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# Record of the Listener

Selections of Chinese Supernatural stories



*Attributed to Hong Mai (1123-1202)*  
*Translated from the Chinese by Alister D. Inglis*



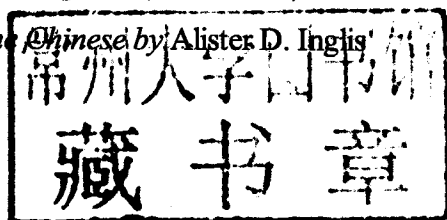
FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

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# Preface

Social progress lies in exchanges, as does the development of cultures as well as personal friendships. It has been proven through world historical practice that the achievement of cultural prosperity and social progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century depends on mutual understanding and exchange.

Thanks to the rapid development of transport and communications, mutual exchanges are becoming increasingly frequent day by day, but at the same time new problems have emerged under new circumstances.

Human culture can be divided into two levels. The surface level, or “living culture,” which involves all aspects of survival such as eating, drinking and clothing, has been universally propagated. Through fusion, integration and imitation of each other, living culture has played the role of deepening friendship and enhancing mutual understanding among different peoples.

The deeper second level of human culture we also need to pay attention to is known as “conceptual culture,” exchanges which have also been carried out, but still far from sufficiently. Although also formed over a long period of time through rich historical accumulated development, conceptual culture evolves from the original national traditions, so its nature is more concealed and more profound. Yet, it also allows for concise abstract ways of thinking, more accurate ways of expression and more systematic written records, and can be constantly accumulated, readjusted and improved. Conceptual culture manifests itself through the literature,

history, philosophy and arts of a people or a region—aspects nowadays belonging to the field of “humanities”—and becomes the spiritual wealth enjoyed by all human beings. To gain a better understanding of a people or a country, in particular one with long-standing and rich cultural traditions, one needs to better understand and respect its conceptual culture.

It takes time to advance from understanding a culture to respecting it, as with the process of moving from respect to appreciation. Chinese culture has experienced three peaks in its history of exchange: The first occurred during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), when the Silk Road connected China with Western Europe, bringing with it the first great leap in Chinese culture, and thus this period in history came to be known as the “prosperous age of the Han Dynasty.” The second apex came during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), when the “Maritime Silk Route” was opened up as a supplementary trade route, which in turn expanded the scope and content of interaction, upgrading the level of exchange from living culture to conceptual culture, and promoting the prosperity of the Tang Dynasty through cultural exchanges with South Asia and neighboring countries in the east. The third exchange peak began from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, becoming the greatest in scale and the longest in duration.

Cultural exchanges during the 19<sup>th</sup> century began as unidirectional, with China in a passive position, or we could say that China had been “forced into” exchanges. Nevertheless, during these foreign contacts, China also began to open its eyes to a much larger world, encountering the characteristics and values of many other cultures. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, China has begun undertaking equal and bidirectional exchanges with the outside world. We came to realize that Chinese culture has its own strong points and weaknesses, as do foreign cultures, and only by learning from others’ strengths to offset our own weaknesses is it possible to make even more contributions to China, the entire world, and humankind in general.

The purpose of publishing this series is to introduce Chinese culture to the outside world, and to help readers abroad to gain a truer under-

standing of China. The Chinese people are always ready to unreservedly offer the riches of Chinese culture to the world, so that greater spiritual wealth can be shared with all peoples across the world. Since we have also enriched ourselves by drawing nourishment from the world, we should reciprocate by sharing our own spiritual wealth.

The aspects of culture that can represent a people or a country in the truest sense are conceptual culture, especially the representative works in the fields of literature, history and philosophy. Most works included in this series belong to these categories. In the past over 100 years, translations of world-famous works can be found in many different versions in various languages. However, as for the traditional culture of a country, the older the nation is, the more difficult it becomes for us to properly compile and annotate it. Therefore, despite being a single translation version, this series, having been translated mostly by native Chinese, would generally minimize the limitations in Chinese cultural understanding that translators from other cultural backgrounds might have. We sincerely hope that this series will prove helpful to international scholars in their exchange studies.

**Ren Jiyu**  
*March 2008*

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# Foreword

Most China specialists are familiar with the contents of Hong Mai's (1123-1202) well-known collection *Yijian zhi*, or *Record of the Listener*. Compiled and circulated in several installments over a period of decades, this valuable text is a goldmine of information on Song Dynasty (960-1279) social and cultural history. In recent years, a few scholars in China and the West have even produced specialized studies on Hong Mai's collection of stories and reports. These inquiries reveal, in no uncertain terms, that the contents of the *Yijian zhi* represent much more than a massive collection of "random jottings" (*biji* 笔记) concerned only with relating "strange happenings" or tales about "gods and ghosts." Rather, Hong Mai's accounts are - in large part - valuable *historical* documents that open a unique "window" to Song Dynasty life and culture. And yet, despite the importance and value of the *Yijian zhi*, most educated readers in the West have never heard of Hong Mai or his famous collection. This is no surprise because, until now, a sizeable, representative, faithful, and readable English rendition of the *Yijian zhi* has simply not been available. Professor Alister Inglis' translation, published here for the first time, has now filled this lacuna. It is for this reason that I applaud the publication of *Record of the Listener*. Readers interested in learning more about the contents of the *Record of the Listener* might also want to consult Prof. Inglis' *Hong Mai's Record of the Listener and Its Song Dynasty Context*, 2006.

