

The "Ghost-wife" Theme in
China, Japan, and Korea:
New Tales of the Trimmed Lamp,
Tales of Moonlight and Rain,
and *New Tales of the Golden Carp*

"And I scarce know which part may greater be,
What I keep of you, or you rob from me."

George Santayana, "With You A Part of Me"

Dominic Cheung

The *New Tales of the Trimmed Lamp* is a series of tales of romance written by Ch'u Yu (1341-1427) of Ch'ien-t'ang in Ming China. Altogether, there are twenty-one tales in four volumes. Ch'u Yu, being a prolific writer, has another forty volumes of romance tales written under the title of *Records of the Trimmed Lamp*, and in addition, a myriad of poems.¹ The reasons why the work has been neglected by Chinese literary historians can be attributed to many factors. First, it is a collection of tales written in classical Chinese, while Chinese short stories, since the time of the inception of prompt tales in the Sung dynasty, have already merged in the stream of vernacular literature. Such colloquial tales as *Stories of Old and New* and others have in fact won a tremendous popularity among the literary circle in later Sung, while the classical romances of the T'ang dynasty have long fallen out of fashion, having drifted apart from the interest of the Chinese audience. Second, after a major breakthrough in both language and themes in T'ang and Sung dynasties, the Ming dynasty marks the beginning of long fiction. Except for the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a novel written in classical Chinese, most of the major lengthy fictional works, including *Water Margin*, *Journey to the West*, *Golden Lotus*, *Canonization of Gods*, and *The*

Pleasant History, are all written in the vernacular tongue of the common people. These works integrate such historical events as the confusion of the three kingdoms, the fetching of sutras by Monk Tripitaka, the rowdy thirty-six bandits, or delineate intangible feelings and emotions of lovers, reflecting truthfully the reality of the time, handling each theme artistically. On the other hand, the T'ang-Sung classical romances have degenerated and exhausted their own resources. The writing of short stories has already begun to lean towards the style of prompt books and colloquial tales.

Third, with the invasion of the Mongolians in Yuan dynasty, and their cultural persecutions of the Chinese intellectuals, the writing of short stories has come to a temporary stasis. Since the T'ang dynasty, the scholars have converted daily events of the T'ang society into imaginary tales of romance. Such practice has resulted in paving the way to establish the genre of Gothic tales as a continuation of the tradition of the mythical tales of the Wei-Chin periods, the tales which were fragmentary and were discontinued to be written. Although the prompt books of the storytellers have contributed to the major popularity of the vernacular stories, the writing of the classical stories in the Sung dynasty has been in line with the direction of the T'ang romances. Though they lacked new import, such tales as "Life of Green Pearl," "Private History of Lady Yang," "Tale of Flying Swallow," and "Story of Lady Mei" have not only inherited the tradition of mythical stories, but they also opened the possibility of a new genre. The editing of the *T'ai P'ing Miscellany* by Li Fang was a classic example of such inheritance and possibility. When the Mongols invaded and established their sole dominance of the Chinese empire, they not only destroyed the Confucian school of thoughts, but also interrupted and terminated all literary activities including imperial examinations, due to their prejudice and discrimination against the scholars. The emergence of the *Trimmed Lamp* tales symbolized a revival of the T'ang-Sung classical romances.

By early Ming, after a long period of Mongolian dominance, the copies of the T'ang-Sung romances were almost all lost, and even the circulation of the *T'ai P'ing Miscellany* was limited. There was a strong urge among the intellectuals to search for these works and to re-link their Chinese tradition to its classical past. When the *Trimmed Lamp* tales emerged, they were immediately appreciated and popularized. Further evidence of its popularity can be seen from Li Ch'en's continuation of the work titled *Remnants of the Trimmed Lamp*, in which a collection of twenty-two tales were included in four volumes. Thus far, the so-called "Trimmed Lamp tales," imitations of

the T'ang-Sung romances, have come to a total number of forty-three tales. It was reported that the contents of the three *Trimmed Lamp* collections were "so well received by the contemporary writers that numerous imitations were followed up until the government put a censorship on the writing of these tales."²

Literary historians tend to agree that the *Trimmed Lamp* tales are no more than decadent, sensuous tales of love and romances, yet the tales stand out significantly in the course of the historical development of Chinese fiction. In terms of language, they mark the divergent development of classical and vernacular fiction in China. In terms of style, they influence the Ming-Ch'ing novellas with their classical terseness. In terms of contents, the *Trimmed Lamp* tales inherited the fantasy world of human beings and ghosts from the T'ang-Sung romances, which in turn inherited the supernatural elements from the Wei-Chin mythical tales.

All these tales formed an indispensable resource for the writing of the *Strange Tales from the Leisure Chamber* in the Ch'ing dynasty. Since the *Trimmed Lamp* tales were written in late Ming and the ghost tales of the *Leisure Chamber* were written in early Ch'ing, the influence of the *Trimmed Lamp* tales was inevitable. As far as the literary genre is concerned, the *Trimmed Lamp* tales functioned as a vital linkage to the continuity of the tradition of mythical tales, linking the mythical and fairy tales of the Wei-Chin and the Six Dynasties, and the following mystical tales influenced by Buddhism and Taoism in Sui-T'ang dynasties, to the mythical romances in Sung, Yuan, Ming and Ch'ing dynasties.

There are only a few lines devoted to the discussion of the *Trimmed Lamp* tales in Lu Hsun's *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*. Lu says, "He [Ch'u Yu] modelled the language and form of these tales on those of the T'ang dynasty; and though his style was rather weak, since he dwelt on love and other romantic themes his stories were popular and many writers followed his example. It took a government prohibition to end this fashion."³ In terms of the development of the genre of mythical tales, what Lu Hsun claims with regard to the stories recorded in *T'ai P'ing Miscellany*, stands true: "The stories of marvels at the end of the Ming dynasty are usually so brief and fantastic as to seem incredible."⁴ Indeed the anecdotes contained in the above work may be of such kind, signifying the decline of the literary trend.

