ALLEGORICAL NARRATIVE IN SIX DYNASTIES ANOMALY TALES: GHOSTLY SIGHTINGS AND AFTERWORLD VENGEANCE

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Tales of the anomalous (*zhiguai* 志怪) contain valuable clues to the conceptions of death and the afterlife in the Six Dynasties (c. 220–589 C.E.). These tales synthesized traditional viewpoints,[2] integrated and echoed the advent of Buddhist and Daoist teachings, and addressed issues prominent in contemporary philosophical debates, such as discourses about the existence (or non-existence) of ghosts and the relationship between a person's body and spirit.[3] Of the over one hundred extant tales, many they drew from a variety of non-official traditions (*zazhuan* 雜傳 and *zaji* 雜記). Within narrative literature, this constitutes an aesthetic of the strange that serves as a model for subsequent ghost stories. Encompassing a broad range of motifs, tales of the anomalous are similar to the tales of transformed spiritual beings (*jingguai* 精怪) and gods, all of which are based on a narrative model which I call "guiding the deviant towards the norm (*chang* 常)." These narratives unfold by attempting to resolve problems presented by the anomaly. Not only did sophisticated readers, narrators, and compilers of the anomaly tales such as Gan Bao 干寶 (276?–336) use this narrative model with great skill, ordinary readers also read with the expectation

[1] I would like to thank Drs. Dai Sike and Harrison Huang, and Professors Poo Mu-chou and Robert Campany for their comments and assistance with the English version of this paper.

[2] For research concerning the earlier ghost culture, see Ikeda Suetosh 池田末利, *Chūgoku kodai shūkyūshi kenkyū: seido to shisō* 中國古代宗教史研究: 制度と思想 (Tokyo: Toukai Daigaku Shuppankai, 1981), pp. 155–289, which discusses ancestors, ghosts, *hun* and *po* souls from an etymological viewpoint; in Western languages, consult Anthony C. Yu, "Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit! Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Prose Fiction," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47.2 (1987): 398–99, particularly note 3; in Chinese, see Pu Muzhou 蒲慕州 (Mu-chou Poo), *Muzang yu shengsi: Zhongguo gudai zongjiao zhi shengsi* 墓葬與生死: 中國古代宗教之省思 (Taipei: Lianjing Chuban Gongsi, 1993), pp. 205–25; also Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 165–76.

[3] Lin Lizhen 林麗真, "Wei-Jin qingtan zhuti zhi yanjiu 魏晉清談主題之研究," Ph.D. diss., National Taiwan University, 1978, Chapter 6, pp. 339–41.

that the anomalous would in the end be guided back to the norm. The anomaly tales, however, are not merely conventions inherited from the past. They are in a sense creative works that reinvent the categories by which the world is ordered and evaluated.[4] Using as evidence three sets of Six Dynasties narratives representing traditional, Daoist, and Buddhist tales of the strange, I shall demonstrate how this narrative mode attempts to solve the troubled relationship between the human and the spirit worlds through rituals informed by shamanistic, Daoist and Buddhist practices, and how it symbolically expresses a dialectic between "normative" and "anomalous" in an age of upheavals.

Even if this narrative mode is traditionally regarded as a kind of "minor way" (*xiaodao* 小道), i.e., a trivial literary pastime, it is nevertheless able to reflect serious worldviews. The more outlandish the narratives seem, the more keenly they reveal attitudes and beliefs regarding the ultimate questions about the afterlife. Issues such as the separation of the living and the dead and the continuity of life and death ultimately aim at "guiding the deviant back to the norm" and thus embody the collective psychological demands of normality and order.

Basic Concepts of Ghost Narrative

The Realms of Life and Death

Differentiating the spaces of the living and the dead in terms of "the norm," coordinated with burial practices, created a "representational space"[5] for the realm of the dead. For example, the hundreds of large tombs of the Yangshao (仰韶) culture, dating from the Neolithic period, are public graves for one clan. As the space of the dead, these graves, while usually located in the vicinities of the villages, are clearly

[4] For the narrative model of "guiding the deviant towards cosmic constants (*chang* 常)" see Liu Yuan-ju, *Shenti, xingbie, jieji—Liuchao zhiguai de changyi lunshu yu xiaoshuo meixue* 身體·性別·階級—六朝志怪的常異論述與小說美學 (Taipei: Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, Academia Sinica, 2002), pp. 18–19, 195.

[5] According to Lefebvre, representational space is the combination of both spatial practice and represented space. For a discussion of how this concept can be applied to a spatial analysis of cityscapes, see Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-imagined Places* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1997).

differentiated into separate locations from the living areas.[6] While these realms do not overlap, they are nevertheless still tied together by the concept of the clan or family.[7] Later, anomaly tales prominently feature the concept of family bonds that last even after death.

The separation of the residential and burial areas took another step forward in the Han Dynasty during the process of codifying ritual regulations, as we see in an important court discussion:

> Why should burials be outside of the city walls? The beginning that is life and the end that is death should be placed separately. The *Book of Changes* says: "Parents are buried outside of the residential area." The filial son sets a limit for his grief by this means.[8]

This explanation of burial outside of the city walls expounds a boundary between the living and dead as well as a properly delineated set of obligations of the living towards the dead. To explain this normalized separation of tombs and residential domains, we can invoke iconographic evidence from Han dynasty tomb reliefs. A number of illustrations show funerary procession wherein the deceased is placed in the coffin and sent to the grave site under the protection of family members and servants. The illustrations also show stone gates and grave trees, which may symbolize either the road of no return taken by the dead, or the entrance to the lineage graves.[9] Further support comes

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[6] Xu Jijun 徐吉軍, *Zhongguo sangzangshi* 中國喪葬史 (Nanchang: Jiangxi Gaoxiao Chubanshe, 1998), p. 7.

[7] See Xing Yitian 邢義田, "Handai de fulao, dan yu juzu liju—'Han shili fulaodan maitian yueshushiquan' duji 漢代的父老、僤與聚族里居——「漢侍里父老僤買田約束石券」讀記," *Hanxue Yanjiu* 漢學研究 1.2 (1983): 355–77; idem, "Cong Zhanguo zhi XiHan de zuju, zuzang, shiye lun Zhongguo gudai zongzu shehui de yanxu 從戰國至西漢的族居、族葬、世業論中國古代宗族社會的延續," *Xinshixue* 新史學 6.2 (1995): 1–41.

[8] Ban Gu 班固 ed., annotated by (Qing) Chen Li 陳立, *Baihutong Shuzheng* 白虎通疏證, in *Zhongguo zixue mingzhu jicheng* 中國子學名著集成 (Taipei: Zhongguo zixue mingzhu jicheng bianyin jijinhui, ming o, 1978), v. 86, p. 660.

[9] Hayashi Minao 林巳奈夫, "GōKan jidai no shaba gyōretsu 後漢時代の車馬行列," *Tōhō gakuhō* 東方學報 37 (1996): 183–226; Hayashi Minao 林巳奈夫, "Kandai kijin no sekai 漢代鬼神の世界," *Tōhō gakuhō* 東方學報 46 (1974): 223–306; Sofugawa Hiroshi 曾布川寬, *Konronzan e no shōsen* 崑崙山への昇仙 (Tokyo: Chūou Kouronsha, 1981); Sofugawa Hiroshi 曾布川寬, "Kandai gazouishi ni wakeru shōsentsu no keifu 漢代畫像石にわける昇仙圖の系譜," *Tōhō gakuhō* 東方學報 65 (1993): 23–222; Xin Lixiang 信立祥, *Chūgoku Kandai gazouishi no kenkyū* 中國漢代畫像石の研究 (Tokyo: Heifansha, 1991). The usual explanation often takes the gate as the entrance to the world of celestial beings, while the grave tree is a tree for the ascension of the immortals.

from written materials such as land purchase contracts found in some tombs. For example:

> Life and death have different roads. They may not obstruct one another. The dead return to Haoli. At the date *wuyi*, those above and below the earth cannot interfere [with its return].

Another example shows clearly the separation of the living and the dead:

> In life, he belonged to Chang'an. In death, he belongs to Mt. Tai. The living and the dead are placed differently; they may not interfere with one another.[10]

This passage betrays how a worldly bureaucratic idea penetrated into the conception of the realm of the dead. It deals with the problem of where to register one's residence after death. Just as Emperors of Chang'an governs the world of the living, so also God of the Mt. Tai (泰山) is to rule over those in the underworld. This change in residential registration means that the deceased is prevented from returning and disturbing the living.

