

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 40.

Last time, Wu Song avenged his brother's death by cutting off the heads of the adulterers Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing. But the county magistrate liked Wu Song, so he just bent the law a little bit by, oh you know, changing the witnesses' testimony so that premeditated double homicide became two accidental manslaughters. As we rejoin the narrative, Wu Song and all the other people involved in the case were being sent to the prefectural court for sentencing.

The prefect was a smart guy and had already heard about this case. After he reviewed the indictment, the testimonies, and the evidence, he switched the cangue that Wu Song was wearing to a lighter one and put him in a jail cell for the time being. As for Mrs. Wang, for her role in the murder of Wu Song's brother, her cangue was traded in for a heavier one, and she was sent to death row. As for everyone else, the four neighbors, the coroner, and the boy Yunge were allowed to go home. Ximen Qing's wife, who was the plaintiff in this case, was told to stay at the prefectural offices while the prefect waited for word to come down from the next level up.

Now, the prefect was also a member of the Wu Song fan club, so he saw to it that Wu Song was taken care of while in jail. None of the jailers tried to hit him up for money like they usually do to prisoners. Instead, they were the ones shelling out silver to buy him food and wine. Meanwhile, the prefect rewrote the indictment to further lighten the charges before sending it up to the Legal Office of the Imperial Government for review. I swear, if they water down the charges any more, Wu Song was just gonna get off with a stern warning. The prefect also dispatched a confidant to rush a few secret letters to the capital to help grease the wheels of justice even more. In the capital, the prefect's connections went and talked to their connections in the Legal Office, and just like that, backs were scratched and the deed was done. Here's the judgment that was sent back down to the prefecture:

"Mrs. Wang stimulated sexual cravings and adulterous desires and persuaded a woman to poison her husband and then told the woman to prevent Wu Song from making a sacrifice to the memory of his

brother. This resulted in the loss of lives and indecent behavior by man and woman. For this, she shall be executed by slicing.”

And just so you know, this form of execution was a literal death by a thousand cuts, as the executioner takes his time slicing off a thousand pieces of flesh from the condemned. This was the most severe form of punishment in ancient China. So Mrs. Wang definitely got her just deserts.

Now, as for Wu Song, here’s the sentence he got:

“Even though Wu Song was avenging his brother, he DID kill his brother’s adulterous wife and Ximen Qing. And even though he turned himself in, he still must be punished. So he shall receive 40 strokes on his back and be exiled to a location 700 miles away. As for the adulterous couple, their crimes were severe, but there is no need to speak of them as they are already dead. As for everyone else, they are free to go home. The sentences should be carried out upon the receipt of this document.”

Upon receiving the sentences, the prefect summoned all the witnesses and the plaintiff to court. He then retrieved Wu Song from his jail cell, read his sentence aloud, and gave him the 40 strokes on his back. And of course, even this punishment wasn’t that bad, as the men doing the caning were looking out for Wu Song. They may have swung their rods 40 times, but only five or six of those actually landed with any force. Then, Wu Song was placed in a light cangue weighing only about 7 pounds. One thing he couldn’t avoid was the face tattoo that all exiled criminals received. In this case, he was being sent to the penal colony at Mengzhou (4,1) Prefecture. All the witnesses and plaintiffs were then dismissed.

Next, they turned their attention to Mrs. Wang. She was brought in from death row and her sentence was read aloud. They then wrote up her crime on a placard and she was made to sign her confession. After that, she was strapped to a wooden donkey and paraded through the streets. And if you don’t know what a wooden donkey is, just google it. It’s NOT a pleasant way to travel to your death.

With much fanfare, she was taken to the execution grounds in the center of town and met her gruesome, though well-earned, fate.

