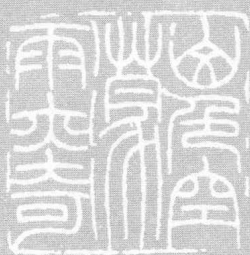


Chinese Tales from Hangzhou

West Lake
a collection of folktales

Translated by Jan & Yvonne Walls
Illustrated by Cheng Shifa

A JOINT PUBLICATION



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A COLLECTION OF FOLKTALES

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Introduction

The Chinese proverb says: "There is Heaven above, and there are Suzhou and Hangzhou below." The reference, of course, is to the beautiful scenery and environment, both natural and man-made, of the two cities. Hangzhou, with a history of more than two thousand and one hundred years, is today the capital city of Zhejiang Province, and has long been a center of cultural, political and literary activities. It was also the garden city of ancient emperors. The Wu Yue period, for a large part of the tenth century, was a golden age for its capital Hangzhou. During the Southern Song (A.D. 1127-1279), Hangzhou again became a capital, this time renamed Lin'an, and it grew into a major trading center. Marco Polo, who visited China in the late thirteenth century at the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty, was one of the first Westerners to call at Hangzhou, and he left the world with an impressive description of the city. The Qing Emperors Kangxi (reigned 1662-1722) and Qianlong (reigned 1736-1795) are each said to have visited Hangzhou six times. Hangzhou is today a modern city, retaining its famed beauty and boasting fairly developed industries.

The Qiantang River is located to the southeast of Hangzhou. In the past, high tide at the estuary often posed a threat to the city and its agricultural lands, and conserva-

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tion was a continuous struggle. More effective measures have been used to control the destructive force of the Qiantang waves, and today the Qiantang tidal bore is a natural wonder that people come from all over to view. It is said that the best time to view the tidal bore is on the eighteenth day of the eighth month on the lunar calendar. The tide comes racing up the river and reputedly can reach a height of thirty feet. The roar of the approaching tide can be heard for more than half an hour before it passes the viewer.

Situated to the west of Hangzhou, and taking its name therefrom, is West Lake, or *Xi Hu*, perhaps the most famous lake in China. In the past, when the waters of the Qiantang River flooded the city, West Lake acted as a natural reservoir. It has had different names throughout history: Brilliant Sage (*Mingsheng*) Lake, Golden Ox (*Jinniu*) Lake, and Supreme (*Shang*) Lake.

The famous Song poet-official Su Dongpo (Su Shi, A.D. 1037-1101) once compared West Lake to Xi Shi, the famous beauty of ancient times. Geographically, the lake is situated at a place where plains, hills and waters meet, creating the ideal conditions for scenic beauty. Throughout history, its landscape has been fashioned both by natural and by human forces, but gradually the traces of human effort have merged with the natural lineaments. Since ancient times, pagodas, pavilions, bridges, causeways, and monasteries have been built to enhance its attractiveness and convenience for human activity. Among the many scenic spots are Bao Chu Pagoda, with its small base and very tall body; Three Pools Mirroring the Moon; Jade Spring, whose water spills into a square pool filled with colorful carp; Fly-in Peak, which is covered with Buddhist statues; Six Harmonies Pagoda, an octagonal structure built entirely of wood; Soul's Retreat Monastery, which was first

established in the fourth century, most recently restored in 1956; and many others.

With a background of so much history, traditionally acclaimed beauty, and social activity, the imaginative powers of the folk in this area naturally created a wealth of folktales. In the spring of 1959, a group of people, with Xu Fei, Chen Weijun and Shen Tuqi in the lead, began collecting folktales in Hangzhou and the West Lake area. Altogether they gathered nearly four hundred stories of various kinds, and eventually selected these thirty-four tales for a volume that would give prominence to the scenic beauties of the area. The draft of the collection was finished in 1960, but the book *Xi Hu Minjian Gushi (West Lake: A Collection of Folktales)* was not published until 1978. We do not know to what extent these folktales have been edited, but we are told that they have been selected, sorted out and edited many times. The original collection was beautifully illustrated by Cheng Shifa, and these illustrations have been retained for this English edition.

Nearly all the thirty-four tales center around the well-known scenic spots and tell of their origins. The other few are anecdotes of famous figures who have been to West Lake, such as Yuchi Gong, Su Dongpo, and Emperors Kangxi and Qianlong. Whether the tales be supernatural, legendary or anecdotal, they are all told with great sincerity and charm.

