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# How People Learned to Grow Rice and Sing Songs: Shen Seventh Brother, a Folk Epic from China's Lake Tai

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## Abstract:

In the pre-contemporary era, the rice cultivators of China's Lower Yangzi delta sang songs while toiling in the rice paddy. The Lake Tai region was particularly noted for its long narrative songs about thwarted lovers and local heroes.

The folk epic translated here, "Shen Qige" (Shen Seventh Brother) is regarded as one of the most important and oldest of the Lake Tai folk epics. It tells the story of a man who travels to a mystical land to steal grains of rice. He falls in love with a magical golden bird who teaches him the art of rice-growing. After many tribulations on his journey and much suffering at the hands of a Daoist magician, Shen manages to escape from the mystical land with grains of rice. Shen and his bride, Golden Bird, settle in his home village where they introduce rice cultivation and animal husbandry. This folk epic offers rare insight into the faith system based around a female rice deity. These beliefs parallel the numerous rice deities venerated in monsoonal Asia.

Keywords: China, folk epics, rice cultivation, rice deity, agriculture

## INTRODUCTION

The story of how a mortal man, born on the shores of Lake Tai, in the hinterland of Shanghai, climbed a sacred mountain to steal rice grain to bring back to his village is regarded as one of the oldest of the Lake Tai folk epics (or long narrative songs). The rendition translated here for the first time in English was sung by Qian Afu 錢阿福 (1907–1993) during the 1970s and recorded by a fellow villager and local cadre, Zhu Hairong 朱海容 (b. 1930). This translation is based on the transcript of “Shen Qige 沈七哥” (Shen Seventh Brother) as sung by Qian Afu, published in 1997.<sup>1</sup>

Qian was born into a poor farming family in Dongting 東亭, located to the east of the township of Wuxi. Like most of the rural population at that time, he did not have the opportunity to acquire literacy, however, he was widely admired for his prodigious ability to sing long narratives in mountain song style. This rendition tells a more or less “complete” story in about eight hundred lines. In performance this tale would be sung for several days and been much longer. These longer performance songs had more plot elaboration and included the songs sung in the paddy fields such as “Plucking the Seedlings” and “Transplanting the Rice Shoots.” “Shen Qige” was among the long narrative songs sung by song troupes employed by landlords to assist with the toil of rice cultivation in the pre-contemporary era.

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<sup>1</sup> Zhu Hairong, *Wuge wang de ge: Qian Afu geyao xuan* 吴歌王的歌：钱阿福歌谣选 (Wuxi: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1997), 305–43. An “arranged” edition of this folk epic sung by multiple singers and edited by folklorists is included in the anthology of Jiang Bin 姜彬, *Jiangnan shi da minjian xushi shi* 江南十大民间叙事诗 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1989), 89–169. Simplified character script is used in this translation in line with the transcript. The original authors’s names and book titles are in simplified script.

This rendition by Qian Afu was divided by the editor into ten sections. I have retained this textual division and added English titles for the benefit of the reader.

Qian's style is broadly representative of the mountain songs (*shan'ge* 山歌, a common term for folk songs) of this region. Mountain songs feature mostly four-line stanzas, uneven line lengths, parallelism, onomatopoeia, earthy imagery, and local idiom.<sup>2</sup> The story is narrated mostly in the third person but is enlivened by monologue to represent the inner thoughts of the characters and dialogue between disputing protagonists. In this translation, monologue is marked by single quotes and dialogue by double quotes. The singer, in the voice of the narrator, intervenes in the story to offer pointed comments, warnings, and portents of what is to come.

The folk epic of “Shen Qige” is discussed extensively in chapter 3 of this author’s *Memory Making in Folk Epics of China: The Intimate and the Local in Chinese Regional Culture* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Sinophone World Series, Cambria Press, 2022). The interested reader is referred to this chapter for further information.

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<sup>2</sup> For a study on the ethnomusicology of Lake Tai mountain songs, see Antoinet Schimmelpenninck, *Chinese Folk Songs and Folk Singers: Shan'ge Traditions in Southern Jiangsu* (Leiden: CHIME Foundation, 1997).

PART 1  
THE HUNDRED BIRDS COMPETE IN SONG

South of the river, in the Jing Man wastelands,  
Wearing pelts for clothes and living in shacks, we gathered our food from the wilderness.  
Brother Shen and his wife were the ones who taught us to grow rice and raise livestock, passing  
on the sacred rules and the art of song—how was hard their labor!  
I open my mouth, this treasure box, to tell you in song how it all came about.<sup>3</sup>

Lake Tai is broad and vast, blue-green, pure and bright,  
Sky meets water and cloud follows cloud.  
The sun shines on the jade-green water as golden fins bob up and down,  
Beneath the waves, seventy-two peaks emerge then vanish, come into view, then fade from  
sight.<sup>4</sup>

Towering high, Dragon Mountain soars up to the clouds,  
Silken strands of white tufts entangled around its waist.  
Sinuous and curving, curving and coiling, three twists, nine turns, bending round and round,  
Like Nine Dragon Peaks—once fast asleep, then suddenly aroused.

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<sup>3</sup> *Man* 廿 originally referred to a southern ethnic group beyond the reach of proto-Chinese civilization. The region they lived in was called “the place of brambles and wilderness,” or *Jing* 荆. However, Jiangsu singers use the term *Jing Man* to refer to two villages located at Meili, to the east of modern Wuxi, where, according to legend, founding ancestor Wu Taibo 吳泰 [太]伯 set up an early settlement.

<sup>4</sup> There was a popular belief that beneath Lake Tai mountains lay submerged.

South of the river in the third month, the hundred flowers bloom.  
 On Dragon Mountain the flowers bud yellow-gold to greet the spring; the magnolia flowers bud  
 white as silver; the pink azalea open their mouths to smile; the hydrangea shakes in  
 great delight.

Fresh flowers of all colors and kinds inlaid amidst a forest of pines,  
 Like a slab of green stone inflected with numerous glittering stars.

The hundred flowers compete to flaunt their beauty; the hundred birds display their talent in  
 song.

Large and small, birds of every color and shape come to listen.  
 From far and near, with a querulous clang and clatter, all a-bustle,  
 Flowers, foliage, bamboo and trees, roebucks, cats, deer and rabbits, insects and the myriad  
 shelled creatures, all stop and prick up their ears.

The sparrows, siskins and titmice began their chirpy squeaking, a hubbub of noisy squawks;  
 With a loud “chip chop chop,” the white-naped bulbul let out a screech that terrified the three  
 smaller birds, who, all a-twitter, fled back three steps, as if brought to a halt by striking  
 cymbals and beating drums.

The skylark, with a hop and a skip, led out Miss Oriole; slim and graceful, she followed on  
 behind;

She warbled a hundred rounds and a thousand trills; it was just like a stone chime and copper  
 bell accompanied by a seven-string zither.

On seeing the younger singer, the white-naped bulbul nodded his head and replied,  
 “I give way to you”; with a “chip chop chop,” he ran off the stage.  
 Suddenly a raucous “haha haha” interrupted her fine melody.  
 The skylark led Miss Oriole away; bursting with anger, they slunk into a thicket of green pines.  
 How could the laughing magpie know that the couple had fallen in love?  
 He thought his own singing was better than that of Miss Oriole!

The myna wearing a black gown, red boots on his feet, rushed up to the center of the stage.  
 Clearing his throat, he spoke as well as sang, teaching the magpie a lesson:  
 “You can only cackle and laugh; you don’t understand the seven emotions of joy, anger, sorrow  
 and love.<sup>5</sup>  
 From now on you will be a tireless harbinger of good fortune.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The remaining emotions are fear, hate, and desire.

<sup>6</sup> The magpie (*xique* 喜鹊) is traditionally regarded as an omen of good fortune.

Now the myna could speak as well as sing, in words both fine and proper.  
So, all the birds agreed that the first prize should go to the crested myna.  
Who could have known? An astonishing sight: a young man coming out of the forest with a  
wicker basket on his back and an axe at his waist to cut firewood,  
When he opened his mouth, mountain songs, long and short, gushed forth like gurgling spring  
water from Dragon Mountain.

He ceased his song; the birds sang back—cheep cheep, chop chop, chitter chitter, chatter  
chatter—pure and crisp.

The hundred birds and sparrows spread their wings, dancing gleefully around the mountain  
peaks;

The hundred trees and flowers nodded their heads; bowing at the waist, they uttered words of  
praise;

The hundred insects and animals opened wide their eyes, reared up on their legs, and stood on  
tiptoe.

The myna adjusted his black gown; coming forward respectfully and humbly, he called out  
“ge ge.”

He showed his respect for the younger singer by calling him “older brother.”<sup>7</sup>

The hundred birds jumped and leapt, praising Seventh Brother as the God of Song.

The young man’s name was Shen; from birth he knew no other name;

From that time on he took the name of Shen Seventh Brother.

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<sup>7</sup> The word “myna” (*bage*) is homophonous with “eighth brother.” *Ge* refers to one’s older brother. Because Shen is a superior singer, he is hailed here as the older brother of the myna, hence the moniker “Seventh Brother.”

PART 2  
SEVENTH BROTHER ASCENDS THE MOUNTAIN

From the banks of Lake Tai rises Green Dragon Mountain.  
At the foothills of Green Dragon lies Shen Village of Song.  
Beyond the four borders of Shen Village lies only wasteland.  
Here live the Man people, in cold and hunger, suffering endless misery.

In the village there is a handsome young man;  
He is a fine apprentice of Ancestor Shen Nong, a worthy teacher of Zhang Liang, and the most  
filial of the twenty-four filial sons.<sup>8</sup>  
This fine young man, who is he?  
He is Shen Seventh Brother, the older brother of the myna bird, his name known far and wide.

Shen Seventh Brother, a man of extraordinary character!  
With his strong feet and tireless hands, day after day he climbed the mountain ranges seeking  
food.  
In gathering fruit from trees and plants he is a living treasure, devoted to his mother and kith  
and kin.  
As he journeyed along, he plucked food and hummed a song or two.

As for fishing and field songs, he knows an infinite number,  
As for mountain songs, he knows them all.  
He was the first to sing on top of mountains,  
And so became the very first singer of mountain songs.

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<sup>8</sup> The historical Zhang Liang was a military strategist, but in legendary tales of this region he is renowned as a singer. Stories of the twenty-four most filial sons circulated continuously during the last millennium.

