

The Personalization of Tradition in the Stories of Wang Yü-chen

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Comparative literature scholars and folklorists have not, as yet, significantly shared their research aims and results, even though both deal with narrative materials from several cultures, and versions of the same story may be written by highly literate authors and told by folk narrators. With the exception of structuralists¹ who have drawn attention to similar patterns in both oral and written media, scholars in the two disciplines continue to use distinct methods and techniques of analysis. Doubt concerning the compatibility of folklore and comparative literature hinges perhaps on a common criticism of folkloristics: namely, that folklorists, who were mainly compilers of tale indexes for the tales they so laboriously collected and stored away in archives, neglected to study individual works and narrators. As those aware of current study in the field know, however, folklorists no longer view a story or ballad as merely an anonymous work of various ethnic, cultural, or linguistic groups. Instead they make every effort to give due attention to the performer and his innovative contribution to the tradition. In fact, they would take great exception to Paul Van Tieghem's claim that "Art plays no part in these anonymous traditions whose nature it is to remain impersonal."² The research of Lina Dégh, Robert Adams, Henry Glassie, and others³ demonstrates just how personal traditional stories and songs are. Accordingly folklore scholars have reached an impasse with regard to the indexes produced by historic-geographic scholars, and methods of dealing with the dialectic between non-distinctive tradition and personal achievement have not been developed. The study presented here asserts that some attention to the related discipline of comparative literature can aid narrative

folklorists in approaching the study of folklore comparatively and prevent them from resorting to generalizations which to a large extent neglect the artistry of individual performers. Through a comparative analysis of tales, the relative accomplishments of a storyteller can be evaluated, and a better understanding of how an individual teller personalizes traditional motifs and themes can be attained.

However, the comparative folklorist who wants to discover the relative innovations of the individual must still base his study on the existing typologies since direct cross-cultural influence, except in rare cases, would be impossible to trace, and the transmission of oral tales within one tradition or locality is usually more evident. The function of the indeces can be twofold: on the one hand, the references noted in them may verify the traditional nature of the tale as it appears in a particular form or combination of motifs and show in general how different versions have been distributed throughout the world; on the other hand, types or type-complexes can establish a range within which stories may be selected for comparison, thus making the comparison less subject to randomness. Of course, the folklorist will still be met with difficulties in dealing with the typologies of internationally distributed tales. The typology of international tales compiled by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson⁴ has an Indo-European bias. And even though this has been rectified by local indeces which serve the purpose of providing a more accurate reflection of one culture, such as the Thompson-Roberts index of Indian tales and the indeces of Wolfram Eberhard and Ting Nai-tung for Chinese tales,⁵ some problems remain. As Ting states, "Chinese tales, as compared with European tales, are far more mercurial in form and entangled in structure. . . . one Chinese tale can be composed of several AT types, or parts of these types."⁶ Since it is in local and individual variation that different stories or parts of stories become combined, it is through analysis of individual stories and combinations that we can arrive at some understanding of how stories whose traditionality is confirmed by the indeces can at the same time be personal expressions.

With the aim of discovering some of the relatively distinctive features in the traditional tales of a Chinese storyteller, two narratives told by Wang Yü-chen (王鈺貞), a woman living in Tainan, Taiwan from whom I have been collecting a complete repertoire of stories, will be discussed. Wang Yü-chen was born in Hui-min Hsien (惠民縣) in Shantung in 1922, the fourth child and the third daughter in a family with five children. When she

was a young girl, stories were often told in her home. This was before the War of Resistance against the Japanese and in the relatively peaceful early years of the Republic. The narrator mentions two occasions for storytelling: one while making thread or weaving cloth and the other when relaxing in the evening after the work and household duties were done. Members of her immediate family, relatives in the extended family, and neighbors would be present on such occasions. Although her younger sister was given the opportunity of getting an education, Yü-chen was not, and, therefore, she remained preliterate. Perhaps, as a consequence of this, her ability to remember stories she has not told or heard told for many years is phenomenal. Now living in Taiwan, she uses her stories for entertainment and in the instruction of her three children. Although some aspects of her tales reflect very closely her own rural life in Hui-min Hsien, the themes remain highly relevant to modern situations.