The Continuity of Life and Death

Besides the spatial separation of the dead and the living in lineage regulations and burial practices, what is most noteworthy in Chinese views of death is the continuity of life and death. Chinese society during the Han period could be described as a lineage society, as seen in the lineage enterprises in life and the lineage burials at death.[11] Officials in the Han Dynasty extolled the filial principles and ceremonial regulations of the Confucian tradition: while the parents are alive, one serves them ritually, and when dead, one also serves them with proper ritual.[12] Ritual regulations were carried out throughout the family and its lineage, showing that these principles sufficed to coalesce the entire clan. Seasonal offerings, as an expression of lineage piety, were attempts to settle the spirits of ancestors. Although their "physical body" is no

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[10] Ikeda On 池田溫, "Chūgoku rekidai boken ryakukō 中國歷代墓券略考," *Tōyō Bunka Kenkyūjo Kiyō* 東洋文化研究所紀要, 86 (1981): 193–278.

[11] Xing Yitian 邢義田, "Cong Zhanguo zhi XiHan de zuju, zuzang, shiye lun Zhongguo gudai zongzu shehui de yanxu." For lineage society, see Zhao Pei 趙沛, *Handai zongzu yanjiu* 漢代宗族研究 (Jinan: Shandong Daxue Chubanshe, 2002).

[12] *Lunyu zhushu* 論語注疏 (*Shisanjing zhushu* ed. 十三經注疏), p. 16.

longer present, they are nonetheless present as "cultural bodies"[13] to be venerated.[14] The continuous strengthening of such a view of lineage offerings brought ghosts and family members into a state of harmonious relations.

During the Han-Tang transition, religious piety gradually placed greater emphasis on the securing of family fortune through ancestral worship. Prayers to the ancestors are not just for protection but also to gain wealth and happiness for the living. Views about inherited responsibility (*chengfu* 承負) appeared already in the late Han text *Canon of Great Peace* (*Taiping jing* 太平經), and further developed against this background, that is, the belief that crime and fortune were shared in common by the entire family. Therefore, during the Southern and Northern Dynasties, Buddhist and Daoist tenets promoted the very popular custom of praying for merit and "netherworld fortune" (*mingfu* 冥福) for both the living and the deceased family members. In the north, erecting devotional stelae at Buddhist rural devotional communities (*sheyi* 社邑) were public ritual acts for obtaining the fortune of an entire village and region. Privately erected devotional stelae in turn ask for the fortune of an entire family.[15] Ancestor worship manifests an awareness of retribution (*bao* 報),[16] that is, what is done shall be repaid accordingly; praying for the good fortune for the ancestors is performed in hope of receiving reciprocity from them. This conception of reciprocity, in the eyes of some cultural psychologists, is a basic mentality of the Chinese in handling the grave affairs of life

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[13] Elaine Scarry, "But yet the Body is His Book," in Elaine Scarry ed., *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 76.

[14] (Han) Cui Shi 崔寔 ed., *Simin yueling* 四民月令, redacted by Tang Hongxue 唐鴻學, in *Suishi xisu ziliao huibian* 歲時習俗資料彙編 (Taipei: Yiwen Yinshuguan, 1970), p. 3. Moriya Mitsuwa 守屋美都雄, *Chūgoku kodai saijiki kenkyū* 中國古代歲時記研究 (Tokyo: Teigoku Shoen, 1963), pp. 11–23.

[15] Hou Xudong 侯旭東, *Wu liu shiji beifang minzhong fuojiao xinyang* 五、六世紀北方民眾佛教信仰 (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1998); Zhang Zexun 張澤珣, *BeiWei Daojiao zaoxianbei yishu* 北魏道教造像碑藝術 (Hong Kong: Mingshi Wenhua Gongsi, 2002); Zhang Zexun 張澤珣, "BeiWei Daojiao zaoxiangji yanjiu: diyu de zongjiao wenhua yu yishi huodong—fu zaoxiangbei wenlu jiaodian 北魏道教造像記研究: 地域的宗教文化與儀式活動—附造像碑文錄校點." Ph.D. diss., Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2003.

[16] Qu Tongzu 瞿同祖, *Zhongguo falü yu Zhongguo shehui* 中國法律與中國社會 (Taipei: Liren Shuju, 1984), pp. 338–46.

and death.[17] In sum, within the lineage system, the living and the dead form a continuous community sustained by various ritual acts.

Guiding the Deviant to the Norm

In most circumstances, bringing mutual peace between life and death, humans and ghosts, means the establishment of a normal state that is stable and secure. Yet because of the existence of irregularities such as abnormal death, and transgressions such as improper treatment of the dead, it induces all kinds of monstrosities; ghosts and other strange phenomena are themselves a kind of abnormal and deviant state of affairs.[18] The ritual regulations of the Han Dynasty had been taken up and preserved by the elites of the Six Dynasties. They also continued to be followed by less prestigious lineages and families. However, this was also a time of political chaos and social upheaval that resulted in massive refugee movements and the death of innocent victims. Thus for a wide variety of reasons the regulations were not always followed observed. This is frequently reflected in the narratives of the anomaly tales, such as the following story:

> Prime Minister Sun Jun of Wu killed Princess Zhu and had her buried on Mount Shizi. When Guiming succeeded to the throne, he wished to have the princess reburied, but all the graves on the hill were indistinguishable from one another. However, some palace servants still remembered what the princess had been wearing. Two shamans were thus stationed at two different places on the hill to watch for her ghost—they were only to observe and not to approach it.
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> Some time passed before the two reported to have seen a young woman around thirty moving about on the upper part of Mount Shizi. She was wearing a green embroidered headdress, purple and white robes, and crimson pongee-silk slippers. With her hands in her lap, she sighed long and deeply. She paused for a while and then approached a tomb. She stopped, hesitated again for quite some time, and shortly thereafter disappeared. The accounts of both shamans matched without prior con-

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[17] Yang Guoshu 楊國樞, *Zhongguoren de xinli yu xingwei: bentuhua yanjiu* 中國人的心理與行爲: 本土化研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 2004); Huang Guangguo 黃光國, "Renqing yu mianzi: Zhongguo de quanli youxi 人情與面子: 中國的權力遊戲," in *Zhongguo de quanli youxi* 中國的權力遊戲 (Taipei: Juliu Tushu Gongsi, 1988), pp. 7–56. See also the article by Steven Sangren in this volume.

[18] Lee Fongmao 李豐楙, "Taiwan minjian Lisuzhong de shengsi guanhuai 台灣民間禮俗中的生死關懷," *Zhexue zazhi* 哲學雜誌 8 (1994): 32–53.

> sultation, so the tomb they indicated was opened. The clothing on the corpse was just as they had described.[19]

This is an example of the murder of an innocent victim. The moral of the story is that the innocent dead could somehow be redeemed by showing her apparition and henceforth receiving proper burial. What was abnormal thus became regulated. Or, consider another example:

> During the civil disorder of the Yongjia period (307–313) of Jin, there was no stable government in the prefectures or counties. The strong dealt with the weak violently. In Yiyang County there was a woman, named Peng E. Her family members include her father, mother, elder and younger brothers, in all more than ten people. They were attacked by the brigands from Changsha. Peng E was carrying a container out to get water from the creek when she heard the raiders arrive. She fled back and saw that the village defensive walls were already destroyed. She could not control her grief and fought with the brigands, who tied her and forced her to the side of the creek and were about to kill her. There was a large mountain at the edge of the creek, with a rock cliff over a hundred meters high. Peng E looked up to the sky and shouted: "Does August Heaven have gods or not? What crimes have I committed that I should come to this?" With this, she took off running towards the mountain. A large vertical opening appeared in the wall, about a dozen meters wide, and with a path going through it as smooth as a whetstone. The band of brigands pursued Peng E into the mountain, but the mountain collapsed back together without seams just as before, and the brigands were all crushed in the mountain, with their heads sticking out. Peng E went into hiding and never came out again. The water container Peng E carried to get water changed into a rock shaped like a chicken. The locals thus called it "Stone Chicken Mountain"; the pool there became "Lake E."[20]

The background to the story is the chaotic period of the Yongjia reign (307–312). The parents and brothers of Peng E are killed through no fault of their own, which makes the story an example of abnormal death. That Peng E is able to escape and miraculously traps the brigands in the mountain, if one perceives it as a literary strategy, is a case of guiding the deviant (the death of her family members) to the norm (her family tragedy found justice in the death of the brigands). The goal

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[19] Ge Bao 干寶, *Soushen ji* 搜神記 (Taipei: Muduo Chubanshe, 1987), p. 26. This translation is based on the translation of Kenneth J. DeWoskin and J. I. Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 25–26.

