

Water-Mirror Turning Back the Tide of Destiny

Essays and Verses by the Venerable Tripitaka Master Hua

*In Memory of General Gwan Yun-Chang,
Marquis of Shou Ting of Han Dynasty*

TEXT:

At the end of the Han Dynasty, China was divided into the three kingdoms of Wei, Shu, and Wu. In a peach garden, Lyou Bei, Gwan Yu and Jang Fei swore to be as brothers. Of the three heroes, General Gwan Yun-chang was the one the people most admired and honored. He was loyal, faithful, and true, and his righteous energy reached as high as the heavens. He put aside his personal interests for the public good. He was never unfaithful to his wife. The oil lamp stayed lit till dawn as he painstakingly studied the Spring and Autumn Annals.

The general had eyebrows that resembled crouching silkworms, and eyes like that of a phoenix. He had a ruddy face and a full beard. His magnanimous and awesome spirit made him a worthy model for humankind.

A verse in praise says:

During the Three Kingdoms Period
Heroes and illustrious men emerged in succession
Ju-ge Lyang of Nanyang
Devoted his life to the Emperor Lyou
This greatly righteous general
Had his bones pared in order to remove poison,
Yet he went on talking and laughing at ease.
What a rare man!

Another verse says:

The proper energy between heaven and earth produces an
extraordinary hero.
With patriotic fervor, he served his country, startling the ghosts and
spirits.
The great righteousness of the Spring and Autumn Annals fills the
universe;
His pure and lofty integrity shines like the sun and stars.
Magnificent is his spirit of the Way, eternally glorious from past to
present.
His extensive aspirations pervade heaven and earth.
Wealth, honor, force and oppression could not move his resolve.

In China and abroad, he is unique!

COMMENTARY:

This lecture series is about great and wise people within and outside of China, from the past to the present, whom we select for discussion. Why? Because we want to model ourselves after good people. It is necessary for us to be clear about this, because we do not want to learn from those who are not good. As people, we should choose what is wholesome and follow it, and we should change what is not wholesome. As it is said, "Use praise and criticism to distinguish between good and bad." (與褒貶,別善惡) If individuals are praise-worthy, we should praise them. I am not gossiping about right and wrong, because all these events happened in the past. For instance, General Gwan died over a thousand years ago. If we praise him, he won't know, at least if we look at it superficially. Or, if we slander him, he also won't know. This is how most people see it. However, although we say he doesn't know, his spiritual nature still exists. He embodies the essence of heaven and earth, and he is a proper energy within and outside of China, from past to present. Therefore, if we praise him now, he knows; and if we criticize him, he also knows. This is because when people die, it is not like a lamp going out. What's the basis for our praise and criticism? We base it on what we have seen and heard concerning the individual's conduct and character. We want to evaluate the person impartially.

I composed this essay, but Professor Jou wrote it out. You won't find it in any book. You can't find it in history. Just now as some students were leaving, they asked, "When are you going to lecture?" I said, "I am going to speak right now." And they said, "Oh, weren't you going to lecture on history?"

This isn't history. This is a series called **Water-Mirror Turning Back the Tide of Destiny**. The purpose of these essays is to turn people's minds around.

But how hopeful are the prospects of this work? It is like the reflection of the moon in water, also the appearance of flowers in a mirror. I can only hang on to this kind of hope—whether or not I can fulfill it, I do not care.

What is the principle of **Water-Mirror Turning Back the Tide of Destiny**? It is like the Chwun Chyou [the Spring and Autumn Annals compiled by Confucius, the official chronicle of historical events of the state of Lu from 722-484 B.C.]. The Spring and Autumn Annals bestowed praise and criticism to distinguish good from bad." However, the language of that work is too deep—one word could represent many words, and since it was written such a long time ago, people do not understand it now. Therefore, I will use short essays, accompanied by an eight-line verse with four characters to each line, to elucidate an individual's character, behavior, conduct, learning, and strong points. We point out his strong points if they are worth remembering; we also want to bring up his shortcomings. Therefore, we give an appraisal of historical figures in China and abroad from the past to the present. What we say is not fixed. You cannot find it in a book.