Ok, so before we continue, let's just pause and look back on the story of Wu Song, Pan Jinlian, and Ximen Qing. There are a few loose ends to tie up. One, it's worth mentioning that the character of Pan Jinlian has become THE archetypal villainess in Chinese literature -- the evil, unchaste harlot against whom all evil, unchaste harlots are compared. The novel really doesn't do her any favors, painting her in pretty much the worst light possible so as to leave no room for sympathy. But it's interesting to note that the various TV shows based on the novel have tried to soften her character a bit. On the shows, she's been painted a little more sympathetically, as an unlucky woman stuck in an unhappy marriage, manipulated by the wicked Mrs. Wang, seduced by Ximen Qing in a moment of weakness, getting pulled farther and farther in over her head, and even feeling pangs of remorse about what she's done. In one version, they even had her throwing herself on Wu Song's blade. Of course, there's only so much you can do to redeem her character given the source material. Just like with Song Jiang and his mistress, the novel contrasts Pan Jinlian, the evil harlot, against Wu Song, the upstanding hero who's utterly uninterested in sex and completely immune to all of the foul temptress's advances. Talk about turning the evil-woman trope up to 11.

Oh, and while Pan Jinlian has become the archetypal harlot and temptress, it's also worth noting that Mrs. Wang herself has become an archetype as well in Chinese culture -- the nosy, meddling, scheming old lady next door. Now, there is no shortage of nosy old ladies in Chinese literature, movies, or TV shows, but Mrs. Wang really took it to the next level by infusing her meddling with a strain of flat-out wickedness. If you think about it, she really was the mastermind behind the whole thing, from setting up the affair to plotting the murder and coverup. Pray that you never live next door to a Mrs. Wang.

And finally, Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing may have met a gruesome end at Wu Song's hands in our story, but their characters would find new life in another novel. That work was called *The Plum in the Golden Vase* or *The Golden Lotus*. It was written by someone using a pseudonym in the late Ming dynasty and was in circulation at least as early as the late 1500s, so maybe two centuries after the *Water Margin* was written. This novel is infamous for its explicit depictions of sexuality as it follows the playboy Ximen Qing on various adventures of the flesh. *The Golden Lotus* starts more or less with the story of Wu Song, Wu Dalang, Pan Jinlian, and Ximen Qing as it was told in the *Water Margin*. But this time, Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing survive, and Ximen Qing goes on to more sexual adventures with his many lovers while his clan's status gradually declines.

The book was steamy enough to be deemed pornographic and has been officially banned for most of its existence. Yet, the educated class always seemed to manage to get their hands on it somehow, and it has actually received its share of praise from Chinese and Western critics alike, being hailed for, among other things, its character development. In fact, it has often been considered a work on par with the likes of the *Water Margin*, the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and the *Journey to the West*, which are always at the top of the list when people talk about the greatest classical Chinese novels. So that's good company.

Ok, so anyway, back to Wu Song. After watching Mrs. Wang receive her comeuppance, he prepared to set out on his exile to Mengzhou Prefecture. One of the neighbors brought over all the money from the sale of his brother's possessions. The prefect then issued the paperwork and sent two guards to escort Wu Song. And these two guards respected Wu Song for his heroic deeds, so not only did they not torment him on the way ala the guys who escorted Lin Chong the Panther Head on his exile, they actually went out of their way to look after him. Appreciating this, Wu Song also treated them well. He

had plenty of money, thanks to the generous donations from his fan club, so whenever they passed a tavern, he would buy them food and wine.

It was the third month of the year when Wu Song did his vigilante avenger thing. He then spent the next two months in jail awaiting his sentence. And now, it was the sixth month, which meant scorching hot weather. So Wu Song and his escorts only traveled during the relatively cool hours in the morning. After 20-some days, they followed a major thoroughfare to the top of a hill. It was around 10 a.m., and Wu Song told the escorts, "Instead of stopping to rest, let's hurry off this hill and find some food and wine."

The guards agreed, so they picked up the pace and descended the hill. In the distance, they saw a dozen or so thatched houses near the foot of the mountain. On a willow tree by a stream hung a banner with the character for wine.

"There's a tavern!" Wu Song said as he pointed. So the three of them rushed down the hillside. As they were walking, a woodcutter appeared from around the hill, carrying a load of firewood.

"Hey man, what's this place called?" Wu Song called out to him.

"This is called Mengzhou Road Hill," the man said. "Next to the woods in front of the hill is the famous Crossroads Rise."

