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WHOSE STRANGE STORIES? P'U SUNG-LING 蒲松齡
(1640–1715), HERBERT GILES (1845–1935),
AND THE *LIAO-CHAI CHIH-I* 聊齋誌異

John Minford and Tong Man 唐文

For many decades Herbert Giles' nineteenth-century *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (*Liao-chai chih-i*) have been at best quietly tolerated, more often derided, and dismissed as orientalist bowdlerisations of P'u Sung-ling.¹ But people have kept on reading them, publishers have kept on reprinting them, and nobody has yet come up with anything better—in English at least. It is perhaps a good moment to take a look at Giles' life² and times,³ and at what exactly it was that he did to these Chinese texts. This might also offer a new prism through which to view P'u Sung-ling himself, surely the outstanding example of a “great” Chinese author poorly served by his own

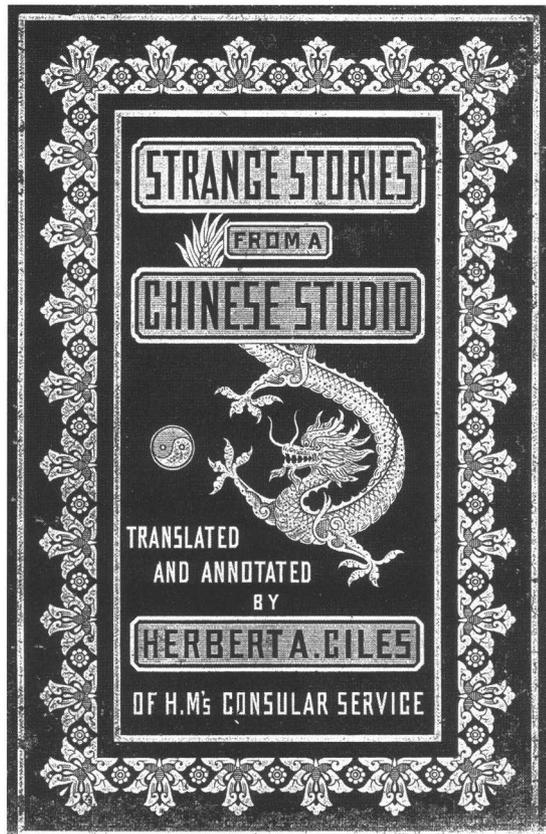
¹ In the post-Waley era it became common to refer to “old Giles” in a patronising and dismissive way, to mock at his vague *Cbuang Tzu* and his prudish *Strange Stories*; to complain that his *Dictionary* was too heavy (i.e. useless), and full of mistakes, that his *Biographical Dictionary* was, in the words of Joseph Needham, full of “superficial and apocryphal anecdotes,” and that it had, in the words of David Pollard, been “made obsolete by modern historical research.” It was customary to assume that he was an “amateur,” and had been in every way bettered and replaced by the more recent generations of professional sinologists. And yet it was Joseph Needham who on a later occasion praised Giles for being

“probably the first to make a radical distinction between the ‘south-pointing carriage’ and the magnetic compass proper...”

² The publication of Giles' own *Memoirs* in *East Asian History* 13/14 (1997), recently edited by Charles Aylmer from the typescript in the Cambridge University Library, offers fascinating insights, but the sort of information it pro-/OVER

Figure 1

Embossed cover of the first edition of Giles' Strange Stories, designed for Giles by his friend, Warren de la Rue



vides is largely bibliographical (details of what he himself wrote, and how well he wrote it) and polemical (attacks on the shortcomings of his contemporaries—"maulings," as he himself called them). There is still room for a genuine biographical study. An "old Chinese admirer" described Giles as "of the fanatical type, always furiously taking sides no matter right or wrong." From his translations and writings, from his frequent attacks on others, and theirs on him, we catch tantalising glimpses of a highly versatile, prolific, complex, combative, but nonetheless deeply fascinating, creative and humane individual, an idiosyncratic dissenter, a multi-faceted man of letters, whose first published work in 1870 was a version of Longinus' *On the Sublime*, and who in his eighties was still writing, on such subjects as "Chinese Anchors" and "Chinese Taxi-cabs." Herbert's father, John Allen Giles (1808–84), was himself a prolific writer. Apart from his numerous Keys to the Classics, he published, *inter alia*, *Scriptores Graeci Minores* (1831), a *Latin Grammar* (3rd edition, 1833), a *Life of Thomas Becket* (1845), *Hebrew Records* (1850), and *Christian Records* (1855). His entry in the *National Dictionary of Biography* (many thanks to David Hawkes for having copied this out several years ago) provides a fascinating picture of an unconventional Victorian cleric and man of letters (by comparison, Herbert Giles' official entry is surprisingly dry and disappointing). John Giles was a Somerset man (like his father and grandfather before him), was educated (like his son Herbert) at Charterhouse, and (unlike his son, who never received a university education) went on to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, on a Bath & Wells scholarship, taking a Double First in 1828, MA in 1831 and becoming a Fellow in 1832. He wished to join the bar, but was persuaded by his mother to take orders, and obtained the curacy of Cossington in Somerset. His subsequent try at schoolmastering (Headmaster of the City of London School, 1836–40) was disastrous, and he retired under a cloud: he had "failed to preserve discipline" and "the school did not do well under him." After this he "took pupils and did literary work" near Bagshot, before returning to the church as curate of Bampton, in Oxfordshire. Here it was that he wrote his two controversial books questioning the authenticity of both the Old and New Testaments, which brought down on him the wrath of the Bishop of



Figure 2

*H. A. Giles at the rear of his house in Selwyn Gardens, Cambridge, in his latter years**

* Figures 2, 3, 5, 7 and 14 were reproduced from family photograph albums in the possession of H. A. Giles' great-grandson, Giles Pickford of Canberra, whose permission to use them is gratefully acknowledged. These albums have since been donated by Mr Pickford to the Library of the Australian National University, Canberra (who own the copyright), where they are held in the Rare Book Collection.

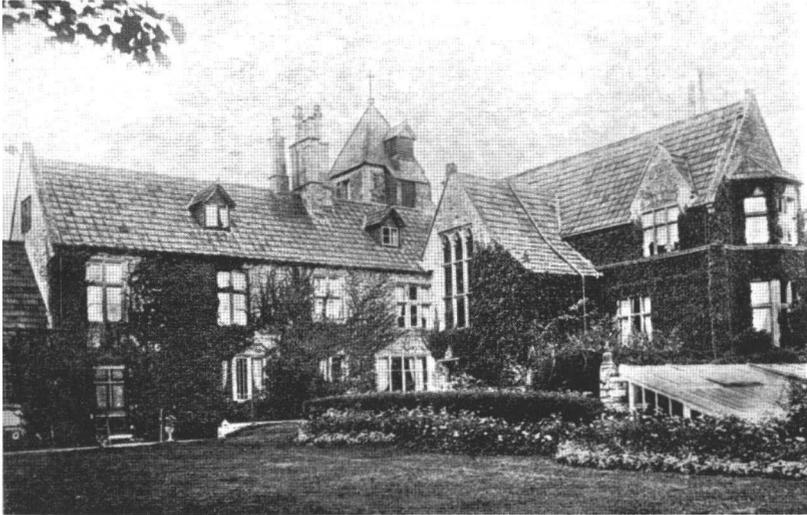


Figure 3

Herbert Giles aged twelve

Figure 4

"Churchill Court," the Giles' house in Somerset where H. A. Giles grew up (source: Aegidiana: or gleanings among Gileses at home and abroad by one of them. With portraits and illustrations, a record of all Giles families in Britain printed for private circulation in 1910, between pp.106 and 107, courtesy Giles Pickford)

**Figure 5**

H. A. Giles with his second wife Williamina, their daughter Kathleen, and Chinese servant in the garden of the British Ningpo Consulate, 1889



/Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce. And then in 1855 (when Herbert Giles was ten years old) came John Giles' sensational trial before Lord Campbell at the Oxford spring assizes, for having falsified the marriage registry of Bampton parish. It appears that Giles père was guilty of this charge, having, out of good nature, tried to "cover the frailty of one of his servants, whom he married irregularly" (out of official hours, at the same time falsifying the date and certain other details of the entry in the register) "to her lover, a shoemaker's apprentice." For this crime he was sentenced to a year's imprisonment in Oxford Castle, though he was released after only three months, by royal warrant. After a "lapse of two or three years," he entered once again upon an intermittent clerical career, at the end of which he became rector of Sutton, Surrey (from 1867 until his death in 1884). Giles père was clearly a man of an unusual character, with controversial views on a number of issues. "His literary tastes and some peculiarities of manner and disposition are said to have injured his popularity, but he was kind and courteous."

³ Giles lived through almost the entire reign of Queen Victoria (1837–1901), and the whole Edwardian reign (1901–10), and died six weeks before George V. His lifetime saw enormous changes, both in China and the West. He was born in the year of the publication of Engels' *Situation of the working classes in England*, and three years before the *Communist manifesto*. He died three months after the Nuremberg Laws had made the swastika the official flag of the Third Reich, and two months after the Italians had invaded Abyssinia. In the year of Giles' birth, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan 洪秀全 was beginning the process of preaching and conversion that would lead to the establishment of the T'ai-p'ing Heavenly Kingdom 太平天國. In the year of Giles' death, Mao Tse-tung 毛澤東 and the eight or nine thousand survivors of the Long March finally reached Yen'an. When Giles arrived in China, the great upheavals of the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion and the Second Opium War were over. It was an interlude of moderation and accommodation in foreign relations, after the drama of the burning of the Yuan Ming Yuan 圓明園 and before the turmoil of the close of the century. Shortly before his arrival the T'ung-wen kuan 同文館 (precursor of today's Foreign Language Institutes) had been set up, and, unsuccessful /OVER

/though it ultimately proved to be, this institution was seen by some to symbolize a new era in intellectual relations between China and the West. Giles' first seven years were spent under the so-called "restoration" of the T'ung-chih 同治 reign, and for the remainder of his time in China, the country was dominated by the Dowager Empress, Tz'u-hsi 慈禧. He left six years before the 100-days Reforms, and eight years before the Boxers. His experience of China was thus one of relative calm, and he spent it profitably, immersing himself in the ethos of traditional Chinese culture (he was to his dying day conservative, if not reactionary, in his view of Chinese politics) and devoting himself to the mastery of the language, which "a close observer has not hesitated to declare ... requires the age of a Methuselah to overtake" He arrived back in Britain in early 1893. If his twenty-five years as an expatriate consular official in China had been a period of calm, he was to find himself back in Europe at a time of eventful transition in every sphere of life. Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Gondoliers* had received its first performance in 1889, Debussy's "L'Après-midi d'un Faune" and Mahler's Second Symphony were to receive theirs in 1894. In 1892 Lord Tennyson had died, and in April 1894 appeared the first issue of *The Yellow Book*. In April 1895 Oscar Wilde brought his ill-fated libel suit against the Eighth Marquess of Queensberry. The next twenty years were to witness the prolific creations of those great Edwardians, Elgar, Galsworthy, and Kipling. They also saw the arrival of Pound and Eliot, "The Waste Land" and Modernism. Giles lived through it all. In fact it was his rhyming versions of Chinese poetry that provided the material for Pound's first Chinese pieces, several years before *Cathey*.



Figure 6

A rare (by his own admission) formal portrait of H. A. Giles, who disliked photographic sittings (source: Aegidiana, between pp.106 and 107, courtesy Giles Pickford)



Figure 7

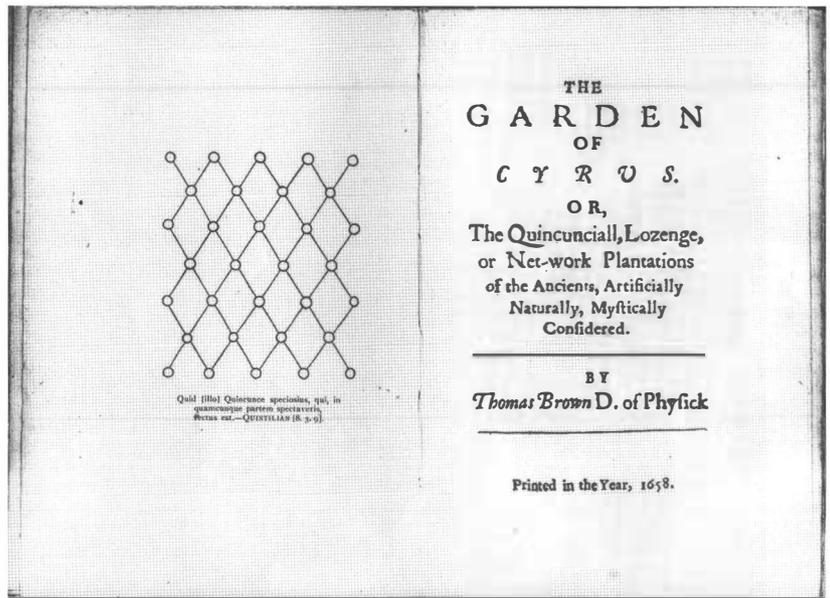
Giles family group in the garden of their Cambridge home, 1900

native critics and by Chinese readers of modern times in general.⁴ For in order to ask the question “How *should* this story be translated?” or “How *has* it been translated?,” we inevitably find ourselves asking “What does it really mean, and how is it, and was it, supposed to be read?”—and thereby we may find ourselves discovering a new way of reading, and of bringing the stories alive again. All of this requires a bold leap of the imagination. To turn Said on his head, this unusually roundabout and difficult rebirth is an unashamed process of reappropriation, of once again making the stories one’s own, their own.⁵

Here, as a first rereading, we present one of Giles’ versions—“Miss Lien-hsiang, the Fox-girl” (*Lien-hsiang* 連香)⁶—taken apart, with reference to the Chinese “original,” and carefully put back together again, reconstituted in as generous a surrounding medium as possible. This literary

Figure 8

Title page from a fine early edition of *The Garden of Cyrus*



⁴ Following the demise and discrediting of the traditional Chinese reading universe (the May Fourth syndrome), there has been a widespread unwillingness and incapacity amongst the Chinese intelligentsia to read any of its own huge classical repertoire of *pi-chi* 筆記 literature—all the more so if it happened to deal with the supernatural (as was the case with the entire subdivision entitled *chib-kuai* 志怪). This led to a more general unquestioning assumption that such literature was not worth reading. This in its turn caused such readers as did bother with it either to distort it (decades of politicisation), or to trivialise it (reducing its powerful themes to silly, infantile, almost meaningless clichés). (There were notable exceptions to this broad generalisation.) Readers of recent *pai-hua* 白話 versions of the *Liao-chai* stories, and viewers of many of the film and TV adaptations, are being treated to something that has as little connection with P'u Sung-ling's original texts as *Buffy the vampire slayer*. Recently, a few modernist critics (including the Freudian critic Wang I-chia 王溢嘉 and the novelist Wang Wen-hsing 王文興 in Taiwan, and the poet/essayist Leung Ping-Kwan 梁秉鈞 in Hong

/Kong) have begun to comment intelligently on the surprisingly modern and powerful qualities of P'u Sung-ling's fiction. As Leung observed to me recently, “Why have we been making all this fuss about South American literature? We have our own magical literature right here!” Ironically, it may be *pi-chi* literature that proves to be the most “post-modern” of all Chinese genres.

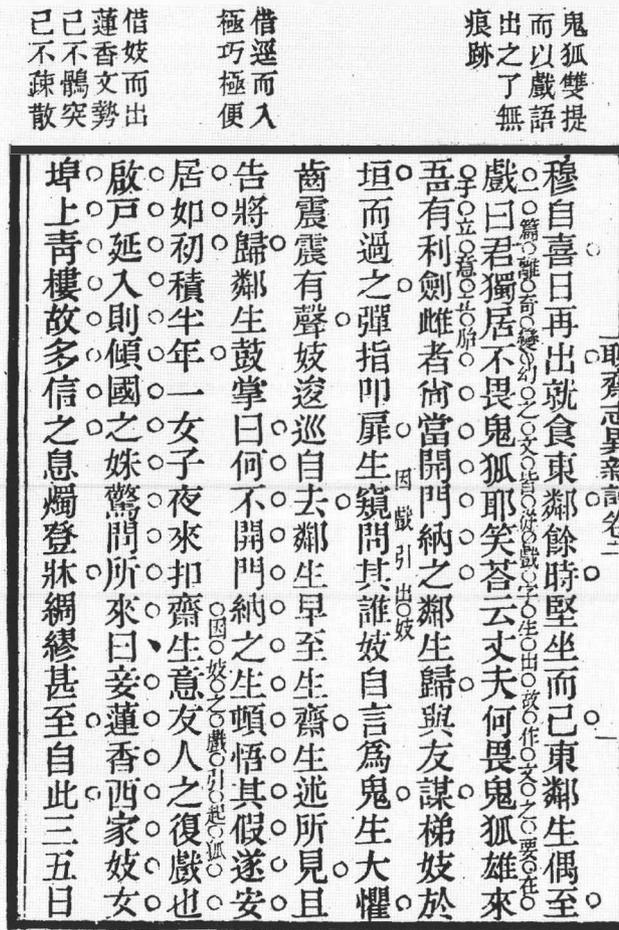
⁵ Surely original and translation, readings East and West, all reside together with equal legitimacy in that universal imaginative universe so well described by Marcel Proust, a universe that belongs to us all: “Celle de toutes les diverses vies que nous menons parallèlement, qui est la plus pleine de péripéties, la plus riche en épisodes, je veux dire la vie intellectuelle.” See p.71 of the superb cartoon adaptation of *Du côté de chez Swan*, done with extraordinary sensitivity by Stéphane Heuet (Paris: Delcourt, 1999).

⁶ While this introduction records joint reflections, the reconstruction itself is the work of Tong Man. The Chinese text followed is that of the *Cb'üan-pen bsin-chu* 全本新注 *Liao-chai chib-i* edited by Chu Ch'i-k'ai 朱其鎧 et al. (Peking: People's Literature Press, 1989),

/while the text for the commentaries is that found in the irreplaceable Chang Yu-ho 張友鶴 ed., *Liao-chai chib-i bui-chiao bui-chu bui-p'ing pen* 聊齋誌異會校會注會評本 (Shanghai: Ku-chi Ch'u-pan she, 1983 reprint). The English text used is that of the third revised edition (London, de la Rue and Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh: 1916), although in this case Giles made no changes to the translation, merely shortening one of his footnotes. In his *Memoirs*, Giles tells how he completed the translation in 1878, after his transfer to the consulate in Canton, and goes on to reveal that the manuscript (which he had sent back to London for publication) was actually lost for some months in the offices of the celebrated French shipping line, Messageries Maritimes! One is reminded of the fate, less than ten years earlier, of an early draft of James Legge's translation of the *Book of changes*: “I wrote out a translation of the *Yi King*, embracing both the Text and the Appendixes, in 1854 and 1855; and have to acknowledge that when the manuscript was completed, I knew very little about the scope and method of the book. I laid the volumes containing the result of my labour /OVER

Figure 9

Single page from the 1842 edition of *Liao-chai*



/aside, and hoped, believed indeed, that the light would by and by dawn and that I should one day get hold of a clue that would guide me to a knowledge of the mysterious classic. Before that day came, the translation was soaked, in 1870, for more than a month in the water of the Red Sea. By dint of careful manipulation it was recovered so as to be still legible; but it was not till 1874 that I began to be able to give the book the prolonged attention necessary to make it reveal its secrets. Then for the first time I got hold, as I believe, of the clue ... The writer.