This is something newly written. I myself, an unlearned person, have written some short essays to comment on some great and wise men of the East and West, from the past to the present.

The present essay is titled "**In Memory of General Gwan Yun-chang Marquis of Shou Ting of the Han Dynasty**". This is an honorary title bequeathed upon General Gwan during the end of the Han dynasty. This general had a very long beard. In Harbin, I met a person who also had a long beard. His surname was also Gwan. He was a native of Shansyi, and his name was Gwan Syi-shan. This old man's beard was about two and a half feet long. He used to sit on a heated brick bed with his beard sticking out three or four inches. He used a cloth sack to hold the end of his beard. He valued his beard as if it were a treasure. But his beard was not dark; it was streaked with some white, and so it was not as beautiful as Gwan Yun-chang's beard. General Gwan was known as the "Gentleman with the Beautiful Beard," because his beard was extremely full and luxuriant. But his face was a frightening red color, like some weird creature. His entire life was an expression of righteous energy. He was very upright. Anything that was not in accord with righteousness he would not do. Where did he get this energy? He learned it from the Spring and Autumn Annals, which preaches about great righteousness. The Spring and Autumn Annals has exerted profound influence on many people. The loyal ministers of China liked to read and study it.

At the end of the Han Dynasty, China was divided into the Three Kingdoms of Wei, Shu, and Wu. These were independent states. Shu wanted to swallow Wei and Wu. Wei wanted to swallow Shu and Wu. And Wu wanted to swallow Wei and Shu. They wanted to swallow one another like big fish eating small fish. But the result was that none of them could eat the others, because they were of equal strength. These fish were about the same size.

At that time, **in a peach garden, Lyou Bei (劉備), Gwan Yu (關羽), and Jang Fei (張飛), swore to be as brothers.** They made a pledge of allegiance to each other, like brothers. **Among those three heroes, the one people most admire and honor is General Gwan Yun-chang.** They were all outstanding individuals, but General Gwan was the most respected among the three. **He was loyal, faithful and true.** He was extremely loyal to his country, and faithful to his sworn brothers. **And his righteous energy reached up to the heavens.** His proper energy was equal to heaven and earth. **He put aside his personal interests for the public good.** He only had a mind for the public good, and was not selfish. Moreover, **he was never unfaithful to his wife.** In his whole life, he never drew near to any other woman except his own wife. He did not want two wives. He never approached another woman. **The oil lamp stayed lit until dawn.** One time, he and the two wives of Lyou Bei, his sworn brother, had to stay in one room and spend the night. Lyou Bei's two wives, Madam Mei and Madam Gen, were very attractive. General Gwan was their chaperone. He kept them company but he did not sleep at night. This shows he was worthy of respect. The crafty minister Tsau Tsau arranged this event to try to undermine Gwan's character, but he had not anticipated this would instead increase Gwan's stature, thereby causing more people to admire him. The oil lamp stayed lit until dawn, as the General remained awake all night. He probably slept

during the day, this we don't need to ask. Or maybe he sat during the night and slept without lying down. He read a book, and if his eyes felt tired, he closed them and slept.

During the night **he painstakingly studied the Spring and Autumn Annals**. He attached great importance to the moral integrity of this work. **The General had eyebrows that resembled crouching silkworms**, which was a sign of nobility, and he had **eyes like that of a red phoenix**. Phoenix eyes' are long-shaped, and very beautiful. The phoenix is not a creature that most people are able to see. People in the past have seen them, but present day people have not seen dragons and phoenixes. This does not mean these creatures no longer exist. Dragons are spiritual creatures: they can either vanish or materialize, and become large or small. As for phoenixes, it's said, "Among quadrupeds, there is the chi-lin: among birds there is the phoenix; among small mounds there is Mount Tai..." These belong to the same category. By the same token, sages and common people are not so different—they also belong to the same species.

