

纪晓岚志怪故事选

FANTASTIC TALES

by Ji Xiaolan

Edited and Translated by
Sun Haichen



NEW WORLD PRESS

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Introduction

The 144 stories in this volume are adapted from *Thatched Abode of Close Observations* by Ji Yun of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Though they appear more or less weird, as most feature ghosts, fox spirits, demons or deities, they are not horror stories. This point can be settled beyond a doubt if one compares the gluttonous, wily but still lovable house cat in the seventieth story "Revenge of a House Cat" with the demonic black cat portrayed by Edgar Allen Poe. The author would not even have agreed to call his work fiction, for his intention was to record experiences and hearsay rather than making up imaginary tales.

Ji Yun, whose polite name was Xiaolan, was born into an official's family in Cui village of Xian County, Hejian Prefecture (modern Hebei Province) in the second year of the Yongzheng reign (1724). Like many famous figures in China, his birth was said to have been accompanied by astounding phenomena, which caused him to be regarded as a fire god incarnate — he himself alleged to have the ability to see in the dark as a child. Legends aside, he was a true child prodigy who learned to read at four, showing an extraordinary retentive memory. He perused books of all schools of thought, so that his father often blamed him for being too wide in his interests, which was nevertheless beneficial to his writing facility. After passing the metropolitan examination at the age of thirty-one, he enjoyed a successful official career and was appointed to various high posts including Minister of Rites. The only setback he suffered was a three-year exile to Urumqi in Xinjiang due to his leakage of some court secret to an in-law. However, as a misfortune may turn out to be good luck in disguise, the exile to the northwest frontier enriched his life

experience and provided him with source materials for his writing. As a scholar his greatest achievement was acting as chief compiler of the *Complete Collection of the Four Libraries*, but ordinary readers get to know him chiefly through *Notes of the Thatched Abode of Close Observations*, composed in his later years "to while away the time." Comprising over one thousand notes of what he had seen and heard in Beijing, Hebei, Fujian and Xinjiang, the book gives a social panorama covering life in the official circles and folk customs in addition to tales of the supernatural.

Stories about ghosts and deities originated from myths and legends in China's remote past, which were intermingled with ancient history as our ancestors seemed to lack the ability to tell reality from imagination. The propagation of Buddhist and Taoist doctrines in the Six Dynasties (222-589) induced quite a few scholars to write about marvels and extraordinary phenomena, but they took ghosts and gods seriously and believed they were making brief notes of actual occurrences. Chinese fiction, in the true sense of the word, emerged in the form of prose romances in the Tang dynasty. Apart from a marked increase in length, the prose romances were consciously made up as imaginary tales, but ghosts and spirits played only a minor part in them. The Qing dynasty saw the flourishing of supernatural tales, the representative works being Pu Songling's *Strange Tales from the Carefree Studio* and Ji Yun's *Notes of the Thatched Abode of Close Observations*. The former, modeled on Tang-dynasty prose romances, featured intricate plots and minute description, whereas the latter favored a pithy style and laconic account in the tradition of the writings from the Six Dynasties, with the addition of a few comments.

Demons and spirits depicted by the authors of the Six Dynasties, who were contented enough to make brief records of strange tales and anecdotes, often behaved in inexplicably bizarre manners. On the other hand, Ji Yun wanted his work to be "conducive to moral persuasion," hoping that people would gain some enlightenment from each story. Thus the apparitions in his work are much more human-like. The Qing dynasty was governed by the Manchus, a minority

people who enlisted the service of Han scholars but regarded them with deep suspicion; many authors were persecuted when the imperial court found their writings offensive. To speak through the mouths of gods and ghosts was therefore a self-protection strategy just like using the past to allude to the present. Social criticism took a prominent position in the many views Ji Yun expressed in his book. The Cheng-Zhu school of philosophy, the dominant Confucian doctrine at the time that advocated "annihilating human desires to uphold heavenly principles," was an invisible dagger that killed without spilling blood. Many of its theorists, in spite of their solemn airs, turned out to be hypocrites committing fraud in the name of safeguarding public morality. Thus the eighty-fourth story intimated that if a man had books on human nature and moral principles on his desk, he was very likely to be an insincere man with ill intentions. Lu Xun wrote that Ji Yun "was, among his contemporaries, a man of great courage who dared criticize ridiculous conventions and social customs during the harsh rule of Emperor Qianlong."

