

## Harvard-Yenching Institute

---

Some Chinese Tales of The Supernatural

Author(s): Kan Pao, Sou-shen chi, Derk Bodde

Source: *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3/4 (Feb., 1942), pp. 338-357

Published by: Harvard-Yenching Institute

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2717981>

Accessed: 03/03/2009 15:12

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=hyi>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*Harvard-Yenching Institute* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*.

## SOME CHINESE TALES OF THE SUPERNATURAL

KAN PAO AND HIS *Sou-shên chi*

DERK BODDE

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

### INTRODUCTION

The curious combination of realism and fancy, practicality and credulity, often characteristic of Chinese thought, is nowhere better exemplified than in the innumerable tales of the supernatural that occupy so many pages of Chinese literature. Even in those stories which make the greatest demands upon the imagination, their author usually takes pains to preserve an appearance of historical verisimilitude by carefully noting not only the surnames and personal names of his heroes and their locale, but also in many cases their exact dates and other realistic details.

Such stories go back early into Chinese literature, and a number appear incidentally in the pages of such historical works as the *Tso chuan* and *Kuo yü*. In the first century A. D. the famous iconoclast, WANG Ch'ung, recorded many of the legends current in his own day, with the express purpose of heaping ridicule on them.<sup>1</sup> It was only in later centuries, however, that the "ghost" story attained to the dignity of a separate genre in Chinese literature. Men with a taste for the fantastic, often scholars who lacked official employment, amused themselves and their friends by writing collections of such short stories, all being magical or supernatural in character. Some had long been handed down among the people; others were pure inventions of the authors themselves. The culminating collection of such stories is undoubtedly the *Liao-chai chih-i*,\* by P'ü Sung-ling (1630-1715),<sup>2</sup> translated in part by H. A. GILES under the title, *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. for example the many stories contained in his two chapters, "Spook Stories" and "All About Ghosts" (trans. FORKE, *Lun-Heng*, in *MSOS* 10[1907]1-30).

\* [For V. M. ALEKSEEV's translations from this collection cf. *JA* 230. 323-325.]

<sup>2</sup> These are the dates given in T'AN Chêng-pi 譚正璧, *Chung-kuo wên-hsüeh-chia ta-tz'ü-tien* 中國文學家大辭典, no. 5401. GILES, *Chinese Biographical Dictionary* 1668, gives a birth date of 1622 and no death date.

The man who initiated this type of literature in its crude beginnings seems to have been the Chin dynasty writer, KAN Pao 干寶, who during the first half of the fourth century A. D. compiled a work in twenty *chüan* called the *Sou-shên chi* 搜神記. It may be roughly translated as "Researches into the Supernatural."<sup>3</sup> This little book, to be sure, was prepared by its author for a purpose far more serious than that of mere entertainment, as was the case with later examples of its class, and it cannot, like them, be considered as pure fiction. Nevertheless, it remains their prototype, inasmuch as it seems to be the first conscious attempt in Chinese literature to make a systematic collection of stories dealing exclusively with events in the realm of the supernatural, the magical, and the fantastic. As we shall see, its terminal date of composition may be placed roughly at A. D. 350.

The little that we know of KAN Pao's life is derived from his biography in the *Chin shu* (History of the Chin Dynasty).<sup>4</sup> This informs us that he was a native of Hsin-ts'ai 新蔡 (corresponding to the present place of the same name in south-eastern Honan), that his *tzŭ* was Ling-shêng 令昇, and that he came of good family, his grandfather having been a marquis. He himself was summoned by the Chin government to a post in the Bureau of History, and later was enfeoffed as a Kuan-wei Marquis 關內侯. Under Emperor Yüan (A. D. 317-322) he was made head of the Bureau of History and commissioned to write a history covering the reigns of the earlier Chin rulers from the founding of the dynasty in 265 to the year 316. This work, called the *Chin chi* 晉記, in twenty *chüan*, brought him wide acclamation, but is today known only in quotation. The biography's mention here of Emperor Yüan gives us the only fixed dates in KAN Pao's life, and it says little concerning the rest of his official career, though it mentions him as holding several different offices. It does state, however, that he wrote other books, including a work on the *Tso chuan*, the

<sup>3</sup> KAN Pao is sometimes incorrectly referred to as Yü Pao, owing to the graphic similarity between the characters *kan* 干 and *yü* 于. Thus WYLIE, *Notes on Chinese Literature*, p. 192, erroneously speaks of him as Yü Pao, and the *Combined Indices to Twenty Historical Bibliographies* (Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series no. 10) 2, p. 82, gives a cross reference from Yü Pao to KAN Pao.

The text of his *Sou-shên chi* used for this article is that edited and punctuated by HU Huai-ch'ên 胡懷琛, published by the Commercial Press, 3rd ed., 1935 (1st ed., 1931). In this edition the pagination is continuous for the entire book, instead of following the usual practice of beginning anew for each *chüan*. [For a brief account of the *Sou-shên chi* cf. also H. MASPERO, *BEFEO* 9. 597-8.]

<sup>4</sup> *Ssu-pu pei-yao* ed. 82. 7b-8b. [*Chin-shu chiao-chu* was not available to the author.]

*Tso-shih i wai-chuan* 左氏義外傳; commentaries on the *Book of Changes* and the *Rites of Chow*; and his *Collected Writings* (*Wên chi* 文集). All of these have since been lost, and it is the *Sou-shên chi* to which KAN Pao owes his reputation today.

If we are to believe the biography, the circumstances under which KAN Pao compiled this work were, to say the least, peculiar. According to the biography, KAN Pao's father had had a certain maidservant who had been his special favorite, and who, as in so many similar cases, had incurred the jealousy of the legitimate wife, i. e., of KAN Pao's mother. This mother, when the father died, cruelly caused the maidservant to be thrust alive into a tomb (presumably that of the father), an event which happened at a time when KAN Pao and his brothers were still too young to interfere. Ten odd years later, however, when the mother herself died, the tomb was opened and, to the amazement of all, the body of the maidservant was found to be perfectly preserved as if in life. After several days the maidservant actually recovered consciousness and explained that throughout her ten years of sojourn in the tomb, she had been carefully supplied with food and drink by the father. She was thereupon married to someone and ultimately gave birth to several children.

