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## THE PECULIAR REVELATIONS: SCROLLS PAINTINGS FROM THE WORLDS OF LUÓ PÌNG - 罗聘 (1733-1799)

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### Abstract:

Since the early days of Homo Sapiens-Sapiens wandering the land, ghosts, spirits, and apparitions have dominated much of human existence. The goal of this two-part article is to offer a broader knowledge of the evolution of ghost-spirits from their early origins, as well as to analyse the many qualities of them and their interaction within the Chinese artwork of Luó Pìng - 罗聘 (1733-1799). The first section discusses the artist's historical background, his symbolic interpretations of themes and techniques, and his portrayal of the afterlife. The second section of this study concentrates on and provides several evidences of the Chinese philosophical background of death and life as well as the Ghost (Guǐ - 鬼) definition within the Chinese philosophy. Finally, this study concludes with a brief assessment of the artist's work, its cultural background, and its psychological effects, - a journey that captivates the fancies of every generation across different continents-.

### Keywords:

Ghost, Spirits, Apparition, Phantom, Spectre, Soul.

### Introduction

Human nature exists between the realms of life and death, and religions from various cultures have traditionally focused on the nature of the divine. This human and divine relationship, as

well as the moral and ethical values that emanate from this relationship, have created the paths that lead to this revelation through knowledge in order to transcend the human experience, whether through prayers, rituals, or various other types of physical practises. *Luó Pìng* – (罗聘, 1733-1799), was one of China's most versatile, original and acclaimed artists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He was the youngest member of the so called, 'Eight Eccentrics' of Yangzhou alongside *Huáng Shèn* (黄慎, 1687-1768); *Wāng ShìShèn* (汪士慎) 1686–1759; *Lǐ Shàn* (李鱣/李鱣) c. 1686–1756; *Jīn Nóng* (金农, 1687-1764); *Gāo Xiáng* (高翔, 1688-1753); *Zhèng Xiè* (郑燮, 1693-1765), also known as *Zhèng BǎnQiáo* (郑板桥, 1693-1795); and *Lǐ FāngYīng* (李方膺, 1696-1755). They were distinguished in the Qing era for abandoning conventional painting principles in favour of an expressive and individualistic approach. The use of the term 'eccentrics' also referred to their strong personalities, which were at odds with the traditions of the day. They were from poor families, yet the phrase is more commonly used to define their creative approach than any socioeconomic peculiarities. *Luó Pìng* - 罗聘, lived in Ganquan 甘泉, present-day Yangzhou, Jiangsu province, an affluent city on the Grand Canal, just north of the Yangzi River (Spence, 2009), which connected Beijing's capital with the prosperous economic and intellectual cities of Suzhou and Hangzhou. The Manchu conquest of China, was a long period of war between the Qing dynasty, established by the Manchu clan, Aisin Gioro in Manchuria, contemporary North-eastern China, and the Ming dynasty from the South. The famous city of Yangzhou known for its carved lacquerware and jade, was devastated by the invading Manchu troops from the north in the 1640s, following a harsh and protracted siege that left the city in ruins and its populace decimated. However, Yangzhou's strategic location and commercial prominence served it well, and by the time Luo Ping was born, it had made a spectacular resurgence, in part because it became the financial centre for the salt merchants of coastal and central China, who bought the right to sell and transplant salt from the central government and amassed colossal private fortunes from this lucrative trade (Spence, 2009). The city benefited from imperial support as well as the generosity of the salt merchants, many of whom built great libraries and recruited renowned local professors as cultural amanuenses or tutors to their children in order for them to pass the imperial examinations. This thriving intellectual milieu, in turn, drew other intellectuals and artists to the region, and Yangzhou came to be known as a byword for educated connoisseurship and artistic pursuit (Spence, 2009). *Luó Pìng* - 罗聘, was an individualistic painter with a deep insight into humanity's desires and deepest fears. He studied painting under *Jīn Nóng* (金农 1687-1763), an elder member of the 'Eight Eccentrics' a leading figure of the Yangzhou bohemian culture, developing a unique personal style. This group of artists came to symbolize the best that Yangzhou in its heyday could offer, the avant-garde of the time. *Jīn Nóng* - 金农, accepted *Luó Pìng* - 罗聘 as his student at the age of 23 years old, and the two maintained a regularly close friendship until Jin's death seven years later in 1764. *Luó Pìng's* - 罗聘 early life was filled with loss and grief. His father had completed the second level of state tests, which was no minor achievement and could only be accomplished by individuals with exceptional academic preparation, but he died when *Luó* (罗) was one year old and his mother died shortly after. *Luó Pìng* - 罗聘, was adopted by an uncle who saw to it that he had a solid education, encouraged his talents as a poet and introduced him to some of the affluent businessmen known for their

cultural meetings. *Luó Ping* - 罗聘 married a well-educated woman who was already well-known for her literary and creative abilities when he was nineteen, and they had three children, all of whom became outstanding poets and artists (Spence, 2009). At the age of 42, *Luó* 罗 described how he felt at a young age, and it was said that:

*‘He that was born on the day of man, is a pitiable creature. Standing at the foot of the Golden Ox Mountain tears rolled down my face. Back and forth, for three thousand miles from south to north I hasten. For twenty years I have seen my parent’s grave in my dream. Who knows that, when not even a year old, I lost my father? I sigh, harbouring lifelong sorrow. In this life I can only envy those who may delight and honour their parents. In a life to come, so I hope, I am destined to remain at their side’* (Russell, 2021).

