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# Analysis and Enlightenment of Jin Prince Shensheng 申生's Choices

## 摘要

晉國太子申生，在僖公四年，自殺於新城曲沃。在歷史事件當中，有不少學者給出可以逃脫的時機，比如在攻打耿國後，吳氏曾祺認為，「申生此時猶有可去之義」<sup>1</sup>，戰勝東山臯落氏後，《會箋》云：「戰而捷，使諸大夫致成功於君父，而已逃之，則庶乎其可也。」<sup>2</sup>以及在逃回曲沃後，有學者認為「晉獻公誤信讒言欲殺申生本已屬於不義之舉，申生应当在父亲面前申辯或是立即逃亡他國避禍」<sup>3</sup>等。申生面對困境，沒能一步步地突破，反而是不斷錯失許多可以逃脫的時機，最終造成不可挽回的結果，令人惋惜。對於申生的抉擇，筆者首先從出逃抉擇的角度出發，將申生在三次歷史事件中的抉擇劃分為三個時機：先機，成熟時機和被動時機。接著，筆者分別論述在這三個時機中，申生並沒有選擇出逃的原因。先機的錯失在於客觀原因以及他心中對建設國家的一份期待；成熟時機的錯失，在於他聽取了大臣里克和羊舌大夫的建議，固化了他對忠孝的認知，認為對父親的命令盡心盡力地去完成，這才真正的盡忠盡孝；被動時機的錯失在於他沒有打破對孝道固有的認知，真正為父親的長遠利益去考慮。而從以上內容的分析，筆者得出了三條啟示：第一，事禁於未發。在事情還未向更壞的方向發展時，就應當及時發現和處理；第二，兼聽則明，觀機而變。面對大臣的建議，要取其折中，面對時勢的變化，要應時而變，而不能固守一端；第三，看清自身，主動突破。對於自身的問題，要看得清楚，並主動地去突破，包括自己固有的認知等。

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<sup>1</sup> 韓席籌：《左傳分國集注》（江蘇：江蘇人民出版社，1963年），頁247。

<sup>2</sup> 〔日〕竹添光鴻：《左氏會箋》（成都：巴蜀書社，2008年），頁408。

<sup>3</sup> 樊智寧：〈孝道中的經與權：從“晉侯殺其世子申生”談起〉，《太原理工大學學報》，2019年第4期，頁55。

## 1. Introduction

The Prince of Jin, Shensheng, committed suicide in his capital, Quwo 曲沃, in the fourth year of Duke Xi. Regarding Shensheng's choice, later generations have mixed praise and criticism for him. Some people sympathize with his commendable behaviors, and believe that he faced various pressures from the outside world silently, without blaming or complaining. During the Spring and Autumn Period, it was not uncommon for fathers and sons to turn against each other and the ruler and his ministers to kill each other. His "respectful and submissive behavior towards his father 敬顺事上" was obviously a special case.<sup>4</sup> Some people believe that he died without fear, perfecting the value of life through moral beauty.<sup>5</sup> However, in the historical events, many scholars have proposed some opportunities for Shensheng to escape. For example, after he attack on Geng and other kingdoms, Wu Zengqi 吳氏曾祺 believed that "Shensheng can choose to leave at this time."<sup>6</sup> After defeating the Gaoluo clan of Dongshan 東山皋落氏, Weixi said, "Isn't it okay that Shensheng asked the ministers to take credit to Duke Xian 獻公 after winning the battle, and he choosed to flee?"<sup>7</sup> And after fleeing back to Quwo, some scholars believe that "Shensheng should defend himself in front of his father or flee other countries immediately for avoid persecution<sup>8</sup>" and so on. Facing the predicament, Shensheng failed to break through step by step. Instead, he kept missing many opportunities to escape, which eventually resulted in irreversible results, which is regrettable. For his choice, the author will elaborate and reflect on it. Finally, we get inspiration from it, which has reference significance for guiding personal behavior to prevent repeating the mistakes of history.