Snow covered the ice, then frost covered the snow in Shen village of song,  
When the drought was just gone, the floods arrived; when the floods receded, plague broke out.  
From every hearth and home came piteous wails and howls of grief,  
Day after day and night after night, shoulder to shoulder and hand to hand, they carried and  
buried the dead.

Lake Tai, broad and vast, was formed by the Heavenly Waters.<sup>9</sup>  
On Lake Tai the peaks of the Isle of Sacred Grotto towered high—the domain of the immortal  
spirits,  
On the sacred isle they grow the five grains and raise the six types of livestock that can cure  
sickness and sustain life.<sup>10</sup>

How our forebears through the ages longed to see this sacred site!

Seventh Brother thought this over and over then clenched his teeth.  
To save his mother, to save his kin, he settled on a plan.  
With a wicker basket on his back, an axe in his hand, a bow and arrow at his waist, hempen  
sandals on his feet, he would journey to Sacred Grotto.  
He bade farewell to his aged mother then hastened forward, crossing rivers and streams,  
climbing hills and peaks.

Over the vastness of Lake Tai, the waves shine like limpid jade.  
The mountain peaks of Sacred Grotto are reflected in the water.  
Wind ripples across the pure blue, the billows flash and sparkle, the trees flicker and shake.  
It was just like the Jade Lake and sacred lotus, when green leaves and red flowers form row upon  
row of nine-lotus lanterns.<sup>11</sup>

Nine-lotus lanterns shone like crystal.  
Seventh Brother cut down trees and built a raft; breaking through the waves, he crossed the lake  
and reached the sacred site.  
Who could tell that just as his boat reached the bank, he would feel a gust of wind.  
Suddenly he heard a buzz, buzz, buzz, as swarm after swarm of wasps flew by.

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<sup>9</sup> According to legend, Lake Tai is vast because it originated in an outflow from the Milky Way (in Chinese, Heavenly Waterways (Tianshui 天水)).

<sup>10</sup> "Five grains and six types of livestock" refers to agricultural activity in general. The singers also commonly say "five grains" when speaking of rice grain.

<sup>11</sup> Jade or Jasper Lake (Yaochi 瑶池) is the abode of Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母), revered since ancient times. She is believed to be an immortal figure who lives on Mt. Kunlun 昆仑山. Here Jade Lake and the lotus lanterns are used to conjure up images of a magical Daoist Heaven.

Tens of thousands of wasps flew straight towards Seventh Brother!  
 Sticking up their tails of steel they took aim at his head, his body, his arms, his feet, wildly  
 pricking, wildly biting, boring through to his heart; it was as if he'd fallen into a hill of  
 knives or a sea of fire, shrieking loudly he fell down time after time; burying his head in  
 his hands he tumbled and rolled.  
 He rolled so much that his whole body was covered in lumps and his entire face was blue with  
 wounds.

Seventh Brother felt sick in his stomach, anxious and downhearted,  
 Fearing death he called out: "Mother, mother, your son cannot carry out his filial task!"  
 Then he heard a call, "Seventh Brother, Seventh Brother" ring out in the air,  
 In a trice he felt the wasps disperse and the pain ease; the buzzing sound was stilled.

Seventh Brother raised his head to see where the voice came from.  
 A bird dressed in golden filigree replied in clear tones:  
 "If you wish to proceed to the sacred mountains, you will encounter ten great trials.  
 Poisonous snakes, vicious insects, cunning foxes and famished wolves, fierce lions and savage  
 tigers, range upon range of mountains, one after the other—it will be very hard to cross."

Seventh Brother listened carefully and paused a moment.  
 Before she'd finished, he waved his hands and uttered these words.  
 "I will follow Pan Gu, who separated Heaven from Earth, and Nüwa, who smelted stones to fill in  
 the sky and suffered endless pain,  
 I will be like sage Shun who crossed mountains to plant and plough, like Yu of the Xia who split  
 a way through mountains and crossed the ocean to control the waters and save  
 mankind."<sup>12</sup>

Having said this, Seventh Brother continued his journey.  
 His filiality and virtue were both so exemplary that the gods and spirits were moved,  
 The precious bird saw this and nodded her head:  
 The Golden Bird called out to him, "Seventh Brother, just wait a little while."

Seventh Brother turned his head and listened.  
 He couldn't guess what was in the calabash<sup>13</sup>—

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<sup>12</sup> These figures belong to Chinese mythology. Pan Gu 盤古 is said to have created Heaven and Earth, Nüwa 女媧 tried to fill in a hole in the sky with pebbles, and Shun 舜 is a sage king associated with the coming of agriculture. Yu 禹 controlled the floods in antiquity and set up the first dynasty, believed to be the Xia 夏.

<sup>13</sup> That is, he could not see what was coming.

MCLAREN, "SHEN SEVENTH BROTHER"

It was as if a hatchling suddenly turned into a duck in front of his very eyes!  
Golden glimmering raw grains of rice fell to the ground.

As the magic grains fell to earth they blossomed and bore a golden harvest,  
The snowy white grains of rice were perfectly round like a set of pearls.  
Seventh Brother's old mother took a sip of gruel; it was just like heavenly potion or a fine  
medicine, suddenly her stomach was full and her body strong.  
When the villagers came to try the gruel, each one gained fresh vigor.

The mother was happy and the community delighted.  
They kept some in a clay pot and put the lid on tight.  
Who could have known that the new storage room would catch fire; in the middle of the night  
the sharp-toothed mice seized the vat of precious grain and ate it all up!  
Seventh Brother was so anxious he was just like Master Stone of Sacred Grotto.

PART 3  
SEVENTH BROTHER IS CAPTURED  
BY THE BLACK TURTLE DEMON

We'll leave this tale and sing of what happened next.  
We'll sing of Sacred Grotto on Lake Tai, a heavenly realm.  
On the peak of Dragon-Tiger Mountain lived Celestial Master Zhang, a descendant of Zhang  
Daoling of the Eastern Han, the founding ancestor.<sup>14</sup>  
The Master's wife was the Old Mother of Sacred Grotto. She bore him seven children but only  
two daughters survived—they were cherished like precious pieces of gold.

These two lotus buds had two different hearts,  
One was moth-borer dark and the other pure white,  
Sixth Sister, the older one, was like the seductive Peach Blossom Maid.<sup>15</sup>  
Seventh Sister, the younger one, was bright of mind, skilled in her work, good and kind.

Sacred Grotto, Sacred Grotto,  
On Sacred Grotto they planted grain and raised livestock to sustain themselves.  
The Celestial Master ordered Sixth Sister to keep strict charge; every year she must descend the  
mountain to capture a hired hand to do the work of oxen and horses in planting the  
crops.  
In the busy season an urgent command was issued; the prawn soldiers and crab generals of Lake  
Tai mounted the banks to assist with the task.

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<sup>14</sup> Zhang Daoling (張道陵 35–157 CE) is regarded as the founder of religious Daoism.

<sup>15</sup> In Chinese legend, the Peach Blossom Maid (Taohua nü 桃花女) is a Daoist adept who spars with another Daoist adept whom she ultimately marries.

Who could have known that there was a Black Turtle Demon?

He had steel-black bones, a coal-black heart, hands of stinging garlic, head like a slippery loach  
and was cunning and malicious.

In the busy season he climbed the mountain and spotted the two sisters busy at their toil.

Entirely besotted, totally distracted, he hit on an evil plan.

That dark night the stars were crow-black; rain suddenly pelted down.

Black Turtle climbed the wall and crept through the hole, feeling his way towards the rear  
garden.

He met up with Sixth Sister; matching each other in lust, they were to meet a disastrous fate.  
From that time on, a black fish demon crept into the gold-fish bowl.

Now Wang Ba was originally a Black Turtle.

He named himself Wang Ba so as not to forget his true self.

He crouched in Lake Tai for over three hundred years but said of himself that he was less than  
forty years of age.<sup>16</sup>

Wang Ba seduced the flighty Sixth Sister, who was besotted with him.

When the Black Turtle appeared before the Celestial Master, he would lower his head and bend  
his waist like a bondsman.

He knew how to boast and flatter, how to follow each and every command; he would even say  
the Master's fart was fragrant.

Sixth Sister went to her father to put in a good word,

She said, "Wang Ba is honest and diligent; he abides by all the rules and is smooth and slick; he  
can be charged with great tasks."

The call of the cuckoo marked the start of the ploughing season.

Sixth Sister hurriedly aroused Black Turtle from the pillow.

She said, "You're not doing your job as overseer; the busy season is rapidly approaching, don't  
get diverted.

Quickly go down the mountainside and grab someone from the Man people; be sure to pick a  
strong and diligent young man."

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<sup>16</sup> His adopted family name, Wang 王, is homophonous with *wang* 忘 "forget." We are told later in this story that Wang Ba is defeated and trapped beneath a rocky outcrop on Lake Tai known as Turtle Head Isle, Yuantou zhu 龜頭渚.

Just as with flowers, there are those in front and those behind, so mountain songs have earlier and later parts.

Next, I'll return to the earlier story and explain it all in detail.

When Shen Seventh Brother climbed the mountain to pluck seeds, his stomach felt like boiling oil.

He gathered the seeds with both hands, humming a tune as he worked.

When a lamb encounters a hungry tiger, it loses its life.

When Wang heard the sound of singing, without a thought, he grabbed Shen and tied him up.

Saying, "Young man! Come to Sacred Grotto mountains to plant the five grains!

You'll be like an old rat entering the store of white rice!"

When Seventh Brother heard he was going to Sacred Grotto,

He was both fearful and happy, just as at the sixth or seventh month the sky can turn from clear to dark.

He was happy that he could travel by boat to the mountain to get grain and plough the fields.

But fearful that his old mother would be on her own with no one to care for her.

Summer sped by, then autumn passed, and it was now early winter.

Leaves fell, flowers withered, and the trees were bare and desolate.

When Seventh Brother saw this he was very sad and wailed out a thousand, ten thousand times,  
"Old Mother!"

The more he called out the more he thought; then he sang a mountain song, "Thinking of My Mother."

When the fox comes out of the cave it wants something to eat,

Sixth Sister hurriedly came out of her door to find the source of the song.

She went this way and that, that way and this, hurrying and scurrying.

Behind the thicket of bamboo and trees she saw something—her heart leapt; both cheeks blushed bright red like fireflies.