[20] *Youming lu* 幽冥錄 in Lu Xun 魯迅 ed., *Guxiaoshuo gouchen* 古小說鉤沈 (Taipei: Tangshan reprint, 1989), p. 254.

and motivation to narrate the anomaly stories, if one may venture a speculation, is, in many cases, to allow the reader to find peace when normality is recovered in the stories.

As has been demonstrated, souls of the innocent victims of unjust death would often come back to take their vengeance and influence the fate of the living.[21] Early Six Dyansties Daoist works, such as the *Nüqing guilü* 女青鬼律 and *Taishang Dongyuan shenzhou jing* 太上洞淵神咒經, often mention that the victims of violent deaths could become plague demons and ghosts of epidemics in "spreading pestilence."[22] It would be necessary to employ Shamans or Daoist masters to carry out rituals and remove the interference or avert the vengeance of the threatening ghosts, thus guiding the deviant back to the norm. In sum, early medieval ghost stories generally contain the three basic elements discussed above.

Angry Ghosts and Wronged Ghosts

The anomaly tales of the Six Dynasties are not only of literary interest for their narrative style, but may carry other messages tied to religious mentality and social criticism.[23] They impart a special intention, and their ironic barbs and criticisms embody their projected aim. Ghosts are like costumed and masked actors who preserve the person's most striking features before death. When their behavior becomes anomalous, the spectators are given a chance to speculate on the symbolic meaning contained therein.

Consider the following story:

> The wife of Wang Chengzhi of Langye was of the Xie family of Chen Prefecture. She had given birth to a son named Nuzi. After some years, he made his wife's maidservant Zhaoli his concubine. Xie died of illness in the eighth year of the Yuanjia period (431). The Wang family's tombs

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[21] See the article by Mu-chou Poo in this volume.

[22] For details, see Lee Fongmao 李豐楙, "*Daozang* suo shou zaoqi Daoshu de wenyiguan—yi *Nüqingguilü* ji *Dongyuan shenzhou jing* xi weizhu:《道藏》所收早期道書的瘟疫觀—以《女青鬼律》及《洞淵神咒經》系爲主," *Zhongguo Wenzhe Yanjiu Jikan* 中國文哲研究集刊 3 (1993): 417–54.

[23] Besides my view that anomaly writing guides difference to normalcy as a social discourse and aesthetic structure, Robert F. Campany in his *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) sees the anomaly tales as cosmological texts that mixed cosmological conceptions and religious beliefs of the time; see also, Mu-chou Poo, "Ghost Literature: Exorcistic Ritual Text or Daily Entertainment?" *Asia Major* 13.1 (2000): 43–64.

> were in Kuaiji, so he made expedient use of a plot in the eastern hills of Jiankang to bury her. Having placed the coffin in the grave, he returned to settle her spirit on the ancestral tablet. Having brought her earth soul into the room, he leaned on a stand, when the tablet suddenly was thrown through the air to the ground. [The ghost of Xie said] with an angry tone: "Why did you not perform the elegy? Do you want to leave me to set on the path in loneliness?" Cheng said, "Not all the proprieties were performed simply because it is not a permanent burial."[24]

As the Wangs and the Xies were the most prestigious families at the time, all the funerary ritual details were expected to be respectfully followed and the burial properly located. Since the ancestral tombs of the Wang family were at Kuaiji, a time should have been chosen to return the deceased to the ancestral cemetery in accordance with common customs. However, perhaps hampered by the political and social circumstance, there was no way to return the body immediately for burial at Kuaiji. At the time of the funeral procession to the grave, moreover, Wang Chengzhi did not follow the contemporary custom to perform a funeral elegy.[25] This is why his wife complained about being alone when she set off for the netherworld. Furthermore, after the burial, when he returned to settle her soul on the ancestral tablet, by custom he should have carried out the ritual terminating the weeping,[26] but Wang Chengzhi merely leaned on the stand, having brought her earth soul into the room. This oversight betrays his casual and uncaring attitude during the mourning process. Rather than saying that his behavior is ritually improper, we might say instead that it shows his lack of inward sincerity. Even if he had followed the external ritual forms of the time, if he had lost his inner feelings, as far as the anomaly narratives are concerned, his case would still be considered as "deviant." All these "irregularities" may have contributed to the plot in the story regarding the expression of his wife's anger, since she would have the reason to feel that she was abnormally or unjustly treated.

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[24] Liu Jingshu 劉敬叔 (comp.) and Fan Ning 范寧 (annot.), *Yiyuan* 異苑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 9.58.

[25] *Jinshu* 晉書, p. 626.

[26] *Liji zhushu* 禮記注疏, p. 171: "In this month change the site of the memorial to the home shrine and terminate weeping to complete the duties. On this day use an auspicious offering in the course of the funeral ceremonies."

The genre of ghost stories represented by this text seems to be a means to criticize those who lack inward feelings in ritual practices.[27] Did the ghost really make her husband realize his faults? Or did the wrath of the angry spirit shake and frighten her husband into submission? The succinct narrative in this text keeps an open space for imagination. Wang Chengzhi's reply to the inquiry of the ghost of his wife was straight forward and did not show much remorse, for his excuse for not performing the elegy was because it was not a permanent burial. This means that the burial would be moved to the ancestral cemetery eventually, a promise made to assuage the angry spirit, and to guide the deviant situation back to normal.

The following story tells about the grievance of a man for his sorry death, and his success in seeking justice at the heavenly court.

> In the Jin, Xiahou Xuan, courtesy name Taichu, was a great talent of the time. Sima Shi, King of Jing, was jealous of him, and had him beheaded. His lineage sacrificed to him, and they saw Xuan come and sit in the spirit seat. He took off his head and placed it on the spirit seat, and took all the fruit, food, fish and meat he could get, and stuffed them into his neck. When finished, he put his head back on. At this, he stated: "My case has been taken up by the Supreme God. The King will have no heir." Shortly thereafter, when the army returned from the campaign of Yongjia, the king ended with no sons to inherit his property. Subsequently, a shaman saw the soul of Emperor (Wu of Jin), who said, weeping: "The country's downfall began at the time when Cao Shuang and Xiahou Xuan petitioned their grievances (to the Superme God) and were granted permission." Shuang was executed for having a powerful lineage and Xuan was beheaded due to his potential [for creating unrest].[28]

This story chronicles the revenge of the famous Xiahou Xuan (209–254) against the Western Jin Dynasty (265–317). During the struggle for power at the end of the Wei Dynasty, Xiahou Xuan, who was a supporter of the Wei, was arrested and executed by his opponent Sima Shi, later Emperor Wu, the founder of the Western Jin Dynasty. Story has it that as he was to be beheaded, he did not turn pale, and his comportment

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[27] As early as the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 and *Guoyu* 國語, the performance of proper ritual was used as a criteria to judge the reciprocal returns of individuals and states, and thus whether a person was to be praised or blamed. See David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge: Harvard East Asia Monographs, 2001), pp. 207–21. My thanks go to Scott Davis for noting this. However, the concept of *bao* or reciprocal return in the Six Dynasties, other than its ritual standard, also makes requirements in terms of *qing* 情 or emotions.

[28] *Yiyuan* 異苑, 6.52.

was relaxed and natural. He was thus highly praised by some literati at the time.[29] Unlike other ghosts resulting from executions, who seem woefully encumbered by their shackles, or were ashamed of the marks of their punishments,[30] Xuan's ghost was still as his contemporaries had described him: "illustrious and magnanimous as if encompassing the sun or moon in his breast,"[31] expressing a graceful manner.

The point of the narrative is the indefatigable efforts of Xiahou Xuan to exact revenge. According to the story, he waited almost sixty years before bringing his case to the heavenly lord and won. The end of the Western Jin Dynasty was predicted by Emperor Wu himself, thus Xiahou Xuan's grievance was addressed, and the deviant returned to normal. Reading from a historical point of view, the story was most likely written as a postfacto pseudo-prediction of the downfall of Western Jin, probably written by a sympathizer of Xiahou Xuan. For there could be no real justice in the struggle for political power, and Xianhou Xuan's revenge would logically become the source of injustice from the point of view of the Jin court.

Intermediaries between Ghosts and Humans

From the wealth of Daoist works in the collections of the anomaly stories of the Six Dynasties period, I draw here on stories related to the magicians and Daoist masters in order to briefly explore the function exercised by the Daoist tradition.

The "magicians" (also known as *fangshi* 方士 or *shushi* 術士) are those who possess a broad range of techniques about such matters as medicine and the occult. In the following story, the magician uses a special technique to allow the dead and living to meet.

