



Gengcun, China 2006: From Silk Road to Tale Trail

By Craig Harrison

This is the story of the latest Nu Wa Storytelling Delegation's recent journey to Gengcun, China.



Forty-one storytellers from across the United States spent the better part of September, 2006 in the People's Republic of China, exchanging stories in the historical storytelling village of Gengcun! The visiting storytellers — educators, artists, musicians, docents, one teen-age teller and a mime — told their stories and listened to those of local tellers ranging in age from eight to their eighties! Nu Wa storytellers told in local homes, shared stories with 3rd and 4th graders, played music, engaged in various arts and crafts and even danced the Hora! Visitors and villagers bonded as they celebrated commonalities and differences through stories.



Third time returnee Elaine Stanley renews old friendships on arrival.



Leeny Del Seamonds of Westford, MA dances with Gengcun storytellers.

Old and Nu Wa

Ours was the third trip of its kind since 1997, of tellers from the US who visited Gengcun, in the Hebei province of China, to trade stories. This year's trip was led by Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo and Nancy Wang of Eth-Noh-Tec, and teller Linda Wang of Washington DC, with assistance from Linda Yemoto. Gengcun, three hours by bus from Beijing, is in Central China's Jizhong Plain. This year's delegation again took its name from the

Chinese Goddess of Creation, Nu Wa, who not only created man and woman, but later made peace among the heavens. In concert with Nu Wa, our delegation fostered peace on earth through our storytelling exchange.



One Gengcun student tells her story faster than interpreters can translate!



Group telling (from left): Elly Reidy, Linda Yemoto and Lorraine Lum Calbow.

Found Through Translation

From the moment we disembarked the bus to a hero's welcome, we laughed and cried, exchanged gifts and more. We told stories. They told stories. The interpreters translated our stories from English to Mandarin and then into Pinyin, the local dialect of Gengcun village. Then, they translated their stories from Pinyin — through Mandarin — into English. Much of the fun occurred in the translation process, with digressions and discussions of the nuances of languages, puns and pronunciations.



Story Home Companions



Multi-generational Tellers



Villagers and guests enjoy a Peking Opera aria in Gengcun's Hall of Stories.



We're all enthralled when a certified master teller spins his yarn.

The Silk Road as Story Road

Gengcun village is on the legendary Silk Road where Marco Polo trekked and traded his way to Cathay. For 600 years, since the Ming Dynasty, its villagers have told and retold stories. No wonder some villagers now know hundreds of stories.

Stories Told Through Music, Dance , Art...

This village of 1,200, nestled in corn fields miles from the nearest city of Gaocheng, is impoverished by Western standards. Yet it is rich beyond belief in the stories villagers tell in the Hall of Stories and in their school curriculum.

Universal Appeal

While the tellers from the US told many stories of various backgrounds — Native American, African, Yiddish, Filipino, Spanish, Russian, Persian and more, the locals told their own stories — of emperors and dowagers, turtles, monkeys and dragons, of scheming dogs and wicked step-mothers, clever barbers and more. I even experienced “twice-told pork” after a little girl’s retelling of Three Little Pigs.

Laughter in Real Time

Throughout this trip the laughter and applause occurred in waves. Those understanding the native storytellers’ tongue laughed first, then the interpreters, and finally the rest as the stories’ laughter and surprises were translated into the listeners’ language. A special moment occurred in the Hall of Stories when Japanese mime, Motoko (Dworkin Maeda) performed. In that moment we were all in the moment...no translation was required!

Become A Part of the Story of Gengcun

Monetary and other contributions helped the village stock its library, pipe well water to homes and improve their Hall of Stories. You too can support ongoing Nu Wa fund-raising (see below). Best yet, now a thousand Chinese and Americans have new stories from 2006’s Nu Wa exchange!



Everyone’s a teller in this class photo!



Gengcun women tellers made music and led ceremonies



Craig Harrison enlists girl and boy to lead Mandarin choruses of “that’s good” / “no, that’s bad!” in his story.



These popular storytellers enthralled listeners with tales of local customs and traditions, told in their homes.



Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo and Nancy Wang receive a commemorative banner from Gengcun village.

Tellers and Toastmasters Unite in Beijing!

On September 11, eight Nu Wa storytellers braved unbelievable rush-hour traffic to attend *Beijing #1* Toastmasters’ meeting (www.bjtm1.org). Each told 90-second stories and spoke about storytelling, visiting Gengcun during a lively Q&A period. A Colorado teller, Anita Strickbine, related how her father became a Toastmaster in Germany during the cold war, and how it changed his life and hers! Members, for whom English is a second language, have added storytelling to their repertoire!



Author **Craig “Hackin’ ‘Boo” Harrison** (seated) is a Berkeley-based storyteller and professional speaker. Contact him at www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com.

For information on donating to Gengcun, the next trip in 2009, or a trip to India in 2008, contact Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo: robert@ethnohtec.org or (415) 282-8705.