Wu Song and his guards continued on their way and soon arrived at Crossroads Rise. They saw a huge tree so thick around that four or five people linking arms would not be able to encircle it. The tree was covered with vines. Next to the tree stood a tavern, and in front of the tavern sat a woman wearing a green silk tunic and sporting gleaming golden pins and wildflowers in her hair.

When she saw the three travelers, the woman got up to greet them. As she stood, they saw that she was wearing a red skirt of fine silk, and she wore rouge and powder on her face. Her tunic was open, revealing a peach-colored silk blouse with gold buttons.

“Sirs, rest awhile before you continue,” she said to Wu Song and company. “We have good wine, good meat, and if you want some snacks, we have big buns!”

Wu Song and the two guards went inside the tavern and sat down on benches around a table. The two guards laid down their wooden staffs and their bundles. Wu Song also took off the bundle on his back and laid it on the table, and then he took off his sash and his shirt.

The guards said to Wu Song, “There’s no one else here. How about we take off your cangue so you can drink at ease? We’ll take responsibility for it.”

So they removed the paper seals on the cangue and took it off and set it under the table. They then all took off their sweat-soaked shirts and laid them on a window sill to dry. The woman now came back with a big smile and asked, “Sirs, how much wine would you like?”

“Don’t worry about how much, just keep it coming,” Wu Song said. “As for meat, bring us four or five catties. We’ll pay for them all together.”

“We also have nice big steamed buns,” she said.

“Good. Bring us 20 or 30.”

The woman smiled widely and went into the back of the tavern. She reemerged with a big bucket of wine. She laid out three big bowls, three pairs of chopsticks, and two platters of food. She then poured four or five rounds of wine in a row for her guests and brought out a steamer of buns.

The two guards started devouring the buns without hesitation. But Wu Song picked up a bun, pulled it open, took a look, and called out to the woman, “Tavern keeper, What kind of meat is in these buns? Dog or human?”

The woman laughed and said, “Sir, please don’t make fun of us. This is a time of peace. How could there be buns filled with dog meat or human flesh? Our buns are all filled with beef.”

But Wu Song said, "In the time I've spent on the jianghu scene, I've often heard people say, 'What traveler dares stop by the big tree at Crossroads Rise? The fat ones end up in dumplings, the thin ones fill up the stream.' "

"Sir, what kind of saying is that? You must've made it up yourself."

"Well, I saw a few strands of hair in this filling. They looked like pubic hair, so I got suspicious."

Now, I can just imagine the two guards stopping dead in their tracks with big bites of steamed bun in their mouths when they heard the words public hair. Wu Song now asked the woman, "Hey miss, why haven't we seen your husband?"

"Oh he's away on business."

"Well then, aren't you lonely?"

"Oh sir, stop teasing me. Enjoy a few more bowls, and then go catch a breeze under the tree. If you want to, it's no problem for you to stay here."

Wu Song thought for a second and then said, "Miss, this wine is pretty weak. Do you have anything better?"

"Oh I have some very fragrant wine, but it's a little murky."

"Perfect! The murkier the wine, the better the taste!"

So the woman went to the back and brought out a jug of wine, and she wasn't kidding about it being murky. Wu Song took a look and said, "This is great wine. It's best warmed up."

"Ah, so you know your wine. I'll warm it up for you," the woman said as she took the wine to the kitchen. Soon, she returned with three bowls and said, "Sirs, please have a taste."

The two guards were thirsty as all, so they gulped down their bowls in the blink of an eye. Wu Song, though, said to the woman, "Miss, I never drink wine without something to go with it. Go cut me some more meat."

So the woman went back into the kitchen, but instead of cutting more meat, she just waited for a couple minutes and then came back out, clapped her hands, and said, "Down you go!"

Almost as if on cue, the two guards started wobbling in their seats, and then plopped backward to the ground with eyes tight shut. On the other side of the table, Wu Song also closed his eyes and fell backward onto the ground.

"Gotcha!" the woman laughed. "Damn scoundrels, I'll have you drink the water I use to wash my feet!"