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[29] These events are found in material such as *Wei Shu* 魏書, "Xiahou Shang 夏侯尚," *Wei Shu* 魏書, "Xiahou Shang zhuan, with appended zhuan for son Xuan 夏侯尚附子玄," that quotes *Weilue* 魏略, *Wei Shu* 魏書, *Shishuo* 世說, etc. Also see Cao Jianghong 曹江紅, "Lun Xiahou Xuan yu zhengshi gaizhi 論夏侯玄與正始改制," *Guizhou Shifan Daxue Xuebao* 貴州師範大學學報 (*Shehui kexueban* 社會科學版), 1 (1998): 24–26.

[30] One can often find those having died of punishment appearing in the anomaly writing of the Six Dynasties; they are documented as appearing with the shackles on them or as unwilling to manifest their forms due to their injuries. For instance, *Youming lu* 幽明錄, "Guanglingsan 廣陵散," p. 298; *Yi yuan* 異苑, "Li jian 李謙," 6.53.

[31] See *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, "Rongzhi 容止," p. 609.

> During the Han Dynasty, there was a Magician from Yingling in Beihai commandery capable of arranging meetings between the living and the dead. In the same commandery, there lived a man who had lost his wife some years earlier, and when he heard of the Master's skills, he went to see him.
>
> "If you could let me speak to my wife again, I would die with no remorse," said he. The Master instructed him as follows: "You can be sent to visit her, but when the drum sounds, you must leave her at once! Do not tarry a moment!"
>
> The Master then recited his formula for "meetings," and in a trice the man was with his wife. They immediately fell to conversing, feeling the whole range of joy and sorrow and the profound affection they shared while alive. In this manner did much time pass until suddenly he heard the drum sound *lang-lang*. He could not linger, but as he left, his garments caught in the doorway. He hastily ripped himself free and fled.
>
> A little more than a year later, the man himself passed away. When his survivors opened the family crypt to bury him, they discovered, caught beneath the cover of his wife's casket, a piece of his robe.[32]

The magician of Beihai broke down the boundaries of *yin* and *yang*. This border is not simply a spatial barrier, but requires traversing between the body and its absence. Because of the growing influence of the Daoist religion, accounts of this ability in the anomaly narratives were seen by contemporaries as credible reality. The Beihai Magician "could arrange meetings between the living and the dead." But how can one rationally conjoin the worlds of *yin* and *yang* in a narrative? What method can the narrative deploy for it to be convincing and believable for the reader? The narrative depicts the man's contact with the netherworld under the casket beyond anyone's view. It seamlessly combines details about the everyday and the occult so that the events seem natural and factual. In the story, the man was explicitly told before he entered the netherworld: "When the drum sounds, you must leave her at once! Do not tarry a moment!" Obviously, when humans and ghosts communicate, it should be in the dark of night, which is the time of *yin*. How could one secure the objectivity of the narrative to make it credible?[33] The robe left

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[32] Gan Bao 干寶, *Soushen ji* 搜神記, pp. 25–26, this translation is based on the translation of Kenneth J. DeWorskin and J. I. Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record*, pp. 24–25.

[33] Some scholars point out that the anomaly literature is a kind of "historiographical style of narrative," in that it displays a documentary principle of "without proof there

behind in the hasty exit of the "door" must be called upon to testify. In this way material evidence is revealed under the coffin lid, supporting what the plot tells us about the man's entrance into the netherworld. It suggests that the inextricable meeting of the two took place inside the wife's casket. The conclusion of the story was only known after the grave was opened. As the family opened the tumulus and sent the man to join his wife, they finally discover the secret of the couple's meeting after traversing these boundaries. The depth of emotion in the anomaly tales is often like this; although the story is simple, there is abundant space left for the imagination. This is an aesthetic property of the genre, as its romantic style lies close to poetry.

This story conveys how the living can cross boundaries and enter the world of the dead but it was necessary to rely upon the extraordinary skill of a magician to do so. This kind of border crossing by the living was something of which the Confucians "did not speak." However, the separation between life and death gave rise to the psychological need to cross it. One needed only to have a strong willingness to believe it, and the door to the tomb, the door to the realm of death, would open accordingly. The special arts of the shamans and Daoist masters provided unusual services to ordinary people in need, and created an expectation of their success. It is a resistance to the disappearance of the bodily form: even after death one wishes that the soul could continue to talk, be conscious, and express emotions. Again, the basic concept of guiding the deviant back to the norm, that is, crossing the boundary of death and bringing back the moment of life, underlies the story.

Another story tells of the way Daoism gradually became more familiar to the common people as its concepts permeated folk culture. In the Daoist view, the afterworld was replete with an extensive bureaucracy and feudal positions just as in the human world.

> Xu You dreamed that an official dressed in black presented him with a lacquered tray, on which were six documents of appointment. He knelt. The statement read: "You, governor, will be the Lord of the Big Dipper in the seventh month of next year." There was another tray upon which were four documents, saying, "Chen Kang will be the Registrar." After he woke up, Kang was just arriving. He said, "I have arrived for an audience!"

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is no belief." See Wang Ping 王平, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo xushi yanjiu* 中國小說敘事研究 (Shijiazhuang: Xibei Renmin Chubanshe, 2001), pp. 10–19.

> Hearing this, You was even more terrified. He asked Kang, who said, "I am a Daoist Master. After death, I am no more than a village's tutelary god (*shegong* 社公). Now I hear I am to be the Registrar for the Lord of the Big Dipper—I am certainly unworthy!" In the seventh month of the next year, both died on the same day.[34]

Xu You was an advisor for Cao Cao (155–220), the founder of the Wei Dynasty. According to the official histories, Xu was put to death for being unduly arrogant.[35] This story asserts that before Cao Cao executed Xu You, he had had a remarkable dream about becoming the Lord of the Big Dipper, which, according to Daoist cosmology, is only one rank below that of the Emperor of the North who holds the highest position. No matter if the story was created after Xu You's death, it could be read as intentional praise of his merit and criticism of Cao Cao's failure to honor talented men.

The story makes it clear that a Daoist master after his death could usually become one of the local gods, the village tutelary god. Under special circumstances such as the one in the story, he may be promoted to a higher position. The assumption behind this narrative was that the world after death was essentially a bureaucratic society, which was reflected in the early Daoist work *Zhenling weiyetu* 真靈位業圖. There was of course a long tradition for the development of such a world view. Quite a number of newly excavated texts from the Han dynasty testified that there were various underworld officials that the deceased were supposed to encounter in their respective capacities.[36] In our story, the promotion of Xu You after death to the position of the Lord of the Big Dipper was certainly a way to compensate for his unfortunate death, thus again resonating with the underlying theme of guiding the deviant to the norm.

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[34] See *Youming lu* 幽明錄, pp. 292–93.

[35] See *Xinjiaoben Sanguozhi* 新校本三國志, *Wei Shu* 魏書, "Cui Yan 崔琰," 12.370.

[36] For a complete examination in this respect see Pu Muzhou, *Muzang yu shengsi: Zhongguo gudai zongjiao zhi shengsi* 墓葬與生死:中國古代宗教之省思, and Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare*; also see Liu Yi 劉屹, *Jingtian yu chongdao: zhonggu jingjiao daojiao xingcheng de sixiang beijing* 敬天與崇道: 中古經教道教形成的思想背景 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2005).

Aspects of Reincarnation

The entrance of Buddhism into China may have been a "conquest of China";[37] however, in the process of development it was also conquered by China. The concept of the Six Realms (*liudao* 六道) introduced by Buddhism—namely of the gods in heaven, *asuras*, demons, beasts and souls in hell—deploys a multi-leveled view of life that enriched Chinese religious culture. The concept of the hungry ghost/demon (*egui* 餓鬼; Skt. *preta*) introduced by Buddhism has several characteristics: one, it depends on others for food;[38] two, it is weak and frightened;[39] three, even if it lives longer than humans,[40] it still dies and migrates through the Six Realms. From Buddhist doctrine, we know that all living beings require food and shelter; and, life is an endless continuum that spans death.[41] Did this kind of view of life and death "conquer" the Chinese knowledge of life and death? Outside of the concept of hungry ghosts, there are also other demons like *rāksasa* that eat humans, lustful fiends, fast-moving demons, and baby-eating monsters. Due to their bad karma, they are reincarnated in the world of demons; they often are active in mountains, forests or swamps, and are often mixed with Chinese traditional or indigenous legends of supernatural beings in those areas.

