

## The Emergence of Ghosts in Early China

How abundantly do ghosts and spirits display the powers that belong to them! We look for them, but do not see them; we listen to, but do not hear them; yet they enter into all things, and there is nothing without them.<sup>1</sup>

A painter who lived in the fourth century BCE once was asked to paint for the king of Qi, a state located in present-day Shangdong province in eastern China. The king asked: “What is most difficult to draw?” The painter answered: “Dogs and horses are the most difficult to draw.” The king asked again: “What is the easiest to draw?” The man answered: “Ghosts are the easiest to draw.” This, the author of the story explains, is because dogs and horses are well known to the people and are seen daily, thus it is easy for the people to detect any deficiency in the painter’s representation. On the other hand, since ghosts have never appeared to human eyes, any wildest scribble would not be inappropriate; therefore, they are easy to paint.<sup>2</sup> The author of the text was Han Fei (韓非, ?–233 BCE), the founder of the Legalist School of thought, which had a most profound influence on the development of law and statecraft in Chinese history. The original intention of this story, knowing the author’s interest and the context of the narrative, was to expound the idea that it is more difficult for one to perform within the confines of certain system of measurement than without any measurement. Thus the importance of

<sup>1</sup> *Liji zhengyi* 52:12.

<sup>2</sup> *Hanfeizi jijie* 11:202. A similar idea is found in *Huainanzi* 13:6a: “Nowadays painters like to draw ghosts and demons and dislike drawing dogs and horses. Why? This is because ghosts and demons never appeared on earth, while dogs and horses can be seen daily.”

law. Yet by using the example of ghost-painting to illustrate his point, the author inadvertently tells us that it was perhaps a commonly accepted view that ghosts were something formless and difficult to capture by human imagination. Indeed, Confucius himself was once heard saying:

How abundantly do spiritual beings (*guishen* 鬼神, i.e., ghosts and spirits) display the powers that belong to them! We look for them, but do not see them; we listen to, but do not hear them; yet they enter into all things, and there is nothing without them. They cause all people in the kingdom to fast and purify themselves, and array themselves in their richest dresses, in order to attend their sacrifices. Then, like overflowing water, they seem to be over the heads, and on the right and left [of their worshippers]. It is said in the *Book of Poetry*: “The Spirits come, but when and where, no one beforehand can declare. The more should we not Spirits slight, but ever feel as in their sight.”<sup>3</sup>

This passage is from the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), a collection of Confucian teachings and anecdotes probably collected and redacted during the third century BCE.<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to know to what extent the followers of the Confucian teaching would subscribe to this view, yet by virtue of its being recorded in the prestigious canon and regarded as the saying of Confucius, this passage tends to leave the impression that Confucius (or his disciples) regarded ghosts and spirits as invisible beings. In the Confucian *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), Confucius once said that one should “revere the ghosts and spirits but keep a distance from them.”<sup>5</sup> The rationale of this statement seems to be that, as a humanist, Confucius encourages his students to pay more attention to the affairs of living people based on secular principles, rather than following the instructions of ghosts and spirits as propagated through those religious personnel such as shamans. However, this statement, as well as the *Book of Rites* passage quoted above, makes it clear that Confucius did not deny the power and efficacy of ghosts and spirits. We should also recognize that Confucius and his followers constituted only an extremely small group of intellectuals in their contemporary society. The majority of the people in pre-imperial China, from the tenth century to the third century BCE, would probably have had some idea of how a ghost should look like, though they might not have agreed with each other. To trace the origin and development of the concept of ghosts, however, it is necessary that we go back to the earliest documents.

<sup>3</sup> *Liji zhengyi* 52:12; trans. (with slight change) Legge 1960: vol. 2, 307–8.

<sup>4</sup> Loewe 1993. <sup>5</sup> *Lunyu zhushu* 6:54.

2.1 THE MEANING AND ORIGIN OF *GUI*, OR GHOST

As discussed in the previous chapter, the concept of ghost in the Chinese language context is often represented by the term *gui* 鬼. However, the term *gui*, just like the English term “ghost,” has more than one layer of meaning. Thus the *gui* = ghost equation is, strictly speaking, not unproblematic, as we shall see below.

The modern Chinese character of *gui*/ghost is a direct descendant of the oracle bone graph of *gui* (𩺰) of the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600–1100 BCE). Attempts at explaining the original significance of this character vary from seeing it as the death mask to seeing it as the mask of a shaman, as originating from the idea of fear, *wei* 畏, or as connected with the word *gui* (歸, to return), as the dead return to the underground, as stated in the *Book of Rites (Liji)*: “All the sentient beings will eventually die, when they die they will definitely return to the earth, this is called ‘*gui*’ (ghost),”<sup>6</sup> which is all inconclusive.<sup>7</sup> The Eastern Han scholar Xu Shen (許慎, c. 30–124 CE), in his monumental etymological dictionary *Shuowen* (說文), explained the origin of the character *gui*: “What is [the meaning of] *gui* (鬼)? It is ‘to return’ (*gui* 歸) (鬼者歸也).” This rather terse explanation essentially agrees with the *Book of Rites* and assumes that the meaning of the character *gui*-ghost is connected with the idea of a person returning to the underground after death. Yet this connection is based merely on the phonetic semblance of the two characters, that is, *gui*-ghost and *gui*-return, while no explanation is given about the character *gui*-ghost itself. What can be certain is that when the oracle bone inscriptions were being used, the idea of certain spiritual beings that could inflict harm to humans had already been conceived and expressed with the graph, which later proved to be the word for *gui*-ghost. For example, *gui*-ghost appears in the dream of the Shang kings: “[It has been] divined, Ya [personal name] often dreamt of ghosts”;<sup>8</sup> “Divined, often dreamt of ghosts”;<sup>9</sup> although it is not clear whether the dreams were bad dreams or not, other appearances of *gui* suggest its malicious nature: “Divined, [will be] plagued by ghosts.”<sup>10</sup> Or *gui* could be connected with sickness.<sup>11</sup> Thus the contexts in which these examples appeared seem to suggest that

<sup>6</sup> Liji: 祭義: 眾生必死,死必歸土,此之謂鬼。

<sup>7</sup> Ikeda 1981: 155–98; Shen Jianshi 1986; Guo Guanghong 1993. See also Lai Guolong, 2015: 36–37.

<sup>8</sup> Yao 1989: 125, no. 17448.

<sup>9</sup> Yao 1989: 125, no. 17450.

<sup>10</sup> Yao 1989: 126, *tun* 4338.

<sup>11</sup> Yao 1989: 125, no. 14277.

*gui* was understood as a kind of malicious spirit that could cause harm or illness.

In addition, *gui* was also part of the name of a foreign tribe, the Guifang 鬼方 (literally, “the region of the ghosts”), which occurs a number of times in the oracle bone inscriptions as the place where the Shang kings attacked.<sup>12</sup> That the term carried a certain sense of denigration regarding the foreign tribe, similar to the later terms *man yi rong di* (蠻夷戎狄, i.e., the barbarians of four corners) can be reasonably assumed.<sup>13</sup>

As for the subsequent Zhou period (c. 1100–256 BCE), the contemporary documents, that is, the bronze inscriptions, present a mixed picture. The character of *gui* does not seem to appear in the bronze inscriptions of this period with the meaning of “ghost,” or the spirit of the dead, but was mostly used in the compound term of Guifang 鬼方, which already appeared in the oracle bone inscriptions. However, the graph of *gui* was used as part of some other characters, indicating that it had acquired a distinct meaning and could serve as an “ideogram” or “radical” in the formation of a character/concept. The characters that have *gui* as their “radical” suggest that the graph of *gui* representing a category of malicious spirits was not different from its use in the earlier Shang period.<sup>14</sup>

In the *Book of Poetry*, one of the earliest surviving canonical texts from the Zhou period, the word *gui* appeared only twice; one, again, as part of the term “Guifang,”<sup>15</sup> the other as denoting an evil spirit or ghost:

Now I use these three creatures for sacrifice,  
In order to secure a curse on you,  
If you were a ghost (*gui*) or a short fox (*yu* 虺),  
Then I could not get you.<sup>16</sup>

Here *gui* is mentioned together with *yu* (虺), a type of evil spirit in the water that was believed to be able to bring harm to people. This is also in concordance with the meaning of *gui* in the oracle inscriptions and the bronze inscriptions. In other passages in the *Book of Poetry*, the term *shen* 神, or spirit, is often used in the sense of the spirit of the ancestors<sup>17</sup> or the deities in a honored and revered way.<sup>18</sup> Thus the same word

<sup>12</sup> Yao 1989: 126, no. 8591–93.      <sup>13</sup> Poo 2005a: chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup> Zhou Fagao 1968: vol. 11, 5661–86.      <sup>15</sup> *Maoshi Zhengyi* 18/1:5

<sup>16</sup> *Maoshi Zhengyi* 12/3:18.      <sup>17</sup> *Maoshi Zhengyi* 13/2:7.

<sup>18</sup> *Maoshi Zhengyi* 17/4:3.

“shen” in the Chinese texts could be understood and translated as “god/deity” or “spirit/soul” in the English language.

Since both *shen* and *gui* denote spiritual beings, it seems natural that both would share some overlapping qualities. In fact, in many pre-Qin texts the concept of *gui* can be applied to various spiritual beings. For example, in *The Commentary of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳), the first extensive historical chronicle probably compiled in the fourth century BCE, the term *gui* is associated with two meanings. First, when used in combination with *shen* to form compound terms, as in *guishen* 鬼神, it can be synonymous with *shen*, referring to the spirits of the deities.<sup>19</sup> The same use of *gui* is also found in such early texts as the *Book of Change* (*Yijing* 易經),<sup>20</sup> the *Book of History* (*Shangshu* 尚書),<sup>21</sup> or the Daoist philosophical work *Zhuangzi*.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, a number of examples show that the terms *shen*, *guishen*, and *gui* are interchangeable, indicating that the concept of *gui* was regularly used in reference to the spirit of a deity.<sup>23</sup>

Second, however, there are instances in *The Commentary of Zuo* in which the term *gui* clearly refers to the spirit of a deceased person, who is not a divine character.<sup>24</sup> A similar situation is found in the Confucian *Analects*. The few references to ghosts and spirits in the *Analects* show that the term *gui* could refer to one’s own ancestor,<sup>25</sup> and *guishen* as a composite term could either refer to spirits in general (including ancestral spirits and gods),<sup>26</sup> or be synonymous with *gui*/ghost.<sup>27</sup> This shifting of meanings suggests that the original meaning of *gui* was a generic term referring to the spirits or souls of human beings, deities, or even animals. The fact that in the oracle bone and bronze inscriptions as well as in the *Book of Poetry* the word *gui* seems to refer only to human ghosts of a malicious nature can be understood as limited representations of the possible wider semantic range of the concept of *gui*.

