

The Completion of an Ideal World: The Human Ghost in Early-Medieval China

The topic of this paper is the idea of the human ghost, as described in *chih-kuai* 志怪, or anomaly-accounts, during the early-medieval period of China (the Six Dynasties period). The term "human ghost" here refers to ghosts represented as having human characteristics, either in form, or in nature and behavior, and which were human beings before death. In the development of Chinese culture and religion, the idea of human ghosts exerted a powerful influence on people's moral, ethical, and social lives, as well as on their literary activities. The Six Dynasties period, moreover, was one in which the Buddhist and Taoist religions were beginning to gain widespread influence among the populace, and were, each in its own fashion, integrating preexisting beliefs into their systems. The idea of the ghost was inevitably one of the central themes that both religions needed to address with care. The result of this encounter was to have profound significance for the formation of people's religious mentality. For the understanding of the later development of religious life in China, therefore, the idea of ghosts in the Six Dynasties period occupies a crucial position. Previous studies related to this theme in the medieval period mainly concentrate on literary expression and typology in the anomaly-accounts, with less emphasis on its religious significance.¹ Recently, Robert Campney launched a series of studies of the *chih-kuai* and paid special attention to the religious aspects. He sees *chih-kuai* stories involving ghosts as explo-

¹ For a typological and literary-structural analysis of *chih-kuai*, see Karl S. Y. Kao, ed., *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic* (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1985), pp. 1-53. See also Kenneth DeWoskin, "The Six Dynasties *Chih-kuai* and the Birth of Fiction," in Andrew Plaks, ed., *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1977), pp. 21-52; Anthony C. Yu, "Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit! Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Prose Fiction," *HJAS* 47.2 (1987), pp. 397-434. Li Chien-Kuo 李劍國, *T'ang-ch'ien chih-kuai hsiao-shuo-shih* 唐前志怪小說史 (Tientsin: Nan-k'ai ta-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1984), offers a comprehensive discussion of the origins and development of the *chih-kuai* before the T'ang dynasty. Wang Kuo-liang 王國良, *Wei-Chin Nan-pei-ch'ao chih-kuai hsiao-shuo yen-chiu* 魏晉南北朝志怪小說研究 (Taipei: Wen-shih-che, 1984), offers a topical analysis of the *chih-kuai* as well as a bibliographical introduction. Yeh Ch'ing-ping 葉慶炳, "Wei-Chin Nan-pei-ch'ao ti kuei-hsiao-shuo yü hsiao-shuo-kuei" 魏晉南北朝的鬼小說與小說鬼, in *Ku-tien hsiao-shuo lun-p'ing* 古典小說論評 (Taipei: Yu-shih, 1985), pp. 100-19, discusses the literary image of ghosts without going into the religious aspect. Chin Jung-hua 金榮華, "Ts'ung Liu-ch'ao chih-kuai hsiao-shuo k'an tang shih ch'uan-

rations of new types of concern regarding the relationship between the living and the dead,² and many of the *chih-kuai* authors as portraying for their readers a wide variety of situations in which the "living and the dead individuals who began as strangers ended up ... bound to one another with moral and, often, emotional cords despite the chasm that still separated them."³

In this paper I explore further the religious aspects of *chih-kuai* stories by discussing images and ideas about ghosts. Scholars of Chinese religion have noticed that whether in the modern or in the early-imperial period, the nether-world was conceived largely on the model of this world,⁴ and especially as related to the similarity between the bureaucratic structures of the two worlds. Concerning the more nuanced issues, such as the psychological and emotional states of the characters, a straightforward mirror-image can hardly express the complex interplay of social reality and literary representation when dealing with the world of ghosts. My basic assumption is that, considering the mentality of the writers, the ghost stories represented imaginative expressions of a craving for some elements of life that were restricted or prohibited in reality. The writers, consciously or not, were constructing an ideal world through the telling of ghost stories. For, in the world of ghosts, restrictions and taboos in the real world could be transgressed or transcended.⁵ On the other hand, one could argue that such a world was imaginable only inside the context of the actual matters and events of early-medieval China, and that the authors could

‘ung ti shen-kuei shih-chieh’ 從六朝志怪小說看當時傳統的神鬼世界, *Hua hsüeh chi-k’an* 華學季刊 5.3 (1984), pp. 1–20, discusses the images of gods (*shen*) and ghosts (*kuei*) in the *chih-kuai* and concludes that since the world of ghosts and spirits was an imaginary world based on the human world, when one eliminates the supernatural imaginations in the stories, the behaviors of the ghosts and spirits are no different from that of humans. Wu Wei-chung’s 吳維中 two articles give a simplified picture, that the *chih-kuai* was a “literarized religious activity,” that its goal was to advocate superstitions, with a concern for the practical benefits in secular life; “Shih-lun chih-kuai yen-hua ti tsung-chiao pei-ching” 試論志怪演化的宗教背景, *Lan-chou ta-hsüeh hsüeh-pao* 蘭州大學學報 (社會科學版) 17.4 (1989), pp. 94–99; and “Chih-kuai yü Wei-Chin Nan-pei-ch’ao tsung-chiao” 志怪與魏晉南北朝宗教 (1991), pp. 15–34.

² Robert F. Campany, “Ghosts Matter: The Culture of Ghosts in Six Dynasties Zhiguai,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 13 (1991), pp. 15–34; idem, “Return-From-Death Narratives in Early Medieval China,” *Journal of Chinese Religion* 18 (1990), pp. 91–125, emphasizes that the *chih-kuai* stories were written to provide glimpses of the world of the dead, and to persuade the reader that such a world exists. The latter article also provides a thorough treatment of the *chih-kuai* genre.

³ Robert Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany, N.Y.: State U. of New York P., 1995), p. 384.

⁴ Arthur Wolf, “Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors,” in idem, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1974); Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1998), pp. 167–70.

⁵ For the crossing of boundaries between humans and the world of the dead, see Campany, *Strange Writing*, pp. 365 ff.

not have created the collective psychological condition that was the engine for propagating and accepting ideas associated with ghosts. The literary imagination of the world of ghosts had to depend upon the non-literate, or lay, imagination. For readers, whether seeking thrills or confirmations of belief, the stories may also have served to relieve psychological tensions.

THE IMAGE OF GHOSTS

BEFORE THE SIX DYNASTIES PERIOD

One of the most elusive yet omnipresent notions in Chinese popular religion is that of *kuei* 鬼, or “ghost.” The Chinese character *kuei* exists among Shang oracle-bone inscriptions, although there it refers to the name of a foreign state. The concept of ghosts, however, must have existed long before the invention of writing. Although we can be sure that people during Shang and Western Chou recognized ghosts and spirits as well as their powers, it is only since the Eastern Chou that direct evidence of that is available. By searching through such traditional sources as the *Book of Rites* (*Li-chi* 禮記) or the *Commentary of Iso* (*Iso-chuan* 左傳), as well as such newly discovered texts as the daybooks (*jih-shu* 日書), we can gain a general idea of the nature of ghosts during this period. I have elaborated this in a longer study,⁶ and in the following remarks I summarize those findings.

In China’s ancient texts there are in general two views concerning the nature of ghosts: one abstract and intellectualized, the other concrete. The abstract view is represented by a passage in the *Book of Rites*:

The Master said: “How abundant and rich are the powers possessed and exercised by ghosts and spirits (*kuei shen*)! We look for them, but do not see them; we listen for, but do not hear them; they enter into all things, and nothing is without them. They cause all under Heaven to fast and purify themselves and to array themselves in their richest dresses in order to attend at their sacrifices. Then, like overflowing water, they seem to be over the heads, and on the left and right of their worshippers.”⁷

Here ghosts and spirits are considered formless beings, powerful yet undetectable by human senses. This attitude was generally held by the Confucianists. In contrast, in the thought of others, ghosts could be concrete and

⁶ Poo, *In Search*.

