Four Tales of the Supernatural: An Inquiry

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The appearance of *ch'uan-ch'i*—classical Chinese tales of the T'ang period (618-906 A.D.)—has made an epoch in the history of Chinese prose literature. While vernacular diction—which was to characterize most of the full-fledged Chinese fiction—did not appear until later in *hua-pen* of the Sung Dynasty, the development of Chinese fiction nevertheless owes much to *ch'uan-ch'i* in its upholding of classical prose as against euphuistic style. There are mainly three factors contributing to the rise of *ch'uan-ch'i*. Besides the neoclassical movement in prose, there is the prevalence of Buddhism and a kind of supernatural tale known as *chih-kuai* (literally, the recording of the strange) carried down from a previous period. The most important factor, however, is the examination system of that period, which was often the sole route to official posts. Inherent in this system is a convention in which, before the examination proper, candidates would hand in tales with a view to reveal their capacity in basically three areas: the ability to narrate "history," the talent for poetry, and competence in making comments. Ch'uan-ch'i is therefore, from its very inception, a "consciously created fiction"[1] and marked by its utilitarian features. If it does not serve the T'ang people as a whole, it does serve a special class of them, namely, the genteel society, and *ch'uan-ch'i* is indeed a revealling document representative of the point-of-view of that special class.[2] Any inquiry with *ch'uan-ch'i*, therefore, without recognizing its rapport with contemporary social and ideological issues would be fatal.

However, since characteristic of *ch'uan-ch'i* is the fact that a basic pattern often enters a series of tales, a concentration on the tales *per se* regarding the handling of materials and how they are transformed is likewise indispensable. It thus seems that, in discussing *ch'uan-ch'i* tales, a combination of the sociological and structuralist approaches would prove to be the

most appropriate. Since the supernatural tale is one of the main categories in *ch'uan-ch'i* tales, three tales from which, with a common theme of the disintegration of body and soul, are selected, and a fourth from the earlier *chih-kuai* tales—which is among the earliest portrayals of this theme—is incorporated[3] with a view to presenting more clearly, through comparison and contrast, the new rhythm in T'ang tales as well as their underlying structural pattern.

I.

Commenting on the death of mythology in China, E. T. C. Werner, in his *Myths and Legends of China,* is of the opinion that

> The T'ang epoch was one of the resurrection of the arts of peace after a long period of dissension. A purer and more enduring form of intellect was gradually overcoming the grosser but less solid superstition. Nevertheless the intellectual movement which now manifest itself was not strong enough to prevail against the powers of mythological darkness. It was reserved for the scholars of the Sung period 960-1280 to carry through to victory a strong and sustained offensive against the spiritual obsessions . . . . the anti-myth movement of the T'ang and Sung periods was in reality the long arm and heavy fist of Confucius emphasizing a truer rationalism than that of his opponents and denouncing the danger of leaving the firm earth to soar into the unknown hazy regions of fantasy.[4]

Werner, then, sees supernatural tales of the T'ang period as the last stronghold of the "superstitious" trend in the Chinese mind. However, the retention of the supernatural elements is never a safe guarantee that the belief is also held intact. While the belief is not totally played down, it is nevertheless diluted through the intervention of the materialistic principle—considerations which, on the one hand, are marked by the change in social and ideological values, while on the other hand are highlighted by the intention of the author mainly to write for a display of his knowledge and skill. This process of sophistication in T'ang period is most readily demonstrated through a comparative study, regarding the position of supernatural elements, of our first tale (written in the late Fifth century A.D. in the Six Dynasties) and the three other T'ang tales. While the supernatural elements underneath the four are, similarly, a combination of Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist

beliefs vindicating that "the soul of man is two-fold. . . . The superior soul may . . . leave the body and live a separate and distance life apart from it, while the body, kept alive by the inferior soul, remains more or less inert, even for years, awaiting its return,"[5] the emphasis is nevertheless far from being identical. Scanning through the four tales, one can hardly deny that, concerning treatment of the supernatural, the one that receives the most elaborate treatment is the first one–the twice binding and vanishing of the soul is a motif exclusively belonging to the first tale. Considering the relative distance in time between the three T'ang tales and the first tale, and also the fact that complexity is more often than not a feature of later rather than earlier manifestation, one seems to be left with no other choice but to conclude that, for T'ang writers, the supernatural motif is only a foil; they use it not so much because they really believe in it but rather because of its expediency. Even their quest for truth, which is shown at the end of both the third and fourth tale, is also suspect. The more they assert or try to prove that their stories are true, the more their uneasiness and skepticism are laid bare.