His brilliance was noticed at a young age of his career, and he was admitted to the privileged intellectual circles of his hometown of Yangzhou, where poets and artists consciously looked to their local history to provide inspiration and orientation in their contemporary moment (Chiem, 2013, p. 183). He lived in the middle of the 18th century, when Yangzhou was a cultural and educational centre. This is when he established himself as one of the most fascinating Chinese painters of the period (Russell, 2021). *Luó Ping* - 罗聘, spent the majority of his later years working in Beijing. Unlike the economic centre of Yangzhou, the Manchu empire's capital was culturally conservative, with professors and government officials focusing on classical literature studies and evocations of former forms. This intellectual atmosphere had strong impact on *Luó Ping*'s - 罗聘 character and painting abilities and in his subsequent artworks, he increasingly referred to these historical techniques of Chinese painting to develop the key monumental work, “The Ghost Realm Amusements”, as an effort to establish his own creative artistic identity after his mentor’s death. *Luó Ping* - 罗聘, transported this long handscroll with him during his entire professional life, collecting commentaries by all the leading fellow intellectuals of his time.

## Literature Review

There is a vast bibliography and numerous publications on Chinese Ink painting, National painting or *Shānshuǐ-huà* (山水畫) ranging from its historical progressions to materials, and even though painting techniques changed over time, the subjects remained relatively constant, which included portraits, dragons and fishes, landscape, animals such as tigers and falcons, birds, vegetables and fruit, wild scenery and hermit scholars seated in contemplation of nature. As the fundamental reference point for its evolution and comprehension, this study adopts a historical technique. The discourse broadens by supplying a fundamental terminology of terms utilized, as *Luó Ping*'s - 罗聘 work is assessed from the Eastern standpoint. The major topic of discussion revolves around concepts such as ghost (鬼), soul (灵魂), spirit (精神), apparition (幻影), life, and death. Finally, the purpose of this article is to study *Luó Ping*'s - 罗聘 Chinese ink painting and his ghost (鬼) narrative. The classification system may then be used to comprehend the work of literature, which is available in print or electronically via the internet. The debate may serve as evidence in the realm of fine arts, particularly painting, by raising awareness among institutions, students, instructors, and artists about the endeavour to comprehend these distinct aspects. The authors hope that this study will serve as a springboard

for further research into the subject of Chinese ink painting, namely the Ghost (鬼), Soul (灵魂), Spirit (精神), and Apparition (幻影) themes, as part of a continuing attempt to encourage creative activity in general.

### Research Methodology

This study takes an empirical method based on direct observation analysis of a single well-known painter named, *Luó Ping* - 罗聘, with an attention to a specific topic of ghost (鬼), soul (灵魂), spirit (精神), apparition (幻影), that he had re-created during his creative process. It also focuses on defining distinctions and parallels in the terms used in Chinese art, such as ghost (鬼), soul (灵魂), spirit (精神), apparition (幻影), life, and death, in order to provide an acceptable explanation for his work's unchangeability. For the purpose of supplying a better understanding of the unmodified aspect of Chinese traditional ink painting, it is vital to have a clear explanation and definition of the words used throughout this research.

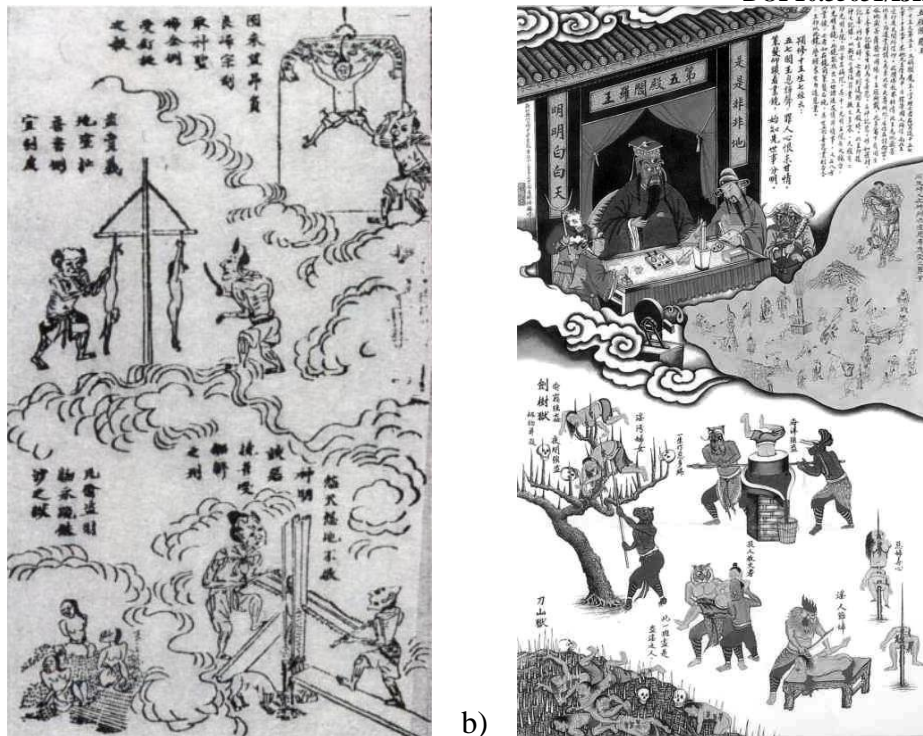
### *Ghost (Guǐ - 鬼) Definition in Traditional China*