This mixed use of *gui* and *shen* suggests that the later distinction between *gui* as the spirit of the dead and *shen* as the spirit of the gods had not yet been clearly made. This is another reason why the concept of *gui* cannot be regarded as the exact equivalent of “ghost” in its modern English connotation. Here ethnological data on the conception of ghost and spirit in modern southwestern China may provide a meaningful comparison. It has been noted that in many minority groups there the

<sup>19</sup> *Zuozhuan zhushu* 3:7; 4:24; 6:18.      <sup>20</sup> *Zhouyi zhushu* 2:33.

<sup>21</sup> *Shangshu zhushu* 8:14; 13:8.      <sup>22</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi* 150.

<sup>23</sup> *Zuozhuan zhushu* 12:23; 38:12; 49:12; 54:4.      <sup>24</sup> *Zuozhuan zhushu* 18:13

<sup>25</sup> *Lunyu zhushu* 2:10.      <sup>26</sup> *Lunyu zhushu* 6:8.      <sup>27</sup> *Lun-yu zhushu* 11:4.

concept of ghost – whether good or evil – was prevalent, but the concept of deity or god was relatively vague. In some cases it seems that the good or benevolent ghosts later could become gods (*shen*), while the unfriendly ghosts could become the “ghosts” that would harm people.<sup>28</sup> Similar cases could be found in early China.

The *Book of Rites* contains an explicit statement about the origin of *gui* that seems to limit the concept of *gui* to the human dead: when a person died, it is called *gui*.<sup>29</sup> In the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮), the concept of *gui* is also clearly separated from the concept of *shen*, the “heavenly spirit (天神 *tianshen*),” and is referred to as the “*rengui* 人鬼,” the “human ghost.”<sup>30</sup> This, however, does not preclude the possibility that other spiritual beings could still be called *gui*.

In the *Mozi*, the book of the Warring States philosopher who propagated universal love, the author employs a common-sense approach to look at the existence of ghosts and spirits. The author insists that if people have seen and heard about ghosts and spirits, then ghosts and spirits must exist. Mozi cites one example to support this view:

If an example is to be given that shows a ghost seen by many and heard by many, then the story of Du Bo is one. The King Xuan of Zhou killed his subject Du Bo unjustly. Du Bo said, “My Lord kills me unjustly. If the dead has no sense, then that is the end. If, however, the dead possesses sense, then within three years I shall let my lord know about it.” After three years, King Xuan assembled the vassals and hunted at the ranch, with several hundred chariots and thousands of followers that filled the field. At noon, Du Bo appeared on a black chariot drawn by a white horse, dressed in red gown and cap, holding a red bow with red arrow, and chased King Xuan. He shot the king on his chariot, hit his heart and broke his spine. The king fell in the chariot and died prostrated on his armor. At the time, all the people who followed the king saw it, and those at the distance all heard about it, and it was written in the chronicle of Zhou. Thus kings could teach their subjects and fathers could warn their sons, saying: “Be very cautious and discreet! Whoever kills innocent people will receive inauspicious signs, and the punishment by ghosts and spirits will come as quickly as this!” Seeing from the saying of this book, who could doubt the existence of ghosts and spirits?<sup>31</sup>

It is clear that the author’s intention was to use the story as evidence of the power of ghosts and spirits to avenge for wrongdoing, so as to induce the fear of the common people and to promote moral values so that an orderly society could be maintained. *Mozi* further stated, “The ghosts and

<sup>28</sup> Xu Hualong 1991: 5–7. For details, see Harrell 1974; He Zhiwu et al. 1993.

<sup>29</sup> *Liji zhengyi* 46:6. <sup>30</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi* 18:1.

<sup>31</sup> *Mozi xiangyu* 8:153. The story also appears in *Guoyu* 1:11.

spirits (*guishen*) of past and present are of three kinds only: the ghosts of Heaven, the ghosts of the mountains and rivers, and the ghosts of men who have died.”<sup>32</sup> Instead of using *shen*, here, as well as elsewhere, Mozi employed *gui* to refer to the spiritual beings of Heaven, earth, and human beings.<sup>33</sup> This might have been a deliberately archaic use of the term *gui* as “spirit” in a general sense.

In the *Hanfeizi*, the book of the Legalist philosopher we met at the beginning of this chapter, a clear idea of malicious ghost was also expressed, but *gui* and *shen* were still interchangeable concepts,<sup>34</sup> and the term *guishen* was employed synonymously with “spirits” in general.<sup>35</sup> Here we need to point out that these ancient texts reflect mainly the idea of the elite literary tradition, where the authors would use expressions with subtle twists of meanings by mixing old conceptions with the new, or even instilling intended archaism. Nonetheless, neither Mozi nor Han Fei’s arguments could carry any persuasive power if their stories did not sound credible enough to their intended readers/audiences. These readers/audiences were certainly the minority in society, yet we cannot exclude the possibility that their view of ghosts and spirits might not deviate from that of the common people.

Of course, if we wish to find a view that may represent ideas that belonged to a wider section of society, we should look at materials that originated from the nonelite social stratum. Thanks to archaeological discoveries in the past few decades, we now have some textual evidence that might have represented views that had a more popular basis. One of the most important new archaeologically excavated texts is the *Daybook* (日書 *rishu*) from Shuihudi, modern Hubei province, discovered in 1972 and dated to the late third century BCE. Written on bamboo slips, this is basically an almanac-like text that contains various methods for the user to choose appropriate days to conduct daily activities such as traveling, house construction, marriage, farming, commercial exchange, and the like.<sup>36</sup> Among various chapters that contain these methods, however, there is a chapter named *jie* (詰), which literally means “inquiry,” but the content suggests that it could be understood as a kind of “Demonography.”<sup>37</sup> Instead of selecting auspicious dates, it is a

<sup>32</sup> Mozi *xiangu* 8:153; Watson 1967: 107.

<sup>33</sup> Mozi uses the term “ghost of Heaven, *tiangu*” several times; see Mozi *xiangu* 29, 50, 124.

<sup>34</sup> *Hanfeizi jijie* 104. <sup>35</sup> *Hanfeizi jijie* 42–43, 89.

<sup>36</sup> Poo 1998: chapter 4; Harper and Kalinowski 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Harper 1985. For translation of the text, see Harper 1996.

collection of exorcistic methods to expel all sorts of ghosts and evil spirits that people encountered in their daily life. What is interesting is that this text lists the names of a few dozen “*gui*ghosts,” where the term *gui* indiscriminately refers to the spirits of human beings, animals, or even inanimate things such as trees, rocks, wind, and fire. To give a few examples, there are the “ghost of the mound (*qiugui* 丘鬼),” “sad ghost (*aigui* 哀鬼),” “infant ghost (*airu zhi gui* 哀乳之鬼),” “ghost of the thorn bushes (*jigui* 棘鬼),” “innocent ghost (*bugu gui* 不辜鬼),” “violent ghost (*baogui* 暴鬼),” “hungry ghost (*egui* 餓鬼),” and so forth.<sup>38</sup> This use of the term *gui* indicates that in the conception of the wider populace – as the *Daybook* is arguably a product of the sociocultural environment of the lower-middle echelon of society at the end of the Warring States period<sup>39</sup> – *gui* could be used to refer to harmful spirits of a variety of origins. To the users of the *Daybook*, it seems, whether these spirits were of human or nonhuman origins was not really their main concern. The important thing was to be able to recognize the names of the evil spirits, because, similar to many early societies, knowing the names means having control of the entities, whether humans or spirits. Interestingly, the names of a few ghosts in the *Demonography* actually contained the word *shen* – such as *shengou* (神狗), possibly the “spirit-dog,” or *shencong* (神蟲), the “spirit-insect.”<sup>40</sup> It is clear from the context that these are malicious ghosts; thus, the use of the adjective *shen* in their names should be understood not as something divine but as the supernatural power that these demonic beings possessed.

Another important piece of evidence is the by now famous story of resurrection discovered in 1986 in a text found in a Qin tomb from Tianshui, Gansu province, dated to the third century BCE, which gives us an unexpected account of the characteristics of a ghost.<sup>41</sup> The story tells about a person named Dan – a servant of an official by the name of Xiwu – who committed suicide because he had wounded someone in a fight, perhaps unintentionally. His body was exposed on the marketplace for three days before he was buried – obviously a kind of punishment for the crime that he had supposedly committed. Three years after his death, his former master Xiwu, for whatever reason, reopened the case, and found that Dan should not have deserved death for his crime. Thus Xiwu

<sup>38</sup> Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 1990: 212–16. For a list of the ghosts, see Harper and Kalinowski 2017: 245.

<sup>39</sup> Poo 1998: 84–92. <sup>40</sup> Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 1990: 212, 213.

<sup>41</sup> Li Xueqin 1990; Harper 1994; Gansusheng kaogu wenwu jianjiuso 2009.



reported this to the Secretary of Controller of Fate (*siming shi* 司命史), a divine official who kept the roster of human life span. The Controller of Fate, whose name was Gongsun Qiang, thus had a white dog dig Dan out from his tomb. Dan stood on top of the tomb for three days, then he went with the Controller of Fate to the northern region of Boqiu (Mound of Cypress). Four years later, he was able to hear the sound of dogs and chicken and to eat like an ordinary human being, while his limbs were still feeble. This extraordinary story provides a rare glimpse of the society, legal system, funerary customs, and vivid imagination and literary expression of the people at the lower echelon of the government in the late Warring States period. Our attention here shall focus on the idea of death and the netherworld.