II.

This difference is really a difference of the age. While the transition is drastically different from what Caudwell describes of the English poets,[6] there are nevertheless certain parallel situations. The first tale, of the Six Dynasties, seems to parallel the first inkling in the era of primitive accumulation, in which every individual "seems as if his instincts–his "freedom"–are intolerably restricted by laws, rights and restraints, and that beauty and life can only be obtained by the violent expression of his desires."[7] Being of an age characterized by upheavals in political situation, men of the Six Dynasties are often individualistic and idiosyncratic to the extreme. Despairing of the public event, they regard it intolerable and steer clear of it. Their eyes are directed only toward their own private self, with the accompanying almost morbid emphais on personal beauty. Hence we find in the first tale–"Pang O"–the fact that Pang O is a "strikingly handsome man" is crucial to the development of the story. What is more, the violence of the girl's desire for Pang O's beauty can never be more fully portrayed than by recourse to the popular belief in the split of body and soul. In total, what "Pang O" presents is completely a private and inner world,

with personal feelings as its dominating principle. There is no reference to the larger world, the political sphere.

The two tales of the mid-T'ang period (the Eighth Century, A.D.)—"Wei Yin" and "Li Hun Chi"—reveal significant changes. While personal elements remain active, what is conspicuous, in contrast with "Pang O," is that the public principle begins to assert itself. In line with Caudwell's query as to the reason why Shakespeare, "although expressing the bourgeois illusion, is an official of the court or of the bourgeois nobility,"[8] one sees, in the two tales of the mid-T'ang period, the cohesion of the private and the public. While Pang O is defined by the place he lives in—"Pang O of the principality of Chulu," hence the intimate relationship between man and land, the definition of personages in "Wei Yin" is carried out not by their dwellings but by their official titles—both Han Chin-ching and Wei Yin are designated through their official titles: *Chiang-tsuo Shao-chiang* and *Shang-yi fung-yu.* At first sight, the case with "Li Hun Chi" may seem similar to "Pang O"—"Chang I of Ch'ing-ho" and "Wang Chou of T'ai-yüan." However, a study of the surnames and their origins in the T'ang period shows that, at that very time, the surname "Chang" of the place "Ch'ing-ho" and "Wang" of the place "T'ai-yüan" are both surnames of the nobility. In other words, the designation of place in "Li Hun Chi" is not so much to indicate the dwellings *per se* but rather to serve as an indication of the noble status of the personages involved. Hence the rapport with the official world.

Yet the public element also asserts itself in another way. While in "Pang O" there is never one indication of the official rank, both "Wei Yin" and "Li Hun Chi" are saturated with reference to official missions. Integral to the development of the story in "Wei Yin" is the fact that Wei Yin is sent as an envoy to Hsin-lo. References to official posts are more diverse in "Li Hun Chi": Chang I is "governor of Heng-chou," Wang Chou is "to report in the capital for service," both of Wang's sons have "good positions," and Chang Chung-kui is "the governor of Lai-wu." As a contrast to the intimate relationship between man and land in "Pang O," the two tales of the mid-T'ang period are thus characterized by the motif of drift, a fact reinforced by the predominance of travelling. The difference of the private vs. the public also helps define the difference in the social strata. While in the case of "Pang O," personages are all within the family scope, the personages in "Wei Yin" and "Li Hun Chi," in line with the intrusion of the public element, can roughly be divided into two categories: characters within

a family and characters outside a family, and it is the latter who are often functional in affecting the behavior of the former. In "Wei Yin," for instance, Wei Yin has to make an excuse for his wife's presence in the tent. With "Li Hun Chi" this point is even more crucial, since it is the fact that "Chang's best assistant asked him for Ch'ien-niang's hand" that launches the plot into its main line. One thus sees, in the two mid-T'ang tales, the impossibility of the individual to be self-sufficient. T'ang is a great age of expansion; its people are therefore more social creatures than recluses.

