‘the story divides into two tales’ hua fen liang shuo 話分兩說, most often appear after a small gap in the running text. Their function as visual markers for segmentation is obvious. How far they might reflect a storytellers’ oral style at the time of the creation of the text seems to me still an open question, cf. also McLaren 1998, p. 263-365.

110 Zhou Zhaoxin 1994 draws the same conclusion, but based on a different outlook and different source materials. However, I tend to doubt the validity of many of Zhou Zhaoxin’s intermittent arguments and criteria for which characteristics in the early ‘huaben’ texts should be considered related to storytellers’ scripts and which should be seen as reflecting the storytellers’ performances of Song and Yuan time. A further discussion of these questions is outside the scope of the present study.
Vibeke Børdahl: Storytellers’ Scripts


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Appendix A

Transcription and translation of the performance by Dai Buzhang, 24 October 2003, corresponding to the passage from the script. Titles of episodes are only ‘invented’ for
performances that are transferred to written genres, such as *xin huaben*. This episode has no title, since Mr. Dai did not envisage such use.

**Western Han** 西漢
_Told by Dai Buzhang_ 戴步章口述

效：涿鹿之心思，依舊詔催風後急。
效：飛熊之入夢，仍然施展子牙才。

大漢天子劉邦，在南鄭城築壇拜將，用治粟都尉韓信為元帥。韓信受帥事以後做了很多準備工作。

“噗禿”一聲催臘信，梅花幾點送春來。
時間快得很，過了新年，今天正月初五。漢王升座寶殿，諸臣前來朝賀。

“有事出班啓奏，無事卷簾散朝。”

“嗯······”

漢王看表大喜啊：

“卿家。”

“吾皇萬歲。”

“觀卿家之表，足見卿家之忠心為國，於民有利，於國有利，於朕躬有利，卿家是一大功······勞。”

還沒有做事呢，這個就說是一大功勞。的確是一大功勞。

“吾皇萬歲，謬獎微臣。”

“但東征之舉是應在何時啓？”

劉邦底下這句話就犯嫌了。是好！我們承認你這個是好，的確是好。好嘛不是擺到紙上的，不能在紙上談兵，我們要付諸實施。付諸實施要有一個時間，
在我的看法，是快越好，哪怕今天就发兵才好呢。所以问，哎～东征之舉，
应在何时呢？韩信啊胸有成竹，晓得主人翁要问这回事，自己未早也准备好了。
“吾皇万岁。项羽居彭城已有多时，未及西顧。”

這個項羽到徐州来，他把這個西邊等於忘記得了。不是忘記得了，諸君
諸侯将刘邦弄到衰中来以後，他心頭就安了。不是嗎？你到了那個沒有地方，
纨绔偷壞的地方，路上有群山阻隔，而且我派有重兵在三秦，就是現在陝西之西
的那個地方，重兵。稟道又煥得了，又沒得個路曖。你走那個川中出來，走漢
中想出來，走裏中向東邊來，不得來。既然不得來，我髙枕無憂。所以韓信說啊，
他認為我們是不得出去，他就不曉得我們另外有玩意，旁的玩意頭，他不曉得。
所以：
“項羽居彭城未及西顧，諸侯各散。項羽前面的那些部下都各到各地去了，彭城
現在真個虛。”

“照這樣子說法子，現在就可以走了”
“啊，不然！萬歲，諸侯雖然各散，我大漢部下將士、所有軍人也久未操演。”
可是久未操演啊！不相干！韓信在近幾月當中，操兵訓將，
玩得著實不醜，就是劉邦還沒看見過呢。現在嘴頭說的客氣話，久未操演，其
實不相干，想請他去看嘿在。

“明日有請吾皇萬歲到校場閱兵，請萬歲聖裁。”

這個意思之聞就是，我明天把軍將操演了把你看嘿在，你望能用不用用，
你看好不好，然後啲我們再談日期的話。嘿嘿！
“好！既然嗯～元帥如此說法，明日清晨，朕躬當到演武廳前去，觀元帥操～兵。”

“吾皇萬歲。你老閱兵以後呃，自然由臣親駕東征。”

“好！哈哈、哈哈、哈～～，擒項羽，捉範增，東征破楚，一切仰仗你～～元帥。”
“哎哎～嘿嘿嘿！”

