



STORIES ABOUT  
NOT BEING AFRAID  
OF GHOSTS

# STORIES ABOUT NOT BEING AFRAID OF GHOSTS

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Front cover: Chung Kuei, a famous  
figure in Chinese folklore known  
for his skill in catching ghosts

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*PUBLISHER'S NOTE*

This is a selection of stories from the first Chinese edition of *Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts* published by the People's Literature Publishing House, Peking, in February 1961. A preface written for the Chinese edition by Ho Chifang, Director of the Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, is also included.

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## PREFACE

Ho Chi-fang

There are no ghosts. Belief in ghosts is a backward idea, a superstition and a sign of cowardice. This is a matter of common sense today among the people.

In the past, however, people took a different view. Many believed in ghosts and were afraid of them. There is nothing strange about this. When man was not yet able to comprehend natural and social phenomena in the light of science, he inevitably had all sorts of superstitions. The more so because the reactionary ruling classes fooled and frightened the people with ghosts and gods so as to strengthen their rule.

What should amaze us today is not that there were so many believers in ghosts in those days but that, at a time when believers in ghosts had the upper hand, there was a minority who denied the existence of ghosts. Confucius, as recorded in the *Analects*, had doubts and reservations about ghosts and gods. Hsun Tzu, in "The Removal of Prejudice," ridiculed a "stupid and timid" man who believed in ghosts and goblins. Huan Tan and Wang Chung of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.), Juan Chan and Juan Hsiu of the Tsin Dynasty (265-420 A.D.) and Fan Chen of the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-589 A.D.) all held materialist views. They contended that a man's spirit died with his body or openly maintained

that there were no ghosts. Like an eternal fire, disbelief in ghosts or gods has never been stamped out throughout China's history. This has been a never-fading light of our nation's wisdom. We cannot fail to admire the intellectual courage and the brilliance of the ideas of those men of ancient times who refused to be fettered by superstitions about ghosts and gods.

Many ancient Chinese authors of tales and sketches liked writing about ghosts. This often showed, of course, that they were still unable to rise above a superstitious belief in ghosts. But there were some among them who, though admitting the existence of ghosts, had no respect for the ghosts everyone else feared. They held that ghosts were nothing to be afraid of, and they described men who dared to curse, expel, beat or capture ghosts. Such stories are full of meaning. They were ingenious reflections of the dauntless spirit of our people in ancient times. Such are the *Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts* which we have compiled.

In compiling this booklet our aim was not to use these stories to illustrate the materialist ideas of ancient China. Our intention was mainly to present these stories as fables and satires to readers. A man who is cowardly at heart and has not emancipated his mind will be afraid of non-existent ghosts and gods. But if he raises his level of political understanding, does away with superstition and emancipates his mind, he will find not only that ghosts and gods are nothing to be afraid of but that imperialism, reaction, revisionism and all natural or man-made calamities that actually exist, are also nothing for Marxist-Leninists to be afraid of but are something that can be defeated or overcome.



It was after *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*) published "Comrade Mao Tse-tung on 'Imperialism and All Reactionaries Are Paper Tigers'" that we started compiling this booklet. Comrade Mao Tse-tung said:

All reactionaries are paper tigers. In appearance, the reactionaries are terrifying, but in reality they are not so powerful. From a long-term point of view, it is not the reactionaries but the people who are really powerful.<sup>1</sup>

He said this in a talk with the American journalist Anna Louise Strong in Yen-an in 1946. Since then, we have defeated Chiang Kai-shek backed by U.S. imperialism, and founded the People's Republic of China. In the war to resist U.S. aggression and aid Korea, we fought shoulder to shoulder with the Korean people and defeated the aggressive forces of U.S. imperialism. Many facts have borne out Comrade Mao Tse-tung's thesis. But how to assess the forces of revolution and the forces of reaction is still a big question, in China and throughout the world, which many people have not yet solved. These people still harbour superstitions; they have still not emancipated, or have not completely emancipated, their minds. They do not understand that the apparent "power" and "strength" of imperialism and all reactionaries at certain times is, historically speaking, merely a transient phenomenon, a factor playing only a temporary role. But their anti-popular character and the fact that they are already rotten and have no future is the essence of the matter and is a factor playing a constant role. In contrast to the case of