/characters of the Chinese are not representations of words, but symbols of ideas, and the combination of them in composition is not a representation of what the writer would say, but of what he thinks. It is vain therefore for a translator to attempt a literal version ... There is not so much an interpretation of the characters employed by the writer as a participation of this thoughts;—there is the seeing of mind to mind." James Legge, Preface to *The texts of Confucianism, pt II: the Yi King*, 1882.

vivi-section attempts to recreate some of the features of an unusual reading experience, to build a new environment that approximates the richness of the original. P'u Sung-ling wrote for his fellow literati in a dense, lyrical style, choosing his words with infinite care, aware of the resonance of every word and phrase. He was speaking to readers steeped in a culture made up of layer upon layer of associated texts and memories, where a thousand assumptions, attitudes and allusions could be taken for granted and played upon, because they were shared. One of the high places of this culture was the Studio, the *chai* 齋, inner sanctum of traditional male leisure. This new many-layered textual structure is a re-installation, a new space for reading that seeks in its own way to emulate the environment of a Chinese Studio.

In the central hall stands Giles' Strange Story, with whatever emendations and additions have seemed necessary to make Giles complete (suitably marked by typographical or punctuation devices). This central space has been divided into vertical sections with lattice patterns taken from Daniel Sheets Dye's *Grammar of Chinese Lattice*.⁷

In the centre (of the double page), in the inner chamber, are a variety of visual reminders of the Studio environment: the desk is strewn with inkstones, calligraphy brushes, strange scholarly knick-knacks of one sort or another, Chinese characters in various styles, and seals (especially seals carved by or for P'u Sung-ling's contemporaries, the sort of people who might have enjoyed the Stories as he intended them). Screens and walls are hung

⁷ Harvard University Press, 1937. These window structures seemed appropriate for the job in hand. This "latticization" of the translation (the use of see-through partitions, rather than walls) is in fact closer to the structure of the undivided, unpunctuated Chinese original than Giles' long rambling paragraphs. It also helps (together with its section titles) to throw light on what is rather a complicated plot, involving multiple identities and incarnations. ("Translation it is that letteth in the light," Translators' Preface to the King James Bible.)

with potent talismans against a variety of afflictions. We all—the young scholar-protagonist of the story, the author, the translator and his editors, and the reader—may well be in need of protection.

The outer column, the outer chamber, is a running commentary, in the time-honoured Chinese style, a commonplace-book, made up of gleanings from Chinese and Western sources, all selected to unravel levels of meaning, to suggest nuances of the story (the spices that may have evaporated over the ages, or may have been destroyed by the process of linguistic metamorphosis).⁸

This “enriched” tripartite reworking of Giles is in effect another (virtual) *chai*, consisting of three “bays,” or *chien* 間. It is an experiment at a more mobile way of presenting a Chinese text in translation, one that admits of a number of permutations and interpretations. In a more advanced medium than the printed page (perhaps a CD-ROM),⁹ it might indeed be possible to manipulate the whole thing physically, like a Chinese puzzle, in such a way that lattices, seals, Chinese characters, and blocks of text in Chinese and English (and other languages, even musical) could be moved around, even superimposed upon each other, at the will, or whim, of the reader.

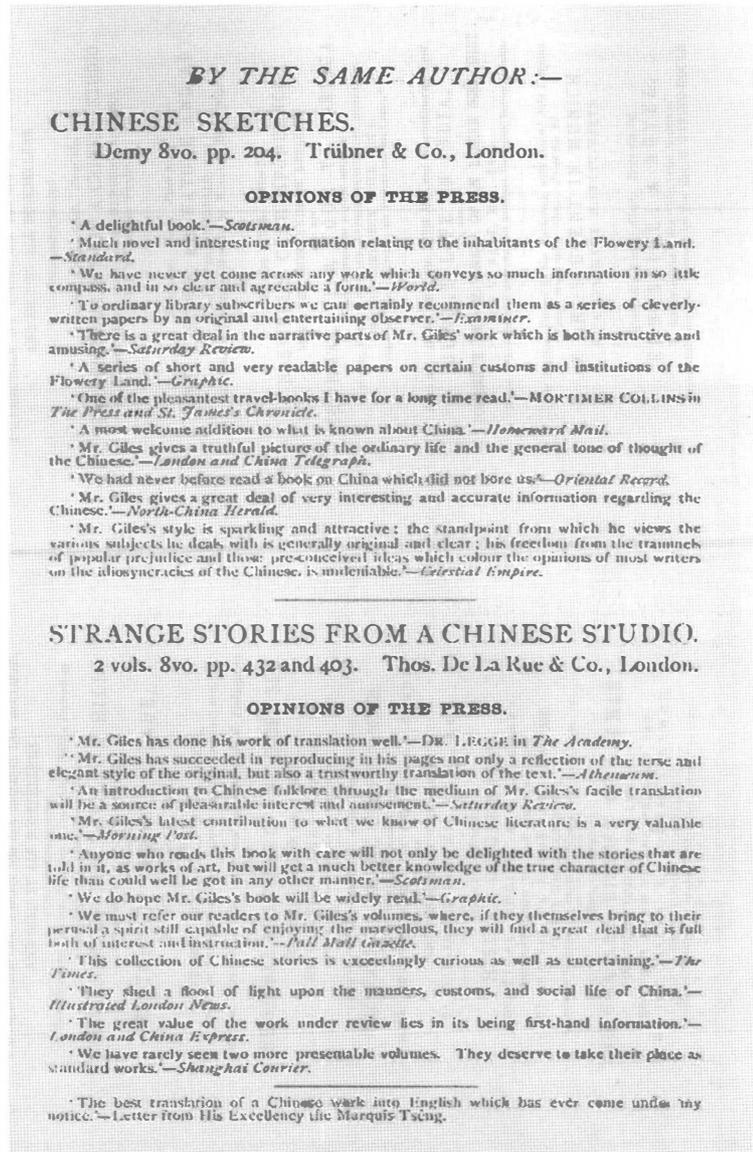
Reading old Chinese texts like this one today (whether in Chinese or in translation) requires an intense degree of imaginative projection. The old reading world has vanished. The modern reader can certainly make use of the available materials, but in the end he or she has to create the space and step into it. As Wu Hung has written about

⁸ A brief list of the sources used for this commentary is provided at the end of this introduction.

⁹ Cf. Yao Dajun, “The pleasure of reading drama,” Appendix 3 to Stephen West and Wilt Idema, *The moon and the zither* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1991): “The integrated sensory effects of this [the illustrated Hongzhi 1498] edition are actually a portable multi-media presentation of a dramatic performance ... a sensory and intellectual experience that can be recreated anywhere, any time.” In recent weeks Microsoft have announced their plans to collaborate with Penguin Books in the production of a series of classics on screen. The future may hold new and exciting possibilities for translators. Indeed my friend John Cayley has already been experimenting with several such possibilities for some time.

Figure 10

A collection of contemporary critical reactions to Chinese Sketches (1876) and Strange Stories (1880), printed at the back of Historic China (1882)



¹⁰ Wu Hung, *The double screen: medium and representation in Chinese painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), p. 30.

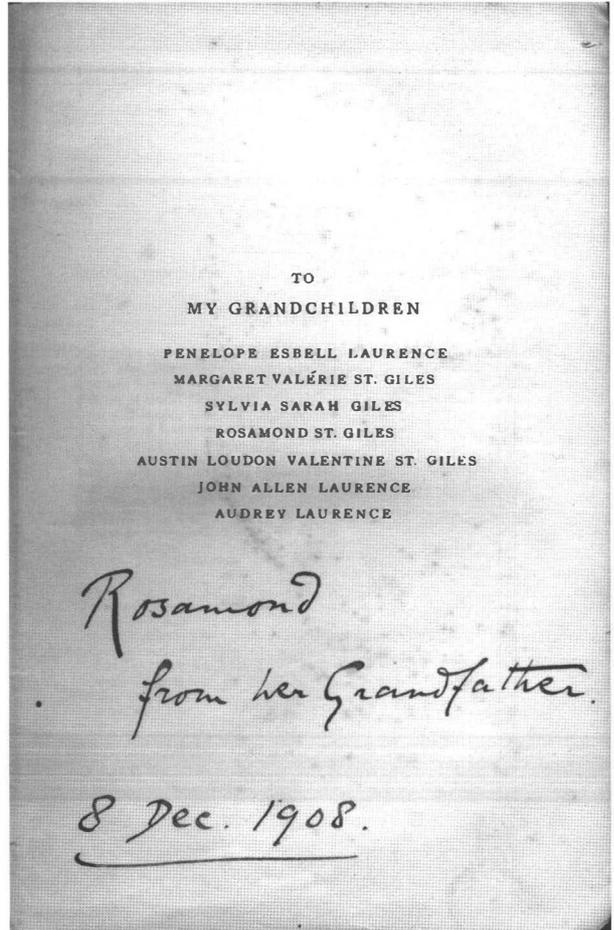
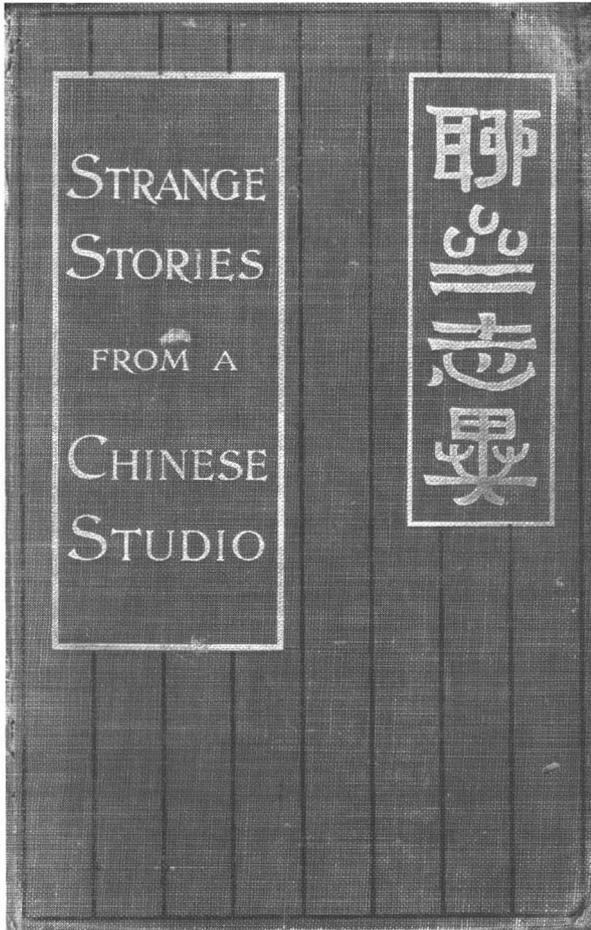
¹¹ Penguin, 1996.

the act of “reading” Chinese visual art, with all of its scholarly paraphernalia: “These historical records, colophons and modern writings constitute ‘textual enclosures’, which simultaneously yield and block off an entrance to the painting itself Can we penetrate the layers of textual shells to gain a direct look at the painting? In other words, can we reinstall the painting’s status as the object of an original visual analysis?”¹⁰

In his inspired lyrical essay *A History of Reading*,¹¹ Alberto Manguel (himself a distinguished translator among other things) draws attention to the importance of the physical dimensions of the act of reading, in the Western tradition. How much more did the physical nature of the old-style Chinese book reflect the sensibility, the leisurely life-style, the cultured perception and relaxed enjoyment of the Chinese literatus! The flimsy pages, the soft-stitched binding and smallness of each fascicle (as comfortable to handle as a cloth shoe was to wear), the openness of the text without punctuation, the invitation to participation held out by the marginal and interlinear comments; the fact that the volume starts “at the back”—all these little details remind us

Figures 11 and 12

Cover and dedication page of the second (and “cheaper,” according to Giles) edition of *Strange Stories*, inscribed and given to his granddaughter Rosamond in the year of its reprinting



of more human differences: the absence of the page-boy, of the tea, of the incense, of the textures, aromas and other sensations of the Studio. The absence of the very quality of leisure itself.

This experimental format we have created (unwittingly) answers to one of Jacques Derrida's definitions of deconstruction: "The task is to dismantle [*déconstruire*] the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work in [the text], not in order to reject or discard them, but to reinscribe them in another way The relationship between the reinscribed text and the so-called original text is rather the relationship between two palimpsests."¹²

What is at issue here, in this mode of re-interpretation, is the notion of play (*hsi* 戲), and playfulness. As the nineteenth-century critic Tan Ming-lun 但明倫 (often to be encountered in the outer column, or chamber of the studio) is ever eager to point out, P'u Sung-ling is essentially a *playful* author: playful in his vision of the human condition and of human relationships, playful in the way he uses language and exploits the art of the classical story-teller. In this he closely resembles the sublime Chuang-tzu 莊子, the transcendental Taoist philosopher and raconteur to whom Herbert Giles was also deeply attracted.

A close reading of P'u Sung-ling and Giles will certainly tell us a great deal about the taste of Giles' time,¹³ and will reveal the limitations of what Giles considered permissible. "I had originally determined to publish a full and complete translation of the whole of these sixteen volumes; but on a closer acquaintance many of the stories turned out to be quite unsuitable for the age in which we live, forcibly recalling the coarseness of our own writers of fiction in the eighteenth century. Others, again, were utterly pointless . . ." (Giles' Preface to *Strange Stories*).¹⁴ But, whatever his qualms about the situa-

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), Translator's Preface, pp. lxxv–vi.

¹³ He shared many of the characteristics of Edmund Gosse (for whose series "Short Histories of the Literatures of the World" he wrote his *History of Chinese literature* in 1901), of the prolific and influential Andrew Lang and George Saintsbury: a personal prose style of great elegance; a leisurely approach to literature; an enormous regard for "style" as opposed to "subject"; a predilection for the conversational type of criticism, for casual—and sometimes crushing—judgements; a love of the entertaining (and often lengthy, and deceptively learned) aside; the persona of the literary amateur; a tendency to launch into the attack, if only to prove that his own opinions prevailed.

¹⁴ Elsewhere, in his little book *The civilisation of China* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1911), Giles made known his views on the subject of the chastity of Chinese literature in general: "And here a remark may be interjected, /OVER

Figure 13

Card inscribed by her grandfather for Rosamond, contained in the family's copy of Strange Stories (illustrated above and reproduced courtesy of Giles Pickford)

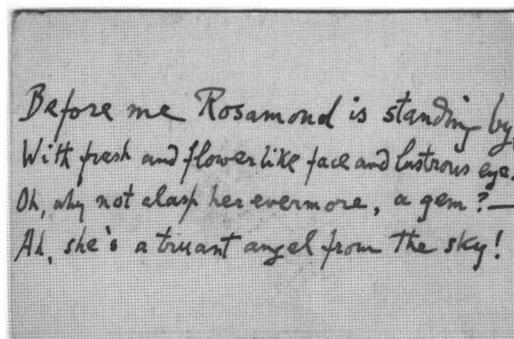


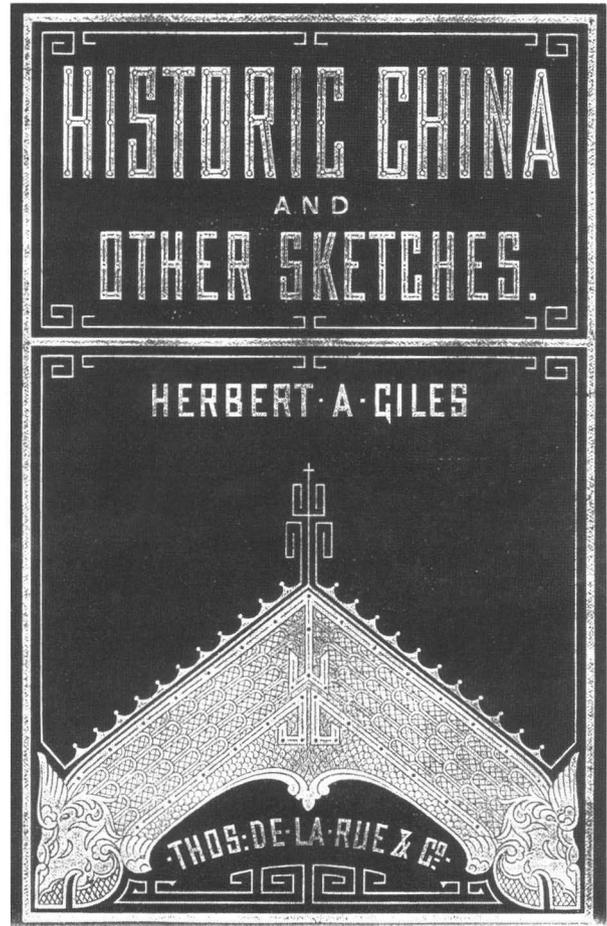
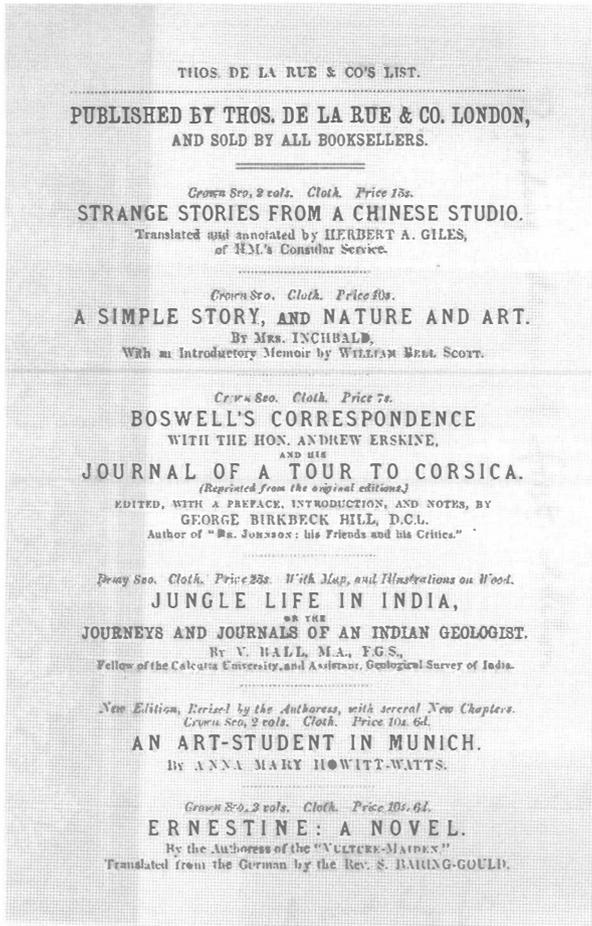
Figure 14