As if this startling experience were not enough, the biography also states that on another occasion KAN Pao's elder brother once fell ill, during which time his breathing was interrupted for several days, yet his body did not become cold. Later he too recovered consciousness, and stated that during this period of suspended animation he had seen, as if in a dream, wondrous things in heaven and earth, and had had no realization that he had died.

The biography tells us that KAN Pao, deeply moved by these events, "thereupon collected from ancient and modern times (instances of) supernatural and awe inspiring anomalies, and changes and transformations in men and creatures. (The resulting work), in twenty *chüan*, he named the *Sou-shên chi* 搜神記 (Researches into the Supernatural)." So excellent was the result that later, when he showed the completed work to a friend, LIU T'an 劉惔 (of whom more hereafter), the latter admiringly exclaimed: "You may be said to be the TUNG HU 董狐 of demons!" This TUNG HU is renowned as an historian of the seventh century B. C. once reputedly praised by Confucius for his fearless honesty.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Apropos of TUNG HU's recording of the murder of a certain duke in 607 B. C., Confucius, according to the *Tso chuan* (LEGGE, *Chinese Classics* 5.291), said of him:

While today we may remain skeptical of the circumstances that caused KAN Pao to compile his book, his surviving preface for it certainly testifies to the fact that the book was not written for any mere purpose of entertainment, but had the very serious mission of proving to a skeptical world the actual existence of spirits. In this preface KAN Pao first attempts to absolve himself for any errors of fact the book may contain. "Although," he writes, "I have made careful examination of what is recorded in ancient writings and have taken from traditions that are current at the present day, these are probably not matters such as a single ear or eye (in every case) hears or sees for itself. How, then, may I dare say that there are no instances which deviate from the truth?" For, he goes on to defend himself, cases also exist in which mistakes have been committed by historians of the past, who nevertheless have retained respect because their mistakes have been few, whereas the truth that they have preserved has been great. "And if, then," he continues, "among the affairs of the present age which I have culled out and investigated, there be some that are empty or untrue, I beg that the blame for this may be shared in part by those talented men and scholars of antiquity. As for what I have recorded, it will still suffice to show that the 'way of the spirits' <sup>6</sup> is not a delusion."

With this background in mind, it can be seen that the *Sou-shên chi* is not fiction in the sense that the *Liao-chai chih-i* and other examples of its type are fiction; hence it also largely lacks the literary qualities that grace these later works. Instead, it consists simply of a series of several hundred bald and matter-of-fact recitals of supernatural occurrences, usually derived from earlier sources, many of which, including the *Tso chuan*, *Kuo yü*, and other historical works, can be identified. The entire sixth *chüan* of the *Sou-shên chi*, for example, is borrowed with little change from records of various anomalous manifestations found in the two "Treatises on the Five Elements" contained in the *Han shu* (ch. 27) and *Hou Han shu* (chs. 23-28).<sup>7</sup> Some of the stories,

"Of old, TUNG Hu was an excellent historian. In his writings he had the rule of not concealing (the truth)."

<sup>6</sup> *Shên tao* 神道, the same term used for the Japanese Shintō.

<sup>7</sup> The editors of the *Ssü-k'ü ch'üan-shu tsung-mu* (Ta-tung 大東 Book Co. lithographic ed. of 1930, 142. 3b-4a) erroneously state that the seventh *chüan* is also derived from the same two sources. This seventh *chüan*, however, while similar in subject matter to the sixth, deals entirely with events after A. D. 220, i. e., subsequent to the close of the Later Han dynasty.

again, closely resemble each other, and are evidently merely differing versions of the same tradition. These facts, plus what KAN Pao himself expressly states in his preface, make it improbable that any of the stories is the pure invention of KAN Pao himself.

None of the stories are long, some being less than forty characters in length, and even the longest extending to less than five hundred characters. In subject matter they are very diverse. Some deal with a multitude of different kinds of spirits and demons, both malevolent and otherwise; others with divine rewards bestowed upon exemplars of filial piety; still others with supernatural dragons, tigers, birds and other animals; others again with miraculous births, resuscitations from death, etc., etc. A certain amount of classification is apparent in the way these different types of story have been arranged in the book. Elements of folklore appear in some of the stories, and despite KAN Pao's reliance upon other sources for his material, his book remains of considerable interest today as a broad picture of many of the popular beliefs of his time. It is also valuable in another way, because many of its sources have since become lost, leaving the *Sou-shên chi* as the only, or at least earliest, version of certain stories and legends, a few of which are still current at the present time.

Before translating some of these stories, a word must still be said as to the present-day condition of the *Sou-shên chi* and the nearest possible date when it may have been compiled. On the first point, the editors of the great eighteenth century bibliography, *Ssü-k'ü ch'üan-shu tsung-mu*,<sup>8</sup> adduce a number of quotations which are to be found in later works, and which agree substantially with our present-day text. On the other hand, they also adduce other such quotations which are not to be found in the existing text. These facts indicate that the *Sou-shên chi* as we have it today, while authentic as far as it goes, is incomplete.

In their attempt to date the compilation of KAN Pao's work, however, the usually reliable *Ssü-k'ü* editors have fallen into a curious error. They point to the fact that one of the stories in the *Sou-shên chi* (2.16-17) concerns itself with a contemporary of KAN Pao, a certain HsIEH Shang 謝尙 (308-357), who is mentioned there as being Commander (*chiang chiün* 將軍) of Chên-hsi 鎮西 (a place in eastern Sinkiang). This title, as the *Ssü-k'ü* editors observe, was acquired by HsIEH Shang under Emperor Mu of the Chin dynasty, i. e., between the years 345 and 356.