Both life and death are intrinsic to the essence of being human; yet, there is another aspect in this duality of existence that is neither human nor divine but appears in between, even if not everyone agrees on the nature of this realm, its location, or its purpose. Both Eastern and Western societies have debated this subject through the development of religion and philosophy. Funerary rituals are encoded with rich symbolic connotations, which are best understood in terms of cultural and religious ideology, social context and group perception of their own relation to the cosmic spirits (Pujazon Patron, et al., 2022, p. 32). The origin of the word, **ghost** (Guǐ - 鬼), is obscure and ambiguous, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as: ‘*the soul of a dead person believed to be an inhabitant of the unseen world or to appear to the living in bodily likeness*’ [Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Ghost. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved March 17, 2022]; or it may have been passed down from old inscriptions that probably suggest a graphic representation of the death mask, or the headgear of a shaman (spiritual healer), which in some cases was the keeper of the rituals performed by the shaman/spiritual healer (Pujazon Patron, et al., 2022, p. 33). Some others have suggested that this term may also be used to name a foreign tribe, Guǐ fāng (鬼方 - ghost party). ‘Party’ refers to the third person group of people. Chinese people from different ethnic groups have many undermining ways to refer to foreigners, some which are very unpolite words, such as Cantonese: Guǐ lǎo - 鬼佬, translated as foreigner ghost. The book: ‘Classic of Poetry’ or ‘Book of Songs’ also known as Shījīng (诗经) from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century, includes the term ghost - Guǐ (鬼) and spirit - shén (神) which are often used in the sense of the ancestors or the deities (Poo, 2006, p. 175). Every religion across the world must find a way to explain the realm of ghosts and spirits... so; why do we need to explore ghosts and spirits?... Because, they are an essential component of the human experience. Historically, this idea was traditionally more closely associated with the cultural characteristics of each world civilization. ‘Death’ has always had a profound impact on how people see and understand it in every cultural setting. Different cultures have widely held opposing views on the “breath of life” or “how the soul abandoned the physical body” to become or exist in the un-physical unknown realm (Pallis, 2022). Popular views reflect on surviving arguments spanning from early beliefs to modern ones, as well as the significance of certain old death conceptions. Communists, for example, rejected traditional concepts of death and burial. Under Chairman Mao Zedong (毛泽东-1893-1976), cremation

became the norm, and funerals were discouraged as superstitious customs associated with feudalism. Graves were regarded as a waste of prime farmland, while coffins were regarded as a waste of wood. Despite the government's continued opposition to corpse burial and expensive funerals, these restrictions were often ignored. Ancestor worship is an inherent and significant component of Chinese cultural legacy. In traditional houses, there is still an ancestor shrine honouring the deceased. In this reciprocity, the living are required to care for the dead in payment of the obligations they owe them (Anedo et al., 2019). Beyond this reciprocity, and in the act of fulfilling this obligation, the living hope to elicit a further reciprocal response from the ancestors, obtaining good life as they perceive it through them; perhaps hoping for much more wealth, rich harvests, and offspring who will ensure undying memory and sustenance in the afterlife (Anedo, et al., 2019). This Chinese viewpoint on 'death' is linked to whether it is in sync with the life cycles. This topic may also be approached from a variety of perspectives. 'Death' has traditionally been mirrored in public perception via poetry, literature via storytelling, and visual arts via historical artwork depicting conflicts and wars, such as Egyptian art. (Pallis, 2022). According to Chinese popular belief, the cosmos is divided into three domains: Heaven, Earth, and the Underworld, each of which is occupied by a slew of significant gods and goddesses. The Underworld is where the demised 'Soul-spirit' is held accountable for his or her acts during life and after receiving the ultimate judgement, the 'Soul-spirit' may be granted permission to reincarnate. Very few people might be granted an 'early release' on the idea that they were good people who led virtuous lives (Braarvig, 2009, p. 256).

