

## MOZI AND THE GHOSTS: THE CONCEPT OF MING 明 IN MOZI'S "MING GUI" 《明鬼》

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### Abstract

This article offers a new reading of *Mozi's* chapter "Ming gui" 明鬼, conventionally considered as a treatise explaining Mohist ideas about ghosts and spirits, by shifting the focus from the ghosts (*gui* 鬼) to the concept of *ming* 明, interpreted as "sagely illumination." The "Ming gui" chapter does not discuss ghosts in general, but instead a specific group of "punitive ghosts" who mete out punishments and rewards; it also shows that *ming gui* was not a group of ghosts particular to *Mozi* or Mohism alone, but was widespread in the beliefs and practices of the period. The execution of justice, which is the crucial concern of the treatise, depends on *ming*—the principle of justice and Heaven's agency in human life—and not on ghosts. *Ming* also is an indispensable component of sagehood, as it is the illuminated sage ruler (*ming jun* 明君) who, on behalf of Heaven, ultimately metes out just punishments and rewards.

The "Ming gui" 明鬼 chapter, classified as Book VIII in *Mozi jiangū* 墨子間詁,<sup>1</sup> is the only one in the entire Mohist canon devoted entirely to ghosts and spirits; only the "lower essay" (*xia* 下) of the original triad survives.<sup>2</sup> The title is conventionally rendered as "Explaining Ghosts" or "Understanding Ghosts," which suggests that in this chapter Master Mo lays out his doctrine about the spirit world, where extraordinary beings, such as ghosts and spirits, are in focus.<sup>3</sup>

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1. All *Mozi* references in this article are to Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, *Mozi jiangū* 墨子間詁 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2001).

2. The oldest existing version of *Mozi*, on which the present editions are based, comes from the Ming dynasty collection *Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏 (1447); according to it, the text originally consisted of seventy-one chapters, but only fifty-three of them are extant; the chapters are organized in fifteen books (*juan* 卷). Book VIII lists three "Ming gui" chapters: *shang* 上, *zhong* 中, and *xia* 下, with only the last one being extant. It is not known if the remaining two chapters of the triad ever existed or why they are missing.

3. Burton Watson translates the title as "Explaining Ghosts"; see Burton Watson, *Mozi Basic Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 97–113; Yi-Pao Mei renders "On Ghosts"; see Yi-Pao Mei, *The Ethical and Political Works of Motse*, Probsthain's Oriental Series (London: A. Probsthain, 1929), 160. Sun Yirang, following

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How, then, does *Mozi* “explain” the ghosts? What does the received text actually have to say about them? Who are they, what is their function, and what kind of a relationship do they have with humans?

Recent years have shown an increased interest in *Mozi*, with two new translations by Ian Johnston and Jeffrey Riegel, and a monograph by Carine Defoort and Nicolas Standaert.<sup>4</sup> Two studies in particular focus on “Ming gui,” tackling the way *Mozi* explains ghosts: Erica Brindley discusses the relationship between the received “Ming gui” and a Chu bamboo-slip manuscript “Guishen zhi ming” 鬼神之神明, analyzing the question of the ghosts’ “perspicuity”;<sup>5</sup> Roel Sterckx provides a thorough analysis of Mohists’ take on ghosts, focusing on doctrinal inconsistencies and disagreements within the “school,” and discussing Mohists’ competition with the Ru 儒.<sup>6</sup> Brindley asserts that it is impossible to determine whether or not, according to *Mozi*, ghosts are perspicuous (*ming*); Sterckx concludes that there has never been one homogenous Mohist doctrine on ghosts, but instead an ongoing debate with many different points of view.

Both Brindley and Sterckx focus on the ghosts themselves and both agree that the “ghost chapter,” rather than an explanation, offers a puzzle: it does not clarify whether or not ghosts exist; if and how they respond to human behavior; and whether ritual is wasteful or not. I intend to contribute to the discussion on “Ming gui” and reconcile some of its ostensibly contradictory points by shifting the focus from the ghosts *gui* 鬼 to the concept of *ming*, translated by Brindley and Sterckx as “perspicuity” or “consciousness.” Rather than analyze whether or not, according to *Mozi*, ghosts have “consciousness,” I demonstrate that it is *ming* that should be considered the determinative principle in the treatise, without which “explaining” ghosts would be impossible.

