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The People-oriented Spirit and View of Cause and Effect Presented Through Ghosts and Gods in *Zuozhuan* 左傳

摘要

孔子曾言：「不語怪力亂神」，《左傳》卻記載著許多有關鬼神的內容，因此，有人提出了批評，韓愈言：「《春秋》嚴謹，《左氏》浮誇。」¹范甯道：「左氏豔而富，其失也巫。」²他們認為《左傳》記載鬼神之事是浮誇，且違反孔子精神的，但實事并非如此，汪中說：「《左氏》之言鬼神，未嘗廢人事也！」³《左傳》談鬼神，並未廢棄對人事的關注，反而是更加注重。因此本文將嘗試通過對《左傳》中鬼神敘事和文本的分析，揭示書中所傳達的人本精神以及因果觀。

宮之奇言：「鬼神非人實親，惟德是依。」⁴季梁也說：「民為神之主」⁵，百姓的安定和福祉是神靈降福的基礎。因此，神與民常常聯係在一起談論，如「神怒民痛」⁶晏子說，君王如若暴力殘忍，即使信奉鬼神，鬼神也不會護佑。「虢必亡矣，虐而聽於神。」⁷虢國的滅亡也證實了這樣的說法。以上，反映了《左傳》強調治理好國家、關愛百姓才是獲得神靈護佑的關鍵，於此呈現了以人為本的精神。

其次，鬼神故事還承載了《左傳》中的因果觀。書中多次提到惡行招致惡果，善行則有善報的因果法則。例如，齊襄公因為謀害魯桓公並處死彭生，最終自己也不得善終；晉景公夢見厲鬼討債，因殺人而遭受惡報；而魏顆因曾善待其父之寵妾，戰場上得到幫助而戰勝敵人。這些故事都傳遞了善惡有報的因果觀，也與《左傳》「懲惡勸善」的道德教化功能相契合。

總言之，《左傳》中鬼神的記載並非迷信、誇張的敘述，而是反映出了中國古代對道德、因果關係的思考，通過這些內容傳遞了以人為本的德行觀和因果報應的倫理觀，體現出德行對歷史發展和個人命運的關鍵影響。這種敘事方式將神秘性與合理的道德、因果邏輯相結合，引導人們去惡向善、以人為本。本文研究的深度和篇幅有限，僅探索了《左傳》中部分有關鬼神的內容，後續還有待更深入的研究。

關鍵詞：鬼神、以人為本、因果觀

¹ [清] 吳楚材、吳調侯編選：《古文觀止》（北京：人民文學出版社，2021 年），頁 1353。

² [晉] 范甯注，唐·楊士勳疏：《春秋穀梁傳注疏》（臺北：藝文印書館，1955 年），《十三經注疏》本，卷首〈春秋穀梁傳序〉，頁 5。

³ [清] 汪中著，蔣秋華、林慶彰編審，王清信、葉純芳點校：《汪中集》（臺北：中央研究院中國文哲研究所籌備處，1990 年），頁 55-57。

⁴ 楊伯峻編著：《春秋左傳注》（臺北：洪葉文化，2015），頁 309。

⁵ 楊伯峻編著：《春秋左傳注》頁 111。

⁶ 楊伯峻編著：《春秋左傳注》頁 1416。

⁷ 楊伯峻編著：《春秋左傳注》頁 252。

1. Introduction

As an important historical document in ancient China, *Zuozhuan* 左傳 not only records the political, military and diplomatic events of the Spring and Autumn Period, but also contains rich cultural and ideological connotations. Its unique narrative style and historical analysis not only reflect the social situation at that time, but also provide valuable material for future generations to understand the ancient Chinese ideological system. In particular, the *Zuozhuan* also records many "ghosts and gods". *The Analects of Confucius* says: "The subjects on which the Master did not talk, were: extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings 子不語怪力亂神."⁸ However, the *Zuozhuan* contains many records about ghosts and gods, so it was said that the fault of *Zuozhuan* lies in its discussion of witches(ghosts and gods). Han Yu 韓愈 also said: "*The Spring and Autumn Annals* are rigorous, while the *Zuozhuan* is exaggerated."⁹ So, is it a mistake and too exaggerated to record many things about ghosts and gods in the *Zuozhuan*? In fact, this is not the case. Wang Zhong 汪中 said in *Shu Xue* 述學: "The talk about ghosts and gods in *Zuozhuan* does not abolish human affairs."¹⁰ Therefore, although ghosts and gods are mentioned many times in *Zuozhuan*, its ultimate purpose is not to mystify or theologizing, but reflecting a human-centered thinking and the close connection between human actions and their consequences. The appearance of ghosts and gods in the book is not only a symbol of mysterious power, but also a key medium used to explain the people-oriented spirit and view of cause and effect. This article will analyze the narratives and texts of ghosts and gods in *Zuozhuan* to explore the people-oriented spirit and view of cause and effect. First, the article will explore how *Zuozhuan* presents a human-centered concept by talking about ghosts and gods. Second, it will analyze the stories recorded in it to analyze the view of cause and effect it displays.