<sup>8</sup> See above, note 7.

It will be remembered in this connection that the only fixed dates in KAN Pao's biography are those of the period 317-322, during which time Emperor Yüan commissioned him to write his history of the earlier Chin rulers. It will also be remembered, however, that when the *Sou-shên chi* was completed, KAN Pao showed it to his friend, LIU T'an. Now this LIU T'an, according to the *Ssü-k'u*<sup>o</sup> editors, died during the T'ai-ning period (323-326), i. e., some twenty years before HsIEH Shang acquired his title of Commander of Chên-hsi. Therefore, they conclude, the story of HsIEH Shang, at least, must be an interpolation that has been added to the *Sou-shên chi* after KAN Pao's time.

This reasoning, while correct in itself, is based on an inexplicable error concerning the date of LIU T'an's death. Thus when we turn to LIU T'an's biography in the *Chin shu* (75. 6a-6b), we find no mention of his death as having occurred during the T'ai-ning period. We do find, however, the statement that he was made a minister at the beginning of the rule of Emperor Chien-wên. Chien-wên reigned officially from 371 to 372, but much earlier, in the year 345, a momentary and unsuccessful attempt was made to seat him on the throne. There is no doubt that when the text speaks here of the beginning of his reign, it refers to this brief period in 345, and not to his official rule of 371-372. This can be readily proved by the following facts: (1) LIU T'an's biography states that LIU died at the age of thirty-six *sui*, i. e., thirty-five years in our western reckoning. (2) It also states that he was poor when young, so that only WANG Tao 王導 then recognized his merits. This WANG Tao died in the year 330, a date that corresponds well with LIU T'an's presumed promotion to minister in 345, but which antedates by more than thirty-five years the other hypothetical date of 371-372. (3) After mentioning how LIU T'an became a minister at the beginning of the reign of Emperor Chien-wên, his biography states that he protested against the machinations of HUAN Wên 桓溫, when the latter captured Szechuan in the year 347. This date once more harmonizes well with that of 345, and immediately following it, the biography announces the death of LIU T'an in such a manner as to show that this probably occurred soon after 347.

We may conclude, therefore, that LIU T'an died shortly after 347, and probably not later than 350, as any subsequent date would make him less than fifteen years old when he was befriended by WANG Tao. From this, furthermore, we may conclude that KAN Pao completed his *Sou-shên chi* some time between the year 345 (the beginning of

the period when HsIEH Shang, mentioned in his book, became Commander of Chên-hsi) and the year 350 (by which time LIU T'an had presumably died). In summary, therefore, we may say that the *Sou-shên chi*, as it exists today, is probably for the most part the same as KAN Pao's original work, save that certain parts have been lost from it; also, that the terminal date for its composition is probably not later than the year 350.

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE *Sou-shên chi*

The following are a few stories from the *Sou-shên chi*, selected for their interest or humor, or because they are characteristic of the work. The titles given to them here do not occur in the original text, in which they simply follow each other as a succession of paragraphs.

1. The Hindu Magician

(*Chüan 2*, pp. 13-14)

This is one of the least representative stories in the entire collection, because there is really nothing "supernatural" in it. It is translated here, however, as an interesting account of how one Hindu, at least, no doubt actually earned his living in fourth century China. While there is no evidence that this man was himself a Buddhist monk, he was probably one of the many hangers-on of Buddhism who came to China with that religion from India and Central Asia during these centuries, and whose arts closely remind one of those miracle-working Buddhist monks who, as described in the *Kao-sêng chuan* (Biographies of Eminent Buddhist Monks), performed all kinds of magical tricks in order to impress their Chinese converts.<sup>9</sup>

The Yung-chia period (307-312), mentioned at the beginning of the text, is that tragic epoch during which hundreds of thousands of Chinese fled from their homes in North China and crossed the Yangtze river to escape the invasions of the northern Tatars.

During the Yung-chia period (307-312) of the Chin dynasty, there was a foreigner from India who came travelling south of the Yangtze river. He had magical arts by means of which he was able to cut off his tongue, join it together again, and to spit out fire. Wherever he went, people gathered to watch him.

When he was about to cut off (his tongue), he would first stick out the tongue and show it to the assembly. After that he would cut it off with a knife so that blood poured forth and covered the ground. He would then place it in a vessel, which he would hand around to the audience for inspection, showing them that half of his tongue was

<sup>9</sup> Cf. T. K. CHUAN, "Some Notes on *Kao Seng Chuan*," *T'ien Hsia Monthly*, 7, 5 (Dec., 1938), 452-468, especially pp. 459-464.

apparently there. After that he would take it back, put it in his mouth, and join it together once more. After a brief space of time, the people seated there could see that his tongue was as it had been before, so that they could not tell whether it had actually been cut off or not.

In (the trick of) joining together some object which had been cut in two, he would take a thin silk cloth. This he would give to another man so that each held one end, and then with scissors he would cut it in two at the center. This having been done, he would take the two severed parts and display both of them. But then the silk cloth would again be joined together into one piece, so that it was nowise different from its original condition. Many people of the time suspected that this was an illusion, yet when they secretly tried to do it themselves, they found the cloth actually to be cut in two.

When he spat fire, he would first have a powder placed in a vessel. He would ignite a bit of this, and swallow it<sup>10</sup> together with some millet sugar. Then after puffing and blowing two or three times, he would open his mouth, the whole inside of which would be filled with fire. He would use the heat thus generated to cook something, in this way having a (cooking) fire.

He would also take such things as book-paper or string and throw them into the fire, with all the crowd looking on. When they had seen that these things were completely burned up, he would stir the ashes and bring the things forth, whereupon they would be in their original condition.