'Oh! Who would have thought that there could be such a fine man in the human world!

It was just like finding a single shoot of magic fungus in the midst of mountains and wilderness!"

Suddenly she saw Wang Ba scurry out, his eyes fixed on Shen; with a whack he struck him fiercely and drew out his knife.

Sixth Sister yelled loudly at him,

"Henchman Wang, you are not allowed to step out of line.

Today it's my mother's birthday, the young hired hand can carry the gift and accompany me up the mountain side."

Shen bore the burden as Sixth Sister followed from behind.  
The couple were like husks flying this way and that in the threshing room.  
One thought: 'If only I could turn around and pass on the rules of rice growing to my kinsfolk.'  
The other thought: 'If only I could drop last year's turnip and change it for fresh ginseng.'

Seeking the fish behind the kitchen door, the hungry cat stands on tiptoe, wide-eyed and salivating, its tongue hanging right out.  
Unable to scratch, the itch beneath the boot becomes harder to endure.  
Sixth Sister bore this for a while, but her heart burned, her lungs were on fire, and her stomach churned. She belched and opened her mouth:  
"Seventh Brother! I'll go first in singing a mountain song to keep us entertained."

"Trees on the mountain top, one forest after another,  
The water in the lake gets deeper and deeper.  
Lake Tai's Sacred Grotto presents a wondrous scene,  
Seventh Brother, why not sing a mountain song to amuse us?"

The seeds of the mustard greens fell right into the eye of the needle,  
A drop of water fell into the bottle of oil.  
Seventh Brother was just that moment thinking of his mother and kin.  
What was in his heart rushed out like a river bursting its banks.

"The water of Lake Tai, forever rolling on,  
Sacred Grotto, forever green,  
The water has its source just as the trees have roots,  
I, Shen Seventh Brother, think only of the mother who bore me, who nurtured me, and of my village kin."

The stomach of the centipede is long and winding, giving rise to evil thoughts.  
Sixth Sister thought to herself: just as raw iron bends in the fire, fine men fear the seductions of women.  
With a "hei hei" she sung to reveal what was in her heart: "Seventh Brother, an amusing song is worth a thousand pieces of gold,  
Come now and sing a heartfelt song, so that we can enjoy a laugh or two."

When the water urn breaks beyond the wall one can hear it clearly,  
Seventh Brother furrowed his brows, puckered up his face, his eyes bulged:  
"The small bird trapped in the basket flutters and leaps in vain; the goat led into the pen brays piteously.

I am just like the small bird and the goat, unable to save myself, locked away and sick at heart—  
how can I sing a happy song?"

Whatever she said, Seventh Brother refused to budge.

Sixth Sister was like the revolving lantern at the New Year Festival.<sup>17</sup>

She thought to herself: 'I only need to exert a little magic to make this turtle take the hook and never escape!'

With a "hei hei" she waved her hand, in a trice a speckled fierce tiger launched upon Seventh Brother.

Seventh Brother totally lost his senses; he fell down in the dust.

He saw Sixth Sister leap onto the lion's back; her fists clenched, she threw herself at the fierce tiger and forced it back,

She beat the tiger to death, then stretching out her pointed jade-like hands, she picked Shen up and bore him on her back, up then down, down then up, shaking off the dirt and dust.

As she shook him up and down, she put on airs; her face wreathed in smiles, seeking to charm, she opened wide her red lips:

"Seventh Brother, don't be alarmed,

We can spend time together, there is nothing to fear.

Look at the small birds in the tree and the butterflies in the flowers, they fly in pairs in mutual love,

Sing to me only of love and affection."

Seventh Brother raised his head and saw on the tree there was a white-naped bulbul.

The very sight affected him sorely; his eyes filled with tears:

"When you see a white head you think of a white head,

I think of nothing but sorrow for my white-haired mother!"

Whatever you said to him, Seventh Brother would not budge.

Sixth Sister thought, this is as rare as one strike of summer lightning followed by another,

She thought: 'If the pepper is not hot then add spicy eggplant; I'll use the magic of scent; even a practicing monk would decide to eat meat!'

With a "hei hei" she waved her hand, a five-clawed green dragon opened its bloody maw to gobble Seventh Brother whole.

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<sup>17</sup> At the Lantern Festival at the New Year, it was customary to feature a decorated lantern with figures in silhouette. Once the candle is lit, the hot air makes the lantern revolve and the figures appear to move. Here it refers to Sixth Sister desperately seeking a plan.

Shen was so scared he was struck dumb; he saw Sixth Sister draw out her jewel-encrusted sword.

She fought with the vicious dragon till the sky was dark,

She fought on until the dragon made his escape, her mouth was full of fresh blood,

She grabbed Seventh Brother at the armpits and made off for the mountain valley with rapid steps.

Leaping over mountain brooks, they traversed deep forests until they reached a curved winding path by a mountain cave broad and deep.

Sixth Sister's whole body dripped with fragrant sweat from top to bottom.

She let go of Seventh Brother and wiped her face clean of marks of blood.

Brazenly she claimed, "I have strength to defeat a dragon and subdue a tiger; today Heaven has sent good fortune and a favorable day.

We can seek sanctuary in the Sacred Grotto of the dragon and phoenix."

Seventh Brother was dumb struck as if he'd eaten bitter goldthread; he felt unbearable pain.

He stared at her, his eyes bulging in anger.

He pushed away Sixth Sister with both hands,

When suddenly he heard cries from beyond the grotto, "Sixth Sister, Sixth Sister."

PART 4  
SEVENTH BROTHER TOILS ON SACRED GROTTO

Who was it who saved him from this predicament?  
It turned out to be her lover, Wang Ba, the Black Turtle Demon.  
Wang feared the turtle dove would land in the magpie's nest and he would be left empty-handed.  
With a rattle and clatter like the sound of a vinegar pot shattering, heeding nothing, he raced up the mountain side.  
Sixth Sister's almond eyes were fixed in fury, her heart pounded.  
She said, "I'm here just resting my feet, why are you running up as if it's an urgent matter, like a dog chasing a mouse?"  
Turtle Wang Ba, his eyes moist and soft, hiding his crooked intent with a playful manner, said, "I've come to help you with your burdens."  
Sixth Sister laughed, "Ha, ha," and said coldly, "Let's quickly ascend the mountain." The three of them were like a blind man eating dumplings, hiding their thoughts from others.  
Now Henchman Wang had many nefarious schemes,  
His stomach was full of vinegar, sourness penetrated to his very heart.  
Quickly he climbed the mountain side, with a thump he threw himself down before the Celestial Master, tears forming stinking rivulets on his face, his eye sockets bulging in and out,  
He said, "Seventh Brother has been making passes at Sixth Sister. Celestial Master, you must punish him."  
Henchman Wang talked on until his throat was hoarse.  
When the Celestial Master heard this at first, he only half believed it.

But when he saw the couple enter the Cave Palace with his own eyes,  
He secretly resolved upon an evil plan.

"There is much work to be done on the mountain top, we need many, many men.  
You, youngster, can stay here to do some work, be diligent in your toil.  
Pluck all the fruit in the eastern forest; drain all the water from the southern pond, slash all the  
cogon grass on the western slope; cut down all the bamboo thickets on the northern  
cliff; when these four tasks are done you will be allowed to return home.  
Be sure not to betray my kindness, like the heavenly dog who bit the Immortal Lü Dongbin."<sup>18</sup>

A basket on his back, Seventh Brother went to the Eastern Forest to pluck the fruit;  
it was as hard as trying to extract the moon's reflection from water.  
He picked and plucked, plucked and picked, letting out this complaint:

'Fruit trees, in the tens of thousands, filling up the Eastern Forest.  
Fresh fruit, a hundred varieties, clustering layer on layer,  
Red oranges and green apples growing round and round;  
Large pears, small plums giving off sweet fragrance.

'With a basket on my shoulders, I busily pick the fruit,  
Basket after panier, panier after basket, plucking without ceasing.  
I have toiled from the festival of Pure Brightness to the day of White Dew.<sup>19</sup>  
Oh! Why is it that when I pluck at the front, the rear grows even more thickly; when I pluck to  
the left even more fruit grows on the right?"

Somewhere a drum beat rolls and echoes loudly in a rocky cavern,  
From thin air comes the voice of a woman, melodious and low, pleasing to the ear.  
"Good-hearted Seventh Brother, listen to what I have to say,  
Do not be afraid, do not be dismayed.  
All you have to do is hang up your paniers on the trees; do not let them touch the ground.  
In an instant you'll be able to pluck an entire mountain full of fruit."

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<sup>18</sup> This common saying relates to the story of Daoist Immortal Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, who captured the dangerous Heavenly Hound of Erlang shen 二郎神. Taking pity on the dog, he set him free, only to be bitten by the ungrateful animal.

<sup>19</sup> The Chinese agricultural calendar is divided into twenty-four solar periods. In this region, the time of Pure Brightness (*qingming* 清明) occurs on the fourteenth day of the third lunar month, and the time of White Dew (*bailu* 白露) occurs on the twenty-third day of the seventh month. In the Western calendar this corresponds to the period from early April to early September.

Her dulcet tones resounded, neither close at hand nor far away.  
He could hear the song, but the singer remained unseen.  
Seventh Brother felt as if he were travelling in a boat enveloped in heavy fog.  
He raised his head sharply; his vision blurred, he saw a golden bird fly out from the forest of  
fruit.

Half doubting, half believing, Seventh Brother hung up his paniers and baskets on the trees.  
Oh! He saw tens of thousands of multi-colored objects flashing and flying into the baskets and  
paniers.

In the blink of an eye the fruit had all been plucked clean.  
When the fruit were all picked his heart felt at ease.

Seventh Brother took up his pole carrier and went to the southern mountain top.  
He drew thousands and thousands of buckets of water and then tens of thousands more, toiling  
hard to drain the water from the pond.  
Anxious and upset, he sang another song of complaint:

'In the southern pond the water is green and pure, the pond is as deep as half a man.  
On one bamboo pole I bear two buckets,  
Day and night, night and day, I carry them ceaselessly,  
The soles of my feet have rubbed away a thousand layers of skin.

From tree after tree, my shoulder pole has broken and been replaced a hundred times.  
I've borne my burden from spring time until winter,  
Why is it that when the eastern side of the pond is low, the western side is high?  
Why is it that when the southern pond is shallow, the northern side gets even deeper?