2. The people-oriented spirit presented through ghosts and gods in *Zuozhuan*

Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 once said: "*Zuo Shi* is confused by witches, especially gods and monsters."¹¹ Zhu Shi 朱軾 also said: "the *Spring and Autumn* mainly record normal things, while *Zuozhuan* likes to record strange things……*Spring and Autumn* talks about people, while *Zuozhuan* talks about gods. What good is it to talk with pleasure about what saints do not talk about?"¹² It can be seen that people have criticized the records about ghosts and gods in *Zuozhuan*. The article of "Research on ghost series in *Zuozhuan*" summarizes: "Regarding the ghost series issues in *Zuozhuan*, there are generally three tendencies: First, people who criticize *Zuozhuan*. Fan Ning 範甯 first criticized this phenomenon in *Zuozhuan: Zuozhuan's* text and content is beautiful and rich, and its loss is ghosts and monsters. After that, this statement gradually became popular and people began to question *Zuozhuan*. Secondly, people who respect and like *Zuozhuan*. In *Shu Xue* 述學, Wang Zhong 汪中 clearly stated that the talk about ghosts and gods in *Zuozhuan* does not abolish human affairs. Third, there are questioners who pursue facts. Critics represented by Wang Chong 王充 this phenomenon is explored. Wang Chong's *Lun Heng* 論衡 said: *Zuozhuan* records a lot of weird things, which goes against the spirit of Confucius who advocated not

⁸ Translated by James Legge: *The Chinese Classics* (Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Bookstore, 2014), P.67.

⁹ Edited by Wu Chucai 吳楚材, Wu Tiaohou 吳調侯: *Guwen Guanzhi* 古文觀止 (Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2021) P.1353.

¹⁰ Wang Zhong 汪中, edited by Jiang Qiuhua 蔣秋華, Lin Qingzhang 林慶彰, Wang Qingxin 王清信 and Ye Chunfang 葉純芳: *Zhongji* 汪中集 (Taipei: Academia Sinica China Preparatory Office of the Institute of Literary and Philosophical Research, 1990) vol. 1. pp. 55-57.

¹¹ Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元: *Liu Zongyuan Ji* 柳宗元集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1979) P.1291.

¹² Feng Lihua 馮李驊 Lu Hao 陸浩 Edit Comment: *Zuoxiu* 左繡 (Taipei: Wenhai Publishing House, 1967), pp. 1-2.

talking about weird things."¹³ In short, people have different views on this matter. Some people think that *Zuozhuan* writes about ghosts and gods that saints do not talk about. This is exactly the shortcoming of *Zuozhuan*, and Wang Zhong said that although *Zuozhuan* writes about ghosts and gods, it does not ignore the affairs of the common people in the world. The two views are completely opposite, so we return to the text of *Zuozhuan* for analysis.