When we scrutinize twenty some tales contained in the *Trimmed Lamp*, however, we find new elements which would reveal new attempts in writing

the stories of marvels, rendering the collection to a unique place in the history of the genre. The style of the tales may indeed appear repetitive and weak, yet the themes of the tales which connect typical love stories with tales of marvels open the new realm where the impossible love union between human beings and ghosts could be treated meaningfully. Truthfulness of love give credibility to union between ghosts and human beings, by rendering ghosts appear more human and human beings more ghost-like. "The Story of Ai Ch'ing" is an outstanding example.

The tremendous influence the *Trimmed Lamp* tales exerted on later works extended way beyond *Amazing Stories*, the last Ming tales, to the literature of the Edo period in Japan crossing the ocean.⁵ Records indicate that *Trimmed Lamp* was read as early as in Momoyama period, roughly early Ming. The Japanese version of the *Collection of Marvels and Miscellany*, published in the Tenmon years, contained three of the *Trimmed Lamp* tales in Japanese translation. Later in the sixth year of Kanmon, Asia Ryoi rewrote the eighteen *Trimmed Lamp* tales in his *Hand Puppets*, changing all the Chinese names and locations into Japanese. Since the *Hand Puppets* is a rewriting of the Chinese tales in Japanese, most Japanese audience were not aware that they were Chinese tales originally. Like the *Trimmed Lamp* in China, *Hand Puppets* attracted immediate attention and its popularity grew rapidly. Consequently, such imitation sequences as *A Continuation of Hand Puppets*, *New Hand Puppets*, *Pre-Hand Puppets* and *Remnants of Hand Puppets* appeared.

These imitations were not only comparable in style and content to Li Ch'en's *Remnants of the Trimmed Lamp* in China, but they surpassed the Chinese work in quality; indeed, they formed a prototype for the Japanese *kaidan* (ghost-tales) genre, which were to be developed extensively in later years. The emergence of the ghost story genre in Edo Japan, indeed owes, if not completely, to the influx of the *Trimmed Lamp* tales. Even Ueda Akinari's *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*, which signifies the maturation of the genre, contains stories whose origins can be traced explicitly to Chinese tales.⁶ Take for instance, "The House Amidst the Thicket" was originated from "The Story of Ai Ch'ing" in the *Trimmed Lamp*.⁷

The writing of *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* points towards the similar literary situation in China which produced the *Trimmed Lamp* tales. As I have mentioned before, the *Trimmed Lamp* is the product of the Ming intellectuals' intense interest in the tales of marvels in T'ang, marking the linear development of the *ch'uan ch'i* (romances) genre since the beginning

of the Wei-Chin mythical tales. In Japan, the appearance of *kanazoshi*, or prose fiction written in *kana*, in early Edo marked a new development of fiction away from the *monogatari* genre, towards a popular fiction written in non-kanbun style. Asai Ryoi's *Hand Puppets*, an imitation of the *Trimmed Lamp*, was a classic example of ghost tales in the form of *kanazoshi*. Later, *kanazoshi* developed into *ukiyozoshi*, by such major fiction writer as Ihara Saikaku, who created a unique world of fiction by integrating the dream-beauty of the samurai-aristocrats into the reality of the bourgeois life. After the death of Saikaku, Ejima Kiseki revived the *ukiyozoshi* from the "hachimonjiya" texts published by the Hachimonjiya Bookstore in Kyoto, making it once again a popular form of fiction.

After the "hachimonjiya" texts deteriorated around the middle of Edo, the *yomihon* began to arise. The *yomihon*, as Donald Keene points out, is "a serious form of fiction intended for 'reading' (as opposed to picture books, which were meant to be looked at,) developed early in the nineteenth century in reaction to the prevailing frivolous works of fiction."⁸ Ueda Akinari, sensing "the importance of a spirit of righteousness" and writing in the *yomihon* genre, merged the classical taste of Chinese colloquial stories with the mythical taste of the *kana* writings. Although *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* was written shortly after *the Hand Puppets*, it is clear that the work reflects the direct influence from the *Trimmed Lamp*. Akinari was an adopted son of a rich Osaka merchant, who, not only was well-read in literature, but also studied formally Chinese and Japanese literature (*kokugaku*) under the guidance of Tsuga Teisho.⁹

The mutation of the genre of the ghost stories in both China and Japan, thus, can be meaningfully compared in the emergence of the *Trimmed Lamp* and *Moonlight and Rain*. The *Trimmed Lamp* represents a literary trend which is in opposition to the current, popular literary trend. The development of the popular vernacular stories in the Sung times, as in the case of the development of the *zoshi* writings in *kana* in early Edo, was the response to the emergence of the merchant class readers. The rapid expansion of the middle class created the demand for semi-realistic literature. This is the reason why the *Trimmed Lamp*, written in classical language, only enjoyed the transient glamour. It was a work in a transitional period in the development of the gothic tales, functioning only as a link between the classical tradition and the new development.

In the same way, the *Moonlight and Rain* was a variation of *zoshi* tales. It did not follow, however, the typical patterns of stories and themes of *ukiyozoshi*, whose main thrust was to depict the life of the merchant class.

On the contrary, the *Moonlight and Rain* draws its basic imagination from the fantastic elements of the mythical tales in China: by adding to it the historic background and geographical description of Japan, it turned itself into a romantic as well as realistic work. In contrast to the aristocratic *ch'uan ch'i* of T'ang China, the characters in the *Moonlight and Rain* were mostly those of the middle class, namely, the merchants. This is the main difference between the characters in "The House Amidst the Thicket" and "The Story of Ai Ch'ing." Because the class background of the characters are different, their personalities are different, leading to necessary divergence in the plots.

