

STEPHEN R. BOKENKAMP

ANCESTORS AND ANXIETY

DAOISM AND THE
BIRTH OF REBIRTH
IN CHINA

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Envisioning the Dead

The living and the dead form a single moral community, divided by visibility and frequency of contact perhaps, but not by obligation, affection, emotion, or even aesthetic taste.

—Robert Campany, *Strange Writing*

One of the most intimate descriptions of the underworld abode of the dead in all of Chinese letters is to be found among the visionary transcripts of Yang Xi (330–86?), as assembled and annotated by Tao Hongjing. In book 5 of his *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zheng'gao*), Tao has transcribed for us the revelations Yang received, both from his celestial informants and by other, unknown means, concerning the six palaces of Mount Luofeng, or Fengdu, as the administrative center of the dead was known.¹

Located on and under a massive mountain in the far north, the direction of winter, darkness, and seasonal death according to five-phase thought, the six palaces of Fengdu are all under the control of the Northern Thearch.² Under his imperial oversight are a number of functionaries, men of remote as well as recent memory, who enjoy titles and func-

1. For previous descriptions of Fengdu that inform this one at many points, see Peter S. Nickerson, "Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy in Early Medieval China" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1996), esp. 537–612; Sandrine Chenivresse, *Le Mont Fengdu: Lieu saint Taoïste émergé de la géographie de l'au-delà* (Paris: École Pratique des Hautes Études, 1995); and Matsumura Takumi, "Shinkō ni mieru Rahōdo kikai setsu," in *Rikuchō dōkyō no kenkyū*, ed. Yoshikawa Tadao (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1998), 167–88.

2. According to the cosmology fully developed by the Han dynasty, all existence was composed of and governed by five phases that had the following major associations: wood (east, green, spring); fire (south, red, summer); metal (west, white, autumn); water (north, black, winter); and earth (center, yellow). For more on the system and its importance in Daoism, see Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 15–20.

tions similar to those they held in the sunlit world. Indeed, when Yang's informants do not reveal the offices to which underworld titles correspond, Tao Hongjing sometimes does.

Much of the administrative work of Fengdu seems to consist of judging new arrivals and assigning them to appropriate positions in the teeming land of the dead. We hear, of course, only of the elite. For Yang, as for Dante, the common folk are invisible. Presumably they are subject to the administration that forms the sole concern of Yang's informants. Like Dante, too, Yang is quite aware of the political and social stakes involved when someone is assigned to this or that position in the underworld. Placement might be higher or lower than the rank that person achieved in life. Postmortem promotions and demotions, too, are possible. Yang differs from Dante, however, in that, given Chinese ideas of clan responsibility and ancestor cult, the living prove to be even more closely implicated in the fates of the dead than were the citizens of fourteenth-century Italy. Then, too, Yang's material was not meant to be simply allegorical. He presents his revealed material as factual, and Tao Hongjing takes the information Yang provides as an accurate record of the underworld. In his annotations he compares what Yang reports with earlier revelations, allowing us to trace to some extent the tradition within which Yang worked.

That tradition, composed of reports on the underworld—by ghosts, usually family members of the person receiving the revelations, or by those who had died and somehow been resuscitated—is known to us from as early as the fourth century BCE.³ Because such reports from the underworld were, by their nature, oral and not the sort of anecdote regularly recorded for posterity, we have no way of judging just how widespread or early the phenomenon might have been. The documentary record that does survive suggests that from the third century CE on, either the number of returnees increased dramatically or the impulse to record and circulate such stories became much stronger.⁴ As we saw in the introduction, the tendency among modern scholars is to attribute this apparent new interest in the structure and denizens of the underworld to the influence of Buddhism and the consequent changes in attitudes toward the dead. As we shall see, Yang Xi's account of Fengdu does not easily support this hypothesis.

3. Donald Harper, "Resurrection in Warring States Popular Religion," *Taoist Resources* 5, no. 2 (1994): 13–29; Nickerson, "Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy," 97–100. I discuss the evidence Harper presents in the section entitled "Moderation in Burial" in this chapter.

4. See Robert F. Campany, "Return-from-Death Narratives in Early Medieval China," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 18 (1990): 91–125.

FENGDU AND BUDDHIST “HELLS”

Among the gifts of religious imagination brought to China with the Buddhist religion was a distinct vision of hell as a place—or rather a network of places—where the dead were held for a period of brutal punishment in retribution for the sins that they had individually committed during their lifetimes.⁵ The term coined to designate these infernal regions was *diyu*, “earth prisons,” a term some have suggested should be translated as “purgatories,” since the damned were confined there for set terms.⁶ But even my preferred translation—“earth prisons”—is not quite accurate, since the *yu* of ancient China were not penal institutions, but rather courts of inquisition where complaints were lodged, the accused questioned, and punishments determined. Suspects were incarcerated in the *yu* during this process, usually in shackles, but the administration of punishment was often carried out elsewhere.⁷ Nonetheless, the use of torture to extract true information made the ancient *yu* similar to Buddhist hells (*naraka* in Sanskrit), where the dead underwent hideous retribution and were tortured over and over as they recalled the transgressions of their previous lives.⁸

These ideas, introduced at least by the second century CE, found fertile ground for acceptance because the Chinese already entertained several roughly compatible notions concerning lands of the dead. There was

5. My account of the curious mixtures of Buddhist with traditional Chinese descriptions of the underworld owes a particular debt to the following works: Nickerson, “Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy”; Sawada Mizuho, *Jigoku hen: Chūgoku no meikai setsu* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1968); Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), esp. 168–95; Xiao Dengfu, *Han, Wei, Liu chao fo dao liangjiao zhi tiantang diyu shuo* (Taibei: Taiwan xuesheng, 1989); and Michihata Yoshihide, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shisōshi no kenkyū: Chūgoku minshū no bukkyō juyō* (Kyoto: Heiryakuji shoten, 1979), esp. 200–224.

6. Stephen F. Teiser, in his survey of Buddhist scriptural accounts of the underworlds, argues against this translation; see “‘Having Once Died and Returned to Life’: Representations of Hell in Medieval China,” *Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48, no. 2 (1988): 435–37. In his *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), however, he allows that this “vision of the hereafter and its social realization are sufficiently analogous to the medieval European situation to merit the label of ‘purgatory,’ which may be defined as the period between death and the next life when the spirit suffers retribution for past deeds and enjoys the comfort of living family members” (1).

7. A. F. P. Hulswé, *Remnants of Han Law* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), 74–155.

8. On the suffering of those incarcerated in the hells, see Sawada, *Jigoku hen*; Michihata Yoshihide, “Tonkō bunken ni mieru shigō no sekkai,” in *Tonkō to Chūgoku Bukkyō*, ed. Makita Tairyō and Fukui Fumimasa (Tokyo: Daitō, 1984); Donald E. Gjertson, *Miraculous Retribution: A Study and Translation of T’ang Lin’s “Ming-pao chi”* (Berkeley: Centers for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California, 1989), 132–44; and

the subterranean Yellow Springs, where commoners were believed to labor, as they had in life on the banks of the Yellow River, governed by those who had governed them before. This labor was not punitive, but rather a continuation of their lives above ground. Another account finds the underworld administrative center ruled by the Lord of Mount Tai, a mountain in Shandong province, while those who managed to avoid death altogether enjoyed an equally bureaucratically organized existence on mysterious isles floating in the seas off the east coast of the Chinese mainland.⁹ The extent to which these traditional, otherworldly geographies were seen as suggestive of Buddhist concepts of hell is evident in the fact that early translators sometimes used the term “Offices of Mount Tai” to translate what must have been “hells” in their sources.¹⁰

Since Fengdu, as we shall see, arrived on the scene rather later than the Yellow Springs or Mount Tai, we might expect to find traces of Buddhist conceptions, but we do not. Compared with the postmortem delights that Yang Xi had to offer those who followed his way, Fengdu is not entirely pleasant, but it is not a place of punishment.¹¹ Instead, those who serve there, the “lords below the ground” 地下主, occupy administrative posts similar to those they held in life. They may even, through hundreds of years of study, advance in the bureaucracy to the point where they are transferred to more attractive afterlife destinations. Yang Xi was aware of the notion of *diyu*, for the Perfected beings mention the term once in a series of poems they recite at a gathering in the heavens on the autumnal equinox.¹² But this is Yang’s sole mention of *diyu* in the *Dec-*

Teiser, *Scripture on the Ten Kings*. For a comparative study of descriptions of hell found in Lingbao and Buddhist texts and their basis in Chinese legal practice, see Amy Lynn Miller, “Doing Time in Taoist Purgatory: Annotated Translations, Dating, and Analysis of Punishments in Two Six Dynasties *Ling-pao* Texts on Purgatory” (MA thesis, Indiana University, 1994), 176–202.