## 2. The Spirit of the Rice Pestle, Hsi-yao

(*Chüan* 18, p. 135)

This is one of a group of stories in the *Sou-shên chi* dealing with spirits who inhabit houses, walls, and other human constructions. A closely parallel story is that of the Taoist priest, HsIEH Fei 謝非, to be found in *chüan* 19, pp. 147-148. According to HU Huai-ch'ên, editor of the Commercial Press edition of the *Sou-shên chi* used here, the same Hsi-yao story is still current at the present time. The name, Hsi-yao 細腰, meaning "narrow waisted," is no doubt an allusion to the shape of the rice pestle.

CHANG Fên 張奮 was a native of the Commandery of Wei.<sup>11</sup> His family had originally been great and rich, but it suddenly suffered reverses, its wealth became dissipated, and so he sold his house to

<sup>10</sup> The *ho* 合 (to unite) of the text is probably a misprint for *han* 含 (to swallow).

<sup>11</sup> 魏郡. There were several commanderies of this name. This may be the one established under the Chin dynasty at the present Chiang-ning 江寧 hsien in Kiangsu.

CH'ENG Ying 程應. When Ying occupied it, his entire family fell ill, and so he in his turn sold it to a neighbor, AH Wên 阿文.

Wên first went alone carrying a large sword, and at sunset he entered the northern hall<sup>12</sup> and climbed up onto the central roof beam. During the third watch<sup>13</sup> a person suddenly appeared, more than ten feet tall, wearing a high cap and yellow clothes. He ascended the hall and cried out: "Hsi-yao!" Hsi-yao replied, and the person continued: "How is it that in the house there is the aura of a living man?" "There is none," came the answer, whereupon the person disappeared.

After a while another person wearing a high cap and green clothes appeared, followed by a second one wearing a high cap and white clothes. The questions and responses between these two were like those that had preceded.

When day was about to break, Wên climbed down into the hall, and in the manner that had been followed previously, he called out, asking: "Who is the one wearing the yellow clothes?" "Gold," was the reply, "below the western wall of the house."

"And who is the one wearing green clothes?" "Cash coins," was the reply, "five paces to the side of the well in front of the hall."

"And who is the the one wearing white clothes?" "Silver," was the reply, "below the pillar in the north-east corner of the wall."

"And who may you be?" "Oh, as for me," was the reply, "I am the rice pestle. At present I am underneath the stove."

When it became light, Wên accordingly dug for these things. He found five hundred pounds of gold and silver and ten million strings of cash. He furthermore took the pestle and burned it up. From this time onward he enjoyed great wealth, while the house was henceforth peaceful and undisturbed.

### 3. The Goddess of Silkworms

(*Chüan* 14, p. 104)

This, so far as I know, is the earliest version of a curious bit of folklore invented to explain the origin of the silkworm. Like many folk stories, it is not entirely consistent, inasmuch as it seems to imply that before the appearance of the first silkworm, some other kind of silkworm had already existed. E. T. C. WERNER, in his *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology* (Shanghai, 1932, pp. 517-518), gives the same story in slightly different form, and writes concerning its strange heroine, the Goddess of Silkworms: "In the temples her image is to be seen covered with a horse's skin. She is called

<sup>12</sup> The main hall of the house.

<sup>13</sup> I. e., around midnight. The third watch lasts from 11 p. m. to 1 a. m.

Ma-t'ou Niang 馬頭娘, 'the Lady with the Horse's Head,' and is prayed to for the prosperity of mulberry trees and silkworms. The worship continues even in modern times. The sacrifice is performed on the third day of the third moon."

There is an old story that in ancient times a certain master went away on a distant journey, leaving no one at home save a single daughter, together with a stallion of whom she herself took care. Living a long time in this lonely spot, she was filled with thoughts about her father, and so said to the horse in fun: "If you can get my father to return to me, I will marry you." When the horse heard these words, it broke away from its halter and went straight off to where her father was. On seeing the horse, her father was surprised and delighted, and took it and rode on it. But the horse kept constantly looking in the direction from which it had come and made neighs of lamentation. The father said: "This horse has never acted like this before. Must there not be some reason for it at home?" And so he hurriedly rode home on it.

There, because the creature had such remarkable qualities, he gave it increased rations of fodder. Yet the horse refused to eat, and each time it saw the girl appear or disappear, it immediately pulled impetuously (on its halter), showing either pleasure or displeasure. This happened more than once, until the father, in wonder, privately inquired about it of his daughter. The latter told him everything that had happened, saying that that must be the cause. Her father replied: "Don't say anything about this, for I fear it may bring shame on our house. Moreover, you are not to move about (where the horse is)." So saying, he lay in ambush with a crossbow, with which he shot and killed (the horse). Its skin he set out to dry in the courtyard.

When the father (again) went away, his daughter, in company with the girls of the neighborhood, played about with the skin and trampled on it with her feet, saying: "You, a brute animal, wished to take a human being for a wife! Thus you yourself brought on this butchering and flaying, and have caused for yourself such suffering!" But before she had finished speaking, the horse's skin arose with a bound, wrapped itself around the girl, and made off with her. The other girls of the neighborhood, filled with fear, did not dare to save her, but ran away to tell her father. Yet by the time her father returned and looked for her, she had already disappeared.

Later when several days had elapsed, both the girl and the horse's skin were found among the branches of a great tree, where she had been completely transformed into a silkworm which was spinning in

the tree. The threads of its cocoon were thick and large and quite different from those of ordinary silkworms. The women of the neighborhood took it and reared it, and (the amount of silk) which they received from it was several times more (than the ordinary). Therefore they named its tree the "mulberry." The word "mulberry" (*sang* 桑) is here equivalent to the word "mourning" (*sang* 喪).<sup>14</sup>

From this time onward all the people have vied with each other to produce this (kind of silkworm). It is the same as that raised at the present time, and the so-called "mulberry silkworm" (of today) is descended to us from that ancient silkworm.