While Buddhism enlarged the concept of ghost into including certain demons, that is, non-human evil spirits, the demon never displaced the ghost because Chinese culture placed the most importance on human beings.[42] In the concept of the continuity of life and death whereby life

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[37] See the preface in Eric Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

[38] Zhen Di 真諦 trans., *Lishi apitanlun* 立世阿毘曇論, in *Taishō*, v. 32, no. 1644, p. 866: "Among the five drives there is no drive that hopes more to obtain satisfaction from other sentient beings; due to such causality, the drive is described as ghostly."

[39] Dao Shi 道世, *Fayuan zhuli* 法苑珠林, in *Taishō*, v. 53, no. 2122, p. 311b: "Ghosts (*gui* 鬼) are fear (*wei* 畏). It means they are weak and full of fear, thus are called ghosts."

[40] Shi Qin 世親 (Skt. Vasubandhu) annot., Xuan Zang 玄奘 trans., *Abhidharma storehouse treatise* 阿毘達磨俱舍論, in *Taishō*, v. 29, no. 1588, 11.6: "A month in the human world for a ghost is like a day, so doing the math, the lifetime of a ghost is 500 human years."

[41] *Dasheng yizhang* 大乘義章, in *Taishō*, v. 44, no. 1851, 7.613: "Many lives on a continuum is the multitude of living beings." Ghosts belong to the three worlds and the six levels of existence. Causal effects have fixed limits of effectiveness in time, and this is just what *Cheng weishilun* 成唯識論 calls the separation into sections of lives and deaths. *Taishō*, v. 31, no. 1851, 7.613.

[42] For further discussion of ghosts in Buddhist texts, see Mu-chou Poo, "The Culture of Ghost in the Six Dynasties," in this volume.

and death are one, ghosts are simply just another form of life. For this reason, even if Buddhist theoretical discourse about demons dazzled, it was merely redacted to become a part of the discourse about body and spirit. At the same time, ghosts became an important medium for the teaching of the Buddhist ideas of the other world such as heavens, hells and so forth. Now the Confucian ritual system and Daoist asceticism mixed with and complemented each other institutionally, liturgically and conceptually. In particular, the internal organization of the lineage and family system still tied the fortunes of a family to the ancestral ceremonies. To come to terms with this kind of situation, Buddhism made accommodations to gain the acceptance of the Chinese people. In constructing a world after death, Buddhist doctrinal expression remained similar to the original Indic version. But lay and popular Buddhism were really indigenized or Sinicized Buddhist beliefs. Works such as what Wang Yan 王琰 recorded in *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記 or other works such as *Xuanyan ji* 宣驗記, *Guanshiyin yingyan ji* 觀世音應驗記, *Ganying zhuan* 感應傳, *Yuanhun ji* 冤魂記, *Jiling ji* 集靈記, *Jingyi ji* 旌異記, and so forth were considered as "teaching books that furthered the efforts of Śākyamuni." These texts emphasized basic principles from *sūtra, vinayas* and *sastras* that were Indic in origin yet adapted to the existing Chinese customs. My discussion selects a few narratives that had to do with the phenomenon of reincarnation of ghosts.

Reincarnation from the Realm of Hungry Demons

Six Dynasties *zhiguai* about ghosts mainly follow indigenous traditions concerning body and spirit; when ghosts appear after death, they preserve their appearances as in life, with the same clothing, expression and disposition. In some cases, they even preserve the condition they were in at death. Even if a ghost in this kind of indigenous narrative is resentful, most petition their case and only a few directly resort to malice or deliberate injury of the living. However, the newly introduced Buddhist idea of hungry demon brought changes. The realm of hungry demons was one of the Six Realms of reincarnation, which along with beasts and hell belonged to the realm of evil. Those who in their lifetimes had flattered others, been perverse, lied, slandered, cheated, were stingy, or avaricious—once they fall into hell after death, they would be punished and then join the realm of the hungry demons. After becoming demons, they are still unable to rid themselves of their wicked habits and previous karma. They hide during the day and come

out at night, roaming about scrounging for food; or they change their bodily form at the snap of a finger, frightening the living; or they take the opportunity to demand that the living offer them incense. The story about An Shigao gives an example of an eminent monk who encounters a demon who behaves very differently from human ghosts.

> Lord An Shigao was the Prince of Anxi (Parthia). He left home to become a monk together with an Elder's son. They studied and lived in the [city of] Sravasti. When they begged, some people did not treat the monks well, and the great man's son was often furious about it. Shigao always cautioned him about it. After twenty eight full years, he remarked that he ought to go to Guangzhou, but just then revolt broke out.
>
> A man confronted Shigao; the man spat on his hand and pulled out a knife saying, "I have really got you now." Shigao laughed heartily and said, "I owe you from my previous life, so I have come from afar to repay you." The man then killed Shigao. A child said, "This was a foreigner from afar who spoke my country's language; in such distress he didn't lose his composure. Is this perhaps a celestial?" Everybody laughed at him with apprehension.
>
> Shigao's spiritual consciousness returned to life in the kingdom of Anxi and again was the prince, named Lord Gaoan 高安侯. At age twenty, he once again renounced the kingship and cultivated himself. After a dozen or so years, he said to his fellow monks, "I should go visit Kuaiji and pay back what I owe." Shigao passed by Mt. Lu and visited a friend there. He then passed through Guangzhou and saw the man who was still there [that is, the boy who witnessed his death in his previous life]. He stayed at his house and spoke to him about the past. They enjoyed each other's company immensely, and then the man accompanied Shigao to Kuaiji.
>
> When they passed by the temple at Mt. Ji, they called to the spirit to talk to Shigao. The temple spirit took the form of a python that was more than a dozen meters long, and wept tears. When Shigao drew near to speak to it, it went away. Shigao, for his part, returned to his boat.
>
> Then a young man got on the boat, he knelt and received the incantation prayer and then disappeared. [Gao spoke to] the man from Guangzhou, saying, "That youth was the temple spirit who had been freed from his evil form. He was an Elder's son [whom I knew from the previous life]." Later the keeper of the temple noticed a foul odor; they found a dead python. After this, the temple spirit no longer was spiritually effective. They continued on to Kuaiji. When they entered the marketplace gate, they encountered men fighting. Shigao was accidentally hit in the head and died. The man from Guangzhou then devoted his life to the Buddha.[43]

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[43] The version I use here includes emendations by Zheng Wanqing 鄭晚晴, *Youming lu* 幽明錄 (Beijing: Wenhua Yisu Chubanshe, 1998), p. 167, notes 3 and 4.

The important lesson of the narrative of this text has to do with the fate of An Shigao in connection with the past, the present and the future. In Shigao's second life, he and an Elder's son left home to become monks; but in response to humiliations and disrespectful treatment while begging for food, the latter was often full of rage. This bad karma led to his being reincarnated into the realm of demons as the temple spirit on Mt. Ji. He took the form of a python, but this does not mean he had fallen into the realm of beasts. According to the *Lengyan jing* 楞嚴經 (*Śūraṃgama-sūtr*), those beside themselves with rage and hatred who do evil will atone for the crimes and become "venomous demons" (*gudu gui* 蠱毒鬼).[44] At the same time, demons can metamorphose and have extraordinary godlike abilities; men have to make offerings to them for this reason. Reborn as an animal, one is stupid and without self-awareness; a beast could not meet an old friend and weep as this python spirit did. Moreover, he was willing to leave the bad karma of the demon and undergo rebirth. In addition, the story imparts the idea that those who become monks possess the ability to tame ghosts and subdue demons, thus reinforcing the proselytizing power the story.

Many stories about hungry demons omit Buddhist teachings and instead emphasize their avarice and demonic behavior such as scaring and threatening others. For example, while walking alone at night, a man who fears demons welcomes a companion, but his companion suddenly turns into a vicious demon with protruding tongue and bulging eyes, or perhaps has become a rabbit with eyes as large as hand-held mirrors.[45] There are also cases where demons attack people with axes, spread pestilence, or rob people of their "essence."[46] There are also hungry demons who play unpleasant tricks on people and want food,[47] or who break into a house to steal food.[48] Some stories attempt to encourage religious belief; many stories satirize aspects of humanity such as suspicion of others, lust, arrogance, and deception.

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[44] See *Dafoding rulai miyin xiuzhengliaoyi zhupusa wanxing shoulengyan jing* 大佛頂如來密因修證了義諸菩薩萬行首楞嚴經, in *Taishō*, v. 19, no. 945, p. 150a.