Although we can say that we don't see phoenixes, we cannot make the claim that absolutely no one sees them. We can only say that we ourselves haven't seen them. In the past, people saw phoenixes. Some people even see them nowadays, but these people do not regard this as something very strange. You could say a phoenix is somewhat like a pheasant, which has a very long tail. The phoenix was probably some kind of very exotic pheasant. For instance, witch-doctors call chickens "phoenixes." If they want to eat chickens, they ask for "phoenix." Phoenixes emerge from chickens.

If you raise many chickens, you may discover a phoenix amongst them. For example, in New York there is a "Chicken King." He looks just like a turkey. Why? Because he particularly relished eating turkey in the past, and so now he looks like a turkey. If people keep on eating turkeys, those turkeys will become people and come back to eat turkeys who were once people in their past lives.

You may ask, "What is the evidence for that?" Well, just now someone said that General Gwan washed his face in the Red River, and that his face turned red from it. Ultimately where is the river located? Does it still exist? If it had not existed, how could it have been red when General Gwan washed his face in it, and why isn't the river around anymore? If it still exists now, then who is washing his face in it and having it turn red?

Anyway, a very beautiful chicken can be called a phoenix. As the saying goes, "A crane standing among chickens," meaning someone who surpasses his peers. Among chickens, the phoenix is a most outstanding bird—it is not like other fowl. Have you noticed that the eyes of chickens are beautiful? General Gwan had eyes like that of a red phoenix. A rooster can be called a red phoenix. The eyes of a rooster are good-looking.

General Gwan **had a red face**, which was a noble feature, and he had **a beautiful beard**. His beard, which he treasured, was very long, full and splendid. **His magnanimous, awesome spirit made him a model for humankind**. He had an awe-inspiring, heroic spirit.

A verse of praise says: During the three kingdoms period, heroes and illustrious men emerged in succession. During that time, many heroes appeared, such as Generals Jang Fei, Jau Yun, Gwan Gung, and also Ju-ge Lyang of Nanyang. Ju-ge Lyang was no common hero. He was a scholar, but he commanded all the other heroes of his time. **Ju-ge Lyang devoted his life to Emperor Lyou.** He was loyal to Lyou Bei.

The greatly righteous general—Gwan Gung had supreme, righteous energy—**had his bones pared in order to remove some poison.** He had great patience. When operated on, he did not need to be tied, nor did he have to lie down on a bed. Rather he just sat, drinking and playing chess, and **went on talking and laughing at ease.** He was not afraid of pain, and went on chatting and laughing. **What a rare man!** He was an extraordinary person.

Another verse says: The proper energy between heaven and earth produces an extraordinary hero. It gave birth to a hero like General Gwan. **With patriotic fervor he served his country, startling the ghosts and spirits.** He was imbued with proper energy, great righteousness, and a loyal heart, wishing to repay the kindness of his country. He wanted to rescue the people and punish wrong-doers. **The great righteousness of the Spring and Autumn Annals fills the universe.** The moral courage and fortitude of this work pervades the universe. **His pure, lofty integrity shines like the sun and stars.** His character and rectitude were lofty and as bright as the sun and the stars. **Magnificent is his spirit of the Way, eternally glorious from past to present.** His energy of the Tao and his vast energy exist from past to present. For instance, everybody admires and respects him now, just as they did in the past. And **his extensive aspirations pervade heaven and earth.** His mind was pure and vast, filling up heaven and earth. **Wealth, honor, force, and oppression, could not move his resolve.** No riches or honor could influence him. Even if he was oppressed by force, his determination would not change. He was consistently the same way. **In China and abroad, he is unique!** When we investigate the great personages and scholars of both China and overseas, we see that Gwan Gung is incomparable. He is foremost in righteousness and loyalty. Others may be foremost in other things, but not in righteousness and loyalty.