In Chinese mythology, underworld or *Diyù*-地獄 refers to what the Westerners know as 'purgatory', which serves to punish and renew 'soul-spirits' in preparation for reincarnation. The place is typically described as a subterranean maze with various chambers and levels that differ between Buddhist and Taoist interpretations to which deceased 'souls-spirit' are taken after death to atone for the sins they committed while alive. This 'purgatory' according to Christian doctrine, which is translated from the Latin word, '*purgatorium*' meaning a '*place for purification*' is an intermediate state after physical death for expiatory purification; a temporary punishment under this transitional stage where the soul pays for any misdeed they may have committed. This word also denotes a condition or state, entered at death, remained in for a time, and then left for heaven. It is the thread that binds heaven, hell, and earthly life together, conceptually speaking. (Figure 1 (a), beneath).





**Figure 1: (a) Illustration from the 19th century Calendar or Yù lì-玉曆, shows sinners being tortured in the Sixth Court of Hell. Hammering metal spikes into the body; skinning alive; sawing body in half; kneeling on metal filings (Public domain)**  
**(b) Old Chinese painting depicting Yánluó Wáng -閻羅王, King Wáng of Hell. Inspired by the Hindi deity Yama**

Another way to define 'death' is the event that marks the passing of an individual being from one existence to the next, or from the realm of man to the world of spirit. These social gatherings serve as platforms for manipulation and bargaining between the forces of the living and the forces of the dead (Pujazon Patron, et al., 2022, p. 32). According to Francis LKH in his book, "Under the Ancestor Shadow..." (1971), the ritual in Western funerals aims at four things: a) the expectation for the spirit's safe entry into the underworld; b) comfort in that world; c) expressing sorrowful feelings for the living and their reluctance to let the dead go; and d) ensuring that the dead has not created any conditions for further disaster (Anedo, et al., 2019). This also helps us deal with the changes that are occurring as a result of our increased knowledge of the activities in question (Pujazon Patron, et al., 2022, p. 32). Worshiping the departed's ethereal body, ancestor, memory, and actual body is a popular practise in many cultures throughout the world (Pujazon Patron, et al., 2022, p. 32).

***In Chinese Religion, Philosophy, and History, There Are Several Interpretations of the Ghost (鬼), Soul (灵魂), Spirit (精神), and Apparition (幻影).***

There are many monsters, ghosts, and other supernatural entities in Chinese mythology, including three categories of ghosts in particular:

- a) orphaned ghost, who has no offspring to make offerings to them;
- b) vengeful ghost, who has died in an incident or has been enraged by some perceived injustice and needs to be appeased;

- c) hungry ghost, who has been condemned to their ghostly form for some misdeeds they have committed; they usually have a large belly but a small mouth and are so named because they are perpetually hungry.

Another interpretation is that ghosts are largely women who have been mistreated in their earthly existence and they desire to inflict vengeance on males. Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and folk religions all influence the concept of the soul (Línghún - 灵魂). Buddhism believes that 'hell' comes in a multitude of forms that are intertwined with the concepts of 'karma' and reincarnation (Braarvig, 2009, p. 257).

The concept of 'hell' is also prevalent across East Asia more than two-thousand-year history. Buddhism and Christianity have opposing views on the concept of 'hell,' with the former believing that it is eternal and the latter believing that it is not. Everything, according to Buddhism, is ephemeral (Braarvig, 2009, p. 257). Confucians have long held that there is a hierarchy of souls within each individual, and that these souls are related to cosmic forces of the cosmos. Confucians and other folk religionists believe that after death, the energies of the human soul return to the basic energies of the cosmos, frequently in the form of *yīnyáng*- 陰陽 forces and that those many souls require assistance in going their own ways; under this concept of *yīnyáng*- 陰陽, opposite or contrary forces may actually be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world. Taoist doctrine believes that the universe was generated from three fundamental elements: heaven, earth and water and does not fear death, *'life and death are like day and night'*. Zhuang-Zhou 莊子 (c. 369 BC- c. 286 BC), commonly known as Chuang Tzu, was an influential Chinese philosopher and writer- composer, who lived around the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, during the Warring States period (475-221 BC) corresponding to the peak of the Chinese technology and the philosophical development of the Hundred Schools of Thought and the Autumn period (Cartwright, 2017). He is recognised with writing one of the foundational Taoist texts. Mencius, born as Mèng Kē (孟子; 372–289 BC) who was a Chinese philosopher and who has often been described as the 'Second Sage' after Confucius (*Kǒngzǐ*. c. 551–479 BC), and also known as "Master Kǒng"; further developed 'Confucianism philosophy', emphasising personal and governmental morality, correctness of social relationships, justice, kindness and sincerity, expanding upon its doctrines and asserting the innate goodness of the individual and the importance of destiny. In the perspective of Daoism, the significance of death is the process towards life in a different dimension, it is seen as a unity that is inseparable and human beings will experience nature in a cycle. Other minor but influential philosophical, social-ethical and religious movements such as Legalism, and Mohism also advanced their fundamental text. In addition, archaic lettering from early religions gave place to a significantly more recognised type of Chinese script. Chuang-Tzu (莊子 - c. 369 - c. 286 BC), was well-versed in all of his time's literature, and he stated that *"death and life have the same source like twins"* (Zhang, 2009, p. 69). Confucians and followers of folk religions believe that after death, the energies of the human soul return to basic energies of the cosmos, frequently in the form of Yīn (陰) and Yáng (陽) forces, and that the different souls require assistance to go their own paths. They also emphasize the ancestor worship and filial piety. Like Taoism, death is a natural part of the human life span and besides, they disagree that the spirit of the dead preoccupies the living. These Yin-Yang forces, however, may be accessed, operated and channelled through magic, geomancy and inner body discipline. Through offerings, Chinese gods and animated natural objects, as well as human spirits, may communicate with and negotiate with humans. This is essentially an abstract notion of the