9. On the antiquity of this bureaucratic image of the otherworld and the construction of orderly channels of communication with the dead, see David Keightley, “Shamanism, Death, and the Ancestors: Religious Mediation in Neolithic and Shang China” *Asiatische Studien* 52, no. 3 (1998): 763–828. For some of the many interesting means by which a practitioner might hope to avoid death, see Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 18–85.

10. See, for instance, Kang Senghui’s use of the term in *Liudu ji jing*, T 152, 1:1a24ff.; 3:13b19; 3:15a20; 3:16a7ff.; 4:20c12ff.; 4:21b26ff.; and 5:30b24ff. for just a few of the grislier descriptions.

11. On this point, see Christine Mollier, “La méthode de l’empereur du nord du mont Fengdu: Une tradition exorciste du Taoïsme médiéval,” *T’oung Pao* 83 (1997): 341–42.

12. *Zhen’gao*, HY 1010, 3.9a9–9b1. The series of poems deals with Buddhist concepts. For instance, the term *miedu* 滅度, an early translation of nirvana, appears in one of the verses. They also mention physical punishment in the afterlife.

larations of the Perfected.¹³ He does not use the term in referring to Fengdu. It is likely, then, that Yang and many of his contemporaries believed concurrently in several postmortem destinations. Yang Xi's description of Fengdu and the several accounts of his predecessors identified by Tao Hongjing actually deal with different postmortem destinations. Nonetheless, Tao treats them as if they were all part of the same system.

It will thus not serve us here to attempt a history of these Chinese abodes of the departed—they are at any rate poorly documented for the earliest periods, and what is known has been ably presented and analyzed by a number of scholars.¹⁴ Our focus on the roles of ancestral practice in traditional Chinese religion does, however, require that we keep in mind the highly moralistic, personal, and retributive character of the Buddhist afterlife. As we shall see, the underworld presented in the stories we examine first features none of the punitive elements so common in Buddhist descriptions of the hells. These Chinese underworlds are, despite some signs of conflation with the hells, desirable destinations.

EXPLORING THE UNDERWORLDS

The earliest story that Tao Hongjing mentions in his annotations to Yang Xi's revelations of the underworld involves the return of a dead ancestor who appeared to one of his sons both to report on the afterlife and to request a certain disposition of his physical remains. Receiving visions of deceased ancestors was as common in China as elsewhere in the world. Indeed, there is evidence that such visualizations formed part of normal ancestral practice.

The *Records of Ritual (Liji)*, a Confucian compendium of practice compiled ca. 50 BCE from ancient materials, provides a touching description of the procedures by which ancestors were to be visualized, nourished, and thus made a living presence in the quotidian life of their families. The text begins with recommendations for the period of purification preceding the feeding of the ancestors and moves on to the actual day of the sacrifice:

13. Another reference to suffering in the earth-prisons appears in *The Upper Scripture of Purple Texts Inscribed by the Spirits*, a scripture likely to have been composed by Yang Xi. See Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 364.

14. See Nickerson, "Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy"; Poo Mu-chou, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 157–77; and Xiao, *Han, Wei, Liu-chao*.

On the day of the purification ritual, one thinks of the ancestors seated, thinks of their smiles and speech, thinks of their will and intentions, thinks of that which pleases them. On the third day, one will see those for whom he is conducting the purification ritual. On the day of offering, when one enters the chamber, the images [of the ancestors] will indeed appear on the seats provided. As one makes his rounds and is about to go out, with a sense of reverence one will hear the ancestor's voices. When one has gone into the front hall, one will hear their faint sighs.¹⁵

This passage is important for the evidence it provides of the ubiquity of the visualization of spirits in early Chinese society, but it reveals only one part of how ancestor rites were meant to work. Proper ritual offerings to the ancestors fostered correct remembrance on the part of descendants. But Confucian family rituals also enacted remembrance on the part of the ancestors for their descendants.¹⁶ The voices of the ancestors were heard through the mouths of lineal male descendants, as in the story we discuss below. In traditional ritual, at least as hallowed in the approved ritual corpus, the voices of the dead were scripted, issuing from the “personators” (*shi* 尸; literally, “corpses”) in time-honored cadence and in terms that invariably announced the ancestors’ “enjoyment” of the sacrifice.¹⁷

Significantly, while our story's vision of a dead ancestor occurs outside of this tightly controlled ritual context, familial sacrifice does play a prominent role in the tale. And, for all their evidential weight, visions of the dead can be doubted. When this happens, memory is again foregrounded.¹⁸

15. *Liji*, chap. 47, *SSJZS* 2:1592c; see also James Legge, *Li Chi: Book of Rites, An Encyclopedia of Ancient Ceremonial Usages, Religious Creeds, and Social Institutions*, 2 vols. (New York: University Books, 1967), 2:210–11. The translation is mine.

16. For a fascinating study of one performance text, see Martin Kern, “*Shi jing* Songs as Performance Texts: A Case Study of ‘Chu ci’ (Thorny Caltrop),” *Early China* 25 (2000): 49–111. Kern argues that such performance texts are “constitutive”; that is, “(a) they generate and semanticize the very situation in which they will play a part, (b) they enforce social hierarchies, . . . (c) they circulate collective messages within the ritual community, (d) they contribute to the sensual efficacy of the performance proper, (e) they emblematically express authoritative control over the tradition, and (f) they instantaneously confirm the success of the ritual efforts” (66–67). While Kern's primary concern in this article is with cultural memory, we shall see that many of these features operate as well in the discontinuous and ad hoc ritual texts we analyze below.

17. See Kern, “*Shi jing* Songs,” esp. 103–6; and Lothar von Falkenhausen, “Reflections on the Role of Spirit Mediums in Early China: The *Wu* Officials in the *Zhou Li*,” *Early China* 20 (1995): 297–99.

18. The following account is based on the citation in Li Fang, *Taiping guangji* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1961), 319.2528–30, of Wang Yin's 王隱 (fl. 318) now lost *Jinshu* 晉書. Other sources that cite the tale are (1) Tao Hongjing's annotations to the *Zhen'gao* (HY 1010, 15.4b, 15.7a, 16.4a, and 16.11a); (2) Li Fang, *Taiping yulan* (Beijing: Zhonghua,

SU SHAO 蘇韶

Su Shao, byname Xiaoxian, was a person of Anping.¹⁹ His highest rank was that of Governor of Zhongmou²⁰. He died early in the Xianning 咸寧 reign period [275–280].²¹ Shao's paternal uncle was Cheng 承, who died holding the title Southern Palace Attendant and Military Adjutant 南中郎軍司.²²

When all of Shao's sons were escorting [their father's] body home for the funeral and had reached Xiangcheng 襄城,²³ the ninth son, Jie 節, dreamt he saw the armed retinue of an official procession, its ranks extremely regal. Then he saw Shao. An outrider²⁴ called to Jie, saying, "You are encroaching upon the procession! For this crime, your head should be shaved." Jie lowered his head and accepted the tonsure. Then, startled awake, he rubbed his head. It was in fact bereft of hair in spots.²⁵ The next evening, he was sleeping together with others when he dreamt that Shao said to him, "Not all of your hair has been cut." Then he was again shaved as on the previous night.