West Lake, possessing such magnificent features, could only have been created in Heaven after much labor by mythical creatures like the dragon and the phoenix, as recounted in "The Bright Pearl." This is the folk way of explaining the almost supernatural beauty and purity of the lake. "Stone Man Ridge," on the other hand, describes the origin of the lake from a more human and down-to-earth point of view; here we find the lake was created only after

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much human hardship, labor and sacrifice. These two stories viewed together illustrate the attempt to use both supernatural and human efforts to explain the origin of West Lake.

The dragon and the phoenix, especially the former, appear frequently in the stories. We note that in both "Rising Sun Terrace" and "Phoenix Mountain," the phoenix is a beneficent bird and a supernatural helper who also assists in delivering humans out of miserable circumstances. The dragon, with the exception of the malevolent old fire dragon in "The Little Yellow Dragon," is almost always a beneficent being. He helps the underprivileged, as in "The Little Yellow Dragon" and "The Hua Pond"; or provides water, as in "Jade Spring" and "The First Well Spring of Mount Wu." The Dragon King may occasionally cause trouble, but when he is threatened or reasoned with, we feel that he is capable of understanding human needs. The story of the black dragon draws sympathy from the readers. The very fact that a dragon can transform into a person, and a person into a dragon, brings the relation between dragon and mankind even closer together. Both dragon and phoenix, then, are closely involved with human fate. These stories tend to substantiate Wen Yiduo's suggestion, in his *Myth and Poetry (Shenhua Yu Shi)*, that the dragon and the phoenix were two totems of ancient Chinese peoples.

The Dragon King, as we see in "Six Harmonies Tries to Fill the River," "Beating the Dragon King" and "Prince Qian Shoots the Tide," also appears as the personification of a force of nature, namely the Qiantang tide. As mentioned before, high tide at the Qiantang River had been difficult to control, and often led to loss of agricultural lands. In many cases, however, human efforts may prevail over the forces of nature. Six Harmonies subdues the

Dragon King by throwing rocks into the river, and by cursing him. Prince Qian has thousands and thousands of arrows shot into the river to quell the ill-tempered Dragon King. The giant Great King Qian — a magnified personification of human force — makes the Dragon King promise to give a loud warning before his tide rises. Thus, Six Harmonies, Prince Qian and the giant gained the approval and admiration of the people and they are commemorated in folklore to this day.

The destructive forces of nature are by no means all that the people have to confront. Another destructive force comes from within human society itself, through the arbitrary and selfish acts of the rich and the powerful. This is especially evident in unfeeling landlords and greedy, selfish officials. The victims of these people can be the populace in general, as in "Golden Ox Lake"; or the poor tenant farmers, as in "The Hua Pond"; or a kind and capable young woman, as in "Xing Chan"; or even a monkey, as in "Monkey Calling Cave." In the end, however, evil is always punished, often through supernatural intervention. This theme runs through almost all the tales.

But if evil officials are condemned by the folk, then good and benevolent ones are certainly praised and tribute is paid them. Yue Fei, a Song Dynasty general, is an embodiment of loyalty and bravery for the folk. Qin Hui, the Prime Minister who caused Yue Fei's death, is considered "foul" and his likeness was fried in oil and eaten. This is the folk way of expressing partiality and admiration towards a "good" general. Su Dongpo is an exemplary good "fatherly" official in the eyes of the folk. In "Su Dongpo Solves a Case by Painting Fans" and "Dongpo Meat," we hear the people lament his unjust punishment and express their sincere love for him. In their stories, the folk redress his wrongs by emphasizing his sense of justice and his

concern for the common people, making it clear that he was a good man victimized by the intrigue of jealous officials.

Among the heroes most celebrated in the tales are those who suffer long and even sacrifice their lives for the public good. There are many of them: Bao Chu who finds the captive sun; the little yellow dragon who leads the people against the old fire dragon; and Waterboy who brings a source of water to the people. The most celebrated heroines, typically, are model mothers, wives, daughters-in-law and good neighbors, such as Lady Wisdom, Xing Chan and Lady White.

Love stories always occupy an important position among folktales. In this collection, "Lady White" and "A Thread of Sky" are two beautiful and touching stories that let the reader experience the joys and sorrows of the lovers. What is more, we are given to believe that love can even transcend human form. Despite the fact that Lady White is the transformation of a snake, Xu Xian loves her to the end, and her love for Xu Xian is always true. In the other tale, the love between Stone Child and Sister Flower persists even after they both have been transformed into birds.

