

CHINESE LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION

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CLASSICAL
CHINESE
TALES
*of the Supernatural
and the Fantastic*

Selections from the Third to the Tenth Century

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(61) The Disembodied Soul

by Ch'en Hsüan-yu

In the third year of the T'ien-shou reign period [690-692], Chang Yi, a native of Ch'ing-ho [in Hopeh Province] took up residence in Heng-chou [present-day Heng-yang County, Hunan Province] because of his official duties. He was a mild-mannered man with only a small circle of acquaintances. He had two daughters, but no sons. The older daughter died at an early age, but the younger one, Ch'ien-niang, was the epitome of virtue blessed with beauty.

Chang Yi's nephew from T'ai-yüan [in Shansi Province] Wang Chou was intelligent and handsome even as a child. Chang thought so highly of his nephew that he was often heard saying, "Someday I will give Ch'ien-niang to him in marriage."

After they grew up, Chou and Ch'ien-niang constantly longed for each other--even in their dreams. No one in their families knew of this, so when one of Chang's colleagues, an appointee to the Ministry of Personnel, asked for his daughter's hand, Chang gave his consent.

When the girl heard about this she became dejected. Chou felt deeply offended. He asked for permission to go to the capital, claiming that he had been transferred to a government post there. Chang tried to stop him, but seeing that he could not be dissuaded, he finally saw him off with lavish gifts. Suppressing his resentment and sorrow, Chou said goodbye and boarded a boat. By sunset he reached the mountains several *li* away. Still awake at midnight, Chou suddenly heard footsteps--someone was running on the riverbank and soon arrived at his boat. Chou asked who it was. It was Ch'ien-niang; she had run after him in her bare feet. Chou was beside himself with wonder and delight. He took hold of her hand and asked how she had managed to come.

"Even in my dreams I couldn't stop thinking of you and your affection for me," she replied, weeping. "I was about to be forced to marry someone else, and knowing that your feelings for me had not changed, I decided to give up my life for you. It is for this reason that I have run away from home."

Chou was overjoyed since this was more than he had even hoped for. He hid Ch'ien-niang in the boat and sailed on the rest of the night. Making two day's journey in one, they were able to reach Shu [approximately present-day Szechwan Province] in a matter of a few months.

They lived there for five years. During that time Ch'ien-niang gave birth to two sons. Although she did not write to her parents, she often thought of them. One day she spoke to Chou and broke down in tears, "Because I could not be unfaithful to you, I followed you in spite of my filial obligations. I haven't seen my parents for five years. In all the world how could there be a daughter as disrespectful as I've been?"

Chou was moved and he comforted her, "Don't worry. We're going back." With that they left for Heng-chou.

When they arrived, Chou first went alone to Chang's home to apologize for eloping with his daughter.

"What nonsense are you talking about?" Chang asked, "Ch'ien-niang has been lying sick in her room for years."

"But she is in the boat at this very moment!" Chou insisted.

Chang was astounded and sent one of his servants to see if it was true. Ch'ien-niang was indeed inside the boat. She appeared healthy and cheerful, and asked the servant about her parents. But the astonished servant ran to report back to Chang.

When the girl in the room heard this report, she happily rose from her bed, put on some make-up, and changed her clothes. She smiled but did not say a word as she walked out to greet the other girl. As soon as they met, their bodies became one, and their two sets of clothes fused together.

Ch'ien-niang's family kept this affair a secret because it was so bizarre. Only a few relatives knew about it.

Chou and Ch'ien-niang died forty years later. Their two sons passed the civil service examination after going through the local selection process. One became a deputy magistrate and the other the sheriff of a subprefecture.

In my youth I, Hsüan-yu, often heard this story. It has many versions, and some people say that it is pure fantasy. Near the end of the Ta-li reign period [766-780] I happened to meet Chang Chung-kuei,¹ Prefect of Lai-wu [in Shantung

¹ The second character of the prefect's name is

Province], who informed me of the events recounted here. Chang Yi was Chung-kuei's grand uncle² and that enabled him to know all the details of this story, so I wrote down what he said.

(Wang, p. 49; Hsü, pp. 22-24; Chang, pp. 13-15; TPKC, 358.4)

Tr. Cordell D. K. Yee

Note: Reference to the "historical source" at the end of the story will become a generic convention of T'ang *ch'uan-ch'i*.