existence of spiritual entities that deny them a physical appearance, a formlessness body which may have resulted from the premise that people in general did not have a shared understanding of the Ghost idea. It may also show scepticism about the existence of ghosts. Most people believe that the dead-ghost has a human-like form (Linda Sun Crowder, 2003).

Confucianism is an ethical metaphysical doctrine permitted by the state in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, that sought to regulate human society by modelling society after a patriarchal order of the family and giving offerings to ancestors and gods. Buddhism, a foreign religion introduced from India in the first century AD, became a vital element of the society's cultural discourse. Buddhism teaches that all living beings are subject to reincarnation as governed by the 'Law of Karma', which explains the meaning of suffering and teaches pity and mercy. Buddhism teaches the good deeds of '*karma*' (the retributive cause and effect of one's actions), to achieve reincarnation, and also teaches the clear image of afterlife paradise and hell with demons and 'petas'. Taoism, which was introduced in the fourth century AD, practised in many ways of complexity of classical belief that fits into the state framework of Heaven with its man-in-nature orientation that concentrated on the function of the human to the orderly process or "way" of the 'Cosmos' (Linda Sun Crowder, 2003). Taoism is a formal belief system that includes heavens, the five elements, and the yin-yang system. Internal body cultivation connects with the cosmos supplemented Confucius' idea of the continuous link between earthly descendants and their spirit ancestors, as did Buddha's practices of meditation method to enhance one's inner spirituality (Linda Sun Crowder, 2003).

### ***Definition of Heaven (Tiān-天), The Celestial Aspect of the Cosmos***

China has a rich tradition of philosophical inquiry concerned with the ultimate essence of reality, its existence, components, beginnings, and modes of change (Perkins, 2019). The most essential and crucial notion are Tian天- (Heaven) and ming-命 (the command, associated with fate), the concept of Tiānmíng - 天命 (The Mandated of Heaven), which was originally established during the Shang dynasty (1766-1046 BC) who governed the Yellow River Valley. Tiān -天 (Heaven), (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2016, March 1). *Tian*), is the highest force ruling over lesser gods and mankind; it can also refer to a deity, as well as the impersonal character of both. Evidence suggested that Tiān -天 (Heaven), originally refer to the sky, similarly to Shàngdì -上帝 (Supreme Ruler or Deity) both terms are closely identified and frequently used synonymously. However, Shàngdì -上帝 referred to the Supreme Ancestor who resided there. The importance of Tiān -天 (Heaven) and Shàngdì -上帝 (Supreme Ruler or Deity) to the ancient Chinese rested in their imagined control over the fertility of the clan and its harvests; sacrifices were made to these forces alone by the sovereign and subsequently by the emperor. Chinese emperors were originally referred to be Descendants of Tiān -天 (Heaven), and their power was thought to come from it. Beginning with the Zhou dynasty (1050-771 BC), the notion of 'The Mandate of Heaven' was used to explain sovereignty Tiānmíng -天命. This was a giving of authority based on virtue rather than divine right. Indeed, if the ruler did not attend to his virtue, this authority was removable. Because the ruler's morality was seen to be reflected in the empire's harmony, social and political turbulence were generally regarded as indications that 'The Mandate of Heaven' had been rescinded and would soon be handed to a subsequent dynasty.



### *The Festival of the Hungry Ghost (餓鬼)*

It is said that ghosts roam the world every year for one Lunar month (Zhōng yuán jié - 中元). People light small fires by the roadside and believers burn paper money and other offerings to appease restless spirits that have temporarily been released from the 'Gates of Hell' ("Dìyù zhī mén" - 地狱之门), which are open, and the dead souls-Spirits visit their loved ones (Figure 1-b, above). This day is usually observed on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh Lunar month. On these days, Chinese families commonly offer newly harvested grain to departed ancestors, which this practice coincides also with the Buddhist, Ullambana Sutra (*yúlánpén-jīng* 盂蘭盆經) or Deliverance (Ullambana, 2022), a transcription from Sanskrit into Chinese by Dharmaraksha, which is said to have originated from the offerings made by the Arhat Mahamaudgalyayana, when he understood, using his newly acquired magical powers, that his mother had been reincarnated as a 'petra' or a hungry ghost (Mahamaudgalyayana, 2022). It is also commemorated by the Taoist ghost festival.