There is a dialogue between Duke Yu 虞公 and his minister Gong Zhiqi 宮之奇 in *Zuozhuan*: Duke Yu said: "I offer sacrifices abundantly, and the gods will definitely bless me." Gong Zhiqi replied: "I heard that ghosts and gods don't really get close to someone, virtue is the only basis. Therefore, *Book of Zhou* 周書 says: Heaven has no close people, only virtue can rely on. It also says: Grain is not fragrant, only virtue is the real fragrance, can be fragrant far away. The people cannot change the sacrifices, only virtue can unite the people's hearts. Therefore, if there is no virtue, the people will not be harmonious, and the gods will not enjoy the sacrifices."¹⁴ Through this dialogue, we can clearly understand the people-oriented spirit presented through ghosts and gods in *Zuozhuan*. Gong Zhiqi said, "Ghosts and gods will not really get close to someone, virtue is the only basis." Therefore, ghosts and gods will not care about a certain person because of who gives him richer sacrifices or more pious prayers, but cares about those who are truly virtuous, and virtuous people are those who truly care about the people. So, in other words, ghosts and gods will protect those who care about the people. In the sixth year of Duke Huan 桓公, there is a similar record: Sui Hou 隨侯 said: "My sacrifices are fat and the sacrificial supplies are all ready. The gods will not disbelieve me." Ji Liang 季梁 replied: "The people are the masters of the gods, so the wise monarch first stabilize the people and then devote themselves to the gods. Offering fat animals during sacrifices means that the people are healthy and the animals are fat. The sacrifices are rich, which means that the people live and work in peace and contentment, and the harvest is good. Offering wine is a sign of good virtue and a clear conscience. This so-called fragrance means the absence of slander and evil. Therefore, we should pay attention to the four seasons of farming, cultivate the five ethics, and be close to the nine tribes, use these to pay homage to the ghosts and gods. In this way, the people will be harmonious and the gods will send blessings. It will succeed."¹⁵ From what Minister Ji Liang said to Sui Hou, the people-centered thinking is more prominent. Gong Zhiqi said, "Ghosts and gods will not really get close to someone, and virtue is the only basis." He emphasized that ghosts and gods will take care of people who are good to the people based on virtue. Ji Liang said, "The people are the masters of the gods." In the former, the status of ghosts and gods is significantly higher than that of humans, while in the latter, the common people and gods are placed in the same position. The most important thing is that they all emphasize that a wise monarch should first care for the people and then to pay homage to the gods. A good harvest and people's happiness are the best sacrifices to ghosts and gods, and are the highest respect for ghosts and gods. Therefore, in *Zuozhuan*, gods and people often appear at the same time. For example: "The gods are angry and the people are in pain." According to the record of Duke Zhao 昭公 in the 20th year, Yanzi 晏子 said: "If you encounter a tyrant, he behaves lustfully, violently and indulgently, and does anything that is not in compliance with the law. He has no scruples, does not consider the resentment of the people, is not afraid of the wrath of the ghosts and gods, and has no repentance." If the praying official speaks truth to the ghosts and gods, this is to proclaim the sins of the monarch; If the official cover up the faults of the monarch to the ghosts and gods, and talk about the virtues of the monarch, this is deception. The officials are in a dilemma and have nothing to say, so they have to say empty words to

¹³ Wen Xiaoling 溫曉玲: The Survey of the "Ghost" of "Zuo Zhuan" 《左傳》“志怪”研究(Hebei:Normal University 河北師範大學 MA thesis.2014) P.33.

¹⁴ Yang Bojun 楊伯峻: *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Taipei: Hung Ye Culture, 2015) P.309.

¹⁵ Yang Bojun: *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhu*, P.111.

please the ghosts and gods. Therefore, the ghosts and gods do not enjoy the sacrifices. As a result, the country suffered disasters, and the officials also suffered disasters.¹⁶ Yanzi told Jinggong and the world that if you treat the people badly and harm the people for your own selfish desires, then the officials who pray for you will suffer disasters. Those who harm the people will not be protected by gods, because gods are wise and upright. Shi Yin 史嚚 said that gods are wise and upright.¹⁷ Nei Shiguo 內史過 said: "When a country is about to prosper, the gods descend upon it to monitor its virtues; when it is about to perish, gods descend upon it to monitor its evil deeds..."¹⁸ God is so smart and upright, so he will monitor the king's virtue.

It can be seen that the Spring and Autumn Period attached great importance to the people-oriented spirit. *Zuozhuan* explained the relationship between gods and humans by recording dialogues and stories about ghosts and gods. God protects people based on their virtues, especially their care for the people, and does not depend on the richness of the sacrifices or the piety of the attitude. Ji Liang's view goes further, believing that the people are the masters of the gods, and the blessing and protecting of the gods is closely related to the stability of the country and the harmony of the people. Therefore, only after the country is well managed and the people are stabilized, will the gods bring blessings. On the contrary, they will have to endure disaster. Therefore, gods and people are closely connected. Only when the people are happy will ghosts and gods bless them, and the country will prosper. Moreover, "when a country will prosper, it must be obeyed by its people; when it will fall, it must be obeyed by God."¹⁹ The most fundamental and important thing is to care for the people wholeheartedly. This is the people-oriented spirit embodied in *Zuozhuan* through ghosts and gods.