Yeah, so all the gossip on the jianghu scene about this place was true. This was in fact a "black tavern," one of those places where you stop in for a meal, and the next thing you know, you've become the meal. Earlier, when Wu Song was flirting with the woman, she was thinking to herself, "You damn criminal. You must not want to live, trying to mess with me. You're like a moth flying into a flame. You're gonna get burned. I wasn't planning to do any business, but now I'm gonna fix you good."

And that was when she brought out the drugged wine. When Wu Song asked her to heat it up, she thought, "Yeah, you're destined to meet your end today. The drug works even faster when it's warmed up. I've got you now."

So now, staring at three motionless bodies on the ground, she turned and called out to the back of the tavern, "Alright you two, c'mon out here. Quickly!"

Two big guys rushed out and carried the two guards into the back. While they were doing that, the woman went to collect her victims' bundles. As she did so, she could feel the weight and shape of some silver inside, and she rejoiced, "These three are gonna be enough to make a couple days' worth of steamed buns. And we got all this stuff on top of it."

She went to stash the bundles in the back. When she came back out, she saw the two big guys trying to carry Wu Song, but they couldn't even lift him off the ground.



“Look at you two sissies!” the woman said to her associates. “All you know how to do is eat and drink. Totally useless! I guess I’ll have to do this myself. This big boy was trying to flirt with me. Look at how much meat is on him. We can sell him as brown oxen meat. As for those two skinny ones, we can only sell them as water buffalo meat. Once I get this one in the back, butcher him first.”

As she spoke, she took off her green tunic and her red skirt. With her arms bare, she bent down and effortlessly lifted up Wu Song.

But in that very moment, Wu Song suddenly opened his eyes and wrapped his arms around her, held her in front of his chest, and put a tight bear hug on her. He then put his legs on hers and held her in place. She squealed like a pig about to be slaughtered. The two big guys were just about to come help her, but Wu Song let out a mighty roar that left them dazed and frozen in place.

“Hero, spare me!” the woman screamed as she struggled in vain to free herself.

So yeah, Wu Song was on to her from the beginning. He was already suspicious coming into the tavern, based on what he had heard about this place. I don’t know if he actually saw hairs in the bun filling or not, but when he was flirting with her, he was just trying to agitate her into making a move. And he was pretty sure the murky wine was drugged, so he asked the woman to go get him more meat. When her back was turned, he quickly poured out his bowl behind the table. And when he saw the two guards collapse to the ground, he just played along and pretended to pass out as well.

As he was holding the woman in place, Wu Song suddenly saw a man appear in the doorway. He was carrying a load of firewood. When this guy saw what was happening, he quickly put down his load by the door, rushed inside, and said to Wu Song, “Hero, please calm down. Please don’t be angry, and listen to me.”

Wu Song jumped to his feet but kept his left foot on the woman. Raising both fists, he sized up the guy. This man was wearing a black headscarf, a white cloth tunic, hemp sandals, and a sash around his

waist. He had a protruding forehead and prominent cheekbones. A wispy beard adorned his chin. He looked to be about 35 or so.

Clasping his hands respectfully, the man said to Wu Song, "Hero, may I ask your great name?"

"I am none other than the constable Wu Song."

"Are you the Constable Wu who killed the tiger on Jingyang Ridge?"

"Exactly."

The guy immediately bowed and said, "I have long heard of your great name. I am so fortunate to get to make your acquaintance today."

"Are you this woman's husband?"

"Indeed I am. We were blind and did not recognize greatness in our midst. I don't know what she did to offend you, constable, but please forgive her for my sake."

Seeing how respectful this guy was, Wu Song dropped his guard and released his hold on the woman.

"You two don't look like common folk. What are your names?" he asked.

First, the man told his wife to go get dressed, and then they both bowed to Wu Song again.

"Please pardon me," Wu Song told the woman.

"I didn't recognize greatness," she said. "Please forgive me and let's go sit down in the back."

"Who are you two?" Wu Song asked again. "How do you know my name?"