The next night, Jie made diligent preparations. He lit a lamp and arrayed talismans and interdictions. Again, he dreamt of Shao, who had him shaved as before. This went on for five nights. Originally, Jie had beautiful hair, but after five nights it was all gone. Then, for six or seven nights, he had no further dreams.²⁶

The tale of Su Shao's return begins by drawing on traditional Chinese methods of mediumistic communication with the dead and on the emerg-

1960), 883.3b–4a, 554.7a, and 373.4b; and (3) Xu Song *Jiankang shilu*, ed. Zhang Chen-shi (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986), 188–89, citing the now lost *Sanshi guo chunqiu* 三十國春秋). All of the latter sources cite the tale for specific reasons and delete parts of it that are not pertinent to their arguments. The encyclopedia *Taiping yulan*, for instance, cites the Su Shao story under "spirits and ghosts" (883), "funeral processions" (554), and "hair" (373), citing in these chapters only the parts of the story that fit the category. Tao Hongjing mentions only the ranks of the dead, and Xu Song (or his source) severely abbreviates the story but confirms its general outlines. I give only the meaningful variations among these sources in the following footnotes.

19. Southeast of Linzi County 臨淄縣 in modern Shandong Province.

20. The eastern part of Zheng County 鄭縣 in modern Henan Province.

21. The date of Shao's death appears in the citation of Wang Yin's book found in Li, *Taiping yulan*, 373.4b.

22. Su Cheng is otherwise unknown to history. Li, in *Taiping yulan*, 883.3b, has only a portion of this sentence and skips to "ninth son," making it look as if Jie were Su Cheng's son. This seems to be the slip of a copyist's hand, since all of the other available sources, except for Xu Song's *Jiankang shilu*, which claims that Jie was Shao's younger brother, list Jie as Su Shao's ninth son.

23. Present-day Xiangcheng County 襄城縣 of Henan Province.

24. Li Fang, in *Taiping yulan*, 373.4b, reports that Shao himself made this pronouncement.

25. Li Fang cites the passage to the effect that a "finger's breadth of hair" was found to have been cut off (*Taiping yulan*, 373.4b).

26. Li Fang, in *Taiping yulan*, 883.3b, elides both of these paragraphs, but they do appear at 373.4b–5a of the same work.

ing prestige of Buddhism. In addition to visions of the dead made possible through family ritual, there were also established liturgies that allowed the dead to respond. This was effected through selecting a younger male member of the family, usually the grandson of the deceased, as impersonator of the dead. The *shi* passively allowed the ancestors to animate him. He accepted the offerings meant for the ancestor, eating and drinking the deceased's portion. His utterances, generally involving a recital of the blessings to be granted in response to the ritual feeding, would then be interpreted by a ritual specialist.²⁷

In China, possessions by spirits that occurred outside of this ritual scenario often involved younger members of the family as well. As in instances of mediumism around the world, the youthful and illiterate were regarded as more reliable conduits to the dead, since they could hardly be suspected of having fabricated their utterances and writings themselves.²⁸ This fact brings to the fore questions of power. Women and junior male members of a family frequently found that mediumism was a way to bring attention to their own, otherwise easily ignored, concerns.²⁹ Given that Jie was the ninth son of Su Shao, we suspect he might have harbored such motives himself. Though the tale naturally provides no evidence of this, it is likely that the messages Su Shao brings to the brothers through Jie represent Jie's own views.

Jie's period of preparation and his assumption of the role of family medium might thus be fruitfully analyzed in psychological and sociological terms. For our purposes, however, it is more important to note the role played by the image of Buddhism (though not the actual religion itself). Jie's gradual hair loss, while it may have been a hysterical response to the grief of losing a parent, serves to transform him into a

27. Patricia Ebrey, *Chu Hsi's Family Rituals: A Twelfth-Century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), xvi, xviii.

28. On the prevalence of mediumism among women and the "powerless," see I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1978), 66–126. Glen Dudbridge, in *Religious Experience and Lay Society in T'ang China: A Reading of Tai Fu's Kuang-i chi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), provides many Chinese examples, especially of female mediums.

29. Of the possession of one young girl, Glen Dudbridge writes, "Young girls, of course, would not enjoy conventional access to . . . polite male society. . . . But trance made all the difference. The first possession . . . came unexpectedly, perhaps involuntarily, but now it rewards the girl with a place of honour and respect as the centre of attention in the local official's social circle" (*Religious Experience*, 4). For parallels in medieval Japan, see Doris Bergen, *A Woman's Weapon: Spirit Possession in the Tale of Genji* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

simulacrum of a Buddhist monk. This hint that a knowledge of Buddhist practice might somehow lurk in the background of these events is underscored by the fact mentioned later on that Su Shao, when he causes Jie to write the language of the dead, produces only the incomprehensible horizontal writing of the *hu* (“western barbarians”), the pejorative ethnic designation regularly applied to foreign Buddhist monks at this time.³⁰ Since these hints are never made explicit in the account and there are no further references to the religion, Buddhist claims to control the fate of the dead figure as little more than a backdrop, lending an air of prestige and believability to the visual and auditory hallucinations (if such they were) of Jie.

Despite these odd, foreign embellishments, Jie responds to the appearance of his father in traditional Chinese fashion—he prepares “talismans and interdictions” to rid himself of the demonic vapors that accompanied death. Nonetheless, the hair-cutting continued, and the visions became even more vivid:

Later, Jie was boarding a carriage in broad daylight when Shao came riding in on a horse from outside the gates. He was wearing the black headwrap of a civil official, an unlined robe of brown brocade, white stockings and silk slippers. He drew near to the axle of Jie’s carriage. Jie said to his brothers, “The Governor is here.” They all looked around in astonishment, but saw nothing. So Jie asked Shao why he had come, to which Shao replied, “I want you to rebury me.” Then he took his leave, saying that he would come again. When he went out of the gate, he could no longer be seen.³¹

After a number of days, Shao came again. The brothers sat together with him. Jie said, “If you want to be reburied, you will have to order it yourself.” Shao replied, “I will write a letter.” Jie gave him a brush, but Shao was unwilling to take it, saying, “The dead write differently than do the living.” Then he caused Jie to draw some characters—they were like the writing of the Western barbarians 胡. At this, Shao smiled and ordered Jie to write at his dictation as follows:

Of old, the Martial Marquis of Wei 魏武侯 [r. 387–72 BCE] was floating along the Western River. When he came to the middle stretches, he looked over his shoulder and said to [his general] Wu Qi 吳起, “These fastnesses between the river and the mountains are truly beautiful! This is the treasure of the Wei!”³² Now, by nature I love the eastern capital and the Lo river.

30. For more on the script of the dead, see Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 12, n. 52.

31. The final sentence of this paragraph does not occur in Li, *Taiping yulan*, 883.3b.

32. This event is recorded in Sima Tan and Sima Qian, *Shiji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 65.2166; and Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian* (Beijing: Guji, 1957), 1.28–29.

Each time I left or returned, I looked up at Mount Mang with pleasure.³³ There are the tombs of ten-thousand generations!³⁴ To the north, the Mengford backs them—the river so vast; to the south, they look out on the Celestial Citadel, with its throngs so bustling. Even though I never spoke of this aspiration, it has been inscribed in my heart. I did not count on life's brevity and so I was not able to realize my sentiments. In the coming tenth month, I would like to be reburied. Buy several *mou* of land next to the Adjutant [my uncle, Su Cheng]—that should be enough.

Our account began with Jie and his brothers returning home for the burial of their father. The tomb must have already been prepared, but now Jie learns that his father wishes to be buried instead at Mount Mang, the imperial burial grounds north of the eastern capital Luoyang.³⁵ The reasons Su Shao gives for his preference are telling. In his “letter” he cites an exchange during the Warring States period between the Wei monarch and his general Wu Qi, known to all literate men of the time from its inclusion in China's first universal history, the *Shiji*. But Su Shao cites only the monarch's praise of the mountains that were to become the resting place of later rulers. Wu Qi's response, which he does not mention, but which would have been in the minds of all who heard this, concerns the greater importance of a ruler's charismatic virtue over such trifling strategic considerations as the selection of easily defensible ground. The implied message for those who would oppose Su Shao's burial next to his military relative at Mount Mang is that such an act outweighs any consideration as to who might or might not be interred on this specific piece of real estate, since the burial expresses both the virtue of the Jin rulers, who would inspire such loyalty, and of Shao himself, who could respond to it. The question of loyalty resurfaces later in the tale.

