

= The Painted Skin =

" The Painted Skin " (Chinese : 画皮 ; pinyin : Huàpí) is a short story by the Chinese writer Pu Songling collected in Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio in 1740 . Literary critics have recognised it as one of the best and best @-@ known entries in Strange Tales ; in particular , its textual detail and in @-@ depth characterisation are lauded . " The Painted Skin " has also received numerous adaptations in popular media , especially in film . The story 's original title has become a common phrase in Chinese vocabulary , " a synonym for duplicity that wears an outwardly human face but is inwardly demonic " .

Set in Shandong , the story revolves around a Chinese scholar , Wang , who becomes infatuated by a demon in disguise as a beautiful young maiden . They develop a romantic relationship which goes awry after Wang discovers her true identity . Thereafter , a Taoist priest 's skills are put to the task of exorcising the demon ; a fight between good and evil ensues .

= = Plot = =

An academician from Taiyuan , referred to only by his surname Wang , chances upon a homeless girl who claims to be an ill @-@ treated concubine . Noting her beauty , as well as feeling pity for her , Wang agrees to let her stay at his residence temporarily . They make love at his study , unbeknownst to anybody else . A few days afterwards , Wang 's spouse , Chen , discovers their affair and is unhappy with the arrangement , but fails at changing his mind . At the marketplace , a Taoist priest informs Wang that he has been possessed by an evil spirit . Wang dismisses this with incredulity . He returns home but finds the gates locked . Nevertheless , he manages to find a way into the courtyard and notices that the front door is bolted too . Peeking through the window , Wang makes a startling discovery ? the girl is actually a " green @-@ faced monster , a ghoulish creature with great jagged teeth like a saw . " All this while , she had been wearing a mask made of human skin , on which her attractive features were painted .

In petrification , he returns to the Taoist priest and begs him for help . The priest agrees but concurrently wishes to be lenient on a likewise sentient being , thus only offers Wang a charm meant to ward off demons . Wang goes back home and hangs the charm outside his bedroom , but it has no effect on the demon . Instead , she turns enraged and rips out Wang 's heart . Wang 's spouse reports this to the priest who , incited to fury , launches a full @-@ scale offensive on the demon . They find that it has transformed into an elderly helper working at Wang 's brother 's place . In the climax , the demon reverts to its original form , and the priest beheads it with his wooden sword . The demon 's remains dissipate into smoke which the priest stores in his calabash . He also rolls up the demon 's " painted skin " and stores it away .

Later on , the priest tells Chen to visit a lunatic beggar at the marketplace , should she wish to revive her husband . The madman treats her with disrespect by continuously demeaning her , but she takes it in her stride and patiently pleads with him for help . Finally , he coughs out some phlegm and makes her swallow it . The beggar makes his leave and Chen is left feeling deeply ashamed . Back home , during funeral preparations , the phlegm hardens gradually and rises from Chen 's stomach to her throat . Ultimately she disgorges a throbbing heart , which she places into the gaping wound in Wang 's chest ; slowly , his life is restored .

= = Publication history = =

The story was originally titled " Huapi " (画皮) and first appeared in Pu Songling 's anthology of supernatural tales , Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio (Liao-zhai) in 1740 . It was first translated into English as " The Painted Skin " by the British sinologist Herbert A. Giles and was included in his 1880 translation of Strange Tales . It reappeared with modifications in a subsequent edition , published in 1908 . Since then , many other translators , including John Minford (2006) , have published their translations of " The Painted Skin " .

= = Themes and analysis = =

How foolish men are , to see nothing but beauty in what is clearly evil ! And how benighted to dismiss as absurd what is clearly well @-@ intended ! It is folly such as this that obliges the lady Chen to steel herself to eat another man 's phlegm , when her husband has fallen prey to lust . Heaven 's Way has its inexorable justice , but some mortals remain foolish and never see the light !