However, while in the mid-T'ang period there is a happy mixture of the public and the private, with the flow of time one nevertheless sees the gradual degradation of the private self until, at last, the public completely triumphs over the personal and the individual is left almost inert. Caudwell's description of the decline which eventually finds the human spirit "the miserable prisoner of the cash-nexus"[9] seems to have a comparable embodiment in our last tale under discussion, "Chêng Shêng" of the late T'ang period, ca. the Ninth century A.D. In this tale, elements of the public predominate. Chêng Shêng goes to the capital "to join the exam which would eventually lead to an official appointment," and Mr. Liu is "at his post in Huai-yin." Yet what is striking in this tale is the complete playing down of the personal feeling. The lovelorn symptom in the two mid-T'ang tales is shockingly lacking here. This decay of the personal is most aptly epitomized in the character of Chêng Shêng. While both Wei Yin and Wang Chou would take the initiative, Chêng Shêng is always in a passive state.[10] He seems to have no free will but just to do what is told. His marriage with Miss Liu is suggested by the old lady and is due to his not knowing "how to refuse." His taking his bride home to visit her family is again instigated by the old lady. Conditioned by his environment and at the mercy of his heredity (the old lady happens to be his "distant aunt"), Chêng Shêng thus seems to be in the train of naturalistic heroes described by Lukács,[11] and the transition from the two mid-T'ang tales to "Chéng Shêng" a perfect illustration of Lukács' concept of "the decay from realism to naturalism."[12] Bearing the four tales in mind, one seems to see a line of development at once drastic and appalling. While, in the first stage ("Pang O"), with the distance between the public and the private, man is self-sufficient, and is individualistic and idiosyncratic to the extreme; and, in the second stage ("Wei Yin" and "Wang Chou"), with the encroachment of the public upon the private, one sees somewhat a happy combination of public duty and personal feeling; yet, in the last stage ("Chêng Shêng"), probably due to the overwhelming power of

the public force and the ensuing unbalance between the public and the private, personal feelings are completely shattered and the scholar-hero is left more or less inert. It is thus in the third stage that the balance and order in the society as a whole again crumble.

III.

The dialectic pattern from an upholding of the subjective principle to an all-assertion of the objective principle discussed above is, in a sense, embodied in the changing concept of marriage as filtered through the four tales. Since marriage is a social institution integral to the plots of the four tales, and since the concept of marriage also has intimate relationship with the rhythm of the contemporary society, a study of the marriage issue in the four tales is helpful in revealing, on the one hand, important issues of the day, while on the other hand it is also functional in detecting the authors' allegiance, an inquiry central to Arnold Kettle's approach to literature.[13]

One may take marriage in "Pang O" as a point of departure. Several factors determine the marriage between Pang O and the daughter of the Shih family. The society being feudal, the image of the father is extremely important. It is the father who dominates the whole scene and the conversation, and it is also the father who, by receiving money from Pang O, eventually marries his daughter to Pang O. While the marriage is first instigated by the daughter herself–thus in a sense an aberration in the traditional society, yet it finally returns within the scope of the tradition by the symbolic act of the father receiving the gift of the betrothed. Nevertheless, the recognition of the daughter's own feelings is still precious in itself.

The image of authority within family is still ponderous in "Wei Yin," this time embodied by Wei Yin's parents. Crude as the story is, one can nonetheless detect a pressure from outside greater than that in "Pang O" through the employment of the word "transgression." The sentence "Yin then laid open her transgressions to his parents" inevitably implies the criminality of the wife's act. There is still another transformation. While there is no knowing the social status of either Pang O or Miss Shih, the first two lines in "Wei Yin," with the mentioning of both the titles of Wei Yin and his wife's father, already indicates that, in the mid-T'ang period, the idea of a good match lies not so much in considerations regarding the couple themselves as in the comparable social status of the two households. The

case in "Li Hun Chi" is largely the same, with Wang Chou, "an intelligent youth with an alert mind and a handsome face," defeated by Chang I's "best assistant." This theme is carried to its climax in "Chêng Shêng." While on the one hand the grandmother's presumption in marrying her granddaughter is striking, on the other hand the old lady's declaration that "Her father, Mr. Liu, is at his post in Huai-yi. You two families peer with each other. She would be a very good match for you" is indeed typical of the feudal society. In this last phase, there is not an inkling of personal feelings involved. The boy and the girl never meet each other before.