#### 4. The Slaying of the Fox Fairy

(*Chüan* 18, p. 141)

This is one of several tales in the *Sou-shên chi* dealing with that famous character in Chinese ghost stories, the fox fairy. A story with similar theme appears on the following page of the text.

The essential characteristic of the fox fairy is, of course, its power to transform itself, either into a horrible demon, as in the present story, or into a human being (preferably a beautiful woman) who does mischief to mankind. Such a belief, however, appears not to have become developed before the late third or early fourth century A. D., and before that time the fox seems to have been regarded merely as a creature of ill omen, without clearly defined magical powers. Such, at least, is the conclusion to be reached through a perusal of the large amount of material that J. J. M. DE GROOT has collected on the subject.<sup>15</sup> The *Sou-shên chi* is the earliest work, I believe, in which stories of fox fairies assume a prominent place, while the first definite statement that I have found of the ability of the fox to change its form is that made by the famous Taoist alchemist, Ko Hung (ca. 250-ca. 330), in his *Pao-p'ü tzü*:<sup>16</sup> "The fox and the wolf

<sup>14</sup> This is one of the typical popular etymologies often established in Chinese writings for words accidentally the same in sound. It is, of course, completely devoid of any scientific foundation.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. his *The Religious System of China* (Leyden, 1901), 4. 188-196; 5. 576-600. Of the many citations made by him, only a very few (cf. pp. 576-577 and 592) go back before the late third century. He makes numerous references to the *Sou-shên chi*, incidentally falling into the common error of calling its author Yü Pao instead of KAN Pao.

<sup>16</sup> *Ssü-pu pei-yao* ed. 3. 2a (a passage overlooked by DE GROOT, *op. cit.*). The dates of Ko Hung's life are uncertain. I follow those given by T'AN Chêng-pi *op. cit.* (see fn. 2) no. 356. These dates are confirmed by CHIANG Liang-fu 姜亮夫, *Li-tai ming-jên nien-li pei-chuan tsung-piao* 歷代名人年里碑傳總表, p. 37, who states that Ko Hung died at the age of eighty-one *sui* some time during the Hsien-ho period (327-334). The dates of ca. 281-361, however, are suggested by WU Lu-ch'iang and Tenney L. DAVIS, "An Ancient Chinese Alchemical Classic, Ko Hung on the Gold Medicine and on the Yellow and White," *Proceedings Amer. Acad. Arts and Sciences*, 70. 6, Dec. 1935, p. 221.

both live to an age of eight hundred years, and when they reach five hundred years they are clever at changing themselves into human form." It is curious in this connection that the wolf, while mentioned in later Chinese folklore, has not shared there the important position of the fox.<sup>17</sup>

The word translated as "demon" in this and the two following stories is the Chinese *kuei* 鬼.

In the western suburbs outside Nan-yang<sup>18</sup> there was a lodge for travellers where no one could stay, because anyone who did so would be sure to suffer some calamity. But once a native of that city, SUNG Ta-hsien 宋大賢, stopped overnight at that lodge, inasmuch as it happened to be just on the road from his own place. There he sat, without having prepared any weapons, playing his lute in the night. Toward midnight a demon suddenly appeared, who climbed up the stairs and began talking to Ta-hsien. He had staring eyes, grinding teeth, and a horrible face.

Ta-hsien continued playing his lute as before. The demon thereupon went off to the city, where he found the head of a dead man which he brought back with him. Then he again spoke to Ta-hsien, saying: "Would it not be better to sleep a little?" And with this he threw the dead man's head in front of Ta-hsien. "Splendid indeed!" exclaimed Ta-hsien. "I had no pillow to sleep on, and was just wishing for something like this."

Again the demon went away, and after a long time once more returned, saying: "Could we not have some boxing together?"<sup>19</sup> "Excellent!" exclaimed Ta-hsien, and before he had finished speaking, while the demon was yet standing in front of him, he laid hold of the latter's waist. The demon could only cry out impetuously that he would die, but Ta-hsien thereupon slew him. The next day, when he looked at him, he saw that he was a fox. From that time onward there were no more supernatural doings in the travellers' lodge.

### 5. The Righteous Mei Demon

(*Chüan* 17, pp. 131-132)

The Mei 魅 demon, like the fox fairy, figures prominently in several of the stories in the *Shou-shên chi*. It appears already in early works such as the *Tso chuan*, where it is always coupled with the word *ch'ih* 螭 as the Ch'ih-mei demon. GRANET, in his

<sup>17</sup> DE GROOT (*op. cit.*, 5. 563-570) discusses lycanthropy in China, but admits that it has been in no way comparable there with the belief in supernatural foxes.

<sup>18</sup> 南陽, at the present hsien of the same name in Honan.

<sup>19</sup> *Shou po* 手搏, lit., "striking with the hands."

*Danses et légendes de la Chine ancienne* (Paris, 1926, p. 316 and note 2 on p. 490), discusses the meaning of Mei and explains that it is a term for the ensemble of aged things that have become malevolent; also that it is a general term for prodigies of various kinds. A more detailed analysis, citing the various early texts in which the Mei or Ch'ih-mei is mentioned, together with the remarks of the commentators on these texts, is to be found in KIANG Chao-yuan, *Le voyage dans la Chine ancienne* (translated from the Chinese by FAN Jên, Shanghai, 1937, pp. 168-172). Among the often conflicting and vague statements of the commentators quoted there, the clearest describes the Mei as being a malevolent creature, either having bestial form, or with human face and animal body, and born from the supernatural emanations of mountains and forests.

In the *Sou-shên chi* the Mei is usually conceived of as at least in part animal, and is often identified with the fox fairy. Likewise it is generally malevolent, so that the manner in which the Mei in the present instance rectifies a case of human injustice, gives a surprising twist to this story. The story is also of interest for its account of the exorcizing activities of the Taoist priest.