**Figure 2: Gōng Kāi (龚开, 1222-1307). Zhong Kui Travelling. c. 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century**

Despite the fact, this event distinguishes between Taoist and Buddhist rituals. Taoists are more concerned with pleasing wandering spirits from the underworld, whilst Buddhists are more concerned with filial piety. Traditional Taoist beliefs hold that three deities govern mankind's fate: *Sānguān dàdì*, 三官大帝, the Three Emperor Lords of the Three Realms (Heaven, Earth and Water); a) *Tiānguān dàdì* 天官大帝, Lord of Heaven, who brings bliss; b) *Dìguān dàdì* - 地官大地, Ruler of Earth, who forgives crimes; and *Shuǐ guān dàdì* - 水官大地, Ruler of Water, embodies the essence of the energies of wind and water, who mitigates all perils and distress. *Shàng yuán jié* - 上元节 which occurs on the 15th day of the first Lunar month, and *Xià yuán jié* - 下元节, which occurs on the 15th day of the tenth Lunar month, are the birthdays of the rulers of heaven and water. Ghosts are souls who remain on earth harassing and causing trouble for the living, they are 'souls' who failed to reach the afterlife due to; a) some problems they encountered during their journey; b) a lack of proper send off by their relatives living on earth; and c) tragic circumstances surrounding their death. The necessity of particular ceremonies and rituals is for these ghosts to be sent to their afterlife destination. They roam over earth looking and hunting for food. While the meanings of the Hungry Ghost (餓鬼), differ between Buddhism's and Taoism's, both Chinese beliefs commemorate it in similar manners. Furthermore, outdoor concerts on a temporary stage are held to amuse both ghosts and people, with the front row seats left unoccupied for the spirits (Sim, 2004). According to Arthur P. Wolf, ghosts, demons, and other disgruntled spirits "are the spiritual counterparts of robbers, beggars, and other hazardous outsiders" (Bianchi, 2017, p. 225), and this meaning may someday be applied to white foreigners referred to as "white devils".

## Result and Discussion

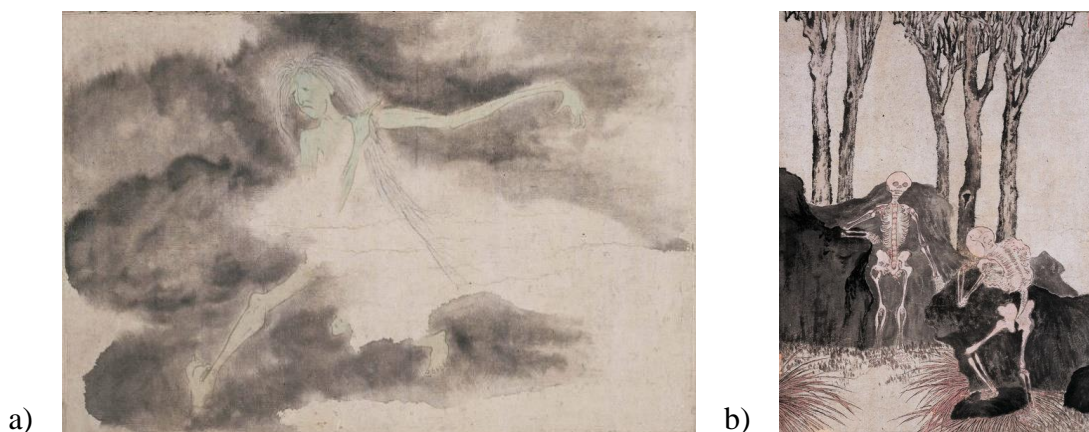
### *How The Ghostly World Captured the Imagination Of The Chinese Art World In The 18th Century*

In China's long history, almost every dynasty has some masterpieces or legends of ghost. Between the 1660- and the 1800, China took the leading role in Asia. The eighteenth century saw China re-emerged as a huge empire spanning deep into Asia (Hay, 1999, 201). Other contemporaneous thinkers referred to China as having an "unparalleled past" when all aspects of culture flourished: China was an affluent state with vast natural resources, a large but mostly contented populace, and a royal house of immense reputation both at home and abroad. However, it also was known by the century of humiliation, a term used to describe the period of intervention and subjugation of the Qing dynasty, also called the Manchu (Manzu) a weak imperial ruler which translated into the opportunity by the Western powers to add China to their own list of imperial possessions. Following Britain's decisive victories in the Opium Wars, China was compelled to open treaty ports at its coastal towns. These ports were practically free trade zones where foreign nationals and their businesses could operate independently. Sections of China were therefore "controlled" by British, French, German, and Italian corporations that established themselves in certain parts of the nation.