As traditional Confucians, both Akinari and Ch'u Yu, writing in the age of commercialism due to the rapid growth of the middle class, were well aware of the didactic function which literary works are supposed to fulfill. Literary works must be a vehicle to carry out the way in order to justify its existence. The elaboration of the gothic elements and expansion of the ghostly themes, however, meant a direct reversal to the Confucian demand for didacticism in literature. This is the reason why Ch'u needed a defensive statement in the preface to the *Trimmed Lamp*:

So far, I have collected and edited strange tales of old and new in forty volumes of the *Trimmed Lamp Collections*. Informants told me events happened a few years or a hundred years ago, I recorded and compiled them. New events happened each day, and after months, they grew in abundance. Deeply caught in my practice, I could not stop but to put them down in writing. These are joyous, sad, shocking, strange events. The only regret is my fussy mind and clumsy diction. There are really no profound thoughts to expound. Because of the fantastic nature of these events, I hid them in my bookshelf after I wrote them, hoping that these materials may avoid the chance of leading the readers to go astray. Yet many people heard of my writings and requested to read them. I could not turn them all down. Finally, I made up my own apology the *Book of Songs*, *Book of History*, *Book of Changes* and *Spring and Autumn* were all written by the sages to set canons for future generations. Yet the *Book of Changes* spoke of dragons dueling in wilderness, the *Book of History* recorded pheasants crying over sacrificial cauldrons, the folkways in the *Book of Songs* included poems of illicit love, and the *Spring and Autumn* noted events of the rebels. All these can not come up with a definite answer. My edition of these tales may not help much to educating the people, but they may

advise them to choose the good, and avoid the punishment of evil to lament the poor or weep for the unjust. My friends thought I was right, and this is why I wrote this preface.¹⁰

The preface clearly reveals the creative motive of Ch'u Yu in writing the *Trimmed Lamp*. Ch'u explains that at first he was merely involved in collecting the existing strange stories, yet he came to decide to write them down, not because he desired to exercise his creative talent nor elaborate his own style, but because the tales contained worthy contents — joy and sorrow, the strange and shocking events. The author, however, justifies ultimately the publication of the collection in Confucian terms: he insists that the work may well fulfill the didactic function in advising people to choose the good and avoid the punishment of the evil.

In addition to Ch'u Yu's own preface, there are three other prefaces written by his friends, Ling Yun-han, Wu Chih, and Chia Heng. They all placed emphasis on the didactic functions of Ch'u's tales may fulfill, and praised Ch'u's treatment of materials as well as his narrative techniques.

Learning Chinese literature from Tsuga Teisho, a Confucian scholar from Osaka, Akinari Ueda felt just as much pressure for the didactic literature from the traditional culture. Consequently, like Ch'u Yu, he could not avoid making the following apology in the preface to *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*:

Lo Kuan-chung wrote *Water Margin*, and for three generations he begot deaf mutes. For writing *The Tale of Genji*, Lady Murasaki was condemned to hell. Thus were these authors punished for what they had done. But consider their achievement. Each created a rare form, capable of expressing all degrees of truth with infinitely subtle variation and causing a deep note to echo in the reader's sensibility wherewith one can find mirrored realities of a thousand years ago.

By chance, I happened to have some idle tales with which to entertain you, and as they took shape and found expression, with crying pheasants and quarrelling dragons, the stories came to form a slipshod compilation. But you who pick up this book to read must by no means take the stories to be true. I hardly wish for my offspring to have hare lips or missing noses.

Having completed this work one night late in the spring

of the Meiwa Era, under the zodiac of earth and the rat, when the rain cleared away and the moon shone faintly by my window, I thereupon gave it to the bookseller, entitling it *Ugetsu monogatari*.¹¹

Akinari was indeed enormously learned in Chinese literature. There are more than ten allusions to Chinese literature in the above preface. His reference to Lo Kuan-chung's tragic fate of begetting deaf mutes for the three generations because he wrote *Water Margin* is clearly based on *Manuscript of Seven Major Categories*. Wang Ch'i also stated in his *A Continuation to the Study of Textual Sources* that "*Water Margin* was written by Lo Kuan-chung, whose style was Pen-chung. He was from Han Cheu, and had written a number of novels. The *Water Margin* was a narration of events about Sung Chiang, in which the mechanisms of treachery, banditry, escape and deceit were detailed; yet the variety of these evil treacheries imposed a demonic influence on the readers, and it was told that Lo's children and grand-children were all deaf-mutes. Such was the way of nemesis."¹²

The condemnation of Lady Murasaki to hell refers to an episode in a series of Buddhist anecdotes written in the 13th century. The three capital punishments in Buddhism are entering hell, becoming hungry ghosts, and reincarnating to animals.

The crying pheasants and quarreling dragons indubitably remind us of Ch'u Yu's reference to the *Book of History*, and the *Book of Changes*, except Akinari requested his readers to read them as "idle tales," Akinari's attitude to these tales is identical which Ch'u Yu's, treating the supernatural tales as acceptable to the norm of Confucian ethics. Akinari signed his name as Senshi Kijin, the eccentric man with split fingers, referring to his deformity caused by the severe case of smallpox he contracted when he was five years old. His loss of eyesight in old age also increased his feeling of his own abnormality. He used two seals in his preface, Shikye Kejin was alluded to Ssuma Hsiang-yu's famous rhyme-prose "Mr. Nothing" in which Mr. Nothing was an eccentric man. The other one, Yugi Sammai was alluded to the *Five Miscellany* which recorded that whenever fiction, miscellaneous plays or play-scripts were written, the author had to take an attitude of merging reality with fiction, presenting his themes in a playful (*yugi*) manner.

Akinari, in emphasizing the playful attitude toward reality and fiction, is not outside the Japanese literary tradition. The tangible relation between reality and fiction has long been discussed in classical literature, as in the case

of *The Tale of Genji*, laying a basis for further exploration as in Saikaku's famed theory of fiction, and to be succeeded in a hot debate carried out between Akutagawa and Tanizaki in modern literary scenes. Prince Genji, in the dialogue with Tamakazura, criticized the interests of the court ladies in *Sumiyoshi monogatari*, saying that *monogatari* does not present truths of human reality.

Women seem to have been born to be cheerfully deceived. They know perfectly well that in all these old stories there is scarcely a shred of truth, and yet they are captured and made sport of by the whole range of trivialities and go on scribbling them down, quite unaware that in these warm rains their hair is all dank and knotted.¹³

Genji, at the same time, however, had to admit that *monogatari* does convey emotional truths.