According to the account, when the dead Dan comes to life again, he did not possess the normal bodily senses and functions as the living, and had to be resuscitated gradually. However, the dead were not without senses of their own. As Dan recounted after his resurrection, the dead, or ghosts, did not wish to put on much garments, and they favored white rushes, a medicinal plant with magic powers. Moreover, the ghosts would detest those relatives who came to the tomb to make offerings yet for the real purpose of eating the food, so much so that they would vomit by the tomb, presumably because they ate too much of the food. One can vividly imagine such an unwholesome scene by the grave side. The ghosts would also like their grave site be cleaned carefully. People should not pour broth over the offering, because ghosts would not eat it. These little details, in a sarcastic way, reveal a lot of the social reality of the day, and very interestingly complemented the famous story about a man of the Qi state who daily went about the graveyard and ate from the leftovers of people's food offerings, and yet told his wife and concubine that he was invited to dine with some dignitaries.<sup>42</sup> The story was told by Mengzi (c. 372–289 BCE), who was a keen observer and critic of the social customs of his time.

It is interesting to note that the process of resurrection seems to be a gradual regaining of the senses, possibly a reverse of the situation when one dies, when bodily senses were gradually lost. What is unclear, however, is whether or at what point of time the ghost of the dead “returned” to the body when the dead was revived. The story did not elaborate on the “crossing line” of life and death, as we are not informed of how or when

<sup>42</sup> Mengzi, Li Lou II: chapter 33, translation: Legge 1960: vol. 2, 340–41.

or if the ghost went back to or was reunited with the body. It merely says that when Dan was dug out of the tomb, he stood on top of the tomb for three days, then he went along with the Controller of Fate to the north. Indeed, we are not even sure if the ghost of the dead ever left his physical body. When it is mentioned that ghosts did not like to wear clothes, and did not like to eat soaked food, one logically must assume that the ghosts still possessed certain physical functions or mobility that was not together with the body, which should have lain motionless in the tomb.

It is also extraordinary that Xiwu the master could have access to the Controller of Fate, since the later should have been a divine officer who did not reside in the human world. The figure of Siming (Controller of Fate), moreover, appeared in the *Song of South (Chuci)*, a collection of ritual songs that could have been performed at various religious rites in the region of the Chu state, in which the poet portrayed a “Grand Controller of Fate (Da Siming)” and a “Junior Controller of Fate (Shao Siming).” Both of these were apparently heavenly deities. In the *Rite of Zhou (Zhouli)*, one of the duties of the Grand Master of Ceremony (*dazongbo* 大宗伯) was to make sacrifice to Siming, thus confirming the idea that Siming was a heavenly deity. What is interesting is that the story seems to suggest that the worlds of the living, the divine, and the dead could all be interacting with each other, since the dead in the tomb could see or know what people offered to the dead at the tomb. Viewing it from a literary point of view, the story betrays a literary motive that became prevalent in the Six Dynasties period, in which the worlds of the living and the dead often intermingled with each other. Moreover, we need not employ our modern sense of logical thinking to examine the narrative, such as whether the ghost was separated from the body, with the body in the tomb all the time, or if the ghost never left the body. We should not expect to find a scholarly essay about the nature of ghosts in this story. Instead, the story reveals to us some glimpses of the current perception of ghosts, of the possibility of finding justice for those who died of injustice, of the imagination of life in the netherworld, and a tongue-in-cheek comment on the ghost–human relationship.

The above discussion of the meaning of *gui* in early China based on received texts and newly excavated manuscripts demonstrates that by the late Warring States, or the third century BCE, the term *gui* could refer to spiritual beings of a variety of origins: some are human dead, some are other animate or inanimate things, some are even “gods.” Among these some are unfriendly to humans for various reasons. On the whole, it is widely accepted, among both the elite and the common people, that the

human dead usually would become a *gui*-ghost, whether an evil one or not. As we shall further discuss below, when a ghost receives proper burial and sacrifice, he becomes the ancestor of his descendants, and should theoretically rest in peace. Those that did not receive proper burial and sacrifice, or died of certain untimely or violent death, on the other hand, could become evil ghosts (*li* 厲) and have the potential to come back to the world and haunt or harm people. Moreover, throughout history, the term *guishen* was constantly used as a collective term for “spirits” in general. In later documents the terms *wu* (物) and *guai* (怪) are often used to denote spirits of nonhuman agents. The spirits of nonhuman agents, moreover, could often appear in the guise of human beings. This, presumably, causes some confusion as to the difference between a “human ghost” and a “nonhuman ghost/demon,” as they all look like human beings. In the Qin *Demonography* mentioned above, there is a passage about the spirit-insect: “A *gui*-ghost who is wont to follow men and women, and who goes away when it sees other people: it is the spirit-insect (*shencong* 神蟲) who disguises as a human being. Use a sharp sword to stab its neck, then it will cease to come.”<sup>43</sup> Thus in the imagination of the people there seemed to be no fixed pattern as to what a human ghost or a nonhuman spirit should look like, human being or otherwise. This brings us to the problem of the image of ghosts and spirits.

## 2.2 THE IMAGE OF GHOSTS

What does a ghost look like? This seemingly simple question has prompted endless imaginations and debates. Our evidence concerning ancient China must have represented only a small portion of what had actually existed in the minds of the people then. Nonetheless, by examining these incomplete samples one can still acquire a rough idea of what the entire picture might have looked like. The question also hints at the issue of the formation of the conception of ghosts as a collective imagination, and the relationship between cognition, experience, and imagination.

In the story of the avenging ghost of Du Bo mentioned earlier, we are told that when Du Bo’s ghost came to take his revenge, he appeared in bright daylight and rode on a chariot, shot an arrow, and killed the king.

<sup>43</sup> Shuihudi qinmu zhujian zhenli xiaozu 1990: 213.

The image of the ghost in this story is exactly the same as that of the deceased person himself. The action of the ghost is also exactly like that of an angry, living person seeking revenge. Thus the only criterion to judge if this figure is a ghost or not is the knowledge or the assumption that the person in question had died already. Similarly, a story in the *Lüshi chunqiu* (呂氏春秋 *Master Lü's Chronicle*) mentioned a naughty ghost who was able to disguise himself as the sons and brothers of the villagers and to play tricks on them. No one in the village could have known, simply by his appearance, that the ghost was not a "living person":

In the north of Liang there is a place called Liqiu Bu, where there was a strange ghost who liked to imitate the likeness of people's sons, nephews, and younger brothers. In the town there was an old man who went to the market and came back drunk, and the ghost of Liqiu turned into the form of his son and held him and tortured him on the way home. When the old man returned home and sobered up, he scolded his son and said: "I am your father, didn't I care for you? I was drunk, and you tortured me on the way, why?" His son cried, bowed to the ground and said: "This is wicked! There is no such thing. You can ask the people to the east of the town tomorrow." His father believed him and said: "Yes! This must have been the strange ghost. I have heard about this." The next day, he again went to the market and drank, thinking that he might meet the ghost and kill it. Thus he went to the market and got drunk. His real son feared that his father could not return safely, so he went to meet his father. The old man saw his real son, drew the sword and stabbed him. The old man's wit was confused by that which resembled his son and so killed his real son. So if one is confused by the false gentleman and misses the true gentleman, this is like having the wit of the old man of Liqiu.<sup>44</sup>

Although the story seems to be a rather burlesque one showing the foolishness of the old man, it at least confirms our observation that among local societies the idea that a ghost looks like a living person was not at all uncommon. The author of *Lüshi chunqiu*, however, takes the opportunity to make it into an example of the importance of discretion in one's observation of people and things. This is another example that the elite utilized a story that could have originally circulated in society and made it a convenient example for moralization.

The *Demonography* in the *Daybook* also mentions a ghost who was wont to cohabit with women and called himself "the son of God on High."<sup>45</sup> This ghost must have assumed the physique of a human being.

<sup>44</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu* 22:5b. A similar story is found in Gan Bao, *Soushenji* 搜神記. See *Soushenji*, 198.

<sup>45</sup> Shuihudi qinmu zhujian zhenli xiaozu 1990: 215.

All these examples indicate a belief that saw no particular physical feature that could effectively distinguish a human-shaped ghost from an ordinary living person. Without the instruction of manuals such as the *Daybook*, it was impossible for people to know that the entity was actually a ghost. Whether people could later discover if they had seen a ghost or not, then, was not guaranteed.

Some ghosts, indeed, possessed certain unusual physical features, such as the ghost who appeared in the dream of the Duke of Jin, with disheveled hair spreading down to the ground.<sup>46</sup> The amusing story of an adulterer in *Hanfeizi* reveals the idea that a ghost might look like a naked man with disheveled hair:<sup>47</sup>

A man of the state of Yan named Li Ji liked to travel afar. His wife had an affair with another man. One day Li Chi came back unexpectedly when the man was in the inner chamber. His wife was frightened. Her maid said: "Let the young gentleman be naked with disheveled hair and rush straight out through the door. Then we will pretend to have seen nothing." Thereupon the man followed her advice and ran out through the door. Ji said: "Who is that?" People in the house all replied "Nobody." Li Ji said, "Have I seen a ghost?" His wife replied: "Certainly!" "What shall I do then?" "Take the excrement of five kinds of animal and bathe in it." Ji said: "All right!" So he bathed in the excrement. [Another version says the man bathed in orchid soup.]

This story might hint at the idea of a ghost as a kind of spiritual existence of the person, which resonates with the resurrection story mentioned above, when Dan said that the dead did not like to wear clothes. However, this idea did not seem to have been widely circulated in the collective imagination of ghosts either in ancient China or anywhere else. The fact that most accounts of ghosts would show them dressed in proper garments – such as Du Bo in his red gown and cap – indicates a fundamental issue regarding the idea of ghosts: in order to recognize a ghost, it is necessary to have proper garments so that the ghost could be recognized in a normal and conventional fashion. A naked ghost might be equal to an anonymous ghost.

The ghosts in the above examples, however, are at least still in the shape of human beings. Other stories indicate the possibility that the ghost of a dead person could assume the shape of an animal,<sup>48</sup> or vice versa. Just as the shadow-like ghost in ancient Mesopotamia or in ancient

<sup>46</sup> *Zuozhuan zhushu* 26:29. See discussion below.