Now there's something passing strange,  
Neither close at hand nor far away, the voice of a woman came to his ears.  
"Filial Seventh Brother, listen to me carefully.  
Do not be upset, do not be frustrated.  
All you have to do is take up your bucket and strike it once.  
Bucket by bucket, you'll see that the water will drain clean away."

The sun shone brightly in the blue sky.  
Seventh Brother did as she said; bearing his bottomless bucket, he raced ahead.

When the bucket entered the pond, two white dragons flew out with a whoosh, from the bottomless bucket.

Oh! Just as the buckets were back on his shoulder, the pool water flew away and dried up entirely; the bottom of the pool now faced to the sky; it beamed with happiness.

Seventh Brother took up his load and his hoe and went to the western slope to slash the grass stalks.

He slashed crossways and up and down, downwards and then across.

It was such hard work—he flickered like a candle burnt low to the wick.

Angry and annoyed, he sang out this complaint:

'The grass on the western mountain is green and lush,

Wild flowers and thick foliage, with long pointy stalks, low stems, and prickly vines.

With hoe in hand I hack the wild grass.

On and on I go, time after time, my hand working without cease.

The palms of my hands have rubbed again and again into blisters that swell and throb.

I hoe quickly until the hoe is blunt, then I try a new hoe. I take the new hoe and toil until it is blunt, from the year's beginning till the year's end.<sup>20</sup>

'Oh! Why is it that when the grass on the top slope is cut down, the grass on the lower slope keeps growing, and when the grass on the lower slope is all gone, the upper slope is green again?'

The sky, the earth, the day and the time were all propitious.

Before Seventh brother had even begun his song he heard a moving voice in his ears:

"Good-hearted Seventh Brother, listen carefully; don't be perplexed, don't be down at heart.

All you have to do is take up the hoe and hold it upside down.

The hoe will hack down a hundred clumps of grass, a thousand stalks and ten thousand thorny vines."

When Seventh Brother heard this song, he felt overjoyed, like eating the sweet hearts of lotus seeds.

Shen placed the hoe upside down to slash the grassy clumps just as he was told.

When he raised the hoe once, one hundred clumps collapsed and died.

Ah! In a trice, the grass and vines on the slope turned into withered leaves and rotten roots.

When the one hundred types of grass were all slashed, Shen's heart rejoiced.

A hatchet in his hand, he ascended the northern cliff to chop down the bamboo thickets.

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<sup>20</sup> That is, until the final month of the lunar calendar, known as *layue* 腊月.

But as soon as he chopped down one lot, it would grow again.

As soon as it grew once more, he would hew it down, but this was like rocking a boat tied to the banks, his efforts were in vain.

In despair and rage he fiercely complained:

“On the small northern crag grows green bamboo thickets,  
When the wind blows, they make a soughing sound.  
With a hatchet in my hand, I hew down the bamboo.

“The hatchet flashes as it moves, sparkling as it chops without cease.

I hack this way and that way; the new grass is slashed down but then it grows back.

I chop so rapidly that the hatchet goes up and down, down and up, jagged like a serrated saw.  
One year has four seasons, one season three months, one month thirty days; day and night,  
night and day, I toil away.

Oh! Why is it that I cannot chop faster than it can grow again? Even before the bamboo is  
chopped down it forms new shoots; before I can depart, it grows to fill the forest once  
more!”

Happiness takes myriad forms but good luck comes from one person and one event.

Neither near nor far away, the voice of a woman reached the ears of the one who felt sad and  
angry.

“Seventh Brother, with your sincere intentions, listen once again.

Do not despair, do not waste your vigor.

Just change the hatchet for a bamboo knife.

The bamboo knife will cut bamboo, the bamboo will not regrow and come again.”

Seventh Brother felt a spring wind on his face and rejoiced in his heart.

Straight away he changed to a bamboo knife and chopped down the bamboo thickets.

With one stroke he made it bald as a monk’s pate; thousands of bamboo clumps were now  
uprooted and toppled over.

Oh! Not a single bamboo shoot was left in the bamboo garden on the crag.

PART 5  
SEVENTH BROTHER MEETS GOLDEN BIRD

Four matters need to be completed.

That night Seventh Brother lay in bed, tossing this way and that, unable to sleep.

'Will the golden bird's instructions lead me astray? Or is the Golden Bird my benefactor, an immortal in disguise?

If you don't thank someone for a good deed, then you're not a true man.'

He got out of bed and sang this song, standing on the plank as if it were a mountain top:

"Lake Tai, so vast, broad and deep,

Songs churn in my stomach like billowing waves.

Of all the rolling songs, which one will I choose to sing?

I will sing a song of thanks, a song of gratitude."

By fortunate chance, it was the first day of spring.<sup>21</sup>

Talking of the night, the moon had already risen in the east.

While Seventh Brother was singing his song of thanks,

The poignant sound came again, reaching his heart.

"On the heights of Dongting, the mountains are green.

My stomach is full of baskets of mountain songs,

From the panier of songs, what will I sing?

I'll sing of a filial lad, a good brother, a kind youngster, a man with a heart that is true."

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<sup>21</sup> The first day of the lunar new year is referred to as "the first day of spring" (*suifeng chun* 歲逢春), a time of good fortune.

Seventh Brother's heart raced like a horse galloping, the songs in his heart flew like a kite to the vast heavens.

"Fear not that the mountains are high and the lake deep,  
I want to sing to you face to face,  
Dear voice, dear voice, please tell me,  
Are you a bird or a human being? In which ocean or mountain range do you dwell?"

When winter is past the plants await the spring wind,  
Seventh Brother pricked up his ears and heard the response.  
"You have the intention; I am stirred to passion.  
I don't want you to race around high and low; as to whether I'm a bird or human, a human or  
bird; let's come face to face so you can see.  
Come quickly to Phoenix Pavilion."

Seventh Brother's two feet sped like a comet.  
He ran to the Phoenix Pavilion; standing in the middle was a beautiful woman.  
He saw: wavy hair in a phoenix bun with exquisite sparrow-shaped clasps of gold filigree; in the  
sparrow's mouth a set of pearls sparkling like crystal; one set of cherry-like lips; two  
crimson-red cheeks; three strands of black hair gracing her temples; two hands tugging  
lightly on a handkerchief of fine silk.  
She was just like Chang E in the moon<sup>22</sup> come down to the world of dust.

Softly soughing, a fragrant breeze brushed his face.  
When good fortune strikes, it lifts the spirits.  
Seventh Brother turned sideways to peer at her; his eyes dimmed, his face blushed, it was as if—  
gluck—he'd swallowed a glob of spittle, which went smoothly right down to his  
stomach, reaching even his heart and lungs; his whole body felt cool and comfortable, it  
was even better than sipping water from both springs on Dragon Mountain.  
It was just like when the Cow Herd first met the Weaving Girl.<sup>23</sup>

Wordless and quiet, their feelings were endless.  
They both raised their heads; when their eyes met—zap!—bright rays of light left them  
entranced.

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<sup>22</sup> Chang E 嫦娥 is the fabulous lady believed to reside in the moon. It is also a common term to describe feminine beauty.

<sup>23</sup> This is a famous love story based on the journey of the constellations across the night sky. The Cowherd (the Altai Star) can only meet up with the Weaver Girl (the Vega Star) once a year. Here the image refers to love longing.

They lowered their heads, bashful but pleased, as if in a dream or lost in a trance.  
Softly, laughingly, they expressed what was in their hearts.

"My benefactor! I received your help to obtain the rice grain and learn the sacred rules to teach  
the village.

What kind of immortal maiden are you?"

"Seventh Brother! I am the younger sister of the Celestial Master's Sixth Sister.  
Now I've told you, there's no need to be afraid!"

'Don't be afraid!' He was utterly terrified.

Of his three souls, one soul tore right away.

'The Master sought to harm me, the Sixth Sister tried to seduce me, the Zhang family are all bad  
people.'

Seventh Brother turned away like someone who steps on a rope and is bitten by a viper.

In great haste he turned to flee.

Seventh Sister lowered her powdered neck and spoke to him in an endearing tone,

"Do you not know who at the foothills of the mountain told you how to expel the poisonous  
wasps, who instructed you how to cross the ten passes, who gave you grain and taught  
you how to grow the crop; which bird helped you carry out the four tasks on the  
mountain top? Which bird was that, which person?"

Recalling their moment of love, Seventh Brother was as if aroused from a dream; as if he's  
swallowed a firefly, he became aware in his stomach.

"Seventh sister, bitter and sweet melons can grow from the same vine,

One mother can give birth to two different people.

I took a phoenix for a wild chicken demon,

With ten thousand expressions of regret, I blame myself; I misjudged you.

I earnestly entreat you, Seventh Sister, do not despise me."

Not only did she not despise him, her love became even deeper.

Seventh Sister was delighted to the tips of her eyebrows; her passion growing ever stronger, she  
said in a soft tone,

"The cool pavilion, although it is fine, is not a place to stay for long.

Tomorrow at the third watch I'll go to your room to discuss this in detail."

The bell struck in the temple can be heard from way beyond.

Words spoken within the walls can be heard outside the walls.

At the Phoenix Pavilion, Seventh Brother and Seventh Daughter, whispering, arranged a rendezvous.

Beyond the pavilion, Sixth Sister secretly listened in; this will be the root of calamity!

She waited till the second watch rang out from the watchtower.

When Wang, plied with wine, was drunkenly asleep, she glided off with tiny steps. Her neck and head outstretched, she slowly left the room.

Feeling her way along the wall, she softly made her way to the room of Seventh Brother, but she didn't see even a shadow.

Seeing no one, she mulled it over; then with a quick roll squeezed herself into the curtained bed, covered herself with the coverlet, and pretended to be sick.

Just as one person got into the bed, someone else entered the room.

Seventh Brother tried to make out the sound of rustling; his eyebrows furrowed tightly.

"Seventh Sister! To avoid scandal, quickly get out of bed!

Whether things be long or short, square or round; square, round, long or short, sit down for a while and we can discuss it."

Seventh Brother stood by the bed and waited patiently.

All he heard was the swoosh whoosh of someone turning on the bed.

Suddenly from behind the curtains emerged ten sharp nails on snow-white soft-skin fingers on two white-jade hands—hands that grabbed Seventh Brother and would not let him go!

Seventh Brother looked carefully, thinking: 'The head of an ox and the mouth of a horse do not fit together'.