3. The view of cause and effect presented through ghosts and gods

In addition to the above narratives about ghosts and gods, *Zuozhuan* also contains some stories about gods, such as stories about Peng Sheng 彭生, Prince Shen Sheng 申生, Boyou 伯有, Hun Liangfu 渾良夫, and the story of the Marquis of Jin 晉侯 dreamed of a ghost and Wei Wuzi 魏武子's doting concubine's father repaying his favor. From these records, readers will naturally establish the concept of cause and effect, which is in line with one of the five major functions of *Zuozhuan* mentioned in Chunqiu preface of *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義: "Punish evil and encourage good."²⁰

To understand from the perspective of cause and effect, we need to analyze these stories. First, analyzing the story of Pengsheng. In 694 BC, Duke Huan of Lu 魯桓公 and his wife Wen Jiang 文姜 went to Qi. Wen Jiang had an affair with her brother Duke Xiang of Qi 齊襄公, and Duke Huan of Lu learned about it. Duke Xiang of Qi knew that Duke Huan of Lu knew about it, so he entertained Duke Huan of Lu. When he returned, he ordered Pengsheng 彭生 and Duke Huan of Lu to sit in the same car, and let Pengsheng kill Duke Huan of Lu in the car. Killing the monarch was a big deal. At the request of the people of Lu, Duke Xiang of Qi blamed Pengsheng and killed him. In 686 BC, Duke Xiang of Qi went hunting and found a wild boar. His followers said it was Pengsheng. Duke Xiang of Qi was furious and shot an arrow at him. The wild boar stood up and cried. Duke Xiang of Qi was shocked and dropped a shoe in a hurry. That night, Lian Cheng 連稱 and Guan Zhifu 管至父 killed Duke Xiang of Qi.²¹ From this story, we can know that

¹⁶ Yang Bojun : *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhu*, P.1416.

¹⁷ Yang Bojun : *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhu*, P.252.

¹⁸ Yang Bojun : *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhu*, P.252.

¹⁹ Yang Bojun : *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhu*, P.252.

²⁰ Edited by Li Xueqin 李學勤 : *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義 of *Shisanjing Zhushu* 十三經註疏(Beijing: Peking University Press, 1999), P.20.

²¹ Yang Bojun : *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhu*, P.175.

Peng Sheng died very unjustly. It was Duke Xiang of Qi who asked him to kill Duke Huan of Lu, He became a scapegoat for Duke Xiang of Qi and was executed in the end. So Peng Sheng finally appeared in the image of a wild boar to scare Duke Xiang of Qi. Although Duke Xiang of Qi was not killed by him in the end, it is also considered that he indirectly retaliated against Duke Xiang of Qi. Duke Xiang of Qi did not have a good end because he had committed adultery with a married woman, but he asked Peng Sheng to kill Duke Huan of Lu and then executed Peng Sheng. These were two lives, and all the mistakes were started by him, so he did not have a good end in the end.

Secondly, analyzing the story of the Marquis of Jin 晉侯 dreaming of a ghost. Duke Jing of Jin 晉景公 dreamed of a big ghost with long disheveled hair dragging to the ground. He beat his chest and jumped up and said to duke Jing of Jin: "You killed my descendants. This is unrighteousness! I have asked God for his permission to take revenge." The big ghost destroyed the gate and the dormitory door and came in. Duke Jing of Jin was afraid and hid in the inner room. The ghost also destroyed the door of the inner room. After Duke Jing of Jin woke up, he summoned the necromancer to divine good and bad luck. What the necromancer said was the same as what Duke Jing of Jin had dreamed. Duke Jing of Jin also asked: "How is it?" The necromancer said: "The king can't eat new wheat (which means he won't live until next year)." Then Duke Jing of Jin fell ill, and he went to Qin to ask a doctor, but he couldn't be cured. Later, sure enough something happened. Duke Jing of Jin's stomach began to swell before he ate the new wheat. He went to the toilet, fell into the toilet and died.²² Like the previous story, Duke Jing of Jin incurred the revenge of the evil spirits for killing other people's descendants, so he finally fell into the toilet and died.

