

# The Thunder God

By P'u Sung-ling

Yo Yün-hao and Hsia P'ing-tzū lived as boys in the same village, and when they grew up read with the same tutor, becoming the firmest of friends. Hsia was a clever fellow, and had acquired some reputation even at the early age of ten. Yo was not a bit envious, but rather looked up to him, and Hsia in return helped his friend very much with his studies, so that he, too, made considerable progress. This increased Hsia's fame, though try as he would he could never succeed at the public examinations, and by-and-by he sickened and died. His family was so poor they could not find money for his burial, whereupon Yo came forward and paid all expenses, besides taking care of his widow and children.

Every peck or bushel he would share with them, the widow trusting entirely to his support; and thus he acquired a good name in the village, though not being a rich man himself he soon ran through all his own property. "Alas!" cried he, "where talents like Hsia's failed, can I expect to succeed? Wealth and rank are matters of destiny, and my present career will only end by my dying like a dog in a ditch. I must try something else." So he gave up book-learning and went into trade, and in six months he had a trifle of money in hand.

One day when he was resting at an inn in Nanking, he saw a great big fellow walk in and seat himself at no great distance in a very melancholy mood. Yo asked him if he was hungry, and on receiving no answer, pushed some food over towards him. The stranger immediately set to feeding himself by handfuls, and in no time the whole had disappeared. Yo ordered another supply, but that was quickly disposed of in like manner; and then he told the landlord to bring a shoulder of pork and a quantity of boiled dumplings. Thus, after eating enough for half a dozen, his appetite was appeased and he turned to thank his benefactor, saying, "For three years I haven't had such a meal." "And why should a fine fellow like you be in such a state of destitution?" inquired Yo; to which the other only replied, "The judgments of heaven may not be discussed." Being asked where he lived, the stranger replied, "On land I have no home, on the water no boat; at dawn in the village, at night in the city." Yo then prepared to depart; but his friend would not leave him, declaring that he was in imminent danger, and that he could not forget the late kindness Yo had shown him. So they went along together, and on the way Yo invited the other to eat with him; but this he refused, saying that he only took food occasionally. Yo marvelled more than ever at this; and next day when they were on the river a great storm arose and capsized all their boats, Yo himself being thrown into the water with the others. Suddenly the gale abated and the stranger bore Yo on his back to another boat, plunging at once into the water and bringing back the lost vessel, upon which he placed Yo and bade him remain quietly there. He then returned once more, this time carrying in his arms a part of the cargo, which he replaced in the vessel, and so he went on until it was all restored. Yo thanked him, saying, "It was enough to save my life; but you have added to this the restoration of my goods." Nothing, in fact, had been lost, and now Yo began to regard the stranger as something more than human. The latter here wished to take his leave, but Yo pressed him so much to stay that at last he consented to remain. Then Yo remarked that after all he had lost a gold pin, and immediately the stranger plunged into the water again, rising at length to the surface with the missing article in his mouth, and presenting it to Yo with the remark that he was delighted to be able to fulfil his

commands. The people on the river were all much astonished at what they saw; meanwhile Yo went home with his friend, and there they lived together, the big man only eating once in ten or twelve days, but then displaying an enormous appetite. One day he spoke of going away, to which Yo would by no means consent; and as it was just then about to rain and thunder, he asked him to tell him what the clouds were like, and what thunder was, also how he could get up to the sky and have a look, so as to set his mind at rest on the subject. "Would you like to have a ramble among the clouds?" asked the stranger, as Yo was lying down to take a nap; on awaking from which he felt himself spinning along through the air, and not at all as if he was lying on a bed. Opening his eyes he saw he was among the clouds, and around him was a fleecy atmosphere. Jumping up in great alarm, he felt giddy as if he had been at sea, and underneath his feet he found a soft, yielding substance unlike the earth. Above him were the stars, and this made him think he was dreaming; but looking up he saw that they were set in the sky like seeds in the cup of a lily, varying from the size of the biggest bowl to that of a small basin. On raising his hand he discovered that the large stars were all tightly fixed; but he managed to pick a small one, which he concealed in his sleeve; and then, parting the clouds beneath him, he looked through and saw the sea glittering like silver below. Large cities appeared no bigger than beans—just at this moment, however, he bethought himself that if his foot were to slip, what a tremendous fall he would have. He now beheld two dragons writhing their way along, and drawing a cart with a huge vat in it, each movement of their tails sounding like the crack of a bullock-driver's whip. The vat was full of water, and numbers of men were employed in ladling it out and sprinkling it on the clouds. These men were astonished at seeing Yo; however, a big fellow among them called out, "All right, he's my friend," and then they gave him a ladle to help them throw the water out. Now it happened to be a very dry season, and when Yo got hold of the ladle he took good care to throw the water so that it should all fall on and around his own home. The stranger then told him that he was an assistant to the God of Thunder,<sup>1</sup> and that he had just returned from a three years' punishment inflicted on him in consequence of some neglect of his in the matter of rain. He added that they must now part; and taking the long rope which had been used as veins for the cart, bade Yo grip it tightly, that he might be let down to earth. Yo was afraid of this, but on being told there was no danger he did so, and in a moment whish-h-h-h-h—away he went and found himself safe and sound on *terra firma*. He discovered that he had descended outside his native village, and then the rope was drawn u-p into the clouds and he saw it no more. The drought had been excessive; for three or four miles round very little rain had fallen, though in Yo's own village the water-courses were all full. On reaching home he took the star out of his sleeve, and put it on the table. It was dull-looking like an ordinary stone; but at night it became very brilliant and lighted up the whole house. This made him value it highly, and he stored it carefully away, bringing it out only when he had guests, to light them at their wine. It was always thus dazzling bright, until one evening when his wife was sitting with him doing her hair, the star began to diminish in brilliancy, and to flit about like a fire-fly. Mrs. Yo sat gaping with astonishment, when all of a sudden it flitted into her mouth and ran down her throat. She tried to cough it up, but couldn't, to the very great amazement of her husband. That night Yo dreamt that his old friend Hsia appeared before him and said, "I am the Shao-wei star. Your friendship is still cherished by me, and now you have brought me back from the sky. Truly our destinies are knitted together, and I will repay your kindness by becoming your son." Now Yo was thirty

---

<sup>1</sup> This deity is believed to be constantly on the look-out for wicked people, aided by the Goddess of Lightning, who flashes a mirror on to whomsoever the God wishes to strike. "*The thief eats thunderbolts*," means that he will bring down vengeance from Heaven on himself. Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, Vol. 1., p. 88.

years of age, but without sans; however, after this dream his wife bore him a male child, and they called his name Star. He was extraordinarily clever, and at sixteen years of age took his master's degree.