<sup>47</sup> *Hanfeizi jijie* 182–83; see Poo 1998: 58.      <sup>48</sup> *Zuozhuan zhushu* 8:17.

Greece (see Chapter 7), similar ideas were found in ancient China, as shown in another story about a neurotic and suspicious person:

There was a man named Juan Shuliang who lived south of Xiashou. He was stupid and easily frightened. One night he was walking under the moonlight when, glancing down and seeing his shadow, he took it for a crouching ghost. Looking up, he caught sight of his own hair and took it for a devil standing over him. He whirled around and started running, and when he reached his home he fell unconscious and died.<sup>49</sup>

The story of poor Juan suggests a world haunted by shadow-like, formless ghosts, similar to some of the Mesopotamian and Greek ghosts that we shall discuss in Chapter 7. Of course, when Xunzi recounted this story, he was not concerned with the appearance of ghosts, but only using this story to emphasize the importance of staying sane and rational. In the *Demonography* chapter in the *Daybook* of Qin, ghosts are described as having a variety of different shapes, some human, some animal, others inanimate things. One could well characterize the *Demonography* as a sort of catalogue of ghosts in a flourishing ghostly community.

The text in the *Demonography* further makes it clear that it has the authority to identify which ghosts are responsible for people's experience of certain strange phenomena, sicknesses, or other calamities. Sometimes even without the sight of a ghost, certain strange or disastrous events could be identified as the doings of ghosts; thus, ritual acts need to be applied to eradicate them:

Whenever people in a house are having nightmares and cannot rest, this is because a \_\_\_ ghost lives there. Take a club made of peach wood and thrust it at the four corners and the center of the house. Then hang a knife made of thorn on the wall, and pronounce: "Ho! Get out quickly! If you do not get out today, I shall use the thorn-knife to strip your garment." Then there should be no more trouble.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, people's experience would have to be sanctioned by a certain authority (in this case the authority of the *Daybook*) to be recognized or imagined as related to the actions of ghosts. In other words, there was a correlation between experience, imagination, and cultural sanction. People often could not tell a ghost was a ghost simply by looking at its physical body, unless given certain attributes, such as disheveled hair and nakedness, or other obviously evil doings. For the invisible ghosts,

<sup>49</sup> Xunzi *jijie* 270; cf. Watson 1963: 134–35.

<sup>50</sup> The name of the ghost is missing. Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 1990: 214.

moreover, people's own experiences would have to be informed by imagination and authoritative interpretation.

It seems that in order to recognize a ghost, psychological factors such as fear of darkness, and physical experiences such as strange sounds, physical distress, or disease would all have to be subjected to interpretation. The interpretation could come from instruction manuals such as the *Demonography of Daybook* or those exorcistic texts mentioned in the *Treatise on Books* (*Yiwenzhi* 藝文志) of the *History of Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書) (see Chapter 3).

The images and accounts associated with ghosts in the pre-Qin period, as they turned out, are mostly negative. In the book of *Zhuangzi*, there is a story about Duke Huan of Qi and the ghost of the marshes. Duke Huan of Qi saw a ghost while he was hunting in the marshes. When he returned, he became sick. People therefore assumed that the duke had been harmed by a ghost. A certain person by the name of Huangzi went to see Duke Huan and told him that he could not have been harmed by a ghost. Instead, Huangzi said, it was because the *qi*-energy in the Duke's body was not in balance. Still, the duke asked if ghosts indeed existed. Huangzi then answered yes and proceeded to describe the various ghosts that dwelled in all places. The ghost that dwelled in the marshes was called Weiyi, and "it is as large as the wheel, and as long as the axle, it wears purple clothes and a red cap. It hates to hear the sound of thunder-chariot. When it does, it will raise its head and stand up. Anyone who sees it may become a hegemon (*ba* 霸)." After hearing this, Duke Huan laughed and said: "This is what I have seen." Henceforth he straightened his garment and cap and sat up with Huangzi. In less than a day his sickness was gone.<sup>51</sup>

The story itself is of course a satire about the vanity and feeble-mindedness of Duke Huan, and a demonstration of the wit of the storyteller Huangzi, who might be qualified as a proto-psychotherapist, for he turned the bad omen of seeing a ghost into an auspicious one by manipulating the duke's pride and fear. Yet the background of the story was based on a common conception that the ghosts could be something with strange and horrific features. The story about Weiyi, moreover, most probably was not an invention of the writer but was based on existing beliefs, since a similar spirit was also mentioned in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, a collection of geographic information about the

<sup>51</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi* 650.

world that includes descriptions of local beliefs, compiled perhaps between the late Warring States and early Han Dynasty.<sup>52</sup>

It is curious to notice that, witnessing all these descriptions of the images of ghosts, very few actual paintings of ghosts are available or remain for us to see today. As mentioned in Chapter 1, there are some samples of the strange “deities” or “spirits” found in connection with funerary objects, including the painted coffins of Marquis Zeng and of Lady Dai from Mawangdui Tomb no. 1. Yet these figures are basically benign protective spirits and not “ghosts” in the sense of the souls of deceased persons. It was not until the early Tang Dynasty, it seems, that some painters were known to specialize in painting religious figures, deities, and ghosts. The famous Tang painter Wu Daozi (吳道子, c. 680–759 CE) was known to have painted a scene of *diyu* (Buddhist Hell) depicting suffering ghosts, for moralizing purposes. Zhang Yanyuan (張彥遠, c. 815–907 CE), in his *Notes on Famous Paintings in History* (*Lidai minghuaji* 歷代名畫記), mentioned the achievement of Wu Daozi, and that some Buddhist temples preserved paintings about “gods and ghosts,” painted by Wu Daozi and other painters.<sup>53</sup> None of these paintings has survived. In the history of Chinese art, it seems that “ghosts” are not a subject that people normally wanted to paint, perhaps exactly because of the evil or inauspicious associations that ghosts carried. The Qing Dynasty painter Luo Ping (羅聘, 1733–1799), known for his series of ghost paintings as a kind of social sarcasm, was apparently an exception that proves the rule.

To recognize a ghost and identify its name and behavior, to sum up, was the important first step in dealing with the ghost. While the ordinary people may, with the help of manuals such as the *Daybook*, be able to identify a ghost, the reality could be far more complicated, and certain authorities, that is, people who possessed the expertise to identify ghosts, would have to be invoked. Similar to the religious personnel who were authorities in matters concerning the worshipping of a deity, therefore, the business of recognizing ghosts produced certain specialists who could also become the interpreters of the ghostly sightings. They were the mediators of the relationship between ghosts and human beings after the ghosts were identified. As we shall see later, these would eventually include the shamans, Daoist masters, and Buddhist monks.

<sup>52</sup> Poo 1998: 98.      <sup>53</sup> *Lidai minghuaji*: 31–33.



### 2.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GHOSTS AND HUMAN BEINGS

The above discussion shows that there was a general consensus that the term *gui*-ghosts referred basically to the spirits of dead human beings, although other nonhuman spirits could also be called *gui*. Theoretically, therefore, everyone would become a ghost after death and join the company of the ancestors. Yet not all the dead would stay with the rest of the ancestors, but would instead come back to haunt the living. Why did these ghosts appear, or what caused them to appear? A common conception is that people who died of violence or of an unnatural or untimely death would become haunting ghosts (*ligui* 厲鬼) and appear either to their kinsfolk or friends to demand a proper sacrifice and burial or to their enemies to avenge for the “injustice” (whether they deserved it or not) that they suffered.

A famous story in the *Zuozhuan* relates the haunting ghost of Boyou, a corrupt nobleman of the state of Zheng who was killed in civil strife. His ghost was later seen by the people, and allegedly several of his curses against his enemies seemed to have been fulfilled. Finally, it was the able minister Zichan who came up with the idea to grant an official title to Boyou’s son so that the ghost of Boyou was satisfied, because now his descendant could make sacrifice to him properly with official honor. Zichan’s explanation was “when the ghost has a place to return to, it will not become malicious. What I did was to give it a place to return to.” Later when Zichan was asked about the event – “Could Boyou *still* become a ghost?” – Zichan replied:

Yes. When a man is born, that which is first created is called the *po* (魄) and, when the *po* has been formed, its positive part (*yang*) is called *hun* (魂). If one is well provided for, his *hun* and *po* grow strong, and possess intelligence and clear mind, and could even reach the divine luminaries. When ordinary men and women die of violent death, their *hun* and *po* can still attach to the living and become licentious demons (*yinli* 淫厲), not to mention Liangxiao [i.e., Boyou], who was the descendant of our former lord, the grandson of Ziliang and son of Zier, the official of our estate – three generations of officials... And since he died of violence, it is appropriate that he should become a ghost.<sup>54</sup>

Here is the idea that people who died a violent death could become revenging ghosts. Most scholars cite this passage to discuss the nature of *hun* and *po*, with *hun* being the *yang* part of the soul that goes up to

<sup>54</sup> *Zuozhuan zhushu* 44:13–14; cf. Legge 1960: vol. 5, 618, translation mine.

Heaven, and *po* being the *yin* part of the soul that stays in the tomb.<sup>55</sup> One point of this story, however, did not receive much attention in previous discussions. This is the question of “Could Boyou *still* become a ghost?” The very fact that this question was asked seems to indicate that since Boyou already received a proper burial, he should not come back to harm people. Zichan’s reply suggests that even though a burial was given to him, because Boyou died a violent death, it is proper that his ghost will come back for revenge. Thus the meaning of the question “Can Boyou still become a ghost?” should better be understood as “Can Boyou still become a malicious ghost?” That is to say, the term *weigui* 為鬼 should be understood as “making ghostly malice.” Despite some contradiction with the previous statement that after an heir was installed for Boyou his ghost would stop appearing, this passage can only suggest the idea that every person, commoner or nobleman alike, could become a haunting ghost when they had died a violent death. It is worth noting that the story was rather “neutral” about avenging ghosts; that is to say, any ghost of a person could seek for vengeance for itself, regardless of whether the person was a righteous one or not in the eyes of the living. Therefore, even the ghost of a morally deficient person (such as Boyou) could still come back to haunt people and claim his “right” of having a proper burial or funerary cult.