But amid all the fabrication I must admit that I do find real emotions and plausible chains of events. We can be quite aware of the frivolity and the idleness and still be moved.¹⁴

Ueda Makoto, discussing Japanese writers' concern over the relation between reality and fiction, argues that "Fireflies" chapter of the *Tale of Genji*, in which the dialogue between Genji and Tamakazura takes place, set the criteria to discern good fiction from bad ones. He argues that Genji regards a successful novel as one which, despite its frivolity and idleness in presenting the truth, moves nevertheless readers by the sentiments presented through the illusions of life. In such supreme fiction, Ueda Makoto states:

A novelist may distort historical facts or tell lies, but so long as he succeeds in creating the feeling of pathos — his story will appeal to the reader with more realness than, say, a faithful record of historical facts.¹⁵

Ueda Akinari, who was the advocate of the *kokugaku* (national literature) revival, undoubtedly felt abreast with the Heian fictional practice in moving the readers through trivial and idle matters.

The relation of reality and fiction also leads to the question of truth

and falsehood in literature. Truth can be falsehood, and falsehood can be truth. What then is truth and falsehood in fiction? From a Chinese traditional point of view, the mythical tales written in the early Wei-Chin periods were no doubt the imaginative manifestation of falsehood in fiction. Unfortunately, the lack of artistic persuasion had made falsehood look like real falsehood. The increase of linguistic persuasion in the *ch'uan-ch'i* tales in T'ang and Sung, together with the use of real historical characters as fictional characters were responsible for expanding the element of truth in fiction. Lu Hsun states in his *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* that

Their prose romances appeared singly or in collections: they were usually fairly long with a complex plot, and sometimes had just thrown in too. The conventional critics thought them a low form of literature and dubbed them *ch'uan-ch'i* (romances) to distinguish them from the work of Han Yu and Liu Tsung-yuan.¹⁶

Lu further states:

Of course, in the Chin dynasty there was already fiction deliberately written as such. Some examples are Yuan Chi's "Story of a Great Man," Liu Ling's "The Virtue of Wine," T'ao Ch'ien's "Peach Blossom Stream" and "The Master of Five Willows." But these were allegories rather than pure entertainment, and we can see this tradition carried forward in the T'ang dynasty in Wang Chi's "The Land of Drunkedness." Han Yu's "The Mason Wang Cheng-fu" and Liu Tsung-yuan's "Hunchback Kuo," which are different from the prose romances. The T'ang prose romances had their origin in the tales of marvels of the Six Dynasties, but with their more distinguished style and more complex plots they constituted a distinctive literary form. Occasionally, it is true, the prose romances also use parables to convey a mood or speak of divine retribution, yet on the whole the aim is to write tales of imagination, whereas the earlier tales recorded supernatural happenings as warnings to men.¹⁷

What Lu Hsun stated as the "more distinguished style and more complex plot" could well be taken as a "pathetic persuasion," which corresponds to the "rare form" in Akinari's preface, capable of expressing "all degrees of

truth with infinitely subtle variation and causing a deep note to echo in the reader's sensibility."

Likewise, Wu Chi in his preface to the *Trimmed Lamp* said, "With diction, the tales belong to the *ch'uan-ch'i* trend, but, the implications are that of the parables of the old masters,"¹⁸ Ling Yun-han also said in the other preface, "In regards to peculiarly contrived imports and the miraculous usage of diction, this book blooms itself into an independent school." It will be clear by now that diction itself should not be taken as a more result of spontaneous expression, but should be understood as a deliberate device by the authors for a more profound literary performance. The use of the mystical and supernatural elements in the tales is no longer a matter of "using parable to convey a mood or speak of divine retribution," but rather, a stylistic challenge to turn fiction into reality.

The miraculous usage of diction and contrived imports, however, does not necessarily implies that they are the products of the purely fictional imagination. They can very well derived from truthful reality. All characters, social customs and phenomena can be taken from reality, to which the author's personal experience are closely connected. The most illustrated example is Yuan Chen's "The Story of Ts'ui Ying-ying," which can well be regarded as a semi-autobiographical sketch of the author's love experience. Likewise, Ling Yun-han enquired with the following question, "As to the creation of the 'Story of Autumn Fragrance Pavilion', it is similar to that of Yuan Chen's 'The Story of Ts'ui Ying-ying.' I will verify with Ch'u Yu."²⁰

Just as Ch'u Yu wrote in classical language and adopted the *ch'uan-ch'i* as a form of expression, the "realistic imagination" can derive its source from the themes and structure of classical literary tradition. In Japan and Korea, the *Trimmed Lamp* tales have been absorbed by Akinari and Kim Si-sup as classical models in *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* and *Tales of the Golden Carp* (*Kumo sinhwa*.) Such reception has surpassed the unilateral development of a national literature, and should therefore be understood as the multilateral influence in comparative studies. Consequently, in determining the degree of influence and literary interchanges, the comparative perspective must be applied. The relationship among these works in particular, present an appropriate case in the literary study of influence. It was the Chinese tales which influenced both the Japanese and Korean tales. There was no transmitter. At least, literary evidences indicate that the *Golden Carp* tales had taken a very limited role in transmitting the Chinese influence to Japan. If Chinese tales were the emitter, then the Japanese and

the Korean tales were both receptors. I have already discussed the close relationship between China and Japan, particularly in respect to how the *Trimmed Lamp* tales found their entrance into Japan. With regard to the connection between the *Trimmed Lamp* and the *Golden Carp* tales, a Korean collection of tales, some elaboration is needed to bring out its close ties to the Chinese tales.