During the Wu period (222-280) there was a certain NI Yen-ssü 倪彦思 who lived in the village of Yen 埏 in the western part of Chia-hsing hsien,<sup>20</sup> where he once suddenly noticed a Mei demon enter his house, talk with the people there, and eat and drink like a man. Its body, however, remained invisible. Among Yen-ssü's maidservants were some who had the habit of secretly slandering everybody, and who now said that they were going to speak about this. But Yen-ssü kept them in check so that none of them dared to speak ill of (the demon).

Yen-ssü had a concubine whom the Mei followed about and sought after, so Yen-ssü invited in a Taoist priest<sup>21</sup> to exorcize him. No sooner had the wine and food been prepared (for the ceremony), than the Mei smeared them over with filth which he took out of the privy. The Taoist then fiercely beat upon a drum to summon spirits (to drive away the Mei). Thereupon the Mei grasped the "crouching tiger" that stood on the spirit-seat, and blew into it in the note of *chiao*.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> 嘉興縣, south of the present Kashing hsien in Chekiang.

<sup>21</sup> *Tao shih* 道士.

<sup>22</sup> 角, the third of the ancient five note scale, corresponding to the western note of E. The "crouching tiger" (*fu hu* 伏虎) is explained in the *Tz'ü-yüan* and *Tz'ü-hai* under the term *chiang lung fu hu* 降龍伏虎, "descended dragon and crouching tiger." According to these dictionaries, both Buddhist and Taoist priests have the power to induce dragons to descend from the sky into their alms bowls; also, with their priestly staffs, to separate tigers locked in deadly combat, and cause them to crouch in respectful submission. The "crouching tiger" here referred to was no doubt a figure of such an animal used by the Taoist priest as part of his paraphernalia for exorcism ceremonies, and set up on the seat or altar which the assisting spirits were supposed to occupy.

A moment later the Taoist suddenly felt a chill on his back, and leaping up in alarm, pulled off his clothes. There was the "crouching tiger"! At this the Taoist desisted from his efforts and departed.

During the night Yen-ssü secretly discussed the matter with his wife beneath the bed clothes. They were both terrified by this Mei. The Mei thereupon from the roof beam of the house said to Yen-ssü: "You have been talking about me to your wife! I am going to break off the roof beam of your house." And with this there was a tremendous rumbling sound. Yen-ssü was frightened lest the roof beam be broken in two. He seized a light to look around, whereupon the Mei at once extinguished the light. The sound of the breaking of the beam continued even more ominously than before. Yen-ssü was afraid that the house would collapse, and everyone, both big and small, ran outside. Again they took a light to look around, only to see that the beam was still as before. Then the Mei let out a loud laugh and asked Yen-ssü: "Now are you going to talk about me again?"

The Intendant of Agriculture of the Commandery heard of this and said: "This spirit must surely be a fox creature." The Mei at once went to the Intendant of Agriculture and said: "You as an official take for yourself many hundred bushels of grain, which you store away in a certain place. As a functionary you have been corrupt and wicked, and yet you dare to talk about me! Now you must vacate your office and let the people take back the grain which you have stolen from them."

The Intendant of Agriculture, greatly terrified, thanked him, and from that time onward there was no one who dared talk about him. Three years later he departed, and no one knows where he has located himself.

## 6. A Ghostly Encounter

(*Chüan* 16, p. 122)

This, one of the most amusing stories in the collection, well illustrates the humanized form in which the Chinese often conceive their spirits. Indeed, so cooperative and good natured is the demon whom we encounter here, that we cannot but feel sorry for him when he meets his sorry fate. Perhaps, however, we should not be too surprised by his human characteristics, since he is, after all, a true ghost who had once been a man, and not, like the Mei, a monstrous creature "born from the supernatural emanations of mountains and forests."

This story is one of a number in which human beings succeed in outwitting their ghostly opponents. It contains the interesting folk belief that the only thing feared by ghosts is to be spat upon by a man.

SUNG Ting-po 宋定伯, a native of Nan-yang,<sup>23</sup> once in his youth was travelling by night, when he encountered a demon. On questioning the demon, the latter replied: "I am a demon," and then asked: "And who are you?" "I too am a demon," said Ting-po falsely. "Where are you going?" the demon asked again. "To the city of Yüan," he replied.<sup>24</sup> The demon said: "I too am going to the city of Yüan." And with this they continued walking.

After several miles the demon said: "To walk on foot is too tedious. How would it be if we each alternately carry the other?" "Very good," replied Ting-po.

Thereupon the demon first carried Ting-po for several miles, but finally said: "You, sir, are too heavy. It must be that you are not a demon." "I have only recently become a demon," Ting-po replied, "and that is why my body is so heavy."

Ting-po then in his turn carried the demon, who weighed almost nothing at all. And this was done a second and a third time. Then Ting-po again said: "As I am only a new demon, I don't yet know what I should be afraid of." "The only thing that will give you discomfort," replied the demon, "will be to have a man spit on you." And with this they continued together.

Along the road they came to a stream, where Ting-po told the demon to cross first. Yet as he listened, (the demon) seemed to make no sound at all. When Ting-po himself crossed, however, he made a great splashing noise. The demon again asked him: "How is it you make such a noise?" "Because," Ting-po replied, "having only recently died, I am not yet accustomed to fording streams. So don't be surprised at me."

When they had almost reached the city of Yüan, Ting-po, who was then carrying the demon on his shoulders, suddenly seized him. The demon raised a tremendous yell, but (Ting-po) tied him up with a rope and paid no more attention to him. Then (Ting-po) went with him straight to the center of the city of Yüan, where on setting him down upon the ground, he became transformed into a sheep. (Ting-po) thereupon sold him (as a sheep), but being afraid that he might (again) transform himself, he spat upon him. He obtained fifteen hundred cash for him, and then departed.

<sup>23</sup> See above, note 18.

<sup>24</sup> 宛, in the present Nan-yang hsien, Honan.