Yet what makes the old lady in "Chêng Shêng" determine that Chêng would be a good match for her granddaughter? There are mainly two factors. Chêng's family background is discovered through his surname, and his potential is detected through his applying to undergo the official exam. This utilitarian feature, hand in hand with the prevalence of the materialistic principle starting from the receiving of "money" by Mr. Shih, is indeed a reflection of the assumptions of the age, at least of the genteel society, with the scholar-author as its chief advocate. The fact that in the three T'ang tales the protagonists are all scholars can be the most persuasive evidence.

IV.

In dealing with the author's allegiance, one is immediately reminded of Kettle's distinction between "Popular" realism and "Critical" realism. While none of our tales can be termed "Popular" since, in contrast with the definition of "Popular" realism which is "expressive of the sensibility of progressive sections of the people other than the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia,"[14] the four tales–especially the three T'ang tales–are more or less expressions of the genteel society, one may still wonder if any among the four may be "sufficiently critical of class society to reveal important truths about that society and to contribute to the freeing of the human consciousness from the limitations which class society has imposed on it."[15] Although basically all four tales are advocates rather than opponents of their society, yet since, with Kettle, "(w)ithin the general movement of Critical Realism . . . there are certain writers who–though certainly critical of bourgeois society–remain in their overall sensibility essentially attached to the ways of thinking and feeling of that society,"[16] one seems still entitled to make the

inquiry. It would seem that, while in the three other tales critical elements are scarce or far from being of any importance, the case with "Li Hun Chi" is different, which may be the reason why, of all tales with the common theme of the disintegration between body and soul, "Li Hun Chi" should prove the most popular. In "Li Hun Chi," there is indeed a reconciliation between the lovers and the parents at the end. However, the poignancy of the two lovers' sufferings is so predominant, the conflict of Ch'ien-niang torn between her love for Wang Chou and her filial duty to her parents is so severe, and the space devoted to these issues is so immense, that the "human consciousness" as described by Kettle is really evoked, and the assumption as to the complete absence of criticism is rendered suspect. What is more, the criticism is also embodied in the triumph of the lovers. By the portrayal, if not advocacy, of the kind of marriage based on love rather than extrinsic considerations and on individuals' own choice rather than impositions from parents, something in the feudal society is undermined. While "Li Hun Chi" still embodies many "standard" viewpoints of its contemporary society, its author is nevertheless conscientious enough not to avert his eye from a criticism of certain aspects of that society.

V.

It may be our task, at this stage, to search for a structural pattern in the four tales that would serve as a buttress for previous discussions. It is our hope that, with the potential agreement between thematic and structural aspects, both the diachronic and synchronic phase would be fully unravelled.

Our attitude is largely similar to what Lévi-Strauss propounds in his "The Structural Study of Myth." Lévi-Strauss is of the opinion that, since "a myth is made up of all its variants, structural analysis should take all of them into account."[17] In treating all the four tales as variants of the theme of the disintegration of body and soul, we would, therefore, model on Lévi-Strauss' analysis of the Oedipus myth and draw a similar chart for each of the four tales, with the aim of comparing and reorganizing them in such a way as to pinpoint their similarities and significant differences. Based on Lévi-Strauss' idea of binary oppositions among mythemes, our charts would be treated as an orchestra score. While the story would be told through a reading of the rows from left to right and from top to bottom

regardless of the columns, to understand the tales it would be necessary to read column after column and only from left to right. Our charts are as follows:

	Column I Recognition of love	Column II Denial of love	Column III Recognition of magic	Column IV Denial of Magic
"Pang O"	A daughter of the Shih family . . . fell in love with Pang O.	The wife bade her maids tie up Miss Shih and take her home	on the way the young lady vanished like smoke	The girl's father was astounded
		The wife again seized Miss Liu and took her home		The father was completely amazed
			The moment the real girl appeared the other vanished	
	The girl explained, "I dreamed of going to his home." Pang O married Miss Shih			"Well, I never!" exclaimed the father
"Wei Yin"	Miss Han married Wei Yin	Yin was appointed ambassador to Hsin-luo	The wife is outside the drapery	
	The wife replied, "I follow	Yin cheated his attendants		Yin laid open the wife's transgressions

	you out of my own will"			to his parents
			It seemed that the wife was already inside the room. And the two women finally became one	
"Li Hun Chi"	Wang and Ch'ien-niang often dreamed about one another	No one in their families guessed their feelings		
		Chang's best assistant asked for the girl's hand		Chang gave his consent
	The proposal agitated both Wang and Ch'ien-niang	Wang departed	Ch'ien-niang followed Wang	
	Ch'ien-niang said, "I followed you without my father's consent," and Wang was happy to the extreme	Wang kept the girl out of sight		Ch'ien-niang thought of her parents constantly
			Wang apol-orized for their behavior	Chang thought of it as a lie