Rosamond, elder daughter of Giles' son Lancelot (and later mother of Giles Pickford)—photographed in June 1909 at the British Consulate, Amoy, where her father was posted as Pro-Consul (courtesy ANU Library)



Figures 15 and 16

Advertisement printed at the back of Giles' *Historic China and Other Sketches* (1882), listing various items from the *de la Rue catalogue*, including *Strange Stories*—the cover again designed by Warren de la Rue



/which is very necessary for the information of those who wish to form a true estimate of the Chinese people. Throughout the Confucian Canon, a collection of ancient works on which the moral code of the Chinese is based, there is not a single word which could give offence, even to the most sensitive, on questions of delicacy and decency. That is surely saying a great deal, but it is not all; precisely the same may be

/affirmed of what is mentioned above as high-class Chinese literature, which is pure enough to satisfy the most strait-laced. Chinese poetry, of which there is in existence a huge mass, will be searched in vain for suggestions of impropriety, for sly innuendo, and for the other tricks of the unclean. This extraordinary purity of language is all the more remarkable from the fact that, until recent years, the education of women has not been at all gener-

/al, though many particular instances are recorded of women who have themselves achieved successes in literary pursuits. It is only when we come to the novel, to the short story, or to the anecdote, which are not usually written in high-class style, and are therefore not recognised as literature proper, that this exalted standard is no longer maintained" (pp.128-9). This is of course a gross misrepresentation of Chinese poetry and lyric drama (especially the

translator, and sought to fashion it into something that would bring pleasure to his readers, sometimes creating strange narratives of his own.¹⁵

A good example of Giles' ingenuity in refashioning P'u Sung-ling is to be found in the famous story "The Painted Wall," *Hua-pi* 華壁. Here the "Kiang-si gentleman Meng Lung-t'an's friend Mr Chu, M.A.," is "transported" into the fairy world of a temple mural, and is seduced by a beautiful maiden, who "waved the flowers she had in her hand as though beckoning him to come on. He accordingly entered and found nobody else within." The original Chinese text continues: "With no delay [in the *Liao-chai* stories, there is usually very little delay between the first encounter and its physical consummation], he embraced her, and finding her to be not unreceptive,

/is having problems with "nocturnal emission." These stories are a gold mine for anyone wishing to investigate the sexual psychology of the traditional Chinese literati, through the imagery and symbolism of dreams and the supernatural. They are also firmly based on a traditional Chinese conception of physical and psychic "metabolism," and portray "metamorphosis" in an often startlingly concrete way. Blood (including the menstrual variety), puss, phlegm, semen, constantly feature in the narrative, as the author traces the strange process of transformation. In this respect the original stories are more in tune with our age than they were with Giles'. Not only are we ourselves more willing to perceive these different levels of human existence (the physical, the sexual, the supernatural) as interrelated; we are also living in an age when it is becoming possible, and necessary, for readers, whether Chinese or Western, to confront the "Ugly Chinaman" and his culture whole, warts, bound feet and all, glory and horror, beauty and cruelty. This means reading a work such as one of P'u Sung-ling's *Stories* with a determination to preserve every facet, in absolute objectivity. But we are living a hundred years later than Giles.

¹⁵ J. Dyer Ball (born 1847), reviewing Giles' *History of Chinese literature* in the pages of the *China Review*, eloquently describes Giles' gift as a translator: "There are translations and translations of Chinese books into English. The wooden style for example, heavy and uninteresting, and confirming the reader in his prejudices against an excursion into what has been styled the wilderness of Chinese literature and the desert of Chinese books Dr. Giles discovers many a garden in the erstwhile wilderness and oft an oasis in the supposed dreary desert Steeping himself in the sense of the original, he 'Englishes' it, eschewing uncouth renderings . . . that wring all beauty and sense out of it, leaving a jejune, lifeless semblance to the original, out of which all grace, freshness and vigour has gone We have not here in these translations a Chinese tricked out in Western garb, looking foreign and ill at ease; but the spirit, the life of the Celestial has been, by a touch of genius—by a species of metempsychosis—by the turn of a mental wheel of transmigration of the spirit of literature,—transferred into the body of a European style, robed with well-fitting language and grace of manner."

/more informal genres from the Sung dynasty onwards), which are one of the richest storehouses of eroticism in world literature. But it is no more wide of the mark than Arthur Waley's oft-quoted and much disputed claim that Chinese poetry only treats of friendship, not of passion or love; or Robert van Gulik's dismissal of foot-binding as a custom on the same level as the wearing of tight corsets; or Joseph Needham's presentation of Chuang-tzu as a proto-Marxist. Each of these perspectives had its personal bias and rationale. Waley's China was the China of a Bloomsbury littérateur; van Gulik, the diplomat bon viveur, projected into Chinese sexual life a questionable post-Freudian, post-Jungian Utopia, and was reluctant to admit the existence of any "perversions" or "abnormalities"; while Needham's ideological commitment (always strong) varied with time, and as the orientation of that commitment varied, so did his interpretation of texts. Since the first Jesuits began the great European enterprise of understanding China, students of China, like explorers of some alien planet, have yearned to find there the fulfilment of their hopes and dreams. How many leading sinologists of a previous generation went along with the rulers of "People's China" during its first decade (and more), and turned a blind eye to the massacres and purges, because (as one of them put it to me) "China seemed to us the last hope for humanity to get it right". There have been over the ages many false perspectives on many aspects of Chinese culture, and many of them have belonged to the Chinese themselves, for whom, ever since the May Fourth movement, the appreciation of their own traditional culture has been extremely problematic. Of the many "modern *pai-bua* versions" and Chinese critiques of the *Liao-chai* stories, not one seems to capture the true

/flavour of the original. In other words, let us not get Giles' bowdlerising of *Liao-chai* out of proportion. Giles was a creature of his time. Our generation will soon be able to read all the Chinese erotica it can get its hands on—we live after all in the post-Henry Miller era. Whether we will really be any the better off for it, who knows? Giles, on the other hand, was living in the days when this sort of stuff was most definitely "underground", and in this sense the Victorian brand of hypocrisy coincided nicely with the Confucian (and Marxist) brand: the respectable reader is seen to be reading *Pilgrim's Progress* (or the *Four Books* or *The Thoughts of Deng Xiaoping*), but within the covers lies a much dog-eared copy of *Fanny Hill* (or *The Western Chamber* or *Liao-chai*). Giles' Chinese text of *Liao-chai* itself was not expurgated. He himself went to enormous lengths to remove from those stories he selected for translation anything connected with sex, procreation, blood, sometimes indeed the human body in any of its aspects. (In doing so, he often goes to extraordinary lengths to cover up his traces, showing considerable craft and cunning.) These absences greatly dilute the texture of P'u's fictional world, and enhance the acceptable "quaintness" of Giles' stories: lovers never exchange more than a faint kiss, fox spirits tend to appear in order, not to seduce and sleep with budding young scholars, but to chat with them and perhaps sip a delicate cup of tea. P'u's Chinese originals are brief but explicit. They use a tantalisingly succinct language of psychic and physical seduction, which unlike its counterpart in the thriving Chinese pornographic fiction of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is always in exquisitely good taste. One entire story, for example, revolves around a young man who

¹⁶ See Leslie Fiedler, Introduction to *Beyond the Looking Glass: extraordinary works of fairy tale and fantasy* (London: Hart-Davis, 1974).

¹⁷ *The Virago book of fairy tales* (London: Virago Press, 1990). For “poor” read “Chinese,” for “middle classes” read “Western reader.”

¹⁸ The positive achievement of Herbert Giles was memorably summarized in 1922, when at the age of seventy-seven he was awarded the Royal Asiatic Society's triennial gold medal. In its citation, the Society judged that “beyond all other living scholars he had humanized Chinese studies.” His biographer in the *Dictionary of national biography* (1931–40) eloquently described him as “probably the most potent influence in replacing the old English regard for things Chinese as merely queer or silly by an intelligent perception of the depth and beauty of the culture of China,” adding significantly (perhaps to forestall critics), that “he did not possess the gifts of the profound and minute researcher.”

¹⁹ *Possession* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990), pp.171–2.

proceeded to enjoy carnal pleasure with her. Afterwards, she closed the door and left, bidding him not to make the slightest sound.” Giles turns this into: “Then they fell on their knees and worshipped heaven and earth together, and rose up as man and wife, after which the bride went away, bidding Mr. Chu keep quiet until she came back.” And in order to authenticate this rather quaint and extremely respectable scene, Giles (in the manner of an experienced seller of fake antiques) adds a convincing footnote about the Chinese marriage ceremony (which, we must remember, was totally absent in the Chinese original).

It is interesting to compare Giles, and his need to reduce the often overtly erotic encounters in *Liao-chai* to precious, platonic liaisons, with certain of his Victorian contemporaries: John Ruskin (obsessed by a fear of sexuality to the point where he shunned females after the onset of puberty), Lewis Carroll (forever photographing very young girls in the nude) and above all Andrew Lang, who had presided almost single-handed over the fairy-tale revival of the 1870s and 1880s. And yet the “other Victorians” were prolific producers of pornographic fiction.¹⁶ As Angela Carter has written: “Removing ‘coarse’ expressions was a common nineteenth-century pastime, part of the project of turning the universal entertainment of the poor into the refined pastime of the middle classes, and especially for the middle-class nursery. The excision of references to sexual and excremental functions, the toning down of sexual situations, and the reluctance to include ‘indelicate’ material—that is, dirty jokes—helped to denaturize the fairy tale and, indeed, helped to denaturize its vision of everyday life.”¹⁷

But should we be so smug about our own age, its taste, its permissibilities, its sensitivities, its ability to interpret this (or any other) strange document? We also suffer from our share of “correct” preconceptions and cultural limitations. Have we done any better than Giles—we Chinese and non-Chinese readers of the modern age?¹⁸ A survey of the available translations, *pai-hua* versions, and jejune Chinese critiques, would suggest not. Indeed, the widely distributed Commercial Press (HK) edition of the stories makes many of the same prudish cuts as Giles. Rather than sit in judgement on Giles, can we not share some of his dilemmas as a translator, and in doing so try ourselves to recover the magic of P'u Sung-ling's Studio (for this is surely a magical world), enter into its rich and at the same time highly refined consciousness, savour the artistic fashioning of those natural and supernatural elements, the conscious and unconscious motifs, that are the stuff of this extraordinary collection of tales?

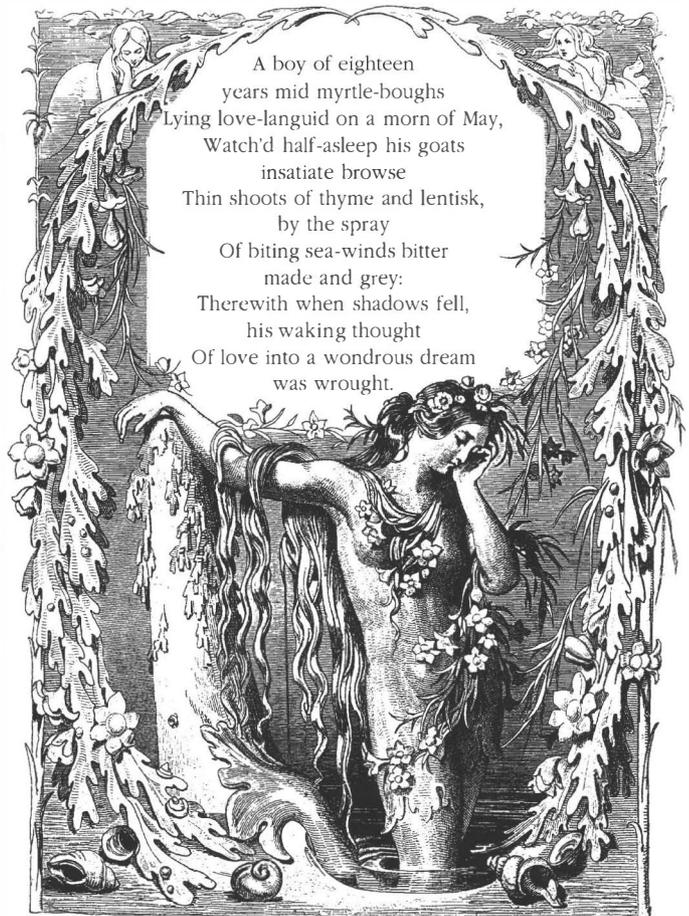
We have our own tradition of tales of the supernatural, our own personifications of seduction and obsession. Keats, in the preface to his poem “Lamia,” quoted one such tale in full from Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. The brevity of the narrative, Burton's dry, laconic prose, the pregnant use of allusion, the pseudo-historical persona, and the understated pathos of the conclusion, are all worthy of P'u Sung-ling.

Philostratus, in his fourth book *de Vita Apollonii*, hath a memorable instance in this kind, which I may not omit, of one Menippus Lycius, a young man twenty-five years of age, that going betwixt Cenchreas and Corinth, met such a phantasm in the habit of a fair gentlewoman, which, taking him by the hand, carried him home to her house, in the suburbs of Corinth, and told him she was a Phoenician by birth, and if he would tarry with her, he should hear her sing and play, and drink such wine as never any drank, and no man should molest him; but she, being fair and lovely, would live and die with him, that was fair and lovely to behold. The young man, a philosopher, otherwise staid and discreet, able to moderate his passions, though not this of love, tarried with her a while to his great content, and at last married her, to whose wedding, amongst other guests, came Apollonius: who, by some probable conjectures, found her out to be a serpent, a lamia; and that all her furniture was, like Tantalus' gold, described by Homer, no substance but mere illusions. When she saw herself thus descried, she wept, and desired Apollonius to be silent, but he would not be moved, and thereupon she, plate, house, and all that was in it, vanished in an instant: many thousands took notice of this fact, for it was done in the midst of Greece.

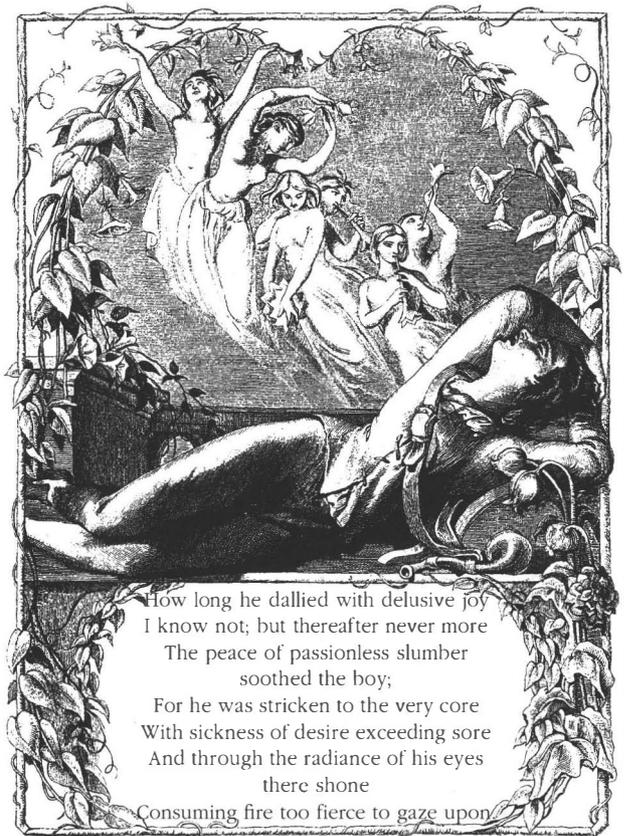
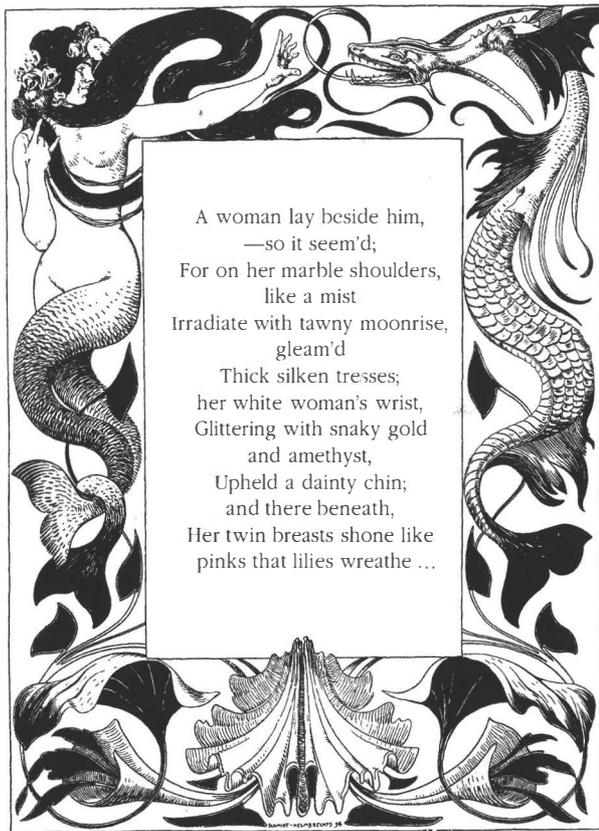
The contemporary writer A. S. Byatt reminds us of the rich Western tradition of spectral seduction in her novel *Possession*, purporting to quote Paracelsus:

The Melusinas are daughters of kings, desperate through their sins. Satan bore them away and transformed then into spectres, into evil spirits, into horrible revenants and frightful monsters. It is thought they live without rational souls in fantastic bodies, that they are nourished by the mere elements, and at the final Judgment will pass away with these, unless they may be married to a man. In this case, by virtue of this union, they may die a natural death, as they may have lived a natural life, in their marriage. Of these spectres it is believed that they abound in deserts, in forests, in ruins and tombs, in empty vaults, and by the shores of the sea ...¹⁹

The late nineteenth-century essayist, translator and poet John Addington Symonds (1840–93) effectually evokes the image of the nympholept in his three-stanza poem, “Le Jeune Homme Caressant Sa Chimère—For An Intaglio—,” which portrays the young man possessed, haunted by the winged, serpentine delusion of passion:



A boy of eighteen
years mid myrtle-boughs
Lying love-languid on a morn of May,
Watch'd half-asleep his goats
insatiate browse
Thin shoots of thyme and lentisk,
by the spray
Of biting sea-winds bitter
made and grey:
Therewith when shadows fell,
his waking thought
Of love into a wondrous dream
was wrought.