乖乖，這個不是仰仗我的事情，要大家用勁哩。哈。
“萬歲，所有我裏中的軍將，上至將士，下至軍人，均也是東路人士，久
欲思歸，如果我們現在舉兵東征，唉～正是有泰山壓卵之勢。”

“啊哈，卿家言之是也。”

劉邦面前的一些人，都是江蘇人、山東人、安徽人這一，這一路的人
d啊，給項羽趕到這個裏中來。裏中秦陝之地，這個地方苦得很，哪個不想家。
固然嘛，這個家鄉是美麗，家鄉跟這個地方對比起來是好，即使那個地方也窮困。
人生莫不愛其父母，人生莫不愛其家鄉，當然都想家鄉。這個大兵你如果訓練好
了，趁對過不得防備的時候，趁對過有缺陷的時候，冒然投資的打了去，哎，的
確是起作用。

“好！”

君臣大致談到這個地方，其他的事情就不談了。吃中飯唉，擺宴唉，今天
財神日子唉。大家吃過中飯之後，各散，哎就約好了，明天大早，演武廳。飯後
不談。

一夜過去，第二天大早，韓信到演武廳。韓信當然要來得早，噢，他等於
是個，這個地方，他就是個主人，請了萬歲來看嘛，主人翁是個客唉，文武官員
都是他的部下。韓信築壇拜將跟那個掛帥不同，掛帥，諸位看戲也好，聽書也好，
看小說本子也好，什麼張三掛帥、李四掛帥，太多了，穆桂英掛帥，女將掛帥。
拜帥，拜帥叫困處之舉。內管皇宮各業，外挾各路諸侯，出將入相，文武官員，
連主人翁都要聽他的軍令，軍令大似聖旨。這個拜帥，曆古以來也不多。當初剛
有什麼風后、姜子牙，都是拜帥，韓信拜帥。這個韓信之後立拜帥就不多了。什
麼玩意頭，國家的制度不同了。在秦朝以前嘛是王，到秦始皇開始做秦始皇，開
Inspiration: Thinking of his defeat in Zhuolu, the Yellow Emperor acted according
to old custom and hastily appointed Feng Hou his commander

Inspiration: When King Wen saw the Flying Tiger in his dream, he let his marshal
Jiang Ziya give full play to his talents

When Liu Bang, the Son of Heaven of the great Han, set up his altar and conferred titles
on his officials in the town of Nan Zheng, he appointed Han Xin, the officer of cereals, as
Commander-in-chief. After Han Xin had accepted the post as commander, he started
(military) preparations.

Plop! A New Year message arriving right here! Buds of winter-plum announcing spring
is near!

Time was passing quickly, and presently New Year was over and today was the fifth of
the first month. The King of Han stepped up into the ceremonial hall, and all his officers
came forth to bring their greetings.

If you had something on your mind, you might step forth and present a memorial!
If you had nothing on your mind, you might roll up the curtain and leave the court!
“Please”!
Han Xin had something to say:
“My King, Your Majesty! Your servant Han Xin would like to present a memorial to
Your Majesty!”
“Please! Very good!”
He delivered the memorial and Liu Bang read it at once:
“Good! Well...”

In this memorial the situation of the two states of Chu and Han, as well as the
situation of all the feudal lords of the whole country were described: climate, terrain and
population. Where were conditions favorable to our state of Han? Where were conditions
harmful to the state of Chu? Where were the advantages and strong points of the state of
Chu, and where were our own disadvantages and defects? All of this was treated in the
memorial. The historical trend, the working of the whole country. ‘Not bad!’ Liu Bang was
reading and reading: ‘Ahem! The territory and strength of Xiang Yu, the military and
political control of Xiang Yu, are superior to my own. If I now launch a punitive expedition
towards the eastern state of Chu, it is like throwing an egg against a rock, isn’t it? Well, not necessarily. All things have their opposites. He has his strong points, but also
his weak points. I have my weak points, but also my strong points. I should use my own
strong points to beat my enemy on his weak points.’ Han Xin had put these questions on
the punt-pole (the protocol). When Liu Bang read this, he was happy. These questions had
been discussed earlier, too. Great talents and men of learning, such as Xiao He, Zhang
Liang and Li Sheng, had already discussed these matters. The old strategist Xiahou Ying
had also discussed the question with him. However, Han Xin’s statement today was
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different. Han Xin had given a much more penetrating explanation. Han Xin had been much more explicit. ‘His ideas are in many ways on a higher level than ours, and his strategy and military art are much more clever than what has been expressed by all the others.’ Liu Bang himself was an expert. As soon as he read the piece, he was clear about the great difference! He became so glad in his heart, yes, so very glad at heart and his face lit up with pleasure:

“Ha, ha! Ha, ha! Ha, ha!”