			The two girls melted into one body	The family kept the secret
				Some thought the story fictitious
			The story verified by Chang Chung-kui	
"Chêng Shêng"	The same night Chêng and Miss Liu were married		They first informed the Lius about this	The news threw the family into consternation
		(Mrs. Liu had her suspicions, and felt sure that it must be an illigitimate daughter)	The two girl slowly melted into a single body	Mr. Liu carefully inquired
			A conclusion of the supernatural is reached	Chêng went back to the old place to search for traces
			There is nothing left	

Column I and Column II are oppositions on the level of love: the force to love and the counterforce to separate lovers. Column III and Column IV are oppositions on the level of magic: the existence of magic and the drive to discredit it.

Column I being "Recognition of love," personal feelings necessarily dominate. Since direct quotations are often most effective in emotive expressions, "Pang O," "Wei Yin," and "Li Hun Chi" all resort to this technique to express their protagnoists' poignant emotions. The emotional world in "Li Hun Chi" is most vividly portrayed and effectively conveyed partly due to the reason that the emotional states of both the male and female protagonists receive almost equal emphasis and minute elaboration. "Chêng Shêng" is a most peculiar case. Except for the sentence "the same night he and Miss Liu were married," this column is left blank, hence an excellent indication of marriage without love.

In Column II, the one that remains the most suspect is still "Chêng Shêng." Since Column II is opposed to Column I, the blank in Column I necessarily entails that there be hardly any significant element in Column II (Mrs. Liu can only "have her suspicions"). In other words, no inner conflict is inherent in "Chêng Shêng." All is imposed from without, a fact bearing eloquent testimony to the prevalence of the public elements in the tale. Public personages characterize both "Wei Yin" and "Li Hun Chi," but they are happily balanced by the private world in the first column. As to "Pang O," the personages here are still within the sphere of the family.

In Column III, the supernatural receives the most contorted treatment in "Pang O" While in the other tales the soul would vanish only once through reunion with the body, in "Pang O" the soul vanishes twice, the first time "like smoke" and the second time when "the real girl appeared." While the supernatural still occupies a large portion in subsequent tales, yet it is gradually encroached upon by the materialistic principle, culminating in the "quest for truth" shown in "Li Hun Chi" and "Chêng Shêng."

In Column IV, the doubt and denial of the existence of magic is represented through the image of mundane authority: either the father or parents. This aurhority is shown either actively suspecting, showing surprise, or even condemning, or as a passive principle envoked by the protagonist (as in "Li Hun Chi". Ch'ien-niang thinks of her parents constantly). Active or passive, they are a potential force in shattering the world of magic.

These tales, in all, have to do with a culture which is troubled with the inexplicable world of magic, and they provide somewhat a kind of logic tool which relate the original problem—Is magic an essential feature of the world? —to the derivative problem—Is love an essential feature of marriage? However, while in the earlier tales the derivative problem really helps to validate a positive answer to the original problem, yet, as the society becomes

more and more sophisticated and utilitarian features entering into the composition of the tales themselves, the problem becomes rather erratic until, at last, one can only resort to the outside evidence for verifications.

In exploring four ancient Chinese supernatural tales with a common theme, this paper has attempted 1) a study of the changing social and ideological issues as embodied in the four tales through references to mainly Caudwell and Kettle's approach to literature, and 2) modelling on Lévi-Strauss' analysis of the Oedipus myth, a rudimentary sketch of the underlying structural pattern. It is hoped that, through this two-fold study, the significance of the ch'uan-ch'i tales can once more be asserted.

Appendix:

The English Translation of These Four Tales.

"Pang O" 龐阿

Pang O of the principality of Chulu was a strikingly handsome man. A daughter of the Shih family in that district fell in love with him at first sight, and when later she was seen calling on him his wife grew extremely jealous. One day hearing the girl coming, she bade her maids tie her up and take her home; but on the way the young lady vanished like smoke. When the maids reported this to her family, the girl's father was astounded.