It turned out that from behind the curtains it was a case of a white tungsten ring pretending to be made of solid silver; it was actually the debauched Sixth Sister, that stinky demon!

Sixth Sister looked out—the fish she'd got on a hook was trying to get away! She opened her mouth and a strange scent wafted up the nose of Seventh Brother, immediately she grabbed him under his armpits and fled to her room.

Using her magic, she pushed Wang Ba towards a side room next to the lotus pond.

We'll recount later how Sixth Sister waited for her lover to wake with an anxious heart.

But let's talk first of how the wind blew over Wang Ba; he gave out a long sigh and then awoke.

Wang Ba's brain was really addled; he stuck his head out and saw the golden-lotus feet<sup>24</sup> of  
Seventh Sister walking sideways into the room of Seventh Brother.

He hit on an evil plan; just as when damp firewood ignites, it gives off thick smoke that slowly  
rises higher.

Wang Ba believed he could acquire a pair of carved arrows, one on the left and one on the right,  
both worth a thousand pieces of gold.

Brash and brazen to the very heavens; with all his strength he raced ahead to grab hold of  
Seventh Sister.

But sharp-eyed Seventh Sister dodged sideways; with a loud thwack she struck the Black Turtle  
Demon till his nose was black and his mouth swollen; his black-skinned face like a half  
raw, half cooked crab; there were red flecks in the purple, green streaks in the red, the  
green seeped into the black: all was green, purple, red, and black.

If you called on eight master artists, they would find it hard to paint.

With a sharp clap—just one kick to his turtle heart—the black turtle spun around and rolled  
over the threshold.

Thud, crash—he fell into the open cesspit and was transformed into a turtle demon stinking to  
high heaven.

The brick he'd thrown had broken his own foot!

Wang Ba climbed out of the cesspit, reeking of a vile smell.

With a heart full of shame, he tightly clutched his tail and quietly slid into the room of Sixth  
Daughter.

When Sixth Sister saw him, she tightly pinched her nose and hurriedly hid herself behind the  
bed.

When Wang Ba drew back the curtains of the bed he got a terrible shock—he saw not his lover  
but his foe instead!

Raising his stinky fist, he flailed wildly at Seventh Brother—chip-chop chip-chop!

Roused from his slumber, Seventh Brother rapidly returned his blows.

In the darkness Seventh Sister helped to beat the black turtle to the point where his bones were  
broken inch by inch; his four legs upturned in the air, he tried to beg for his life.

But it was as if he had a fishbone in his throat, he could barely utter a sound.

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<sup>24</sup> This is a reference to small bound feet.

Sixth Sister and Wang Ba harbored dark thoughts, not daring to tell the truth.

Sixth Sister offered this excuse: "That accursed Seventh Brother tried to entice me, he burst into my room!"

Wang Ba came up with endless malicious tales,  
"I tried to catch the adulterer but fell into the cesspit."

Chill rain fell down, a cold wind blew.

The two of them were like a tree growing many branches, each coming up with evil plans.

Sixth Sister wanted to get rid of Seventh Sister and Wang Ba and make Seventh Brother her lover;

The black turtle wanted to kill Seventh Brother and reign supreme in the land of Sacred Grotto.

PART 6  
SEVENTH BROTHER FLEES SACRED GROTTO

The dark clouds scatter, the moon shines bright.  
The wind ceases on Lake Tai, the waves fall silent.  
Seventh Brother and Seventh Sister arrange a love-tryst; the pair meet again beneath the green pines.  
Each sad to bid farewell, Seventh Sister pours out her innermost feelings:  
“Seventh Brother, my dear, hold this in your heart.  
I bestow on you this precious parasol. This talisman is from the Old Mother; it will protect you from harm.  
When you send a swan feather on a journey of a thousand leagues, the gift is light but the meaning deep.  
Wait until you reach your home to open the parasol, open not on your journey; if you encounter difficulties, sing a song to ensure a safe return.”  
When she had finished speaking, she offered the parasol to her lover with both hands.  
Seventh Brother accepted it with a deep bow; he bowed again more deeply, pearly tears filling his eyes.  
“Sister, sister, many thanks for your kindness.  
I thank you for your Bodhisattva heart and feel deep gratitude.”<sup>25</sup>  
Seventh Brother farewelled Seventh Sister and proceeded to the great hall.  
He reported to the Celestial Master: “I have completed the four tasks and now wish to return home in line with your earlier promise”.

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<sup>25</sup> The Bodhisattva refers to the Buddhist goddess Guanyin, renowned for her compassion.

The Celestial Master was astounded and perturbed; he wanted to say "You can't!" but could not find the words.

All he could do was scratch his head and rub his ear.

Gritting his teeth, he had no choice but to agree to the request.

When the bird flees the cage, it flies straight up to the azure sky.

When the dragon leaves the shoals of a river, it dashes and bounds around the sea.

Seventh Brother, his goods on his back, a bundle in his hand, rushed to leave this place of trouble and strife.

He had no idea that a Stinky Mother Plant<sup>26</sup> was intent on blocking his way!

The brightly-colored butterflies long for the flowers to open and bloom;

The red red flowers long for their lover to come.

"Seventh Brother, I'll secretly help you do four tasks,

Don't stiffen your heart with iron and refuse to respond."

Beneath the skirt of the demon fox lurks the crafty tail.<sup>27</sup>

Seventh Brother did not see this with his two eyes as he toiled around the mountain crag.

He said to himself, 'Sixth Sister! The black beans have fallen into the rice vat; how easy now to sort the white from the black!

This fresh fish will return to the ocean and quickly meet up with its beloved!"

When Seventh Brother had finished speaking, he raced away.

Sixth Sister leech-like followed on; the river snails rose ready to strike.

Turtle Wang Ba spun his eyes around and raced to see the Master, saying:

"Seventh Brother has the nature of a jackal; he has blocked the path of Sixth Daughter; it's all undone!"

The Celestial Master gave the order to quickly get the magic talisman<sup>28</sup> and follow in hot pursuit; as for himself, he swung his sleeves in anger and entered the inner hall.

Sixth Sister took the lead with a chicken feather as her symbol of command.

<sup>26</sup> Stinky Mother Plant (*chouhua niang* 臭花娘) is the vernacular term for *cang erzi* 蒼耳子 (*Xanthium strumarium*), sometimes known as Rough Cocklebur in English. It is widely found in Jiangnan and elsewhere. Known for its barbed spines and prickly fruit, it clings to skin and clothing. Here it refers to the evil Sixth Sister.

<sup>27</sup> Fox demons commonly feature in Chinese folk stories. A fox demon takes the form of a beautiful woman to seduce unsuspecting men. This is another reference to the evil Sixth Sister.

<sup>28</sup> The *fuzhou* 符咒 or talisman, was commonly used by Taoist priests. It is a magical inscription written in a special script on paper believed to be able to ward off demons.

One of them wanted to do harm, the other wanted to lead the way.  
Each bore a heart full of malice and hate.

Walking on the Hundred Flowers Promenade, they saw Seventh Brother stepping over the jagged rocks of the crag.

Sixth Daughter pursed her lips tightly and tried to entice him again.

"Why not accept a place to sleep and wait till break of day?  
Why choose to wind around the grassy paths instead of the broad highway?  
Why leave the flowers unplucked and just walk on your way?  
Why spurn good fortune to return to your miserable village home?"

Sixth Sister longed for Wang Ba to fall into a rage like the Fiery Star.<sup>29</sup>

She said: "Don't bother playing a lute to an ox, quickly use your magic to show your mighty powers."<sup>30</sup>

Sixth Sister hardened her heart and was the first to display her magic arts.

In a moment the rocky hillock was covered in moss, wild flowers, brambles, and hanging vines.

The slippery moss and clinging vines tripped him up; down he fell and hurt his head, blood gushed out.

He called to mind Seventh Sister's words and hummed lightly, softly:

"The path is covered all over with green moss and wild flowers; clinging vines twist and tangle.  
I walk one step but fall back three; with one step forward and three steps back it is hard to advance.

Seventh Sister, Seventh Sister, please give me your advice!  
Tell me how to cross the stony track."

When Seventh Brother had finished his song, he heard a response.

From far away came a soft honeyed voice, so smooth and warm.

"Thick and dense, dense and thick, the slippery moss and wild flowers entangled in clinging vines are snares and traps to do you harm.

Seventh Brother, do not fall down, don't walk on the moss and vines; step instead on top of the flowers."

Seventh Brother trod on top of the flowers and walked beyond the rocky path.  
On the flowery promenade, Sixth Sister set up another ghostly battle formation,

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<sup>29</sup> The Fiery Star (*huoxing* 火星) is the name for Mars, regarded as a fiery planet.

<sup>30</sup> "Don't play your lute to an ox" *dui huang niu tan qin* 對黃牛彈琴. This common saying means don't waste your fine artistry on someone who cannot appreciate it.

Wang Ba rapidly displayed his second magic trick.

From a crevice in a tall mountain, he led forth a huge striped serpent, his three-foot tongue poking in and out.

Seventh Brother was so startled he fell into a sweat—his hair stood on end.

Recalling Seventh Sister, he once again called on his saving star:

“I’ve passed through one trial but now there’s another disaster,  
Seventh Sister, a huge striped serpent from the crevice blocks my path,  
How can I get across the mountain peak?”

The moment his voice ceased the answer rang back clear as a monastery bell:

“There are many snakes on tall mountains; this is truly detestable!

The hard thing about magic is that you have to put yourself in harm’s way.

Seventh Brother, if you want to cross the mountain pass,

You must walk on the serpent’s head, each step firm and steady!”

Stepping on the serpent’s head, Seventh Brother crossed the mountain peak.

In an instant there was a fierce storm; facing him were two old men.

They were dripping wet from top to toe; top to toe and all over, drenched with rain.

Quivering, shaking, trembling, they implored him for aid:

“Young man, we beg you to loan us your parasol and open it out.

Please save we elderly ones, we’ll never forget your kind heart.”

Those with a kindly heart cannot guard against those with evil intent,

Seventh Brother drew out his hand and was to pass over the parasol, but suddenly stopped.

He recalled Seventh Sister had said not to open the parasol.

He hurriedly held it tight. Taking off his hat and coat he said:

“Dear uncles! I cannot loan you my parasol,

Please take my bamboo hat and patched coat to cover yourselves.”