⁷ *Li-chi* 禮記 (SSC’s edn.; rpt. Taipei: Hsin-wen-feng, 1985) 52, p. 12; trans. James Legge, *Li Ki*, in vol. 27 of Max Müller, ed., *The Sacred Books of the East* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1885), pp. 307–8.

tangible. The Taoist philosopher Chuang-tzu 莊子 once told a story about a ghost who came to him in a dream in the form of a "sophist," arguing with Chuang-tzu about the happiness of being dead.⁸ The belief in the existence of ghosts is also illustrated by a number of stories found in the *Iso-chuan*. One concerns the idea that ghosts needed to have food;⁹ another concerns a re-vengeing ghost who appeared in the form of a boar.¹⁰

The idea that ghosts and spirits had a concrete existence formed a basis for most religious sacrifices, and reflects a primordial belief in the physical similarity between human- and spirit-beings. This common attitude is again aptly expressed in the text of *Mo-tzu* 墨子, which argues for the existence of ghosts and spirits:

If one holds that there is no ghost and yet tries to learn about the ritual of sacrifice, it is just like learning to show hospitality to the guest while no guest exists.¹¹

From evidence such as this one gains an impression that in everyday religious beliefs, ghosts could either appear in human form or possess strange and ferocious features. It was perhaps because of the uncertainty of such images that people's imaginations were released in all directions. This can also be demonstrated by the daybook of roughly 250-225 BC found in Shui-hu-ti that provided the names of many ghosts popularly considered as annoying and targets of exorcism.¹² A story preserved in another Ch'in-era bamboo text found at T'ien-shui, Kan-su province, further substantiates this impression. It is a story about a man who returned from death after being buried for three years. The man mentioned several habits of ghosts: they prefer to wear little clothing; they detest sloppy persons who vomit during ritual offerings held at gravesides; and hate soup-soaked food.¹³

Such depictions of the characteristics of ghosts – that they were elusive

⁸ Kuo Ch'ing-fan 郭慶藩, *Chuang-tzu chi-shih* 莊子集釋 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1978) 6B, pp. 617-19.

⁹ *Iso-chuan* 左傳 (SSCCS edn.; rpt. Taipei: Hsin-wen-feng, 1985) 21, p. 21; cf. James Legge, trans., *The Ch'un-tse'w with the Iso-chuen*, vol. 5 of *The Chinese Classics* (rpt. Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1985), pp. 296-97.

¹⁰ *Iso-chuan* (Chuang 8) 8, p. 17; Legge, *Ch'un-tse'w*, p. 82.

¹¹ Sun I-jang 孫貽讓, *Mo-tzu hsi-en-ku* 墨子閒詁 (Taipei: Shih-chieh, 1974) 12, p. 276.

¹² Mu-chou Poo, "Popular Religion in Early Imperial China: Observations on the Almanacs of Shui-hu-ti," *TP* 79 (1993), pp. 225-48; Donald Harper, "A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century B.C.," *HJAS* 45 (1985), pp. 459-98. Also Poo, *In Search*, chap. 4.

¹³ See Li Hsueh-ch'in 李學勤, "Fang-ma-t'an chien chung ti chih-kuai ku-shih" 放馬灘簡中的志怪故事, *WW* 1990-4, pp. 42-47; Donald Harper, "Resurrection in Warring States Popular Religion," *Taoist Resources* 5.2 (1994), pp. 13-28.

but somehow graspable by human senses, able to appear in various forms, and seen both inflicting harm and expressing benevolence – remained during the subsequent era as well.¹⁴ This was a "commonsense" approach to the idea of ghosts and spirits that was quite different from the Confucian idea about them. The Confucian view of the spirit-world was basically one that could be described as passively acknowledging the existence of gods and ghosts, yet not encouraging excessive worship. Thus, on the one hand, besides the passage of *Book of Rites* quoted above, we hear Confucius say: "One sacrifices to the gods as if the gods were present."¹⁵ On the other hand, we also hear: "To give one's self earnestly to the duties due to man, and while respecting ghosts and spirits (*kuei-shen*), to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom."¹⁶

GHOSTS IN THE SIX DYNASTIES PERIOD

Late-Han Precursors

One may have the impression that since ghosts were originally humans, then descriptions of them would show imitations of their real lives. Prior to the second half of the Eastern Han period (roughly before 100 AD), however, descriptions and stories about ghosts generally lacked such details.¹⁷ We are not told about their more "personal" aspects aside from the harm they inflicted on people. We often do not know, for example, their emotions and intentions, their loves and hates. In other words, there are no "stories" about these ghosts, although they might be part of a story. If we believe that the Eastern Han scholar Wang Ch'ung's essay on contemporary conceptions of ghosts reflects a popular attitude, then what we have most of all are ghosts who caused fear and horror.¹⁸ The relationship between ghosts and human beings was, there-

¹⁴ I do not deal with the subject of soul, or *hun* and *po*, in this paper, as it has been discussed by Yü Ying-shih, "O Soul, Come Back: A Study in the Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China," *HJAS* 47.2 (1987), pp. 363-95. For a more detailed discussion of the image and nature of ghosts in early China, see Poo, *In Search*, chaps. 3-4.

¹⁵ *Lun-yü chu-shu* 論語注疏 (SSCCS edn.), "Pa-i 八佾"; trans. James Legge, *Confucian Analects*, in vol. 1 of *The Chinese Classics* (rpt. Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1985), p. 159 (translation slightly modified).

¹⁶ *Lun-yü chu-shu*, "Yung-yeh 雍也"; Legge, *Confucian Analects*, p. 191 (translation slightly modified).

¹⁷ One exception may be the story of resurrection preserved in the T'ien-shui Ch'in bamboo slips, where the habits of the ghosts were described in some detail. See Harper, "Resurrection," pp. 13-28, for a general description of the nature of ghosts, not that of a particular ghost.

¹⁸ Liu P'ar-sui 劉盼遂, *Lun-heng chi-chieh* 論衡集解 (rpt. Taipei: Shih-chieh, 1990), "Ting-kuei," pp. 423-56; "Ssu-hui," pp. 465-72; trans. A. Forke, *Lun Heng* (New York: Paragon Book Gallery, 1962) 1, pp. 239-49.

fore, conceived as mutually antagonistic. The ability to exorcise ghosts was to become one of the outstanding characteristics of people known for their magical power, including those known as shamans or magicians (*fang-shih* 方士), as recorded in the *History of the Later Han* (*Hou Han-shu* 後漢書).¹⁹ It seems that, as an element in the literary tradition, the ghost had not yet become an independent entity into which writers could place their own thoughts, that is, the ghost had not yet become a vehicle for the expression of ideas and emotions.

It is in Ying Shao's 應邵 (ca. 165–204 AD) *Feng-su t'ung-i* 風俗通義 (*A Penetrating Account of Manners and Customs*) that we first encounter stories that include descriptions of the deeds and characteristics of ghosts in a more humanized fashion. One such story tells about a certain Chang Han-chih 張漢直 from the state of Ch'en, who left home to seek higher learning. Several months after he left, a ghost possessed his younger sister and spoke to the family members in his voice, explaining that he had taken ill and died on the road, and that he wished his family to take care of several chores at home that he had not finished. Since even his wife did not know about these things, and his younger sister, who had just returned from somewhere else, could not have known, his family believed that it was indeed his ghost who spoke through his younger sister. This reflects a belief that, as Ying Shao says, "there are many cases in the world in which a dead man's spirit takes possession of a family member and speaks through him."²⁰ Curiously, it turns out that Chang Han-chih had not in fact died, and later returned home safely. People thus concluded that his sister was possessed by an anonymous ghost. The rationale for the ghost's actions remains puzzling. What can be observed is that the story presented the concern of the ghost in a totally human fashion. That the ghost did not inflict any harm on the living, however, may not be taken as typical of the ghost stories of this period. Another story related by Ying Shao concerns a certain Lai Chi-te 來季德.

[Lai] was lying in state in his coffin when suddenly he sat up on the bier. His complexion, dress and voice were all familiar. In an orderly fashion he gave systematic instructions to each of the various family members

¹⁹ See Kenneth DeWoskin, *Doctors, Diviners and Magicians of Ancient China: Biographies of Fang-shih* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1983). One has to remember, however, that *Hou Han-shu* was compiled in the Liu-Sung dynasty, therefore the stories could have been influenced by the *chih-kwai* tradition of the period.

²⁰ Wang Li-ch'i 王利器, *Feng-su t'ung-i chiao-chu* 風俗通義校注 (rpt. Taipei: Ming-wen 1988), p. 409; a translation of this story is given in Michael Nylan, "Ying Shao's 'Feng Su T'ung Yi': An Exploration of Problems in Han Dynasty Political, Philosophical and Social Unity" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton U., 1982), pp. 535–37.

according to their standing. Next he beat, with fairness, each of the slaves for his or her faults. When he had eaten and drunk his fill, he bade them good-bye and departed. The family, absolutely heartbroken, fainted with grief. After the same thing happened three or four more times, the family grew increasingly wretched. Later Lai Chi-te got drunk and the body rotted. [In its place] they merely found an old dog, which they immediately caned to death. Inquiries in the neighborhood [showed it was] the wine-seller's dog.²¹

Here the ghost of Lai possessed a dog's body. When the dog was beaten to death, Lai's ghost must have gone away for there was no medium for it to cling to. Ying Shao's explanation is that "there are many cases in the world in which the dead appear as spirits. They talk, eat, and drink. As [their families believe] the apparitions [to be real,] they are all the more distressed." For us this story shows that people then believed that a ghost could appear in human form through a non-human medium, and that this medium could be killed to expel the ghost. In this story, it is also possible to see the dog as a demon that appeared in the form of the dead and bedeviled the household. Similar stories about dog-demons and snake-demons are reported elsewhere in *Feng-su t'ung-yi*.²²

This kind of belief was nothing new to this period, since similar cases are found already in the Shui-hu-ti daybook.²³ What was new was that the stories now provided details about the "personality" of the ghosts and their intentions, to an extent unparalleled in previous documents. This is not to say that previous writers did not or could not engage in the description of personalities or intentions, but that ghosts had not been a subject of such treatment.