Ji Xiaolan's tales appeal to modern readers due to their intriguing story line, plain style, wry sense of humor, and witty comments. *Notes of the Thatched Abode of Close Observations* was written by a man of great erudition, vast experience, and a large mind, who had the benefit of narrators from all walks of life: servant women, maids, tenants, peddlers, as well as nobles and high officials; the result being this rich and fascinating book. In his opinion, since the world with its myriads of phenomena abounds in wonders and surprises, it is a pleasure to attain a deeper understanding of life while entertaining oneself by listening to strange tales — whether one believes them or not. The huge success of the book since its publication attracted quite a few imitators, who mistook its stories of ghosts and foxes for parables created for the sole purpose of preaching retributive justice. It comes as no surprise that their works, which were mostly drab sermons, have now sunk into oblivion.

引言

本书所收一百四十四个故事都选编自清人纪昀的《阅微草堂笔记》，因大多涉及鬼魂、狐精、妖怪或神仙，读着多少有点古怪诡异之气。不过它们并非恐怖小说，为此我们只需把第七十则“家猫复仇”里那个贪嘴、狡猾却不失可爱的家猫与爱伦·坡笔下令人毛骨悚然的黑猫作个比较，就一目了然。纪昀甚至不会同意把它们称作小说，因为他是在记录见闻，并非只凭想象编造故事。

纪昀，字晓岚，清雍正二年（1724）生于河间府（今河北省）献县崔庄的一个官宦家庭。象中国的许多名人一样，据说他出生时也颇有异象，因而被认为是火精转世——他自称小时候有对夜光眼。撇开传说不谈，纪晓岚是位名副其实的神童，四岁开始读书，过目不忘。他喜欢博览百家之言，父亲常责备他爱好过于广泛，但这肯定对他的写作大有好处。他三十一岁中进士，随后仕途坦荡，历任礼部尚书等高官，只有一回因向一位姻亲透露朝廷机密而被谪戍新疆乌鲁木齐三年。塞翁失马，焉知非福；谪戍西域丰富了他的人生体验，也为他的作品提供了素材。主持编纂《钦定四库全书》是他最大的学术成就，普通读者对他的了解则主要来自其晚年“消遣岁月”的作品《阅微草堂笔记》。此书收入他在京师、河北、福建、新疆等地的见闻一千多则，除志怪故事之外还有关于官场世态、风土人情等社会生活的记述。

作为志怪故事的源头，中国远古的神话传说就与历史浑然一体，因为我们的祖先有点分不清现实和想象。六朝时佛道思想广泛传播，出现不少文人所著的志怪书，但那些作者都认为鬼神之事确实存在，自己仅仅是加以简要记录。中国真正意义上的小说始于唐代的传奇，它们篇幅明显变长，更关键的是作者开始有意编造故事了，但其中志怪成分并不多。清代志怪小说很兴盛，代表作是

蒲松龄的《聊斋志异》和纪昀的《阅微草堂笔记》。前者模仿唐代传奇、情节曲折、描写细腻；后者则效法六朝传统，文风质朴、叙事简要，只不过多了几句议论。

六朝志怪书的作者只满足于把奇闻异事简录下来，故事中精魅的行为往往古里古怪，不合情理。纪昀则要求他的著作“有益于劝惩”，希望每个故事都能给读者一些启示，于是在他笔下，鬼怪的行为更近人情。清朝是异族入主中原，统治者对于汉族文人既利用，又严加防范，不少作者因文字触犯朝廷而获罪，所以借鬼怪之口抒发自己的见解，正如借古讽今，也是当时文人的一种自我保护手段。纪昀在书中表达了许多看法，对社会的批评尤其突出。当时流行的儒家学派——程朱理学提倡“存天理，灭人欲”，成为一把杀人不见血的刀子。而众多理学家道貌岸然，内心肮脏，沦为以维持风化为名招摇撞骗的伪君子。所以第八十四则故事里暗示，谁桌上摆满讲人性道德的书籍，他十有八九心术不正。鲁迅曾言，纪昀“生在乾隆间法纪最严的时代，竟敢借文章以攻击社会上不通的礼法，荒谬的习俗，以当时的眼光看去，真算得很有魄力的人。”

今天的读者喜爱纪晓岚的志怪故事主要因为其情节生动，风格质朴，文笔诙谐，议论隽妙。他写作《阅微草堂笔记》时已是饱学之士，见多识广，胸襟开阔，而且为他提供素材者来自社会各个阶层，既有达官贵人，也有仆妇婢女、佃户贩夫，书中表现的内容也就丰富多采，趣味盎然。在他看来，宇宙之大，无奇不有，对异闻怪谈“姑妄听之”，既得到了消遣，又能从中悟出一点人生哲理，何乐而不为。《阅微草堂笔记》一经刊印即大受欢迎，引来不少文人竞相模仿，但他们误以为那些狐鬼故事纯粹是为了宣扬因果报应而编写的寓言，依此效法，作品多成为枯燥无味的劝善书，自然就被今天的读者所遗忘了。

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