[45] As in *Soushen ji* 搜神記, "Gu Pipa 鼓琵琶," p. 197; "Dunqiu guimei 頓丘鬼魅," p. 211.

[46] As in *Soushen houji* 搜神後記 (Taipei: Muduo chubanshe, 1982), "Yiwu ru niao 異物如鳥," pp. 41–42; "Fuzhonggui 腹中鬼," p. 43; *Soushen ji* 搜神記, "Ruyang guimei 汝陽鬼魅," pp. 205–206.

[47] As in *Youming lu* 幽明錄, "Xingui Mishi 新鬼覓食," pp. 312–13.

[48] As in *Youming lu* 幽明錄, "Guidao Zhugeshi Liang 鬼盜諸葛氏糧," p. 289.

All these show that although Buddhism was respected as a rather different religion in form and content, the ordinary Chinese tended to select those aspects of the Buddhist teaching that were most familiar to the indigenous culture. The core principles of Buddhism required a longer period to be assimilated.

Reincarnation in Seven Lives

The mourning and sacrificial ritual associated with Confucianism extended family relations from the third to the sixth generation, and even to the hundredth generation. At the outset, such views of life and death were incompatible with Buddhist views, which stressed the transient nature of all phenomena, comprised as they are of the Five Aggregates (*skandhas*).[49] The gentry society of the Southern Dynasties was very particular about filial piety, and stressed the unbroken continuity of sacrificial and incense offerings to the ancestors. There was therefore an obvious conflict between the belief in ghosts represented by ancestor worship and the realm of the demons in Buddhist lore. At the folk level, however, this problem was more easily handled by appealing to the emotional content of stories.

The following story about Dong Qingjian serves as an example of how, under the influence of Buddhism, funeral customs and sacrificial ceremonial at that time gradually changed. Dong Qingjian epitomized the life of a disciple to an official of the Southern Dynasty period. From his birth, early career, last words before dying of disease, tomb construction and ascetic sacrifices, to the dispersal of his body and seven souls and the ascension of his soul—this entire narrative emphasizes his temporary return home, his description of his circumstances after death, and his foretelling his parents' death and future lives. He personally narrates the destiny of seven generations and further expounds about the principle of the Six Realms of karmic reincarnation to encourage his father to draw nearer to Buddha and make spiritual progress and avoid the three realms of bitterness: to be born as a ghost, beast, or in hell. This repeatedly emphasizes the retribution of karmic justice, and discriminates between and compares similarities of ghosts and other *yin* phenomena (in the after-death state or *antatrā-bhava*), as well as the secrets of reincarnation. The story is constructed according to

[49] 1. 色 *rūpa*, form, matter; 2. 受 *vedana*, sensation; 3. 想 *samjñā*, discernment; 4. 行 *samskāra*, judgments of like and dislike, good and evil, etc.; 5. 識 *vijñāna*, cognition.

various Buddhist concepts: dependent origination; the inconstancy of birth and death; the continuation of thoughts and desires; the intermediate state between death and rebirth (*zhongyin* 中陰); and the power of karma and retribution. Below, I focus on excerpts that relate to these Buddhist concepts.

> On the 16th day of the seventh month of the second year, he was sick in bed. He said, "There will be no recovery." By the 18th, he was nearing the end. He sat up and said to his mother: "My expiation is over and fortune awaits. My karmic entanglement will be broken forever. I hope, mother, you will cut yourself off from me; there is no need to worry." With seven sobs, the sounds ceased and he was dead....
>
> They were preparing to put the body into a coffin in the front of hall, when, that night, his spirit spoke: "The living and the dead should be separate; don't put my body in front of the hall. A monk who carves icons should come to help in the funeral." The next day, indeed a monk named Tanshun arrived. They told Tanshun just what the spirit had said. Tanshun said, "Your humble monk lives in Nanlin Temple, where I have just completed an icon of a height over four meters high. Your son responded to this. To the west of the temple there is a small open plot of land; this would be a good place to bury him to rest in peace." Therefore, they buried him to the west of the temple. Three days later, his mother went with around ten other relatives to make offerings at the grave. She saw Qingjian standing to the east of the tomb just as in life, and he said, "I hope, mother, you will cut yourself off from grief and go back. I am still living in the temple now." So his mother stopped crying and returned home. She prepared the family's vegetables in order to practice abstinence. At the 11th day of the intercalary month, [his father] Xianming had a dream of Qingjian, who said, "I would like you, father, to go to the eastern hall." So Xianming bathed in fragrant water and went to the eastern hall. By the night of the 14th, in his sleep he heard Qingjian calling, which shocked him awake. Qingjian was there in front of the hall, looking as he did in life. His father asked him, "Where are you staying now?" Qingjian said, "From the time I died, I stayed at the Palace of Training Spirits; after 100 days, I should be reborn in Trayastrimsa Heaven. I cannot bear to see my parents and brothers crying and hurting. When the seven-day cycle had reached the third round, I performed a rite for the Buddhas and Boddhisatvas and requested the four Kings of Heaven, to allow me to return temporarily. Please, in the future, do not cry and offer sacrifices to me again.[50]

The Buddhist view sees death as a transition, so that life is a continuous birth-death-rebirth process rather than having a decisive end. The

[50] Lu Xun, *Guxiaoshuo gouchen*, pp. 526–27.

intermediate phase between death and rebirth is called *zhongyin*; the transitional stage for the soul before reincarnation. The notion of the Six Realms makes clear that humans are not the only ones who take this itinerary through life, death, *zhongyin*, and rebirth; demons and animals also traverse these stages.

What exactly is the situation of the person in the intermediate *zhongyin* stage? This would be a question of great concern to the living. According to the information in the *Storehouse Treatise*, the continuation of karma over long periods of habituated attachment to the self (*woai* 我愛; Skt. *ātma-sneha*) ties the person to the Six Faculties (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body surface, and thought) even after death. One continues to see and hear things, to love and hate and desire things just as in life. Therefore, while one still craves food, one can only enjoy (the scent of) incense. At the same time, as a ghost, one can teleport to wherever one desires; however, one can only be seen by other ghosts, or those endowed with the Eyes of Heaven, and not by those with ordinary, biologically based powers of vision.[51] From this, we learn that Qingjian, as a ghost, felt great pity for his grieving parents, family and friends and was worried about their future. It was of course highly extraordinary that his ghost appeared.

Qingjian himself explains: after the third seven-day cycle, he asked the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and four Kings of Heaven to allow him to return temporarily. With their help, he returned to his former home and ordinary people could see his form. He asked his father to fast and bathe because the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas would come to escort Qingjian. The narrative arranges this trip to show the place where one goes after death. Qingjian says, "Following my death I stayed at the Palace of Training Spirits; after 100 days I was able to be reborn in Trayastrimsa Heaven." This statement involves two important points: one is the duration of the intermediate *zhongyin* stage. Buddhist sects vary in their opinions as to how many cycles must occur before one is reborn, but most agree that each cycle is comprised of seven days. In this story, the Chinese tradition of a hundred days is followed. The second problem is the soul's destination after death. The Training Spirit Palace cited by Qingjian is a notion influenced by traditional Chinese concepts. According to Daoist beliefs, ghosts must cultivate themselves

[51] See *Abhidharma storehouse treatise* 阿毘達磨俱舍論本頌, in *Taishō*, v. 29, no. 1560, p. 314a.

in the afterlife.[52] When the story continues, Buddhism adds another element: karma decides the soul's destination.