When Jie would talk to Shao, those beside him could only see his mouth move, as if he were speaking clearly and loudly, but nothing could be heard.³⁶ [Jie] led Shao into a room where a seat had been set out so that they could sacrifice to him. Shao would not sit, nor would he allow them

33. Mount Mang lies north of the eastern capital, Luoyang, and is the site of imperial graves.

34. Li Fang, in *Taiping yulan* (554.7a and 883.4a), records this line as “This is the foundation of the ten-thousand generations!” and leaves out the detail concerning Shao's wish to be buried next to the Adjutant.

35. For the practice of rewarding meritorious service with burial near the imperial graveyards, see the case of Wen Qiao 温嶠 (288–329; reported in Fang Xuanling et al., *Jinshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 37.1795–96). In Wen's case, the move to rebury him north of the imperial mausolea was blocked when Tao Kan 陶侃 (259–334) produced a letter detailing Wen's last wishes.

36. Li, *Taiping yulan*, 883.4a, does not have this sentence.

to feast him. Jie said to Shao, “All your life, Governor, you loved ale and fish. You can have a small drink!” Shao, holding the cup, drank it down, then said, “Fine ale!” Jie saw that the cup was empty, but when Shao left, it was full again.

Shao came some thirty or more times and the brothers began to be disrespectful in his presence.

Jie asked Shao about things he wanted to know. Shao said, “The affairs of heaven and the underworld cannot all be known. Yan Yuan 顏淵 and Bu Shang 卜商 are today Gentlemen of the Imperial Gates 修門朗.³⁷ There are eight gentleman-attendants in this department. Among the sages here is Xiang Liangcheng 項梁城 and among the worthies, Wu Jizi 吳季子.³⁸ Yang Xiong 揚雄, Zhang Heng 張衡 and others are the Five Thearchs.”³⁹

Like Jie’s audience, we modern readers expect a bit of legerdemain, some small miracle, to provide a sense of verisimilitude. Su Shao could no more actually drink human liquor than could the ancestors to whom it was regularly offered in family sacrifice. The mysterious emptying and refilling of the beaker demonstrates this nicely. The report on the official status of the dead in the otherworld, however, represents a sort of proof that no longer figures prominently in Western culture, our nearest analogue being the visions of Dante Alighieri. Sometimes medieval Chinese reports on those in the underworld did, as we shall see, adopt the monitory tone of Dante. Often, though, the figures in such accounts are doing quite well for themselves, as are the men Su Shao mentions here.

Yan Yuan 顏淵, better known as Yan Hui 回, and Bu Shang 卜商, or Zi Xia 子夏, were both well-known disciples of Confucius. Wu Jizi 吳季子, also known as Ji Zha 季札, was the uncle of King He Lü 闔閭 of Wu (r. 514–496 BCE). Known for leaving his kingdom to live in reclusion, Jizi was honored at several shrines.⁴⁰ Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE)

37. Li Fang’s *Taiping guangji* 319.2529 and *Taiping yulan* 883.4a have 修文朗, a Tang-dynasty title; see Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), 249a. This emendation is likely the doing of an over-zealous editor who did not recognize the underworld title. The title “Gentleman of the Imperial Gates” appears in a citation of this passage in Tao’s notes (*Zhen’gao*, HY 1010, 15.7a2).

38. Li Fang’s *Taiping yulan* 883.4a reads “Liang Cheng 梁成.” Tao’s notes in *Zhen’gao*, HY 1010, 15.4b, match the *Taiping guangji*. Jizi is also known as Jizha 季札.

39. This line is cited by Tao Hongjing in *Zhen’gao*, HY 1010, 16.11a2. He goes on to complain, “If Yang and Zhang are not higher sages, their rank should be low, not on a par with the Red Thearch. Perhaps there is a lesser Five Thearchs that are not mentioned [by Yang’s informants] or perhaps the information on Yang and Zhang [given by Su Shao] is just incorrect.”

40. See Tao Hongjing’s notes in *Zhen’gao*, HY 1010, 15.5b8 ff. Tao mentions a Jizi temple in existence at his time. Gao Shao 高紹 (fl. 719), in his record of the restoration of the Jizi temples of the Jiangnan region, mentions that there were three related temples in

and Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139) were both well-known literati officials of the Latter Han.⁴¹

One of the figures named here, Xiang Liangcheng, proves, however, to have been less prominent, and consequently more interesting. Tao Hongjing, in his note to this passage, speculates that he might be Xiang Liang, uncle of the famous Chu general Xiang Yu,⁴² but goes on to complain that “such a person as this should not be given more prominence than Wu Jizi.”⁴³ That might well be so, but whoever he may have been in life, Xiang Liangcheng interests us as one of the early figures who reported on the structure of the underworld. In this case, the terrain was that of Mount Luofeng, Yang Xi’s underworld, not Mount Tai. Yang reports that Xiang Liangcheng had composed a poem of twenty thousand words on Mount Luofeng, but cites only the portion that mentions its Six Palaces, knowledge of the names of which can serve to protect against harm inflicted by the dead.⁴⁴

Ge Hong (ca. 283–343) also knew of Xiang Liangcheng. The context in which he mentions him is significant. In Ge’s *Baopuzi*, a spirited and detailed defense of the possibility of attaining transcendence, he presents his discussions with an interlocutor, who objects as follows: “Allowing that divine transcendence might be obtained through study . . . so that one could depart the world, would it not be the case that none would then carry out ritual feedings, so that the sentient ghosts of the ancestors would starve?” Ge’s response addresses both aspects implied by this question, the posterity of those who depart in transcendence and their own ancestors. As to posterity, transcedents have sons and younger brothers who might continue family sacrifice and who will receive immense blessings from their illustrious forebears.⁴⁵ The transcedents’ own

the region in his time (see Dong Gao, et al., comps., *Qinding quan Tang wen* [Taipei: Huiwen shuju, 1961], 294.19a–20a).

41. For brief biographies, see David Knechtges, *Wen Xuan or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 2, *Rhapsodies on Sacrifices, Hunting, Travel, Sightseeing, Palaces and Halls, Rivers and Seas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 364–66, and vol. 1, *Rhapsodies on Metropolises and Capitals* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 481–83, respectively.

42. Xiang Yu did inspire cultic devotion. As a brilliant, but frustrated, general, he was revered as a patron of military arts. See Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 211–12.

43. *Zhen’gao*, HY 1010, 15.4b5–7.

44. *Zhen’gao*, HY 1010, 15.1b–4b. See also Tao Hongjing’s collection of liturgical materials, the *Dengzhen yinjue*, HY 421, 2.13a8.

45. We notice the same appeal to the deeds of the “religious hero” in the case of Sengdu, considered in the introduction.

ancestors, on the other hand, will participate directly in the glorification of their descendants. Among the new powers they will enjoy will be that “in authority they might direct Luofeng [= Fengdu]; their prestige would be sufficient to rebuke Liangcheng.”⁴⁶ That is to say, they may command even the lords of the underworld.

While there is no mention here of apotropaic verses, the “table turning” nature of the first part of this remark—Fengdu usually directs the dead, but these fortunates will be able to command Fengdu—suggests that Ge Hong might have known Liangcheng as a spirit whose words were sufficient to “scold” or “chastise” demons. If Liangcheng was a spirit associated with apotropaic powers, then one who could rebuke even him would be powerful indeed. Unfortunately, we have no further information on Xiang Liangcheng or the lengthy apotropaic poem that Yang Xi attributes to him.

As we shall see later in the story, Su Shao is on his way to Mount Tai, so at first it seems curious that he should be aware of Xiang Liangcheng, a key figure in the early history of the Mount Luofeng underworld complex. But, as we noted at the beginning of this chapter, our otherworldly informants seem little concerned about such specifics and tend to conflate what might seem to us distinct underworld destinations. Since we know so little of the palace complexes of Fengdu before Yang Xi came to write of them so eloquently, we must leave this observation. Instead, we follow the interests of those who came to question Su Shao. Their questions have less to do with the structure of the underworld than with the relations possible between the living and the dead.

Jie asked how death compared to life. Shao responded, “There is no difference, except that the dead are immaterial and the living material.