Ying Shao's ghost stories made up only a small part of his *Feng-su t'ung-i*, yet it was an important precursor of Six Dynasties ghost stories in *chih-kwai*, anomaly-account, literature.²⁴

²¹ Wang, *Feng-su t'ung-i*, p. 416; cf. Nylan, "Ying Shao's 'Feng Su T'ung Yi,'" pp. 538–39.

²² Wang, *Feng-su t'ung-i*, p. 423.

²³ See Poo, "Popular Religion." In the context of a typological analysis, Karl Kao also traces this "animistic phenomena" into earlier cultural traditions; see Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales*, pp. 5–9.

²⁴ At least three stories were incorporated into *Lieh-i-chuan* 列異傳, the first collection of ghost stories in the Six Dynasties period, and said to have been compiled by Ts'ao P'i, emperor Wen of Wei; see Wang Kuo-liang 王國良, "Lieh-i chuan yen-chiu" 列異傳研究, in idem, *Liu-ch'ao chih-kwai hsiao-shuo k'ao-lun* 六朝志怪小說考論 (Taipei: Wen-shih-che, 1988), pp. 54–57. For a study of the relationship between *Feng-su t'ung-i* and the Six Dynasties *chih-kwai*, see Tsao Tao-heng 曹道衡, "Feng-su t'ung-i ho Wei-Chin liu-ch'ao hsiao-shuo" 風俗通義和魏晉六朝小說, *Chung-ku wen-hsueh-shih lun-wen-chi hsu-pien* 中古文學史論文集續編 (Taipei: Wen-chin, 1994), pp. 35–47. Campano, *Strange Writing*, pp. 101–26, emphasizes the tradition of cosmological collecting as the origin of the anomaly accounts.

Six Dynasties Ghosts

Chih-kuai have been intensively studied for structure, content, and literary-historical significance. It has been pointed out that the political, economic, and intellectual situation of the Six Dynasties provided unique opportunities for the development of *chih-kuai*, and at the same time conditioned the character of its content. The historical trends contributing to the genre's popularity and development are, according to one study, three-fold. First is the rise of the Taoist and Buddhist religions, for they fostered the idea of ghosts and spirits through a massive production of religious literature on a scale unprecedented in China. Second is the fashion of "pure talk (清談 *ch'ing-t'an*)."²⁵ Various legends and stories were dispersed among the literati, who then seem to have assiduously collected them into books. Third would be the general flourishing of historical and literary works during this period.²⁶ Moreover, the content of some of the *chih-kuai* stories probably reflected, on the one hand, the chaotic social and political realities of this period, and on the other, people's longing to resist or change this reality.²⁷

While there is a certain truth to the observation that literature, in one way or another, inevitably reflects the reality of the times, whether political, social, intellectual, or religious, such observations often remain truisms. As Campany pointed out, these observations do not really explain the literature at hand.²⁸ Concerning the *chih-kuai*, especially the ghost stories, we need to make detailed analyses of particular stories to extract whatever significance they carried and try to comprehend not only the full meaning of the stories, but also the mentality of the story-tellers and the readers. For us, the pressing questions

²⁵ See a series of works by Donald Holzman: "Les sept sages de la forêt des bambous et la société de leur temps," *TP* 44.4-5 (1956), pp. 317-46; *La vie et la pensée de Hi Kang (223-262 Ap. J.-C.)* (Leiden: Brill, 1957); and *Poetry and Politics: The Life and Works of Juan Chi, A.D. 210-263* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1976). Among numerous works in Chinese, T'ang Ch'ang-ju 唐長孺, "Ch'ing-t'an yü ch'ing-i" 清談與清議, in *Wei-Chin Nan-pei-ch'ao shih lun-ts'ung* 魏晉南北朝史論叢 (Peking: San-lien shu-tien, 1955), pp. 289-97; Wang Yao 王瑤, "Hsüan-hsüeh yü ch'ing-t'an" 玄學與清談, in *Chung-ku wen-hsüeh ssu-hsiang* 中古文學思想 (Taipei: Ch'ang-an ch'u-pan-she, 1986), pp. 44-79, deserve special notice for their consideration of the social reality of the time and the relationship between *ch'ing-t'an* 清談 and *ch'ing-i* 清議.

²⁶ Li, *T'ang-ch'ien chih-kuai*, pp. 220-37. Among numerous authors who express similar opinions, I cite Lu Hsün 魯迅, *Chung-kuo hsiao-shuo shih-lüeh* 中國小說史略 (rpt. Taipei: Ming-lun, n.d.); Wu Hung-i 吳宏一, "Liu-ch'ao kuei-shen kuai-i hsiao-shuo yü shih-tai pei-ching ti kuan-hsi" 六朝鬼神怪異小說與時代背景的關係, *Chung-kuo ku-tien wen-hsüeh yen-chiu ts'ung-k'an*, part 1: *hsiao-shuo* 中國古典文學研究叢刊 (小說一) (Taipei: Chü-liu, 1977), pp. 55-89; Wang, *Wei-Chin Nan-pei-ch'ao chih-kuai*, pp. 13-36.

²⁷ Li, *T'ang-ch'ien chih-kuai*, pp. 238-40. For a general account of the intellectual atmosphere at the beginning of this period, see Charles Holcombe, *In the Shadow of the Han* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1994).

²⁸ Campany, *Strange Writing*, pp. 168, 199-201.

are: What are the purposes of the authors? Why did such stories get circulated? Why did people like to read, talk about, and listen to them? No matter whether the stories were created by believers in ghosts and spirits, it seems that the social need and the mentality of the audience were what kept the stories circulating. By searching for this social need and mentality, we can perhaps shed light on the meaning of the *chih-kuai* in the context of contemporary culture. What follows is a typological analysis of ghosts as presented in the *chih-kuai*. I should like to make it clear that by extracting the "types" of ghosts out of the context of the stories, one runs the risk of losing some of the rhetoric and nuance of social criticism that the stories carry. The typological analysis in no way replaces a detailed reading of each story for its various implications, and thus is no more than a convenience to look at the collective image of the ghosts in a general fashion to help us approach the mentality of the writers and readers.

Characteristics

Although not every story possesses the same elements, we can still try to depict some typical images of the ghosts by concentrating on their personalities and behavior, as well as their relationship with human beings.

One outstanding common characteristic of the ghosts is their straightforwardness, or even simplemindedness. In a story about Tsung Tai 宗岱, a governor of Ch'ing-chou, who was famous for denouncing the existence of ghosts, a ghost once told him directly that he was going to take revenge on Tsung for abolishing the ghost cults.²⁹ A similar situation is found in the story of Juan Chan 阮瞻, who wrote a treatise on the non-existence of ghosts.³⁰ One day a ghost came to Juan and challenged his treatise, revealing that he himself was a ghost. Thus the ghosts proved their existence by appearing directly to those who did not believe in them. In another story, the ghost of Cheng Hsüan 鄭玄, the Han-dynasty scholar famous for his commentaries to the Confucian classics, appeared to the talented young scholar Wang Pi 王弼 and scolded him for his disrespect towards the senior scholar, that is, towards Cheng himself.³¹ In all these stories, the ghosts made unadorned protests, and the results were

²⁹ "P'ei-tzu yü-lin" 裴子語林, in Lu Hsün 魯迅, comp., *Ku hsiao-shuo kou-ch'en* 古小說鈞沈 (rpt. Taipei: Tang-shan 1986; hereafter, *Lu*), p. 28.

³⁰ "Hsiao-shuo" 小說, in *Lu*, p. 119. Tsung's story is preserved in *Chin-shu* 晉書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1970) 4, p. 100; 57, p. 1533. His reputation as an atheist is partly confirmed, since he was mentioned in the same category as the atheist Kuo Hsiang in Liu Hsieh's *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* 文心雕龍; Vincent Y. C. Shih, trans., *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (Hong Kong: Chinese U.P., 1983), p. 203. (Here Tsung 宗 is written as Sung 宋.)