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<sup>4</sup> Shang Yongliang 尚永亮, 'Qinzhū shìyèxià de Lǐjī zhī luàn jīqí wénhuà yìyì--Yì Shēnshèng zhī sǐ, Chōngér chūwáng wéi zhōngxīn' 棄逐視野下的驪姬之亂及其文化意義——以申生之死、重耳出亡為中心, *Jiānghàn lúntán* 江漢論壇, 7(2013), 34-44(p.38).

<sup>5</sup> Wang Yanyan 王燕燕, 'Zuozhuan, Guoyu, Shiji daode meixue--Yì Shēnshèng zhī sǐ wéi hexīn' 《左傳》、《國語》、《史記》道德美學——以「申生之死」為核心, *Wénxué* 問學, 20(2016), 69-98(p.93).

<sup>6</sup> Han Xichou 韓席籌, *Zuozhuan fenguo jizhu* 左傳分國集注 (Jiangsu: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1963), p.247.

<sup>7</sup> Zhutian Guanghong 竹添光鴻, *Zuoshi huijian* 左氏會箋 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2008), p.408.

<sup>8</sup> Fan Zhining 樊智宁, 'Xiaodao zhong de jing yu quan: cong Jinhou sha qi shizi Shensheng tanqi' 孝道中的经与权: 从“晋侯杀其世子申生”谈起, *Taiyuan Ligong Daxue xuebao* 太原理工大学学报, 4(2019), 54-61(p.55).

## 2. Analysis of Jin Prince Shensheng's Choices

### 2.1. Analysis of the timing of choices

Combining the contents of *Zuozhuan* 左傳 and *Guoyu* 國語, the author simply sorts out the situation of Prince Shensheng in the four periods and the choices he made. It can be seen from this that Shensheng's situation has become increasingly difficult step by step. When he was at the first opportunity to escape, the external environment was not bad for him at this time. Although Shensheng had heard of his father was dissatisfied with him, he did not choose to escape; But after a gap of a year, his father's behavior intensified, which made him alert. Before the expedition, he never said a word, because of the dilemma in his heart, he finally chose to flight with Gaoluo clan of Dongshan. And this is an important opportunity to flee, because most of the courtiers saw the facts clearly, especially Hutu 狐突 admonished him twice. Although Shensheng won the battle later, he still did not choose to flee, which is a pity. After escaping back to Quwo, he was in a very passive situation because he had already been convicted of monarchy. In the end, after weighing the pros and cons, Shensheng chose to commit suicide to express his sincerity to his father and country. During the whole incident, Shensheng's attitude towards his father was always "respectful and submissive" and did not resist. After his death, he was remembered by the people, and the people built the "Temple in the west gate of the city"<sup>9</sup>, and he was also known as "Gong Shizi 恭世子"<sup>10</sup>. Looking back at the whole process, Shensheng missed the opportunity to escape step by step, which eventually led to a tragedy, which is regrettable.

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<sup>9</sup> Yang Qiumei 杨秋梅, 'Zhongxiao Ji nanquan shengsi liang mangran Jin gongshizi beiming bingxu pingshu' 忠孝既难全生死两茫然《晋恭世子碑铭并序》述评, *Shanxi dangan* 山西档案, 2(2012), 33-36(p.35).

<sup>10</sup> Zheng xuan 鄭玄, Kong Yingda 孔穎達 and Gao tonglin 郅同鄰, *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義(Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe,2021), p.162.

| Period                               | Shensheng's situation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Shensheng's choices                                                                                                                        | Time to escape            |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Stationed in Quwo                    | Not yet aware of the anomalies, away from the palace                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Obey his father's orders                                                                                                                   | /                         |
| Attack on Geng and other kingdoms    | As a prince, he was appointed as a general. Hearing about his father having a prejudice against him                                                                                                                                                        | Obey his father's orders and take rumors with a grain of salt                                                                              | The first opportunity     |
| Defeating the Gaolu clan of Dongshan | Father's behavior is even more unusual. Gradually accept the fact that his father don't like him;<br>Choose to flee: protect himself and be unfaithful and unfilial;<br>Choose to go into battle: fall into a trap, die in battle, and be loyal and filial | Listen to the advice of Minister Yangshe 羊舌大夫 and go to battle for obey his loyal and filial heart                                         | The important opportunity |
| Committed suicide in Quwo            | Father is going to kill him;<br>Frightened at first, then calm;<br>Choose to justify: save one's own life but make his father unhappy in his later years; choose to flee: bear the notoriety of killing lords                                              | Taking care of his father and country, he chose to commit suicide in order to adhere to loyalty and filial piety and express his sincerity | The passive opportunity   |