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the *Hanshu* 漢書 commentators, interprets *ming* as “making it evident (proving) that ghosts really exist” 明，謂明鬼神之實有也 (*Mozi jiangou*, 221). In his recent translation, Ian Johnston renders it as “Perceptive Ghosts,” which seems to consider the notion provided by Master Mo that the ghosts are able to spot the villain even in the darkest alley and strike him down without fail; see Ian Johnston, *The Mozi: A Complete Translation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

4. John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, *Mozi: A Study and Translation of the Ethical and Political Writings*, China Research Monograph 68 (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2013); Carine Defoort and Nicolas Standaert, eds., *The Mozi as an Evolving Text* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013).

5. Erica Brindley, “The Perspicuity of Ghosts and Spirits and the Problem of Intellectual Affiliations in Early China,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129.2 (2009), 215–36.

6. Roel Sterckx, “*Mozi* 31: Explaining Ghosts, Again,” Defoort and Standaert, 95–141.

As becomes evident from a closer analysis of the grammar, structure, and contents of *Mozi* “Ming gui,” further supported by the excavated manuscript “Gui shen zhi ming” from the *Chu Bamboo Strips* in the Shanghai Museum Collection,<sup>7</sup> Mohist doctrine builds on a particular quality of the ghosts: *ming*—the “illumination,” or the ability to see things clearly. These ideas are based on the principle that, in order to be able to mete out punishments and rewards, ghosts need to be “clear-sighted”—*ming*, and thus capable of discerning right from wrong. Read in this light, the “Ming gui” chapter does not discuss ghosts in general, as previous readings assume; instead, it focuses on a specific group of ghosts endowed with a set of particular qualities and functions—“punitive ghosts” who mete out punishments and rewards.

To forward this point, I analyze the Shanghai Museum bamboo strips. The excavated manuscript is fragmentary and of unknown provenance; it is uncertain to what degree, if at all, it is related to the Mohist canon, but it highlights the applicability of *ming* to the execution of justice; moreover, it suggests the existence of two groups of ghosts: those who are *ming* and those who are not. I also present a variety of other sources to demonstrate that *ming gui* 明鬼 as a group of specialized “punitive ghosts” was not specific to *Mozi* or Mohism, but was widespread in the beliefs and the practices of the period, appearing, e.g., as covenant ghosts, and that their intervention into human life is very limited in scope (they are not supposed to punish every offence). It is this particular group that Master Mo “borrows” to support his argument that human behavior is always supervised and assessed.

“Ming gui” foregrounds the quality of *ming*—the principle of justice and Heaven’s agency in human life. The execution of justice, which is the crucial concern of the treatise, depends on *ming* and not on ghosts. Humans, too, can be “illuminated” (*ming*) and serve as Heaven’s agents meting out punishments and rewards. We find explicit instances of this in “Ming gui,” a detail that has been overlooked in other analysis. Under the influence of *ming*, humans undergo a transformation that renders them ghost-like, just as “punitive ghosts” are transformed ex-humans. As I demonstrate, *ming* is an indispensable component of sagehood; an illuminated sage ruler (*ming jun* 明君) is the one who, on behalf of Heaven, ultimately metes out just punishments and rewards, not the ghosts.