³¹ "Hsiao-shuo," in *Lu*, p. 114.

all the same: the men who showed disrespect soon met their fate. It may even be said that the ghosts were almost self-righteously defending their right of existence.

At times ghosts appear rather simple-minded. Consider the story about Tsung Ting-po 宗定伯, who tricked a ghost not only into carrying him but also revealing the method for catching ghosts. The ghost was finally seized in the form of a goat by Tsung and was sold at the market.³² Another story mentions that a certain Liu Tun 劉遁 was visited by a ghost, who stole his food. Expecting that the ghost would come again, he made a pot of poisonous porridge. Sure enough, the ghost came again and swallowed the porridge. When Liu found the empty stolen pot, he could still hear the ghost vomiting.³³ In yet another story, a naughty ghost was wont to disturb a family by throwing dirty things into their food. The head of the family conceived a plot: he pronounced loudly that he was not afraid of dirty things, but if the ghost were to throw money at him, then he would really be distressed. The ghost heard and believed him, and thereupon threw money at him. The family collected a small fortune.³⁴ A common feature in these stories is that the ghosts did not play tricks on men; on the contrary it was men who tricked the ghosts. Sometimes the ghosts are even portrayed as rather soft in character. In one story, a ghost who appeared to Juan Te-ju 阮德如 was shamed into retreat when Juan sneered, "People say that ghosts are despicable. It surely is true!"³⁵ This ghost was depicted as a shy and harmless character.

A simple-minded or even a naive character was not restricted to male ghosts. Chung Yao 鍾繇 once had an affair with a woman, who, as he later found out, was actually a ghost. He therefore secretly plotted to kill her. Although she had already sensed that Chung had ill intentions, she still trusted in Chung's love and believed in him when he said that he would not harm her.³⁶ As a result, she was hurt by the suspicious Chung. We see many similar plots: the female ghosts are portrayed as not only physically attractive, but as single-mindedly devoted to the men they love, even though some may turn out to be ungrateful.³⁷

³² "Lieh-i chuan" 列異傳, in *Lu*, pp. 141-42.

³³ "Shu-i-chi" 述異記, in *Lu*, p. 172.

³⁴ "Shu-i-chi," in *Lu*, pp. 184-85.

³⁵ "Hsiao-shuo," in *Lu*, p. 115. Juan was known to have written two famous essays in debate with Chi K'ang and refuted the validity of geomancy in siting houses; see *Chi K'ang chi* 嵇康集, in Lu Hsün, ed., *Lu Hsün ch'üan-chi* 魯迅全集 (rpt. Taipei: Tang-shan, 1989), ch. 2.

³⁶ "Lu-shih i-lin" 陸氏異林, in *Lu*, p. 385.

³⁷ Eg., *Lu*, pp. 190-91 (Ch'ui Chi); 144-45 (T'an Sheng); and 158 (Ch'in Shu). In a recent study, among 23 stories about male-female ghost marriages, only one female ghost did harm to the man, her "unfaithful" husband who married another woman after the female ghost had died.

What are we to make of the significance of the character of these ghosts? One approach from the theory of psychological compensation would be to explain such types of female ghosts as the product of the fantasy of sexually dissatisfied male story-tellers who craved for an ideal female partner.³⁸ In other words, it was a reflection of the social reality where relations between the sexes were still under very strict supervision by the prevalent etiquette in society. Here it might be relevant to quote Anthony Yu's remark on the "Amorous Ghost": "The male is the 'normal' human protagonist, whereas the female is almost always depicted as the incredibly beautiful, talented, sensual, and sometimes virtuous figure of another realm."³⁹ Yu further says that the female in the stories is "a creature of fantasy — both affectionate and threatening, both desired and feared." Although he selected few examples from the Six Dynasties *chih-kuai* genre, his observations are suggestive.⁴⁰ A point worth mentioning, however, is that during the Six Dynasties period, male ghosts also figured prominently in ghost-human marriages and love stories.⁴¹ Furthermore, it is also debatable if the male sexual fantasy explanation works in the case of *chih-kuai*. Below, I concentrate further on this point.

Ghosts in *chih-kuai* are often depicted as having a "plain" character — less complex in their intentions and emotions than human beings. Does this reflect a mentality that perceived the nature of man as more intelligent than ghosts? Such an attitude would have appealed to readers anxious to gain an upper hand in the contest between man and ghost. We recall that even today in colloquial Chinese such familiar expressions as "you're cheating the ghost," or "only a ghost would believe this," clearly indicate that ghosts are more easily deceived than men. I would not, however, push this point too far, but would rather like to present it as a working hypothesis.

Furthermore, it was the relationship of the ghosts with the living that reveals one of the most important elements of the genre, for it was essentially their extraordinary activities that attracted people's attention and interest. What did the ghosts do? How did they affect people's lives? Such information, as I

All other female ghosts were depicted as faithful lovers. See Yen Hui-ch'i 顏慧琪, *Liu-ch'ao chih-kuai hsiao-shuo i-lei yin-yuan ku-shih yen-chiu* 六朝志怪小說異類姻緣故事研究 (Taipei: Wen-chin ch'u-pan-she, 1994), pp. 86-103; and Yu, "Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit," p. 429.

³⁸ Lai Fang-ling 賴芳伶, "Shih-lun Liu-ch'ao chih-kuai ti chi-ko chu-t'i" 試論六朝志怪的幾個主題, *Yu-shih hsüeh-k'an* 幼獅學刊 17.1 (1982), pp. 94-108.

³⁹ Yu, "Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit," p. 429.

⁴⁰ For similar stories concerning love affairs between human beings and ghosts in the T'ang dynasty, see Glen Dudbridge, *Religious Experience and Lay Society in T'ang China: A Reading of Tai-shu's Kuang-i chi* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1995), pp. 154-73.

⁴¹ See Yen, *Liu-ch'ao chih-kuai hsiao-shuo*, pp. 87-103.

suggested elsewhere, was presumably also what attracted the readers of the biographies of the immortals and the eminent monks.⁴²

Vengeful ghosts

For male, and some female, ghosts, revenge for the wrongs they had suffered when alive seems to be a popular action. In a typical story of ghostly vengeance, a man, unjustly executed by a certain magistrate, came back as a ghost to seek his revenge.⁴³ Another story tells of a jealous husband who harmed his widow because she broke her promise of staying chaste after his death.⁴⁴ On the other hand, female ghosts could also seek revenge for their sufferings, although examples are not as many as those of males. It has been suggested that these tales played out the principle of reciprocity, and emphasize the commonality of moral principles across social and ontological boundaries.⁴⁵ This being said, however, we also notice that not all the vengeful actions were so "rational." One story has it that the ghost of a jealous wife caused the death of her unfaithful husband. Her anger was so great that even her own sons could not escape her destruction.⁴⁶ We have also mentioned the story of Wang Pi. When he was working on his commentary on the *I-ching* (the *Book of Changes*), he laughed at Cheng Hsüan's opinion and said, "This old fellow was not very intelligent regarding [the essence of] time." That evening, the ghost of Cheng Hsüan came to him and scolded him in grave anger: "You are a young man, why are you making distorted explanations of the texts and groundlessly criticizing a senior scholar?" Not long after this, Wang died a sudden death.⁴⁷ On the surface, this is a story about a ghost who sought revenge because he was insulted, and not even in his previous lifetime. This very fact is in itself unusual, as most of the ghosts in the stories are newly dead. Moreover, we may suppose that in this particular case the story may reflect certain debates among the scholarly community of Wang Pi's time and the story-teller probably supported the well-known Cheng Hsüan school of scholarship. Rather than expressing his opinion directly, he created the story and used the ghost of Cheng to vent his displeasure with Wang, or perhaps with anti-Cheng Hsüan polemicists.

It is interesting that, although tradition has it that small children who died of misfortune could become ghosts to haunt people as an act of revenge,⁴⁸ one

⁴² Mu-chou Poo, "The Images of Immortals and Eminent Monks: Religious Mentality in Early Medieval China," *Numen* 42 (1995), pp. 172-96.

⁴³ "Shu-i-chi," in *Lu*, pp. 182-83.

⁴⁴ "Chen-i-chuan" 甄異傳, in *Lu*, p. 157.

⁴⁵ Campamy, *Strange Writing*, pp. 378-79.

⁴⁶ "Shu-i-chi," in *Lu*, p. 187.

⁴⁷ "Hsiao-shuo," in *Lu*, p. 114.

⁴⁸ An early example is found in Ch'in-era Shui-hu-ti bamboo slips, see Yün-meng shui-hu-ti Ch'in-mu pien-hsieh-tsu 雲夢睡虎地秦墓編寫組, eds., *Yün-meng shui-hu-ti Ch'in-mu* 雲夢睡虎

can hardly find any child ghost in the *chih-kuai*. The world of the ghosts was a world for adults.