"My daughter has not left the house," he said. "How dare you slander us? "

Pang's wife watched her husband more carefully, however, and discovered the girl in the young man's study one night. She seized her and took her home. When her own father saw her, he was completely amazed.

"I have just left the inner chambers," he explained, "I saw my daughter there working with her mother. How can she be in two places? "

He told servants to summon his daughter, and the moment the real girl appeared the other vanished. The puzzled father told his wife to investigate, and the girl explained, "after peeping at Pang O once when he was in our hall, I had dreamed ever since of going to his home, and had been caught by his wife when she went in."

"Well, I never! " exclaimed her father. Evidently when a spirit is deeply moved, it can assume any form it chooses. So what vanished was her spirit after all.

The girl resolved not to marry anyone else. A year later, however, Pang's wife contracted some strange disease which proved incurable. Then Pang sent money to the Shih family and married their daughter.

"Wei Yin" 韋隱

During the Ta-li period, the daughter of *Chiang-tsuo shao-chiang* Han Chin-ching married *Shang-yi fung-yu* Wei Yin. Yin was appointed

ambassador to Hsin-luo. Having travelled a certain distance, Yin was homesick. Yin then went to sleep, and suddenly felt his wife's presence outside the drapery. Stunned, Yin questioned her, who replied that "I sympathize with your having to cross the seas, so follow you out of my own will. Nobody knows it." Yin then cheated his attendants by saying that "I want to have a girl to wait on me." Nobody blamed him. It was two years before he came home, and his wife also returned. Yin then laid open her transgressions to his parents, yet it seemed that she was already inside the room. Approaching each other, the two women finally became one. The one following Yin was her soul.

"Li Hun Chi" 離魂記

In the year A.D. 692, having been made governor of Hêng-chou, Chang I of Ch'ing-ho moved there with his family. Being austere and rather solitary, he did not make many friends. He had only two children, both daughters. The elder died in childhood, while the younger, who was called Ch'ien-niang, grew into a woman of rare beauty with an air of quiet dignity.

Wang Chou of T'ai-yüan was the son of Chang's sister. He was an intelligent youth with an alert mind and a handsome face. Chang thought highly of him and repeatedly said: "One of these days I must marry Ch'ien-niang to him."

When they grew up Wang and Ch'ien-niang often dreamed about each other. No one in their families guessed this, however, and when later Chang's best assistant asked him for Ch'ien-niang's hand he readily gave his consent.

The proposal threw Ch'ien-niang into a state of great agitation, while Wang was both disappointed and disgusted. He asked his uncle's leave to go away, saying that he ought to report in the capital for service. As he could not be dissuaded from going he was given a handsome allowance by his uncle, and then, hiding his distress as best he could and still furiously determined to depart, he went to his boat with deepest grief in his heart.

When evening came the boat anchored near a hill-village. About midnight, unable to sleep, Wang heard hurried footsteps approaching along the river-bank. It was Ch'ien-niang, who had followed him barefoot. Wang was nearly insane with surprise and delight. He grasped her hands and asked why she was there.

"Your love has moved me even in my dreams," she told him between her sobs, "and I know that you will not change. My father would never have allowed me to marry you, so I have followed you without his consent."

Wang was so excited by his unexpected good fortune that he laughed and capered about in delight. Keeping Ch'ien-niang out of sight in the boat, he pushed on day and night without stopping, until, after a journey lasting several months, they reached the province of Ssu-ch'uan. There they lived for five years, and during that time two sons were born. They heard nothing of Ch'ien-niang's parents, but she thought of them constantly and one day she spoke of them to Wang, weeping.

"Because I could not give you up I ignored the duty of a daughter and followed you," she said. "That was five years ago. What a disgrace it is to live apart from my parents all this time! "

"Don't fret," Wang replied, soothing her, "we will go back soon," and almost at once they set out for Hêng-chou.

When they arrived Wang went on ahead to beg his uncle's forgiveness for what they had done.

"Ch'ien-niang is lying sick in the women's apartments," said Chang. "Why do you tell me such lies? "

"Go and look in my boat," replied Wang.

Chang was puzzled. He sent a servant hurriedly down to the boat, and there Ch'ien-niang sat, charming and gay.

"Are my parents well? " she asked the astonished servant, who ran quickly back and told his master.