At that time SHIH Ch'ung<sup>25</sup> had a saying about this: "Ting-po once sold a demon, for whom he obtained fifteen hundred cash!"

### 7. The People with Disembodied Heads

(*Chiian* 12, p. 92)

This is one of the tall "travellers' tales" to be found the world over, and in Chinese literature suggestive of the accounts contained in such works of pseudo-geography as the *Shan-hai ching* (Classic of Mountains and Seas). No doubt it is inspired by one of the many aboriginal tribes in south and south-west China with whom the Chinese came into extensive contact in the course of their southward expansion during the early centuries of the Christian era.

During the Ch'in period (255-207 B. C.), there existed in the south a "People with Disembodied Heads,"<sup>26</sup> whose heads had the ability of flying around. This race of people derived its name from the fact that they practised a sacrifice known as that of the "fallen insects."<sup>27</sup>

During the Wu period (A. D. 222-280), General CHU Huan<sup>28</sup> obtained a maidservant whose head, every night after she had gone to sleep, would immediately fly away. It would come and go, sometimes through the small door for the dog, sometimes through the skylight, and its ears would act as wings. When day was about to break, it would return to her again. This happened time after time.

The neighbors, mystified by this, once came with a lamp during the night to look at her, and found that only her body was there, but no head. The body was feeble and cold and its breathing had almost stopped. Thereupon they covered it over with blankets.

At daybreak the head returned, but, being hindered by the blankets, was unable to gain its resting place. Twice and thrice it moved around, and then sank to the floor. Heartrending groans came forth, and the body breathed in quick gasps and looked as if it were about

<sup>25</sup> 石崇, a wealthy official and marquis of the Chin dynasty who was fond of ostentation, and who was executed in A. D. 300 when he refused to surrender a beautiful concubine to a certain favorite of a powerful prince. Cf. GILES, *Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, 1709.

<sup>26</sup> *Lo t'ou min* 落頭民, lit., "people whose heads fall off."

<sup>27</sup> *Ch'ung lo* 蟲落. The only apparent resemblance in the two terms is the common occurrence in both of them of the word *lo*, "to fall" or "fall off." It is quite possible that the characters represent the sounds of some term in the language of one of the non-Chinese aboriginal tribes of South China.

<sup>28</sup> 朱桓, hot tempered but brave and honest officer of the state of Wu who died in 238. Cf. GILES, 448.

to die. They then removed the blankets, at which the head again leaped up and joined itself to the neck. After a short time everything was peaceful as before.

Huan was tremendously astonished by this, and feared that it would be impossible for him to put up with such a thing, so he dismissed her. But when she had explained the matter clearly to him, he realized that it was simply something innate in her nature.

At the present time, the great generals who make expeditions to the south also frequently find such people. Cases, moreover, have occurred when (the neck of these people) has been covered over with a bronze basin, so that the head could no longer approach (the body), whereupon they have died.

### 8. The Great Gibbons of Szechuan

(*Chüan* 12, p. 93)

This again is a story of the travellers' type, closely following in the text that given above. Shu 蜀, the locality referred to, is roughly equivalent to the modern Szechuan. Positive identification of the curious creature here described as the great gibbon is provided by the third of the three names attached to it, that of *ch'üeh-yüan* 獼猴. Bernard E. READ, *Chinese Materia Medica: Animal Drugs* (Peiping, 1931), says of the *ch'üeh* under no. 400a: "It probably denotes the great gibbon, *Hylobates*, W." In the same work, no. 401a, he defines the *yüan* as "the gibbon, *Hylobates agilis*." Under no. 400a he furthermore throws light on the folklore touched on in the present story by his statement (derived from Chinese writers) that this gibbon "steals people's property and is a great observer. There are no females so it goes after women for a mate who bear its young."

The other two terms applied in the text to the great gibbon, those of *chia-kuo* 猻國 and *ma-hua* 馬化, are more difficult to explain. Literally they respectively mean "pig country" and "horse transformation," which are unintelligible, so that it is obvious that they must be incorrect phonetic equivalents for the true characters. In the case of *chia-kuo*, I would suggest that *chia* 猻, "pig," is a mistake for *chia* 加, which the K'ang-hsi Dictionary, quoting the *P'ien-hai* 篇海 (compiled under the Chin dynasty, 1115-1234; revised in the sixteenth century), defines as another name for the *ch'üeh*. The latter, as we have seen, is the great gibbon. Likewise I would suggest that the second part of the name, *kuo* 國, "country," is a mistake for *kuo* (果 or 猻), as used in the name *kuo-jan* (果然 or 猻然). READ, *op. cit.*, no. 402, defines the *kuo-jan* as "the Proboscis monkey, *Semnopithecus larvatus*," and quotes various Chinese authors as saying that "it is larger than a gibbon" and is "like a gibbon, white face with black jaws, a long beard."

The name *ma-hua*, however, is more puzzling. The only hypothesis I can offer is that *ma* 馬, "horse," may conceivably be equivalent to *ma* 馬, which the K'ang-hsi Dictionary, quoting the *Chi-yün* 集韻 (seventh century), merely defines as being some sort of quadruped. I can give no suggestion as to the word *hua* 化, "to transform."

Nor, finally, can I explain why the unfortunate Szechuan bearers of the surname YANG should be singled out in this story as the descendants of the great gibbon.

On the tops of the lofty mountains in south-western Shu, there lives a creature similar in kind to the monkey. It is seven feet tall, can act like a human being, and is good at running and pursuing people. It is named the *chia-kuo*, and is also known as the *ma-hua* or the great gibbon.<sup>29</sup> It lies in ambush for beautiful women walking along the road, and immediately seizes and makes off with them in such a manner that no one knows about the matter. With a long rope it pulls in all travellers who pass by, so that they are firmly bound<sup>30</sup> and unable to escape.