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<sup>1</sup>"Talk with the American Correspondent Anna Louise Strong," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1961, Vol. IV, p. 100.

the reactionary forces, the apparently insufficient strength of the revolutionary forces at certain times is merely a transient phenomenon, a factor playing only a temporary role; their progressive character and the fact that they enjoy the support of the people and are bound to triumph is the essence of the matter and is a factor playing a constant role. We have every reason, therefore, to despise imperialism and all reactionaries, and we have every assurance and full confidence that we can defeat them. The ghosts described in the tales, like paper tigers, are frightful in appearance. But many ghost-defying stories show that, in reality, there is nothing frightful about them. All these stories make this point: if only man has no fear of ghosts but dares to despise and strike at them, the ghosts will fear man. "Don't be afraid of ghosts" — not only can this serve us as a simile for strategically despising imperialism and all reactionaries but its content can be broadened to mean: if we are unable to make an end of superstition and emancipate our minds, and are fearful and apprehensive about everything that appears to be frightful but actually isn't so, we can be called "ghost-fearing" and will be as ridiculous as if we were actually afraid of ghosts.

There are no ghosts such as are described in the old stories, but there are actually many things in this world which are like ghosts. Some are big, such as international imperialism and its henchmen in various countries, modern revisionism represented by the Tito clique of Yugoslavia, serious natural calamities and certain not-yet-reformed members of the landlord and bourgeois classes who have usurped leadership in some organizations at the primary level and staged a come-back there. Some are small, such as difficulties and setbacks in ordinary work, etc. All

these can be said to be ghost-like things. Imperialism, reaction, revisionism and so on differ from ghosts in that they really exist while ghosts do not. But they have something in common with the ghosts in the tales: They are always up to deviltry, they always create disturbance and make trouble. Sometimes they are ferociously vicious, with hideous features; at other times they take on enchanting guises to bewitch people; they all know how to mask themselves, how to fascinate or terrify people, and their ability to transform and metamorphose themselves puts the ghosts in the old stories completely in the shade. But the most important thing is that, like the ghosts in the tales, they appear frightful but actually are not. Some people fear them and this, just as with fear of ghosts, is due to their backward thinking, to their failure to emancipate their minds and to do away with superstition and to their cowardice stemming from the fact that their subjective understanding does not conform to objective reality. To make a clean sweep of such backward "ghost-fearing" ideas is a serious fighting task for every revolutionary. There are people of another kind who are "half-man-half-ghost." If they are not remoulded into complete human beings, they are likely to turn into complete "ghosts." While they are still "half-man-half-ghost," their reactionary aspect will play the devil and stir up trouble like all the rest of the "ghost" species. It will do a lot of good for people to read the old stories about not being afraid of ghosts and for everyone to promote the spirit of not being afraid of ghosts.

Thoroughgoing dialectical materialists and genuine proletarian revolutionaries are, of course, much wiser than those people who did not fear ghosts in the old tales. They know perfectly well that the forces of reaction at

home or abroad, however powerful they may appear to be, cannot after all stop the mighty and irresistible advancing wheel of history. It is the law of history and of actual life that good will triumph over evil, truth over falsehood, virtue over vice, beauty over ugliness, the new-born revolutionary forces over the decadent reactionary forces, the exploited and oppressed people over the exploiters and the oppressors, and the progressive over the conservative. Therefore, as thoroughgoing dialectical materialists and genuine proletarian revolutionaries see it, there is nothing to be afraid of in this world. Imperialism, reaction, revisionism, the overthrown classes which stage or attempt to stage a come-back, exceptionally severe natural calamities, difficulties and setbacks in ordinary work and struggle, etc. — none of these are to be feared. Strategically, with regard to the whole, we have every reason to despise, and we must despise, all of them. Those who dare not despise the enemy and all that obstructs our advance and are frightened out of their wits by imperialism and reaction, or who succumb before difficulties and setbacks, are ghost-fearing men of the 20th century.

