

## Supernatural Retribution in Warring States Texts

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When we examine the Warring States texts in accordance with the Brookses' datings, we notice the appearance of a new idea of moral justice toward the end of the 04c. This is the expectation of supernatural retribution for good or evil that is not required in the mundane world. I suggest that this new belief represents the convergence of two ideas: (1) A concept that the dead can interact with the living on the basis of some moral principle, and (2) an expectation of the adjudication of right and wrong, coming from the development of legal codes.

**Data.** The ten accounts of supernatural moral justice which appear in WS texts (really nine, since Dzwǒ Jwàn Jwāng 8:3 and Gwāndǒ 18 are two versions of the same account) are summarized in the Appendix. They imply a belief that deities or the dead are capable of interacting with humans on a moral basis, rewarding good deeds and punishing evil deeds. Arranged according to the Brookses' datings, they are:

	Source Text	Text Date	Retribution
1	DJ Jwāng 8:3	c0360-c0335	punishment
2	DJ Syī 10:3	"	punishment
3	DJ Sywān 15:3	"	reward
4	DJ Chýng 10:4	"	punishment
5	DJ Jāu 7:9	"	punishment
6 (= 1)	GZ 18	c0309	punishment
7	Gwó Yǔ Jīn 2	c0306	punishment
8	Mwòdǒ 31 "Dù"	c0298	punishment
9	Mwòdǒ 31 "Jwāng"	"	punishment
10	Jwāngdǒ 19:7	c0262	reward

The first nine appear within a span of about two generations or less. Apparently the idea developed among the DJ writers and quickly caught on. The DJ, GZ, and GY accounts assume the validity of the idea of supernatural justice. In contrast, the two MZ 31 accounts express uncertainty: "If there is no cognition in death, that is the end. But if there is cognition in death, then . . . I shall make my lord aware of it." But at the end of MZ 31 "Dù," the MZ narrator, proclaims this belief to be already a working admonition for rulers and fathers. The same admonition is repeated in MZ 31 "Jwāng."

By the time of JZ 19:7, the story is related as if supernatural retribution was an accepted belief. Apparently we are seeing the appearance of a new idea, some skepticism or uncertainty, and then full acceptance. In all cases, the stories are set far back in time, thus using the authority of antiquity to validate the new belief.

My explanation for this new idea of supernatural retribution can be expressed as the following speculation: The appearance of this new concept of supernatural justice is the product of the confluence of two streams of thought. The first of these is a possible evolution in the concept of the dead and their potential relations with the living. The Shāng burials indicate a need to propitiate the dead, and the Shāng oracle bones illustrate a means of communication between the living and the dead. Bronze inscriptions reiterate the importance of memorializing and remembering the dead. But I am unaware of any pre-Hàn evidence that clearly indicates the results of the adequacy of care for the dead, that is, that proper care produces good influences, while inadequate care produces bad influences.<sup>1</sup> This aspect of the relations between the living and the dead is clearly expressed in later sources, and I can only infer that some form of it may have developed within some stratum of society by the late 04c. If this is so, then the possibility of the expectation of retribution for appropriate or inappropriate care of the dead would have been current at the time of the composition of the DJ. The theme of filial loyalty, expressed in DJ Syī 10 and DJ Chǔng 10, may be an indication of the presence of this belief.

The second stream of thought may be the product of the new development of public codes of law: publicly proclaimed rules of right and wrong along with specific schedules of rewards and punishments for conduct. This might have encouraged the expectation of supernatural justice from the Tyēndì 天帝, an anthropomorphic version of a divine supreme judicial officer, in the DJ Syī 10 and GY Jīn 2 stories which strongly suggest a notion of judicial procedure and authority. The DJ Syī 10 story even shows the possibility of judicial appeal and modification of the original penalty.

It does not require much life experience to discover that life is often unfair, justice does not prevail, and good and evil actions are often not appropriately requited. If justice is not forthcoming, one can only accept the injustice of life.<sup>2</sup> However, expectations of justice, in conjunction with belief in the ability of the deities or the dead to intervene in human life on some kind of moral basis, could lead to the expectation that life *should* provide for the requital of good and evil, if not through social or legal mechanisms in the mundane world, then through the intervention of supernatural agents. In these stories, the predominance of the theme of punishment for evil may reflect a sense of injustice and vulnerability in life.

If this is a reasonable inference, then we are seeing the roots of the common belief of later ages that the business of life must be completed before the dead can rest. Thus premature and unjustifiable death could be adjudicated by the ghosts of the wrongfully dead or by deities, and unrequited good deeds rewarded by the grateful dead or by deities. This would bring justice at both the individual and communal levels of society, enable people to complete the business of life, and allow the dead to rest.

<sup>1</sup>Derk Bodde (**Feudalism** 60) asserts the existence of this belief in pre-Hàn society, but does not cite any source.