There is no doubt that Kim Si-sup was deeply influenced by his own reading of the *Trimmed Lamp* tales. Kim himself has a poem describing his feeling of reading the tales. The poem reads as follows:

The Shan-yang scholar works on his warp and woof,
 He trims the lamp and writes tales of marvels,
 There are prose, songs, and real events,
 The style is frivolous, witty, and ethical,
 Beautiful as the spring blossoms,
 Unpredictable as the clouds,
 In one act, all romances are told,
 They first seem fictitious, but later
 Becoming tasteful and delicious.²¹

Soon after the *Trimmed Lamp* entered Korea, it exerted enormous influence on Korean fiction, no less than the influence it gave on Japanese fiction. Tang China had a close cultural tie with the Silla dynasty in Korea. However, the literary impact on Korean literature was mainly seen in poetry; fiction was not considered seriously as a major genre in Korean literary endeavor. The adoption of the script in the middle of Koryo dynasty had begun injecting new blood into its national veins. The most apparent change it caused was the shift from the Chinese imitations to a self created literature with Korean consciousness. Although early works of such kind remained crude and were not totally free from Chinese interference, they became already an obvious model for an independent culture with nationalistic character. Cho Yun-je in his *A Brief History of Korean Literature* points out that

Because of the awakening of this national consciousness, Hangul scripts were invented, which touched off a new cultural consciousness. Consequently, Korean literature was ready for a new appearance and a new development. In fiction, the works could no longer roam in old formats. The interaction between

Korean fiction and Chinese literature happened long before in other literary genres. After the Chinese stimulation, there was growth and expansion. There were records of popular tales as well as creative stories. *Tales of the Young Monk (Chosin-mong-saeng)* in the classical age, *Choe Ch'i-won* and *Tales of Kuk Sensaeng* in the middle ages had not totally departed from the realm of story-telling, and they could not be regarded as fiction. Works in the nature of *Choe Ch'i-won*, from the Chinese literary point of view, could only be regarded as fantasy tales, still remaining outside the gate of fiction. However, even in such pseudo-biographical stories as *Choe Ch'i-won*, *Tales of Kuk Sensaeng* and *The Story of Chosaeng*, there was a strong element of fiction and it was only the matter of in what form these stories were written. The opportunity finally arrived, as the Ming fiction *New Tales of the Trimmed Lamp* written by Ch'u Yu found its way to Korea, serving as a major stimulation, for the Korean fictional literature to bloom and enter into fruition. The *Trimmed Lamp* also expedited the appearance of the tales of romance, *New Tales of the Golden Carp*.²²

The *Trimmed Lamp* was much valued by Korean literati, once it reached Korea, for they all considered reading Chinese tales would improve their writing style and competed among themselves in reading as many Chinese tales as possible. According to Yi Kyu-gyong's *Records of the Five Continents (O-chu-yonmun)*, "there was a book named *New Tales of the Trimmed Lamp* studied by people all over the streets, who thought the reading of these tales can improve their dexterity in the writing of official documents."²³ Among the collection of books in Buddhist monasteries, the *Trimmed Lamp*, in addition to the *Four Classics*, was a major item on the list. The *Trimmed Lamp*, thus, has become the greatest irony in the history of Chinese fiction. While it was neglected in China as a minor work, it was treasured overseas as a piece of rare jade. Outside of China, it not only presented a main linkage between Chinese fiction, but also became one of the major sources of inspiration in developing the genre of fiction in their own national literature.

Just as Ling Yun-han conjectured in the preface to the *Trimmed Lamp* that the fictional creation of some stories might be connected to the author's real life, many tales in the *Golden Carp* can also be traced to the life events of

Kim Si-sup. Indeed, we can see in Kim's tales, a case in which "realistic imagination" derives itself from the author's attitude toward life as well as life events. It is certainly true that it is difficult as well as meaningless to determine which event corresponds to which episode in the story, or to determine how truthfully his attitude toward life is reflected in the work; such endeavor might trap critics in the "intentional fallacy." Even though tales are fictional, authors would fluctuate from using true facts of life to fictional accounts. At times, they may portray the true reality of life, and at times he may sink into his fictitious imagination.

Kim Si-sup was a child prodigy favored in the Sejong court when he was only five years of age. During his middleaged years, the usurption of Sejo prompted his refusal to serve in the Sejo court. Thus he began his choppy life of frustrations by feigning mad, repulsing scholars, and becoming twice as a monk. His life was indeed a tale of romance. He spent his life in writing poetry and reading, and his writing reflected spontaneously his talents and background.

Modern Korean scholars such as Yi Ka-won and Yang Chu-dong have pointed out respectively that among the *Golden Carp* tales, the "Going to Banquet in the Dragon Palace" and "Touring the Floating Blue Pavilion in Drunkedness" were autobiographies of Kim Si-sup.²⁴ Yi and Yang's assumption may not be totally true, but we do see manifestations of Kim himself in various characters in the *Golden Carp*, and indeed all the poems written by these characters are Kim's poems. Such borrowing of the fictional form to exhibit the talents of the author, as we see in the exchange of love poems, or improvising poetry in a banquet, has become a common feature in the romance tales in China, Japan and Korea. It has also become a literary device in the writing of fiction to increase the plausibility of the plot. A reader may not be enchanted by the fantastic details of the story, but he will be in rapture with the poems, for writing poetry has been one of the essential social activities through which the literati endeavored to appreciate the cultural life of the old days. Above all, most of the readers of classical tales were the literati, who very often were the poets themselves.

In this way, even though *Golden Carp* tales may not be strictly autobiographical, we see evidences of the author's imagination wandering in between reality and fiction, manifesting himself and then transcending himself through historical details or fantastic mythos.

There are three stories of ghost wives in the collected tales from China, Japan and Korea. It will not be necessary to compare their plot to point out

similarities, for their mutual close connection has already been discussed. The Chinese "Story of Ai Ch'ing" is about a charming prostitute named Lo Ai-ai who later married to a wealthy man Chao. After becoming his wife, she was well behaved as a housewife. Chao soon was summoned to serve at the office away from home, and was detained for some years before he could finally return. In the meanwhile, Ai Ch'ing was forced to marry a local millionaire during a civil strife, and she refused it by hanging herself to death. After Chao returned and know of what happened, he exhumed her corpse, weeping tremendously and reburied her. A month later, his ghost wife appeared and spent the night with him. Next morning, she told Chao she had to leave and be reincarnated.