Many of the stories which we have selected describe from a positive angle the courage of men who had no fear of ghosts. In "The Scholar of Changchow," from *Tales of Yi Chien*, the hero is not afraid of monsters of any kind. He puts it well: "Nothing in the world should be feared; but there are men who scare themselves." San-mang in "Ghosts Avoid Chiang San-mang," from *Notes of the Yueb-wei Hermitage*, having heard a story about catching ghosts, went secretly to a graveyard night after night, as eager and ready to catch ghosts as a hunter is to catch foxes and hares; but he never met a

ghost. The writer of this story aptly commented: "San-mang was perfectly sure that ghosts could be caught and bound; he despised ghosts in his own mind and his courage was great enough to frighten the ghosts away. That's why ghosts avoided him." The tale "Chen Peng-nien Blows Away the Ghost of a Hanged Woman," from *What Confucius Did Not Talk About*, is a weird and ghastly one. It describes the ghost of a hanged woman which "stood erect and blew its breath at Chen. The gust of wind was icy cold. Chen's hair stood on end and his teeth chattered, while the lamp turned pale and was on the point of going out." But the next paragraph is full of meaning. Chen Peng-nien then says to himself: "So even ghosts have breath! I have breath too, haven't I?" So he takes a deep breath and blows at the ghost which disappears like thin smoke. The ghost in "Chen Tsai-heng," from *Seven Anecdotes of the Golden Bottle*, made this honest confession: "The truth is that ghosts are afraid of men." This more or less sums up the message of all these stories. Shouldn't we show the same spirit towards all the reactionary forces both at home and abroad, to natural and man-made calamities, and to all things which are outwardly terrifying but are actually not to be feared at all? Could it be that they have "breath" while we have none? Could it be, in actual fact, that they don't fear us but that we should fear them? Is it possible that the more we fear "ghosts," the more they will love us? That they will show mercy and not harm us? And that suddenly all will go swimmingly for our cause, and everything will be bright and rosy, like the flowers that bloom in the spring?

Some of the other stories also show the same fearless spirit and are written in a most interesting manner.

One such example is "Juan Teh-ju" from *Records of Light and Dark* of the Southern and Northern Dynasties. Juan sees a ghost in the privy. Unruffled, he says with a smile: "People say that ghosts are hideous; they certainly are!" Thoroughly ashamed of itself, the ghost makes off. This story is terse and amusing. In "What Tsao Chu-hsu Says," also from *Notes of the Yueh-wei Hermitage*, a man who has no fear of ghosts sees a ghost; it tries to frighten him with the dishevelled hair and protruding tongue of the ghost of a hanged person. He smiles at the apparition and says: "It is still hair, only rather dishevelled; it is still a tongue, only a bit longer. What's there to be afraid of?" The ghost then takes off its head and puts it on the table. Still smiling, the man says: "I do not fear you with your head on, so what's there to fear with your head off!" The ghost is thoroughly discomfited. In the story about Keng Chu-ping from "Ching Feng" in *Strange Tales of Liao Chai*, the way one ghost is handled is even more remarkable:

So he (Keng Chu-ping) went alone and read books downstairs. As he sat at the table after dusk, a ghost with matted hair appeared. Its face was as black as charcoal, and it stared at him with bulging eyes. Chu-ping laughed, dipped his finger in the ink and, after smearing it over his face, stared back at the ghost with gleaming eyes. Abashed, the ghost fled.

Reactionary forces both at home and abroad are even more shameless than ghosts. It is sometimes necessary for us to use Keng Chu-ping's method, that is: pay them back in their own coin! Not that we want to make them ashamed of themselves, but it will put them into a hopeless situation and force them to retreat in face of difficulties.