<sup>2</sup>Notice how Confucius lauds the principled acceptance of rejection and poverty, but insists that one always be prepared for and worthy of potential employment.

The intent of these stories also fits into what can be inferred from the DJ about the purpose for writing history: to interpret the past as a didactic record in order to teach posterity the consequences of human actions, and ultimately the right way to act. A writer would witness events in a moral framework of eventual justice, whether justice was provided by human law or by supernatural agents. In this way, the relations between seemingly unrelated events could be discovered, and a didactic interpretation could be recorded for the moral and social education of posterity.

### Appendix: Accounts of Supernatural Retribution in WS Texts

(1=6) DJ Jwāng 8:3 // GZ 18 (story date 0686): Lord Syāng of Chí had incestuous relations with his sister, the wife of Lord Hwán of Lǚ. When Lord Hwán and his wife visited Chí, Lord Syāng again had sexual relations with his sister, but this time Lord Hwán found out and became angry. She reported his anger to Lord Syāng, who then had his half-brother, Pǐng-shǐng, murder Lord Hwán. In response to a protest from Lǚ, Lord Syāng killed Pǐng-shǐng. Eight years later, Lord Syāng went hunting and saw a pig. His followers said “It is Pǐng-shǐng.” The lord became angry and shot the pig, whereupon it stood up like a man and screamed. The lord was frightened, fell out of his carriage, and hurt his foot. Later, the wounded foot impeded his escape from assassination by a group of officers led by a man whom the lord had wronged at an earlier time. (A variant of this story appears in GZ 18; Rickett **Guanzi** 1/282, 290f says the GZ 18 story seems to be taken from DJ).

(2) DJ Syī 10:3 (story date 0453): At the urging of his favorite concubine, who had ambitions for her own son, Lord Syèn of Jìn sent his heir, Shǐn-shǐng, to the frontier with expectations that he would not return. Shǐn-shǐng later sacrificed at the family tombs and sent some of the ritual food and wine to Lord Syèn, but the concubine secretly poisoned the food. When Lord Syèn discovered the poison, he ordered the arrest of Shǐn-shǐng, who then fled. Shǐn-shǐng rejected advice from his protector to return to Lord Syèn and reveal the truth because his father was old and he did not want to make him unhappy by accusing his favorite concubine. Shǐn-shǐng finally committed suicide. Lord Syèn’s successor, Shǐn-shǐng’s brother, reburied Shǐn-shǐng without proper ceremony. Shortly thereafter, Shǐn-shǐng appeared to his former retainer and said he had requested the [Heavenly] Theocrat [天] 帝 to destroy Jìn. The retainer pleaded on behalf of the innocent people of Jìn. Seven days later Shǐn-shǐng, speaking through a medium (wū 巫) said that the [Heavenly] Theocrat had given permission to punish only the guilty party, who would be destroyed by the state of Hán. About twenty years later, the destruction of Jìn and its eventual partition into three states, one of which was Hán, began.

(3) DJ Sywān 15:5 (story date 0593): Wèi Wǔ-dǐ of Jìn had a favorite concubine. When he became ill, he instructed his son to have her remarry when he died, but when his illness became severe he said she should be buried alive with him. However, the son followed the initial instructions, explaining that his father was not of sound mind when he changed his instructions. Later, when the son battled a powerful warrior, he suddenly saw an old man placing grass ropes in front of his foe, which caused him to fall and be captured. That night the son dreamed of the same old man, who said he was the concubine’s father and had come to repay the son for allowing her to live.

(4) DJ Chǔng 10:4 (story date 0580): The Lord of Jīn killed many members of the Jāu family on the basis of false reports by one of their relatives that they would revolt. Two years later the lord dreamed of a spectre with hair hanging down to the ground who identified itself as an ancestor of the Jāu family. Upon awakening, the lord consulted a medium (wū 巫) who said the dream meant he would not live to taste the new crop of wheat. The lord became very sick and could not be cured. When the new wheat crop was ready, some was prepared for the lord to taste. As it was being prepared, the medium was brought in, shown the new wheat, and executed for falsely predicting the lord's death. Just as he was about to taste the wheat, the lord had to go to the privy where he suddenly fell down and died.

(5) DJ Jāu 7:9 (story date 0534): Two wealthy men of Jǔng, Sǔ Dǔ-syī and Lyáng Bwó-yǒu, were rivals. One day the former burned the latter's house and made him flee for his life. Later, Lyáng Bwó-yǒu led troops to attack a city held by Sǔ Dǔ-syī. The defense was led by the latter's relative Sǔ Dài, who killed Lyáng Bwó-yǒu. Later, Bwó-yǒu appeared in a dream to a person of Jǔng and predicted the dates of death for both Sǔ Dài and an accomplice of Dài. Both men died as predicted.

In DJ this is followed by a speech by Dǔ-chǎn of Jǔng explaining the conception of the soul and afterlife, and why innocent victims can return as avenging ghosts. This speech is cited in later sources as the classic explanation of supernatural retribution.