The comparative approach taken in this paper attempts to discover how Wang Yü-chen adapts traditional stories to make them especially meaningful to herself and her own family. First, one of her stories will be compared to tales from the same type-complex in order to determine to what extent her tale is related to and yet distinctive from other stories in the general Eurasian and in the local Chinese tradition; then, a focus upon another of Wang Yü-chen's tales, one which is thematically related to the first one, will show how a legend frames the tale to form a story of another genre still bearing many of the distinctive personal features found in her folktale; finally, the complexity of the common theme underlying these two stories will be discussed, demonstrating how the two stories are complementary expressions of one theme which is not only traditional, but, through these stories, made personally significant to the teller and her audience.

Tale I: The Traditional Motif Combination

The following story told by Wang Yü-chen has many variants throughout the world, yet it remains distinctly her own:

A long time ago there was a poor man who was a beggar. One day while he was begging, he happened to pick up a pan. A pan, it was just a tile pan! When he returned home, his mother just put the pan in the courtyard.

She said, "I'll use it to feed the chickens and the dogs with!" But when she mixed the chaff (*k'ang*, 糠) in the pan no matter how much they ate, the chickens and dogs couldn't eat up all the *k'ang*. Old people being more experienced, she said, "Oh, could this be a magic pan?" She washed it clean, wrapped a spool of thread and threw the thread into the pan. As soon as she dropped it into the pan — Oh! The pan was full! Oh! It is a magic treasure pan! Later she sold the thread; then she threw the coins into the pan and began to take money out of the pan. As she watched — Oh! she knew it was a magic treasure pan. The beggar was able to buy a silk bag and a silk hat and silk clothes, but he still didn't give up his original profession of being a beggar: "A beggar; to beg, that's all right." One day he suddenly had a happy thought: "When we put money in the pan, it produces more money; when we put thread in the pan, it makes more thread. What would happen if I put my father into the pan?" So he put his father into the pan. The moment after he put him there, he had to pull him out again; in the magic pan there was another father. He embraced and pulled out this father and there was yet another. He pulled out about seven or eight, all of them fathers. But in the pan there was still another and he pulled him out. Then he stopped pulling fathers out of the pan, because he was so tired. But when he didn't pull the last one out, the father started to yell and scream in the pan. "What can I do? I'll break the pan!" He broke it to pieces and only one father was left. This story tells us he didn't have a fortunate fate. He got a magic pan and didn't use it right; he put his own father into the pan. (Collected in Tainan, July, 1979)

The above tale chosen from Wang Yü-chen's repertoire is a version of Chinese Type #555C (Ting Index), "Inexhaustible Supply of Wealth and Fathers." Ting gives the following abstract for the tale:

- I. *Discovery.* The container is a (a) vat (b) magic pearl or stone (c) urn (d) drum (e) others. It is (f) discovered in a spot where vegetation is always lush whatever may be the weather or moisture (g) brought up from under the sea (h) the gift of a deity.
- II. *Loss.* (a) It falls into the hands of an insatiable man, or (b) three brothers of a family strive for its possession. As a result (c) the father falls into the container and, instead of innumerable treasures, the family has to support innumerable fathers. (c¹) The original owner sits in it and innumerable owners are pulled out. (d) It becomes useless or broken. (e) It is retrieved by the deity and returned to the sea.