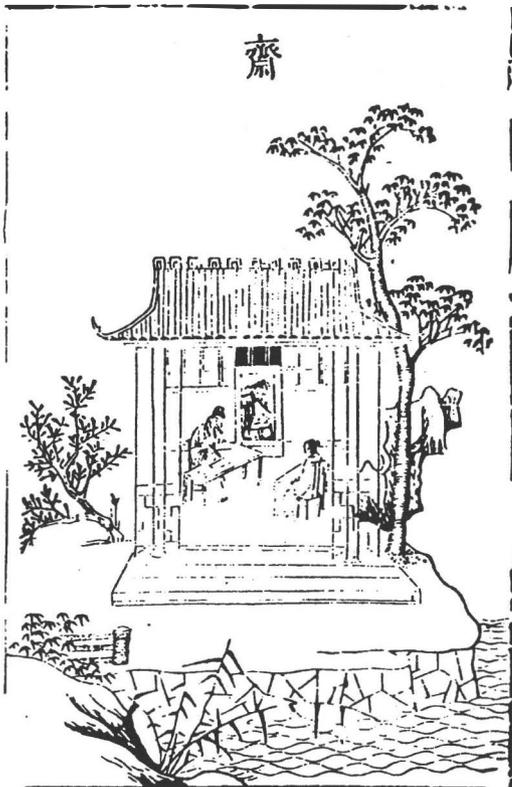
The young man in P'u Sung-ling's "Lien-hsiang," caught between the twin fires of a ghost-infatuation and a fox-enchancement, is eventually cured of his sickness in as novel and fascinating a manner as one could hope to find. In the course of this bizarre triangular relationship and its resolution, playfully traced through a number of incarnations, we encounter powerful archetypes of the Chinese consciousness, and taste some of the extra-

ordinary psychological and psychic subtleties of the mental and emotional life of its cultured élite. Beyond P'u Sung-ling and Herbert Giles, beyond text and translation, we enter into a realm richly representative of the Chinese heart and psyche. In the end, to the extent that we as readers and translators can enable the powerful images of P'u Sung-ling to live again, then these are surely *our* strange stories too.

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- friend of P'u Sung-ling, early commentator
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The following four-page collage is to be read as a Chinese handscroll, in reverse—that is to say, from left to right. It is composed of a pair of poems exchanged by the famous poet and critic Wang Shih-chen, and P'u Sung-ling; portraits of Wang and P'u; and a passage from P'u's Preface to Liao-chai in Giles' translation

Wang Shib-chen, the Poet, to his friend P'u
Sung-ling, the Teller of Tales

姑
妻
言
之
姑
聽
之
豆
棚
瓜
架
雨
如
絲
料
應
厭
作
人
間
語
愛
聽
秋
墳
鬼
唱
時
王
士
禎

Bean arbour,
gourd trellis,
silken rain;
idle words, idly spoken, idly heard—
like Su the Poet
and Teller of Tales
of whom we were both so fond!
the world's debates
disdained;
loving to hear
ghost songs,
from the graves of autumn.

(calligraphy by T. C. Lai 賴恬昌)

The portrait below and the colophons on the facing page have been 'dismantled' from a hanging scroll, "Portrait of Wang Shib-chen in peasant garb," by Weng Fang-kang 翁方綱 dated 1806. The half-length portrait depicts the poet dressed in the broad-brimmed straw hat of a peasant or fisherman, in an all-enveloping white robe with baggy sleeves



嘉輶吾育之蔚管澳
 慶語息信筵今瞻洋
 丙印知寫竊舉遺先
 冥此其良聞斯備主
 殊函所似先軸金儒
 仲禪以昭生蘇凶贊
 方細狀神於齋坡
 請伯塢蜀像
 下耶像脯心



The *li-shu* colophon (above), originally a superscription over the portrait, by Weng Fang-kang in his curious, variant style directly derived from extensive studies of ancient stele inscriptions, compares this portrait to an ancient one of Su Shih 蘇軾 (Su Tung-p'o 蘇東坡, the Sung poet and artist) at Mount Chin 金山. Weng had heard that Wang Shih-chen resembled Su in that painting; but he is unsure if the resemblance was in facial likeness or in spirit of character. He hopes that others would express their opinion on this matter. The colophon is dated to mid-autumn of the *ping-yin* year of the Chia-ch'ing period (1806), and signed "Fang-kang," with Weng's seal "Tan-ch'i" (square, intaglio). The unrecorded relief seal close to the painting, "shih-ching," also belongs to Weng Fang-kang.

This colophon (below) was the topmost colophon of three mounted on the paper 'window', or inner mount around the portrait and its superscription, also by Weng Fang-kang. It consists of two poems by Weng, each of five characters to the line, describing Wang's life and writing style. In his rider, Weng comments on Wang's classification of historical literary masters. Wang says that everybody knows the greatest masters of the High T'ang pentasyllabic verses are Wang Wei 王維 and Meng Hao-jan 孟浩然. However, in choosing the five best poets in pentasyllabic verses from High T'ang poets, Wang Shih-chen selected Wei Ying-wu 韋應物 and Liu Tsung-yüan 柳宗元 while neglecting Wang Wei and Meng Hao-jan. Anyone wishing to enjoy the portrait must first understand this. The colophon is unsigned, but Weng impressed three square seals after it: "Su-mi ch'ai" (intaglio), "Shih-ching" (as on the painting, relief), and "Weng Fang-kang" (intaglio).

著望鬚尾山外依洞宮脚
 洪寥十年思咫尺千里託
 夢中寫難華空外倚
 衡霍對人不可見妙喻
 何從若塔並圓鏡中誰
 與澄前語水月印梅花
 松風度高閣昔者未年造十條塔在山之作今十年餘矣
 吾愛王摩詰側想香煙
 筆云何王孟作不與韋
 柳同五字律琴經三
 唐省射洪先生言外意
 測景豈何程三昧性至
 精兩端請折衷設尚
 起劉郎何以發春容
 有能代答者今載旦暮
 遠青山白雲外一杆
 斜陽鐘先生及門者蜀民即元二書同卷皆未及此
 嘗謂浪洋先生品五言
 詩以盛唐另宗盛唐人
 五言又以三昧集中
 王孟諸家為宗然而先
 生選五言詩於唐取五
 家乃有萃柳而與王孟
 諸家者何也請於此
 下一解後方許拜先生
 像



P'u Sung-ling's reply to Wang Shib-chen

誌
 愚
 書
 成
 共
 笑
 之
 希
 袍
 蕭
 索
 鬢
 如
 絲
 十
 年
 頗
 得
 黃
 州
 素
 冷
 雨
 寒
 燈
 夜
 話
 時
 蒲
 杉
 齋

Threadbare gown,
 grey head,
 silken hair;
 Now my *Book of Tales* is done
 —an idle jest to share!
 Ten years
 I have tasted the joys
 of Su the Teller of Tales
 and Poet—
 of whom we were both so fond!
 Night-time conversations,
 cold rain,
 chill lamp
 of autumn.

(calligraphy by T. C. Lai)

*Portrait of P'u Sung-ling at the age of seventy-four
by Chu Hsiang-lin 朱湘麟, painted in 1713*



Giles's rendering of a passage from P'u Sung-ling's Preface to Liao-chai

As a child, I was thin and constantly ailing, and unable to hold my own in the battle of life. Our own home was chill and desolate as a monastery; and working there for my livelihood with my pen,¹ I was as poor as a priest with his alms-bowl.² Often and often I put my hand to my head³ and exclaimed, "Surely he who sat with his face to the wall⁴ was myself in a previous state of existence"; and thus I referred my non-success in this life to the influence of a destiny surviving from the last. I have been tossed hither and thither in the direction of the ruling wind, like a flower falling in filthy places; but the six paths⁵ of transmigration are inscrutable indeed, and I have no right to complain. As it is, midnight finds me with an expiring lamp, while the wind whistles mournfully without; and over my cheerless table I piece together my tales,⁶ vainly hoping to produce a sequel to the *Infernal Regions*.⁷ With a bumper I stimulate my pen, yet I only succeed thereby in "venting my excited feelings,"⁸ and as I thus commit my thoughts to writing, truly I am an object worthy of commiseration. Alas! I am but the bird, that dreading the winter frost, finds no shelter in the tree; the autumn insect that chirps to the moon, and hugs the door for warmth. For where are they who know me?⁹ They are "in the bosky grove, and at the frontier pass"¹⁰—wrapped in an impenetrable gloom!

¹ Literally, "ploughing with my pen."

² The *patra* or bowl, used by Buddhist mendicants, in imitation of the celebrated alms-dish of Shākyamuni Buddha.

³ Literally, "scratched my head," as is often done by Chinese in perplexity of doubt.

⁴ Alluding to Bôdhidharma, who came from India to China, and tried to convert the Emperor Wu Ti of the Liang dynasty; but, failing in his attempt, because he insisted that real merit lay not in works but in purity and wisdom combined, he retired full of mortification to a temple at Sung-shan, where he sat for nine years before a rock, until his own image was imprinted thereon.

⁵ The six *gâti* or conditions of existence, namely:—angels, men, demons, hungry devils, brute beasts, and tortured sinners.

⁶ Literally, "putting together the pieces under the forelegs (of foxes) to make robes." This part of the fox-skin is the most valuable for making fur clothes.

⁷ The work of a well-known writer, named Lin I-ch'ing, who flourished during the Sung Dynasty.

⁸ Alluding to an essay by Han Fei, a philosopher of the third century BC, in which he laments the iniquity of the age in general, and the corruption of officials in particular. He finally committed suicide in prison, where he had been cast by the intrigues of a rival minister.

⁹ Confucius (*Anal.* xiv) said, "Alas! there is no one who knows me (to be what I am)."

¹⁰ The great poet Tu Fu (AD 712–770) dreamt that his greater predecessor, Li T'ai-po (AD 705–762) appeared to him, "coming when the maple-grove was in darkness, and returning while the frontier-pass was still obscured;"—that is, at night, when no one could see him; the meaning being that he never came at all, and that those "who know me (P'u Sung-ling)" are equally non-existent.

多病長命不猶門庭之棲疢則冷以
 搔頭自念勿亦面壁人果是吾前身耶蓋有漏根因未結人天之果而隨
 風滿階竟成落溷之花茫茫六道何可謂無其理哉獨是子夜驚燈
 依欲茲蕭蕭瑟一寒冷疑冰集腋為裘安得幽冥之錄浮白載筆僅
 成孤憤之書寄托如此亦是悲笑嗟乎鷺霜寒雀抱樹無濕吊月秋
 偶烟自熱知我者其在青林黑塞間乎康熙己未春日

(P'u Sung-ling's own calligraphy)

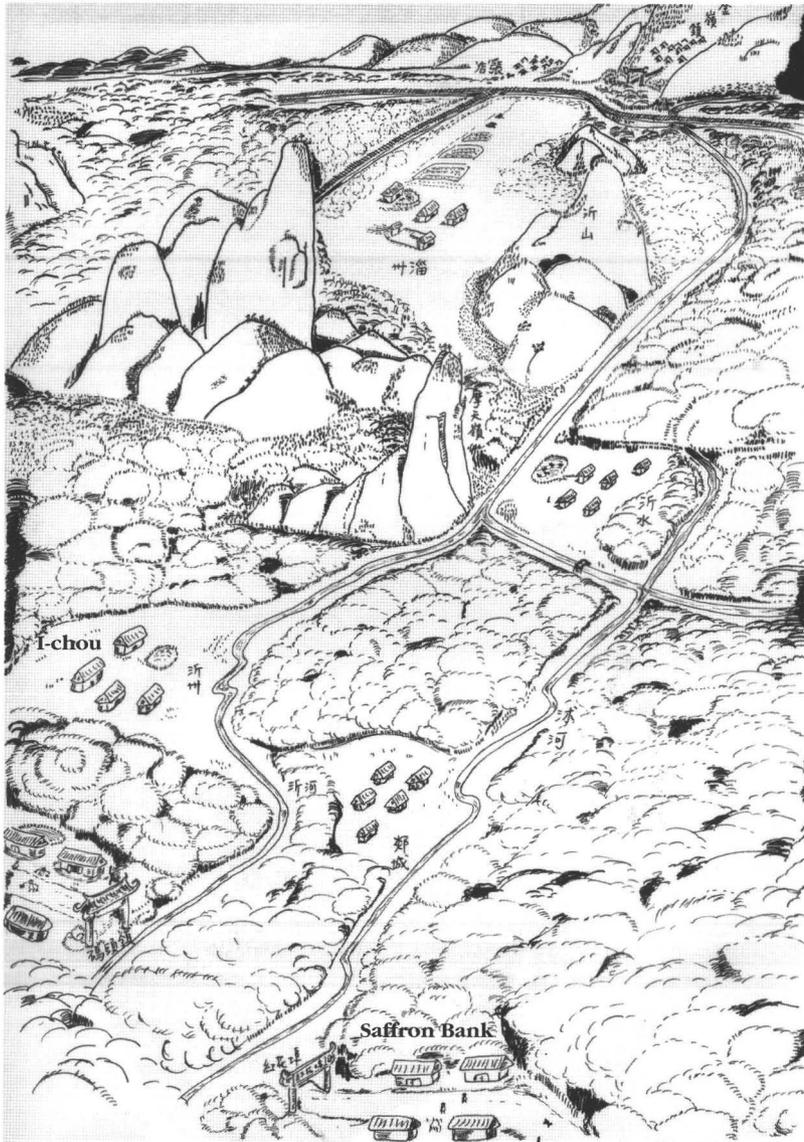
MISS LIEN-HSIANG, THE FOX-GIRL

by P'u Sung-ling

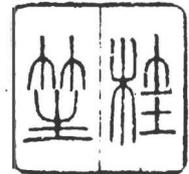


The FIRST PART

Section One



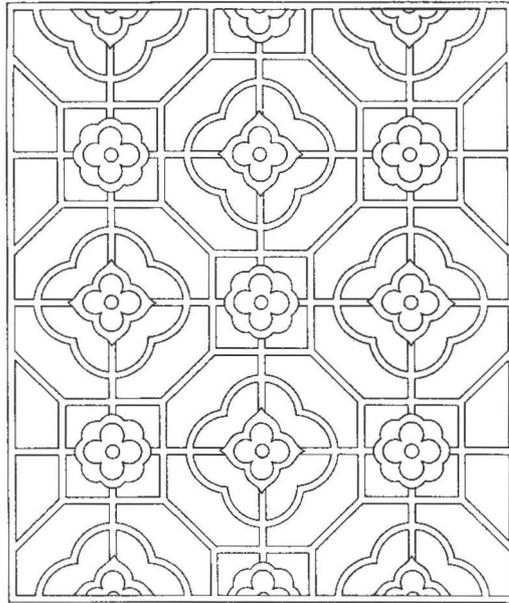
An imaginary modern reconstruction of the southern part of Shantung province, showing the relative positions of I-chou and Saffron Bank



Seals of Kao Ch'ang-han
高昌寒, from Preface to
Hsiang-chu Liao-chai chih-
i t'u-yong 詳注聊齋誌異
圖詠(1886)



Stone Ink Chamber
 石墨樓—seal carved by
 Huang I 黃易 (1744–
 1802) for Weng Fang-kang
 翁方綱 (1733–1818)



Sang Hsiao, a young scholar, brags to his neighbour that he is afraid of neither ghosts nor foxes. The neighbour plays a trick on him, sending a sing-song girl who knocks on Sang's door, pretending to be a ghost, and gives Sang the fright of his life.

There was a young man named Sang Tzu-ming, a native of I-chou, who had been left an orphan when quite young. He lived near the Saffron market [*Saffron Bank*], and kept himself very much to himself [*enjoyed his own company*], only going out twice a day for his meals to a neighbour's close by, and sitting quietly at home all the rest of his time. One day the said neighbour called, and asked him in joke [*jest*] if he wasn't afraid of devil-foxes [*ghosts and foxes*], so much alone as he was. "Oh," replied Sang, laughing, "what has the superior man¹ to fear from devil-foxes? If they come as men, I have here a sharp sword for them; and if as women, why, I shall open the door and ask them to walk in." The neighbour went away, and having arranged with a friend of his, they got a young lady of their acquaintance [*a sing-song girl*] to climb over Sang's wall with the help of a ladder, and knock [*tap with her fingers*] at the door. Sang peeped through, and called out, "Who's there?" to which the girl answered, "A devil [*ghost*!]" and frightened Sang so dreadfully that his teeth chattered in his head. The girl [*loitered*,] then ran away, and next morning when his neighbour came to see him [*in his studio*], Sang

Ghost and fox appear together, and all in jest, naturally, without the slightest trace of artifice. This scintillating text, with its strange transformations, proceeds entirely from the word jest. Jest, play, game. The essence of the writer's art lies in the conception, in the formation of the embryo. (Tan)

¹ The term constantly employed by Confucius to denote the man of perfect probity, learning, and refinement. The nearest, if not an exact, translation would be "gentleman." (Giles)

Writing is that play by which I turn around as well as I can in a narrow place. (Barthes)

Game 1: Enter the sing-song girl. (Tan)

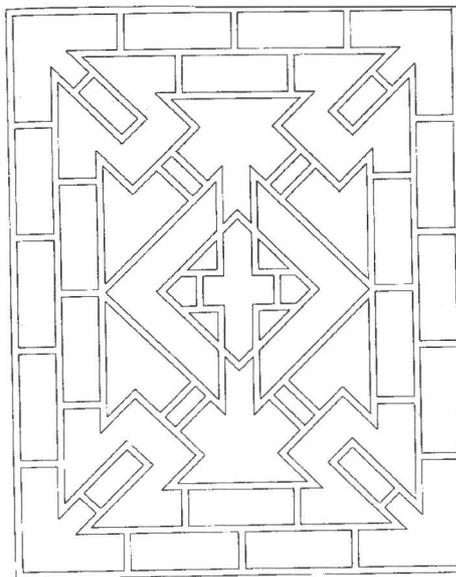
The studio, or *chai*, [is] a strictly elite male space. (Clunas)



Charm for the benefit of a soul under a spell (Doré)

A clever, roundabout way of preparing for the next scene. (Tan)

Six months later,
Lien-hsiang
knocks on Sang's
door, introducing
herself as a sing-
song girl. He
thinks it is his
neighbour up to his
tricks again and
lets her in. She
sleeps with him,
and continues to
visit him every
few days.