In the Japanese tale, "The House Amidst the Thicket," Katsushiro was a good-for-nothing scoundrel who wanted to leave for Kyoto to make some profit as a merchant. His wife Miyagi told him not to go but he refused. After he finished his business and was on his way home, he was robbed. He returned to Kyoto again but this time he was stricken with illness. Fortunately, he was saved by his friend's father-in-law and he stayed in the old man's house for seven years. Meanwhile, Katsushiro's home village was ransacked by soldiers. When he returned to his village finally, he could barely recognized his house. His wife answered the door and they both wept, exchanging sorrows of separation. Next day, Katsushiro awoke and found himself sleeping amidst the thickets. The site was actually the grave of his wife.

The Korean tale "Yi-saeng Looked Over the Fence" has a "happier" ending compared to the previous two stories. Ch'oe was a maiden from a rich family who fell in love with scholar Yi. They were later married after some difficulties with their families. When the red turban bandits seized the capital, scholar Yi fled and his wife was captured. She refused to be molested by the bandits and was killed. When peace was finally restored, Yi came back to his house. Late at night, his ghost wife appeared before him. Although the scholar know she was a ghost, he nevertheless loved her as a living person. They lived together for three years. One night, Ch'oe told her husband that their union in this world was coming to its end, and it was time for her to return to the Great Divide. Soon later, scholar Yi too passed away.

All the above three stories share a great similarity in themes. But in style and form, the Chinese and Korean stories share closely the tradition of classical romance. The most salient feature is the deliberate display of the

author's literary talent through poems written in the stories. On the other hand, in "The House Amidst the Thickets," perhaps because of the identity of Katsushiro as a happy-go-lucky type, the author has not emphasized too much on the romantic literary talents of the protagonist. There are only two poems in the story, all coming from the hands of Katsushiro's wife, Miyagi. After the first separation, Miyagi thought of her husband and she wrote the following waka:

I cannot convey
 The bitterness of my sorrow,
 But would you point out to him —
 Songbird of evening —
 That autumn is almost over.²⁵

After Katsushiro's meeting with his ghost wife, he woke up next morning to find his bedroom was actually his wife's grave. There was a piece of wood on which a poem was written,

I have wept in sorrow,
 Longing for him to come back,
 But how can I go on living
 In this world, till now deceived
 By vain hopes of his return!²⁶

The dramatic tension presented in this poem expresses the dramatic tension of the tale itself. Akinari is successful in fusing the voice of the poem into the plot of the story. Although Miyagi can be considered as a "mask" for Akinari, Akinari has not exceeded his role as an author, or rather, Miyagi's role, to display his literary talent, for Miyagi's poems do not express beyond her feelings, remaining as poems written by a forsaken wife. In this sense, we can even say, Akinari has fused the classical romances of the elite with the mythical tales of the commoners, making a most charming performance of the supernatural drama.

In the Chinese and Korean stories, however, no matter whether it is Lo Ai-ai's famous moon poems, or the love poems exchanged between Yi and Ch'oe, or poems written on paintings appreciated by both Yi and Ch'oe after Yi climbed over the fence to watch these paintings hung on the walls, we do see a deliberate display of the author's talents, in a rather artificial manner.

In fact, a tedious display of these talents has caused an irrevocable flaw in these stories. The reason is quite simple. These poems have no major function to the development of plots, and they even sometimes delay the development of the plot and interrupt the fluency of the fictional rhythm. It is clear that Ch'u Yu is a victim of the deterioration of classical Chinese stories, and Kim Si-sup's imitation has put himself among one of the victims.

The merits of the use of these poems, however, lie in the intensification of the protagonist's feelings, and both Ch'u Yu and Kim Si-sup have achieved their intended effects in some cases. The success of the poems depends whether they were placed in the most appropriate context of the story. For example, when Ai Ch'ing, the ghost wife, appeared before her husband, she "was dressed in plain clothes with light make-up on her face. Only now she had a brocade scarf around her neck. She greeted Chao while she wept and sang her own tune, "Spring in the Shen Garden":

"For three years we've been apart,
 One day seems as long as three years,
 Why didn't you return earlier?
 Remembering when the time your mother was ill,
 I was the one to serve her medicine.
 After she died,
 I buried her and wore mourning dress.
 At night, I sought fortune from the lamp,
 In the morning, I searched signs from the magpies.
 The rain beat on the peach flowers,
 The door was closed all day.
 Who would have known that
 We would be separated forever,
 And not a word was heard from you?

Then came the wielding of arms,
 I was unlucky
 And treaded on disaster.
 In a shiny golden tent,
 Apes terrified, and cranes grieved,
 With a brocade scarf,
 Jade's crushed and flower withered.
 I wanted to retain my chastity,

Even the price was death!
 And people would have no gossip at all.
 In case you thought of me,
 You could only see my image in the picture.

She ended each line with weepings. Her sorrow and sobs prevented her from keeping to the tune."²⁷

In "Yi-saeng Looked Over the Fence," after the meeting of Yi with his ghost wife, he did not seek officialdom, but sought to live with Ch'oe. He "stayed in his house all day, writing poems together with Ch'oe. After a few years passed, one night, Ch'oe said to the scholar, 'We've had three good years. The fleeting world is never bored of its pleasures. Now It's time for departing sorrows.' She sobbed. The scholar was dumbfounded and asked why. Ch'oe said, 'Fate is inescapable. The Heavenly Emperor first thought that my marriage with you had not come to its natural end, and I was free from . He gave me a false body to curb our separation sorrows. I cannot stay long to bewitch the living.' She told the maid to bring in wine, and sang the 'Jade Pavilion Spring' tune for toast:

Then came the wielding of arms,
 Jade's crushed and flower withered,
 The mandarin duck lost its mate;
 Who is going to bury the dismembered corpse?
 Who is going to talk to the blood stained ghost?
 Like the fairy from the mountain, I descended.
 Like breaking of the bell, I grieved,
 Now we'll part forever,
 Up in heaven, down in this world,
 No message will come through.