Humor and satire are two other elements we find in several stories. Mad Monk in "Fly-in Peak" is reminiscent of the crude monk Lu Zhishen in the epic *Water Margin*. When Mad Monk steals the bride and lures the whole village to run after him with various "weapons" in their hands, the reader cannot help but laugh at the whole incongruous scene. When the Governor in "Monkey Calling Cave" cries out in exasperation: "This one doesn't count!" after he is defeated at chess by a golden-haired monkey, we have to laugh at both the ridiculous situation and the Governor's vanity and false pride. When Yuchi Gong first gives the monk Immortal Forest a taste of his own medicine, and then assigns him a spot for his gate far away from his monastery, we laugh

with satisfaction and agree that the monk deserves every bit of what he gets. In another story, we see a man ride unannounced into the yamen on the back of a donkey in a most unassuming manner, and only when he shows his Imperial seal do we learn that he is none other than the new Governor, Su Dongpo. The whole unexpected and incongruous scene is a good example of how folktales handle humor. Emperors are "Sons of Heaven"; in polite society they are not to be ridiculed. The folk, however, see them as ordinary human beings with human foibles and they are made the objects of satire. Emperor Kangxi demonstrates himself capable of making mistakes, but he can only defend himself by the unreasoning shout of "Silence!" Emperor Qianlong, so anxious to trap Monk Censure with a mistaken utterance, only ends up making a complete fool of himself. In "Eight-trigram Plot," the Emperor's deceitful act is uncovered by a mere old farmer. These reverend Emperors are satirized here and we are given to feel that they were taught a lesson.

The carvings and statues on the mountains in the West Lake area clearly show that stone craftsmanship used to be an important trade. It is interesting to learn from "The Stone Censer" that Lu Ban — commonly considered the ancestor of carpentry — and his sister are the master craftsmen who taught people here the art of stone-cutting. Waterboy, Stone Child and the old stone cutter in "Plum Blossom Monument" are other examples of the excellent stonecraftsman ideal.

Tea, silk and embroidery are still very important products of this area even today. Dragon Well (*Long Jing*) Tea has been famous for ages, because the leaves are beautifully shaped, and the tea is fragrant and mellow. "The Ancestors of Tea" recounts the almost accidental origin of the cultivation of this famous tea, and how it came about as a

reward for an old granny's good deeds. "Lady Silkworm" tells a charming story of the origin of sericulture. Sister Flower in "A Thread of Sky" and Autumn Lass in "Phoenix Mountain" excel in embroidery with such good skills that the things they embroider are life-like.

These thirty-four stories offer us imaginative insights which can increase our understanding of the spirit of the historical place and its people, their feelings and their day-to-day activities.

While these folktales exhibit strong local characteristics, they also show clearly universal traits. For example, in a typically Chinese tale like "Rising Sun Terrace," where the son continues and completes his father's unfinished task with the encouragement of his faithful mother, we detect elements of the universal hero syndrome. The circumstance of the hero Bao Chu's birth is unusual, for he is born when his mother is grief-stricken on the discovery of her husband's death. His childhood and growth are unusual: "The boy began to grow as soon as the wind blew on him. When the wind first blew, he could talk. The second time the wind blew on him, he could already run. The third time, he grew into a strong man, eighteen feet tall." When he learns about the death of his father, he voluntarily sets out on the quest for the lost sun. A magic helper, the shining golden phoenix, comes along on the adventure. On the road, other helpers, villagers, make him a "hundred families' coat" which will later save him from being frozen to death. Then the first hero test: He has to swim across a wide and treacherous river. More helpers, other villagers along the way, offer him a bag of soil which will enable him to reach the dark world of the demons. He comes upon another village where he is tempted by fat men and beautiful ladies, good food and fine wine. When he discovers that these villagers are all demons in disguise, he flees. After successfully

enduring further trials, he comes to a distant sea and discovers the underwater cave where the demon king has hidden the captive sun. After doing battle with the demon king, Bao Chu rescues the sun and pushes it halfway up through the sea, but he dies of exhaustion. His supernatural helper the phoenix carries the sun back up into the sky, and light and warmth are restored to the world in a blaze of glory.