> Dong Qingjian says to his father, "Mother has already petitioned to see me. Before long, Mother will die and be with me. You will enjoy seventy-three years of long life, after which you will have to undergo three years of penance for your misdemeanors; but if you work hard to cultivate yourself you can obtain deliverance." Father asked, "You come at night, but where does all your light come from?" Qingjian said, "I am now together with Bodhisattvas and all of heaven, and this is just the light from them!" He asked again, "Who do you know in heaven?" Qingjian said, "I have seen Wang 王, General of Chariots and Cavalry; Zhang 張, Governor of Wuxing 吳興; and the maternal grandfather Zong 宗, Governor of Xihe 西河. I have not only had re-birth in this realm, but from the forty-seventh year until now, I have had seven births and seven deaths. I had already achieved the results of the four ways and had previously made seven vows; I had vowed to be born in the human realm and to undergo birth and death for that reason. Now this process is eternally complete. I will leave behind the seven bitter qualities of life. As I was nearing my end, I saw my seven places of birth and death and so I cried loudly seven times for my seven families that I had to take my leave of." His father asked, "What families were you born into?" Qingjian said, "I was born into the families of Jiang 江, Director of Personel (吏部); Yang 羊, Governor of Guangzhou 廣州; Zhang, Governor of Wuxing, General Wang; Xiao 蕭, Governor of Wuxing; the Honorary (給事) Liang 梁; Dong 董, Colonel of the Picked Cavalry, and others. Only here was I alive for 17 years; in the other places I lived only five or three years."[53]

According to the *Storehouse Treatise*, karma controls the transitional state after death; those going to heaven will ascend with the head pointing up and the feet pointing down. Those going to hell will be inverted, with the feet up and the head down. In other words, those entering the intermediate *zhongyin* state not going to heaven directly to receive their happy rewards will first be punished in hell before they proceed to rebirth. Dong Qingjian himself along with his mother went directly to heaven; as for Wang Cheji (Wang Xuanmou 王玄謨),

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[52] There is no trace of an idea such as "Palace of Training Spirits" (*Lianshengong* 練神宮) in the Buddhist canon. According to the *Zhen gao* 真誥, there is a "Southern Palace" (also called Vermillion Fire Palace) provided for those who are freed from their corpse yet must "refine their qualities" (*lianzhi* 鍊質) or "temper their forms" (*lianxing* 煉形) to become an immortal. See Kamizuka Yoshiko 神塚淑子, *Rokuchō Dōkyō shisō no kenkyū* 六朝道教思想の研究 (Tokyo: Sobunsha, 1999), pp. 44–45.

[53] Lu Xun, *Guxiaoshuo gouchen*, pp. 526–27.

Zhang Wuxing (Zhang Yong 張永), and the maternal grandfather Zong Xihe, while we do not know for sure if they were punished or not, they probably ascended together with them. Other than this, according to his prophecy, his father Dong Xianming would have descended to hell after death to be punished for three years.

Passage through the Netherworld

In Buddhism, hell (Skt., *naraka*) is the most bitter of the Six Realms, and is described in more detail than the other realms, such as that of heaven or hungry demons. One of the most interesting stories is about a certain Liu Sahe. It relates the state of his body and spirit while touring the afterworld. This is a very long story; below, I quote only the material relevant to the issue of the soul's final destination.

> Huida was a Jin dynasty monk, whose original name was Liu Sahe.... At age thirty one, he suddenly died of illness. His corpse remained warm and pliant, [so] his family did not place him in the coffin. After seven days, he came back to life. He said, "At the moment I died, I saw two people with ropes who took me away. We headed northwest.... [Someone] asked Sahe, 'Do you have the papers?' and Sahe handed some documents to them. A woman got some other documents and compared the two sets. At once, two monks appeared, saying, 'Now please devote yourself to the Buddha Śākyamuni.' He accepted the creed as stated, and went with them. Far away he saw a city that resembled Chang'an; it was extremely black and seemed to be made of iron.... A person holding a writing brush stood facing north, and said to Sahe, 'Why did you kill a deer when you were in Xiangyan?' Sahe knelt and answered, 'Somebody else shot the deer. I only wounded it and that is all. Furthermore, I did not eat the meat. For what reason should I be punished?' At that moment, he immediately saw the place at Xiangyang where he had killed the deer: flora, trees, mountains and gulleys suddenly filled his vision. The black horse, along with the other animals, all could speak. They testified about the year, month, day and time in which Sahe killed the deer. Frightened, Sahe could not respond. Not long after that, people with pitchforks stabbed him and threw him into a cauldron of boiling water. Sahe could see his four limbs being boiled and breaking apart. A wind blew on his body so that it amassed together at a small bank. Then he suddenly lost consciousness, and his body was restored as a whole. The one who held the brush asked again, 'You also shot a pheasant, and you have killed a goose.' When he finished speaking, Sahe was [again] stabbed, tossed in the cauldron, and boiled just as before. After receiving this punishment, Sahe was led away. He entered a large city, where people lived. The two monks told Sahe, 'You have received light punishment and are able to return to life. Your good karma has afforded this protection. Hereafter,

> will you ever commit crimes again?' A man was sent to accompany Sahe. From afar, Sahe could see his old former body. He did not want to return, but was dragged there by the man accompanying him. After a long time, he reattached to his [bodily] form and came back to life. He devoted himself to the Dharma and cultivated himself, and later became a monk known as Huida.[54]

Stories about journey through the netherworld often describe a mistaken situation: someone was wrongly summoned to the netherworld before he has finished his allotted lifespan. As a result, the visitor must be sent back to the world of the living. The purpose of such stories about a mistaken journey is that the visitor functions as a messenger who brings back information about the other world. We note that in this story, the experience of the person coming back to life is different from the Buddhist notion of the soul's transmigration. We see that Sahe undergoes interrogation and suffers corporal punishment, yet he never crosses over into another realm (of the Six Realms) as retribution for bad karma that still remains. Instead, unlike Buddhist transmigration, Sahe returns to his former body and life. It is through his coming back to life that he is able to bring back the lesson of retribution to the world of the living.

According to the causal law of karma, a cause must have an effect, and karma must have retribution. However, can one's karma be changed? Dong Qingjian himself had said he was going to cultivate four things: the way of application (Skt. *prayoga-mārga*), the instantaneous way (Skt. *ānantarya-marga*), the way of liberation (Skt. *vimukti-mārga*), and the way of triumphant progress (Skt. *viśesa-mārga*).[55] He had already achieved *nirvāna*. However, he had made seven vows in previous lives in which he vowed to be reborn as a human. In the story, his purpose is not directly explained. However, in terms of Mahayana Buddhism, the personal vow of the Bodhisattva (*pūrva-praṇidhān*) is a vow about the ultimate desire to realize and establish a Buddhist Pure Land. There are also auxiliary vows, which are relevant to teaching the masses. Because Bodhisattvas and Buddhas have different and special attributes and proclivities, their vows are naturally not the same. Moreover, due to the infinite weaknesses of an infinite number of living beings, the rescue

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[54] Lu Xun, *Guxiaoshuo gouchen*, pp. 478–80.

[55] Kātyāyanīputra 迦多衍尼子 trans., *Xuanzang, Treatise of the Great Commentary on the Abhidharma* 阿毘達磨大毘達婆沙論, in *Taishō*, v. 27, no. 1545, p. 843b. Hirakawa Akira 平川彰, *Shoki Daijou Bukkyou no kenkyū* 初期大乘佛教の研究 (Tokyo: Shunjuusha, 1989), p. 408.

strategies of the Bodhisattvas are also various.[56] Dong Qingjian also made a vow to aim at the karmic effects brought about by individual previous lives.[57] As he was about to die, he suddenly saw all his previous lives and learned about karmic bonds formed with seven families; among them, his bonds with the Dong family were stronger than with the others. However, in heaven, he saw only members of three families. Since he had already fulfilled his vow and did not need to return yet again, he loudly cried seven times to cut off his karmic ties with them. It is noteworthy that Liu Sahe had returned and resuscitated before receiving unusually light punishment; from the merit of having been a Buddhist novice in a previous life, he was able to (again) affirm that he would find ultimate rest with Śākyamuni Buddha.

From the above analysis, we see that human ghosts and hungry demons each belong to their own different domain. In the abnormal event that these ghosts manifest, although they are not the same as demons, they illustrate various cultural traits. The details encapsulated in these narratives reflect a dialectical fusion of indigenous belief and Buddhist doctrine.

Conclusion

Six Dynasties ghost stories reflect a time of upheaval and contact with non-Chinese ethnic groups.[58] While they appear to be about anomalies, they are actually allegorical expressions of norms. While their plot undergoes reversals and bizarre turns, they ultimately return to affirm the *Dao*. The *Dao* is not a fixed constant but a principle that evolves and adapts to the times. However, within any particular time and its circumstances (environmental, institutional, psychological, etc.) the *Dao* is clear to those living in that period. Some of the anomaly tales, echoing popular topics of the time, incorporated debates about body and spirit to comment on the phenomena of ghosts; they employed

[56] Hirakawa Akira 平川彰, *Shoki Daijou Bukkyou no kenkyū* 初期大乘佛教の研究, pp. 318–68.

[57] Concerning the relation between karma and vows of a Buddha or bodhisattva, see Kashio Jikaku 樫尾慈覺, "Gyōsetsu no hongan shisō 業說の本願思想," in Nihon Bukkyō Gakukai 日本佛教學會 eds., *Bukkyō ni okeru jōdo shisō* 佛教における淨土思想 (Kyoto: Nairakusi Shoten, 1989), pp. 33–49.