This is the source for the Yüan play *Ch'ien-nü li hun* (The Soul of Ch'ien-nü Leaves Its Body) by Cheng Kuang-tzu (fl. 1294), and it also influences the portrayal of the heroine's dream, death, and revival found in T'ang Hsien-tzu's (1550-1617) play, *The Peony Pavilion* (Mu-tan t'ing). "The Golden Phoenix Hairpin" by Ch'ü Yu (1341-1427) (Ma and Lau, pp. 400-403) is an narrative elaboration of this story in the classical language. Cf. "P'ang A" (44), and editor's note to the entry.

version; see Chang, pp. 14 and 238.--Ed.

² Most version have "uncle" for "grand uncle;" amendment here is made according to the *Yü-ch'u chih* version; cf. Chang, p. 238.--Ed.

(62) Old Woman Feng

by Li Kung-tso

Old Woman Feng was the wife of a miser from a village in the prefecture of Lu Chiang [in modern Anhwei Province]. Destitute, widowed, and childless, she was both scorned and ignored by the other villagers.

In the fourth year of the Yüan-ho reign period [806-820], the areas of Huai and Ch'u [roughly modern Honan and Hupei Provinces] experienced a disastrous harvest. Old Woman Feng went to Shu [in modern Anhwei, west of Lu-chiang] in search of food, passing the Grazing Calf Villa on the way. As evening fell, a rainstorm arose, so she stopped beneath a mulberry tree. Suddenly she noticed a single hut at the edge of the road, with lanterns all ablaze. She approached it, hoping to find refuge for the night. There she saw a young woman, slightly over twenty years old, of lovely countenance and beautiful attire. Holding a child of about three years of age, she was leaning against the gate and weeping sadly. As the old woman went closer, she also noticed an elderly man and woman sitting on a couch. Their manner was mournful and subdued, and they spoke in whispers. It appeared as though they were demanding something from the young woman, in a rather menacing manner. Seeing Old Woman Feng approach, the two gave up and left without a word.

The young woman eventually stopped weeping. She went inside and prepared some food, tidied the couch, and invited Old Woman Feng in to eat and rest. The old woman asked her about herself. The young woman started to cry again and explained, "The father of this child is my husband. Tomorrow he is going to take another wife."

"Who were those two old folks? What business do they have with you that made them so angry?" Old Woman Feng questioned. "They are my parents-in-law. Now that their son is to take another wife, they wanted me to hand over my baskets and chest, scissors and knives, and sacrificial implements to the new bride. I was unwilling to part with these things, so they are displeased with me."

"And where is your former husband?" Old Woman Feng continued.

"I am the daughter of Liang Ch'ien, the magistrate of Huai-yin [in modern Kiangsu Province]. Through my marriage

reputation is known throughout the rivers and lakes. In the beginning he was a scholar, no different from any other man. Once deluded by a supernatural being, he became like this, rejecting the world as a cesspool and seeing a cesspool as the Celestial City of the Heavenly Emperor. The significance of these ideas is clear. The present generation knows only to laugh at Red's delusion. When they reach the point that they must decide what is right or wrong, what to take and what to give, what to face and what to turn their backs on, there are few who would not be like Red. Those who would take the trouble to regulate themselves so as not to be moved by desire or profit are to be congratulated! How can people find the time to laugh at Red?

(*Liu Tsung-yüan chi* [Collected Works of Liu Tsung-yüan], ed. Wu Wen-chih *et al.* 4 vols. [Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1979], vol. 2, 17, pp. 481-83.)

Tr. William H. Nienhauser, Jr.

Translator's Note: That "Red" Li (Li Ch'ih) was a real person is highly questionable. Su Shih (1037-1101) claimed to have seen his poetry--which he did not view as in any way reminiscent of Li Po's verse--but there is no other record of Red's corpus. More likely he is an allegorical character created by Liu Tsung-yüan to bemoan his having been deceived by the wiles of Wang Shu-wen (as Lin Shu [1852-1924] has argued); cf. Chang Shih-chao, *Liu-wen chih-yao* (A Guide to Liu [Tsung-yüan]'s Prose) 3 vols. (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1971), vol. 1, 17, pp. 550-52.

The privy goddess is an old folk tradition known as "K'eng San-ku" (Third Aunt of the Pit). (I am grateful to Professor Wu Pai-t'ao of Nanjing University for this information.)

(64) A Record of Three Dreams

by Pai Hsing-chien

There are some dreams that people have which are different from the ordinary kind. There are those in which one person dreams about going someplace and another person encounters him in the dream. There are those in which one person is doing something and another person dreams about it. There are also those in which two people dream the same dream.