The man answered, "My name is Zhang Qing (1). I used to be the vegetable gardener at a monastery in this area. But I got into an argument with the monks, and in the heat of the moment, I killed them all and burned the place to the ground. There were no witnesses or evidence, so the law couldn't do anything. And then I started robbing passers-by around here. One day, an old man was passing through. I figured he was an easy mark because he was old, but after we fought for 20 bouts, he knocked me on my butt. Turns out HE was a bandit when he was younger. He liked how nimble I was, so he took me into

town with him and taught me lots of fighting skills. He also married his daughter to me. But we couldn't make a living in town, so we came back here and built these thatched houses and ran a tavern. When we spot travelers who are tempting targets, we drug them and then kill them. We either cut them into big pieces and sell them as beef, or we grind them up and use them for meat buns. Each I would take some buns to nearby villages to sell, and that's how we make our living. On the jianghu scene, they call me Zhang Qing the Gardener. My wife is named Sun Erniang. She has picked up all her father's fighting skills, and everyone calls her the Female Yaksha."

Zhang Qing continued. "When I got home just now, I heard my wife screaming for help. Who knew we would run into you, constable. I've told my wife time and again, 'There are three types of people that we shouldn't kill. First are traveling monks. They lead hard lives and have renounced the material world.' And yet even so, a while back she almost killed a really remarkable man. His name was Lu (3) Da (2) and he used to be a major under the old General Zhong. He killed a butcher with three punches and fled to Wutai (5,2) Mountain and became a monk. Because he has tattoos all over his back, he's known as Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk on the jianghu scene. He wields a Buddhist staff that weighs 80 pounds. When he passed through here, my wife saw how fat he was and she drugged his wine. They had him in the kitchen and were just about to cut him up when I came home. When I saw his Buddhist staff, I knew he wasn't a common man. So we brought him around and ended up becoming sworn brothers. Recently I heard that he seized the monastery on Double Dragon Mountain and has become bandits with a Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Beast. He's written to me a few times, but I haven't gone to join him yet."

Now, if all this sounds familiar, it should, because Lu Zhishen recounted this back in episode 24. And back in that episode, we also explained the nickname of Zhang Qing's wife, Sun Erniang, aka the Female Yaksha. Yakshas are nature spirits in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist mythology. They are usually good spirits, but sometimes can be mischievous, and this Sun Erniang certainly pushes the boundaries of the term "mischievous."

Zhang Qing kept going. "My one regret is that there was a pilgrim monk." And by the way, a pilgrim monk, as used here, refers to a class of people who practice Buddhism, but they keep their hair and they wander around, making their living by begging. "This pilgrim monk was a tall man," Zhang Qing said, "but he too fell for our drug. I got home a step too late and they had already killed him. All we have left of him now are a brass-bound iron rod, his black robe, and his monk's certificate. The only other items of importance were rarities. One is a rosary carved from 108 human skull bones. The other is a pair of knives forged from the finest snowflake steel. That monk must have killed his share of people. Even now, those knives still moan in the middle of the night. I just hate it that I couldn't save him.

"I've also told my wife that the second type of people you shouldn't kill are traveling singing girls and the sort. They go from town to town and have to put up with all sorts of crap to make their living. And if we kill one of them, they'll spread word around and sing about it on stage. And then it'll give every one of us on the jianghu scene a bad name. And the third type that I told my wife she shouldn't kill are exiled criminals, because there are many gallant men among them. Who knew my wife would ignore my words and offend you. Good thing I came home a little earlier than usual."

He then turned to his wife Sun Erniang and said, "What gave you the idea to try to kill him?"

"I wasn't planning to," she said. "But then I saw how heavy his bundle looked, and he was getting fresh with me. So I started getting ideas."

Wu Song now explained, "I am a man of principle and would never tease a good woman. I just noticed your eyes staring at my bundle, so I got suspicious and started talking loosely to get you to show your hand. I poured out that bowl of wine and pretended to be drugged. And when you tried to lift me up, I grabbed you. Please excuse me."

Zhang Qing started laughing out loud and invited Wu Song to join him in the back. To see how Wu Song will get along with these Chinese versions of Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we will see what happens when Wu

Song refuses to bribe his way through the Chinese legal system like everyone else. So join us next time.

Thanks for listening!