## 2.2. Analysis of the reasons of choices

### 2.2.1. The first opportunity

Shensheng missed the opportunity to escape for the first time. Judging from the objective reasons, this is understandable. After all, Shensheng is far away from the capital, and the rumors he heard are also dubious. However, the rumor mentioned that Shensheng should follow the behavior of Taibo 太伯 and flee to give way. Judging from Shensheng's respectful and submissive attitude towards his father, he should

have considered it, and his lack of choice is due to the carefulness of his character<sup>11</sup>. But from a year later when he was appointed to fight against the Gaoluo clan of Dongshan, he faced Minister Like 里克 frankly and said, "Am I going to be abolished as the prince?" It can be seen that Shensheng did not choose to flee before, but also because he wanted to realize his ambition to build the country. That's why Han Xichou 韓席筹 thought: "This sentence records that Shensheng still has the ideal of serving the country at this time, and he can't let go of his ideal and flee the country."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, when he faced his father's intensified behavior, he began to doubt himself and sighed like this. A prince who was about to show his skills in national construction was beaten in the head.

### 2.2.2. The important opportunity

When Shensheng was in despair, Minister Like appeared, and the prince revealed his concerns to him. Like said something, which had a certain influence on Shensheng's choice. Like knew that Duke Xian was dissatisfied with Shensheng, but he did not say it outright, but he comforted and encouraged Shensheng like this: "Duke Xian handed over the city of Quwo to you, and now he has appointed you as a general to go on an expedition. Respectfully and earnestly to complete the tasks assigned by your father, how can you worry about whether you will be abolished?"<sup>13</sup> This sentence is intended to appease Shensheng's uneasy emotions. "As a son of man, you should be afraid of not being able to fulfill your filial piety, rather than not being made a prince. You should keep your duty well, don't blame anyone, and you can avoid these catastrophe."<sup>14</sup> This sentence meant to encourage Shensheng to do his duty as a courtier. Shensheng really listened to this sentence, so even if four ministers in succession advised him to flee, he did not make a final decision, but the few words of Minister Yangshe made him decide to fight instead of determination to escape. The Minister Yangshe said, "No, it is unfilial to disobey your father's orders, and it is disloyal to flee instead of fight. Although we know that the king has been unsatisfied with you, you still should not take the disloyal or unfilial behaviors. If you choose to

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<sup>11</sup> Shanghai shifan daxue guji zhenglizu, *Guoyu* 國語(Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), p. 268.

<sup>12</sup> Han Xichou, *Zuozhuan fenguo jizhu*, p.371.

<sup>13</sup> Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注(Taipei: Hongye wenhua shiye youxiangongsi, 2018), p.272. The sentence is translated by myself. The original text is: '告之以臨民，教之以軍旅，不共是懼，何故廢乎。'

<sup>14</sup> Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu*, p.272. The sentence is translated by myself. The original text is: '且子懼不孝，無懼弗得立，修己而不責人，則免于難。'

flee, I think you would rather die in battle.<sup>15</sup>" This sentence echoes Like's suggestion at the end, both of which are intended to persuade Shensheng to do his duty well. In the face of Hutu's remonstrance again, neither protecting himself nor retreating from the army could impress Shensheng. From Shensheng's choice, we can see that his understanding of loyalty and filial piety is not about preserving his own life. Disobeying the father's order, abandoning the task and fleeing is not an act of loyalty and filial piety, but it is the act of loyalty and filial piety to fulfill the father's orders with all one's heart and soul. Even if his father has a prejudice against him, he chooses to trust and tolerate his father, and even if he sacrifices his life, he must do his part well. Shensheng's courage are indeed moving. Four years after his victory over the Gaoluo clan of Dongshan, he chose to keep his duty instead of fleeing, which is the implementation of "doing your duty well and not blaming others 修己而不責人", and also hoped that he could "avoid catastrophe 免於難". However, Shensheng did not choose to leave, but put himself in the vortex of disaster, how can he avoid disaster?