Benevolent ghosts

Besides causing trouble for people, ghosts could also be benevolent. In quite a few stories the ghosts not only were harmless, but helped people, even those not related, in various ways. Most commonly, a ghost appeared to his or her family and rendered assistance, as we have seen in the story of Chang Hanchih. In another story, when a certain Liu Sha-men 劉沙門 died, he left a poor wife and a young son. One night a severe storm destroyed their house, and his wife hugged her son and cried: "If your dad were still alive, we would not have suffered this fate!" That night, she dreamt that her husband called in dozens of people to help repair the house, and it was indeed restored by the next morning.⁴⁹ It is understandable that a ghost would want to help his own relatives and friends, but sometimes their motives were not so obvious. A certain Chang Mu 張牧 was assisted by a young female ghost who made sure daily that his poor family had enough food, and eventually caused them to be wealthy.⁵⁰ The ghost was not related to Chang's family, and we are not told of the reason why she wanted to help the poor family. The story was not trying to moralize on any merit of Chang Mu, unless it was simply saying that his poverty deserved sympathy.

Ghosts in need of help

Besides causing trouble or giving help to the living, sometimes ghosts themselves needed help. A household maid once went into a forest to fetch wood. While she was resting, a woman came to her in a dream and asked her to remove the thorn in her eye. When the maid woke up, she indeed found a coffin nearby, with grass growing through the skull of the skeleton. After she removed the grass, she discovered a pair of golden rings under the skull, which she understood to be a gift from the ghost.⁵¹ Elsewhere, a ghost asks a man to rebury his coffin so that he could be released from confinement.⁵² Another account describes a female ghost's asking a man to help her avenge her children's mistreatment at the hands of her husband's new concubine.⁵³ A similar situation in reverse was that of a man asked by a male ghost to help him take revenge on his wife, who had committed adultery and murdered him.⁵⁴ The

地秦墓 (Peking: Wen-wu, 1981), slip nos. 846 rev., 867 rev.

⁴⁹ "Chen-i-chuan," in *Lu*, p. 159.

⁵⁰ "Chen-i-chuan," in *Lu*, pp. 157-58.

⁵¹ "Shu-i-chi," in *Lu*, p. 190.

⁵² "Yu-ming-lu" 幽明錄, in *Lu*, p. 281.

⁵³ "Tsa-kuai shen-kuai-chi" 雜鬼神怪志, in *Lu*, pp. 423-24.

⁵⁴ "Yu-ming-lu," in *Lu*, p. 306.

mentality behind stories such as these is the assumption that there was an almost equal status between the living and the dead – the ghosts were only human beings in a different stage or state of existence.

Self-assertive ghosts

One of the characteristics of ghosts was the uncertainty of their intentions. With revenging ghosts or helping ghosts, one could at least sense the rationale behind their actions. In some other stories, however, the ghosts were described as acting out of their own vicious whims, with no obvious relation to the deeds of the people that they plagued. Examples include a ghost who caused plagues and raped young maids,⁵⁵ the child-swallowing ghost,⁵⁶ or one who terrified an innocent and courteous person.⁵⁷ No conceivable explanations for these attacks are to be found in the morality, character, or life conditions of the victims. It seems that the only purpose was to tell the reader that the world of ghosts is unpredictable, and that the fate of man is at the mercy of malicious specters.

Ghosts could also appear to people to prove the reality of ghosts, so that people would not ignore them. Several stories relate a common theme: a ghost, disguised as a human, engages in a debate with a man who does not believe in the existence of ghosts. Unable to win the debate, the frustrated ghost is finally forced to admit that he is actually a ghost, in order to end the apparent embarrassment.⁵⁸

At times the ghost appears, performs feats, and leaves. Such ghosts are harmless, and the purpose of their appearance can only be understood as fulfilling their desire to do something of which they were fond. A story relates that the famous literatus Chi K'ang 嵇康 once was playing zither at night:

Suddenly a ghost bound in hand-cuffs appeared to him, applauded Chi's dexterous fingers, and said: "One string on your zither is not in tune." Chi K'ang then let the ghost tune the zither, after which the zither's sound became even more pure and pleasant. When asked his name, the ghost did not answer. People later suspected that it was the ghost of Ts'ai Yung 蔡邕. When he was about to be executed, his hands also had been cuffed.⁵⁹

In this story, the ghost's visit not only did not cause any fear, but on the contrary brought heightened aesthetic feelings. It could also carry a particular

message: that Chi Kang, renowned writer, zitherist, and thinker, not only feared no ghost, but was in the company of a famous scholar. An objective of this story was also not only the ghost's expertise on the zither, but also the caliber of Chi Kang's aesthetics. The author, moreover, demonstrated his own erudition by telling his reader that historically Ts'ai Yung was versed in playing the zither, and that he died wearing handcuffs.

There are also examples in which the ghosts appeared for the sole purpose of making themselves known to people, without causing any damage.⁶⁰

The Purpose of the Ghost-story Writers

What was the purpose of the ghost-story writers? Were they true believers of ghosts? The materials we have contain various possibilities. As far as we can tell, the writers of *chih-kuai* stories in the Six Dynasties period can be roughly divided into three categories: literati with no particular religious inclination, Buddhist literati and monks, and Taoist types.⁶¹ Assuredly several writers simply wanted to persuade readers of the existence of ghosts. Others may not have believed in ghosts, and used the stories to express their ideas about the human world. They adhered to a strand of thought current among the literati that featured a deep fascination with ideas untraditional, non-moral, non-political (at least on the surface), remote, and transcendental. Although some also wrote "serious" and practical works, such as poetry and history, the fact that they also composed works in the *chih-kuai* genre indicates the complexity of their mental world. In a sense, writing anomaly-stories may have been a way to pronounce their intellectual affiliation with the "pure talk" current in their days. In any case, we cannot assume that we have here only one intention or one attitude toward the supernatural.⁶² The appearance of *chih-kuai*, furthermore, may represent a change in the perception of the relationship between the living and the dead,⁶³ but it would be difficult to prove that the authors had written or collected these stories to show that. One can, moreover, agree with

⁶⁰ "Yu-ming-lu," in *Lu*, pp. 253-54, the stories of Sun Ch'uan, Ch'en Hsien, and an unknown official of Wu.

⁶¹ For detailed discussion, see Wang, *Wei-Chin Nan-pei-ch'ao chih-kuai*, pp. 37-52; Kominami Ichirō 小南一郎, "Rikuchō Zui Tō shōsetsushi no tenkai to Bukkyō shinkō" 六朝隋唐小説史の展開と佛教信仰, in Fukunaga Mitsuji 福永光司, ed., *Chūgoku chūsei no shūkyō to bunka* 中國中世の宗教と文化 (Kyoto: Jimbun kagaku kenkyūsho), pp. 413-500; and Campany, *Strange Writing*, pp. 168-79.

⁶² I can therefore only partially agree with Campany's assertion that "for the Zhiguai authors ... ghosts mattered, and their aim was to show and to convince others that ghosts mattered" ("Ghosts Matter" p. 34). We cannot rule out the possibility of writing ghost stories purely for light entertainment.

⁶³ As Campany suggests, "Ghosts Matter," pp. 16-18.

⁵⁵ "Shu-i-chi," in *Lu*, p. 183.

⁵⁶ "Hsün-shih ling-kuei-chi" 荀氏靈鬼記, in *Lu*, p. 201.

⁵⁷ "Lu-i-chuan" 錄異傳, in *Lu*, p. 413, the story of Yang Tu.

⁵⁸ *Lu*, p. 119 ("Hsiao-shuo"), p. 257 ("Yu-ming-lu").