The interesting problem here is the idea that *hun* and *po* are something that grow within a person when they were still alive. That they are different from *gui*-ghost is also suggested by a passage in the *Hanfeizi*: “If a ghost (*gui*) does not afflict a person, his *hun* and *po* will not leave him.”<sup>56</sup> Here the text seems to suggest that before a person dies, he has *hun* and *po* within him; while according to Zichan, *hun* and *po* could become evil ghosts when a person dies a violent death. That is to say, *hun* and *po* could be separated from a person when they died, and became ghosts. Etymologically, both characters of *hun* and *po* are constructed with a *gui* graph, which indicates a close semantic affinity with *gui*-ghost; a certain ambiguity thus existed as to their difference. It is also worthwhile noticing here that there is a long scholarly tradition of overemphasizing the importance of this passage on the nature and difference of *hun* and *po*. We should recognize the fact that this passage was only one episode in the long career of Zichan, the able minister and shrewd politician of the small state of Zheng. Whether or not Zichan really said

<sup>55</sup> Yu Ying-shih 1987; Brashier 1996; Poo 1998: 62–66.

<sup>56</sup> *Hanfeizi jijie* 104.

those words, they should not be taken as an authoritative and philosophically well-thought-out argument about the nature of *hun* and *po*, as if Zichan's words could represent the meaning of *hun* and *po* in the entire Spring and Autumn period. In the Han period, the difference between *hun* and *po*, if any, was already disappearing, and *gui* and *hun* gradually became synonymous.<sup>57</sup>

Let us return to the origins of the haunting ghosts. According to another story in the *Zuozhuan*, a haunting ghost could also appear to avenge not for himself but for injustice suffered by his kinsfolk:

The Marquis of Jin dreamt about a great demon (*dali* 大厲), with disheveled hair reaching to the ground, beating its breast while leaping, saying, "You have unjustly killed my grandson, and I have presented my request to the Emperor [*di*, i.e., the High God]." It then broke the great gate of the palace, advanced to the gate of the bed chamber, and entered. The duke was frightened and went into a chamber, the demon again broke the door of which. The duke then awoke, and called for the *wu*-shaman of Mulberry Field. The *wu*-shaman spoke everything according to what the duke had dreamt of. The duke asked, "What does this mean?" The *wu*-shaman answered: "You shall not have the chance to taste the next harvest."<sup>58</sup>

It is clear that in these cases the interactions between ghosts and humans were built on the theme of seeking a solution for the plight of a violent or untimely death. That is to say, it was because there was unfinished business that the ghosts needed to take care of that they came back to find a settlement with their kinsfolk, or enemies. Thus the relationship could be said to be one-sided: the ghosts needed to engage the living for their needs. This idea is in fact common to many cultures,<sup>59</sup> which reflects a collective anxiety of the living that seeks to resolve conflicts within the community and ensure peaceful succession of generations for the stability of society, because accidental or violent death causes a breach in the social fabric and the smooth transition of life course from cradle to grave. The ordinary dead are those who have gone through the proper ritual process and are peacefully and quietly set aside, join the ancestors, and are forgotten. The unfortunate dead and their ghosts, on the other hand, touched on the unsettled conscience of the living. Not until the distressful situations of these dead are rectified, either by avenging the injustice done to them or by eradicating the lack of

<sup>57</sup> For discussion, see Yu 1987; Poo 1993a: 216–17; Brashier 1996.

<sup>58</sup> *Zuozhuan zhushu* 26:450–51. <sup>59</sup> Schmitt 1998: 5–7.

proper burial and offering, would their ghosts recede to their proper places and stop bothering the living.

One should not, however, extend this interpretation to cover all accounts about ghosts, since some of the ghosts, such as the naughty ghost described in *Lüshi chunqiu*, were obviously not known for their vengefulness. In the early medieval (fourth- to sixth-century CE) *Anomaly Tales* (*zhiguai* 志怪), for instance, there are indeed examples of ghosts demanding proper burial or reburial, or taking revenge for the wrongs they had suffered. Yet there are also ghosts that are benevolent or basically harmless. These examples are admittedly from literary works that might have presented a more humanized account of the behavior of ghosts, perhaps to create dramatic effects, yet they could also have reflected ideas circulating in society, and even exerted certain influence on the popular imagination of ghosts in the later era. We shall explore these stories in Chapter 4.

While the above investigation of the relationship between ghosts and human beings is based on direct descriptions of ghosts and their activities, there is another approach to this issue, namely, by examining the various religious rituals in which the relationship between the living and the dead was defined and articulated. In the following, therefore, we shall discuss rituals and exorcism in early China and try to provide some evidence regarding ghost-human relations.

## 2.4 RITUAL ACTS AND EXORCISM

### *Funerary Rituals*

A funeral is basically a religious and social event that mediates between the deceased individual, the family, and the community. In early China it is certainly an event in which various sociopolitical elements are played out: the relationship between the living members of the family and the deceased needs to be displayed with proper paraphernalia, and the standing of the deceased and their family in the social hierarchy needs to be exhibited by proper funerary ceremony. The future of the deceased in the netherworld, furthermore, needs to be secured by supplying the funerary objects, so that the wealth of the family members still on earth could be demonstrated by all these arrangements. Besides preparing a tomb and all sorts of funerary objects, it is necessary that certain rituals be performed and protective spells pronounced, written down, and buried in the tomb. All these, one has to assume, are the result of a collective concern for the

well-being of the deceased and the harmonious relationship between the living and the ghosts.

Excavations of the Shang dynasty burials show evidence of certain funerary rituals in the form of human and animal sacrifice, which are closely related to the concept of ghosts and the netherworld. At the bottom of the tomb pit, animals such as dogs were buried in the so-called *yaokeng* (腰坑), or “waste pit.” After the coffins and caskets were installed, if it was a royal tomb, human sacrifice was performed and the head and beheaded bodies of the victims were buried on the steps of the ramps.<sup>60</sup> The exact process of the individual rituals, however, was unclear. Needless to say, the custom of human sacrifice, cruel as it was, indicates an early belief in the netherworld in which the ghosts of the sacrificial victims were expected to serve the dead rulers. An inscription from a bronze vessel dated to the Western Zhou may be the earliest textual evidence which mentions that the deceased owner of the vessel was supposed to follow his lord the Zhou King in the “underground.”<sup>61</sup>

The *Book of Poetry* contains some fragmentary information concerning funerary rituals and the idea of ghosts during the Western Zhou period. It was mentioned that when a man died, the family would select a young child, usually his grandson, to be dressed up in the guise of the deceased, in order to accept food and homage on behalf of the deceased. This custom of making a *shi*-尸, literally, “corpse,” as a living effigy of the deceased might have existed as early as the Shang period.<sup>62</sup> For the Eastern Zhou, a collection of rituals performed during the funeral of a man of the *shi* 士-gentleman class, the Shisangli (士喪禮), or “Funeral Rites for the Gentleman,” can be found in the *Book of Ceremonies* (儀禮 *Yili*). Most of these rituals are devised for the purpose of differentiating various social relations and to give a guideline to proper conduct in the entire period from the moment of death to interment and the subsequent ritual sacrifices. In one instance, there is a passage related to the idea of ghosts:

When he has died in the principal room of the private apartments, he is covered with the coverlet used at the smaller dressing [part of the funeral]. A man is sent to call the soul back. He uses the clothes of the russet cap suit for the purpose, sewing the skirt to the coat. Then throwing them over his left shoulder, he takes the collar and the girdle together in his left hand. He then ascends by a ladder set against the front end of the east wall, and, going up to the center of the house, faces north,

<sup>60</sup> Chang 1980: 110–24; Huang 1990.      <sup>61</sup> Zhang Zhenglang 1981.

<sup>62</sup> Hu Xincheng 1990; Fang Shuxin 2000; Ge Yinghui 2000; Lai Guolong 2015: 115–21.

and uses the clothes to invite the spirit to return to them, saying, “Ah! So-and-so, return!” This he does three times, and then throws the clothes down in front of the hall. The clothes are received in a basket, and taken up by the east steps for the clothing of the corpse. The man who went up to call back the soul descends by the back end of the west wall.<sup>63</sup>

This ritual of recalling the soul of the dead was apparently a custom that was prevalent in the Warring States period. In the famous *Song of South* (楚辭 *Chuci*), a literary genre originating in the Chu area (modern Hubei and Hunan provinces) and made immortal by the poet Qu Yuan (屈原, 343–278 BCE), there is a chapter called “Recalling the Soul” (*Zhaohun* 招魂), which is a literary rendition of the ritual of recalling the soul. The poet warns the soul of the dead not to travel to the unknown world: not the heaven above nor the earth below, nor the four directions, for the world of the living is the only safe place to dwell.<sup>64</sup> The idea behind this ritual, apparently, is that the soul of the deceased should be united with the body and buried in the tomb. In other words, this is a magical ritual that aimed at returning the dead to life. There is therefore a certain affinity with the idea contained in the resurrection story of Dan. As the ghost of Dan was living in the tomb with the body, it allowed the possibility for him to come back to life.

This ritual and the abovementioned use of *shi*-corpse (living effigy) indicate two rather different attitudes regarding the possible relation of a ghost with his family members immediately after death – note that the female members of the family were not mentioned. The use of the *shi*-corpse, who acts on behalf of the deceased in the offering rituals, seems to suggest that there was a wish for the deceased to come to life and enjoy the offering. It is not clear, however, whether there was the wish that the ghost of the deceased would somehow cling to the grandson and thus enjoy the offering or, knowing the impossibility of this wish, the grandson was chosen to act for the deceased, thus it was a ritual that acknowledged that the ghost of the deceased would not come back. Therefore, there could be two opposing interpretations of the meaning and function of the *shi*. The soul-recalling ritual, on the other hand, suggests that the soul of the deceased would somehow fly to all directions; thus, the officiant actively tries to retrieve the ghost of the deceased into the clothes, and by dressing the deceased with the clothes, actually returned the soul/ghost of the deceased to the body.

<sup>63</sup> *Yili zhushu* 3 5:1–4; trans. Steele 1917: vol. 2, 45.

<sup>64</sup> Yu Ying-shih 1987.