One of the milestones in the study of world folklore was the publication in 1932 of Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1932-1936). In this monumental work, Thompson isolated the main narrative elements recurring in folk-literature around the world, then systematized and numbered them as motifs. It has since become one of the most important reference tools for anyone who studies folk-literature. All of the thirty-four folktales in the present collection contain some of these world-wide motifs. Consideration of these elements together with those that are typically Chinese should add more to the reader's appreciation of the stories in this collection. With this in mind, we append to the main body of stories a list of motifs, according to their order in *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Revised ed., Indiana University Press, 1955), with the corresponding titles of the folktales in which they appear. We also include a list of place names mentioned in the stories, with *pinyin* romanization and Chinese characters for convenient reference.

We hope that these folktales will be of interest to students of folklore and to those readers who simply enjoy good stories.

Jan and Yvonne Walls

Victoria, B.C.
September, 1979

The Bright Pearl

It was said in ancient times, in a cave east of the Milky Way, there lived a snow white jade dragon; and in the big forest west of the Milky Way, there dwelt a colorful gold phoenix. The jade dragon and the gold phoenix were neighbors. Every morning, one would emerge from the cave and the other fly out of the forest. After a simple greeting to each other, each would then hurry off to do the day's work.

One day, while one of them was flying in the sky and the other was swimming in the Milky Way, they suddenly came upon a fairy islet. On the islet, they discovered a bright and shining stone. The gold phoenix liked it very much: "Jade Dragon! Look, Jade Dragon! What a beautiful stone!"

The jade dragon was also attracted to it: "Gold Phoenix! Shall we work on it and make it into a pearl?"

The gold phoenix nodded her head in agreement, and they started to work on it.

The jade dragon clawed it with his claws and the gold phoenix pecked at it with her beak. They worked on it day after day and year after year, until finally they fashioned it

into a round, bright pearl. The gold phoenix was so pleased that she flew to the fairy mountain and brought back many dew drops to sprinkle upon the pearl. The jade dragon was so happy that he swam to the Milky Way and brought back great quantities of pure water to spray over it. After much sprinkling of dew and spraying of pure water, it gradually became a bright and shining pearl!

From then on, the jade dragon grew to like the gold phoenix and the gold phoenix liked the jade dragon. Both of them loved their pearl. The jade dragon did not want to go back to the cave east of the Milky Way any more, and the gold phoenix had no desire to return to the forest west of the Milky Way; therefore they stayed on the fairy islet in the middle of the Milky Way and kept watch over their own pearl day and night.

Now, this bright pearl was a real treasure. Wherever the bright light of the pearl might shine, the trees there would be green forever, the hundred flowers would bloom all together, the mountains would be bright, the waters beautiful and there would be a bumper harvest of all the grains.

One day, the Queen Mother of the West walked out of her palace gate and saw the beautiful shining light of this pearl. She loved it so much that she ordered a trusted heavenly soldier to steal it at night. Once, when the jade dragon and the gold phoenix were soundly asleep, the heavenly soldier quietly stole the pearl away from them. The Queen Mother of the West was overjoyed when she obtained this pearl. She loved it so much that she would not even let anyone see it, but hid it in the palace. She closed it behind nine layers of gates, which were locked with nine locks.

When the jade dragon and the gold phoenix woke up and discovered that their pearl had disappeared, they were

worried sick! They looked for it in the east, and searched in the west. The jade dragon searched in every cave under the Milky Way, and the gold phoenix looked in every corner of the fairy islet, but still they could not find it, and they were extremely saddened. Nevertheless, they continued to search for it day after day, and night after night, hoping to find it some day.

On the day the Queen Mother of the West celebrated her birthday, immortals from all directions came to celebrate in her palace. The Queen Mother arranged for an "immortal peach party" to entertain all the immortals. They were all drinking fine wine, eating the immortal peaches, loudly singing happy birthday to her: "May your fortune be as great as the Eastern Sea is deep; may your life be as long as South Mountain is high!"

All of a sudden the Queen Mother of the West became so happy that she told all the immortals: "My friends! I am going to show you a precious pearl. It is one the likes of which you may find neither in heaven nor on earth!"

So saying, she took the nine keys from her sash and opened the nine locks. She entered the nine gates and brought out that bright pearl. She held it on a gold platter and placed it in the middle of the big hall. The pearl gave out a bright and glittering light. When the immortals saw this, they all praised it, shouting with glee.

At this very moment, the jade dragon and the gold phoenix were still looking everywhere for the pearl.

When the gold phoenix noticed the cold bright light given out by the bright pearl, she shouted to the jade dragon immediately: "Jade Dragon! Hurry and look! Isn't that the cold bright light that comes from our pearl?"

The jade dragon poked his head out of the Milky Way and took a look: "You're right! It must be our pearl. Let's hurry and get it back!"