Ting lists references for 71 tales collected of this type in China. In the earlier Chinese index compiled by Wolfram Eberhard, the number given tales of this type is #63, "Das Zauberding." In documenting sources for Chinese tales, the Aarne-Thompson international index refers to Eberhard's type and classifies the tales as Type #565, "The Magic Mill,"⁷ a type which has been treated in a historic-geographic monograph, *Die Zaubergaben*, published in 1911 by Antti Aarne.⁸ Allowing for variations in classification procedures and faulty texts, it is perhaps safer to say that the comparisons made with Wang Yü-chen's tale are from a range of Ting and Aarne-Thompson types from #555 to #565, the common feature of which is the motif of inexhaustible wealth or good fortune and its misuse. This tale is best known in the West in the form of the Grimm story "Vom süßen Brei," from the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Consequently, the outline of the type in the Aarne-Thompson index to some extent follows the Grimm version: "The hero or heroine receives (a) a magic pot that fills itself with porridge or (b) a mill that grinds meal or salt. (c) Only the owner can command it to stop." Following this there are motifs concerning what happens when the object is not used correctly: "(a) In the absence of the heroine her mother commands the pot to work but she cannot stop it and it fills the house with porridge until the owner returns to stop it;" or "(b) the thief of the object cannot stop it and must give it back to the owner;" or "(c) a ship-captain steals the mill and takes it aboard ship, where he commands it to grind salt. He cannot stop it and it sinks the ship and keeps grinding. This is why the sea is salty." Referring to Aarne's Indo-European tale abstract and his postulated original form of the type to represent Western versions, the study below compares a Japanese tale,⁹ an Indian tale,¹⁰ and a Chinese tale from Kiangsu¹¹ to the Shantung story told by Wang Yü-chen.¹² The features which distinguish her version from others include the following: the dramatis personae, the motivations for the characters' actions, the objects received, the ways in which the objects are received, how they are used and misused, and other significant cultural aspects. Some versions are folktales, while others are legends, a generic aspect which suggests that the folktales and the religious legends are actually complementary to each other.

In all versions of the type the receiver of the magic object is very poor. In the Japanese version the recipient is a poor man with a rich brother who will give him nothing to eat. The rich man tries to get the younger brother to leave the household by marrying and this increases the poor

brother's need. In the Indian version the protagonist is also poor and desperately hungry. However, he is of the older generation and is happy that he has been able to get his daughter married so that he will not have to provide for her. In the Kiangsu Chinese tale the receiver of the magic object is not a poor man with a family to feed, but a poor woman. She must support both her own daughter and her mother-in-law who is very cruel. Her heaviest labor is carrying water from the well, and she contemplates suicide as a relief from her endless labor. In Wang Yü-chen's story related above, the main character is a beggar who humourously even when he is able to afford better things cannot forget his old profession. This beggar role which by definition is one of lacking good fortune or *fu* (福) is very much in accordance with the story's main point of the receiving of an object which brings a poor man wealth. In the Japanese and Kiangsu versions, the receiver of the magic object who is poor and hungry (or overworked) has potentially jealous or antagonistic family members or friends who will steal and misuse the magic object. However, in Wang Yü-chen's version where the beggar lives with his own mother and father, since the elders are more aware of how magic is to be used, the misuser is the recipient himself, the beggar. His humourous stupidity replaces the jealousy present in the other versions. Besides this, the only significant difference in the tales' characterization seems to be the age or sex of the receiver of the object. All protagonists, by virtue of their need, are deserving of the good fortune provided them.

All of the objects received can produce food or water and other necessities of life. This particular motif is important in the identification of the type which is marked by the aspect of objects producing things inexhaustibly until some minor or major disaster has occurred. The object serves as a core element, and on a thematic level, the moral attitudes and character of the protagonists are measured by the objects' use or misuse. Aarne believes the *Urform* of the story contained a mill which would produce food at will. In the Japanese version millstones are used to produce food and drink and finally salt. Both the Indian and the Kiangsu version contain a magic wishing rod. In the Indian story the rod works directly to produce food and drink, while in the Chinese story, water is produced in a pail tapped by a rod. Wang Yü-chen's story, however, contains objects reflecting her own life to some extent: the pot or pan found by the beggar produces *k'ang* for the chickens and dogs and cotton thread for weaving cloth. The misuse of the pan by the beggar himself who puts his father in it is, as reference

to versions listed by Ting and Eberhard from other areas of Shantung shows, not a particularity of Wang Yü-chen's story, but a rather common comic ending for this tale, at least in Shantung.