She end each line with weepings. Her sorrow and sobs prevented her from keeping to the tune."²⁸

The greatest dissimilarity between the Chinese, Korean stories and the Japanese story however, lies in the incident of man meeting his ghost wife. When romance tales developed into Ming Dynasty and Koryo or Yi Dynasty, the image of ghosts or supernaturals has been greatly humanized. In other words, they do not possess the least ghostly or supernatural elements which ghosts or supernaturals were supposed to have, but instead, they have become more charming and real than real persons. The influence of Buddhism,

particularly its teachings on the illusions of life, have diluted much of the differentiation between man and ghost. Yet it is the manifestation of the romantic spirit that changed the mythical tales into imaginative stories with strong connection to reality. In China, *Strange Tales from the Leisure Chamber*, a collection of ghost stories written in late Ming and early Ch'ing represents this progress.

Lu Hsun has pointed out succinctly that although the *Leisure Chamber* tales contain no more than just stories of the supernaturals, the narratives are concise and meticulous in the tradition of the T'ang romances. He further states that these tales "contain such detailed and realistic descriptions that even flower-spirits and fox fairies appear human and approachable: but just as we forgot that they are not human, the author introduces some strange happening to remind us that they are supernaturals after all."²⁹ Thus we discern that later "human supernatural" are actually continuation of the "human ghost" in the earlier tales. Moreover, a ghost wife possesses a dual identity, an unapproachable phantom ghost, and an endeared real wife. This is why when Chao and Yi both knew of their wives' ghost identities, their love for their lost wives overcome their fears of ghosts. The valiance of these two intellectual husbands is extraordinary, particularly for scholar Yi, who was partially responsible for his wife's death. When the bandits seized the capital, they fled and hid under the cliff. The bandits found them but Yi was too weak to protect his wife. He ran away all by himself, leaving Ch'oe behind to be captured and later slaughtered. After three years of his reunion with his ghost wife came to an end and she was to be reincarnated, he pledged that he would rather die together and joined her in the Yellow Spring. Such empty promise ironically reveals character traits true to all scholars to all ages. When it was time for him to die in order to protect the chastity of his wife, he did not die, but instead, ran away. When it was not the appropriate time for him to die when his ghost wife was to be reincarnated into another life, he pledged himself to die. He certainly misplaced himself in the wrong context of time and place.

Nevertheless, both Chao and Yi's only redemption lies in their pledges of their love to their dead wives. When Chao buried his wife and wept, his eagerness is the source of all courages. Of course, the ghost wife he later met was no different from a living person and appeared "human and approachable." Thus on a realistic level, his wife has indeed turned into ghost, but on a surrealist plane, she remains human possessing all human faculties.

Obtensibly, the treatment of themes in "The House Amidst the

Thicket" was still greatly under the influence of "The Story of Ai Ch'ing," but Akinari has integrated to a large extent sources from Japanese literary tradition to retain the flavor particular to Japanese. Scholars pointed out the underlying shadow of *The Tale of Genji* in the story. In "The Paulownia Court," the first chapter in the book, the emperor thinking constantly of the young prince staying with the old grandmother, wrote a letter to her, begging to pity the feebleness of the young boy like the fragility of the reeds. He requested the old woman in a poem to bring the boy to stay in the palace:

At the sound of the wind, bringing dew to Miyagi Plain,
I think of the tender *hagi* upon the moor.³⁰

The old woman replied with a letter in which the following poem was written:

The trees that gave them shelter has withered and died.
One fears for the plight of the *hagi* shoots beneath.³¹

"Hagi" is often called bush clover, which is synonymous to the family of thickets.

The allusion to chapter 15 of the *Tale of Genji* is also obvious. In "The Wormwood Patch," the safflower princess remained faithful to Genji despite his absence. Her relationship with Gneji was described as "for Genji it had been the merest trifle, but for her, whose sleeves were so pitifully narrow, it was as if all the stars had suddenly fallen into her bowl."³² She lived in poverty and deprivation, waiting for Genji to visit her. All the maid-servant left her one after the other. The house became run down, her garden was never well tended — "The rushes were so thick that one could not be sure whether they grew from land or water. Wormwood touched the eaves, bindweed had firmly barred the gates."³³ Indeed, it was a place "now offered ample cover for foxes and other sinister creatures, and owls hooted in unpruned groves morning and night. Tree spirits are shy of crowds, but when people go away they come forward as if claiming sovereignty. Frightening apparitions were numberless."³⁴ Such is the scene similar to what Katsushiro saw when he woke up next morning in the thickets. When Prince Genji passed through safflower princess's house, it was "a house so utterly ruinous, a garden so rank, that he almost wondered whether human beings had even broken the wild forest." Finally, when Genji sent Koremitsu, his

servant, to inquire, safflower's only maid answered, "Do you think that if she had changed she would not have moved away from this jungle?" Indeed, Genji said the same thing when he entered the house:

Myself will I break a path through towering weeds
And ask: does a constant spirit dwell within?³⁵

Such a house amidst the thickets, and with a lonely woman inside waiting for the return of her lover, confirm strongly the theme of Ueda Akinari's "The House Amidst the Thickets."

Such a backdrop can not only supply the needed emphasis on the eerie atmosphere, but also lead the readers more profoundly to the theme of separation and union — the theme so often elaborated in classical literature. Yet what makes Akinari's version truly independent from the influence of Chinese ghost stories is his treatment of the theme of dream and infatuation of love.

In all of these three stories, the ghost wife is a projection of human subconscious struggling against the finitude of human life. The ghost wife is a ghost, but since she is the wife of a human being, she is a human ghost, fully humanized because of her intimacy with her husband. Yet what is it that can turn around the eternal separation into a temporary reunion? What is the force which make the impossible possible, the incredible credible, and the finite span of life into the infinite time? All three stories seem to agree that it is the infatuation of love that makes this possible. Ai Ch'ing said most appropriately in the Chinese story. "I am touched by your longing for me. Even I am far away in Hades, I am sad and mournful. This is why I want to appear before you tonight."³⁶ Whether it is the Chinese Ai, or the Japanese or the Korean Ch'oe, they appear not to continue their once broken marriage, but they appear responding to the longing of their lovers.