**James M. Hargett**  
Guilderland, New York

28 October 2007



## Sun Jiuding

Sun Jiuding's courtesy name was Guozhen and he came from Xin Prefecture. He was living at the Imperial University in the *guisi* year in the Period of Administrative Harmony (1113). On the day of the Weavermaid and Cowherd Festival, he went to visit his compatriot, Duan Junyi, who lived in Bamboo Fence Lane.

He was traveling along the northern bank of the Bian River when, all of a sudden, there appeared a person dressed in the attire of a high-ranking official followed by a full retinue of mounted attendants. The person called out his name from among the group, then dismounted and addressed him.

"Guozhen, we haven't seen each other for a long time. Have you been well?"

Taking a closer look, Sun realized that it was his brother-in-law, Zhang Xin. Pointing to an inn at the northern end of the street, Zhang suggested, "You can take me there and we can speak at our leisure."

"You, Sir, are a rich fellow," retorted Sun. "Would you have a pauper like me borrow vast sums to buy you wine?"

"My money is of no use," replied Zhang.

So they went to the inn and, sitting down, drank and ate freely. After a short time, Sun finally remembered that Zhang had already died.

"You have been dead a long time, Sir. How is it that you come to be here?" asked Sun. "Does my seeing you portend disaster?"

"Nothing of the sort," replied Zhang. "You are very lucky."

They then talked about the time of Zhang's death and how Sun attended the funeral, and there was not a thing which Zhang did not know.

"I went home last year at the Mid-Autumn Festival, only to find your

sister and her siblings drinking without a care in the world," said Zhang. "They didn't think of me at all. I was furious, and so I overturned a wine flask onto a young girl before leaving."

"Where are you now, Sir?" Sun asked.

"I have been made an official under the jurisdiction of the God of Walls and Moats, and I am responsible for the bestowal of future blessings," replied Zhang.

Sun was pleased and asked about his future.

"It has not yet been decided," declared Zhang. "Such matters are reviewed every ten years, and I have not yet seen your name. It will happen some time after you turn thirty though, and your official posting won't be a lowly one."

Sun then inquired, "You, Sir, enjoyed wine and women throughout your life. Not a month went by when you wouldn't violate a woman. So how did you reach your present position?"

"These were my deeds," Zhang mused. "In all things it is one's heart that is considered. If the heart is not unprincipled, then anything is possible."

Before he could finish speaking, a member of his entourage entered and announced, "Duty calls."

Zhang rose and both of them left together. Pointing to his retinue, he said, "These are my brethren, yet mortals are unaware of them."

Arriving beneath the Gate of Beauteous Spring, Zhang bade Sun farewell.

"You may return from here, Sir. Be certain not to turn back and look at me. If you do, you will die. You have been contaminated by other-worldly ether this day, and you will fall ill in the days to come. You shouldn't take any other medicine; simply use Pingweisan.<sup>1</sup> That will be adequate."

Sun became deeply afraid after Zhang had gone and he proceeded on to Bamboo Fence Lane to see Master Duan. Duan, shocked at his sickly countenance, plied him with wine. Sun returned to the university at sunset. The following day he suffered from a bad case of diarrhoea and was obliged

## SUN JIUDING

to visit the privy over thirty times, but recovered after taking Pingweisan.

In the ensuing years, Sun met with several setbacks and found no success. It was not until some dozen or so years after he went to the Jurchen principalities that he attained first place in the imperial exams and went on to become vice-curator in the palace library.

He had been in the same study hall as my father. They met several times in the north<sup>2</sup> and he himself told my father this story.



## The Man from Three Rivers Village

Zhang Wei's courtesy name was Zheng Lun and he came from Three Rivers Village in Yanshan (modern Beijing). When my father first went to Taiyuan as an envoy, Wei accompanied him as assistant magistrate of Yangqu. He once said that, in the *yisi* year in the Period of Spreading Harmony (1125), he knew of a villager from his home county who was well read and cultivated mulberry trees for a living. He was over sixty years old.

One night he woke from a nightmare. Shaking uncontrollably, he told his wife, "My life is at an end."

Alarmed, his wife asked the reason.

"Just then I dreamed of walking among the fields," he explained. "I saw seven barbarian horsemen on the road. One of them was dressed in white and was riding a white horse. He addressed me angrily, saying, 'In your previous life you were a soldier of Cai Prefecture during the Tang Dynasty. I was a loyal citizen when Wu Yuanji rebelled, and I was helping repair the town moat when you murdered me. I have harboured hatred for a long time. Today I have finally run into you, and although generations have passed, I will kill you in recompense.' He then took a bow and his arrow tore into my heart. I woke as I fell. I certainly shan't avoid it. Tomorrow I will go far away to flee from this disaster."

"A dream in the night isn't worth believing in!" said his wife. "It's been brought about by your unchecked thoughts."

Yet the old man's fears increased. He rose before dawn. As his family was poverty stricken, he bade only a small grandson carry his quilt, hoping to take refuge at a friend's home some sixty *li*<sup>3</sup> away.

The pair went along a grassy pathway for thirty *li* or more before coming out onto the high road. After another few *li* they came upon several