This creature is able to distinguish between the odor of men and women. Therefore it seizes women, but men it does not take. If it captures a married woman, it sets up house with her. Those (women) who then remain childless, are to the end of their lives not permitted to return (to their original homes), and after ten years they become similar to it in form and their minds also become confused, so that they no longer think of returning.

But if (a captured woman) should get a child, she is at once sent back to her home. The children who are thus produced are like human beings in form, and any mother who does not rear them will suffer sudden death. Being afraid of this, there are no (mothers) who do not so rear them.

(Such children), when they grow up, are no different from ordinary human beings, and all of them assume the surname of YANG 楊. Therefore the many Yangs who today live in the south-west of Shu are for the most part descendants of the *chia-kuo* or *ma-hua*.

## 9. Other Stories

Other *Sou-shên chi* stories of interest to the folklorist or students of mythology might also be cited, such as that of the goddess of the manure pile, Ju-yüan 如願 ("As you like it"), who is sacrificed to on the fifteenth day of the first month (*chüan* 4, p. 32); or that of the sacrifice made to the God of the Hearth by the filial son, YIN Tzū-fang 陰子方 (*chüan* 4, p. 33). These, however, are not translated here because I intend to treat them in connection with another work in which the same stories are mentioned.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> For these names, see the discussion above.

<sup>30</sup> *Ku* 固 is probably to be taken here in the sense of *ku* 固, "firm."

<sup>31</sup> The sixth century book on annual customs, *Ching-ch'u sui-shih-chi* 荆楚歲時記, a translation of which I am now preparing. It was in the course of making this trans-

Other stories of interest are those describing the supernatural origin of certain races. Notable among these is the myth of P'an-hu 盤瓠 (*chüan* 14, pp. 101-102), the dog who was a pet of the legendary Chinese emperor Ti K'u 帝嚳 (ca. 2400 B. C.). This dog succeeded in bringing to his imperial master the head of a certain troublesome barbarian general, and was thereupon, in accordance with the reward previously promised by the emperor, given the emperor's own daughter as wife. The dog then carried off the daughter to the fastnesses of the southern mountains, where she gave birth through him to six children, who became the progenitors of the present day Miao and Yao tribes of Kweichow.

Another story is that of Tung-ming 東明 (*chüan* 14, p. 102), the hero who was born somewhere in northern Manchuria or southern Siberia, when the maidservant of the king of that country became pregnant because a strange emanation, resembling a chicken's egg, entered her womb from Heaven. The king, considering the boy thus born to be inauspicious, cast him into a pig sty and then into a horse corral, but in each case the pigs and horses sheltered him and kept him alive by breathing upon him. Therefore the boy was allowed to grow up and became a skilful archer, until the king, becoming alarmed for his own safety, again wished to kill him. Thereupon Tung-ming fled southward until he reached a river, where, on striking the water with his bow, the fish and turtles rose to the surface and conveniently formed a bridge on which he crossed, thus eluding his pursuers. There, in the part of Manchuria lying roughly between Harbin and Mukden, Tung-ming established the country of Fu-yü 夫餘, from which the Koreans trace their origin.

Both these stories appear with only minor verbal variations in the *Hou Han shu*,<sup>32</sup> from which they have already been translated into English; hence only summaries of them are presented here.<sup>33</sup> It might be pointed out, however, that the scholars who have discussed the *Hou Han shu* versions of these myths appear to have overlooked the *Sou-shên chi* entirely, although that work was compiled almost one century prior to the *Hou Han shu*, the author of the latter history, FAN Yeh, having lived from 398

---

lation that I had occasion to read through the *Sou-shên chi*, and so came to write the present article.

<sup>32</sup> *Ssü-pu pei-yao* ed., beginning of ch. 116, and sect. on Fu-yü country in 115. 3a-3b, respectively.

<sup>33</sup> The P'an-hu myth has been translated by Berthold LAUFER, "Totemic Traces among the Indo-Chinese," *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 30 (1917), 419-420; by LI Chi, *The Formation of the Chinese People* (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), 243-244; by LIU Chungshee Hsien, "The Dog-Ancestor Story of the Aboriginal Tribes of Southern China," *Journal of Anthropological Institute* 62 (1932), 361-368; and by LIN Yüeh-hwa, "The Miao-Man Peoples of Kweichow," *HJAS* 5 (1941), 333-334. LIU's article has not been available to me for consultation, but of the others, LAUFER's is by far the most detailed, translating as it does not only the text proper of the *Hou Han shu*, but also the accompanying statements of the commentators, including a passage quoted from KAN Pao's now lost history of the Chin dynasty, the *Chin chi*.

The Tung-ming myth has been translated by Alexander WYLIE in his translation of *Hou Han shu* 115, "History of the Eastern Barbarians," *Revue de l'extrême orient*, no. 1, 1882. Another account of the myth, with added details from Japanese sources, appears in William Elliot GRIFFIS, *Corea, the Hermit Nation* (New York, 1882), 19-21.

to 445. The P'an-hu myth, as a matter of fact, can be carried back at least still another century, since the commentary to its *Hou Han shu* version quotes a reference to it taken from the now lost *Wei lüeh* 魏略, a work which was compiled between the years 239 and 265.<sup>34</sup>

[Ed.'s note: There would seem to have been other *Sou shên chí* differing from KAN Pao's. There is one at the end of Lo Chên-yü's *Tun-huang ling shih* 敦煌零拾, and *The Chinese Repository* contains translated excerpts from one attributed to a Ming dynasty author: 10. 84-87, 185-191, 305-309 (second signature so paginated; not the first and immediately preceding one), 18. 102-109, and 19. 312-317. The latter would seem to be abridged in *Tao tsang* 1105-6 as well as in an illustrated Ming text entitled 出像增補搜神記 now in the Harvard-Yenching Institute Library. Cf. also WYLLIE, *Notes* 193.

<sup>34</sup> For this dating cf. CHAVANNES, *Les pays d'occident d'après le Wei Lio*, *TP* 6 (1905), 519-520.