Jie then asked, “Why do the dead not return to their corpses?” Shao said, “Say that someone cut off your arm and threw it on the ground. When they went on to flay it would you suffer from this or not? For the dead to leave their corpses is just like this.” Jie then asked, “If we provide a rich burial with a high mound, do the dead take delight in it?” Shao responded, “They are not present.” “So,” Jie said, “if you are not present in the tomb, why do you wish to be reburied?” Shao replied, “In truth, there is nowhere I now reside. I merely wish to express my life-time aspirations.”⁴⁷

46. Ge Hong, *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi*, ed. Wang Ming (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 3:45–46. Partially translated in Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 88–89. See also Matsumura, “Shinkō ni mieru Rahōdo,” 181–82.

47. This passage is translated and discussed in Nickerson, “Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy,” 345–46.

One of the younger brothers asked, “Your sons are still young and few of the elder brothers have wives. Your family undergoes hard times. Do you take thought for these things?” Shao replied, “I have no further emotions.” Jie said, “Do you have longevity?” to which he replied, “All have it.” So Jie asked, “As for our longevity, do you know it?” Shao replied, “I know and will tell you.”

We can all comprehend fears that the person will decay with the body, but the anxieties underlying the further questions concerning the memories of the dead seem at first odd. Western traditions emphasize commemoration of the dead rather than what the dead might recall. In the cultures informed by medieval Christianity, ghosts return to ensure that they will be remembered. Anxieties projected onto the dead most often concern fears that descendants will fail to carry out the memorial services that would deliver the dead from purgatory. The Chinese ghosts we survey here seem not to have been overly oppressed by such concerns.⁴⁸ For Su Jie, and others like him, intent on making certain that their cherished dead were remembered in certain ways rather than others, the question more often addressed to the spirits of the dead was, “Do ghosts remember the living?” That is to say, Jie required confirmation of Su Shao’s oath of remembrance with its concomitant promise of ancestral blessing in order to accomplish his goals. We shall thus see this question, in one form or another, expressed again in the stories Tao Hongjing collected. Given the importance of ancestral blessings and the changes that were occurring in conceptions of the dead, the answer put into the mouths of the ghosts of our stories—“We can still help you!”—must have been comforting and thus helped to ensure that the goals of the medium were accomplished.

Though we are not given details, the information Su Shao provided concerning the life spans of his family members constitutes one example

48. I do not mean to indicate by this that Chinese ghosts were never portrayed as making demands on the memories of the living. See, for instance, the mid-third-century tale translated by Gjertson, *Miraculous Retribution*, 5–6, and the poem of Ruan Yu discussed toward the end of this chapter. And even for the tales we treat here, this is a matter of emphasis, rather than of absolute difference. Jacques Le Goff, in *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), notes that medieval Christians believed it was “advantageous to pray for souls in Purgatory, because, once they reach Paradise, they will pray for those who have helped them out” (319). See also Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), esp. 102–50. The mutual obligations of Christians and their dead are similar to those of the early medieval Chinese; however, for Christians, the fear that their dead will go off to Paradise and somehow forget them seems fairly rare. This is the anxiety our texts express over and over.

of what the dead might do for the living if the ties of mutual remembrance were maintained. On a more fundamental level, the family members stand to gain much if their ancestor's bones are allowed to rest near the imperial mausolea. But we cannot dispose of the question of commemoration by the living and the need for a corresponding "memory" on the part of the dead quite so easily. We shall return to this subject toward the end of this chapter.

Jie asked, "This year there is a great contagion. Why?" Shao replied, "Liu Kongcai 劉孔才 was sire of Mount Tai. Wishing to rebel, he assembled a horde without authorization. The Northern Thearch then learned that he had such intentions and by now has already destroyed him."⁴⁹

Jie asked, "In my previous dream when you cut off my hair, whose procession were you leading with the armed retinue?" Shao said, "It was the Prince of Jinan 濟南.⁵⁰ You committed a capital offence and I thought to protect you. Thus I argued for the punishment you received." "Then can the dead aid the living?" Jie continued. "From time to time, the dead think to aid the living, as I helped you. If the dead had no emotions and yet the living sacrificed to them to gain blessings, there would be no benefit."⁵¹ Jie asked, "When I dreamt of you, did I in fact meet with you?" Shao said, "When the living dream of the departed, the departed actually meet with them." Jie asked, "Are you further able to injure those against whom you had grudges when you were alive?" Shao said, "Ghosts value killing, but are not able to follow their whims."

With these paragraphs, we come to the heart of the matter. Su Shao, it becomes apparent, died in the plague years of 275–77.⁵² As many in those trying times must have suspected, the rampant spread of disease and death had chthonic origins. The Lord of Mount Tai, overseer of the underworld,

49. Translated and discussed in Nickerson, "Taoism, Death, and Bureaucracy," 580, n. 42.

50. This was Sima Sui 司馬遂, who died in 266 (Fang, *Jinshu*, 37.1101–2). Jinan was east of present-day Licheng xian 歷城 in Shandong.

51. Here I follow the Ming text emendation given in Li, *Taiping guangji*, 319.2529.

52. Sima Guang, in his *Zizhi tongjian*, 80.2541, first reports the outbreak of the epidemic 大疫 in Luoyang in 275 with the words "those who died numbered in the tens of thousands." Whether this was related to the epidemic that had spread through the Wu kingdom in the previous three years is not noted—and would not be, given the lack of contemporary knowledge of epidemiology. Fang Xuanling (*Jinshu*, 3.65), records that the epidemic broke out in the twelfth month, which would correspond roughly to January of 276 by the Western calendar, and that "over half" of the population of Luoyang perished. Shen Yue (441–513), in his *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 34.1009, reports the death toll at 100,000! Later in 276, the emperor himself became gravely ill and almost died. While none of these reports gives the duration of the plague, the fact that the emperor took the extraordinary step of silencing court music for three days in January of 277 because of "the numerous princes, lords, and great ministers who have died" (Fang, *Jinshu*, 20.630) seems to indicate that the epidemic was both long-lasting and widespread.

had “rebelled” against heaven and, thinking to increase his spectral hordes, had brought a plague upon the living. But now matters were about to be set right. The rebellious lord had been destroyed and a new lord appointed. While we are not explicitly told who this new lord of the underworld was to be, it is very likely to have been Sima Sui 司馬遂, the Prince of Jinan, whose ghostly procession Su attended. Sui was a member of the royal family of the Jin who died in 266, only a year after the founding of the dynasty.

Sima Sui seems not to have overly distinguished himself—his career is only briefly recorded in the histories—but he was appointed to the important task of overseeing the armies surrounding the Wei capital in 262 and so must have played a decisive role in ensuring the transfer of rule to the Sima family.⁵³ As a recently deceased member of the imperial family who had been enfeoffed in the region of Mount Tai, he must have seemed a natural choice to take over the lordship of the realms of the dead under this mountain. While the uncle beside whom Su Shao wished to be buried, Su Cheng, was a military man, his history of service during his lifetime is unknown. But the Su family native place is also in the region of Jinan, and Su Cheng most likely served Sima Sui in life. Thus it is fitting that Shao should find himself among the guards leading Sima Sui to his new office.

The man Sima Sui was to replace, the posthumously rebellious Liu Shao 劉劭 (byname Kongcai 劉孔才 (d. 240–49), is rather better known to history. As an official of the Wei dynasty, Liu contributed to the revision of dynastic law codes and left to posterity a book on judging men for office.⁵⁴ Liu Shao was not a general himself, but had advised the Wei dynasty on methods for quelling rebellions and maintaining the peace.⁵⁵ The irony that such a man might become a rebellious prince in the underworld would not have been lost on contemporaries. But apparently, the administration of the underworld, by this account, changed dynasty by dynasty, and so Liu’s underworld rule was found as wanting as that of the earthly dynasty he had served. Thus he rose in rebellion, with the result that plague assaulted the living citizens of the new dynasty.

53. Fang, *Jinshu*, 37.1101–2.

54. On Liu Shao’s legal contributions, see Hulsewé, *Remnants of Han Law*, 27. The book on human judgment, an important art of the period, is the *Renwu zhi* 人物志, translated by J. K. Shryock as *The Study of Human Abilities*, American Oriental Series, vol. 11 (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1937). Shryock translates Liu Shao’s biography on pp. 20–24.