#### *Jīn Nóng (金農, 1687-1763) A Mentor of Luó Pìn - 罗聘*

Five years after his marriage to poet, writer and painter, Fang Wanyi (1732-1779), Luó Pìn - 罗聘, met a man who would change his life. This was the national poet, calligrapher and artist named, Jīn Nóng - 金農, who was 70-years-old. He had a great liking for the talent of young Luó Pìn - 罗聘, he became his mentor until the day he died. Both artists worked closely and Luó Pìn - 罗聘 even painted several pictures for Jīn Nóng - 金農, who then signed and sold them under his own name. The importance of the use of colour in Chinese painting is paramount from the Northern Song period (960-1127) through the Qing dynasty. This allowed for a better understanding of the materials and method used. Scientific analysis has provided the physical proof of imported pigments. This can enhance future studies on the interaction between China and the rest of the world. From the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the increased trade with Europe and the Americas introduced non-indigenous materials to China (McCarthy & Giaccai, 2021, p. 2), such as cochineal from the Americas and the first European synthetic pigments such as Prussian blue, invented in Germany in 1704 (McCarthy & Giaccai, 2021, p. 2). Any ambitious educated painter typically took on subjects such as landscape, portraits, flowers and birds which are typical of the broader themes within the Chinese ink painting range, which normally is practiced 'in the style of old masters.' Luó Pìn - 罗聘 did practise these genres for his own self-development or when he was taught by his master, Jīn Nóng - 金農. In what way did he choose to render this specific theme of ghosts? The answer is complex. In the second half of the eighteenth century two predominant schools of thought met, the neo-Confucianism with the new interpretation of the classics and the Kǎozhèng - 考证 or Kǎojù xué 考據學, was a school and approach to study and research or 'search for evidence' which disregarded conventional Confucianism and instead emphasized the significance of careful examination in science and technology developed under the Qing dynasty from 1600 to 1850 (Farrington, 2008, p. 2), which was practised by Luó Pìn - 罗聘 and his friends and

acquaintances. *Luó Pìn's* - 罗聘, beliefs were a syncretism of the various schools of thoughts, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and they reveal much of what he learned over his lifetime as a creative artist with descriptions of the cosmology of his world: heaven and hell, demons, ghosts, goblins and other ghoulish entities (Russell, 2021). The blending of the human identity and ghostly traits emphasises the uncertainty of the boundaries between the living and the dead. This is one of the characteristically unsettling and unnerving effects of the viewer (Bianchi, 2017, p. 248). Through this mixture of brutal and more familiar human physical features, *Luó Pìn* - 罗聘 seems to suggest that his inner ghosts (demons or lost souls) are terrifying the world of the living, moving within the bounds of the ordinary. In terms of materials and technique, *Luó Pìn's* - 罗聘 most famous collection of separate sketch-paintings called, 'Ghost Realm Amusements' - (Guǐ jiè yóulè - 鬼界游乐) scroll, (Figure 3 (a), beneath), was painted sometime in the mid-1760's at a time when there was a serious trend for recounting strange stories among the elite. This trend was prompted by the posthumous publication of Pu Songling's 蒲松龄 (1644-1715) book, 'Strange Tales from the Leisure Studio', the first hand-copied manuscript of which was produced in 1766 (Farrington, 2008, p. 3). This collection of stories is a jumble of varied genres, fables, and small descriptive essays designed especially for an upper-class audience of literary liberals. *Luó Pìn* - 罗聘, was famed for his seemingly ridiculous claim that he had the ability to see ghosts, as seen in the painting, 'two skeletons in a landscape' along the side of a river near Jiao Mountain (Figure 3 b, beneath) (Farrington 2008, p. 5). He brings us into the dream world with a series of eight different sized panels that depict ghost like creatures such as imps being chased by a fat-head with short arms and claw-like hands; worried looking ghosts with eyes staring at subtle terrors we can only imagine; a tall, emaciated ghost looking lost with thin twisted lips and vacant eyes, long green arms and legs disappearing into a murky cloud nearly covering him from the head to the feet. These artworks are arranged together on a long scroll (Koon, 2009, p. 66). *Luó Pìn* - 罗聘 painted them to represent the popular ghost stories of the time. He described them in a poem, implying he did not merely envision them, but he saw them as vividly as he saw real people (Russel, 2021).



**Figure 3: (a) *Luó Pìn* - 罗聘, Painting from the Handscroll, “Ghost Realm Amusements” c, 1766. Ink on Chinese paper. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)**  
**(b) *Luó Pìn* - 罗聘, Painting from the Handscroll, “Ghost Realm Amusements” c, 1766. Ink on Chinese paper. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)**



Although 'petas,' from the Sanskrit word *preta*, are unhappy beings that are mostly tortured by hunger and thirst, the Sanskrit scriptures distinguish between the 'pitarah' (honoured ancestral spirits) and the 'preta', who are tortured ghost-like beings who endure different types of punishment based on their 'karma' and cannot be seen with human sight. Some people are able to see them by coincidence (Mahathero, 2018, p. 289). *Luó Pìn* - 罗聘, claimed that he could see them and thus was able to capture ghost like scenes by first dampening the Chinese paper before beginning to draw, thus creating images defined by shadowy blurred lines with dark accents bleeding into miasmatic washes which shape the strange forms that are eerily evocative of an ephemeral vision that he created (Figure 3, (a) & (b) above), (Spence, 2009). In doing so he evoked the literary traditions associated with ghostly apparitions suspended between absence and presence, visibility and invisibility. This inspiration for his paintings, in some ways can be compared to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851) an English novelist who wrote the gothic novel '*Frankenstein*' which spouted from her imagination after nights of telling ghost stories as a guest of Lord Byron at his estate along Lake Geneva, Switzerland, in the summer of 1816 (Farrington 2008, p. 6). By another account the individual descriptions of the '*petas*' vary widely in form, yet several features and traits can be considered 'normal' by the human common understanding. The typical '*peta*' is naked, ugly and smelly, plagued by protracted starvation, with a lean body with prominent ribs and veins, and very sharp nails that it employs as claws to consume its own flesh (Figure 3 b, above). *Luó Pìn* - 罗聘, painted them in a similar way to how they are described. They are 'hungry and thirsty' living off the generosity of others, very miserable, sad, and devoid of delight (Mahathero, 2018, p. 290). Another way to define '*petas*' is as follow:

*'Some are clothed in rags, others covered only by their hair. The petas wander in search of food, going this way and that. Having roamed far, and finding nothing, overcome by hunger, they stagger and fall swooning to the earth.* (Figure 3 a, above) (Mahathero, 2018, p. 290).

### ***Connotations and Psychological Consequences***

The spirits of the deceased were vastly different from the living, yet they were not a-physical and needed to feed (Figure 4, beneath). This sustenance was the duty of their successors, and it was maintained via frequent food and drink sacrifices. Spirits "descended" at the time of such offerings and symbolically ate the food, though their specific physical needs were tenuous enough that no discernible change in the offerings would appear, and aside from certain unpalatable ritual items, the "leftovers" (food offered) were consumed by the thrifty clan members, an act viewed as pious in and of itself. This is a common practice by Chinese people nowadays. Ancestral spirits were very interested in their descendants' affairs, and their influence varied according to their lifetime temperaments, any crotchets they may have picked up from the unpleasant experience of death, their judgments of the descendants' behaviour, and the quality of the sacrificial menu. As ancestors became more distant, their effect became more tenuous, and if they survived, their existence was such that they no longer required additional human attention- only recent relatives showed up at dinnertime. The comparatively benign ancestor spirits interacted with a slew of considerably more intriguing animal demons, nature gods, city gods, nameless revenants, and other creepy entities, all of which made the night-time bearable and Chinese religious beliefs colourfully nonsensical.





**Figure 4: *Luó Pin* - 罗聘, From the Album of Eight Leaves, Ink and colour on Chinese Paper (Honolulu Museum of Art)**

### Conclusion

In ancient China, ghost stories were the first kind of writing. They were very definitely part of a very old oral tradition before writing originated during the Shang Dynasty (1600 – 1046 BC), and they are still popular in China today. The ancient Chinese were immensely concerned about ghosts, they believe that the living have an impact on the fate of the soul after death and that the dead have implications in deciding the well-being of the living. Death is a disruptive catastrophe that creates a schism between worldly and spiritual existences, which is reconciled and bridged through rituals. In the New York Review of Books, Jonathan D. Spence wrote: The English name 'Ghost' does not adequately capture the spectrum of the Chinese term **Guǐ-鬼**, which denotes demons, ogres, monsters, and goblins. *Luó Pin*'s - 罗聘, paintings include landscapes, plum blossom, portraits, buildings, and animals, as well as imaginary creatures from the netherworld in the form of 'Ghosts', or Buddhist *Shibā Luóhàn* - 十八羅漢, which are the followers known as 'Arhats' (deity, divinity, demi-god, immortal), who have attained enlightenment but have not yet attained the higher state of nirvana), Daoist immortals, the marvellous, and the plain. All of his paintings inspire amazement, mystery, and appreciation that such a painter existed, one who bridged the conscious-unconscious divide, defining a new type of person in a new type of environment. He left a significant legacy for future independent artists who followed him, accomplishing something rarely seen in Chinese arts by depicting imagery he developed directly from his experiences with ghosts, reborn Luohan, dreams, grief, and heartbreak. Ghosts (**Guǐ-鬼**) of the dead remained to occupy the local space of their previous dwellings, which required physical nourishment in the form of food and drink, and held the potential to affect global events. It was the responsibility of these ghosts' (**Guǐ-鬼**) lineal descendants — their sons and grandsons — to supply a regular diet in the form of sacrificial food and drink, as well as to act in accordance with the excellent examples established by previous generations. Forebears possessed the ability to wreak retribution if indolent children allowed deceased ancestors to go hungry or brought discredit to their names. On the other side, faithful performance of ceremonial sacrifices, polite salutations of the dead, and upright social behaviour by descendants would draw the blessings of ancestors, who had the power to protect and reward. Finally, in modern-day China, ghosts only had the potential

to hurt if one believes in them, but in ancient China, ghosts were a reality whether one believed in them or laughed them off; believing in life beyond death provides people with religious faith, a deeper feeling of purpose in life, a hope that they are immortal creatures enjoying a mortal experience that will not end but will continue to exist. Soul and body were and continue to be two significant entities in the sphere of life. What occurs after death and how it appears in the realm of the non-existent may still be a riddle that has yet to be solved.

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