* * * * *

During the time of Empress Wu [r. 684-704], Liu Yu-ch'iu¹ was serving as an adjutant in Ch'ao-i [in modern Shensi Province]. He was often sent out as an envoy and on one occasion did not return until late in the night.

When he was a little more than ten *li* from his home, he passed by the courtyard of a Buddhist hall. He could hear sounds of singing and laughter and general frivolity from within the temple. The wall to the temple was not very high and was broken in places, so he was able to see everything inside. When Liu bent down to peek in, he saw more than ten men and women sitting around a table enjoying a feast together. He saw that his wife was seated among them, talking and laughing.

At first Liu was dumbfounded and could not think of any way to explain this. He watched for a long time, convinced that his wife should not be there, yet he could not tear himself away. He scrutinized her appearance and behavior closely, but there was no doubt that she was his wife. He decided to go and investigate, but the gate to the temple was closed and he could not get inside. He grabbed a piece of tile to throw at the party, hitting a big wine jar and a washing jug, both of which shattered under the blow. Immediately all of the guests scattered and disappeared. Liu climbed the wall and went in. He and his followers could see that not a soul was in the hallway, and the entrance to the temple was closed as before. Liu's astonishment grew greater and greater, and finally he got on his horse and galloped back home.

¹ For his official biographies, see *Chiu T'ang shu* 97, pp. 3039ff. and *Hsin T'ang shu* 121, pp. 4327ff. --Ed.

When he got to his house his wife had just gone to sleep. Hearing Liu come in, she got up and, after exchanging news of what happened while they were apart, his wife laughed and said, "I just had a dream that I was on an outing to a temple with more than ten people, none of whom I knew, and we were eating together in the hall. Someone threw a broken tile from outside, upsetting all the cups and dishes, and just then I woke up." Liu also told her everything that he had seen.

This is what is called one person dreaming about going someplace and another person encountering him in reality.

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In the fourth year of the Yüan-ho reign period [806-820] Yüan Wei-chih of Honan,² who was serving as Examining Censor, was sent abroad on a mission to southern Szechwan.

Some ten days later my elder brother Lo-t'ien,³ Li Shao-chih of Lung-hsi [in modern Kansu Province], and I were on an outing together to Ch'ü-chiang [i.e., Crooked River]. We got to the compound of the Tz'u-en Temple,⁴ visited all of the quarters, and lingered there for a long time. After it had grown dark, we went together to Shao-chih's house in the Hsiu-hsing Li district⁵ where we ordered some wine, toasted each other and had an extremely enjoyable time drinking together. My brother put down his cup for a while and said, "Wei-chih must be at Liang-chou [modern Chao-hua County, Szechwan] by now." He asked for a brush and wrote a poem on the wall of the room. It goes as follows:

Spring comes; I have no way to break my
springtime melancholy.

In my drunkenness, I break off flowers and stems
to make wine tallies.⁶

² Yüan Chen (779-831).--Ed.

³ Po (or Pai) Chü-i (772-846).--Ed.

⁴ Constructed in 648 by order of Emperor Kao-tsung (then heir apparent) for the repose of his mother's soul. It was located near Ch'ü-chiang Lake.--Ed.

⁵ Located on the eastern side of Ch'ang-an, not far from Ch'ü-chiang.--Ed.

⁶ For keeping count of the number of cups drained.

Suddenly I think of an old friend who has gone
far away.

I count the days of his trip: today he must be in
Liang-chou.

It was then the twenty-first of the month. About a
fortnight later an envoy from Liang-chou arrived and we
received a letter from Wei-chih. At the end of the letter
there was a postscript with a poem entitled "Poem Recording
a Dream." It reads:

I dreamt you and your brother were at the head of
the Ch'ü-chiang Canal,
And I followed you also into the Temple of
Benevolent Kindness.
My subordinate officials ordered someone to
saddle up the horses;
When I awoke I was in the ancient city of
Liang-chou.

The day and month of this poem were exactly the same as
those of the poem written on the wall after the excursion
to the temple.

This is what is called a dream in which one person is
doing something and another person dreams about it.

* * * * *

During the Chen-yüan reign period [785-805] Tou Chih
from Fu Feng and Wei Hsün from the capital were traveling
together from Po [in modern Honan Province] to Ch'in [in
modern Shensi Province]. On their way they spent the night
in an inn at T'ung-kuan Pass [in modern Shansi Province].