Buying Wine, Listening to
Fishermen's Songs
沽酒聽漁歌—seal carved
by Ho Chen 何震
(fl. 1626)

Game 2: Enter the fox (as a consequence of Game 1). (Tan)

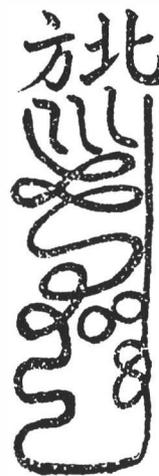
² Literally, "a young Lady whose beauty would overthrow a kingdom," in allusion to an old story which it is not necessary to reproduce here. (Giles)

Typical Giles, to drag Homer into his Chinese Studio! (TM)

The "real" sing-song girl has prepared us for Lien-hsiang. What subtle, tight writing! And Li's appearance is linked with Lien-hsiang's. This is the technique known as Linkage. The whole story repeatedly links ghost and fox. (Tan)

And a cup of tea no doubt ... (TM)

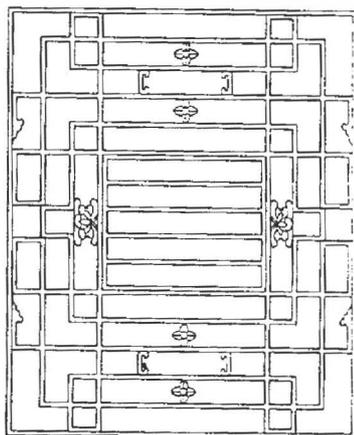
Some six months afterwards, a young lady [came during the night and] knocked at his door; and Sang, thinking his friends were at their old tricks, opened it at once, and asked her to walk in. She did so; and he beheld to his astonishment a perfect Helen for beauty.² Asking her whence she came, she replied that her name was Lien-hsiang, and that she lived not very far off, adding that she had long been anxious to make his acquaintance [she was a sing-song girl from the western part of town. There were many sing-song houses in the town, so he believed her. They put out the lamp and went to bed, spending a joyful night together]. After that she used to drop in every now and again for a chat.



Charm suspended facing
the North (Doré)



Tree Shadow Brushes the Window 樹影搖窗—seal carved by Ho Chen



One evening, a young girl of fifteen or sixteen wanders into Sang's room, and from her manner and appearance Sang suspects that she may be a fox-girl. She introduces herself as a local girl of good family, named Miss Li. She too ends up sleeping with him. When she goes, she leaves behind her embroidered slipper, telling him that he can think of it as if it is her. From then on whenever he takes out the slipper she appears before him.

But one evening when Sang was sitting alone expecting her [*lost in thought*], another young lady suddenly walked in [*came flitting in*]. Thinking it was Lien-hsiang, Sang got up to meet her, but found that the new-comer was somebody else. She was about fifteen or sixteen years of age, wore very full sleeves, and dressed her hair [loosely] after the fashion of unmarried girls, being otherwise very stylish-looking and refined, and apparently hesitating whether to go on or go back [*She had a graceful, sensuous manner and drifted across the room*]. Sang, in a great state of alarm, took her for a fox; but the young lady said, "My name is Li, and I am of a respectable family. Hearing of your virtue and talent, I hope to be accorded the honour of your acquaintance." Sang laughed, and took her by hand, which he found was as cold as ice; and when he asked the reason, she told him that she had always been delicate, and that it was very chilly outside. She then remarked that she intended to visit him pretty frequently, and hoped it would not inconvenience him; [*Then her silken robe was unloosed. In truth he found her to be a virgin. "Our love is fated," she said. "For this, I have given you the flower of my virginity. If you do not think me unworthy, I will gladly stay with you for ever and share your bed. Do you have another lover?"*] so he explained that no one came to see him except another young lady [*a sing-song girl of the neighbour-*

Game 3: Enter the ghost (as a consequence of Game 2). (Tan)

"Flitting in": *entra avec beaucoup de grâce.* (Pavillon des Loisirs)

"Drifted across the room": *une silhouette gracieuse et lascive, une démarche si légère qu'elle semblait flotter.* (Pavillon des Loisirs)

Giles' Dictionary, under 枕, has 枕伴, which he explains as "a bed-fellow." Also 枕席難安, which he explains as "unable to rest peaceably in his bed." He understood perfectly well the meaning of the words he chose to omit. (TM)

"In a single second I have thrown away my body, precious as a thousand pieces of gold. My body and my life I entrust to you forever. May you never disdain me in the future and make me lament my white hairs." (West Chamber, IV.1)

Constantly interwoven, this double thread winds its way through the work, like a rosary or a jade bracelet. (Tan)



Charm suspended facing the South (Doré)

The shoe in which the tiny foot was encased flirtatiously suggested concealment, mystery, and boudoir pleasures. Well-to-do ladies took pride in their small and well-proportioned “golden lotuses,” designed shoes for them of crimson silk, and wore especially attractive models when preparing for bed. The sleeping shoes, scarlet in hue, were intended to heighten male desire through a striking colour contrast with the white skin of the beloved. These shoes were greatly prized and sought after as love tokens. A woman might secretly give them to her enamoured as proof of love sentiments. (Levy)

“Bodkin”: A wonderful description. (Feng)

Comme flottant sur le vent. (Pavillon des Loisirs)

May this red satin shoe, my love,
Worn only once,
Resolve your lonely melancholy.
Place it under your bedcovers,
Caress it to your heart's desire.
Enjoy it in my absence.
When will it rejoin its mate?
When we are as one.
(Fang Hsun, eighteenth century, trans. Levy)

hood], and that not very often. “[I must keep well away from her. I'm not that kind of girl. You must keep our secret.] When she comes, I'll go,” replied the young lady, “and only drop in when she's not here.” [The cock crowed and as she left,] She then gave him an embroidered slipper, saying that she had worn it [it was something that had touched the lowest part of her body], and that whenever he shook it [fondled it] she would know that he wanted to see her, cautioning him at the same time never to shake [touch] it before strangers. Taking it in his hand he beheld a very tiny little shoe almost as fine-pointed as an awl [a bodkin for unpicking knots], with which he was much pleased; and next evening, when nobody was present, he produced the shoe and shook [fondled] it, whereupon the young lady immediately walked in [as if from nowhere, and they embraced]. Henceforth, whenever he brought it out, the young lady responded to his wishes and appeared before him. This seemed so strange that at last he asked her to give him some explanation; but she only laughed, and said it was mere coincidence.

SECTION TWO

The alchemist-adept (in a seventeenth-century illustration) nurtures his three interlinked primary vitalities. The primary essence changes (by the wear and tear of emotions) into the seminal essence of sexual intercourse, the primary energy changes into the breathing of respiration, and the primary spirit is “sicklied over by the pale cast of thought.” (Sun I-k'ui, sixteenth century, The Mysterious Pearl of the Red River, translated by Needham)



東方
出
現

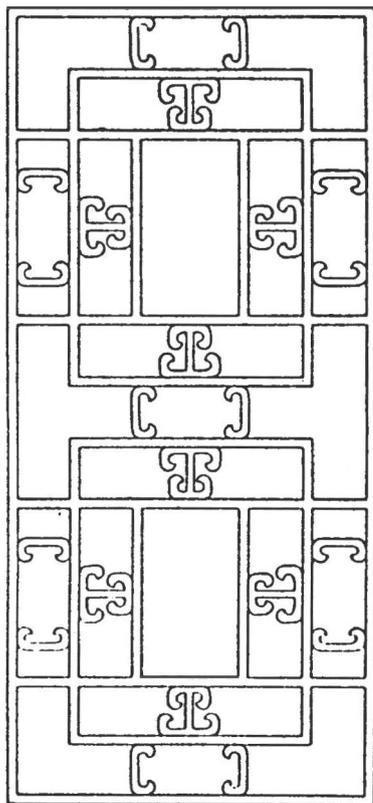
Charm suspended facing the East (Doré)

西方
出
現

Charm suspended facing the West (Doré)



Snow Studio 雪齋—seal
carved by Ho Chen



One night Lien-hsiang appears and comments on Sang's pale, sickly appearance. She goes away for ten days, during which time Miss Li visits him every night. They talk about Lien-hsiang, and Miss Li, feeling somewhat jealous of the other girl's beauty, tells Sang she wants to observe her.



Charm for curing all kinds
of heart trouble,
headaches, and inveterate
dyspepsy (Doré)

One evening after this Lien-hsiang came, and said in alarm to Sang, “Whatever has made you look so melancholy?” [“You look dreadful! What’s the matter?”] Sang replied that he did not know, and by-and-by she took her leave, saying they would not meet again for some ten days. During this period Miss Li visited Sang every day, and on one occasion asked him where his other friend [lover] was. Sang told her, and then she laughed and said, “What is your opinion of me as compared with Lien-hsiang? [Which of us is more beautiful?”] “You are both of you perfection,” replied he, “but you are a little *colder* of the two.” Miss Li didn’t much like this, and cried out, “*Both of us perfection* is what you say to me. Then she must be a downright Cynthia,³ and I am no match for her.” Somewhat out of temper, she reckoned that Lien-hsiang’s ten days had expired, and said she would have a peep at her, making Sang promise to keep it all secret.

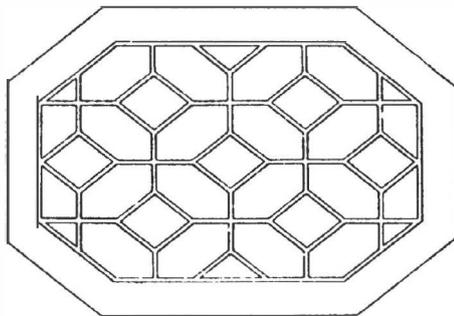
With the ‘peeping’, the author brings ghost and fox into clear focus: with the ‘beauty contest’, he makes way for the ‘peeping’. Subtle. (Tan)

³ The Lady of the Moon: The beautiful wife of a legendary chieftain, named Hou I, who flourished about 2,500 BC. She is said to have stolen from her husband the elixir of immortality, and to have fled with it to the moon. (Giles)

Words of jealousy spoken with such charm!
(Tan)

Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis,
Contactum nullis ante cupidinibus. Ah! woe
is me! ’twas Cynthia first ensnared me with
her eyes; till then my heart had felt no
passion’s fire. (Propertius)

The ten days are over, and Lien-hsiang returns. She tells Sang that he is possessed by a ghost. For her part, Miss Li, who has been peeping at her, tells Sang that Lien-hsiang is a fox, but Sang refuses to believe her.



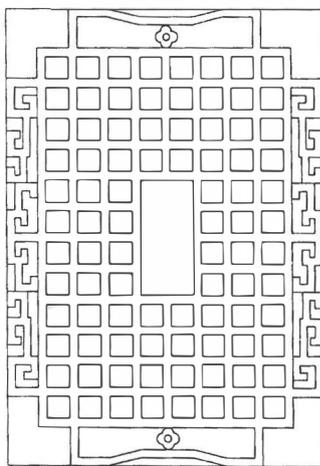
Beautiful Person, Fragrant Grass 美人香草—(Ch'ing dynasty seal, in imitation of Ho Chen)

When a fox is fifty years old, it acquires the ability to change itself into a woman. At a hundred it can assume the shape of a beautiful girl, or that of a sorcerer, or also that of an adult man who has sexual intercourse with women. At that age the fox knows what is happening at a distance of a thousand miles, it can derange the human mind and reduce a person to an imbecile. (Van Gulik)

⁴ Volumes have been written by Chinese doctors on the subject of the pulse. They profess to distinguish as many as twenty-four different kinds, among which is one well known to our own practitioners, namely, the "thready" pulse; they, moreover, make a point of feeling the pulses of both wrists. (Giles)

'Fairy-taken' was a way of describing someone who has been blasted, haunted or bewitched. The very word 'fairy' was itself used to convey the idea of a malignant disease of spiritual origin which could be cured only by charming or exorcism. (Thomas)

Sang tells Lien-hsiang that someone suspects her of being a fox. She protests that foxes do not necessarily harm humans. She guesses that it is Miss Li who suspects her. She secretly observes Miss Li, and tells Sang that she is a ghost. He refuses to believe her. Lien-hsiang looks after him and gives him medicine.



The next evening Lien-hsiang came, and while they were talking [they talked and laughed together gaily. When they went to bed,] she suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, dear! How much worse you seem to have become in the last ten days. You must have encountered something bad." Sang asked her why so; to which she answered, "First of all your appearance; and then your pulse is very thready.⁴ You've got the devil-disease [the symptoms of ghost possession]." The following evening when Miss Li came, Sang asked her what she thought of Lien-hsiang. "Oh," said she, "there's no question about her beauty; but she's a fox. When she went away I followed her to her hole on the hill-side." Sang, however, attributed this remark to jealousy, and took no notice of it.



Demon-expelling charm employed by Taoists (Doré)



True Joy 真樂—(Ming dynasty seal)

But the next evening when Lien-hsiang came, he observed, "I don't believe it myself, but some

A vertical calligraphic charm consisting of several characters in a highly stylized, expressive cursive script. The characters are arranged from top to bottom, with varying line thickness and fluid connections between them.

*Charm for dispelling
sadness and anxiety which
prey on the sick (Doré)*

A vertical calligraphic charm consisting of several characters in a highly stylized, expressive cursive script. The characters are arranged from top to bottom, with varying line thickness and fluid connections between them.

*Charm for curing
diarrhoea (Doré)*

one has told me you are a fox." Lien-hsiang asked who had said so, to which Sang replied that he was only joking; and then she begged him to explain what difference there was between a fox and an ordinary person. "Well," answered Sang, "foxes frighten people to death [*men who are bewitched by foxes fall ill, and even die*], and, therefore, they are very much dreaded." "Don't you believe that! [*A young man like you has his essence and energy restored three days after the act of love. Even a fox cannot harm you. But if you indulge yourself day after day, a human lover can do you more harm than a fox. You cannot blame every consumption and every death on foxes!*]" cried Lien-hsiang; "and now tell me who has been saying this of me." Sang declared at first that it was only a joke of his, but by-and-by yielded to her instances, and let out the whole story. "Of course I saw how changed you were," said Lien-hsiang; "she is surely not a human being to be able to cause such a rapid alteration in you. Say nothing; tomorrow I'll watch her as she watched me." The following evening Miss Li came in; and they had hardly interchanged half a dozen sentences when a cough was heard outside the window, and Miss Li ran away. Lien-hsiang then entered and said to Sang, "You are lost! She is a devil, and if you [*allow yourself to be besotted with her beauty, and*] do not at once forbid her coming here, you will soon be on the road to the other world." "All jealousy," thought Sang, saying nothing, as Lien-hsiang continued, "I know that you don't like to be rude to [*break with*] her; but I, for my part, cannot see you sacrificed, and tomorrow I will bring you some medicine to expel the poison from your system. Happily, the disease has not yet taken firm hold of you, and in ten days you will be well again. [*Let me sleep by your side and nurse you until you are cured.*]" The next evening she produced a knife and chopped up some medicine for Sang, which made him feel much better; [*The next evening she brought a small amount of medicine and gave it to Sang. It immediately brought on two or three bouts of*

In the main the fox has always been an erotic symbol, and for about two thousand years it has been associated with venereal diseases. Hundreds of stories tell how a ravishingly beautiful girl appears one night to a young scholar while he is studying, and how he makes love to her. She disappears in the early morning but comes back each evening. The scholar gets weaker and weaker—until a Taoist informs him that the girl is really a fox which is sucking him dry in order to imbibe the essence of immortality. Stories like this are confirmed to North China, to such Palaeo-Asiatic tribes as the Orok and the Gilyak, and to Korea and Japan. They are not found South of the Yang Tze. (Eberhard)

Wise counsel! The young should take heed of this! (Feng)

Of women's unnatural, insatiable lust, what country, what village doth not complain. (Burton)

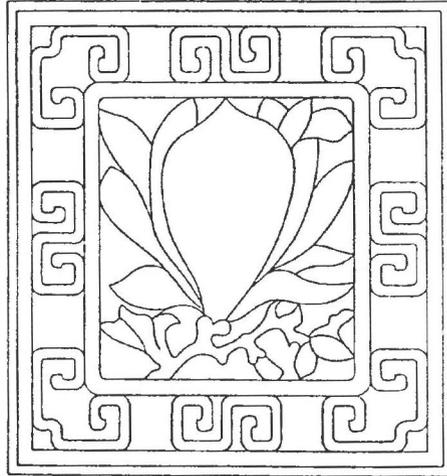
The fox, in China, is a fairy beast with wonderful powers of transformation, and the fear of those animals, who are often malicious, is wide-spread. People especially dread were-foxes who take the form of beautiful young women ... Father Mullin, in *Cheerful China*, speaks of a shrine in Shantung of peculiar structure, with an opening so narrow that worshippers were obliged to crawl in and out on their hands and knees. Tiny women's shoes were given as offerings ... The shrine was built over a spot where foxes were supposed formerly to have had their den. (Bredon)

Falstaff: They are fairies; he that speaks to them shall die. (Shakespeare)

He knows that she is a ghost; but he won't believe it. (Tan)

Lien-hsiang asks Sang to break with Miss Li once and for all. But he cannot bring himself to do so. He tells Miss Li what Lien-hsiang has said about her, which angers her, and she threatens to leave him unless he breaks with the wanton fox!

diarrhoea, after which he felt purged and light, and his spirits were revived.] but, although he was very grateful to her, he still persisted in disbelieving that he had the devil-disease [that Miss Li was a ghost].



Where in the Human World Is There Such a Realm? 人間何處有此境—seal carved by Wu Tzu 吳咨 (1813–58)

In reading these stories, if you read them properly, they will make you strong and brave; if you read them in the wrong way, they will possess you. Cling onto the details, and they will possess you; grasp the spirit, and you will be strong.

Appreciate the wonders of the style; see into the author's subtle intentions; grasp the human qualities of his characters; value his thoughts; then this book will be a unique guide to you in your own inner development. It will transform your character, and it will purify your heart. (Feng)

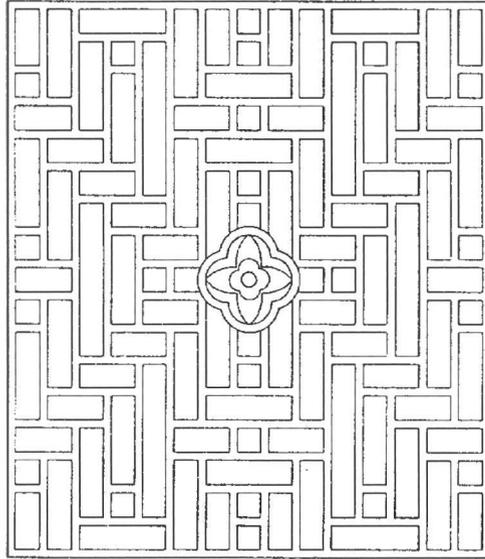
[Lien-hsiang slept close by his side every night, but whenever he wished to embrace her, she rejected him.] After some days he recovered [and began to put on some weight] and Lien-hsiang left him, warning him [earnestly beseeching him] to have no more to do with Miss Li. Sang pretended that he would follow her advice, and closed the door and trimmed his lamp. He then took out the slipper, and on shaking it Miss Li appeared, somewhat cross [resentful] at having been kept away for several days. “She merely attended on me [healed me with charms and medicines] these few nights while I was ill,” said Sang; “don't be angry [with her. It's for me to say whom I love].” At this Miss Li brightened up a little; but by-and-by Sang [in the course of an intimate conversation] told her that [he loved her deeply, but that certain] people said she was a devil. “It's that nasty [wanton] fox,” cried Miss Li, after a pause, “putting these things into your head. If you don't break with her, I won't come here again.” She then began to sob and cry, and Sang had some trouble in pacifying her.