At surface , " The Painted Skin " is a story of a lustful scholar 's encounter with a demon who disguises itself as a lady . Pu Songling intended for the story to be viewed as a parable of human desire and its negative consequences , and emphasised this with his appended comment , " a typical piece of moral didacticism that denounces sexual promiscuity , extols faithfulness , and endorses belief in karma and retribution . " " The Painted Skin " utilises both the zhiguai and chuanqi styles of writing in bringing out " the ghost 's critical and creative writing " , whereas the complexity of prose parallels the " cultural ramifications of the ghost . "

Skin is a major plot device in " The Painted Skin " , serving as a " path between the separate worlds of human and animal , or the natural and the supernatural " . Reality versus perception of it is another overarching issue ; what Wang deems to be a pretty female is in fact a vicious demon . Moral courage trumps the occult and supernatural powers ; the Taoist priest is unable to revive Wang with his magic , whereas Chen 's sacrificial love is arguably more effective in doing so . By extension , this also decreases the credibility of religious institutions , continuing Pu 's subtle criticism of religion present in many other Liao-zhai stories . Pu also presents the trope of the " beautiful talented ghost " in an inverted fashion , portraying art , represented by the demon , as something " utterly demonic " ; Man 's " blind admiration " of it can lead to his dire downfall .

= = Literary significance and reception = =

" The Painted Skin " stays true to the early style of zhiguai by showcasing the chaotic relations between " human society and the world beyond " , unlike majority of Liao-zhai tales which narrate peaceful coexistence between the two groups . It is also significant for being , in the words of Lu Xun , " zhiguai in the chuanqi style " ; Pu was one of the earliest writers to amalgamate the two similar genres in their writings .

The story was positively received . As translator John Minford notes , " (the story) is one of the most widely read of all the Strange Tales ... and continues to be popular for its powerful theme and the sheer gruesomeness of its detail . " Pu Songling is praised by literary critics for offering readers vivid characterisation and an emboldened stance against lust . Qing dynasty critic Dan Minglun (???) offers in his 1842 interlinear commentary of Liao-zhai , " (Wang) is clearly a man in the grip of a serious sexual delusion ... (Chen) should not bother bringing her worthless husband back from the dead . " Taiwanese writer Yi @-@ jia Wang (???) provides a psychoanalytical review of " The Painted Skin " , describing Wang as relying on his wife to restore " the Deep Structure of male @-@ dominated Chinese culture . "

Due to its widespread popularity and usage , the term huapi (??) became a Chinese idiom . According to Mair and Mair , " the words ? painted skin ? have become a synonym for duplicity that wears an outwardly human face but is inwardly demonic . " During the rise of Communist China , led by Chairman Mao Zedong , the meaning of huapi took on a political undertone ; at different points in time it was used to describe United States colonisation , USSR revisionists , as well as the Gang of Four , amongst a host of other political factions or figures . In 21st @-@ century China , huapi is still used in political contexts , but generally means refers to the " mask of an evildoer " and has been used in conjunction with " quack herbal cures " and " fake cell @-@ phones " .

= = Inspiration = =

Before " The Painted Skin " , there was already a plethora of zhiguai @-@ chuanqi stories about lady ? beast metamorphosis . An account in the fifth @-@ century anthology of fictitious accounts , titled Garden of the Strange (Yi yuan ??) , by Liu Jingshu (???) concerns a bachelor named Xu

Huan (??) who gets acquainted with a tiger spirit passing off as a beautiful woman . Blinded by lust , Xu is kidnapped by the tiger , who returns him home after ten days . Tang dynasty writer Xue Yongruo (???) penned a story on a Puzhou native , Cui Tao , who marries a tiger spirit that ultimately devours their child and him . " Scholar Wu of Jiangnan " (????) by Zhang Du (??) revolves around the Wu household , and Wu 's eventual discovery that his spouse , Madam Liu , is a demon . Pu Songling , in writing " The Painted Skin " and many of the other Liaozhai entries , is written to have been inspired by the above @-@ mentioned zhiguai texts , and expended upon the early authors ' efforts .

= = Legacy and adaptations = =

" The Painted Skin " has been adapted or represented in film , television , and cartoons on numerous occasions . The long list of adaptations underscore the story 's enduring legacy ; in particular , it is written to have inspired generations of filmmakers . One of the earliest film adaptations of the story is Bao Feng 's Huapi (1965) . A rumoured 1970s Painted Skin film was reportedly banned in China after a short run at the box office because of its overly intense horror scenes ? it is claimed that some audience members died of fright . Its existence , however , has yet to be proven . King Hu 's last film was a " faithful " adaptation of " The Painted Skin " , released in 1993 . Other film adaptations of the story include Painted Skin (2008) , and its sequel Painted Skin : The Resurrection (2012) .

A television series based on " The Painted Skin " , directed by Danny Ko , was first broadcast in 2011 . In 2001 , China Post issued commemorative Liaozhai postage stamps in Shandong , the birthplace of Pu Songling . Amongst the collection is one depicting a scene in " The Painted Skin " ; others show scenes from entries such as " Yingning " and " Stealing Peaches " .