### 2.2.3. The passive opportunity

At this time, Shen Sheng faced a more difficult choice. First of all, he was framed by Liji 驪姬. When Duke Xian was furious, he chose to flee back to Quwo City first, because he knew that if he did not flee first, it was very likely that he was killed by his father by mistake, making his father fall into an unkind and injustice situation. When Shensheng was in Quwo City, his inner torment was self-evident, but judging from his two responses, compared to the previous inner dilemma and anxiety, he felt more open-hearted at this time. The prince's two paragraphs later showed his consideration for his choice. In the first paragraph about persuading him to defend, Shensheng considered that if Duke Xian lost Liji, he would not be happy in his later years. If the father is not happy, how can the son justify and hurt the father's heart? The second paragraph is about persuading him to flee, which is even more difficult to do at this time compared to the previous expedition, because now he has the notoriety of killing the king. If he fled at this time, which country would dare to accept him easily, and accepting him would be against Duke Xian, and Shensheng would never dare to do so. It is very difficult to advance or retreat. It seems that only by sacrificing his own life can not only quell the "Prince Controversy", the root cause of the turmoil, but also

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<sup>15</sup> Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu*, p.272. The sentence is translated by myself. The original text is: '不可，违命不孝，弃事不忠，虽知其寒，恶不可取，子其死之.'

show his father that he is loyal and die without regrets. Shensheng's choice lies in his inherent cognition of filial piety, which cannot be broken until the end. He failed to see whether his sympathy for his father was really beneficial to his father and the country; He used his life to express his sincerity, just out of feelings, not really to help his father see the facts clearly, so that this difficult country can return to stability as soon as possible.

### **3. Enlightenment of Jin Prince Shensheng's Choices**

#### **3.1. Prevention of evil before it was manifested 事禁於未發**

*Book of Rites* 禮記 says: "The way of the royal school is to prevent the evil produced when the wicked ideas are not emerged. 大學之法，禁于未發之謂豫<sup>16</sup>" There are objective reasons for Shen Sheng's missed first opportunity, but from Shensheng's personal point of view, it is that he failed to detect the abnormality in time and take timely measures. When he heard these words about his father's dissatisfaction with him, he was not able to find out the source at the first time, and then asked the question again to understand the actual situation. Even when the facts are still not clear enough, he should report and confirm to his father as soon as possible, clarify his ambition and loyalty, and reduce some unnecessary quarrels. And be able to take necessary measures before the hidden danger occurs. Even when the truth is as rumored, it is necessary to choose to flee to avoid the country falling into unnecessary disputes. For us personally, when we perceive that there is a situation in the group that affects the unity of the team, we must first find the source and find out. We must give timely warnings to those who spread rumors or even trick people behind their backs. In the face of superiors, we must report more, confirm more, and reduce some unnecessary misunderstandings.

#### **3.2. Listen to everyone's opinions, observe the timing and change in time 兼聽則明，觀機而變**

Shensheng missed an important opportunity because he listened to the Minister Yangshe, but he didn't seem to really listen to the fact that most of the ministers mentioned that his father had bad intentions against him and the fact that the country was about to fall into chaos. At this time, even if he had to make a choice between the

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<sup>16</sup> Luo Zhiye trans, *Liji yingyi* 禮記英譯 (On propriety: social and individual behaviour), (Nanjing: Dongnandaxuechubanshe, 2017), p.186.