[58] See Yu, "Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit! Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Prose Fiction," p. 406.

concrete narratives to implement philosophical discourses. Others used ghosts to resolve unfinished business. *Bao* 報, or retribution, was a core issue of human relationships in Chinese cultural psychology. The retributive acts of ghosts were transgressive and abnormal phenomena that aimed to solve injustice in the human world. The ultimate goal of the various kinds of retribution/reciprocity (*bao*)—revenge, requital of favor, and karmic effects—may be described as an attempt to restore order by guiding abnormality back to the norm.

The relation between body and spirit was from the beginning a topic of philosophical discourse among Daoists and Buddhists. Devotees of Buddhism maintained that the body disintegrates but the spirit persists. In the important public debate between Fan Zhen 范縝 (450–507) and Xiao Ziliang 蕭子良 (460–494) about body and spirit,[59] the body (*xing* 形) was compared to the candle and the spirit (*shen* 神), to fire. Just as a fire must rely on a candle to burn, so also the spirit must be attached to the body to exist. This argument about the existence of the spirit directly relates to the problem of whether ghosts exist or not, which was an important issue for philosophical debates of the time.[60]

The anomaly tales provide a timely response to this problem, which preserves the traces of such intellectual debates in the narrative form. In the story of Xiahou Xuan, even though his ghost that his family saw was one whose head was severed from the body, Xiahou's manner remained easygoing and carefree. In the story of Wang Chengzhi's wife, family members heard the anger of her cry but did not see her form; the cry nevertheless clearly expressed the woman's emotional state. In these stories, the writers are not so much concerned with "manifesting form" as with conveying a person's spirit, i.e., his/her personality and manner. One's personality is what is preserved when the soul continues to exist.

In the story of Liu Sahe, Liu's spirit enters the intermediate *zhongyin* state once it leaves its form. Due to the influence of previous karma, he was able to preserve his appearance and memories from his previous life; therefore, in the *zhongyin* state, he talked, behaved, and reacted to

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[59] From Hu Shi's 胡適 early period, *Zhongguo gudai zhexueshi* 中國古代哲學史 (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1961) to Hou Wailu's 侯外廬 *Zhongguo sixiang tongshi* 中國思想通史 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1956), all are concerned with this.

[60] For relevant discussion see Lin Lizhen 林麗真, "Wei-Jin qingtan zhuti zhi yanjiu 魏晉清談主題之研究."

the pain of punishment just as he would have in life. He later returned to the world of the living and reattached to his form.

Another example is the story of Dong Qingjian, who appeared to his family members because of his karmic attachments to his family. Through the appearance of his ghost, his family comes to understand the workings of karma. In the stories of both Dong Qingjian and Liu Sahe, the protagonists overturned their attachment to physical form in favor of valorizing the spirit that can never be extinguished.

The anomaly tales of our period include many incidents of ghost sightings. A characteristic feature of these narratives was their detailed depiction of these sightings. The rationale for this was to convince the reader of the actual occurrence of such events. In order to gain credibility with the families and the larger public, ghosts looked as they did in life, and they displayed emotions and sentiments just as they did on earth.

When psychologists discuss regional psychological differences, principles of human sensibility are the first item of discussion.[61] Discussing human feelings in terms of cultural mentality, one foregrounds the performance of feelings. The emotional background of the Six Dynasties was that people felt the world was coming to an end and sought to find an escape. In this emotional setting, human feelings and human ethical order were constantly confronted by serious tests such as disasters caused by wars and natural calamities. The anomaly stories made use of what educated and uneducated alike delighted to see and hear: extraordinary stories of ghosts and demons that excite all kinds of feelings and propose unexpected solutions. Many of the stories could be viewed by Buddhist practitioners as proselytizing about the idea of retribution.[62]

The idea of retribution in the anomaly tales reflected collective resentment of injustice. Xiahou Xuan's ghost appeared to his family at the solemn ritual offerings to inform them that he had obtained justice as a result of a petition he submitted explaining his grievance. The spirit tablet of Madam Xie that made angry sounds revealed her discontent. As for the underworld punishment of Liu Sahe, and Dong Qingjian's

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[61] Huang Guangguo 黃光國, "Renqing yu mianzi: Zhongguo de quanli youxi 人情與面子: 中國的權力遊戲," pp. 7–56.

[62] Yang Liansheng 楊聯陞, Duan Changguo 段昌國 trans., "Bao—Zhongguo shehui guanxide yige jichu 報—中國社會關係的一個基礎," *Shihuo yuekan* 食貨月刊 3.8 (1973): 377–88.

seven lives of fateful encumbrance, these expressed the Buddhist concept of the retributive effects of karma. Through the strange itinerary of the travels in the land of the dead, the stories advocated moral principles to the audience. What was expressed was a Buddhist version of "the filial way" and "the way of compassion."

The Buddhist concept of retribution for karmic effects gradually permeated folk culture partly by utilizing the anomaly tales to articulate its teachings. The break-through here was an elaboration of the originally simpler consciousness of retribution in China. Moreover, compared to the ancient folk tradition of the *yin* and *yang* realms, material that mentions the netherworld judgment hall in Buddhist teachings is an even more intense articulation of the view that people receive their just punishment or reward after death. The account of Liu Sahe's entrance and itinerary through the underworld starts by showing punishments in hell for one's wrongdoings, and then shows how cultivation of merit requires many lifetimes of effort. Dong Qingjian's story directly points out the just rewards of seven lifetimes of religious training, as he was reborn in Trayastrimsa Heaven. These new views of death all depart from the simple folk version and popularized Buddhist doctrine: hell and heaven directly correspond to good and bad karma. These examples are easily found in Buddhist narratives about resonant response and testimonials. It is quite true that, compared to ghost stories of requital and revenge from the early Chinese tradition, this new idea of retribution facilitated the imagination of a strange new map of the world after death. It assuaged the fear of death and urged people to devote themselves to Buddhist practice. In the Six Dynasties, many of the elite accepted this new religious consciousness and encouraged the people to follow this view of retribution in the netherworld. The theory of retribution, through popular proselytizing, eventually merged into traditional ghost culture.

During the chaotic Six Dynasties period when Confucian teachings had declined and ceded social and cultural space, the Daoists and Buddhists promptly entered and subsequently incorporated their newly created teachings into ghost narratives. While the core moral principles remained the same, they were presented through the genre of the anomaly tales, which "transgressed but ultimately joined the Dao." Transgression was the cause of the many bizarre and far-fetched stories, and joining the Dao" refers to the way of guiding the deviant back to the norm. The Six Dynasties saw continual struggle for political power

and wide influence of powerful gentry families over government matters. While the official histories may criticize those who brought about disorder, the ghost stories provided both the elite and the commoner alike another venue to express their grievances. In the new vision of the Daoist underworld, good people with talent and virtue could acquire merit, just as Xu You was promoted to the honorable post of Lord of the Big Dipper, and the Beihei resident reunited with his dead wife.

Examining the anomaly stories from the narrative structure of guiding the deviant back to the norm, abnormal deaths often find a solution in the end. Xiahou Xuan obtains a favorable ruling on his petition before the Lord on High and attains peaceful rest; Madam Xie too rests in peace, having received perpetual burial in the ancestral tombs. After the death of the man from Beihai, he was buried with his wife, so his faithful emotions were rewarded. The happy conclusion for people of religious faith is an alternative arrangement. Chen Kang is given the position of Registrar for the Lord of the Big Dipper, and Dong Qingjian achieves *nirvāna* and exhorts his family to devote themselves to the Buddha. Thus, both Daoist and Buddhist accounts conclude with the perfection of merit; "perfection" is precisely what the wronged and the unrewarded souls all want.

It seems that, regardless of their religious inclinations, people are given multiple options when facing the important juncture of life and death. Lineage burial may be the best choice in a clan and lineage society. However, to go to rest in a temple or to ascend to the side of the Big Dipper may also be ideal for the Buddhist or Daoist adepts. In the end the narratives almost always conclude that everything has reverted to the norm, just as in the popular novels and plays of later periods that always conclude with a happy reunion. This mentality reflects the perception that the world is always imperfect, yet this imperfection may somehow be compensated by the ghost stories. From this we learn that although literature and religion are two different kinds of cultural forms, in the tales of the anomaly, these two are combined as a unity that expresses an abiding wish: to revert to normality from abnormality, to return to order from disorder. This is the perfect Dao or the middle way. Therefore, in response to new and old theories about ghosts, souls, form, spirit, the underworld, and the world of death, this period inherited past ideas but also created a new resource for later ghost culture. Thus, this seemingly insignificant literary genre has a great implication; within it is an allegorical assessment of a chaotic period.