55. Chen Shou, *Sanguo zhi* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962), 21.618–19.

Notice, however, that, no matter how compelling the logic presented here for Su Shao's burial near his royal patron, there remains the need to explain why the disposition of an earthly body would matter to the dead. Since the beginning of the Wei dynasty in the early third century, when the ruling Cao family had argued strenuously for—and themselves practiced—austere burials, the question of the deceased's needs for elaborate grave furnishings was continuously debated. The second ruler of the Wei, Cao Pi 曹丕 (r. 220–26), had, for instance, included in his “living will” words that find an echo in our account: “To bury means ‘to store away’; that is, one wishes people not to see [the corpse].⁵⁶ Bones have no knowledge of pain and the tomb is not a residence where the spirits rest.”⁵⁷ Cao Pi goes on to demand that his burial not include the mortuary trappings thought necessary for earlier rulers. For the Cao family and many others, entertainment of the spirits of the dead at family shrines would suffice. There was no need to worry overmuch about the fate of the body.

Su Shao follows the line of argument that, by his time, had become established imperial doctrine. The body is like an arm that has been cut off, and one feels no pain no matter what more is done with it. He really resides nowhere in particular and certainly does not need an elaborate grave. He simply wants to fulfill his lifetime aspirations. Su Shao further refuses the ad hoc seat of honor, food, and drink offered to him, presumably because his body has not yet been buried and this “seat” has not been set up in the official family shrine. Although he has “no emotions” concerning the difficult straits of his descendants, he does allow that sacrifices will cause the dead to bestow blessings. The dead can harm the living, as the plague brought on by Liu Shao's underworld rebellion certainly had, but they cannot freely execute all against whom they have private vendettas.

These responses are, for modern readers, full of paradox. The seeming inconsistencies are a certain sign of changing portrayals of the after-life. Rather than taking these as evidence of confused or unclear notions concerning the fate of the dead, we should see in them attempts to merge

56. Cao here cites a statement attributed to Guo Zigao 國子高, a Qi nobleman who was said to have requested an austere burial. See *Liji*, *SSJZS*, 1:1292a; and Legge, *Li Chi*, 1:155. The sentiment was also expressed by early Moists who advocated moderation in burial; see Jeffrey Riegel, “Do Not Serve the Dead as You Serve the Living: The *Lüshi chunqiu* Treatises on Moderation in Burial,” *Early China* 20 (1995): 306. The logic of this definition of “burial” depends on homophony.

57. Chen, *Sanguo zhi*, 2:81.

old certainties with new exigencies. I explore some of these attempts in the following sections of this chapter.

Finally, we do not know what became of the body of Su Shao. Jie simply provides us with a humorous and self-deprecatory exchange and then relates his futile attempt to detain the spirit. Su Shao, upon departure, asserts once again that he has an honored place in the bureaucracy of the underworld, presumably under Mount Tai—a fact that seems to contradict his earlier assertion that there is nowhere that he resides:

Jie descended from his carriage and Shao laughed loudly at his stature. “You are just like Zhao Linshu 趙麟舒!” Zhao Linshu, the brother of Shao’s wife, was very short.

Shao then wished to depart, but Jie detained him by locking the gate. Shao was only detained for a moment, but then departed. Jie saw that the gate was still locked. In parting, Shao said, “I am now made Gentleman of the Imperial Gates 修門朗.⁵⁸ Because of my duties, I will not be able to come again.” Jie grasped his hand. It was soft and weak. As he grasped it, Shao departed. From this time, the visions ceased.

This is, for us, a very unsatisfactory ending to the tale. We would like to know what effect Su Shao’s postmortem request for reburial had on the imperial officials who must have heard it. Did the tale succeed in prompting Su Shao’s reburial near the imperial burial grounds? We do not know. We are fortunate that the tale survived at all. As citations in later works intimate, it survived for two reasons. First, it restated, from the best of all possible authorities, a shade, that the dead really did not require lavish tomb residences. Second, it provided information on the postmortem status of several prominent figures. This second reason led Tao Hongjing to include large portions of the story in his annotations to the *Declarations of the Perfected*, providing a paper trail that we will follow further in chapter 3.

The reasons for which the tale was first constructed, on the other hand, faded away over time. These motives were all too firmly tied to the occasion of Su Shao’s death and his family’s need for a proper commemoration for their revered ancestor, occasions that would, after a change of dynasties, ensure continued blessings for the Su family.

58. Again, Li Fang’s *Taiping guangji*, 319.2529, and *Taiping yulan*, 883.4b, have the Tang-period title *Xiuwenlang*. I have corrected it based on Tao Hongjing’s citation of the title (*Zhen’gao*, HY 1010, 15.7a2). It seems that Su Shao is to join Yan Yuan 顏淵 and Bu Shang 卜商 in this post.

MEMORY AND COMMEMORATION

Even before Buddhism began to supply the Chinese with hellishly unpleasant choices to add to their list of postmortem destinations, we find frequent expressions of anxieties concerning whether or not the dead would “remember” the living. These existed quite apart from anxieties produced by the brutal fact of death itself. Such concerns were centered, rather, around the ancestral cult, which required for its maintenance both commemoration on the part of the living and memory on the part of the dead. The former proved, of course, easier to mandate. A massive Confucian literature on ritual observance provided precedents for the ways the living were to act toward the dead. Then, too, in a society where prestige emanated from the family, both living and dead, motives for commemoration, as we saw in the case of Cai Yong, were obvious to all. The second requirement—that the ancestors would “remember” the living and keep up their end of the bargain through reciprocating for the feedings they received—was unenforceable and, despite Confucius’ assurances as to the benefits of sacrificing to the ancestors “as if they were present,” anxiety-producing.

We see this anxiety expressed already in two of the earliest and most intriguing poems on ancestral ritual, the “Summons to the souls [*hun*]” and “Great Summons” of the *Chuci*.⁵⁹ These poems, probably dating to the third century BCE, were written as part of a ritual meant to call back the spiritual constituents of a king after his death. Whether the ritual aimed to revivify the dead king or, as is more likely, to keep the flighty components of his person from straying after his death, its primary purpose was to keep the dead from forsaking the living. While the two poems are similar and were both likely to be at least based on hymns used in ritual, I will here discuss only the “Summons to the *hun*.”⁶⁰

The *hun* of the dead is first warned of the dangers waiting in all directions. Even the underworld called “Murky Metropolis,” precursor to the underworlds that concern us here, proves dangerous: “[There] the Earth God lies, nine-coiled, with dreadful horns on his forehead, and a great humped back and bloody thumbs, pursuing men.”⁶¹ The poem then

59. For the “Summons to the Soul” (*Zhao hun* 招魂) and “Great Summons” (*Da zhao* 大招), see Hong Xingzu, *Chuci buzhu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 197–226.

60. For a translation of both “summons” poems, see David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South: An Anthology of Ancient Chinese Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1985), 219–38.

61. Hawkes, *Songs of the South*, 225.

turns from threat to invitation. Enticements awaiting the *hun* (in the tomb, we suppose) are given detailed description. Fine foods and lavish diversions are promised.

The Latter Han writer Wang Chong 王充 (27–91) thought that the *hun*-summoning ritual was a supreme act of filiality, a final desperate measure to call a dead parent back to life.⁶² A man of firm opinions, he also held that Confucians uniformly denied any sort of postmortem existence and provided empirical evidence in support of this assertion.⁶³ Nonetheless, he attests to the practices of the many during his day who sought to provide for their dead in the tomb:

Thus those who follow the customs of the day . . . seeing that the dead appear [in visions] from their tombs before those about to die . . . say that death is like life. They commiserate with the dead who must be buried alone, their *hun* lonely and without companionship, their graves shut up, lacking supplies of grain and goods. Thus they make images to attend to the corpses' coffin and bury a great supply of food to delight the essential *hun*.⁶⁴

While we might suspect the contemporary currency of Wang's own views, we have no cause to doubt his assertion that such ritual acts as *hun*-summoning and grave provision arose from concern over the fate of the dead. Such loving concern encompassed as well the desire that the dead might retain their ties to the family and even provide aid from whatever new station they might enjoy in the afterlife. Under such conditions, in Lothar von Falkenhausen's memorable wording, tombs "became like dollhouses or *laternae magicae* for the dead spirits to play with—and never leave."⁶⁵

We noticed that the story of Su Shao expresses, at least in part, these old concerns regarding the efficacy of ancestral commemoration. Su Shao directly confronts the anxiety of his descendants that the dead might not remember. "From time to time, the dead think to aid the living, as I helped you," the living descendant Jie is reassured, for "if the dead had no emotions and yet the living sacrificed to them to gain blessings, there would be no benefit." But, at the same time, Jie is told that the dead have "no

62. Wang Chong, *Lunheng jiaoshi*, ed. Huang Hui (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 15.671; Alfred Forke, *Lun-heng*, 2 vols. (New York: Paragon Book Gallery, 1962), 2:332–33.