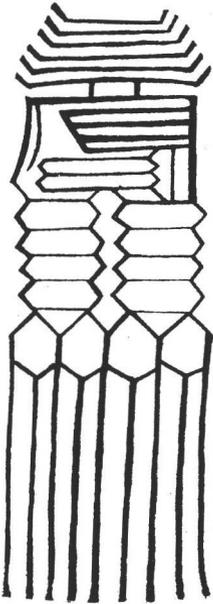
A tonic for dispelling sadness and anxiety in the sick (Doré)



Petal Fragrance 瓣香—
seal carved by Chang
T'ing-chi 張廷濟 (early
eighteenth century)



Lien-hsiang
knows that Miss
Li is still
visiting Sang.
She is angry,
and leaves him.
Sang now spends
every night with
Miss Li over a
period of two
months, and
becomes more
and more
debilitated.
He begins to
suspect her, and
to regret not
having heeded
Lien-hsiang's
advice.



Written charm begging a
happy rebirth (Doré)

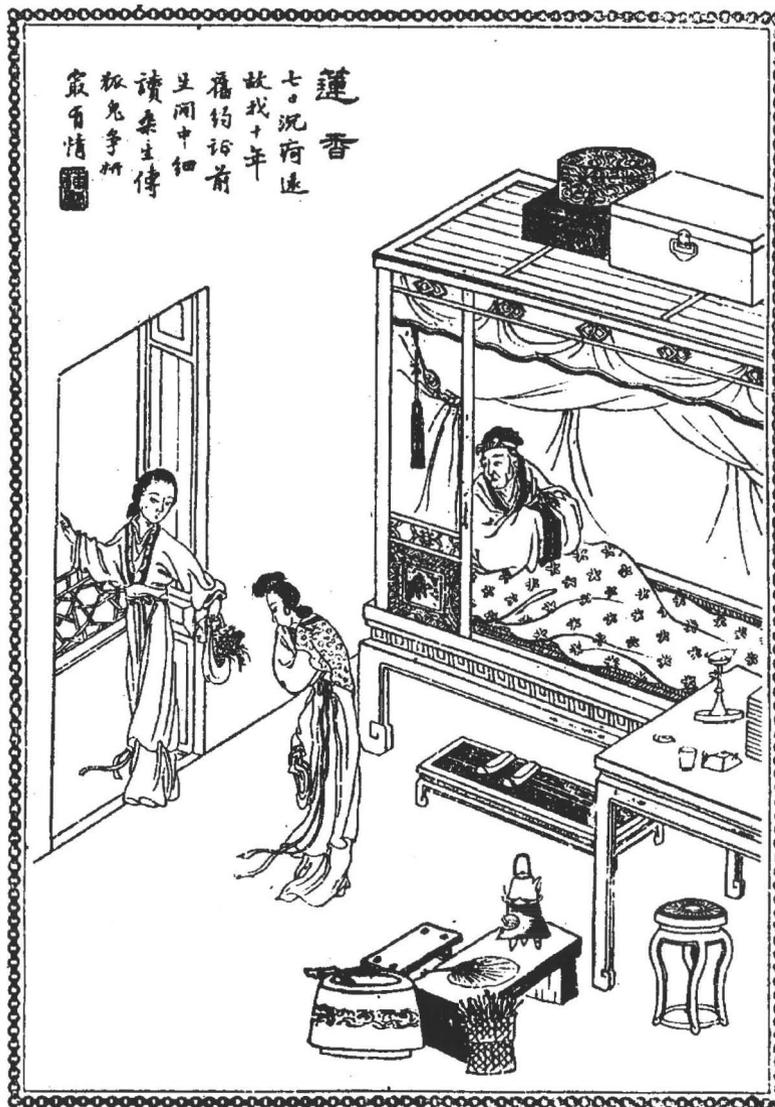
Next evening Lien-hsiang came and found out that Miss Li had been there again; whereupon she was very angry with Sang, and told him he would certainly die. "Why need you be so jealous?" said Sang, laughing; at which she only got more enraged, and replied, "When you were nearly dying the other day and I saved you, if I had not been jealous, where would you have been now?" Sang pretended he was only joking, and said that Miss Li had told him his recent illness was entirely owing to the machinations of a fox; to which she replied, "It's true enough what you say, only you don't see *whose* machinations. However, if anything happens to you, I should never clear myself even had I a hundred mouths; we will, therefore, part. A hundred days hence I shall see you on your bed." Sang could not persuade her to stay, and away she went [*angrily*]; and from that time Miss Li became a regular visitor [*nighly companion*]. Two months passed away, and Sang began to experience a feeling of great lassitude, which he tried at first to shake off, but by-and-by he became very thin, and could only take thick gruel. He then thought about going back to his native place; however, he could not bear to leave Miss Li, and in a few more days he was so weak that he was unable

The Elected Girl asked: "How do incubi originate?" P'eng-tzu answered: "If a person has an unbalanced sex life, his sexual desire will increase. Devils and goblins take advantage of this condition. They assume human shape and have sexual intercourse with such a person. They are much more skilled in this art than human beings, so much so that their victim becomes completely enamoured of the ghostly lover. These persons will keep the relation secret and will not speak about its delights. In the end they succumb alone, without anyone being the wiser. During sexual intercourse with such an incubus one will experience a pleasure that is greater than ever felt while copulating with an ordinary human being. But at the same time one will become subject to this disease which is difficult to cure. (*Secret Instructions*)

The inordinate love of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (the compendium on witchcraft compiled by two Dominican Inquisitors in 1486), from which men pine away and die. (Duffy)

to get up. His friend next door, seeing how ill he was, daily sent in his boy with food and drink; and now Sang began for the first time to suspect Miss Li. So he said to her, "I am sorry I didn't listen to Lien-hsiang before I got as bad as this." He then closed his eyes and kept them shut for some time; and when he opened them again Miss Li had disappeared. Their acquaintanceship was thus at an end.

Section Three



靈鳳書

*Charm for curing
persistent stomach-aches
(Doré)*

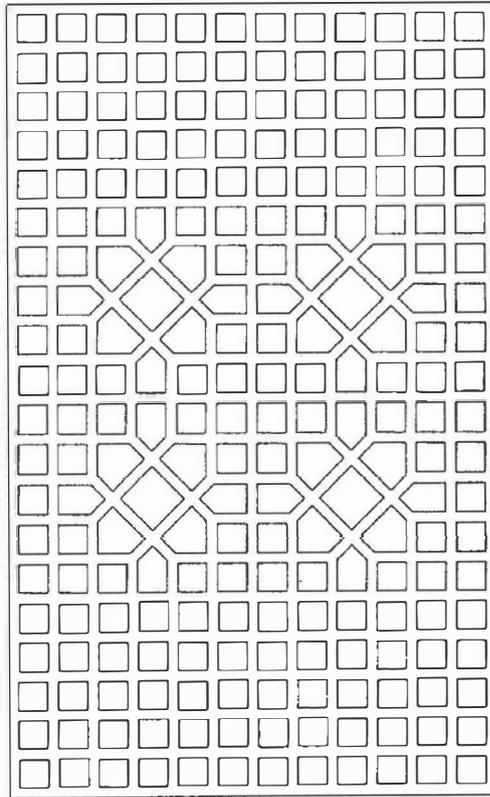
Illustration from Hsiang-chu Liao-chai chih-i t'u-yong. "When she saw Lien-hsiang she turned back as though she would run away, which Lien-hsiang instantly prevented by placing herself in the doorway"



Enquiring of my Heart's
Desire 自問心如何—seal
carved by Ch'en Hung-sbou
陳鴻壽 (1768–1822)



Charm protecting from
malevolent ghosts (Doré)



Sang lay all emaciated as he was upon his bed in his solitary room longing for the return of Lien-hsiang [as a farmer longs for the harvest]. One day, while he was still thinking about her, some one drew aside the screen and walked in. It was Lien-hsiang; and approaching the bed she said with a smile, "[You silly fellow!] Was I then talking such nonsense?" Sang struggled a long time to speak [sobbed a long while]; and, at length, confessing he had been wrong, implored her to save him. "When the disease has reached such a pitch as this," replied Lien-hsiang, "there is very little to be done. I merely came to bid you farewell, and to clear up your doubts about my jealousy." In great tribulation, Sang asked her to take something she would find under his pillow and destroy it; and she accordingly drew forth the slipper, which she proceeded to examine by the light of the lamp, turning it over and over. All

Lien-hsiang comes back and toys with the slipper, whereupon Miss Li appears. They have a long and almost metaphysical conversation about foxes, ghosts and humans, in the course of which Miss Li tells the story of her life, and as a result of which they both agree that Sang's illness has been caused by his frequent couplings with Miss Li.

Four young men were on a hunting trip and spent the night in an empty shieling, a hut built to give shelter for the sheep in the grazing season. They began to dance, one supplying mouth-music. One of the dancers wished that they had partners. Almost at once four women came in. Three danced, the fourth stood by the music-maker. But as he hummed he saw drops of blood falling from the dancers and he fled out of the shieling, pursued by his demon partner. He took refuge among the horses and she could not get to him, probably because of the iron with which they were shod. But she circled round him all night, and only disappeared when the sun rose. He went back into the shieling and found the bloodless bodies of the dancers lying there. Their partners had sucked them dry. (Briggs)

"When out of all my bones she had sucked the marrow." (Baudelaire)

I had observed that intercourse with women distinctly aggravated my health. (Rousseau)

A woman who has learned this secret [of nursing her own potency by absorbing the man's Yang] will feed on her copulations with men, so that she will prolong her span of life and not grow old, but always remain like a young girl. (*Secret Instructions*)

These four words, "Turn love into hate," constitute a veritable Book of Life. (Feng)

此譯句深得吾心。(閔)

It is true that she had no intention of doing so; but with even the best intentions, love can lead to illness and death. Unbridled lust can kill even in a harmonious marriage. (Tan)

⁵ Miss Lien-hsiang was here speaking without book, as will be seen in a story later on. (Giles)

⁶ The female principle. In a properly-constituted human being the male and female principles are harmoniously combined. Nothing short of a small volume would place this subject, the basis of Chinese metaphysics, in a clear light before the uninitiated reader. Broadly speaking, the yin and the yang are the two primeval forces from the inter-action of which all things have been evolved. (Giles)

Originally neither foxes nor ghosts hurt mortals; mortals hurt themselves. (Tan)

This sums up the entire preceding section. It also harks back to the original "jest." (Tan)

Possession can be of three types: by ill-disposed human spirits, by demons and by elementals. However, possession can only take place if the vibration of the victim is identical with its own [i.e. that of the "possessor"]. In other words, the person must himself have a predisposition to hurt. (Wilson)

at once Miss Li walked in, but when she saw Lien-hsiang she turned back as though she would run away, which Lien-hsiang instantly prevented by placing herself in the doorway. Sang then began to reproach her, and Miss Li could make no reply; whereupon Lien-hsiang said, "At last we meet. Formerly you attributed this gentleman's illness to me; what have you to say now?" Miss Li bent her head in acknowledgment of her guilt, and Lien-hsiang continued, "How is it that a nice girl like you can thus turn love into hate?" Here Miss Li threw herself on the ground in a flood of tears and begged for mercy; and Lien-hsiang, raising her up, inquired of her as to her past life. "I am a daughter of a petty official named Li, and I died young, and was buried outside the wall [*of this house*], leaving the web of my destiny incomplete, like the silkworm that perishes in the spring. To be the partner of this gentleman was my ardent wish; but I had never any intention of causing his death." "I have heard," remarked Lien-hsiang, "that the advantage devils obtain by killing people is that their victims are ever with them after death. Is this so?" "It is not," replied Miss Li; "the companionship of two devils gives no pleasure to either. Were it otherwise, I should not have wanted for friends [*young men*] in the realms below. [*"How foolish you are!" said Lien-hsiang, "To couple night after night with a human is too much for any mortal. How much more so must it be with a ghost!"*] But tell me, [*asked Miss Li,*] how do foxes manage not to kill people [*Foxes can cause men to die; by what skill are you able to avoid doing so?*]" "You allude to such foxes as suck the breath out of people?" replied Lien-hsiang; "I am not of that class.⁵ Some foxes are harmless; no devils are, because of the dominance of the *yin*⁶ in their compositions." Sang now knew that these two girls were really a fox and a devil; however, from being long accustomed to their society, he was not in the least alarmed. His breathing had dwindled to a mere thread, and at length he uttered a cry of pain.

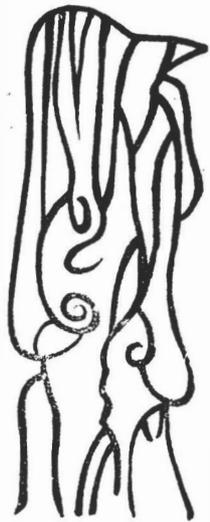


Certificate of good conduct sent to the ruler of Hades
(Doré)

SECTION FOUR

龍 虎 交 媾 圖

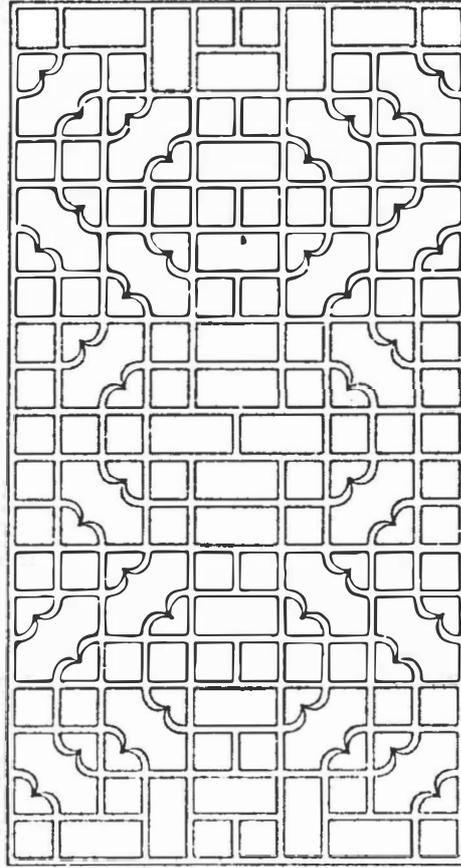
白面郎君騎白虎
青衣女下跨青龍
鉛汞鼎邊相見後
一時閑鎖在其中



Passport for wandering souls on the way to Hades (Doré)

Intercourse of dragon and tiger, Yang and Yin, fused in the alchemical cauldron (Chin-tan ta-yao t'u 金丹大要圖, 1333)

The two of them
are able to cure
Sang of his
Venereal
Consumption
by jointly
administering
a powerful pill,
using a novel kind
of mouth-to-mouth
resuscitation. They
find a common
bond in their love
for Sang, and begin
to feel a deep
sisterly affection
for each other.



Seeking Tidings from the
Plum-Flower Blossom
問梅消息—seal carved by
Ch'en Hung-shou

Giles' Dictionary, under 衽, has 端肅斂衽, which, with his usual precision, he explains as follows: "I respectfully salute you,—said by a woman. This salutation, made by bringing the sleeves together in front of the body, the right hand grasping the left sleeve, accompanied by a bow, corresponds to the 作揖 of a man." (TM)

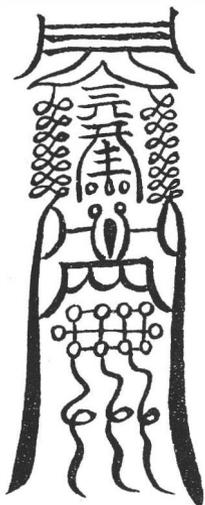
Lien-hsiang looked round and said, "How shall we cure him?" upon which Miss Li blushed deeply and drew back; and then Lien-hsiang [smiled and] added, "If he does get well, I'm afraid you will be dreadfully jealous." Miss Li drew herself up, and replied, "Could a physician be found to wipe away the wrong I have done to this gentleman, I would bury my head in the ground. How should I look the world in the face?" Lien-hsiang here opened a bag and drew forth some drugs, saying, "I have been looking forward to this day. When I left this gentleman I proceeded to gather my simples [on the mountains], as it would take three months for the medicine to be got ready; but then, should the poison [Venereal Consumption] have brought



Anti-delirium charm
(Doré)



Charm curing from an extraordinary or unknown disease (Doré)



Exorcising charm burnt during the ceremony of the "general rescue" (Doré)

anyone even to death's door, this medicine is able to call him back. The only condition is that it be administered by the very hand which wrought the ill [But the cure must come from the very source of the illness. It must come from you]. "Miss Li did as she was told, and put the pills Lien-hsiang gave her one after another into Sang's mouth. They burnt his inside like fire; but soon vitality began to return, and Lien-hsiang cried out, "He is cured!" [Miss Li asked what was necessary. "Just a little saliva from your pretty mouth," replied Lien-hsiang. "When I put in one of the pills, please press your lips to his and let the saliva pass into his mouth." Miss Li blushed, lowered her head and looked at her shoes. Lien-hsiang joked with her: "Still looking at your pretty shoes!" Miss Li was more embarrassed than ever, and looked up and down, not knowing where to hide. Lien-hsiang said to her: "This is an art you have practised many a time, why are you suddenly being so coy?" Lien-hsiang took the pill and held it to Sang's lips, then turned to Li and urged her to proceed. Reluctantly Li did as she had been told, put her lips to Sang's, and moistened the pill. "Again!" said Lien-hsiang, and again she did it. Three or four times she repeated the act, before the pill would go down. In a little while, his belly began to rumble like thunder. Lien-hsiang placed another pill in between his lips and this time she herself pressed her lips to his and projected her own vital force into him. He felt his Cinnabar Field, the very centre of his being, take fire, and his spirit quicken. "He is cured!" said Lien-hsiang.] Just at this moment Miss Li heard the cock crow [and she hesitated] and vanished,⁷ Lien-hsiang remaining behind in attendance on the invalid, who was unable to feed himself. She bolted the outside door and pretended that Sang had returned to his native place, so as to prevent visitors from calling. Day and night she took care of him, and every evening Miss Li came in to render assistance, regarding Lien-hsiang as an elder sister, and being treated by her with great consideration and kindness [affection].