⁵⁹ *Lu*, pp. 20 ("P'ei-tzu yü-lin"), 119-20 ("Hsiao-shuo").

the assertion that the *chih-kuai* authors not only described the world of the dead and its relationship with the living, but also "helped to shape that world and those relations."⁶⁴ Yet we should also be aware of the possibility that the world surrounding the storytellers and authors consisted of many whose interests in these stories were mainly for entertainment in reading or hearing the fantastic plots.⁶⁵ The attraction of a good story with dramatic plot-twists and ironic turns of event may well have exerted considerable influence on the writers in choosing their subjects and styles. The writers, whatever their intentions, could not have operated only according to their own idiosyncrasies. In other words, the telling and writing of ghost stories was not a one-way traffic; it was a reciprocal process that received feedback from society at large. The world of the ordinary people in a period alive with story-telling and gossip-exchanging is vividly described by Ko Hung in *Pao-p'u-tzu*. He mentions that people in his time were fond of telling stories and exchanging gossip, "some concerning their ancestors, some concerning women."⁶⁶ These people included not only commoners, but also people with literary talent. Ts'ao Chih 曹植, the famous poet, writer, and brother of the emperor Wen of Wei, once performed dance in a foreign style and recited several thousand words of entertaining and vulgar stories at a party, all to vie with a certain learned guest.⁶⁷ Even at a court gathering the telling of stories from the world outside elite circles was appreciated by men of high cultivation and power. Indeed, emperor Wen (Ts'ao P'i 曹丕) himself was said to have compiled one of the earliest *chih-kuai*, namely the *Lieh-i-chuan* 列異傳 (*Arrayed Marvels*).⁶⁸ A story in *Ch'en-shu* 陳書 (*History of the Ch'en Dynasty*) mentions that the king of Shih-hsing 始興 often stayed up overnight and invited guests to exchange all sorts of trivial stories that circulated amongst the common people.⁶⁹ These are all examples of the contact and exchange of information between the literary elite and commoners. Activities such as these were certainly an important source of the *chih-kuai* stories.⁷⁰ In view of this, we have to be reminded of the possibility that the

main purpose of the ghost story writers, at least some of them, might have been merely to provide strange tales for people's after-dinner entertainment. In cases such as these, any religious or moral significance the stories carried would, for the writers, have been secondary to the need for gripping narrative.

It is relatively easy to grasp the intention of such ghost-story writers as Kan Pao 干寶 by citing his statement in the preface to *Sou-shen-chi* 搜神記 (*Records of an Inquest into the Spirit-Realm*) that his purpose was to "prove that the way of the spirits is not false."⁷¹ Obviously, Kan himself was a believer in the existence of ghosts and spirits. Along this line, it has been suggested that, since the subjects of ghost stories belonged to a realm to which magicians and *fang-shih* had long claimed access, "it is not unreasonable to think that *fang-shih* magicians or men connected with their profession might have been responsible for starting such collections as a way of propagating their beliefs and advancing their careers."⁷² This position, however, is disputed on the ground that no obvious career advancement came with writing such genres, and that only a couple of the authors are known to have been *fang-shih*.⁷³ Moreover, discussions of Southern Dynasties *chih-kuai* conclude that these works were aimed at promoting Buddhism, since quite a number involved such Buddhist concepts as hell and retribution.⁷⁴ The motivations of the *chih-kuai* authors, as has been suggested, are at times "explicitly tendentious."⁷⁵ On the other hand, it was also due to the audience's tendency to believe in the existence of ghosts and their world that allowed the writers such convenience in propagating Buddhism through a medium familiar to the Chinese. The influence of Buddhist ideas on a wider public through such works must have been considerably important in the early days of the rise of Buddhism. It was perhaps not a coincidence that during this period the ghost festival (*yü-lan-p'en* 盂蘭盆) emerged as an important element in folk Buddhism.⁷⁶ We have to admit, however, that the detailed life stories of many of the authors or compilers of the *chih-kuai* are

⁶⁴ Campany, "Ghosts Matter," p. 16; *Strange Writing*, pp. 199-201.

⁶⁵ A number of stories were repeatedly taken into various collections, not to mention those with similar plots, which indicates their popularity. See Campany, *Strange Writing*, pp. 21 ff.

⁶⁶ Ko Hung 葛洪, *Pao-p'u-tzu* 抱朴子 (*wai-p'ien*), sect. "Chi-miu 疾謬" (Taipei: Shih-chieh, 1969), pp. 146-47.

⁶⁷ *San-kuo-chih* 三國志 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1971) 21, p. 603 (P'ei's commentary).

⁶⁸ For the problem of authorship of "Lieh-i-chuan," see Li, *Tang-ch'ien chih-kuai*, pp. 244-51; Wang, *Wei-Chin Nan-pei-ch'ao chih-kuai*, pp. 315-16; and idem, "Lieh-i chuan yen-chiu," pp. 45-70, who believes that Ts'ao P'i was the author; see also Campany, *Strange Writing*, pp. 47-47.

⁶⁹ *Ch'en-shu* 陳書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1971) 36, p. 494. See Li, *Tang-ch'ien chih-kuai*, pp. 229-35.

⁷⁰ Besides using stories taken from many earlier texts and copying texts of their own contem-

poraries, *chih-kuai* authors also included stories that they heard or collected from local legends and traditions. For a summary of the sources of *chih-kuai*, see Kominami, "Rikuchō Zui Tō shōsetsushi"; Wang, *Wei-Chin Nan-pei-ch'ao chih-kuai*, pp. 53-64; Campany, *Strange Writing*, pp. 179-99.

⁷¹ Others, e.g., DeWoskin, "Six Dynasties Chih-kuai," pp. 32-33, and Yu, "Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit," pp. 403-5, have referred to this mentality as the "ghostly apologue." See also Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales*, pp. 20-21; Campany, "Ghosts Matter," pp. 23-24; and idem, *Strange Writing*, p. 148.

⁷² Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales*, p. 18.

⁷³ Campany, *Strange Writing*, pp. 173-77.

⁷⁴ DeWoskin, "Six Dynasties Chih-kuai," p. 50; Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales*, p. 11.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷⁶ Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1988).

almost unknown, and that their motivations are far from clear.⁷⁷ It might be more fruitful instead simply to analyze individual stories in order to get at an underlying mentality.

In particular, I would like to discuss the mentality behind stories containing amorous female ghosts. It is a theoretically attractive claim that the "ideal type" of the amorous female ghost, or even women who were in love with male ghosts, reflects suppressed male sexual fantasies of something lacking in real life. According to this explanation, the amorous encounters between men and female ghosts, or vice versa, as depicted in the stories, were projections of not only the conscious thoughts, ideas, or beliefs of the authors, but were more fundamentally an unconscious way to express deeply ingrained desires, instincts, or emotions. The plots and images depicted satisfied the frustrated desire for lust, romance, curiosity, or simply excitement and thrill. It was, furthermore, a desire to escape from stereotypically virtuous and hard-working, yet joyless, females that caused the portrayal of amorous female ghosts who could ignore social etiquette and offer a relatively freer love. There is no discernible causal relationship between these men's personal achievements or social status and their being chosen by the amorous female ghosts. Instead of going through all the necessary procedures in obtaining a spouse, not to mention an ideal lover, the men in these stories were given free access to unconditional affection from and the enjoyment of ravishing beauties.⁷⁸

This observation doubtlessly needs the support of a detailed study of gender relations and the images of women in the Six Dynasties period, which I will not attempt at this point. Here I draw on a limited number of cases to illustrate my point. In *Shih-shuo hsün-yü* 世說新語 (*A New Account of the Tales of the World*), for example, we find a number of women who are either virtuous but not really beautiful (such as Hsü Yün's 許允 wife),⁷⁹ or known for wit (Wang Kung-yüan's 王公淵 wife and Huan Ch'ung's 桓沖 wife),⁸⁰ self-sacrifice for the family (Li Lo-hsiou 李絡秀 - T'ao K'an's 陶侃 mother),⁸¹ or devotion to

⁷⁷ See Wang, *Wei-Guin Nan-pei-ch'ao chih-kuai*, pp. 37-52.

⁷⁸ A recent study of fox-fairies described in Ch'ing-era novels shows that in most cases the personal character and achievements of the men who had amorous encounters with female fox-fairies were not mentioned, which indicates that such information was not essential to the story; see Yang Kuo-shu 楊國樞 and Yü An-pang 余安邦, "Ts'ung li-shih hsün-li-hsiieh ti kuan-tien t'an-t'ao Ch'ing-chi hu-ching ku-shih chung ti jen-hu kuan-hsi" 從歷史心理學的觀點探討清季狐精故事中的入狐關係, *Pen-t'u hsün-li-hsiieh yen-chiu* 本土心理學研究 (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 1992).

⁷⁹ Yang Yung 楊勇, *Shih-shuo hsün-yü chiao-chien* 世說新語校箋 (rpt. Taipei: Ming-lun, 1974; hereafter, *SSHY*), p. 510; trans. Richard B. Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsün-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis: U. Minnesota P., 1976; hereafter, *SSHYM*), p. 343.

⁸⁰ *SSHY*, pp. 513, 525; *SSHYM*, pp. 345, 354. ⁸¹ *SSHY*, pp. 520-21; *SSHYM*, pp. 350-51.

her husband (Hsi Ch'ao's 郝超 wife).⁸² In the historiographic treatises called "Lieh-nü chuan 列女傳 ("Arrayed Biographies of Women") included in both *Chin-shu* 晉書 (*History of the Chin Dynasty*) and *Wei-shu* 魏書 (*History of the Wei Dynasty*), we also see a group of "model women" who demonstrate various aspects of the traditional, Confucian virtue of wifely loyalty and filial piety.⁸³ A study of the education of women in this period maintains that such model women possessed both scholarship and immense capability.⁸⁴ The sober women portrayed in these works are not as affectionate or amorous as the female ghosts in *chih-kuai*, although they certainly represented the dominant, official ideology of ideal womanhood.