The way the magic object is received from a donor also varies somewhat in the versions although in all it seems to be associated with a supernatural world of magic power. In accordance with this source of the object is the somewhat surprising fact that all the versions mention how the receiver finds out about the object's properties. In the Japanese version a strange old man in the mountains gives a steamed dumpling to the hero and tells him to take it to the *kobito* or the little people for a trade. Wild pigeons, who almost provide a good meal for the hero in the Indian version, persuade him to take the magic wishing rod instead and tell him how it is to be used. In the Kiangsu Chinese version the girl is given a magic rod by an old woman who suddenly appears before her at the well as she is contemplating suicide. Giving the girl the magic rod, the old woman instructs her with a taboo against striking the water pail more than once. In these cases, since the misuser is someone other than the hero, destruction follows upon not knowing how to use the magic object. In Wang Yü-chen's story, the beggar, in line with his profession, merely picks up the object, but since he does not know how to use it, his good fortune cannot last. It is his mother who recognizes the value of the pan: she first suspects that it is a magic pot and then she tests it. Stylistically, the mother's process of discovery is a dramatic monologue which adds to the vividness of this version. The Japanese version with the feature of the trade and the actual trip to another world is closest to the *Urform* Aarne postulated for "The Magic Mill." However, whether explicitly or implicitly, the object is associated with a supernatural world which is the source of both good fortune and disaster.

Two of the versions contain a feast where, as in the biblical miracle of Christ (Matthew 14.13-21), multitudes are provided with nourishment. In "The Magic Mill" tale such a feast arouses jealousy. This is true in both the Indian and Japanese versions which most resemble Aarne's *Urform* of the tale. At the feast the objects' magic properties are revealed or displayed. In the Indian version the formerly poor man goes to a wedding and complains that the food is too meagre. He proves to the villagers he can do better by giving a feast the next day. The Japanese story takes place at New Year's time in Japan when food must be plentiful. This introductory detail is picked up later in the story when the feast is labelled a New Year's feast. It might

be noted that in Aarne's *Urform* which would apply to Western versions of the story, it is stated that the time of the story is Christmas. Neither of the Chinese versions contains this element: in the Kiangsu version the mother-in-law merely begins to use the object while the daughter is away, and this causes the flood; in Wang Yü-chen's version, the stupidity of the son is responsible for the disaster.

All versions seem to have expressed a sense of "rightful ownership." When those who are not given the object jealously acquire it or see that the man or woman to whom it is given does not continue to use it, they are duly punished. In the *Urform*, the object is sold to a rich brother who has recognized its value at the feast, while in the Japanese version the brother steals the millstones. In the Indian version, the villagers who attended the feast tell the king about the rod, and then it must be given to the king. Here the object originally belonged to the king and was only being returned to its "rightful" owner. The mother-in-law steals the water producing rod in the Kiangsu story. This displacement of ownership initiates a flood since she does not know the taboo and greedily hits the pail many times with the rod. It is very interesting to compare Wang Yü-chen's version with respect to this feature. She mentions that the beggar just doesn't have *fu-ch'i* (福氣); in other words he is not a rightful owner for such an object which brings material wealth. Even though the displacement of ownership motif is seemingly missing, it exists by suggestion when one considers how the mother's knowledge of how to use the object is contrasted with the son's life as a beggar who does not even know how to make use of the good fortune which befalls him.

Displacement of ownership and the misuse of the magic objects bring the removal of good fortune and cause disaster. It is mainly in this feature that the versions of this tale which are folktales are differentiated from those which are etiological or historical legends. In the two folktales the disaster is on a very small scale: in the Indian version the object is returned to the king and a moral is given. Here it would seem that there is a misuse of the object, only, in this case, on the part of the owner who brags about and displays his wealth too much. In Wang Yü-chen's story the misuser is also the receiver of the good fortune. This poor man does wrong in making the pan produce so many fathers. He rues his action and has no alternative but to break the pan which has brought him and his family so much good fortune. These two folktales are stories relating the fortune and misfortune of one