Tou dreamt that when they arrived at Flowery Peak Temple
they saw a tall, dark shamaness, wearing an azure skirt and
a white chemise. She greeted them on the road and bowed to
them, and asked that she be allowed to pray to the gods on
their behalf. Tou could not extract himself, so he let
her have her way. He asked her name, and she replied that
she was from the Chao clan.

Upon awakening, he told Wei Hsün about his dream. On
the following day, as they approached the temple, they saw
a shamaness approach and greet them. Her appearance and
dress were just as in the dream. He told Wei, "That dream
has been borne out." Then he ordered his attendants to

look inside his bags and take out two strings of cash to give to her.

The shamaness clapped her hands and burst out laughing loudly. She said to her associates, "This is just like what I dreamt."

Wei was surprised and asked her about this. She answered, "Last night I dreamt of two people coming from the east. One of them, a short one with a beard, agreed to have offerings and prayers made, and I received two strings of cash from him. This morning I told this to my colleagues and now it has come true."

Tou then asked the shamaness her family name and her associates said, "She is of the Chao clan." From start to finish the two dreams matched up perfectly.

This is what is called two people dreaming the same dream.

* * * * *

I, Hsing-chien, say, "In the *Ch'un-ch'iu* (Spring and Autumn Annals) and books of philosophy and history many dreams have been mentioned, but they have yet to record these three types of dreams. The dreams that people in the world dream indeed must be innumerable, but they have yet to list these three kinds of dreams. Are they just coincidental, or are they caused by some law of predetermination? That is something I cannot answer. I have written these down in detail so as to keep them as a record.

(Wang, pp. 108-09; Hsü, pp. 160-65; SF 4.23b-24b)

Tr. Madeline Spring

Note: The first dream is most striking for the breakdown of the boundary between reality and dream in a material sense. For some later examples of a similar motif, see "Ku-tu Hsia-shu" in *Ho-tung chi* (Wang, pp. 110-11) and "Chang-shen" in *Chuan-i chi* (Wang, pp. 111-12); see "Scholar Chang" (Ma and Lau, pp. 439-40). With regard to the second dream, see also Meng Ch'i's (fl. 886) *Pen-shih shih* (Poems with a Background Story), *chüan* 5; this story may have been invented to provide a "context" for the poems cited in it. Most of the characters mentioned in these dreams are historical figures.

"Feng-yang shih-jen" of LCCI, 2.16, combines all three types of dream in one tale.

(65) Li Chang-wu

by Li Ching-liang

Li Chang-wu, styled Li Fei, came from a family from Chung-shan [in modern Ting County, Hopeh]. He was very clever and quick at learning everything from the time of his birth. He was also well lettered, and had achieved a high level of accomplishment in composition. Although he held a lofty opinion of himself because of his moral standards, he disdained to put on an air of refinement. But, having a handsome visage, he had a pleasant effect on all who met him.

He was best of friends with Ts'ui Hsin from Ch'ing-ho [in modern Hopeh]. Hsin was also a gentleman of refinement, who in particular had a large collection of antique objects. Because of Chang-wu's quickness and intelligence, Hsin often called on him for discussion and debate. On those occasions, Chang-wu was always able to plumb deep secrets and search out hidden origins. His contemporaries compared him to Chang Hua¹ of the Chin [265-419].

In the third year of the Chen-yüan reign period [785-804], Ts'ui Hsin was transferred to Hua-chou [in modern Honan at the city of Cheng-chou] as assistant magistrate, where Chang-wu paid him a visit from Ch'ang-an. After a few days, while he was out strolling along a street in the northern part of the city he saw an extremely beautiful woman. Using a ploy to excuse himself, he said to Hsin, "I must visit with some relatives outside of the county." He then went on to take apartments in the home of this fair woman. The master of the house was named Wang, and this was his son's wife. Chang-wu was delighted with her and they engaged in a secret affair. He stayed there for over a month, spending upwards of thirty thousand, the girl's contribution doubling that amount. Their two hearts became coupled in harmony and their happiness was complete.

Not long after, some business came up and Chang-wu was called back to Ch'ang-an. Tenderly they took leave of one another. Chang-wu gave her a bolt of silk depicting "mandarin ducks with necks entwined" in its weave, and

¹ Author of *Po-wu chih*, known for his erudition; see "Chang Hua and the Fox" (24).