Whether or not the rituals described or prescribed in the *Book of Ceremonies* were actually performed step-by-step at any point in time, it can be assumed that they represented to a certain degree the commonly agreed social customs among the ruling elites and their conception of ghosts. However, it is also clear that the *Book of Ceremonies* is not a field report and that its content is the result of numerous redactions, ideological embellishments, and perilous textual transmissions through time. When we look at the actual practice, deviations from the “norm” as described in the *Book of Ceremonies* seem to be the rule. This refers not only to the use of coffins and funerary objects but also to the rituals associated with the funeral. The soul-recalling ritual, for example, exists even today as a popular folk custom in some parts of China. In contemporary Taiwan, unlike the description in the *Shisangli*, the soul-recalling ritual is usually performed for accidental deaths, such as from traffic accidents, when the soul of the deceased needs to be recalled from the place where the accident happened and be guided back using a soul banner to their home for proper funeral. When the soul of the newly deceased is addressed as *hun*-soul and not as *gui*-ghost, there is an intended subtle distinction that shows a closer relationship between the descendants and the deceased, for *gui* carries more of an unfamiliar or even potentially malicious connotation. Different from the transmitted canonical texts, on the other hand, ritual texts found in archaeological excavations may provide us with a direct description of the local rituals performed at funerals and hence the local ideas of ghosts.<sup>65</sup>

Funerary rituals were normally performed for those who died of natural causes; as for those who died an untimely death, on the battlefield, for example, different rituals would be required. An example of such rituals is a text dated to the late fourth century BCE, found in a tomb from Jiudian, Hubei province. The text seems to be a model text for people to write prayers to a local deity Wu Yi (武夷), who was referred to as being assigned by the Lord on High to take charge of the ghosts of the war dead, and to enable them to return home to receive food offerings from their family members. The somewhat obscure text reads as follows:

[Hao! I] dare to implore Wu Yi, the Son of \_\_\_\_\_. You reside at the bottom of Fu Mountain and in the wilderness of Buzhou. The Lord on High determined that since you have no occupation, he commanded you to take charge of those who

<sup>65</sup> A study of modern Chinese funerary customs claims that despite local variations, there was an overall unified funerary ritual, which was the result of age-old cultural homogenization. See Watson 1988.

died by weapons. Today, so-and-so [the deceased] wishes to eat. So-and-so [the invocator] dares to take his [the deceased's] wife to be your wife. Cut strips of silk and fragrant provisions are offered for the sake of so-and-so [the deceased] at the place of Wu Yi. Your Lordship in the past has received so-and-so's [the invocator's] cut strips of silk and fragrant provisions. Please deign to allow so-and-so [the deceased] to come back to eat as usual.<sup>66</sup>

The text is wrought with difficult passages; the general meaning, however, is more or less certain. As a supplication to the deity Wu Yi, the function of the text was to ensure the safe return home of the ghosts of the soldiers who died on the battlefield. In a sense, therefore, this is also a kind of soul-recalling ritual for the war dead. The fact that such a model text existed indicates a wide acceptance of similar beliefs in society, which was already stated in the *Zuozhuan* passage: "When the ghost has a place to return, it will not cause any malice." The soul-recalling ritual described in the *Song of South* and the *Book of Ceremonies* was but one method to achieve this goal.

### *Protective Rituals against Ghosts in Daily Life*

The funerary rituals, though aimed at taking care of the ghosts of the dead so that they can have a resting place, can also be seen as preventive measures to pacify the possible hostility caused by disgruntled ghosts. Yet this was obviously not enough in a world filled with innumerable potential disasters caused by malicious spirits. One needs to perform various daily rituals to prevent possible injuries caused by evil ghosts. These rituals and exorcistic methods demonstrate how people's mundane lives were intimately related to ghosts and the extra-human world.

The *Daybook* of Shuihudi, already mentioned above, preserved a collection of instructions that could give us some idea of the exorcistic rituals performed in people's daily life.<sup>67</sup> The text, with the original title of "Inquiry" (*jie* 詰), begins with a general introduction to the purpose of the ritual spells and actions:

Inquiry: Ghosts harm the people and, acting wantonly, treat the people unpropitiously. Pronounce spell to bind it and enable the people to avoid the baleful and

<sup>66</sup> Hubeisheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 1995: plate 113; Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Beijing daxue zhongwenxi 2000: 13, 50; Chen Songchang 1998; Zhou Fengwu 2001.

<sup>67</sup> Harper 1985; Kalinowski 1986; Poo 1993a; Liu Lexian 1994.



disastrous. What ghosts detest are namely: reclining in a crouch, sitting like a winnowing basket, linked steps, and standing on one foot.<sup>68</sup>

With this introduction, the text continues with dozens of instructions for exorcistic rituals against various ghosts and demons. A few examples should suffice to illustrate the general nature of the rituals:

When without cause a ghost attacks a person and does not desist – this is the Stabbing Demon. Make a bow from peach wood; make arrows from non-fruiting jujube wood, and feather them with chicken feathers. When it appears, shoot it. Then it will desist.

When without cause a ghost lodges in a person's home – this is the ghost of mound. Take the earth from an old abandoned mound, and make effigies of people and dogs with it. Set them on the outside wall, one person and one dog every five paces, and encircle the home. When the ghost comes, scatter the ashes, strike a winnowing basket, and screech at it. Then it will stop.

When a ghost continually causes a person to have foul dreams, and after waking they cannot be divined – this is the Master of Diagrams. Make a mulberry-wood staff and prop it inside the doorway, and turn a cook pot upside-down outside the doorway. Then it will not come.<sup>69</sup>

In general the text begins by describing the haunting situation, identifying the source of the trouble, and then providing a description of the necessary actions to be performed in order to expel the haunting ghost or demon. The actions usually consist of the use of certain objects or performing certain bodily acts, including the positions described in the introduction such as reclining, sitting in a posture like a winnowing basket, or standing on one foot, and occasionally assisted by spells. This is the reason why this text is often designated the “Demonography.”

It is noteworthy that no deities or divine spirits are invoked to help expel the demons and evil spirits listed in the *Daybook*. A survey of the various methods used in the rituals shows that people relied on the exorcistic power of certain objects, which can be grouped into several categories: (1) objects made of plants such as jujube wood, peach wood, mulberry wood, woolly grass, reeds, bamboo; (2) animal parts that include fox tails or cat tails; (3) objects with offensive smell, such as feces of dogs and pigs; (4) inanimate substances such as sand, ashes, yellow soil, white stone, water, and fire; and finally (5) manmade objects such as

<sup>68</sup> Harper 1996: 244. My translation differs from Harper's at several points; Poo 1998: 79–83.

<sup>69</sup> Harper 1996: 247.

arrows, drums, bells, swords, and shoes. Usually the actions taken are quite simple, yet sometimes the text says only something to the effect of “search for it and get rid of it” without specifying the exact method used in getting rid of the ghosts or demons. There are also examples where the exorcistic ritual consists of only actions, such as “unbind the hair and rush past it,” without the use of any instruments or objects.

The reasons why people considered these objects or actions efficacious in expelling the ghosts and evil spirits have not been entirely understood. Certain objects, such as peach wood or mulberry, have long been discussed. The Qing dynasty scholar Yu Zhengxie (1775–1840), for example, already collected considerable data concerning the popular belief in the magical power of peach wood and peach talismans.<sup>70</sup> Recent scholarship emphasizes the good taste of the peach as a precious and nutritious fruit, its medicinal effect, and its role in the ancient myth.<sup>71</sup> The mulberry, on the other hand, was a symbol of fertility in ancient China, thus possessing certain potency.

The use of animal excrement as a deterrent against ghosts and demons can be corroborated by the famous story about the adulterous wife of Li Ji preserved in the *Han Feizi*, as well as in the much later Dunhuang text *Baize jingguai tu* 白澤精怪圖 (*Diagram of the Spirits and Demons of the White Marsh*) dated to the Tang Dynasty.<sup>72</sup> This custom seems to have originated from people’s distaste for pollution and polluted objects. This dislike was then transposed on the ghosts, with the assumption that they too were afraid of such pollution. Corroboration for this view can be found in the story of resurrection mentioned above. According to the testimony of the protagonist in this story, in the world of the dead, ghosts did not like their graveyards being polluted by people vomiting or by other unclean objects.<sup>73</sup>

The posture of sitting in the shape of a winnowing basket (with two legs stretched open) is seen as an offensive position probably because of the sexual implication. The classic reference to this idea was the story of Confucius’ reprimanding Yuan Rang for the latter’s sitting in a winnowing-basket style.<sup>74</sup> To use such a position to ward off evil spirits may therefore be a reasonable development, assuming that ghosts would

<sup>70</sup> Yu Zhengxie 1957: 359–61. <sup>71</sup> Luo Man 1989.

<sup>72</sup> Huang Yungwu 1981–86: vol. 123.

<sup>73</sup> Li Xueqi 1990; Harper 1994. For a theoretical discussion of the idea of pollution, see Douglas 1966.

<sup>74</sup> *Lunyu zhushu* 14.18. See discussion in Li Ji 1953.

have a similar emotional response to the act as humans do. As for other positions, their common characteristics, as with sitting in a winnowing-basket style, is their irregularity as opposed to a normal daily bodily gesture. The performance of the Yu-steps (*Yubu* 禹步),<sup>75</sup> in this connection, may be seen as another such irregular bodily posture or movement that was seen as possessing great exorcistic power.

The objects of exorcism are various ghosts and demons. The terms used in the *Demonography* include *gui*-ghost, *yao* (妖)-demon, or *shen*-spirit (such as *shengou*, the spirit dog). As discussed before, the term *shen*-spirit referred more to the supernatural power of the ghost or demon than their being considered as “divine.” Moreover, various animals and insects, even natural phenomena such as thunder, clouds, fire, and wind could also be considered as malicious and needing to be exorcised. The mundane nature of these disasters is thought to have originated in the malicious acts of ghosts and demons and, moreover, speaks forcefully to the intimate relation between the daily life of the users of the *Demonography* and the various exorcistic rituals contained in the text. When unknown illnesses or natural disasters occur, as the text suggests, people sought causes outside themselves. In other words, personal morality was not considered as having anything to do with all these difficulties in life.