(6) See under #1, above.

(7) GY Jīn 2 (story date 0653): The Lord of Gwó dreamed that a deity with a human face, white hair, tiger's claws, and holding a golden axe appeared in his palace temple. The deity said the Heavenly Theocrat (tyēn-dì) had issued a mandate that Gwó would be invaded by Jīn. Upon awakening, a diviner identified the deity and said the invasion was due to the Lord of Gwó's misrule. Six years later Gwó was destroyed.

(8) MZ 31 Dù (story date c0800): King Sywǎn of Jōu killed his innocent official, the Lord of Dù. When Lord Dù was about to die he said "My lord would kill me without cause. If there is no cognition in death, this is the end. But if there is cognition in death, then within three years I shall make my lord aware of it." Three years later, when King Sywǎn was out hunting, he saw Lord Dù holding a bow and arrows. Lord Dù shot King Sywǎn through the heart; the arrow broke his spine and he died.

The MZ narrator goes on to say that rulers and fathers use this story to guide their respective subjects and children by saying "Be forewarned! Be careful! All who kill the guiltless will reap execution by baleful ghosts and deities, and it will be as sorrowful and as speedy as this."

(9) MZ 31 Jwāng (story date 0492): Lord Jyēn of Yēn unjustly killed an innocent man, Jwāng Dǔ-yì. When Dǔ-yì was about to die he said "My lord the king would kill me though I am guiltless. If dead men are without cognition, this is the end. But if dead men have cognition, before three years are over I shall cause my lord to know it." The next year, as the lord set out to visit his ancestral shrine, Dǔ-yì appeared in broad daylight carrying a vermilion staff and struck him dead in front of all present.

The MZ narrator says "All who kill the guiltless will reap execution by baleful ghosts and deities, and it will be as sorrowful and as speedy as this."

(10) JZ 19:7 (story date c0650): Lord Hwán of Chí saw a ghost (gwěi 鬼) when he was out hunting. He returned home and became ill. He asked a retainer if there really are ghosts. The retainer named various ghosts and, at the lord's request, described a particular one, adding that he who sees it will become a hegemon (bà 霸). The lord said that this was the one he saw, and then became well.

(Although it is not stated, this seems to be a reward for some meritorious conduct).

### Comment

*E Bruce Brooks, 2008*

The Jwāngdǔ 19:7 story, the latest of this group (we would date it to c0262), is also the only one in which retribution seems not to figure. An omen at first thought to be evil is reinterpreted as good; there is no reference to previous actions of Hwán-gūng. The strange creatures later added to the Shān Jīng (Shān/Hǎi Jīng 1-5) function in this amoral way: if you see one of these creatures, there will be a drought (or whatever), quite independently of the deserving of the one who does the seeing.

A more rational view takes the position that the connection between omens and events is simply illusory. In JZ 19:7, things just happen, and seeming apparitions have no power. If the patient worries less, he will get better. Is not the whole idea of strange creatures as omens of the future being gently ridiculed? Reality (the Jwāngdǔ story may be suggesting) lies not with the supernatural, but in what you think. DJ too, at the end of its formation period, sometimes takes this rationalistic view. One example is the comment of a minister of Lǔ (DJ 3/14:3, after 0320), that seeming omens arise when people's emotions are disturbed; they have no existence in themselves.

This, it seems to me, is a different world from the one where retribution operates. Human actions here have no value, one way or another, and omens have no existence. The universe does as it pleases. It is not a long step from this position to the one in Sywǎndǔ's essay on Heaven (SZ 17), written soon after the Jwāngdǔ story, in c0256: Cosmic regularities exist, and strange things do happen, argues Sywǎndǔ in that essay, but they do not concern us at all.

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The Warring States period was an era in ancient Chinese history characterized by warfare, as well as bureaucratic and military reforms and consolidation. It followed the Spring and Autumn period and concluded with the Qin wars of conquest that saw the annexation of all other contender states, which ultimately led to the Qin state's victory in 221 BC as the first unified Chinese empire, known as the Qin dynasty. The Warring States period covers the period from sometime in the fifth century B.C.E. to the unification of China by the Qin dynasty in 221 B.C.E. It is nominally considered to be the second part of the Eastern Zhou dynasty, following the Spring and Autumn period, although the Zhou dynasty itself ended in 256 B.C.E., 35 years earlier than the end of the Warring States period. Like the Spring and Autumn Period, the king of Zhou acted merely as a figurehead. Moreover, after the war, those who judged former collaborators were sometimes themselves former collaborators. Many people became innocent victims of retribution, while others--among them notorious war criminals--escaped punishment. Nonetheless, the process of retribution was not useless but rather a historically unique effort to purify the continent of the many sins Europeans had committed. This book sheds light on the collective amnesia that overtook European governments and peoples regarding their own responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity--an amnesia that has only recently begun to dissipate as a result of often painful searching across the continent.