The venereal disease is always produced by a poison When it is suffered to take its own course, and not counteracted by proper remedies, the patient will, in the course of time, be affected with severe pains, but more particularly in the night-time; his countenance will become sallow, his hair will fall off, he will lose his appetite, strength, and flesh, his rest will be much disturbed at night, and a small fever of the hectic kind will arise. (Hooper)

"Hand" 一字乃 Giles 暗藏之玄機，為其改寫之伏筆。（文）

The physiological alchemists were of the opinion that the spitting out of saliva involved a dangerous loss of vitality from the body, and they greatly emphasized therefore the necessity of its conservation—indeed the Yang Qi within it formed one of the essential ingredients for the inner elaboration of the enchymoma, the Inner Cinnabar. (Needham)

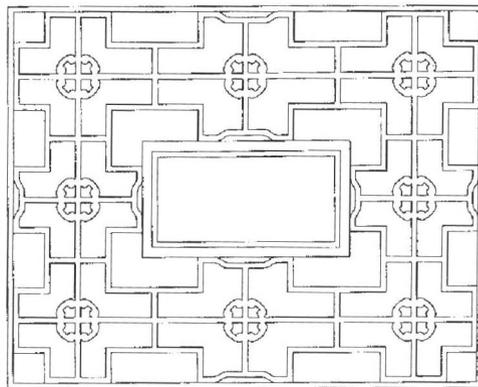
There are vampires and vampires, and not all of them suck blood. (Leiber)

Insufflation, or "symbolic breathing"; blowing or breathing upon a person or thing to symbolize the influence of the Holy Spirit and the expulsion of evil spirits; a rite of exorcism used in the Roman, Greek and some other churches. (Oxford English Dictionary)

⁷ Ber.—It was about to speak, when the cock crew.
Hor.—And then it started like a guilty thing
Upon a fearful summons. I have heard,
The cock, that is, the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the God of Day; and, at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
The extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine. —Hamlet. (Giles)

Only among women, those specialists in romantic friendship, is vampirism embodied in a physical, psychic union which the experts of the next century would label "homosexual." (Auerbach)

Miss Li
succumbs to
a deep sense
of remorse
and vanishes.
They both
feel her
absence
strongly.



Feeding on the Fallen
Splendour of the Autumn
Chrysanthemum
餐秋菊之落英—seal
carved by Yüan Teng-tao
袁登道 (late Ming)

What attracted me [in the *Liao-chai* stories] was something I did not find so fully expressed in similar tales of any other people: an air of intimacy and harmony. Here demons are loved and possessed by humans, humans by demons, but they who come to court us or touch us are neither incubi nor succubi, wavering presences from a dreadful other world, but rather beings of our own world, merely arising from a deeper, darker region. The Chinese avoid all mystifying, shattering horror; instead, we have the magic of the lucid. Here the order of nature is not ruptured but extended; nothing interferes with the plenitude of life, and everything living carries the seed of the ghostly. (Buber)

Three months afterwards Sang was as strong and well as ever he had been, and then for several evenings Miss Li ceased to visit them, only staying a few moments when she did come, and seeming very uneasy in her mind [very downcast]. [*Lien-hsiang often invited her to stay the night with her, but she always refused.*] One evening Sang ran after her and carried her back in his arms, finding her no heavier than so much straw [a straw burial-figure]; and then, being obliged to stay, she curled herself up [*until she seemed only two feet long*] and lay down, to all appearance in a state of unconsciousness, and by-and-by she was gone. [*Lien-hsiang felt an ever greater affection for her. She secretly told Sang to make love to her, and he began rocking her backwards and forwards, but she did not awaken. Sang himself fell asleep, and when he awake, he felt for her, but she had vanished.*] For many days they heard nothing of her, and Sang was so anxious that she should come back that he often took out her slipper and shook [fondled] it. “[*She is such a sweet, pretty creature.*] I don’t wonder at your missing her,” said Lien-hsiang, “I do myself very much indeed.” “Formerly,” observed Sang, “when I shook [fondled] the slipper she invariably came. I thought it was very strange, but I never suspected her of being a devil. And now, alas! All I can do is to sit and think about her with this slipper in my hand.” He then burst into a flood of tears.



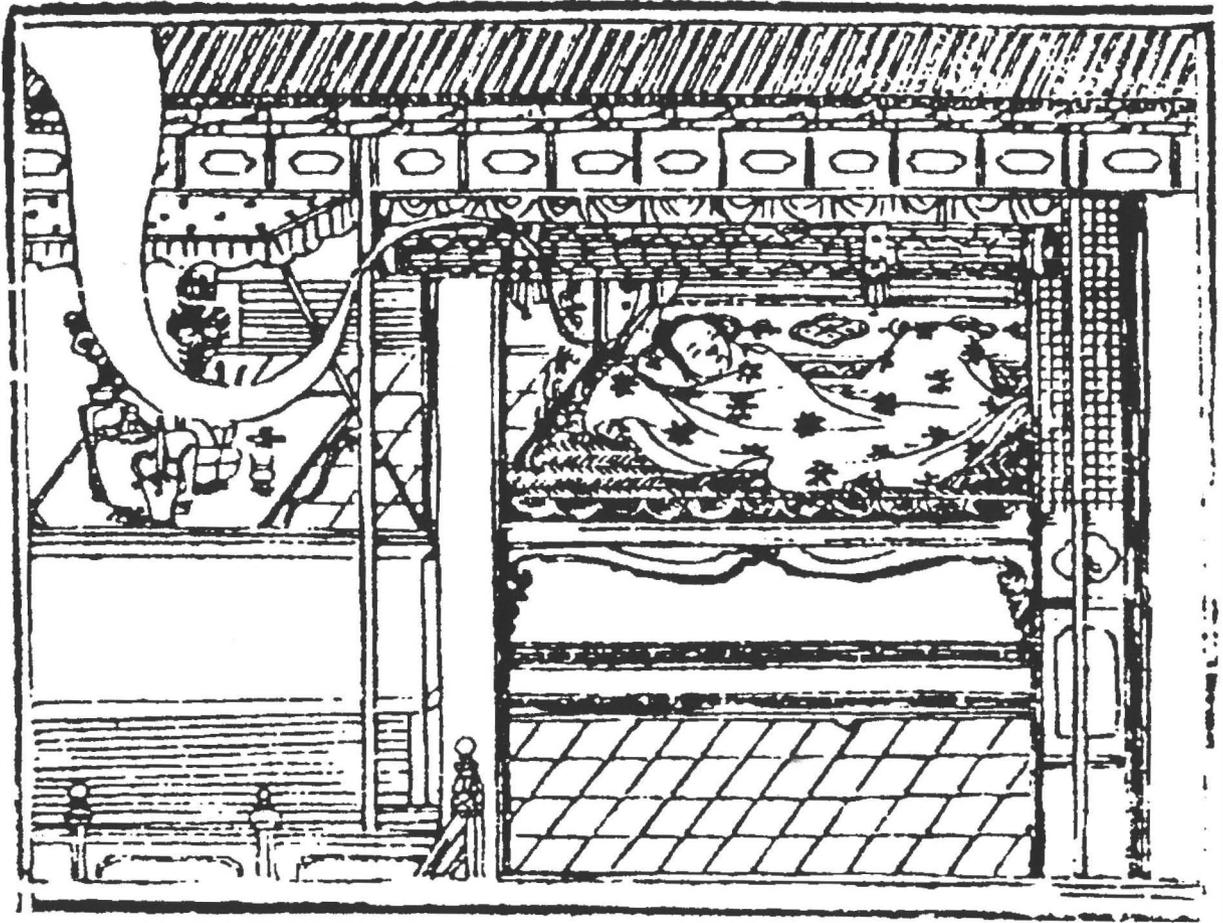
Charm for curing excessive
throbbing of the heart
(Doré)



*One Smile and All Cares
Are Forgotten 一笑百
慮忘—seal carved by
Huang I*

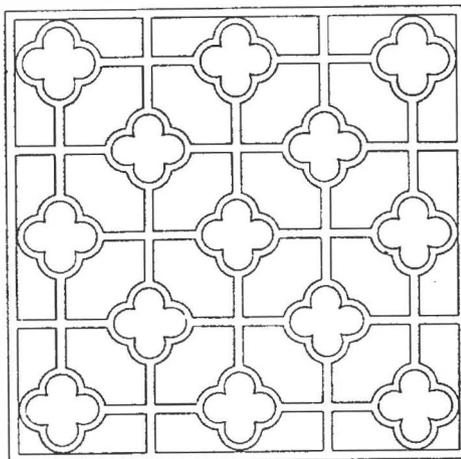
The Second Part

SECTION FIVE



*Dream sequence from the 1498
edition of Western Chamber*

Miss Li is reincarnated as Yen-erh, daughter of the Chang family, residing in the same town. The resuscitated girl insists that she is Miss Li, the lover of Sang. The family refuse to let her out of the house. Sang's neighbour hears the strange story, and wanting to discover the truth of it, goes next door, to find Sang (who has been pretending to be absent) together with Lien-hsiang. The neighbour tells Sang about Yen-erh. Sang wants to see her.



Cloud Root 雲根—seal
carved by Kao Feng-han
高鳳翰 (1683–1743)

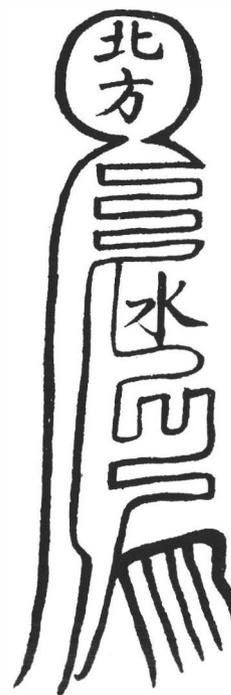
When she was a ghost, it was the slipper that gave such pleasure. In her new life, she is not able to forget it. (Tan)

Only after her rebirth can she admit to being a ghost. (Tan)

The slipper (a tiny receptacle into which some part of the body can slip and fit tightly) can be seen as a symbol of the vagina. (Bettelheim)

Sang alludes to a true event in order to prevaricate; and Mr. P'u quietly reminds us of the very beginning of his story. (Tan)

Now a young lady named Yen-erh, belonging to the wealthy Chang family, and about fifteen years of age, had died suddenly, without any apparent cause [from an inability to sweat], and had come to life again in the night, when she got up and wished to go out. They barred the door and would not hear of her doing so; upon which she said, "I am the spirit daughter of a petty magistrate. A Mr. Sang has been very kind to me, and I have left my slipper at his house. I am really a spirit; what is the use of keeping me in?" There being some reason for what she said, they asked her why she had come there; but she only looked up and down without being able to give any explanation. Some one here observed, that Mr. Sang had already gone home, but the young lady utterly refused to believe them. The family was much disturbed [puzzled] at all this; and when Sang's neighbour heard the story, he jumped over the wall, and peeping through beheld Sang sitting there chatting with a pretty-looking girl. As he went in [stole in and crept up on them], there was some commotion, during which Sang's visitor had disappeared, and when his neighbour asked the meaning of it all, Sang replied laughing, "Why, I told you if any ladies came I should ask them in." His friend then repeated what Miss Yen-erh had said; and Sang, unbolting his door, was about to go and have a peep at her, but unfortunately had no means of [pretext for] so doing.



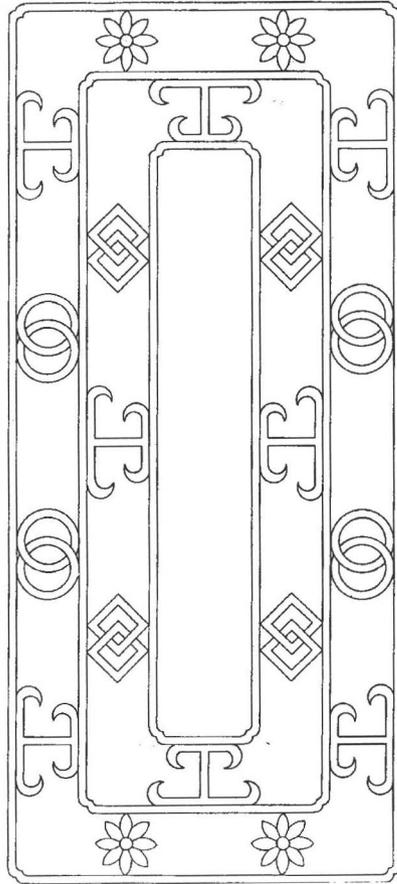
Blue charm suspended
towards the North (Dore)



Play 游戲—seal carved
by Kao Feng-han



Red charm suspended
towards the South (Doré)



Yen-erh
undergoes
a physical
transformation
and
once more
resembles
Miss Li.

Meanwhile Mrs. Chang, hearing that he had not gone away, was more lost in astonishment than ever, and sent an old woman-servant to get back the slipper. Sang immediately gave it to her, and Miss Yen-erh was delighted to recover it, though when she came to try it on it was too small for her by a good inch. In considerable alarm, she seized a mirror to look at herself; and suddenly became aware that she had come to life again in some one else's body. She therefore told all to her mother, and finally succeeded in convincing her, [looking in the mirror and] crying all the time because she was so changed for the worse as regarded personal appearance from what she had been before. And whenever she happened to see Lien-hsiang, she was very much disconcerted, declaring that she had been much better off as a devil than now as a human

All my life I have enjoyed reading the *Records of the Historian* and the *History of the Han Dynasty*. But only the *Liao-chai* stories are capable of dispelling the feeling of oppression. After meals, after wine, after dreaming, in rainy weather, in sunshine, after a conversation with good friends, upon returning from a distant journey, I may toss off a few observations on these stories; they reflect my personal feelings, and are never intended as serious commentary. (Feng)

In ancient Egypt as today in certain circumstances the female slipper, as a symbol for that which is most desirable in a woman, arouses love in the male for definite but deeply unconscious reasons. (Bettelheim)

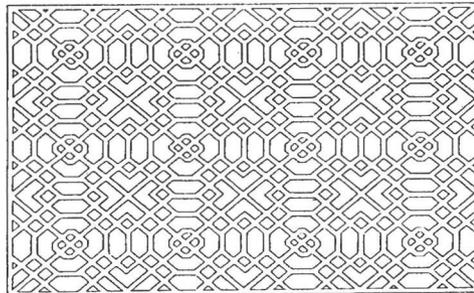
**This time the slipper really makes her happy!
This wraps up the slipper theme!** (Tan)

The window (*taga*) and the shoe (*medassa*) remind you of women. The sexual organ of the woman, when invaded by the verge, resembles a window with a man putting his head in to look about, or a shoe that is being put on. The loss of a shoe foretells to a man the loss of his wife. "She is as tight as a well-fitting shoe." (*Perfumed Garden*)

Lien-hsiang suggests a match-maker for Sang and Yen-erh. Sang attends Mrs Chang's birthday party, where he meets Yen-erh. He asks her uncle to be match-maker, and they choose a day for the marriage.

⁸ The Chinese cycle is sixty years, and the birthday on which any person completes his cycle is considered a very auspicious occasion. The second emperor of the present dynasty, K'ang Hsi, completed a cycle in his reign, with one year to spare; and his grandson, Ch'ien Lung (or Kien Lung) fell short of this only by a single year, dying in the same cyclical period as that in which he had ascended the throne. (Giles)

being. ["I used to be rather proud of my appearance. But every time I saw Lien-hsiang, I was more and more mortified. Now that I look the way I do, I think I was better off as a ghost!"] She would sit and weep over the slipper, no one being able to comfort her; and finally, covering herself up with bed-clothes, she lay all stark and stiff, positively refusing to take any nourishment. Her body swelled up, and for seven days she refused all food, but did not die; and then the swelling began to subside, and an intense hunger to come upon her which made her once more think about eating. Then she was troubled with a severe *irritation* [*itching*], and her skin peeled entirely away; and when she got up in the morning, she found that her shoes [*bed-slippers*] had fallen off. On trying to put them on again, she discovered that they did not fit her any longer [*were much too big for her*]; and then she went back to her former pair, which were now exactly of the right size and shape. In an ecstasy of joy, she grasped her mirror, and saw that her features [*eyebrows, eyes, cheeks*] had also changed back to what they had formerly been; so she washed and dressed herself and went in to visit her mother. Every one who met her was much astonished.



Green charm suspended towards the East (Doré)



*Calm the Spirit Within; Be Rid of Desire Without
內安其神外去其欲
—seal carved by
Kao Feng-ban*

When Lien-hsiang heard the strange story, she tried to persuade Mr. Sang to make her an offer of marriage [*send a matchmaker*]. But the young lady was rich and Sang was poor, and he did not see his way clearly. However, on Mrs. Chang's birthday, when she completed her cycle,⁸ Sang went along with the others [*her sons and her sons-in-law*] to wish her many happy returns of the day [*a long life*]; and when the old lady knew who was coming [*saw his name*], she

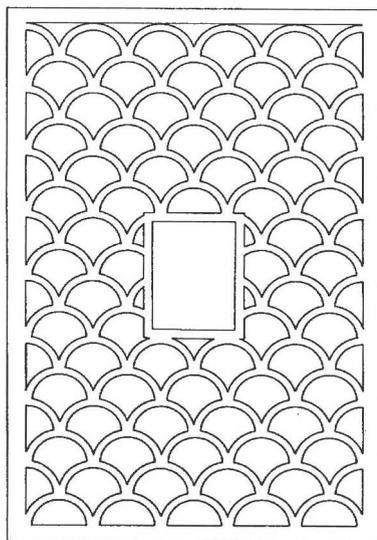
bade Yen-erh take a peep at him from behind the curtain. Sang arrived last of all; and immediately out rushed Miss Yen-erh and seized his sleeve, and said she would go back with him. Her mother scolded her well for this, and she ran in abashed; but Sang, who had looked at her closely [*and recognized her*], began to weep, and threw himself at the feet of Mrs. Chang, who raised him up without saying anything unkind [*a harsh word*]. Sang then took his leave, and got his [her] uncle to act as medium between them; the result being that [*Mrs. Chang chose*] an auspicious day was fixed upon for the wedding [*for him to marry into her family*].



*Studying Should Root Itself
in Tranquillity*
學以靜為本—seal carved
by Kao Feng-ban



*Charm suspended facing
the West (Doré)*



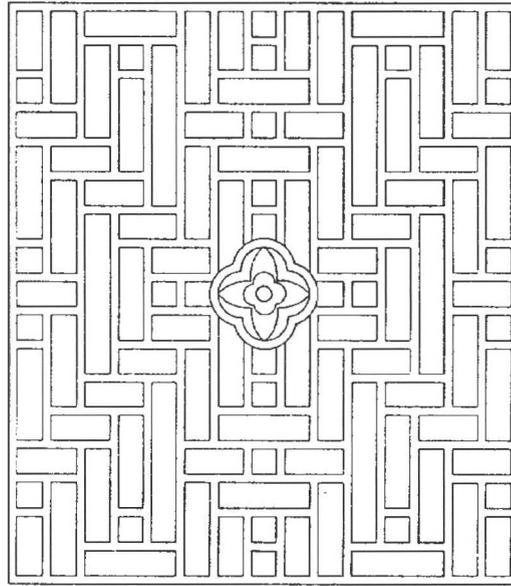
[So Sang came home and told Lien-hsiang, and discussed with her what they should do. She was downcast for a long time, and then said she wished to go away. He was greatly shocked at this and wept. Lien-hsiang said: "Now you are going to her home to be wed, and it would not be right for me to be there." Sang proposed that the two of them should return to his home-town first, and that he should then go to fetch Yen-erh. Lien-hsiang agreed to this, and Sang told the Chang family of his plan. When the Changs learned that he already had a wife, they were angry and reproached him. Yen-erh, however, defended him strongly, and they relented.]