Another feature of exorcism described in the *Demonography* is that no ritual specialist such as the *wu*-shaman is needed in the performance of the ritual acts. Theoretically, anyone who has access to the *Daybook* and is able to read or be told what to do could perform the exorcistic rituals as instructed. It was, so to speak, a “do-it-yourself” manual of exorcism. The mentality behind this is quite revealing. If the ritual acts themselves – including the use of certain objects and the performance of certain bodily actions – were powerful and efficacious, and the human performer was only a neutral agent, without any “qualification” as a specialist such as a *wu*-shaman, who brought the sacred or powerful objects and actions together, there should be no direct relationship between the ritual act and the performer. In other words, the exorcistic rituals were understood as purely technical actions, much as using medicine to cure a disease. In fact, in the medical texts found in the early Han period, for example, the Mawangdui silk manuscript *Wushi'er bingfang* 五十二病方 (*Recipes for Fifty-Two Ailments*), exorcistic acts and spells are placed side by side with herbal recipes. A ritual to cure warts, for example, is as follows:

<sup>75</sup> Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 1990: 240; Schipper 1993: 85, 173–74.

On the last day of the month at the end of the late afternoon, take clods the size of a chicken egg – men seven and women twice seven. First set the clods down behind the house, arranging them in a line from south to north. When dark, go to the place where the clods are. Perform the Pace of Yu thrice. Starting from the southern quarter, pick up a clod and say: “Today is the last day of the month. I rub the warts to the north.” Rub the [warts] once with the clod. After rubbing, set the clod back in its place and leave without looking back.<sup>76</sup>

The instruction is similar to that found in the *Demonography*. The person who performs the act could be anyone who can follow the instruction given in the text. The actions taken were regarded as a form of recipe, just like a medical recipe for a disease. In sum, the existence of ritual handbooks such as the *Demonography* clearly indicates that there was an urgent and common need in society to cope with the many haunting ghosts. The ghosts seemed to have existed in society as common pests that could be expelled by employing some simple (and cheap) methods. The exorcistic rituals in the *Demonography* were in general simple and did not need extensive preparation or expensive equipment, nor was a ritual expert required to perform the act, which is a sure sign that the users of these methods belonged to the lower level of the social echelon.

The cosmological significance of this mentality is very intriguing. If all the elements for exorcising the ghosts had already existed in the world, it seems that there would be no need of any divine spirit to help drive away the ghosts, and indeed the text enlisted no divine spirits for help. It further shows a materialistic understanding of the world, since the ghosts and spirits were conceived in terms of material existence, and were removable through materialistic or tangible methods. Of course, this mentality shown in the *Daybook* could have represented only a particular social group for certain specially defined situations. However, such a kind of amoral understanding of the world, in which the relationships between the living and the dead are defined by mutual obligations such as proper burial and sacrifice, means that there was little ambiguity left in the relationship between the living and the dead.

On the other hand, of course, we know that regarding the administering of ghosts in general there was the Controller of Fate, and there were the deities such as Wu Yi, who was responsible for retrieving the ghosts of the war dead to return to their native places. The picture of the world of ghosts, therefore, resembles somewhat the world of the living: at the local level, people tended to resolve their daily needs on their own, while on the

<sup>76</sup> Harper 1998: 244–45.

state or government level, officials needed to take control of the population and take account of the tallies. As for the bureaucratization of the netherworld, we shall return to that in the next chapter.

## 2.5 THE RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE CONCEPT OF GHOSTS

The religious beliefs of the Shang and Zhou periods could be characterized as a cluster of beliefs, including the beliefs in the Supreme God (*shangdi*), Heaven (*tian*), various deities of nature – mountains, rivers, and various kinds of natural phenomena – and the ancestral spirits, as well as evil spirits of various origins. These were loosely systematized in that the Supreme God on High or Heaven seemed to be the final arbiter of everything, and that there was a certain hierarchical order among the various spirits. Among these, the haunting ghosts, though perhaps occupying the lower echelon of the spirit world, were no doubt what caused most anxiety to the common people. The idea that people who died of unnatural death and were deprived of proper burial would become haunting ghosts and come back to the world could be seen as originating from the desire to satisfy the communal need to take care of the ancestral spirits. Only by providing the dead with proper burial, and regular sacrifice, would the spirits be at peace and assume the proper status of ancestors, and thus not come back to haunt people. For those who died of violent death or injustice, however, ghostly vengeance seems often unavoidable. This was usually the case when ghosts appear to people other than their descendants.

In a way, the social and intellectual background from which our documents originated defined or conditioned our understanding of the emergence of a discourse on ghosts. In the elite texts, ghosts are mostly mentioned in the contexts that aimed at propagating certain ethical values. That is to say, the concept of ghost was appropriated to serve as a moralizing or theorizing device in the contexts of various world views or philosophical systems, be they Confucian, Daoist, Moist, or Legalist. The story in *Zhuangzi* about the ghost of a skull by the roadside is a perfect example:

On his way to the state of Chu, Zhuangzi saw a skull, with a distinct shape. He slashed it with horse whip and asked it, saying: “Was it because you were lustful for life and lost your sense of justice that you arrived at this state? Was it because you have met with the destruction of state and execution by axes that you arrived

at this? Was it because you had evil conduct and scandalous deeds that caused shame to your parents and wife that you arrived at this? Was it because you suffered from cold and hunger that you arrived at this? Was it because of your life span that you arrived at this?” After finishing this, he reached for the skull and used it as a pillow and slept on it. In the middle of the night, the skull showed up in his dream, saying, “Judging from your talk, you seem to be a person of rhetorical skill. What you have said are all things that bothered the living. When one is dead, then there is none of these. Do you wish to hear the saying about death?” Zuangzi said, “Yes.” The skull said, “In death, there is no sovereign above, no subjects below, neither things that need to be done over the four seasons. One pleasantly takes the eternal heaven and earth as life span, not even the pleasure of being a king could have exceeded this.” Zhangzi did not believe him, and said: “If I could ask the Controller of Fate to revive you, recover your bone with flesh and skin, and return to your family and old neighbourhood, would you want it?” The skull frowned deeply and said: “How can I abandon the joy of being a sovereign and return to the toil of the living?”<sup>77</sup>

The author of *Zhuangzi* was obviously using the concept of ghost as a convenient literary device to propagate his idea that what was most important in life was freedom from the confinement of worldly affairs, which, ironically, only a ghost could enjoy. The story also shows that the idea that ghosts could appear in dreams was a prevailing belief in contemporary society.

By talking and writing about ghosts, then, people created a mental world, a make-believe world, that served some practical function. There is obviously the function of moral teaching, which is quite obvious when Confucius says: “To make sacrifice to a ghost that is not one’s own ancestor, it is an act of sycophancy”<sup>78</sup> or “To devote oneself to the duties due to the people and pay respect to the ghosts and gods but keep aloof from them, may be called wise.”<sup>79</sup> The ghost stories, moreover, could add authority to certain people in the belief system: the ancestors, the exorcists, and those who have the power to communicate with the ghosts. *Mozi* even expresses this bluntly in the chapter on “Explicating Ghosts (*minggui* 明鬼),” that the belief in ghosts can be a political tool to keep the people under certain restraint for fear of the ghosts so as to construct a better society: “Now all the kings and nobles and gentlemen of the world who wish to seek for increasing the benefit and eliminating the misery of the world, they should admit that ghosts and spirits do exist and they should not but revere and propagate their existence. This is the way of the sage-kings.”<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi* 617–19.

<sup>78</sup> *Lunyu zhushu* 2:10.

<sup>79</sup> *Lunyu zhushu* 6:8.

<sup>80</sup> *Mozi xiangyu* 154.

This discourse about ghosts in philosophical or literary expositions certainly should not be confused with the concept of ghost in the mind of ordinary people in society. Yet in order for the philosophical or literary expositions to be effective and convincing, there is no denial that the authors' arguments or representations would have to be built on a commonly accepted, though not necessarily the only, concept of ghost. Thus although Zhuangzi might have made his idiosyncratic philosophical point by using the ghost story, we can still assume that the basic idea of the story, that is, ghostly visits in dreams, must have been a common one in contemporary society.

On the other hand, the reality of popular mentality may be better revealed in certain genres of texts that were closer to the everyday life of the people, such as the *Demonography* in the *Daybook*. Although the *Daybook* dates only to the mid-third century BCE, the fact that the text contains so many different sections to suit all kinds of daily needs indicates that the text we have on hand is already the product of a long development. Furthermore, since the Shuihudi tomb owner Xi possessed two versions of the *Daybook*, it seems that it was not anything unique or extraordinary. As the two versions are not identical, and did not seem to be copied from each other, both must have been based on other similar text or texts. Thus it seems logical to assume that different versions could have been copied in fair numbers and distributed throughout the land. In fact, so far archaeologists have discovered some twenty versions of the *Daybook*, all dated to the period between the third century BCE and the second century CE, and spread throughout the empire.<sup>81</sup> For example, a version of the *Daybook* very close to the Shuihudi versions has been discovered as far as the Gansu province, 2,000 kilometers west of Shuihudi. The fact that such similar versions of texts could have appeared almost simultaneously at both ends of this vast stretch of land indicates the possibility of the existence of a common religious mentality and world view as represented by the *Daybook*. This fact reveals that in the transition from the Warring States to the unified empire, there was an aspect of a certain common cultural identity parallel or in addition to political and military measures that constituted the basis for a unified state.

An analysis of the daily activities that needed to be anchored in auspicious dates shows that the main users of the daybooks were most likely farmers, soldiers, craftsmen, and low-ranking government

<sup>81</sup> Huang Ruxuan 2013.

officials, suggesting that the *Daybook* could have represented the mentality of the lower-middle social stratum.<sup>82</sup> Of course, by “using” the *Daybook*, we mean not “reading” it in a literal sense, but following the instructions contained in it as conveyed by those who could read. The actual reading of the *Daybook* was probably the responsibility of some special qualified and literate persons, who served as transmitters of the knowledge presented in the *Daybook*. Given the rate of literacy during this period, that is, around the third century BCE, it is most likely that only a small number of people in society could read and write, and these were mostly government employees. The Shuihudi tomb owner Xi himself was such an employee at the county government level. It could have been that one of his jobs was to teach the local people about how to conduct their daily businesses. The *Daybooks* in his possession, therefore, are most likely references for choosing proper dates for all sorts of affairs that people needed to ask about. It is well known that one of the First Emperor of Qin’s most infamous measures was his burning of books related to the classics such as the *Book of Poetry*, the *Book of History*, the various philosophical treatises, and histories of the various states except that of the Qin, but preserving those practical manuals related to medicine, divination, and agriculture.<sup>83</sup> The *Daybook* would have been regarded as one of those practical texts that were not censored by the government.