Their plot foiled, demon pair transformed back into their true selves—they were none other than the Celestial Master and Wang Ba!

When they did not get back the precious parasol, they tried magic again; in a trice a torrent of rain fell and bolts of thunder rang out.

Seventh Brother silently prayed, secretly calling for help:

“Thunder sounds, lightning flashes, rain pours down in buckets, the wind howls, I have no way out.

Seventh Sister, please save me from my plight!”

When someone comes to your aid in misfortune, they reveal their true self.

A clear voice reached his ears:

"Quickly move on, the thunder will cease,

The wind will subside, the sky will be clear.

Seventh Brother, so long as you ride on the parasol and race on ahead,

You will surely return to your home in safety and peace."

On the immense ocean appeared a bright lantern.

Seventh Brother sat astride the precious parasol as it soared through the sky.

He flew over rivers; he flew over mountains; he flew over wilderness; he flew over forests.

The Celestial Master, Sixth Sister and Wang Ba could only stare wide-eyed.

Their efforts now futile, they were like anxious ants on a hot wok spinning round and round.

They cried out in unison: "To get the parasol we must climb back up the mountain and seek the

Old Mother's aid."

PART 7  
SEVENTH BROTHER BRINGS RICE  
TO HIS VILLAGE

After escaping nine mortal trials, Seventh Brother finally reached his village home,  
Round after round of mountain song reached high into the clouds.  
The mother, in front of the village, her hand warding off the light, heard the voice of her son.  
Standing on tiptoe, her head clasped in her hands, her eyes screwed up, she gazed firmly ahead.

Seventh Brother came up quickly and embraced his mother, his tears flowed freely. He led his  
mother into the room and they sat down.

Seventh Brother told the villagers everything, the long and short of it, every detail one by one:  
“Seventh Daughter of Dongting Mountain is a beautiful woman with a heart so good that she  
surpasses even Guanyin, our ferry of salvation.

She gave me a precious parasol that warded off ten thousand calamities; time after time, again  
and again, she protected me.”

Taking up the parasol, he opened it out,  
Suddenly out flew a five colored golden sparrow with shining eyes.  
In an instant the whole room was full of a golden glow; a strong fragrance filled the house.  
Walking out from the sweet-smelling mist and golden glow came an immortal woman bearing  
seeds for the five grains.

On the branch, the magpie of good fortune was charged to transmit the good news,  
For Seventh Brother, it was as if he had just awoken from a spring dream,  
He could not control himself; he opened up his arms and rushed forward.  
The two lovers spoke of their suffering and hardships.

One said: "Seventh Sister, thank you for your kindness.  
First, I thank you for your exquisite songs, in words so fine and clever.  
Second, thanks for your great goodness in offering me the precious parasol.  
Third, I thank you for your Buddha-heart in saving me from suffering and preserving my life."

The other said: "Seventh Brother, no need to thank me.  
First, because with a true heart you have aided the common people;  
Second, because of your fortitude in travelling up Dongting Mountain.  
Third, because you fell over time after time, but in tumbling and stumbling you did not give up."

These two lotus flowers on one stalk, their hearts were joined like two mandarin ducks,  
Or dragon and phoenix, at last face to face by fortunate chance, now to be joined in marriage.  
Family and neighbors urged them to choose the day or not even wait for the day but get married  
that very night.

Seventh Brother and Seventh Sister held hands and said these words together:

Seventh Brother said: "When the pines endure frost the leaves grow greener,  
We've endured a thousand trials to get the rice grain; once these seeds are sown we will get  
married."

Seventh Sister said: "The more hardships you endure, the deeper is one's passion.  
We came down from the mountain to save the multitudes; what Seventh Brother said just now  
is the right road to take."

Just as the root is linked to the leaf, so the leaf is linked to the heart.  
From that time on Seventh Brother and Seventh Daughter called each other brother and sister;  
their mutual respect and love surpassed that of flesh and blood.  
When the mother saw this, it was like the promise of sweetness when the sugar cane turns red,  
or like awakening with a smile from a deep dream;  
The fierce winter had now gone and spring had come.

"Quick quick"! The *kuaikuai* sound of birds aroused them to their toil.  
Seventh Brother and Seventh Sister taught the art of growing grain and ploughing the fields.  
Their hands and feet unceasing, the fields rang with the sound of mountain songs.  
The golden phoenix flew into the thatched nest of the birds.  
The living blue-green dragon leapt into Jing Man village.

The precious grain has fallen to the ground and has grown into rice shoots.  
The brother and sister lead the mother and neighbors as they sing out the "Longing for Rice  
Shoots Song."

"Tiny rice shoots, you understand the feelings of mankind.  
When you greet the wind, you shake your heads, your faces wreathed in smiles.

Precious shoots! We urge you to grow three inches in a single night.  
We await the happy time when we can marry you off to another field."  
The sister tossed the sacred rice seedlings as evenly as the heavenly maiden scattering nectar  
from flowers,  
The brother worked the bunches with his fingers, arousing the lotus flowers to open up their  
buds.<sup>31</sup>

Their hearts at ease, their hands moved quickly as round after round of songs rang out.  
"The Rice Transplanting Song" was sung again and again,  
The rice shoots grew mature and conceived ears of grain; the brother and sister wept warm  
tears like broken lines of pearls cascading down.  
Leading the mother and villagers, they walked from the eastern edge to the western bank, from  
the north to the southern corners, carefully inspecting the rice crop.  
"The Song of Longing for Son-seeds" rang out like triumphal drums in the Palace of Content.

One load on a bamboo pole will now be divided in two,  
We'll set down the story of the mountain valley and sing instead of Sacred Grotto.  
At the eighth month in mid autumn, the moon waxes full.  
Sixth Daughter raised her head to gaze at the moon;  
Recalling Seventh Brother, Wang Ba raised his head and pondered how to get rid of the root of  
calamity.<sup>32</sup>

At the start of autumn, the air is still hot and heavy; the humid wind weighs one down.  
The Celestial Master and his wife quarrel endlessly day and night about the lost parasol and  
letting their daughter go.  
Sixth Daughter and Wang Ba came to see the Celestial Master; sometimes they spoke harshly  
and sometimes softly, evading blame with excuses, adding fuel to the flames with  
slanderous words.

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<sup>31</sup> "Opening the door of the rice shoot" refers to the loosening of the root stems of the bunches of rice seedlings. This assists the crop to grow by allowing air to reach the tender seedlings. In the minds of the singers and farmers this is akin to the breaking of the hymen and the beginning of the process of cultivation. For more detail see McLaren, *Memory Making in Folk Epics of China*, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> At the full moon in mid autumn, Chinese people traditionally gaze at the moon and think of loved ones far away or deceased. In this case, Sixth Daughter thinks of the handsome hired hand, Seventh Brother, while her former lover, Wang Ba, thinks only of how to get rid of him.

Their eyes blinking with deceit, the threesome tricked the old mother and secretly travelled down the mountain.

Riding on the mist and sweeping through the clouds, they proceeded on their way;  
With a little effort they arrived at the Shen Village of Song.  
What they saw was a field full of rice paddy, green and lush, and Seventh Brother and Seventh Daughter working together, matching each other with mountain songs.<sup>33</sup>  
Their mountain songs were full of deep sentiment.

When the Celestial Master saw that the rice was long and the people content, he became enraged.

Wang Ba provoked him, saying: "Didn't I tell you the truth?"

When Jiangxi peddlers fix porcelain pots it sounds like "zigu zigu"—look after yourself.<sup>34</sup>  
Just as everyone sweeps the snow from their own door,  
So the three of them sought their own advantage.

Sixth Daughter was mad with rage and jealousy, her throat itching, she choked on her words as she burst out:

"Seventh Daughter, Seventh Daughter, she truly should not have left Mother and Father and secretly gone down the mountain,  
You did not think of their labor in raising you, you were defiant and unfilial, this is the first crime.

Second, you should not have deceived me, your older sister, and secretly gone down the mountain.

You did not think of the green plums and bamboo horse toys of our childhood<sup>35</sup>, and our sisterly love; this is the second crime.

Third, you should not have stolen the precious parasol and fled down the mountainside;  
Forsaking the lofty chambers of the Master; you disobeyed the laws of the family, this is the third crime.

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<sup>33</sup> Antiphonal singing (here called *duige* 對歌) was a common feature of Lake Tai songs. Courting lovers tested their wits in question-and-answer songs as they toiled in the fields or walked along the waterways. Antiphonal songs were sometimes included in folk epics.

<sup>34</sup> Peddlers from Jiangxi Province customarily made the rounds of villages to fix broken and cracked pots. Using a diamond drill, they bored holes in the porcelain, making a "cigu cigu 瓷顧瓷顧" sound similar to another expression, *zigu zigu* 自顧自顧 "look after yourself."

<sup>35</sup> Common toys of children.

Fourth, you should not have stolen the five grains and taken them down the mountain;  
 You disobeyed the laws of Sacred Grotto and violated the laws of Heaven, this is the fourth  
 crime.

Fifth, you should not have stolen Seventh Brother from me and accompanied him down the  
 mountain.

You did not think where your food and clothing came from; you spoiled my ploughing work, this  
 is the fifth crime.

Sixth, you should not have settled with a low-class common man and married him,  
 You destroyed the reputation of mountain immortals; we in Sacred Grotto lost face because of  
 you, this is the sixth crime.

Seventh, you should not have, you never should have, never have stubbornly refused to return to  
 the mountain.

Not returning, even until death, this is the seventh crime."

Sixth Daughter spoke such a huge pile of words that she riled the Celestial Master; it was like an  
 oily wok catching fire, he spoke fiercely to Seventh Sister,

"We treated you like gold, like silver, like coral, cornelian, sparkling crystal, like emerald jade.

When you wished to play, we called on the Golden Boy to lead you round and around on the  
 horned unicorn.

When you wished to sleep, we called on the Jade Girl to embrace you and softly play a lullaby.<sup>36</sup>

We did not let the birds cry out in case you would be startled;

We treated you like a pearl, like a precious jewel,

We did not let the waves roll in case it might awaken you too soon.

We truly treated you as if you could melt in our very mouths, as if you would catch cold if we  
 spat you out, or if we swallowed you up, you would stick like a fishbone.

Who could have thought you would reject everything we did for you,

Without even a farewell you left your elderly parents, stole the precious parasol and the five  
 grains, and fled down the mountainside!"