63. See Chou Chao-ming, "Death, Funerals, and Sacrifices in Wang Ch'ung's Philosophy," *Tamkang Review* 17, no. 2 (1986): 178–81.

64. Wang, *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 23.961; Forke, *Lun-heng*, 2:369.

65. Lothar von Falkenhausen, "Sources of Taoism: Reflections on Archaeological Indicators of Religious Chance in Eastern Zhou China," *Taoist Resources* 5, no. 2 (1994): 7.

emotions,” exist nowhere in particular, and certainly have no need of the grave mounds and sumptuous burials that those of former ages so freely provided. This second, seemingly contradictory, strand of Su Shao’s report from beyond the grave might only be understood in light of the change in sumptuary regulations promulgated in the late second and early third centuries.

MODERATION IN BURIAL

By at least the third century BCE, Mohists in the state of Qin had begun to propose more modest burials, denying the need for grave mounds, elaborate coffins, and sumptuous grave goods.⁶⁶ It is within this context that we find the earliest example of a “return-from-death” narrative comparable to Su Shao’s. In this instance, the returnee was not a ghost, but a resurrected man. An official document excavated from a tomb at Fangmatan, Gansu province, describes the fate of a man named Dan who, having committed murder, killed himself but was sent back to the world of the living when his patron communicated to the Scribe of the Overseer of Destinies that his death had been untimely. As Donald Harper points out, this document provides very early evidence of the belief in an underworld administration staffed by those who had held office in life: the Scribe who grants Dan’s release turns out to be the shade of a man who had been a ruler in the fifth century BCE.⁶⁷

The story of Dan’s resurrection parallels Su Shao’s report from beyond the grave in yet another way. Dan, upon his return, provides information on the proper conduct of sacrifices for the dead. Harper’s translation follows:

Dan says: “The dead do not want many clothes. People in the market think that white woolly-grass is fortunate; when ghosts receive [offerings] in something else, they still think it is fortunate.” Dan says: “Let those who offer sacrifices at tombs not dare to spit. If they spit, the ghosts depart and flee in fright. After the sacrificial food has been collected, empty [the vessels]. In this way . . . eat . . .” Dan says: “Those who offer sacrifices must sweep and purify. Do not wash the place of the sacrifice with. . . . Do not pour the boiled dish over the sacrificial food, for the ghosts will not eat it.”⁶⁸

66. See Riegel, “Do Not Serve the Dead.”

67. Harper, “Resurrection,” 14–16.

68. *Ibid.*, 14.

Whatever the specific targets of all these recommendations may have been, the first two of them, at least, concern austerity in burial. As Harper notes, “a man who has been with them is quoted as saying that the dead themselves do not care for luxuries.”⁶⁹

In similar fashion, Su Shao confirms for his living descendants what had become an elite trend in mortuary custom. In 205 CE, the founder of the Wei dynasty, Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220), sent down an edict prohibiting lavish burials.⁷⁰ This austere measure had a distinct impact on the burial practice of succeeding Wei and Jin emperors, as well as those of many of the elite, as confirmed both by archeology and by the number of “last wills” recorded for those who chose modest burials.⁷¹ Su Shao, as we noticed, echoes in his report from beyond the grave the “living will” of Cao Cao’s heir, Cao Pi, that bones feel no pain and the grave is not the place where spirits reside. Likewise, Su’s claim that “there is nowhere I now reside” parallels Cao Pi’s assertion that “if the *hun* has numinousness, there is nowhere it cannot go.”

Cao Pi composed his living will with full knowledge of the fate of the Han emperors whose sumptuous burials had, in his view, ensured that their tombs would be robbed and their remains desecrated. If buried riches entice the greedy, they will “burn [open] precious caskets and snatch [from the burial shrouds] golden threads so that the body and bones are both destroyed.” He then asserts “if they were to [thus] destroy your body, would you not feel redoubled pain?” How could this be possible if, as he also argues, the dead bones feel no pain? The apparent contradiction dissolves when we notice the word “redoubled.” In his living will, Cao Pi assumes an identity between the dead and the surviving descendants. While he repeats the polite ancient formula “if the dead have sentience,” he believes the affirmative response should govern ritual action. Death causes pain. The severance of relations between the dead and the living would cause “redoubled pain.” What this meant for Cao Pi in terms of his imagined relations with his own descendants is made clear in the threat with which he ends his living will:

If anyone violates my present decree, wantonly changing it or adding adornments, I will become an executed corpse below the earth. One who suffered death will be murdered again; one who has died will die again! For

69. *Ibid.*, 23.

70. See Zhang Jiefu, *Zhongguo sangzang shi* (Taipei: Wenjin, 1995), 126–27; and, for the rise of this trend during the Latter Han, see Poo Mu-chou, *Muzang yu shengsi—Zhongguo gudaizongjiao zhi xingsi* (Taipei: Lianjing, 1993), 254–68.

71. Zhang Jiefu (*Zhongguo sangzang shi*, 119–55) provides numerous examples.

subjects and sons to thus destroy their lord and father is neither loyal nor filial. If the dead have sentience, I will not bring you good fortune.⁷²

The vehemence of these words demonstrates clearly enough that the wish for “meager burial” could cause vivid anxiety on the part of living descendants. Against such emotional objections, Cao argues that to go against the wishes of an aged parent might be ritually dangerous, but failure to honor their requests might result in even greater harm to the interests of the family in the long run if the aggrieved dead should fail to provide blessings for their descendants. Cao Pi, with his threat of post-mortem revenge, counters what must have been a common desire to violate the living will in the interests of filially serving the interests of the dead—and thus the family. Thus we see that the prevalence of “living wills” was not a result of any new disbelief in the afterlife.⁷³ Instead, the practice of “moderation in burial” was, as its proponents and a few modern scholars have averred, a matter of both prudence and economy.

In the case of Su Shao’s appearance to his son Jie, we see the inverse of this concern. The story expresses the desire that, even given new ideas concerning the residence and preferences of the dead—ideas that were advanced in support of restricting the ancient, fulsome burial practices—the dead Su Shao might continue to serve the interests of his descendants through the construction of a tomb on Mount Mang. So, while the story reiterates all of the pronouncements supporting modest burials, at the same time it argues for the continuation of honored, if not lavish, burial. And the reason it gives is the old one: the dead might aid the living.

Such concerns provide a necessary, but I believe insufficient, motive for Su Shao’s seemingly contradictory report on the potentialities of the dead. Recall that Su Shao contradicts himself in saying that the dead have no emotions, yet asserting that his emotions led him to save Jie from further punishment. He also contradicts himself in saying that the dead have no control over the victims upon whom they spread disease and death, and yet the fulfillment of his own living will—that he be buried at Mount Mang—might aid his descendants. To comprehend the impulses behind

72. Chen, *Sanguo zhi*, 2:82. Cited in Zhu Dawei et al., *Wei Jin Nanbei chao shehui shenghuo shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998), 294.

73. In his own “living will,” Huangfu Mi (215–282) made the same sort of threat to ensure that his descendants would follow his wish for an austere burial, albeit one that would ensure that his corpse not be disturbed. For a discussion, see Keith Knapp, “Heaven and Death According to Huangfu Mi, a Third-Century Confucian,” *Early Medieval China* 6 (2000): 15–24.

these contradictions, we need to explore yet another contemporary view regarding the power of the dead to affect the living.

O SOUL, DO NOT COME BACK!