Given this predominant view, we may say that the psychological explanation mentioned above carries some weight. However, we should not overlook examples that depicted the female as sexually outgoing. Chia Ch'ung's 賈充 daughter was one such. A story, also preserved in *A New Account*, mentions that she took the initiative to watch the guests behind a screen and spotted the handsome Han Shou 韓壽, an aide to Chia. When she saw Han, she fell in love with him and subsequently expressed her love in poems. The poems were later made known to Han, who then began to pay her night visits, which finally resulted in matrimony.⁸⁵ A longer version of this story recorded in *Chin-shu* tends to confirm that it is not entirely a literary invention.⁸⁶ Although not nearly as active in her pursuit of Han Shou as some of the female ghosts in the *chih-kuai*, nonetheless she could be seen as an "ideal lover," given the social etiquette of the time. There are also stories about some sexually aggressive women who demanded that they be treated equally with men in having male concubines.⁸⁷ These are, to be sure, women of high social status, therefore their behavior should not be considered as normal. Yet the fact that their stories were recorded at all implies that there might be more of such that went unnoticed, and that, given proper conditions, females were quite capable of exerting their right in constructing a pleasure-filled life. It is therefore possible that the romantic, seductive, and unreserved female image found in the

⁸² *SSHY*, p. 527; *SSHYM*, p. 355.

⁸³ *Chin-shu* 晉書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1971) 96, pp. 2507-29; *Wei-shu* 魏書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1971) 92, pp. 1977-85. See Jennifer Holmgren, "Widow Chastity in the Northern Dynasties: The *Lieh-nü* Biographies in the *Wei-shu*," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 23 (1981), pp. 165-86. For a study of the Confucian social ethics prevalent in this period, see Shimomi Takao 下見隆雄, "Chūgoku joseishi kenkyū e no shiten" 中國女性史研究への視点, *Nippon Chūgoku gakkai hō* 日本中國學會報 45 (1993), pp. 50-64.

⁸⁴ Beatrice Spade, "The Education of Women in China during the Southern Dynasties," *Journal of Asian History* 13.1 (1979), pp. 15-41.

⁸⁵ *SSHY*, p. 690; *SSHYM*, p. 487. ⁸⁶ *Chin-shu* 40, pp. 1172-73.

⁸⁷ Spade, "Education of Women," pp. 34-35.

ghost stories might have reflected real life situations to a certain degree. Thus one needs to be more cautious in applying the "male sexual fantasy" theory.

Another story, this concerning the wife of Wang An-feng 王安豐, sheds further light on male-female relations. Wang's wife always addressed him by the familiar pronoun "you 卿." However, Wang thought it was inappropriate for a wife to address her husband in such informal language. His wife replied: "I am intimate with you and love you, so I address you as 'you.' If I did not address you as 'you,' who else would address you as 'you'?"⁸⁸ The anecdote suggests that among elite families, a formal relationship between man and woman was still the prevailing custom. Wang's wife certainly was a rare case, exceptional enough to merit mention by the author of *A New Account*. Viewed from the opposite position, however, one can also argue that she might have represented women who dared to express their feelings unreservedly. A corroboration of this could be found in the popular songs of this period, the words of which occasionally attest women's addressing their lovers by personal names and informal second-person pronouns like *ju* 汝.⁸⁹

As a recent study suggests, women of the Six Dynasties period in general seem to have enjoyed a remarkable degree of freedom in social activities.⁹⁰ In *Pao-p'u-tzu*, for example, Ko Hung criticized some of the women in his time who were free to go out, visiting temples and friends' homes, roaming the streets and singing and drinking freely, staying out until late in the evening, and even spending the night at a friend's house.⁹¹ The picture he drew referred mainly to women of well-to-do families. Such scenes, since we have no reason to doubt Ko Hung's statements, would have been familiar to contemporary authors of the *chih-kuai* stories.

In another genre of literature, the love lyrics of the Southern Dynasties, females are almost universally depicted as the weaker sex, "lost, abandoned, neglected, suffering, wounded ... subjugated by her desire for her lover, lacking any destiny or purpose in life outside love."⁹² The love lyrics describe such love-stricken ladies as extremely beautiful and delicate, in a language far more elaborate than that found in the *chih-kuai*. The male poets created another

⁸⁸ *SSHY*, p. 691; *SSHYM*, p. 488.

⁸⁹ Spade, "Education of Women," p. 31. For the use of *ju*, see Kuo Mao-ch'ien 郭茂倩, *Yueh-fu shih-chi* 樂府詩集 (rpt. Taipei: Shih-chieh, 1961) 46, pp. 1-7.

⁹⁰ Jen-der Lee, "The Life of Women in the Six Dynasties," *Journal of Women and Gender Studies* 4 (1993), pp. 47-80.

⁹¹ Ko Hung, *Pao-p'u-tzu*, p. 148.

⁹² Anne M. Birrell, "The Dusty Mirror: Courtly Portraits of Women in Southern Dynasties Love Poetry," in R. E. Hegel and R. C. Hessney, eds., *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature* (New York City: Columbia U.P., 1985), pp. 33-69; the quotation is from p. 66.

kind of stereotypical romantic female who, just as the female ghosts, also had strong love and devotion for her lover, and would also have been difficult to encounter in real life. The difference between the two kinds of image is that, while the boudoir-bound ladies in the lyrics are passively frittering their lives away waiting for their impossible lovers, the female ghosts had the courage to act on their own initiative to seek out passionate love experiences, no matter how short these may have been. Both, nonetheless, served to satisfy the thirst of the writers and readers for some unusual experiences of passion and love.

In short, psychological explanations of the amorous female ghost stories offer useful perspectives, although their application should not be taken as the only solution.

It has been suggested quite often that some of the ghost stories were aimed at criticizing the evils of contemporary society.⁹³ We have no direct evidence, however, to support such an explanation unless we believe that the mere depiction of things evil amounts to criticism. It is nevertheless clear that many of the stories, being short descriptions of individual events, served as anecdotes not only to satisfy the audience's psychological need for things fantastic and supernatural, but also provided many opportunities to cast a sarcastic eye on human nature. What is interesting to us, however, is whether or not we can detect more subtle meanings. When considering the ghosts' characters — their straightforwardness, simplemindedness, or unconditioned devotion, it is possible that the stories show a longing for a world without treachery, a world where emotions could be expressed directly and unreservedly. By providing a glimpse of such a world, I suggest, the ghost-story writers helped to construct an ideal world where some of life's concerns and distress could be alleviated temporarily.

THE FORMATION OF THE IDEA OF THE HUMAN GHOST

The ghost stories already glimpsed not only reflect different aspects of the world of the living, but also hint at how the world should have been. They may at times see to be reflections of reality; but at times they are prescriptions for an ideal world.

It has been suggested that, "to judge from extant examples, we can safely generalize that the *chih-kuai* were not burdened with discourse and argumentation, but were records of events set forth in plain, unencumbered narrative

⁹³ For example, Li, *T'ang-ch'ien chih-kuai*, p. 238.

style."⁹⁴ I would not argue with this claim, yet this does not mean that the stories were written down or collected without an underlying discourse. Based on the above observations, I propose that the *chih-kuai* of the Six Dynasties collectively were presenting a discourse of a certain appreciable sentiment that was accessible to compilers, writers, and readers and that had to do with their times and their world.

The stories seem to exhibit a tendency to depict ghosts as somewhat less complicated than men in character, although their sincerity and sense of justice were something that men could not resist or oppose. Therefore, although we hear that ghosts were sometimes taken advantage of by men, eventually justice was done to those who had wronged them. The justice of the ghosts, moreover, might not be understood entirely in human terms, because sometimes they exerted power over people and took lives without obvious reason. On the other hand, we also hear that the world of ghosts was similar to that of the living in that such vices as bribery, cheating,⁹⁵ and jealousy were common.⁹⁶ Thus the image of the ghost in the anomaly accounts grew from the featureless existence of pre-Han and early Han to a colorful and humanized character of the Six Dynasties period. Yet this character was not fully humanized, or one may even say was superhuman, since in some cases they grew to be idealized.