When the King of Han had seen the memorial, he was greatly pleased and laughed:

“My Lordship!”

“My King, Your Majesty!”

“My Lordship, a glance at your memorial is sufficient proof of My Lordship’s loyalty towards our country! This is good for the people! Good for the country! Good for us, the King! And good for the civil and military officials! Your Lordship has made a great contribution!”

Nothing really had been done so far, but this was already called a great contribution. Yes, it was, indeed, a great contribution.

“My King, Your Majesty! You are overpraising your humble servant.”

“But when should we undertake the eastern expedition?”

The last sentence of Liu Bang showed his suspicion. ‘Well, indeed! We are convinced that this plan of yours is good, really good. It is good, but we should not let the matter stay on the paper only. One cannot conduct military operations on paper, we must put the ideas into practice. If one wants to put something into practice, it is necessary to decide the time. In my opinion, the sooner the better! Even if we must start recruiting the soldiers today!’ Therefore he asked: when should we undertake the eastern expedition? Han Xin, however, had a well-thought-out plan, and he had guessed that his sovereign might ask this. So he had prepared for this a long time ago.

“My King, Your Majesty! Xiang Yu has settled in the town of Peng long ago. So far he has not cared about the western lands.”

As soon as this Xiang Yu had settled in Xuzhou, he seemed to have forgotten the western lands. He had not forgotten, but when the feudal lords had managed to have Liu Bang settle in Bao Zhong, he (Xiang Yu) felt safe at heart, don’t you think? ‘Travelling to that place where not even dogs can live, that remote hinterland, your road is blocked by endless ranges of mountains. Moreover, my fraction has heavy troops stationed in the state of San Qin.’ That is in the area west of present Shaanxi, heavy troops, mind you! The plank roadways had been burned, so that there were not even any roads! ‘If you, on your side, want to leave the territory of Chuan Zhong, if you want to leave the town of Han Zhong, and travel from the town of Bao Zhong to the eastern territories, how far it is, how impossible to penetrate! Since it is impossible to penetrate, then I, on my side, can sit back and relax! So when Han Xin says he does not think we, on our side, are able to attack, this is because he does not understand that we have other means, yes, we have some other ways out! But he is not aware of that.’ Therefore:

“Xiang Yu has settled in the town of Peng. He does not care about the western lands. The feudal lords are dispersed in all directions.”

The troops under Xiang Yu’s command had moved to various places, and the town of Peng was actually empty (of soldiers).

“From what you say, I gather that we should get going now, or?”

“Oh, no, Your Majesty! The feudal lords are dispersed in all directions, true enough, but the troops and generals of our great state of Han, all of our soldiers have for a long time been untrained”

What? Had they for a long time been untrained? Nothing of the sort! During the last months Han Xin had drilled his men and trained his generals to such a degree that there was nothing to be ashamed of! But so far Liu Bang had not seen this. At present he was turning out some polite phrases, like: “Our soldiers have for a long time been untrained”. As a matter of fact, there was nothing to it. But he wanted to invite Liu Bang to see for himself.

“My King, Your Majesty! We are pleased to invite You tomorrow to inspect the troops in the parade ground! We are anxious to hear the wise judgement of Your Majesty!”

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The meaning behind his words was: “Tomorrow I shall let the soldiers and generals perform their military exercises for you to have a look. Then you can see for yourself if they are capable or not, whether you think they are fit for battle or not. Only thereafter shall we discuss the timing.” Ha, ha!

“Good! We shall follow your advice, Commander-in-Chief, and early tomorrow morning We, the King, shall go to the martial arts mansion and observe the parade of our Commander-in-Chief.”

“My King, Your Majesty! As soon as Your Highness has inspected the troops, your servant is surely willing to take on the duty of the eastern punitive expedition.”

“Good! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! We rely on you, My Commander-in-Chief, to arrest Xiang Yu, to seize Fan Zeng and to launch the eastern punitive expedition and destroy the state of Chu!”

“Oh, ha, ha!”

‘Oh, good gracious! This is more than I can undertake, this demands the effort of all of us! Ha!’

“Your Majesty! My whole army here in the state of Bao Zhong, from the generals and officers to the common soldiers, are all from the eastern regions. They have long cherished the hope to return home. If we now call out the troops and launch the eastern expedition, sure...! This is like crushing an egg under Mount Tai!”

“Ah! My Lord, you have said it and so it is.”

The people in front of Liu Bang were all coming from places such as Jiangsu, Shandong and Anhui. They had been forced by Xiang Yu to retire to the territory of Bao Zhong, to the Qin state in Shaanxi. This was a very poor country, who among them was not longing for home? Surely, their homeland was beautiful, compared to this place their homeland was so much better, even if it was poverty-stricken, too. Human beings all love their parents, human beings all love their homeland, and so, of course, they were all homesick. If you gave such a common soldier good training, and seized the opportunity, when your enemy was unprepared and handicapped, for bold investment in attack, surely the outcome would be efficient!

“Good!”

When sovereign and subject had come about this far in their conversation, they stopped talking of other matters. It was time for lunch, a banquet was laid, today was the day of the God of Wealth! After lunch, they dispersed in all directions. It had already been agreed: Early tomorrow morning at the martial arts mansion. After lunch there was no more discussion.

One night passed, and early next morning Han Xin went to the martial arts mansion. Han Xin, of course, had to arrive early. Well, in this situation, he played kind of the host. He had invited His Majesty to come and look on. His master would be his guest. The civil and military officers were all under his command. When (Liu Bang had) set up his altar and conferred titles on his officials, appointing Han Xin, the meaning of ‘being in charge’ meant something different. ‘To be in charge’, well, when you ladies and gentlemen see an opera, or listen to storytelling, or read a novel or the like, both Mr. Zhang, Mr. Li or anybody can ‘be in charge’, this is really very common! Mu Guiying is ‘in charge’, or that female general is ‘in charge’. But to be appointed the Commander-in-Chief, this title meant dictatorship in a predicament. All the officials of the inner administration of the imperial palace, all the lords of the various regions in the outer administration, all the generals in the field and the ministers at court, the civil and military officials, and even the sovereign himself had to obey his orders. His orders were powerful like imperial edicts. From time immemorial, this kind of Commander-in-Chief is rare. Early in history such famous men as Feng Hou and Jiang Ziya were appointed Commander-in-Chief, and Han Xin was appointed Commander-in-Chief. But after the time of Han Xin, we only rarely find this kind of Commander-in-Chief. How come? Well, the ruling system of our country was not the same any more. Before the Qin dynasty we had kings. When Qin Shi Huang set up himself as First Emperor of Qin, we began to have emperors. Later the concentration of power in the hands of the emperor was different from the periods of the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, and therefore the habit of appointing a Commander-in-Chief also
disappeared. So this was the historical event when Han Xin was appointed Commander-in-Chief.

When Han Xin today came to this place, there would be some sort of ceremony. The sovereign had not arrived yet. There was cracking of fireworks, rolling of drums, the sound of music! Oh, what a dusty field of activity! The soldiers sent off firecrackers: “Da, gudu, da...! Gulugulugulugulu...!” Drums were rolling: “Zhagelongdong, wulinakeke.....!” The whole scale of tones in one great harmony, the whole army of soldiers in imposing battle array! “Arms! Present arms! Arms! Arms!”

As soon as Han Xin arrived they paid homage to the flag, oh, the big army banner was marvellous! The banner was hoisted. The big army banner was hoisted. Oh, then he took his seat. He took his seat, and the civil and military officers stepped forward to pay their respect. When this was over, they stood on each side in attendance, the civil officers to the east and the military officers to the west. When all the generals had stepped forward and bowed to Han Xin who was sitting in the middle, they all waited for the sovereign to appear. What a dignified spectacle! If you had seen it, it was truly...

Translated by V.B.

Appendix B


FORMER THREE KINGDOMS 前三國
Told by Fei Zhengliang 費正良口述

‘Beheading Yan Liang’ 斬顏良

[...]
這時候兩個人在大帳上正在飲酒，只聽見崗前“啊……，……”一陣嘈嚷。有個報事的當差的“的篤的篤的篤……”跑到大帳口單落膝朝下一跪：
“報……！稟丞相，顏良在崗下要戰哪。”
“知道了，退。”
“是歐。”
報事的當差的起身退下去了。
“將軍請用酒。”
“丞相請。”
一會兒工夫，只聽見崗前“啊……”又是一陣嘈嚷。報事的當差的又到了：
“報……！稟丞相，顏良在崗下口出不遜之詞：在那塊罵戰哪。”
“知道了，退。”
“是歐。”
當差的又退下去了。
“將軍請食肴。”
“丞相請。”
一會兒工夫，“啊……”崗前又是一陣嘈嚷。這當差的驚驚慌慌到了帳口：
“報……！稟丞相，顏良在崗下說，如果丞相再不開兵，他就領兵沖上白馬坡啦！”

“知道了。退。”

“是歐。”

當差的又退下去了。

“將軍遠道而來，途中辛苦了，請多飲兩杯。”

“丞相請。”

當差的接連報了三次，曹操居然若無其事。曹操能若無其事，關羽這時候心裡就不安了。“喲，曹操啊！顏良要沖山啦，你光顧陪我飲酒就行了嗎，你這個時候應該要領兵去抵擋咧。不過也不能怪曹操，他請我姓關的來做事的呀！來飲酒盤桓，這時候總不能把我這個尊客一個人撂到這個地方，他跑掉了，這成什麼待客之禮呢。照這麼說，我就向他討差下崗去戰顏良？唉喂，不能。我上次見他討過差咧，他回我是‘些許微末之事’，用不著我。這時候你曉得他有沒得計策對付顏良呢？說不定他有了妙計了，我一開口討差，他還是回我這句話，‘些許微末之事’，那一來我不難為情嗎？唔，對。他如居心要請我姓關的幫忙，他自然會開口請我。你不開口，我最好還是暫時不開口為妙。”關羽想了一陣子，結果沒有開口。那麼曹操應該請關羽下崗了？嘿，曹操不敢開口。他上次沒有答應他哎，這個時候如果開口：“喲，姓關的呀，請你幫幫忙，下崗去跟顏良打下子”？

姓關的臉色一沉：“啊，我上次討差，你說是‘些許微末之事’，用不著我，怎麼這時候又請我下崗？豈有此理，不去！”這個釘子碰下來不得輕。“姓關的這個是聰明人，他曉得我曹操的苦衷，他居心幫我的忙哦，用不著我開口，他自然會開口向我討差。你不開口歐，我就直接請你吃，看你吃得可好意思。”哎，倒也罷了，兩個人，你等我開口，我等你開口，這叫兩個人在這塊掙勁。哪一個掙得過哪一個呢？曹操的掙勁大，關羽掙不過他。

關羽吃啊吃的心裡頭不安了。“不好，這樣子下去要誤事。如果顏良真的沖上山來，把白馬坡丟掉，旁人議論起來，不怪曹操啊，怪哪個？怪我關羽。說關羽這個人武藝雖好，學問雖大，但是敵對一點，他好吃，在白馬坡上只顧在這塊吃，就拖住曹操陪他吃，這個樣子才把白馬坡丟掉的。你看我這個聲名多壞，我算什麼英雄豪杰呢。那麼怎麼辦呢？有了。我現在先不談下崗的事，跟他談談旁的事，看他可有辦法來對付顏良。哎，用得。”

“請問丞相，大兵到此，開兵幾次？”

“將軍若問，開兵一次。”

“勝負如何？”

“將軍勿用提起，先是宋憲，魏續二將下崗雙雙陣亡，後來如此如此，令他等四將下崗也未能取勝，至今還令止罷戰。”

“噢……”

關羽心裡明白了。“聽他這個口氣，到現在他還沒得辦法來對付顏良。’

“如此講來這顏良果然英勇。關某雖有耳聞，未曾目睹，意欲到崗前一觀，不知丞相意下如何？”

Transcribed from the audiotape by Fei Li 費力

[...]
“It shall be!”
The attendant got up and withdrew.
“Please, drink a cup, my general!”
“Please, Prime Minister!”
After a while the noise in front of the mountain was heard again: ‘A-a-a-a-a-a-h!’ The attendant entered once more:
“Report...! Our Prime Minister is informed that Yan Liang is standing at the foot of the mountain, boasting and cursing us into battle!”
“I know! Withdraw!”
“It shall be!”
The attendant again withdrew.
“Please, have something to eat, my general!”
“Please, Prime Minister!”
After a short while the noise was again heard from the mountain. The attendant entered the doorway of the tent in great alarm:
“Report...! I must inform our Prime Minister that Yan Liang stands at the foot of the mountain, saying if you, our Prime Minister, do not come out with your men in battle immediately, he will lead his men up the White Horse Slope in attack!”
“I know! Withdraw!”
“It shall be!”
His attendant once more withdrew.
“You have come a long way, my general, it has been a hard journey. Please, have another couple of cups!”
“Please, Prime Minister!”
The attendant had given report three times and still Cao Cao was acting as if nothing had happened. Cao Cao acted as if nothing had happened, but now Guan Yu was getting upset. ‘Oh, Cao Cao, Yan Liang is just about to attack the mountain. Do you think it is all right just to sit here with me and drink wine? You ought to lead your men out in resistance. But on the other hand, I cannot blame Cao Cao. Why has he invited me, Guan Yu? To drink and feast. Just now he cannot very well leave me, his honoured guest, and run off, that would not be a proper way to treat his guest. According to this, should I not ask for the task to go down the mountain and enter in combat with Yan Liang? Oh, no, that won’t do. Last time we met, and I asked him for a task, he answered me: “This is a mere trifle!” He didn’t need me. Can you tell me if he has a smart plan this time how to handle Yan Liang? Who can tell? As soon as I open my mouth and ask him for the task, he may retort once again: “This is a mere trifle!” And will that perhaps not be still another embarrassment for me? Absolutely! If he really intends to invite me, Guan Yu, to help out, he will of course open his mouth and invite me. If you do not open your mouth, it is better that I do not open mine either for the time being.’ Guan Yu thought a bit about it and he actually did not bring the matter up.

Well, do you think Cao Cao would ask Guan Yu to go down the hill? Ha! Cao Cao didn’t dare to open his mouth. Last time he refused Guan Yu’s offer. If he opened his mouth now: ‘Hey, Guan Yu, please help me! Will you please go down the mountain and have a fight with Yan Liang?’, then Guan Yu’s face would darken: ‘Hem! Last time when I asked you for the task, you said: “This is a mere trifle!” and you didn’t want me. So why do you ask me to go down the mountain now? This is really outrageous! I’m not going!’ After such a rebuff it isn’t easy to smooth things out again. ‘Guan Yu is a clever fellow; he is well aware of my embarrassment. He surely intends to help me out, so there is no need for me to speak out first. He will speak out on his own and ask me for this task. “If you do not speak out, well, then please, be my guest during this meal and let’s see how you feel about it!”’

Well, enough! Both of them were sitting there waiting for each other to speak. The two of them were trying the patience of each other. Which of them had the strongest will? Cao Cao had the strongest, Guan Yu could not compete with him in this.

Guan Yu was eating and eating, getting more and more uneasy. ‘This is no good. If we continue like this, it will be a disaster. If Yan Liang really storms the mountain and we lose
White Horse Slope, people will begin talking. And they will say: “Guan Yu is good in the martial arts and he is well educated, but he has one weak point: He loves to eat. That time at White Horse Slope he was so obsessed with eating that he kept Cao Cao waiting while he finished his meal, and in this way they lost White Horse Slope.” Can you imagine what a bad reputation I’ll have after this? What kind of a hero will I be called henceforth? What is to be done? Got it! Right now I will not talk about going down the mountain, let me first discuss something else with him and see whether he has a plan how to get the better of Yan Liang. Well, let me try:

“I should like to ask the Prime Minister, after your men arrived here, how many times have they engaged in combat?”

“Since you ask this question, my general, they have engaged in combat once.”

“How was the outcome?”

“Don’t mention it, my general. First my two generals Song Xian and Wei Xu went down the mountain and both of them fell in battle. After that things have been only so-so. Now four other generals have gone down, but none of them have been able to win a battle. Up to now we are in a cease-fire.”

“Oh!”

Guan Yu understood very well. From the tone of Cao Cao’s voice he could hear that up till now Cao Cao had not found a way to get the better of Yan Liang.

“The way you speak about it, I see that Yan Liang is truly a brave hero. Even though I have heard about him, I have never seen him. I should like to go to the hillside and have a look. What do you think about it, Prime Minister?”

[...]

Translated by V.B.
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