It was not just the arrival of Buddhism, with its unwelcome news on the fates of the dead, that disrupted the old symmetries of ancestral sacrifice and ancestral blessing, commemoration and memory. Dislocation attendant on warfare, which became common in the years leading up to the fall of the Han dynasty, also separated families from their dead. The official and poet Ruan Yu 阮瑀 (d. 212) gave voice to one particular aspect of the anxiety this could cause in his poem on an old topic, “Seven Complaints.” At first he expresses feelings we might all share when confronting death, but his poem soon moves into unfamiliar territory:

Youthful years are hard to retrieve;
 Wealth and honor will not come twice.
 Good times pass in a trice,
 Then flesh and frame became ashes and dust.
 Dark are the chambers of the Nine Springs,
 Remote the towers of Endless Night.
 My body gone, my energies bound,
 My essential *hun* has no way to return.
 When fine foods are arrayed, I am not served;
 Sweet ales fill only banquet flagons and cups.
 I come forth from my funeral vault to gaze on my old home—
 But observe only mugwort and broom.⁷⁴

Ruan quite literally imagines himself into the grave, a prisoner in the “endless night” of the subterranean “Nine Springs,” who, just when he expects the ritual feeding of the ancestral sacrifice, finds that his family is gone. Now aliens, conquerors of his homeland, we suppose, feast themselves with the fine foods and sweet ale that would otherwise be his. His “old home” –how the term resonates in the Chinese poetic tradition!—has become overgrown with rank weeds. We can feel, across the centuries, sympathy for the abandoned soul, but reading the poem in the context of its times, we find in it other emotions not quite so wistful and bitter-sweet. Anxiety, perhaps even panic, would have been aroused among the

74. Ruan Yu's poem is in Ding Fubao, ed., *Quan Han Sanguo Jin Nanbeichao shi* (Taipei: Yiwen, 1960), “Quan Sanguo shi,” 3.10a.

contemporary auditors of this poem with the penultimate line—"I come forth from my funeral vault to gaze on my old home."

In this time of dislocation, when even such patriots as Wang Can 王粲 (177–217) could write, "The capital is in unspeakable chaos. . . . I will leave behind the Middle Kingdom and dwell among the tribes of the Qing," Ruan Yu intuitively anticipates the possible response of the extended family, the honored dead, to such abandonment.⁷⁵ The dead, he says, might emerge from their graves to find that they are alone. And what will they do then?

We know quite well, from Su Shao's tale as well as from texts that we examine more closely in the following chapters, what people of that time expected that the unfed dead might do. Starving, enraged, the dead would join the ranks of subterranean demon hordes, spread disease, and cause havoc among the living. Most terrifyingly, they would eventually come to voice their bitterness to the subterranean bureaucracy, through what were known as "plaints from the grave," or "underworld lawsuits" as I will call them, so that the family members who had abandoned them might be individually called to account.

In a series of fascinating and influential articles that inform our enquiries at several points, Anna Seidel has analyzed funerary texts inscribed on jars and found in comparatively poorly furnished tombs. In her words,

The function of the funerary texts is that of a passport or letter of introduction by which a plenipotentiary of the highest celestial deity, the "Envoy of the Celestial Thearch," recommends the deceased to the netherworld authorities, thus assuring the newly arrived shade of a satisfactory integration into the subterranean society. The real motive behind these *documents de passage* concerns, of course, the living members of his family. . . . With the loss of the body, all is lost, and the living rightly fear the boundless resentment and wrath of the deprived shade. He is placated with funerary goods, . . . he is given "sacred pharmaka" to delay the decomposition of his cadaver . . . and, above all, he is sternly ordered, with all kinds of commands, invocations, and threats, to go away and never come back.⁷⁶

Seidel has shown that one motive for such documents was to relieve the deceased, and their living descendants, of any culpability that might arise

75. Citing Wang Can's own "Qi ai shi 七哀詩 #1"; see Ding, *Quan Han Sanguo*, "Quan Sanguo shi," 3.5a.

76. Anna K. Seidel, "Post-Mortem Immortality; or, the Taoist Resurrection of the Body," in *GILGUL: Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 228; see also her "Traces of Han Religion in Funerary Texts Found in Tombs," in *Dōkyō to shūkyō bunka* [volume in honour of Professor Akitsuki Kan'ei] (Tokyo: Hirakawa, 1987), 21–57.

from infringing the taboo against digging into the soil. Might those who constructed these graves themselves have been refugees and thus digging in unfamiliar terrain? There is not enough evidence to present even a hypothesis. Seidel shows, however, that yet another concern pervades these sometimes cruel documents. The living fear implication in any misdeeds the dead might have committed in life that will now come out before the underworld tribunals. In one case, the deceased clearly died young, and the text requests celestial officials to recheck the records to ensure that a mistake has not been made, as in the case of Dan. In others, the specific cause of the survivors' nervousness remains unspecified. We cannot even tell, from these mortuary documents, whether or not those who placed these texts in the tomb expected their dead to be available for sacrifice.

Whatever the ultimate reason for this particular approach to the dead, the repeated appeal of these texts to the bureaucracy of the underworld to release the living from any culpability emanating from the grave gives another voice to the anxieties expressed in Ruan Yu's poem. Either the dead might work out their resentments, or the imbalances they left behind might be worked out for them by the otherworld tribunals. In either case, for many in this period, the dead came to be seen not as a source of blessing, but as a potential source of disaster. The threat from the grave we noticed in the story of Su Shao was that rebellious dead might spread disease among the living. Liu Shao, apparently still working on behalf of his toppled dynasty, had sought to enlarge his ghostly hordes through slaughtering the living. To be sure, this threat was of wider concern and did not merely involve the Su family. This is why, while Su Shao might have fallen to the demon-induced plague, he yet proclaims his loyalty to the Sima family and the Jin dynasty. The presence of this disjunctive element in our story requires a closer look at one final paradox found in Su Shao's message.

SU SHAO REDUX

The contradictory messages that Su Shao was held to have brought back with him from beyond the grave mark this text as an "externalist" statement, to return to Company's terminology. Analysis of the sorts of arguments it sets forth to distinguish its claims have led us to consider a variety of approaches to the dead that have been kept distinct in modern scholarship. Yet, in this story, which, judging by Tao Hongjing's response to it, commanded the credulity of those who wanted to know more about the structure and staffing of the underworld, these seemingly di-

verse concerns are merged into one representation. Su reports that the dead do not return to their bodies in the grave, and thus have no need of costly and extravagant burials. These findings accord with the Jin rulers' preference for modest burials and make Su a good candidate for burial at Mang Shan. Su then reports that the dead do, on occasion, have emotions toward their descendants and reward ancestral sacrifice just as he saved Jie's life. With this assurance, he answers the old concern over whether or not the dead think of the living at all. In the context of the tale, he thus provides his doubtful older sons with a motive for their remembrance.

Finally, Su reports that the grave is unimportant to him, since there is no permanent place where he resides, but he goes on to tell of his attendance on the new Lord of Mount Tai. He reveals the underworld etiology of the plague that has recently affected the living and announces that the appointment of a Sima Lord of Mount Tai has ended the threat. Through his revelation that the world of the dead can affect the living in this way, however, Su Shao delivers yet another ambiguous message.

One of the implicit themes of this tale is that of loyalty—loyalty within the family of the living to the dead and of the dead to the living, but also loyalty to the kingdom. Commemoration and memory, properly considered, are but functions of loyalty, the deeper commitment. Su Shao's "letter" mentions the history of Wu Qi, a story that centers on issues of loyalty and the results of its betrayal. We may view Liu Shao's underworld rebellion as arising out of his loyalty to the displaced Wei dynasty. Given the date of Su Shao's death, some ten years after the founding of the Jin, it is likely that he served the Wei in some capacity as well, but he announces loyalty to the Jin. If, Su Shao implies, his loyalty to the Sima house finds reward, as Wu Qi's loyalty did not, he might continue to faithfully serve through his new position in the underworld, as did Liu Shao. The implied alternative need not be made explicit. The Sima rulers would have understood.

Finally, we need to emphasize that this story, while recorded by Tao Hongjing in his notes to the *Declarations*, is not the product of any Daoist or Buddhist doctrine. The only references to established religion found here are to Buddhism—and these are oblique. Rather, the concerns expressed all emanate from the ancestral cult that had come to be threatened by extravagance, dislocation, and dynastic change. The Su Shao tale thus provides us with a template against which to map the changes to come.