What appears to be most unexpected is perhaps the meeting between Katsushiro and his wife in which Katsushiro did not know his wife had already turned into a ghost, unlike the Chinese and Korean stories in which the protagonists knew that their wives were ghosts. When they started talking to each other, it was so real that he had to accept it as reality. When he woke up next day, it all seemed to him as if it were a dream. Of course, he knew it was not a dream, but he could not tell who could it have been? Could it have been a fox? But he soon admitted that it must have been Miyagi's ghost who, "yearning for love, came back to meet me." In a situation where life is a

dream, and dream is life, dream is perhaps sweeter than life, and life is bitter than a dream. The one who remains alive will witness the yearly blooming of flowers, and the fleeting faces of the past. It seems as if becoming a ghost is happier than surviving as a living person. Katsushiro said to himself, "It is only I, I alone who remain unchanged." This spring is not the same as last spring, and the moon is no longer the same as the old moon. Everything is changing except Katsushiro himself. It was the infatuation of love that enabled his wife to meet him in a perfect moment of dream-like reality. Yet what remains behind is the loneliness of life, waking up from all the untraceable dreams. This is the ultimate cruelty, and the utmost imperfection of life.

Thus both knowing and not knowing that the wife is a ghost present paradoxical, therefore, ironic situations. Knowing that the wife is a ghost but not knowing their union is temporary is an irony of fate. While not knowing the wife is a ghost and not knowing their reunion is temporary is a life paradox. These three authors from China, Japan, and Korea have exerted their greatest efforts in their attempt to add profound exegeses to their statement on life.

Notes

1. See Ch'u Yu's *New Tales of the Trimmed Lamp*, ed. Chou Leng-chia (Shanghai 1981), pp. 9-114.
2. See Kuo Chen-i, *History of Chinese Fiction*, ed. Wang Yung-wu (Taipei, 1975), p. 388.
3. Lu Hsun. *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (Peking, 1959), p. 269.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 271.
5. See Aoki Masaji, "The Chinese Influence on Japanese Literature," *Studies of Chinese Culture Moving Eastward*, ed., Liang Yung-jo, (Taipei, 1956), pp. 137-205. According to Aoki Masaji, in the year of Keicho in Japan, the composed of moveable types. Thus the moveable type edition of the *Trimmed Lamp* should have been published during the years of Keicho and Genwa, roughly A.D. 1615 See *Chronology of Japanese Literature*, ed. by Tatano Tatsuyuki and Honma Hisao (Tokyo, 1953). The *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* was written in 1769, and was not published in moveable types until the year of Anei (1777) in Kyoto and Osaka. See *Chronology of Japanese Literature*, p. 206 and p. 212.
6. See Nakamura Yukihiko, ed., *Collections of Ueda Akinari in Compendium of Classical Japanese Literature*, v. 56, (Tokyo, 1959). For English translation, see Leon Zolbrod, *Ugeteu Monogatari: Tales of Moonlight and Rain*, Vancouver,

1974. For influence studies, see *Akinari*, ed., Japanese Literature Research Materials Publications (Tokyo, 1972), which contains the following articles: Goto Tanji's "The Relationship Between *New Tales of the Trimmed Lamp* and *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*," Uzuki Hiroshi's study of the "White Peak" and "The Lust of the White Serpent." For a study of the Chinese influence on "The Chrysanthemum Tryst," consult my article " 'Chrysanthemum Tryst' and 'Fan Chu-ch'ing's Eternal Friendship': A Comparative Study of Two Ghost-Friendship Tales in Japan and China," *Tamkang Review*, 8, no. 2 (1977), 121-32.
7. The note 6 in Goto Tanji's article presents a detailed description of possible Chinese sources in "The House Amidst the Thicket."
 8. See Donald Keene, *World Within Walls* (New York, 1976), p. 377.
 9. Tsuga Teisho used his pseudonym Kinro Gyosha and finished five volumes of *Hanabusa-zoshi*, five volumes of *Shigeshige yawa*, and five volumes of *Shukusatsu*. According to Aoki Masaji's study, there are four tales in the *Hanabusa-zoshi* taken from the Ming tales of marvels.
 10. See *Trimmed Lamp*, p. 3.
 11. *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*. Zolbrod's translation, p. 97.
 12. See Kuo Chen-i, p. 228. The authorship of the *Water Margin* has long been debated among scholars. Some scholars attributed the authorship to Shin Nai-an, some attributed to Lo Kuan-chung. Some said it was a joint effort of Shih and Lo, and some said Shih wrote the first half, and Lo continued the second half of the book.
 13. See Edward G. Seidensticker, trans. *The Tale of Genji* (New York 1980), p. 437.
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. Makoto Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories in Japan* (Cleveland, 1967), p. 31.
 16. Lu Hsun, pp. 50-1.
 17. Lu Hsun, p. 51.
 18. See *Trimmed Lamp*, p. 4.
 19. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. See Kim Si-sup. *New Tales of the Golden Carp* in *Kyemyong*, no. 19 (Seoul, 1927). Only five stories have survived. See Peter Lee, *Korean Literature - Topics and Themes* (Tucson, 1965), p. 67. Kim Si-sup's poem was quoted from Yeh Ch'ien-kun, "Studies of the *Kumo Sinhwa*," *Academic Bulletin of National Chengchi University*, no. 17 (Taipei, 1968), p. 238. Yeh's article is one of the very few and best articles on the study of *Kumo Sinhwa* in China.
 22. See Cho Yun-je, *History of Korean Literature* (Seoul, 1979). The passage I have quoted is from Cho's later edition of *Outlines of the History of Korean Literature* (Taipei, 1969), p. 72.
 23. See Yeh Ch'ien-Kun, p. 220.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
 25. Zolbrod, p. 122.
 26. Zolbrod, p. 123.
 27. *Trimmed Lamp*, p. 72. "I wanted to retain my chastity" was also used in "The House Amidst the Thicket."
 28. *Golden Carp*, n.p. "Then came the wielding of arms" was used in all three stories.
 29. Lu Hsun, p. 271.
 30. Seidensticker's translation, p. 9. For the influence of *Tale of Genji* on *Tale of Moonlight and Rain*, see Goto Tanji's article mentioned in footnote 6.
 31. *Seidensticker*, p. 11.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 290.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 291.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, p. 299.
36. *Trimmed Lamp*, p. 71.