The thesis that "all reactionaries are paper tigers," put forward by Comrade Mao Tse-tung during the Third Revolutionary Civil War period, has armed the people of our country ideologically, strengthened their confidence in victory and played an exceedingly great role in the People's Liberation War. In the struggle against imperialism and for world peace in the coming days, and in the great struggle to overcome finally the remnant forces of the reactionary classes within the country and successfully build a great socialist country, Comrade Mao Tse-tung's concept of strategically despising the enemy will continue to inspire us and will also enable us to go on winning great victories. Comrade Mao Tse-tung's concept of strategically despising the enemy is always spoken of together with his concept of tactically taking the enemy seriously. As early as 1936, in his *Strategic Problems of China's Revolutionary War* he said: "Our strategy is 'to pit one against ten,' while our tactic is 'to pit ten against one' — this is one of the fundamental principles on which we beat the enemy."<sup>1</sup> In his article "On Some Important Problems of the Party's Present Policy" written in 1948, he explained in still greater detail that, strategically, with regard to the whole, we should take the enemy lightly and oppose overestimating the enemy's strength. But, with regard to each part, each specific struggle, we must never take the enemy lightly, we must, on the contrary, take him seriously. He said:

If, with regard to the whole, we overestimate the strength of our enemy and hence do not dare to overthrow him and do not dare to win victory, we shall

<sup>1</sup>*Strategic Problems of China's Revolutionary War*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1954, p. 109.

be committing a Right opportunist error. If, with regard to each part, each specific problem, we are not prudent, do not carefully study and perfect the art of struggle, do not concentrate all our strength for battle and do not pay attention to winning over all the allies that should be won over (middle peasants, small independent craftsmen and traders, the middle bourgeoisie, students, teachers, professors and ordinary intellectuals, ordinary government employees, professionals and enlightened gentry), we shall be committing a "Left" opportunist error.<sup>1</sup>

This concept of Comrade Mao Tse-tung is a summing up of experience which has stood repeated tests over the long years of China's revolutionary struggle. In these terse terms he elucidates extremely complex questions of revolutionary strategy and tactics, and gives us a fundamental guiding principle for our revolutionary struggle. This is a Marxist-Leninist theoretical generalization of great profundity.

Why should we strategically despise the enemy while tactically taking him seriously? Comrade Mao Tse-tung gave a thorough explanation of this at a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held at Wuchang in December 1958. He pointed out that there is not a single thing in the world which is not a unity of opposites, which is without a dual nature. Imperialism and all reactionaries also have a dual nature — they are real tigers and paper tigers at the same time. Looked at in essence, from a long-term

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<sup>1</sup>"On Some Important Problems of the Party's Present Policy," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1961, Vol. IV, pp. 181-82.



point of view, they are paper tigers, and hence we should despise them strategically. In view of the fact that they have eaten millions and tens of millions of people and will continue to eat people in the future, they are real tigers, and we should, therefore, also take them seriously tactically.<sup>1</sup> This shows that the dialectics of our revolutionary theory, the dialectics of our strategy and tactics, are precisely a correct reflection of the dialectics of objective reality. And it is precisely because our theory, strategy and tactics correctly reflect the laws of objective reality that we are able to win every battle we fight. Just as in dealing with the enemy, we must also strategically despise difficulties or setbacks in our work while tactically taking them seriously. Difficulties and setbacks in all revolutionary work are only transient phenomena, merely obstacles or twists and turns in our path of advance; they can be surmounted or overturned. Under certain definite conditions and through conflict, things are always changing positions with their opposites and transforming themselves into their opposites. To people engaged in the stupendous cause of revolution, difficulties and setbacks in revolutionary work are very small things. In this respect, we have every reason to despise them. But we must also face up to them, study them seriously and draw the necessary experience and lessons from them, find effective measures to overcome or overturn them, and resolutely carry these measures through so as to conquer them and move ahead successfully. So in this respect we should also take them seriously.

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<sup>1</sup>See the editorial note of "Talk with the American Correspondent Anna Louise Strong," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1961, Vol. IV, pp. 98-99.