

# Chou K'o-Ch'ang and His Ghost

By P'u Sung-ling

At Huai-shang there lived a graduate named Chou T'ien-i, who, though fifty years of age, had but one son, called K'o-ch'ang, whom he loved very dearly. This boy, when about thirteen or fourteen, was a handsome, well-favoured fellow, strangely averse to study, and often playing truant from school, sometimes for the whole day, without any remonstrance on the part of his father. One day he went away and did not come back in the evening; neither, after a diligent search, could any traces of him be discovered. His father and mother were in despair, and hardly cared to live; but after a year and more had passed away, lo and behold! K'o-ch'ang returned, saying that he had been beguiled away by a Taoist priest, who, however, had not done him any harm, and that he had seized a moment while the priest was absent to escape and find his way home again. His father was delighted, and asked him no more questions, but set to work to give him an education; and K'o-ch'ang was so much cleverer and more intelligent than he had been before, that by the following year he had taken his bachelor's degree and had made quite a name for himself. Immediately all the good families of the neighbourhood wanted to secure him as a son-in-law. Among others proposed there was an extremely nice girl, the daughter of a gentleman named Chao, who had taken his doctor's degree, and K'o-ch'ang's father was very anxious that he should marry the young lady. The youth himself would not hear of it, but stuck to books and took his master's degree, quite refusing to entertain any thought of marriage; and this so exasperated his mother that one day the good lady began to rate him soundly.

K'o-ch'ang got up in a great rage and cried out, "I have long been wanting to get away, and have only remained for your sakes. I shall now say farewell, and leave Miss Chao for any One that likes to marry her." At this his mother tried to detain him, but in a moment he had fallen forwards on the ground, and there was nothing left of him but his hat and clothes. They were all dreadfully frightened, thinking that it must have been K'o-ch'ang's ghost who had been with them, and gave themselves up to weeping and lamentation; however, the very next day K'o-ch'ang arrived, accompanied by a retinue of horses and servants, his story being that he had formerly been kidnapped and sold to a wealthy trader, who, being then childless, had adopted him, but who, when he subsequently had a son born to him by his own wife, sent K'o-ch'ang back to his old home. And as soon as his father began to question him as to his studies; his utter dulness and want of knowledge soon made it clear that he was the real K'o-ch'ang of old; but he was already known as a man who had got his master's degree, (that is, the ghost of him had got it,) so it was determined in the family to keep the whole affair secret. This K'o-ch'ang was only too ready to espouse Miss Chao; add before a year had passed over their heads his wife had presented the old people with the much-longed-for grandson.