man and his family. The legend versions which, rhetorically, at least, purport to be true, involve many other people in the disastrous consequences. In the Indo-European *Urform* the rich brother sells the mill to a ship captain when he discovers he cannot use it and after he has been saved from disaster by the brother who knows how to use the object. In the Japanese version it is the brother himself who goes to sea. In both of these stories the explanation of "why the sea is salty" ends the tale. The ship with the salt producing mill sinks, and the mill continues to grind salt at the bottom of the sea. In the Kiangsu story's ending, as a consequence of the mother-in-law unwittingly breaking the taboo of hitting the pail more than once, the entire town is flooded. Recognizing the goodness of the girl who had received the magic object, but had drowned in the flood, the people build a temple in her honor. According to Eberhard, there were actually numerous temples built to honor drowned girls and women in South and Central China.¹³ Also, in his note to a Shansi version of "Das Zaubering" type, he states that the story is associated with the cult of Shui-mu-niang-niang (水母娘娘) in Chint'sih.¹⁴ According to Chinese myth, the waters of lakes and rivers were kept in buckets which contained enough water to flood all of China. In Ssu-chou there is a legend which ascribes the flooding and submersion of the city in A. D. 1574 to Shui-mu-niang-niang.¹⁵ The Kiangsu tale treated in this comparison is perhaps yet another localization of a "water-mother" legend which contains the motifs of the receipt of a magic object and the object's misuse. Appealing to religious or common belief, the legend variants give evidence of their authenticity: a temple standing in a particular place or the sea being salty. Yet they are of the same type as folktales which make no such appeal to credence.

Not only do versions of the tale vary in the above aspects, they also demonstrate a variance due to differing social customs in different cultures. Such features include the custom of adopted marriage imposed on the introduction of the Japanese tale where the rich brother tries to get rid of his poor younger brother. In the Kiangsu story the girl's having to care for her mother-in-law and the mother-in-law's especially cruel treatment may reflect in part the traditional patrilocality of Chinese society where women served their husband's parents even after the husband's death. The Indian story explicitly transmits social values: the royal prerogative of ownership of precious objects is matched by condemnation of the jealous and bragging nature of the commoner. Wang Yü-chen's story combines aspects of her

own rural life in her native district and general social realities. The objects produced by the magic pan are associated with the weaving activities of the girls in her family and with the food commonly given to chickens and dogs in good times and to humans in times when provisions were lacking. The story also illustrates dramatically the actions and thoughts of a beggar conscious of his profession. It may be noted in reference to this that, according to tradition, beggars who come to one's door in want of a meal should be hospitably treated. These personal, social, and cultural features, though they make the tales fit each social milieu, do not distort the appearance that the versions are of the same type.

The above comparison shows that within one narrative type-complex many kinds of variance occur, including differences in characterization, material detail, genre, and cultural concepts. The story is typified by the order of the motifs and episodes, that is, by the recurrent pattern of 1) a magic object which brings good fortune being received by someone in need, 2) the object's being misused by its rightful owner or by someone jealous of the owner's good fortune, and 3) finally, as a consequence of the improper use of the object, a disaster occurring or the good fortune being removed. This pattern allows the folklorist to identify versions belonging to the type-complex no matter in what cultural milieu they are found. But, more significant for the study of a storyteller's creativity, such a comparison helps to measure the distinctiveness of an individual's style.

Tale II: Generic Variance

One of the major differences in the versions above is that some stories are folktales which make no pretensions to describing an event that actually occurred while others have endings which make them appear to be explanatory or historico-religious legends. Not only does the tale type of "Inexhaustible Supply of Wealth" or "The Magic Mill" have legend variants; it also occurs within legends classified as other types. Thematically it seems to have a particular affinity to Type #750B, "Hospitality Rewarded," and related tales belonging to a complex of tales found spread throughout the world. In the story below, it seems that Wang Yü-chen has combined a story of the type of inexhaustibility of wealth with features from #750B and #751, "The Greedy Peasant Woman." Whereas the hospitality rewarded story usually

has a positive ending, Wang Yü-chen has so synthesized the motifs that in her tale the person who knows no restraint in the use of the inexhaustible magic gift precipitates her own destruction. This story was told immediately following the tale of the beggar and in her repertoire the two stories are not only related to one another by theme and constituent motifs, but are complementary to each other. In Wang Yü-chen's legend, the wandering saint Lü Tung-pin (呂洞賓) is the bestower of good fortune. She has further localized the legend by saying that this *hsien* (仙) is a native of a neighboring district in Shantung and alluding to the existence of an ancestral temple to honor him in that area. The legend was told as follows:

Lü Tung-pin from Shantung never left Chi-nan (濟南). In Chi-nan there is a Lü ancestral temple. They say Lü Tung-pin never left Chi-nan. One day in winter — sometimes he would go out and save poor people in Chi-nan — he came to the house of a poor person. He looked and, oh, there was a girl spinning thread. She would spin thread, weave cloth and sell it. She just spun thread, wove it and made money. In this way she was able to make a living. Lü pretended he was cold — after all, it was winter. He went in and asked to warm himself by the fire. He noticed immediately that this girl was very good. He thought he would just help her out.

- [Lü:] You spin thread, sell the cloth you weave in order to make a little money. How much do you make?
- [Girl:] Making money by spinning thread and selling cloth, of course, I make only a little. I buy some provisions, provide for my life and suffer quite a lot.
- [Lü:] I'm going to help you, how's that?
I'll help you make a little more.
- [Girl:] You, help me?
- [Lü:] How do you want me to help you?
- [Girl:] Well, I'd like to fix up this house of mine, and I'd like to acquire a hundred *mou* (畝) of land.
- [Lü:] Fine! I agree to it.

As she spun the thread, the cotton didn't become less. No matter how long she used it, there was just as much as when she started. Later, she made a fortune, bought a hundred *mou* of land, and fixed up the house. It was just fine! But her covetous heart still wasn't satisfied. People just shouldn't be covetous. She opened up a cotton shop and began to sell cotton on a large scale. Later, she not only sold the cotton, but hoarded it. She made a lot of money. When Lü saw this, he said, "This woman is just too greedy."

[Lü] You wanted a hundred mou of land and I agreed to give you a hundred mou of land. You wanted to build onto the house and I agreed to help you build onto it. You are so greedy, selling things without restraint.

Anyway the cotton would never decrease, but instead the cotton shop caught on fire. People say, when a cotton shop catches fire, it's disastrous. Everything was burned up. The house burned to the ground; the cotton burnt all up. The girl returned to poverty because she was too covetous. People shouldn't be too covetous of their good fortune.

The complex of types listed under the religious tales as #750, #750A, #750B and #750D, wherein hospitality is rewarded in different ways is certainly complementary to the tale-complex of #555-#565 discussed above. Structurally it merely provides a framework for the receipt of good fortune, by rewarding generosity and punishing greediness. Thus, the story of Lü Tung-pin can be considered a legend bearing a variation of the theme of the folktale of the magic pan. But how can the change in genre itself be explained? As a rule, legends are closely associated with folk belief.¹⁶ In the non-legendary versions of the "Inexhaustible Supply of Wealth" or "The Magic Mill," the relationship with the supernatural source of the good fortune or *fu* is not personified; the beggar just chances to pick up a magic pan. As the versions of these stories appear in legendary form their didactic implications tend to become more explicit: the moral is mainly embodied in the interaction of the saint or the donor of the magic object and the recipient whereby the misuser is overtly criticized or blamed by the saint in addition to being destroyed. The folk ethic which links the two above stories makes it clear that one should not misuse or covet his good fortune. The rhetorical devices of legend do not necessarily have to be used in order to get the point across that a person has transgressed a moral value in his behavior. That is, belief in values symbolically transmitted in such tales is as significant as belief in the powers of a particular god or saint or in the veracity of the events in the legendary story. The legend merely reinforces belief in the sources of the good fortune.

In Europe, religious tales of this kind are those which relate of the incognito wanderings of Christ and Peter. A well-known pre-Christian version is that of Ovid's story of Baucis and Philemon in *The Metamorphoses* (Book VIII) where the wandering gods are Jupiter and his son Mercury. Rhetorically a legend, Ovid's version tells why the gods changed habitable

hill country in Phrygia into a lake and explains the existence of an oak and linden tree, the trees being transformations of a kind old couple who in return for their generosity to the gods were able to escape the flood. Before their transformation into trees, the couple served the gods in a temple, itself a transformation of their old cottage. Claiming authenticity, Ovid says he not only was told the story by responsible old men, but that he himself went to the spot and laid fresh wreaths upon the branches of the trees. He then piously adds that those who, like the old couple, worship the gods, should themselves be worshipped. Within this legend frame is embedded the narration of how the gods were hospitably treated by the poor old couple and then rewarded them by turning their meagre fare into a rich repast with wine that was automatically replenished and by warning them of the flood which would punish all the wicked men in the area. Thematically, the old couple favored by the gods are not only deserving because they are poor, but also because of their hospitable conduct. As a comparative literature *stoffgeschichtliche* investigation would demonstrate, the Baucis and Philemon story has appealed to many Western authors including Goethe and Hawthorne. In each case, in literature or in folklore, aside from being localized, the tale is a very personalized expression of the author or narrator.

The Personalized Traditional Theme

The basic theme of both of Wang Yü-chen's stories discussed here is the same, the inexhaustible wealth motifs of the first story being embedded in the legend about the saint's gift. The theme¹⁷ is derived from a traditional belief. Attention to the stated beliefs of narrators is of paramount importance in discovering the dominant themes of a teller's repertoire. Wang Yü-chen often tells her children the following epigrammatic saying:

If one's destiny is good, but his heart
is bad, he'll only go halfway down the road.
If his heart is good, but his destiny bad,
with great difficulty he'll be able to
stretch out the length of his days.
But if his destiny is good and his heart is
good, he will live in honor and plenty to
a ripe old age.

命好心不好，中途要折了。
心好命不好，拖拖拉拉活到老。
命好心也好，富貴活到老。

This saying underlines the tales which convey a traditional belief concerning human character and destiny and the consequences of having or not having good fortune or *fu*. Her stories are dramatic narrative expositions of the belief, wherein the events revolve around the narrative core of a person receiving good fortune. The magic objects and the inexhaustibility of material wealth are concrete representations of *fu*, a major theme of traditional Chinese culture, but also a very personal hope, and the outcome of the stories hinges upon the characters' attitude in the face of their good fortune. At the end of her folktale of the beggar, Wang Yü-chen says that he misused the object because he just did not have the *fu-ch'i* to own it. In the legend of Lü Tung-pin, the girl misuses her gifts from the saint. Hence, for the narrator of the stories there seems to be a balance between *ming* (命) and *hsin* (心), between destiny which may bring *fu* and an individual's moral character which knows or does not know how to deal with *fu*. Not going to excess and not being too greedy or covetous are considered good behavior as are the hospitality of giving and sharing what one has. Thus, it is not fully chance or "good luck" (as the word *fu* has unfortunately popularly been translated into English) which determines a person's life; rather, one's character is deeply involved in his fortune. It is in this way the narrator's stories can be considered character building as well as entertaining and why she uses them in the instruction of her children. And it is thus that the stories are traditional combinations of motifs recognizable as types by historic-geographic scholars of folklore and yet are very personal expressions.

As noted in the motif comparison above, an important feature of "Inexhaustible Supply of Wealth" or "The Magic Mill" was that a poor man in need was given good fortune and wealth, but the outcome of the story shows the misuse of the fortune. In the "Hospitality Rewarded" Type, destruction is spared those who are generous with what they are granted by fortune. Implicit, then, in versions of tales in both types, in the European *Urform* and the Asian tales, is the ethical belief that generous conduct brings beneficence from the supernatural world whereas jealous or covetous conduct when fortune is received brings punishment. This inversion reveals the reward/punishment dichotomy present in traditional folk belief. And stories of reward and those of punishment in relation to the reception of a magic

object can be seen as positive and negative transformations of one traditional theme. By examining the thematic level of narratives in an individual's repertoire, one can see how stories of different genres and types are actually complementary and in a storytelling situation can reinforce each other.

This preliminary study of two stories from the personal tale repertoire of Wang Yü-chen has suggested some ways comparative folklorists can avoid dealing with tales as anonymous entities. A new perspective of the teller and her art is obtained through literary analysis of her tales in comparison with others told in Asia and Europe, the type indexes of the historic-geographic school providing a range within which detailed comparisons can be made. Such an evaluation of the relatively distinctive contributions of the individual teller may lead us toward a better understanding of how tradition is personalized.