From stories contained in other texts of the Six Dynasties period, as expected, one can see that the belief in the existence of ghosts and spirits was widespread in society.⁹⁷ The ghost stories in the *chih-kuai* genre, therefore, should be placed in the context of this belief. Comparing anomaly-accounts with ghost stories contained in other texts, such as the story of Kao Li 高慳 in *Chin-shu*, it seems that in the latter case the ghost itself was not the focus of the story, as it often was in the anomaly-accounts.⁹⁸ This is understandable since the focus of *Chin-shu*, a historiographical work, would be directed towards humans rather than ghosts.

⁹⁴ DeWoskin, "Six Dynasties *Chih-kuai*," p. 39.

⁹⁵ *Lu*, pp. 155-56 ("Tai-tso chen-i-chuan" 戴作齋異傳); pp. 183-84 ("Shu-i-chi"), the stories of Chang K'ai's 張闡 and Fei Ch'ing-po's 費慶伯 bribing the ghosts and cheating the underworld officials.

⁹⁶ Yu, "Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit," p. 413: "Bribery, illicit gifts, and pay-offs are, in these tales, as common as bumbling litigators and venal judges, and in this way, the tales serve as much as any other kind of Chinese fiction to reflect the basic realities of its context."

⁹⁷ See, for example, the stories collected in the sect. "I-shu chuan" of *Chin-shu* 95, pp. 2467-505.

⁹⁸ *Chin-shu* 95, p. 2484.

A special note should be mentioned concerning ghosts in *Shen-hsien-chuan* 神仙傳 (*Biographies of the Immortals*), attributed to Ko Hung. There, ghosts appear mostly in an unfavorable position: they are always causing trouble, inflicting pain on people, and thus become subject to the exorcistic acts of the immortals. The difference between the ghosts in *Shen-hsien-chuan* and the *chih-kuai* is that the *chih-kuai* authors, whether or not true believers, explicitly or implicitly took a position to promote a world of ghosts that was not at all incompatible with the human world, whereas the author of *Shen-hsien-chuan* was a proponent of the immortals. The world of ghosts was therefore unacceptable or unimportant. A similar case can be made for the persons depicted in *Kao-seng-chuan* 高僧傳 (*Biographies of Eminent Monks*), where some monks with supernatural powers were said to be able to expel evil ghosts. These ghosts were without exception abominable creatures that only needed to be exorcised.⁹⁹

In the light of the above comparison, the *chih-kuai* stories should be considered as the most important forum for investigating the literary image of ghosts in this period.

THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF GHOST STORIES

The belief in the existence of ghosts, that they could enter the world of the living, led to the conclusion that communication was possible between the living and the dead because their two worlds overlapped. Thus we have stories of people visiting the realm of the dead as well as ghosts visiting the world of the living.¹⁰⁰ Consequently, we observe in all this a lack of a transcendental idea, something also true for the world of the immortals. Although some scholars render the term *hsien-jen* as "transcendents,"¹⁰¹ it is clear that the entire phenomenon of the belief in *hsien-jen* operated in a conceptual framework that followed closely the mundane world.

Evidence shows that as early as the Shang dynasty, people used all sorts of methods to propitiate and to ward off ghosts. Such actions reflected people's conception of their own position vis-à-vis that of the spirits and gods: one was inferior only in respect to one's power to battle demons or to affect the cos-

⁹⁹ Poo, "Images of Immortals"; John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1997), pp. 84-87. The same situation is found in the Buddhist-influenced *chih-kuai*, although even there the ghosts were depicted in a similar vein as that in other anomaly-accounts. See Kominami, "Rikuchō Zui Tō shōsetsushi."

¹⁰⁰ Campamy, "Return-From-Death Narratives."

¹⁰¹ For example, T. C. Russell, "Revelation and Narrative in the *Zhoushi Mingtongji*," *Early Medieval China* 1 (1994), pp. 34-59.

mos. But one could choose to employ whatever forces, divine or magical, that could be mustered to suppress, to overcome, or to evade the powers of the ghosts and spirits.¹⁰²

In this connection, an intriguing aspect of the nature of ghosts and spirits deserves to be discussed. This is the idea that a ghost or spirit can be "killed." It first appeared in pre-Han documents,¹⁰³ and is also found in the *chih-kuai* stories.¹⁰⁴ If the basic rationale of witchcraft is that one can actively control or threaten ghosts and spirits, then the idea of "killing the spirits and ghosts" follows. An implication seems to be that ghosts and spirits are limited beings. They are limited by their existence and forms, and they have beginnings and endings. Their power may be stronger than that of ordinary human beings, yet man can still control them through magical and ritual acts. This is to say that there existed in the world other powers that could be utilized by men against ghosts and spirits. The idea that ghosts and spirits were "mortal" suggests that, although people imagined that ghosts and spirits existed in a purely spiritual state that could break all the material and physical restraints imposed on human beings by nature, they could not but use their own state of existence as a reference for constructing the world of ghosts and spirits: since human beings are mortal, it follows that ghosts and spirits can be killed. The various apotropaic methods described in the daybooks, as well as in the anomaly-stories, show that people believed that ghosts and spirits would respond to the physical acts of man. Thus the world of man is accessible to the "divine beings," and vice versa.

It is also noteworthy that the ancient Chinese had already devoted much thought to man's fate after death, including the idea of ghosts; but relatively less speculation was paid to the question of the origin of life. This also speaks of a this-worldly attitude toward life, since death and the life beyond are much more important issues for those still living than questions concerning the origin of their lives, which would seem a superfluous matter.

CONCLUSION

Ghost stories, written and collected by the elite, were based on the concept of ghosts and spirits circulating in society. On the other hand, these stories served to articulate or even to recreate the image of the ghost. This reworked, literary image of ghosts was then redistributed to the populace through reading and retelling, not only among the literary elite, but perhaps also among

ordinary people. A culture of ghosts was therefore being shaped through this process. With the emergence of this culture of ghosts came the completion of an ideal world – a world where the living and the dead could interact with each other. What was lacking in the realm of the living, such as honesty, justice, and unabashed love, could be found in the world of the ghosts depicted in the *chih-kuai*. In a sense, this ideal world was also a refuge, as in the case of the world of "pure talk"; it was a place to which troubled literati escaped.

It should be remembered that the ghost stories constitute only part of the *chih-kuai*. I have not dealt with all the *kuai*-stories, those that involve prodigies or spirits of beings other than humans, as well as strange events. In general these prodigies or spirits are more or less anthropomorphic, therefore sometimes it is difficult to tell them apart from the "ghosts." On the whole they also represent a mentality that recognized the existence of the fantastic, that the world was composed of humans, spirits and ghosts. When one considers the reciprocal relationship between the reader and the texts, the fantastic element implies, to borrow the words of Todorov, "an integration of the reader into the world of the characters; that world is defined by the reader's own ambiguous perception of the events narrated."¹⁰⁵ The reader's hesitation between the natural and the supernatural, his curiosity in probing the gray area between the world of the living and that of the dead, was perhaps one of the prime forces that pushed the circulation of these stories.

It is worth stressing that behind all such stories of the fantastic, there existed a common psychological need for things thrilling. Human beings as a species had not only a sense of fear toward the unknown – which some argue resulted in the rise of religion in helping man to seek happiness and the avoidance of misfortune – but also a need to seek out exciting, extraordinary experiences. Such experiences could sometimes be gained in religious activity. The telling, creating, and sharing of ghost or other fantastic stories, as we have seen in the Six Dynasties tales of anomaly, besides providing entertainment, can be understood partly as the product of this hunger for the exotic that tied in with the religious mentality of the time. In other words, the ghost stories not only alleviated the readers' psychological need, but also allowed the readers to have contact with some deeply ingrained religious beliefs that permeated society. This psychological need and belief in ghosts and spirits were certainly there before the Six Dynasties. The combined forces of social development, political change, and literary and religious activities of the Six Dynasties period,

¹⁰² See Poo, *In Search*, chap. 9.

¹⁰³ See Poo, *In Search*, chaps. 4, 9.

¹⁰⁴ "Yu-ming-lu," in *Lu*, p. 300.

¹⁰⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1975), p. 31.

however, culminated in the explosion of the *chih-kuai* genre, and gave the writers and readers an unprecedented chance to explore and exploit the power of ghosts. The literary images of ghosts portrayed in the *chih-kuai* henceforth were carved in people's mentality, whether or not one was a believer. Whether we speak of the possibilities of narrative expression, religious doctrine, or the more nebulous concept of the psychology of a people, China was never the same again.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Lu* Lu Hsün 魯迅, comp., *Ku hsiao-shuo kou-ch'en* 古小說鉤沈
SSHY Yang Yung 楊勇, *Shih-shuo hsin-yü chiao-chien* 世說新語校箋
SSHY/M Richard B. Mather, trans., *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü*