

“Judgment in the Hell” as Depicted in “Min-Pao Chi”

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Abstract

T'an Lin was an eminent judge during the T'ang Dynasty, who participated in the editing of *T'ang-lü shu-i* and authored the famous work, “Retribution after Death”. Drawing from his extensive judicial experience, T'an Lin was able to integrate tedious litigation, the workings of the judiciary, and the government bureaucratic system into his book, thereby strengthening the persuasiveness of his argument concerning retribution after death. This approach influenced the development of later literature, resulting in a better understanding of the process of the issuance of Chinese decrees during the T'ang dynasty. As a result of the descriptions of the trial in hell, people showed respect for the law and complied with its ordinances. T'an Lin was also renowned for the “Chung-Chiu” commission, i.e. release of prisoners, which influenced the emperor Tai-Chung. The “Chung-Chiu” commission not only exhibits the benevolence of the ruling classes but also demonstrates their prudent impartiality. Buddhists consider this action to embody moral excellence, for example as illustrated in Tun-huang literary work, “The Tour of Tai-Chung Emperor in Hell”. In 653 A.D., the emperor Gao Chung appointed T'an Lin judge of Mu-chou in order to investigate the conspiracy surrounding Lady Shuo-Zhen Chen. T'an Lin succeeded in his investigation, and presented a book on the subject, entitled “Retribution after Death”. Historians believe the governing class was continually pressed to promote the popularity of the book.

Keywords: T'ang Dynasty, T'an Lin, “Retribution after the Death”, “Judgment in the Hell”, Judge.