One who is eager to climb famous mountains must have the patience to follow a winding path; one who is eager to eat bear's paw, must have the patience to let it cook slowly; one who is eager to watch the moonlight, must have the patience to wait until midnight; one who is eager to see a beautiful woman must have the patience to let her finish her toilette; reading a story such as this requires its own kind of patience. (Feng)

Sang tells Lien-hsiang about the proposed marriage, and she wants to leave the two of them. But Sang suggests that they (he and Lien-hsiang) should first go and live in his old home, and that he should then fetch Yen-erh. He tells the truth (about Lien-hsiang) to Yen-erh's family. They are angry, but Yen-erh talks them round.

Clever Old Giles! He had to remove this passage, even though it contains nothing offensive, because he has consistently described their relationship (Sang and Lien-hsiang's) as a purely platonic friendship. (TM)

Sang fetches Miss Li/Yen-erh, and arrives at his old home to find it transformed (by Lien-hsiang). Li tells Lien-hsiang the whole story of her rebirth as Yen-erh.



Ancient Delights 古歡— seal carved by Teng Shib-ju 鄧石如 (1743-1805)

⁹ Bride and bridegroom drink wine together out of two cups joined by a red string, typical of that imaginary bond which is believed to unite the destinies of husband and wife long before they have set eyes on each other. Popular tradition assigns to an old man who lives in the moon the arrangement of all matches among mortals; hence the common Chinese expression, "Marriages are made in the moon." (Giles)

Lien-hsiang is such a darling! (Tan)

The vampire is prone to be fascinated with an engrossing vehemence, resembling the passion of love, by particular persons. In pursuit of these it will exercise inexhaustible patience and stratagem, for access to a particular object may be obstructed in a hundred ways. It will never desist until it has satiated its passion, and drained the very life of its coveted victim. But it will, in these cases, husband and protract its murderous enjoyment with the refinement of an epicure, and heighten it by the gradual approaches of an artful courtship. In these cases it seems to yearn for something like sympathy and consent. In ordinary ones it goes direct to its object, overpowers with violence, and strangles and exhausts often at a single feast. (LeFanu)

It takes will-power even to be a ghost! (Feng)

At the appointed time Sang proceeded to the house to fetch her [Yen-erh]; and when he returned he found that, instead of his former poor-looking furniture, beautiful carpets were laid down from the very door, and thousands of coloured lanterns were hung about in elegant designs. Lien-hsiang assisted the bride to enter [the marriage ball], and took off her veil, finding her the same bright [lovable] girl as ever. She also joined them while drinking the wedding cup,⁹ and inquired of her friend as to her recent transmigration; and Yen-erh related as follows:—"Overwhelmed with grief, I began to shrink from myself as some unclean thing; and after separating from you that day, I would not return any more to my grave. So I wandered about at random, and whenever I saw a living being, I envied its happy state. By day I remained among trees and shrubs, but at night I used to roam about anywhere. And once I came to the house of the Chang family, where, seeing a young girl lying upon the bed, I took possession of her mortal coil, unknowing that she [I] would be restored to life again." When Lien-hsiang heard this she was for some time lost in thought.



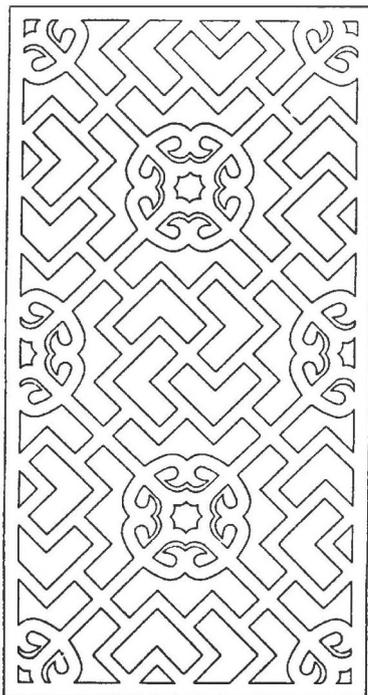
Violet charm suspended in the Centre (Doré)



Entrusting Emotion to the
East-Flowing Waters
心情付與東流水—seal
carved by Kao Feng-ban

震靈靈
凝滯雲
霄如

Written charm for
b hastening delivery. The
charm is burnt, and the
ashes mingled with wine
are given to the woman in
labour (Doré)



And a month or two afterwards [*she gave birth to a son. After the birth*] she became very ill. She [*Her condition became more and more serious. She held Yen-erb by the arm and said: "I wish you to take care of my child. My child is your child."* Yen-erb wept, and comforted her for a while. She sent for the doctor, but Lien-hsiang] refused all medical aid and gradually got worse and worse, to the great grief of Mr. Sang and his wife, who stood weeping at her bedside. Suddenly she opened her eyes, and said, "[*Do not grieve!*] You wish to live; I am willing to die. If fate so ordains it, we shall meet again ten years hence." As she uttered these words, her spirit passed away, and all that remained was the dead body of a fox [*when they lifted the coverlet to lay her out, her body had been transformed into the body of a fox*]. Sang, however, insisted on burying it with all the proper ceremonies. [*The boy was given the name Foxy, and Yen-erb looked after him just as if he were her own child. At every Grave Festival, she would take him to weep at Lien-hsiang's grave.*]

Two months later, Lien-hsiang gives birth to a son, and dies shortly afterwards. She asks Miss Li/ Yen-erb to take care of the boy, and says that if fate allows, they will meet again after ten years. Sang calls the boy Foxy.

Again, Giles covers up his traces with cunning! According to his story, there has been no occasion for Lien-hsiang to conceive and give birth. Therefore, no Foxy! (TM)

When wind and snow fill the sky, and my fire is cold, my page boy lights the coals again and heats my wine; I dust my desk and turn up the wick of my lamp; when I come across a passage that catches my fancy, I quickly dash off a few lines. (Feng)

Only after death does her body really become a fox. (Tan)

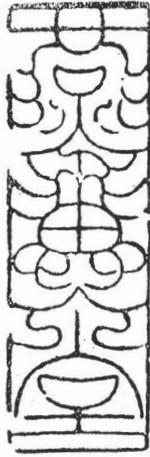
SECTION SIX

九尾狐
 青丘國在滄東
 之北有狐四足
 九尾汲邵云栢
 極子出征嘗獲
 一狐九尾

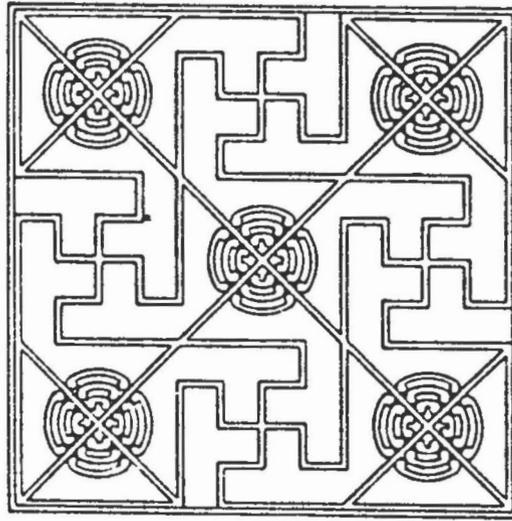
Nine-tailed fox (San-ts'ai t'u-hui
 三材圖會, 1609)

Appearing in many forms, the fox ghost most frequently assumes the role of a beautiful maiden who approaches a man, wins his love, bears him children, looks after his house, and achieves through such a union both a firmer and a brighter state of existence. One explanation among others for this preferential treatment of the fox is that when it crosses a frozen river or lake it repeatedly lays its head upon the ice in order to listen to the flowing waters underneath. Thus it unites, so to say, the domain under the ice, the region of Yin, the dark, feminine, primeval principle, with the lighter world of Yang, the masculine, active element (Buber)





Hall of Swallow's Wings
燕翼堂—seal carved by
Teng Shib-ju



Now his wife had no children; [As time went by, Sang passed his second exam at the provincial capital, and his family gradually became more prosperous. To her sorrow, Yen-erb had no children. Foxy was quite a clever boy, but thin and weak, and constantly ailing. Yen-erb frequently suggested to Sang that he should take a concubine.] but one day a servant came in and said, "There is an old woman outside who has got a little girl for sale." Sang's wife gave orders that she should be shown in; and no sooner had she set eyes on the girl than she cried out, "Why, she's the image of Lien-hsiang!" Sang then looked at her, and found to his astonishment that she was really very like his old friend. The old woman said she was fourteen years old; and when asked what her price was, declared that [this was her one child and] her only wish was to get the girl comfortably settled, and enough to keep herself alive, and ensure not being thrown out into the kennel at death. So Sang gave a good price for her¹⁰; and his wife, taking the girl's hand, led her into a room by themselves. Then, chucking her under the chin, she asked her, smiling, "Do you know me?" The girl said she did not; after which she told Mrs. Sang that her name was Wei, and that her father, who had been a pickle-merchant at Hsü-ch'eng, had died three years before. Mrs. Sang then [counted on

Sang's family prospers, but Yen-erb is sad that she cannot bear him any children. Foxy is a weakling, so she suggests to Sang that he should take a concubine (in order to have another child). By coincidence, an old impoverished woman (Mrs Wei) arrives at the door, wanting to sell her fourteen-year-old daughter. The couple think how like Lien-hsiang she is, and agree to buy her. The girl suddenly recognizes them, as if she has woken from a dream.

¹⁰ The bill of sale always handed to the purchaser of a child in China, as a proof that the child is his bona fide property and has not been kidnapped, is by a pleasant fiction called a "deed of gift," the amount paid over to the seller being therein denominated "ginger and vinegar money," or compensation for the expense of rearing and educating up to the date of sale. This phrase originates from the fact that a dose of ginger and vinegar is administered to every Chinese woman immediately after the delivery of her child.

We may here add that the value of male children to those who have no heirs, and of female children to those who want servants, has fostered a regular kidnapping trade, which is carried on with great activity in some parts of China, albeit the penalty on discovery is instant decapitation. Some years ago I was present in the streets of Tientsin when a kidnapper was seized by the infuriated mob, and within two hours I heard that the man had been summarily executed. (Giles)

Giles still wants to preserve her friendly status! (TM)

A quaint old word. How many readers today would know that this was an open sewer? Most probably they would think the old woman was afraid of "going to the dogs." (JM)

How dull it would have been if the author had wasted a lot of ink explaining the details of Lien-hsiang's reincarnation. (Feng)

If one reads Liao-chai just for the stories, and not for the style, one is a fool. (Feng)



Another efficacious charm
for hastening delivery
(Doré)

¹¹ The power of recalling events which have occurred in a previous life will be enlarged upon in several stories to come. (Giles)

This book should be read as one reads the *Tso Commentary*; the *Tso* is huge, *Liao-chai* is miniature. But every narrative skill is there. Every description is perfect. It is a series of huge miniatures.

This book should be read as one reads *Chuang-tzu*; *Chuang-tzu* is wild and abstract, *Liao-chai* is dense and detailed. Although it treats of ghosts and foxes, the details make it very concrete and real. It is a series of wild details, and concrete abstractions.

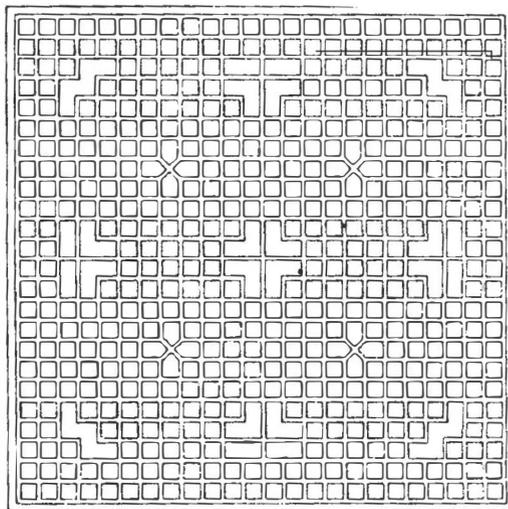
This book should be read as one reads the *Records of the Historian*; the *Records* are bold and striking, *Liao-chai* is dark and understated. One enters it lantern in hand, in the shadows of night; one emerges from it into the daylight, under a blue sky. In so few words, mighty landscapes are evoked, and magical realms created. It is both bold and dark. It is both striking and understated.

This book should be read as one reads the *Sayings* of the Neo-Confucian philosophers; in the *Sayings*, the sense is pure, in *Liao-chai* the sensibility is well-tuned. Every time one thinks a situation is weird, it is in fact very real and true to human nature. It contains both pure sense and pure sensibility. (Feng)

On the Grave
Festival they all
visit Lien-hsiang's
grave, and decide
to rebury the
remains of the two
women together.

Though the double system of sexual morality cannot be defended, there was something very pleasant and amiable about the relations of women among themselves in traditional Chinese society, when things went well. (Needham)

her fingers and] calculated that Lien-hsiang had been dead just fourteen years; and, looking at the girl, who resembled her so exactly in every trait, at length patted her on the head, saying, "Ah, my sister, you promised to visit us again in ten years, and you have not played us false." The girl here seemed to wake up as if from a dream, and, uttering an exclamation of surprise, fixed a steady gaze upon Sang's wife. Sang himself laughed, and said, "Just like the return of an old familiar swallow." "Now I understand," cried the girl, in tears: "I recollect my mother saying that when I was born I was able to speak; and that, thinking it an inauspicious manifestation, they gave me dog's blood to drink, so that I should forget all about my previous state of existence¹¹ [incarnation]. Is it all a dream, or [Today it is as if I have woken from a dream;] are you not the Miss Li who was so ashamed of being a devil?" Thus they chatted of their existence in a former life, with alternate tears and smiles.



Charm of universal efficacy (Dore)



The Sight of the Moon
Eases My Heart
翫月暢開懷—seal
carved by Huang Ching-jen
黃景仁(1749-83)

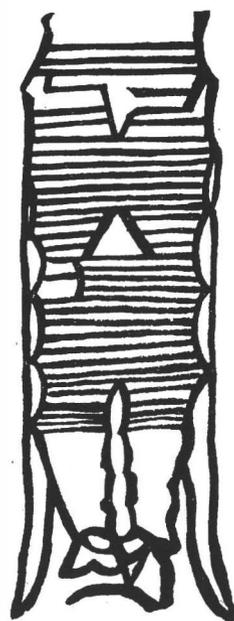
When it came to the day for worshipping at the tombs, Yen-erh explained that she and her husband were in the habit of annually visiting and mourning over her grave. The girl replied that she would accompany them; and when they [When the three of them] got there they found the whole place in disorder [overgrown with

long grass], and the coffin wood all warped [a large tree growing over it]. [The girl sighed deeply.] “Lien-hsiang and I,” said Yen-erh to her husband, “have been attached to [fond of] each other in two states of existence. Let us not be separated, but bury my bones here with hers.” Sang consented, and opening Miss Li’s tomb took out the bones and buried them with those of Lien-hsiang, while friends and relatives, who had heard the strange story, [*came of their own accord and*] gathered round the grave in gala dress to the number of many hundreds.

P'u Sung-ling's glorification of a bigamous relationship is to be rejected. It is branded with the ideology of the unreasonable marriage system of the times. (*New Commentary*)

Strange, that both ghost and fox should be human beings! Stranger still that their bones from a previous existence should be buried together! If ghosts and foxes are like this, what harm can they possibly do? (Tan)

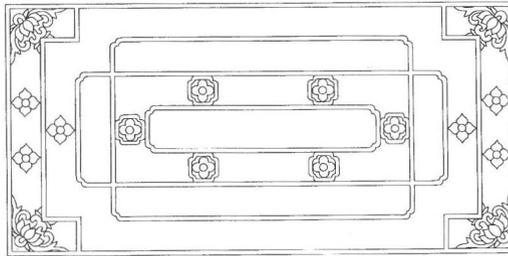
Section Seven



The key to the Buddhist paradise (Doré)

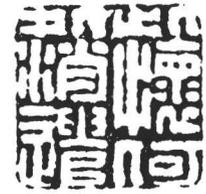
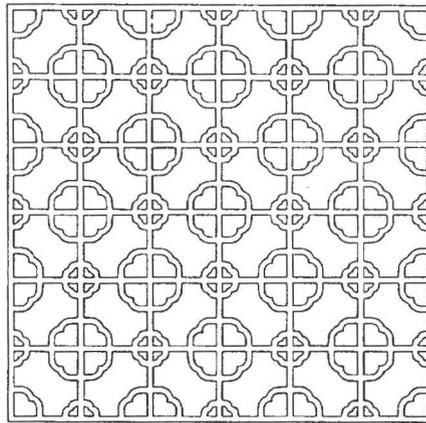
P'u Sung-ling's studio—imaginary reconstruction, from Hsiang-chu Liao-chai chih-i t'u-yung

*Historical
origin of the
story, and
how Pu
Sung-ling
came to
hear it and
record it.*



I learnt the above when travelling [South] through I-chou [in the year *keng-hsu* (1670)], where I was detained at an inn by rain, and read a biography of Mr Sang written by a comrade of his named Wang Tzu-chang. It was lent me by a Mr Liu Tzu-ching, a relative of Sang's, and was quite a long account. This is merely an outline of it.

*Comment
by the
Chronicler
of the
Strange.*



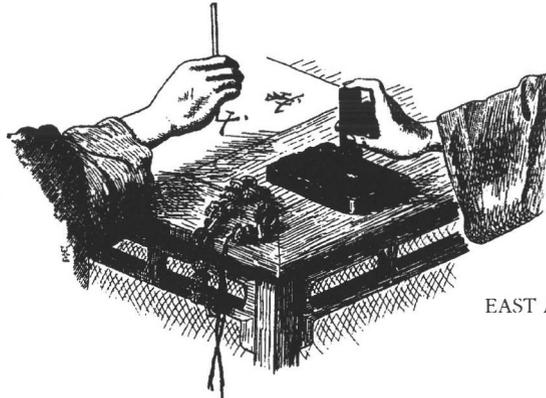
*How Can I Dispel These
Emotions? 此懷何處消
遣—seal carved by
Huang Ching-jen*



*Master of Autumn Sound
Lodge 秋聲館主—seal
carved by Hsi Kang
奚岡 (1746-1803)*

What a fine person was Lien-hsiang! I have seldom seen a woman of such rare quality. let alone a fox! (Wang Shih-chen)

[The Chronicler of the Strange writes: Alas! The dead seek life, the living seek death! Is not this human body the most coveted thing in the world? Unfortunately those who possess it do not cherish it; they live with less shame than foxes, and vanish into death with less trace than ghosts!]



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