two, Shensheng did not see the inevitable trend of the future when he chose to fight. As the prince, he must still be the target of the traitor. He made such a choice, in addition to proving his loyalty, but putting himself in an even more persecuted situation. However, even after Shensheng returned triumphantly, he still stuck to one side's point of view, chose to trust his father, and chose to do his best. Although it has its positive meaning, it should not be to sit still, but to prepare or retire. And the difficult situation in the future is the result of sticking to one end<sup>17</sup>. Preserving one's own life should be a way to practice filial piety under the special circumstances of Shensheng's situation, and it should be expedient<sup>18</sup>. For us personally, in the face of different suggestions from many parties, we must be able to take a compromise, rather than listening to one party favorably. Even if we can only take one party, the other party's suggestion should be taken to heart and always paid attention to. In the face of special circumstances, when sticking to the form of morality may result in life-threatening results, our behavior should change in time.

### **3.3. See your own problems clearly and take the initiative to break through 看清自身，主動突破**

When Shensheng was in a passive situation, he failed to see clearly that his own filial piety was not considering the overall situation, but only a feeling for his father; he only focused on the manifestation of filial piety rather than its connotation. Shensheng should focus on his father's longer-term interests. Therefore, "The principle of sons and ministers serving their fathers and rulers. Not only can they escape when their fathers and rulers abuse them, but in order to save their fathers and rulers' mistakes, they should bravely stand up, state the truth, and make remarks and defenses."<sup>19</sup> This is a problem that Shensheng should take the initiative to break through, so as to prevent his father from making mistakes again and again and making big mistakes. In choosing to commit suicide, he did not see whether doing so would affect his father's reputation. And his choice to run away will only affect his reputation, but it will not give his father the notoriety of killing his son. So *The Works of Mencius* 孟子 says, "But the man of great filial piety, to the end of his life, has his desire towards his

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<sup>17</sup> Han Xichou, *Zuozhuan fenguo jizhu*, p.249.

<sup>18</sup> Fan Zhining, 'Xiaodao zhong de jing yu quan: cong Jinhou sha qi shizi Shensheng tanqi', p.55.

<sup>19</sup> Shang Yongliang, 'Qinzhu shiyexia de Liji zhi luan jiqi wenhua yiyi--Yi Shensheng zhi si, *Chonger chuwang wei zhongxin*' p.38.

parents. 大孝終身慕父母<sup>20</sup> When Shen Sheng is about to die, he should consider whether he can carry forward the virtues of his parents. For ourselves, we need to see clearly where our own problems lie and take the initiative to break through them. And when you are attached to a certain emotion of your own, it is difficult to do things that can really help and benefit the other party. As a son of man, we have to think about whether our actions can carry forward the moral character of our parents, make them famous, and make them continue to improve.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper firstly divides Shensheng's choices in three historical events into three opportunities from the perspective of fleeing choice, the first opportunity, the important opportunity and the passive opportunity. Then, the author discusses the reasons why Shensheng did not choose to flee when faced these three opportunities. Shensheng's missed first opportunity has his objective reasons, and it also lies in his expectation of building the country. His missed the important opportunity is because he listened to the advice of Minister Like and Yangshe, and solidified his cognition of loyalty and filial piety. He believes that to do his best to fulfill his father's orders is true loyalty and filial piety. He missed the passive opportunity because he did not break his inherent cognition of filial piety, and did not really consider the long-term interests of his father. From the analysis of the above content, the author draws three revelations: First, Prevention of evil before it was manifested. Before things develop in a worse direction, we should be discovered in time and solved from the source; Second, Listen to everyone's opinions, observe the timing and change in time. In the face of the minister's suggestion, it is necessary to take a compromise, and in the face of changes in the current situation, we must change according to the times, and not stick to one side; Third, See your own problems clearly and take the initiative to break through. For your own problems, you must see clearly and take the initiative to break through, including your own inherent cognition.

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<sup>20</sup> James Legge trans, *The Works of Mencius* 孟子 (Taipei: Nantianshujuyouxiangongsi, 2016), p.345.

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