Cold rice and gruel are hard to swallow.

When Seventh Brother heard Sixth Daughter and the Master he was stung by the cold harsh  
 words.

"In the twelfth month the fresh flowers bloom.

There are twelve good things Seventh Sister did in going down the mountainside.

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<sup>36</sup> The Golden Boy (Jintong 金童) and Jade Girl (Yunü 玉女) are immortal spirits who represent talent and beauty respectively.

In the first month the plum blossoms bud in [the chill of] winter,  
In that month she helped me breach the Four Passes.  
She was strong and unyielding; this is the first good thing.

In the second month the apricot buds at the start of spring.  
She passed on the five grains; the spring wind blew green all over south of the river;  
this is the second good thing.  
In the third month the pearl blossoms filled the courtyards.  
She bestowed on me the magic parasol to protect my life and safeguard the rice grains; she  
bathed me in spring weather; this is the third good thing.

In the fourth month the roses budded on the fence.  
The green thorns of the red roses stabbed at evil demons; this is the fourth good thing.  
In the fifth month the pomegranates bloomed red as fire.  
As the flowers budded and blossomed, they passed on their seeds to the next generation; this is  
the fifth good thing.

In the sixth month the lotus flowers bloom.  
She did not seek a noble house, nor was she greedy for wealth, she was not impure, enmired in  
mud; this is the sixth good thing.  
In the seventh month, the garden balsam bloomed by the foot of the walls.  
She thought of a clever stratagem, a fine plan, to descend the mountain and cross the pass.  
She put her own life in peril to save others, this is the seventh good thing.

In autumn in the eighth month, the osmanthus bloomed.  
She cleared the wilderness to plant trees; the branches were tall and the forest thick.  
The flowers fragrant and the fruit sweet; this is the eighth good thing.

In the ninth month the chrysanthemums bloomed at the festival of the Double Ninth.  
The silkworms spun cocoons, people toiled hard to reel the silken thread to make winter and  
avoid cold; this is the ninth good thing.

In the tenth month, the hibiscus opened at the time of "the small spring," the last warmth of  
summer.  
Seeking warmth in the chill air, the hibiscus reflected the waning sun, casting a golden glow on  
the faces of young girls.

In the eleventh month the snow-covered golden lantern is lit.  
She feared not the weight of snow or ice; she saved the multitudes; this is the eleventh good  
thing.

In the twelfth month the fresh flowers budded.

Month after month and year after year, she did a myriad things; everything was proper and correct, in all her toil she added luster to you in Sacred Grotto."

The Celestial Master thought backwards and forwards and then sighed, "Oh!"

"Let's not talk further of this; all we want is the return of the precious parasol and five grains."

Having said this, he ordered Sixth Daughter and Wang Ba to act quickly.

Seventh Sister raised the parasol; light poured out on four sides.

The couple were terrified; it was like walking on a single plank over a bridge, they could neither advance nor retreat.

Infuriated and bewildered, the three of them failed to grab the precious parasol.

Their eyebrows raised, their heads pulled back at the neck, they pulled in their tails and returned to Sacred Grotto.

Just as a mother bird opens her wings to protect her young, the long days of rain now cleared, the weather ceased its transformations.

Fearing Seventh Sister would tire herself, from that time on, Seventh Brother and his mother would not allow her to toil in the fields.

## PART 8

### DESTRUCTION OF THE RICE CROP

We'll speak not of Shen Village of Song beneath the mountain.  
Let's move on to sing of what's happening at Sacred Grotto.  
Sixth Daughter and Wang Ba were just like the foreign onion at the time of the final month.<sup>37</sup>  
Its leaves may be shriveled and the stem dried out, but its heart has not yet died.

They scurried away to see the Celestial Master, pouring on oil and adding soy sauce,  
Saying, "Surely such a powerful Master as you would have no problems in dealing with a petty  
village man?"

This blather of crafty talk made the Master so angry that he gave the command to go down  
mountain to bring disaster to the valley; he went personally to the great hall to put the  
case to his wife.

From that time on, Lake Tai suffered wave on wave of misfortunes.  
At Shen Village of Song, the saving star would appear once again.

Suddenly from the sky rushed a swarm of insects; with a whirring sound they covered the lush  
green rice paddy and ate up all the crop!  
Seventh Brother thought of Seventh Daughter's concern for him and called out loudly.  
He'd hardly uttered the words "Flying insects are eating the rice paddy!"  
When the voice of Seventh Daughter came to his ears.

"One head, six feet, two wings; in their midst the king is called 'the emperor,'"<sup>38</sup>  
Like starving pigs grabbing food, with a gulp, gulp sound, the locusts devoured the rice crop.

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<sup>37</sup> *Hucong* 胡葱 "foreign onion" is also known as the Kashgar onion.

<sup>38</sup> The word for locust *huang* 蝗 is homophonous for "emperor" 皇.

"Seventh Brother, quickly grab the precious parasol and call the golden bird,  
Birds can eat locusts with little effort; they can gobble them all up."

Seventh Brother took the parasol and called on Golden Bird—he heard squawk squawk  
resounding in the sky.

In a trice appeared a golden light; a host of colorful clouds appeared.

Flock after flock of golden birds flew into the fields—with a "kaka kaka," they gobbled up the  
insects.

He blinked his eyes; all the harmful locusts were gone.

The Golden Bird nodded her head; it is said that from that time on the birds turned into  
household fowl.

As one line of rice was levelled, another line would rise; the weeds in the fields grew thick and  
dense.

As Seventh Brother opened his mouth to speak, Seventh Daughter rushed in,  
"When the weeds grow lush, they climb up high; the king of the weeds is known as water grass.  
Weeds fill the rice paddy; they cover up the sun, soak up the dew and damage the rice shoots so  
they cannot grow.

Seventh Brother, quickly get a hoe and a basket of bamboo."

He hoed and hoed, weeded and weeded, until he dripped with sweat.

As he hoed and weeded, he sang a song.

The Song of Weeding rang out, one stanza after another.

If you exert yourself then you will meet up with your saving star.

When good people endure trials, it makes them lose heart.

In the field appeared not a few but many, many blood-eating locusts, turning and twisting this  
way and that.

The villagers were frightened; their skin itched and hurt; fresh blood poured out.

Seventh Daughter hid from the mother and went to the fields to sing. When she saw this, she felt  
as if a knife had pierced her heart.

She called out, "Seventh Brother" and heard him respond.

"Leeches enter where you find water; this blood-sucking ghoul is called the Leech Demon.

This is all because my father listened to the slander of Sixth Daughter and Wang Ba and fell for  
their magical tricks.

They want the people, all of them, to die, and the rice crop to fail.

Seventh Brother! Quickly take the parasol and call on the wild ducks; they are the leeches'  
cosmic foes."

Seventh Brother immediately drew forth the parasol and yelled:  
"Wild ducks, come quickly!" Suddenly, from the reedy ponds of Lake Tai, flock after flock of wild ducks came flying in.  
The fields rang with the sounds of "quack quack"; with a loud swoosh a rush of duck shit poured down on the thousands of leeches until they were all killed.<sup>39</sup>  
The wild ducks flew away, leaving behind duck eggs in vast numbers.  
Seventh Brother gathered the duck eggs and extracted the little chicks.  
It is said that from that time on people learnt how to raise short-winged household ducks.

A thousand times, ten thousand times, who would have thought!  
As soon as Seventh Daughter reached her home, from the tall mountain rushed a flock of wild oxen into the paddy to eat the crop.  
When Seventh Brother saw this, he leapt to his feet. Even from ten thousand away, his fury reached up to scorch the heavenly court.  
"What is there wrong in passing down to others the art of growing rice?  
Why is there a small trial, followed by a large trial; a small disaster followed by a big one;  
Why so many disasters, catastrophes, tribulations, one after the other, on and on without end,  
without cease?"

Before his burst of anger had finished, Seventh Daughter gathered some straw rope and raced to the fields.  
With great concern and urgency, she said to Seventh Brother:  
"These disasters are because the Old Mother has not descended the mountain; as for the wild oxen eating the crop, this is a trivial matter.  
Quickly take the straw rope and place it in the nostrils of the oxen,  
The wild oxen will obediently plough the field and even work the water wheel, taking our place and helping the village."

When the sorcery of the Celestial Master failed in its aims,  
Sixth Daughter and Wang Ba were as anxious as two headless golden flies.  
One said, "That small twerp Seventh Brother is really odious!  
Quickly go back to Sacred Grotto to call the Master to come down the mountainside."  
The other said: "That stinky Seventh Daughter is a harmful demon,  
Quickly go back to Sacred Grotto to call on the Old Mother to resolve the case."

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39 It was believed that duck shit could control leeches, hence they were cosmic foes *dake xing* 大克星.

PART 9  
THE OLD MOTHER DESCENDS THE MOUNTAIN

By good fortune there were ten cloudy days at the period of End of Summer.  
By good luck there were ten days of fine weather at the time of White Dew.<sup>40</sup>

The Old Mother of Sacred Grotto wracked her brains over and over, longing to see the Celestial Master.

Famished, she was just eating when the Master entered with a howl of distress.  
In a fit of rage, he was like the loquat leaf that is smooth on one side and furry on the other; his visage changed from smooth to rough,  
“Old Mistress, please rouse yourself; come with me immediately to Shen Village—we must take back the parasol, destroy the grain, get rid of the young man, and bring back that scoundrel, Seventh Sister.”

When the Old Mother heard this, she exploded with fire through all ten apertures of her body.  
When a leader on crutches takes aim at a target, it is like treading on square bricks with a rat-a-tat-tat.

“Whatever size your ears, nostrils and eyes, you still cannot tell good from bad, sweet smells from foul, truth from falsehood, black from white, correct or wrong. You stupid turtle, so obsessed that your brain is addled.”

The Old Mother’s words were weighty and her heart resolved; her tone was strong and measured; she was like the Big Dipper guiding the way when lost in a dark night.

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<sup>40</sup> End of Summer *chushu* 处暑 (late in the eighth lunar month) is the period when the rice shoots “conceive” ears of grain. Overcast weather is optimal at this time. At the time of White Dew in the ninth month, the rice paddy bursts into flower. Fine weather is optimal at this time.

All of a sudden, Sixth Sister and Wang Ba burst into the room.

Wang Ba said: "That youngster Seventh Brother secretly stole the rice grains and deceived  
Seventh Sister; he cursed the Old Mother as a wolf-fang hag!"