Yet government officials were probably not the only people who could have access to and use of the *Daybook*. There were at the time of Warring States period professional day-diviners who might also give instructions to exorcise the ghosts.<sup>84</sup> In sum, the various ghosts that we encounter in the *Demonography* in the *Daybook* or in the elite texts share one common feature: they did not seem to have belonged to any organized belief system, except loosely connected with a supreme deity and some intermediate deities such as the Controller of Fate. In one instance, in the *Demonography*, one of the ghosts assumed the name of “the son of Lord Above (*shangdi zi* 上帝子),” which points to the existence of the conception of a High God and his family. As for another term, “God Above (*shangshen* 上神), the context makes it clear that it is not really a lofty deity, but a rather “low ranking” ghost who could be killed by rushes:

<sup>82</sup> Poo 1993b. For the issue of literacy of this time, see Harper and Kalinowski 2017: 97–110.

<sup>83</sup> *Shiji* 6: 255. <sup>84</sup> *Shiji* 127: 3215–22; Poo 1998: 85–86; Kalinowski 2009.



A ghost constantly comes and tells people: “give me your woman!” and would not stop. It is the God Above who descends to take a wife. Hit it with rushes, it will die. If you do not fend against it, after it comes five times, the woman will die.<sup>85</sup>

Obviously, the term *shen* here refers to nothing sacred or benevolent, and the fact that it could be killed betrays an idea that in the popular mentality, ghosts were like wild animals that could be killed. This points to a rather interesting conception about the nature of ghosts, that is: ghosts do not exist eternally in a spiritual world, but live in the human world, interact with human beings, and could be killed or driven away. In fact, the ghosts in the *Demonography* consist of the human dead as well as nonhuman agents. Here we see an imagined world inhabited by spirits of diverse origins, who could all be called “ghosts,” sometimes even “gods (*shen*),” but all with limited power. Moreover, this world of ghosts and spirits was actually interpenetrating with the human world, and local deities and local ghosts simply existed as part of the human social fabric. Thus we see that the supplication to the deity of Wu Yi was basically to deal with the war dead of the region under his control. For anyone who had some experience with governing the people, the idea of a world of ghosts that was unstructured must have seemed daunting. Such kinds of concern seemed to have congealed toward the late Warring States period, when an intellectual trend to systematize the gods and ghosts into a more coherent structure began to emerge. The “Monthly Ordinance (*Yueling*)” contained in the *Book of Rites (Liji)* as well as in the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Lord Lü (Lüshi chunqiu)* was an apparent case, which organizes the heavenly emperors and deities into the twelve-month cycle of cosmological structure.<sup>86</sup> The *Rite of Zhou* also shows a tremendous effort by constructing an entire system of official religion.<sup>87</sup> Even the author of *Mozi* asserts that there are three kinds of ghosts in the world, revealing an attempt at systematization. All these foresaw or reflected the structure of the spiritual world after the establishment of the universal empire. The world of the dead, in particular, would become a place that resembles the world of the living, with a comparable bureaucracy.<sup>88</sup>

Returning to the resurrection story from the text discovered at Tianshui, it is a clear example of a popular conception of ghosts. What is most remarkable about this story, however, is not that the dead could return to life, but that the story described the feelings of the dead/ghosts,

<sup>85</sup> Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 1990: 215.

<sup>86</sup> *Liji Zhengyi* 6; *Lüshi chunqiu* 1–12. <sup>87</sup> *Zhouli zhushu* 18:1–6.

<sup>88</sup> Poo 1998: 103–21, 157–77.

how they did not like to wear clothes, abhorred unclean sacrifice, and disliked food soaked with broth. This was probably the first example of a more sympathetic or humanistic rendering of the nature of ghosts, which would later be continued and articulated in the Six Dynasties ghost stories. We can sense a change of sentiment here: ghosts used to be something horrifying that one tried to avoid, as the image of ghosts only conjured up a feeling of fear and repulsion. Gradually, however, ghosts were “humanized,” so to speak, and were given more attention regarding their feelings and needs, and not necessarily regarding the vicious deeds that invoke only rejection or apprehension. The story about the ghost of Dan, for example, does not contain any terrifying scenario. Of course, the appearance of this sentiment does not mean that it was becoming prevalent, or even occupied a notable part of the entire picture at this time. It would take some time for it to germinate, and indeed it is only in the late Eastern Han that it again became evident in the available sources, such as the *Fengsu tongyi*, as we shall discuss in Chapter 4.

It is interesting that in the context of more casual situations when ghosts were mentioned during a conversation, one could detect a prevailing common attitude in using the term *gui* as representing something fantastic, outlandish, crafty, or even ingenious. For example, in the *Records of the Warring States* (戰國策 *Zhanguo*) (c. late third century BCE), the famous strategist Su Qin (蘇秦) was confronted by the person Li Dui (李兌), whom Su Qin wished to persuade: “If you come to see me [Dui] with the words of ghosts, that would be fine. But if you come and talk to me about matters of the human world, I already know them all.” Su replied: “I certainly have come to see you with the words of ghosts, not that of the human beings.”<sup>89</sup> He then proceeded with an allegorical story about a conversation between the spirits of the earthen embankment and the wooden embankment in the fields. Here the expression *gui zhi yan* 鬼之言, or “ghost talk,” is used in a matter-of-fact way, indicating that it was a commonly used phrase in people’s daily conversation. This certainly shows a shared view that the idea of *gui*-ghost represented certain unrealistic, bizarre, or extraordinary qualities. In the same linguistic environment, the use of the expression “Even a ghost would not know (*guiqie buzhi* 鬼且不知) [about the outcome of conflict between two states]”<sup>90</sup> indicated an underlying assumption that ghosts knew more than human beings regarding future events and that they somehow

<sup>89</sup> *Zhanguo* 18. Similar expressions can be found in *Zhanguo* 10.      <sup>90</sup> *Zhanguo* 8.

possessed a certain ability to foretell the future. We are reminded of the custom of necromancy of the Greco-Roman world, which assumed that the ghosts somehow possessed a certain ability to prophesize.<sup>91</sup> It is significant to note that, from a modern Chinese linguistic point of view, these expressions in the *Zhanguo* sound distinctively modern, as even in modern Chinese interjections such as “Only a ghost would know (*gui cai zhidao* 鬼才知道),” that is, no one except a ghost knows, or “ghost talk (*guihua* 鬼話),” that is, nonsense, are commonly used in daily conversations that the author of *Zhanguo* would have recognized easily. On the other hand, the term *gui* could also serve as an adjective that expresses a crafty character, as stated *Hanfeizi*: “Therefore the sagacious ruler dispenses measures of governance according to heavenly principles, and deploys personnel in a crafty way (*gui*). When following the principle of heaven, there shall be no mistake; when employing a crafty way, there shall be no obstacle.”<sup>92</sup>

To sum up, beginning from the Shang dynasty, with the invention of the script and the character of *gui*, the idea of ghosts was registered in the documents. There was a steady expansion of the attributes of *gui*, usually associated with some undesirable elements in people’s lives, so that what people feared or hated, such as illnesses or other calamities, could be explained as caused by the agency of the *gui*. The idea of *gui*/ghost thus became a depository of those unpleasant, sinister, terrifying, or evil things that the world had brought about and that had been encountered in the collective social consciousness. It could have been in fact people’s comment on human nature itself, because, as the soul of the human being, *gui* was essentially human. In cases where the *gui* was the spirit of the nonhuman agent, it was mostly the result of anthropomorphic imagination. Moreover, there can at least be two levels of understanding of the concept of *gui*. Texts written by and for the elites talked about *gui* sometimes skeptically, such as Confucius; sometimes as a convenient tool for philosophical or moralistic discourses, such as Zhuangzi and Mozi, or even the author of the *Commentary of Zuo*. Texts that represented the daily concern of the wider populace, such as the *Daybook*, recognized *gui* as having a real existence that needed to be taken care of. There was a consensus that when the *gui* was taken care of by its descendants with burial and offering, it would no longer come back to bother people. It would not become a malicious ghost. Thus people in general wished that

<sup>91</sup> Ogden 2001.      <sup>92</sup> *Hanfeizi* 48.

their ancestors would be satisfied with their care and remain in the realm where the souls of the ancestors resided. Stories and dreams about the revenge of ghosts, however, were shared both in elite literature and in the texts of daily use such as the manual of exorcism contained in the *Demonography*, thus forming a common understanding of the relationship between the ghost and the human. What was not very clear in the texts of this period, that is, from the Shang to the Warring States, was the destination of the ghost. While the tomb was obviously the first stop of the deceased when they entered into that unknown realm, what exactly would happen and where would the dead eventually go was never asked conscientiously nor answered systematically by those intellectuals who had something to say about the ghosts. The ritual of recalling the soul, as we are reminded, assumes that the soul/ghost of the dead could travel to all directions. Studies of the evolution of tombs in the period note that there was a change in the construction of tombs, albeit a gradual one, that reflected a changing perception of what a tomb means, not only to the living but also to the deceased. This change, in a very general sense, was a change from the perception that the tomb was a place to hide away the body to the idea that it was a place where the deceased might have a living realm, which indicated the emergence of a more realistic imagination of the tomb as living quarters.<sup>93</sup> The question is, if the individual tomb is perceived as the abode of the dead, as the resurrection story of Dan indicates, and the collective tombs formed the community of the deceased, what was the next level beyond the immediate community of the deceased? What did the netherworld in general look like? This would be answered when more evidence became available, during the subsequent Han dynasty.

<sup>93</sup> Lai 2015 offers a view that sees the tomb as only a way station for the journey of the soul to the netherworld.