Notes

1. That narrative analysis has been proceeding on three fronts is indicated in a bibliography which combines studies from linguistics, literature and folklore although advances in the comparison of specific intercultural materials is not evident: Wolfgang Haubrichs, Hg., "Auswahlbibliographie zur Erzählforschung," *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, Beiheft 4: Erzählforschung 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1976), pp. 257-331.
2. Paul Van Tieghem, *La Littérature Comparée* (Paris: Colin, 1931), p. 89. As quoted in Ulrich Weisstein, *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory*, English Edition (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1973), p. 4.
3. Linda Dégh, *Folktales and Society: Storytelling in a Hungarian Peasant Community*, trans. Emily M. Schossberger (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1969); Robert J. Adams, "Social Identity of a Japanese Storyteller," (Ph. D. diss., Indiana Univ., 1973); Henry Glassie, Edward D. Ives, and John F. Szwed, *Folksongs and Their Makers* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1971).
4. Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale* (Helsinki: FFC 184, 1964).
5. Stith Thompson and Warren E. Roberts, *Types of Indic Oral Tales* (Helsinki: FFC 180, 1960); Nai-tung Ting, *A Type Index of Chinese Folktales* (Helsinki: FFC 223, 1978). Wolfram Eberhard, *Typen Chinesischer Volksmärchen* (Helsinki: FFC 120, 1937).
6. Ting, p. 16.
7. According to the Aarne-Thompson Index, this tale is found in versions in "Estonian, Livonian, Lithuanian, Lappish, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Icelandic,

- Irish, French, Catalan, German, Austrian, Czech, Slovenian, Serbo-Croatian, Polish, Russian, Greek, Indonesian, Chinese, Franco-American, Cape-Verde Islands, West Indies, African (Basuto)." See Type#565.
8. Antti Aarne, "Die Zaubergaben," *Journal de la Société Finnoougriene*, XXVII (1911), 1-96.
 9. Keigo Seki, *Folktales of Japan*, trans. Robert J. Adams (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 134-138.
 10. Rudolf Tauscher, *Volksmärchen aus dem Jeyporeland* (Berlin, 1959), pp. 32-33.
 11. *Min-su Chou-k'an* (民俗週刊) 11:48-51 (1929); Trans. in Wolfram Eberhard, *Folktales of China* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 112-113.
 12. I am extremely grateful to Wang Yü-chen and her family for letting me spend time with them to record tales, legends and experience stories and to her daughter Liu Hsiao-mei for her painstaking work in transcribing the tapes.
 13. Wolfram Eberhard, *The Local Cultures of South and East China*, trans. Alide Eberhard (Leiden, 1968) pp. 37-41.
 14. See Eberhard, *Typen chinesischer Volksmärchen*, note to Type # 63, p. 109.
 15. E. T. C. Werner, *Myths and Legends of China* (London: George G. Harrap and Co., Ltd., 1922), p. 220.
 16. Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, *The Dialectics of the Legend* (Indiana Univ. Folklore Institute: Folklore Publications Group) Preprint Series 1:6 (December, 1973). This work distinguishes between legends which are "active" and "inactive." Since there is seldom active controversy about the truth of an occurrence in historical or religious legends, these are considered "inactive." Because of their distribution patterns, religious legends such as "Hospitality Rewarded" are usually considered folktales. Concerning the processes of change a legend may undergo in transmission, see Arnold Van Gennep, *La Formation des Légendes* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1910), p. 186. These changes include the following: "localization and de-localization; individualization and de-individualization; temporalization and de-temporalization; and the convergence and dissociation of themes."
 17. Here the word theme is used in not only a literary sense, but also refers to the culture. This definition is one Victor Turner derived from M. E. Opler and J. B. Watson: "the term 'theme' denotes a 'postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in a society.' Every culture has multiple themes, and most themes have multiple expressions." See Turner, "Symbols in African Ritual," *Science* 179:4078 (March, 1973); Warner Modular Reprint (1973), pp. 1-2. It may be noted that since A. Christiansen's attempt to classify folktales according to themes, few folklorists have been concerned with the themes of the stories they have collected. See A. Christiansen, "Motif et thème," (Helsinki: FFC 59, 1925).