Sixth Sister said: "Mother and Father, our family scandal has been exposed; quickly descend the  
mountain to get back the magic parasol, then we can make further plans."

For the Celestial Master it was like choosing medicinal herbs on the counter top—sweet, sour,  
bitter and peppery, he could not tell them apart.

The Old Mother, laughing coldly, stood up with a "hei hei."

She said: "This old body will descend the mountain!"

Having said this, the two old ones set off together on a favorable cloud.

Riding an auspicious cloud, they felt joyful and relieved.

Sixth Sister put on a sorrowful face as she wracked her brains for a plan.

Wang Ba beat his breast, saying, "You go with the old couple down the mountain to see what's  
going on; I will follow on closely from behind; if there is any sign of trouble then send  
me a message.

I will take out my very last weapon—my murderous mace,

To ensure that you alone will reign in Sacred Grotto and thus control the universe."

The wind blew gold haze and the dew glinted like jade. It was now deep autumn,  
The time when frost descends and the weather turns chill.

The two elders from Sacred Grotto, riding an auspicious cloud, relied on moonlight to guide  
them down the mountainside.

Sixth Sister said: "I'll accompany you" and kept a close watch from behind.

Mountain songs rang out round after round from Shen Village of Song: "Blessings on Seventh  
Brother," "Praise for Seventh Sister."

As the elders broke through the clouds, it was just like a brightly-lit paper lantern that can snap  
with a single jab.

Sixth Sister's stomach was like water caltrop wrapped up in lotus leaves; the sharp corms  
stabbed her in the heart.

When you eat meat, you must extract the essence; when you listen, you must be sure to pay  
attention!

Sixth Sister realized that Old Father had changed his mind and Old Mother had set a trap.

Secretly, stealthily, she waved her hand and sent out a small spark

That flew high to the skies and let Wang Ba know to quickly send out his last troops.

The Celestial Master and Old Mother got down from the cloud; when they had just entered the doorway,

Seventh Brother and Seventh Sister, both of them, knelt down to greet and welcome them. It was now the final month of the year and the dead of winter; when thunder pealed, the villagers rushed to bring back news of disaster.

“The rice paddy fields are all on fire and burning fiercely as high as one’s mouth!”

The sister and brother said: “Father and Mother, please sit down and rest a while”; but for themselves they raced towards the fields.

As they sped towards the fields, the fire too rushed forward as high as their eyebrows.

Seventh Sister realized this was a fire caused by sorcery; she returned to the village to grab the magic parasol.

Seventh Brother threw himself into the sea of fire; his hair was alight, his clothes fell to rags, his flesh was scorched.

He rolled over the fields, beating down the flames, his skin peeled off, his flesh burst, but he just gritted his teeth.

He clenched his teeth and steeled his heart, his hands tight, he kept on rolling and rolling across the field.

When Seventh Sister went back home, she saw the two elders holding the parasol and also the Gods of Wind and Rain, their banner raised, leading the heavenly troops.<sup>41</sup>

In an instant the wind stirred up and rain poured down; the great fire was wiped out.

The wind changed, blowing sparks onto Sixth Sister and Wang Ba. Sixth Sister was worried sick and Wang Ba terrified.

Like a broken vase smashed to pieces, the turtle climbed over the threshold, vainly putting faith in his trick of last resort.<sup>42</sup>

Pretending to be dull and dim, he saw the tide had turned and went back to his home.

After one hundred days of grey skies and rain, the sky at last was clear.

The rays of the sun shone brightly over the broad earth.

At Shen Village of Song, men and women, young and old, came one by one to the home of Seventh Brother.

The Old Mother of Sacred Grotto sang “The Man with Ten Virtues” in lofty tones to the assembled crowd.

<sup>41</sup> The deities of the Wind and Rain are Feng Bo 風伯 and Yu Shi 雨師 respectively.

<sup>42</sup> This refers to the saying 乌龟爬门槛—但看此一番 “to do the trick of last resort.”

"Just as spring water drops little by little into the rivers and lakes,  
Seventh Brother became a man with ten fine virtues.  
The first virtue is that his heart and liver are upright.  
Fine flowery speech and honeyed words do not perturb his spirit.  
The second virtue is that he has sharp vision.  
Good and evil, the crooked and the straight, he can tell them apart.  
The third virtue is that he has a fine sense of smell.  
The fragrant and the foul, good and bad, he never gets them confused.  
The fourth virtue is that he toils hard with his two hands.  
Whether the job is heavy or light, fine or coarse, whatever the work, he can do it all.  
The fifth virtue is that he has good feet and heels,  
Mountains, lakes, steep slopes, be they high or low, he always remains sure-footed.  
The sixth virtue is that his shoulders are strong.  
Whether he bears a hundred *dan* or a thousand *jin*,<sup>43</sup> or even the weight of Mount Tai, he does  
not utter a word of complaint.  
The seventh virtue is that his bones are hard.  
He can charge at a mountain of swords, leap into a vat of boiling oil and throw himself into a  
sea of fire;<sup>44</sup> all these he will dare to take on.  
The eighth virtue is that he is an expert singer.  
His throat surpasses that of the myna bird and exceeds that of the oriole; he passed on to later  
generations the songs of the paddy field.  
The ninth virtue is that he has moved the very court of Heaven  
With his filial duty to the elders, his assistance to the villagers; even if he is cut to ribbons, he is  
never deterred.  
As for the tenth virtue, this is truly hard to find.  
At every stage, at every moment, he sought to protect my darling Seventh Sister."

These ten virtues; every single word was true.  
When they heard this, the hundred birds danced and the assembly beamed from ear to ear.  
When Wang Ba heard this, he could make no response; his feet were as if sunk in oil, he just  
wanted to slink away.  
The Old Mother said: "Don't move!" and then went on to sing "The Demon's Ten Vices."

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<sup>43</sup> *Dan* 担 and *jin* 斤 are measurements of weight.

<sup>44</sup> These are all tortures that feature in the Buddhist and Daoist hell, which was familiar to the people of Lake Tai from temple murals.

"After one hundred days of great cold, the ice is three feet thick.  
 Wang Ba is a demon who has ten vices.  
 The first vice is that he is like a fox-spirit.  
 His eyes blurred with tumors, he is crafty and vicious, he harbors a black heart in his chest.  
 The second vice is that he is like a weasel,  
 Who steals chickens and pilfers ducks, letting off a foul fart—truly intolerable!  
 The third vice is that he is like a rat.  
 Who purses his lips, steals our oil;  
 Both greasy and cunning, he chews on our rice and even bites holes in bedding and coverlets,  
 gnawing away at our lapels.  
 The fourth vice is that he is like a poisonous snake,  
 Squatting in a dark corner, ruminating on how to harm and destroy people with good hearts.  
 The fifth vice, he is like a jumping flea that lives by day in the seams of clothing and comes out  
 at night to bite; we ache and scratch without a moment of peace.  
 The sixth vice is that he is like a maggot in a pit,  
 Boring his head into the cracks, doing foul-smelling deeds in dirt and filth.  
 The seventh vice is that he is like rain falling at the time of White Dew.  
 Wherever he falls he brings destruction; damaging the harvest of grain.  
 The eighth vice is that he is like the frost and snow;  
 He cheats the poor, despises the destitute, and devotes himself to squeezing the common folk.  
 The ninth vice is that his sorcery deludes the people.  
 He smashed our homelands, destroyed our Sacred Grotto; his crimes are weighty.  
 The tenth vice is the worst one of all.  
 His evil deeds are multifarious; he has done great harm to others, yet still wants to escape  
 punishment.  
 His ten crimes will not be pardoned; he is a turtle demon full to the brim with evil deeds.  
 A demon with ten vices and ten thousand forms of poison."

On hearing this the crowd was very angry.  
 On Lake Tai the waves rolled fiercely to express their fury.  
 Sixth Daughter lowered her head; the Celestial Master was stunned.  
 Wang Ba took the opportunity to depart. With a swish and a swirl, he raised his heels and fled to  
 save his life.

Wang Ba the turtle raced away, but Seventh Brother had sharp eyes and raced closely from  
 behind; as one fled and sped away, the other chased in hot pursuit.  
 Wang Ba raced to the mountain top; sneaking through the wicker gate, he arrived at the banks  
 of Lake Tai.

He thought to himself: 'I have not succeeded as a mountain devil or as a household ghost, but if I become a water demon then I will be safe and secure.'

With a loud splash he leapt into Lake Tai and transformed himself into "one true, two false, three turtles"; facing Yuantou Islet, he sniggered grimly—"hei hei hei."

Seventh Brother was about to enter the lake to fight him to the death, But the Master stepped forward to stop him, saying: "So long as I am here the turtle will never get away."

He raised the parasol and yelled "Change!"

With a huge crash, the three green mountains fell from the sky and all three turtles were entirely crushed down, down to the eighteenth layer of the lake.

PART 10  
CODA

From that time on the life of the Turtle Demon came to an end.  
The three Turtle Mountains still float on Lake Tai—"One evil, two cunning, crushed under the mountain"—Yuantou Islet faces Turtle Mountain.<sup>45</sup>  
This tale has been passed down for a thousand years through a myriad springs.  
Knowing the demon had deceived him, the Celestial Master blushed and remorse filled his heart.  
From now on his brain was clear; he would strike down evil demons and capture wicked spirits, wiping out evil to the very roots.

Sixth Daughter thought over and over, she had no face to see others; she felt utterly mortified, her pearly tears rolled down.  
With rapid steps, rat-a-tat, her hair dishevelled, she went to the iron tree, using all her force she ran her head against the tree.  
In an instant her breath was stopped and her body dead.  
She became the "weaving Sixth Sister"; night after night she weaves to atone for her crimes.<sup>46</sup>  
The clouds opened, the mist dispersed, the red sun ascended to the sky.  
Kin and neighbors urged Seventh Brother and Sister to hurry up and get married.  
Overcome with joy, the Old Mother grinned from ear to ear.  
The laughter of the Celestial Master reverberated like peels of thunder.

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<sup>45</sup> Yuan is an outcrop of land on the northern shores of Lake Tai near the city of Wuxi. *Yuan* means soft-shell turtle.

<sup>46</sup> It is said that her spirit resides in Turtle Mountain (Wugui Shan 烏龜山), facing Yuan Islet.

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