These are examples of doing bad things and not getting a good death. There are also stories in *Zuozhuan* about doing good and getting good rewards: In the autumn of 594 BC, Duke Huan of Qin 秦桓公 sent troops to attack Jin. The Jin army and the Qin army fought in Fushi 輔氏, Wei Ke 魏顆, the general of Jin, met Du Hui 杜回, the general of Qin. The two fought and were in a stalemate. Suddenly, Wei Ke saw an old man using a straw rope to lasso Du Hui, making this great Qin strongman unstable and fall to the ground. He was captured by Wei Ke on the spot, which led to Wei Ke's defeat of the Qin army in this battle. The old man who helped Wei Ke was actually the father of Wei Ke's father Wei Wuzi 魏武子's favorite concubine. When Wei Wuzi was ill, he told his son Wei Ke to let this favorite concubine remarry in the future; when Wei Wuzi was critically ill, he said, let her be buried alive with me in the future. After Wei Wuzi died, Wei Ke said that when a person is critically ill, his thinking will be confused, and I should obey my father's orders when he is awake, so he let this favorite concubine remarry. Therefore, there was the victory on the battlefield with the help of the father of the favorite concubine. At night, Wei Ke dreamed that the old man said to him, "I am the father of the woman you let her remarry. I am here to repay you for your kindness."²³ Wei Ke saved the woman's life, and the woman's father saved Wei Ke's life again. This shows that good deeds will naturally be rewarded.

It can be seen that this view of cause and effect in *Zuozhuan* is closely connected with traditional Chinese ethics and morals, emphasizing that good deeds will have good rewards, evil deeds will have bad rewards, and destiny is closely related to human morality. This concept of cause and effect not only occupies an important position in Chinese thought, but is also reflected in Western philosophy. Aristotle once proposed that "every action will produce corresponding results." This view coincides with the ancient Chinese view of cause and effect. Mr. Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 said that the greatest achievements of *Zuozhuan* are threefold: "first, it replaces religious prophecies with the causal relationship of behavior; second, it proves the judgment of good and evil in history through the causal relationship of behavior itself; third, Synthesizing

²² Yang Bojun : *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhu*,P.849.

²³ Yang Bojun : *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhu*,P.764.

many factors that organize the results of actions enables people to understand the cause-and-effect relationship of actions."²⁴ Professor Zhang Gaoping 張高評 once said: The most valuable thing about *Zuozhuan* is "turning religious prophecies into behavioral responsibilities, replacing mystery with rationality"²⁵ Therefore, although *Zuozhuan* records many things about ghosts and gods, it emphasizes the people-oriented spirit and the view of cause and effect that good will be rewarded with good and evil will be punished with evil. To achieve the purpose of letting people understand the truth, punishing evil and promoting good.

4. Conclusion

The ghost and god narratives in *Zuozhuan* are not only part of its historical and cultural content, but also carry a profound humanistic spirit and causal view. Although some critics believe that the ghost and god stories in *Zuozhuan* are exaggerated and superstitious, in fact, these records are not simply mystification, but are intended to clarify the relationship between virtue and results. By analyzing the remarks of Gong Zhiqi and Ji Liang, it can be seen that *Zuozhuan* emphasizes that the virtue and human behavior is the key to determining whether ghosts and gods will bless. Whether it is the view that "ghosts and gods are not close someone, but virtue is the basis" or the saying that "people are the masters of gods", it shows that *Zuozhuan* conveys the spirit of "people-oriented". In addition, the stories about cause and effect in the book, such as the examples of Pengsheng, Duke Jing of Jin, and Wei Ke, further demonstrate the traditional concept that good is rewarded with good and evil is rewarded with evil. Through these ghost and god narratives, *Zuozhuan* conveys the importance of people-oriented, morality and behavior, and emphasizes the gains and losses of good and evil in history. This not only allows people to learn to judge their own behavior, but also is a kind of education to encourage good and punish evil.

²⁴ Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Ideological history of the Han Dynasty* 兩漢思想史 (Taipei: Student Book Company, 1979.9), vol. 3, P.280.

²⁵ Zhang Gaopian 張高評: *Zuozhuan Causal narrative and using history to write classics* 《左傳》因果式敘事與以史傳經 (Department of Chinese, Donghai University 東海大學中文系, Donghai Chinese Literature Newspaper 《東海中文學報》, No. 25, 2013) P.106.

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