Meanwhile, the sick girl in the inner room, hearing the noise of Wang's arrival, rose from her bed and dressed, smiling to herself, but saying nothing. Then she ran out of the room to meet the newcomers. When the two girls met they melted into one body, only their clothes remaining double.

To the girl's family the affair appeared rather improper, so they kept it to themselves, only telling a few of their near relatives privately.

Forty years afterwards Wang and Ch'ien-niang died. Their sons were remarkable for their filial piety and honesty, and when they grew to manhood both achieved good positions.

I often heard about this when young, but there were many versions, and some would regard it as purely fictitious. Late in the Ta-li period, I met Chang Chung-kui, governor of Lai-wu, who was distant cousin of Chang I, and perfectly knew this anecdote.

"Chêng Shêng" 鄭生

About the year A.D. 755 a student named Chêng went up to the capital to take part in the exam which would eventually lead to an official appointment. He reached the city just about nightfall, and sought a lodging at an inn in the west suburb. Asked what his surname was, he replied candidly. Then suddenly a servant-girl came out of an inner room.

"Madam must be your distant aunt," she observed.

Almost at once an old woman came out. Chêng introduced himself and they sat and talked for some time. He told her about his family, and discussed his marriage prospects.

"I have here with me the daughter of my daughter," the old lady told him. "Her father, Mr. Liu, is at his post in Huai-yin. You two families peer with each other. She would be a very good match for you, and I should be delighted to offer you her hand; what do you think of the suggestion? "

Chêng naturally was diffident about accepting this sudden proposal, but he did not know how to refuse, so the same night he and Miss Liu were married. When they had been living happily for some months with the old lady, she decided that it was time for Chêng to take his bride home to visit her family. So the couple travelled together to Huai-yin, having first informed the girl's father that they were on their way. The news threw the whole household into consternation. Mr. Liu could not explain it, but Mrs. Liu had her suspicions, and felt sure that this must be an unacknowledged daughter of her husband. She was therefore taken completely by surprise when she saw her own daughter led in by a strange man, knowing that she had never been outside the house and was at that moment in her own apartment. In answer to her mother's call the girl now came hurrying to the door with a smile on her pretty face, to greet the new arrivals. For an instant the two girls faced each other and then slowly melted into a single body.

Careful inquiry led to the conclusion that Mrs. Liu's deceased mother had abstracted the superior soul of her granddaughter and married her to the man she thought suitable. After that she had sent them home and the soul and body of the girl had been reunited.

Chêng went back to the place where they had stayed but could find no trace of the house.

Notes

1. Curtis P. Adkins, "The Hero in T'ang Ch'uan-ch'i Tales," in *Critical Essays on Chinese Fiction,* ed. Winston L. Y. Yang & Curtis P. Adkins (Hong Kong: The Chinese Univ. Press, 1980), p. 17.
2. Adkins perceptively comments that "Ch'uan-ch'i tales are . . . a 'class-literature' in that they were written by and for persons who shared rather similar social, economic, and educational backgrounds" (Adkins, p. 21).
3. These four tales (translated into English) are appended chronologically (from the late fifth century A.D. to the ninth century A.D.) at the end of this essay.
4. Quoted by E. D. Edwards, *Chinese Prose Literature of the T'ang Period,* vol. II (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1938), pp. 28–29.
5. Edwards, pp. 32–33.
6. Christopher Caudwell, "English Poets: (I) The Period of Primitive Accumulation," in *Marxists on Literature: An Anthology,* ed. David Craig (Baltimore, Md: Penguin Books, 1975), pp. 95–109.
7. Caudwell, pp. 95–96.
8. Caudwell, p. 98.
9. Caudwell, p. 100.
10. The female characters function similarly. While the wife of Pang O would "[bid] her maids tie her [the daughter of Shih] up and take her home, and the three female protagonists in "Pang O" "Wei Yin" and "Li Hun Chi" would take the initiative to go to the one they love, Mrs. Liu in "Cheng Sheng" can only "Ha[ve] her suspicions," and Miss Liu is a completely passive character.
11. Georg Lukács, "Tolstoy and the Development of Realism," in *Marxists on Literature,* p. 286.
12. Lukács, *Realism in Our Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 13.
13. Arnold Kettle, "Dickens and the Popular Tradition," in *Marxists on Literature: An Anthology,* pp. 214–17.
14. Kettle, pp. 216–17.
15. Kettle, p. 214.
16. Kettle, p. 216.
17. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 213.