In *Mozi* “Ming gui” the main objective is a good government, which is based not so much on the belief in ghosts, but on a proper administration of punishments and rewards. A *ming* government, in turn, depends on

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7. Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed., “Gui shen zhi ming” 鬼神之神, in *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhangguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書 5 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2005), 307.

the sage (*ming*) ruler, who, as seen in *Mozi*, possesses ghost-like qualities. Therefore, in the doctrine laid out in the treatise the emphasis is less on the dogmatic belief in the physical existence of ghosts and in their actual execution of rewards and punishments, and more on defining and understanding the quality of “discernment”—the concept of *ming* itself. “Ming gui,” then, is not about the ghosts, but about *ming*—a universal concept not tied exclusively to ghosts and not limited to one function. The importance of the belief in actual agents from the spirit world in Mohist doctrine gives way to a more agnostic view of “ghosts” as a function of moral balance and retribution. *Mozi*’s insistence on these qualities suggests a moral, politically pragmatic stance rather than an ontological one. The fact that “right” and “wrong” behavior can be recognized and evaluated, and that each brings about its respective results, needs to be made evident to the society at large, and rulers in particular.

### Some Context

Henri Maspero offers the earliest and most detailed analysis of the term *ming*.<sup>8</sup> As he observes, the word literally means “light,” “bright,” and “clear,” and figuratively “intelligent”; however, as a term *ming* is always related to spirits and spiritual things, and particularly to objects designated for the dead and things connected with sacrifices and ritual: ritual vessels *ming qi* 明器, clothes for the dead *ming yi* 明衣, sacrificial grain *ming qi* 明齊, and other things used in sacrifices (*ming shui* 明水, *ming huo* 明火, *ming zhu* 明燭), or *ming qi* 明旗—funerary banners that announced the name of the dead, etc. Maspero also defines *ming* as a verb, meaning “to endow with spirit-like qualities” or “to deify,”<sup>9</sup> which is particularly relevant in the context of *Mozi*.

According to Knoblock, the binomial *shenming* 神明 in the Warring States Period represented “gods in general.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, *ming* was not only the kind of quality the spirits possessed, but actually ancestral spirits themselves. A *ming* person was either dead or a person endowed with ghost-like qualities.

In a more recent study, Sándor P. Szabó provides a very thorough analysis of the term *shenming*.<sup>11</sup> As he concludes, the term can be

8. Henri Maspero, “Le mot *ming* 明,” *Journal Asiatique* 223 (1933), 249–96.

9. Maspero, “Le mot *ming* 明,” 257.

10. John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol. I (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 253.

11. Sándor P. Szabó, “The Term *Shenming*—Its Meaning in the Ancient Chinese Thought and in a Recently Discovered Manuscript,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 56.2–4 (2003), 251–74.

understood as a pair of concepts, where the first (*shen*) refers to the nature of earth and the second (*ming*) to the nature of heaven. Szabó quotes Xunzi, who claims that humans can acquire the *shen* and *ming* natures through self-cultivation. Such a human becomes “a bearer of perfect virtues of heaven and earth, and is able to know the *Dao*.”<sup>12</sup> As Szabó observes, “the [Xunzi] passage shows that the *shenming* is something which is acquired by someone during the process of becoming a sage (i.e. a person, who possesses the perfect virtues), and acquisition of *shenming* is a result of the accumulation of good and the perfection of virtues.”<sup>13</sup> A sage, then, is one that “becomes equal to heaven and earth.”<sup>14</sup>

According to Constance Cook, the term *ming* had been linked with virtue *de* 德, which she defines as “spiritual essence” or “life force”; a person can attain *mingde* 明德 through imitation (*xing* 型) of his ancestors. Cook observes that certain sacrifices described as *ming* and *de* indicated “something corrected” *zheng* 正 or “extended into eternity” *yanyong* 延永. The “illuminated power” (*mingde*) was received through the heart *xin* 心 during a special ritual.<sup>15</sup> Before he could correct and transform others, then, a sage had to first “correct” himself by molding himself after the ancestors. In other words, he had to acquire the *mingde* and become *like* an ancestor—possess certain qualities and abilities of dead people. In order to do this, the adept had to undergo a transformation through a sacrificial ritual in the ancestral temple.

Returning to Szabó, he quotes Carine Defoort’s work on *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子, where she concludes: “Separately, *shen* and *ming* are attributed to the sage, but combined they often refer to divine beings with whom the sages communicate.”<sup>16</sup> Graham arrives at the same conclusion: “*Shen* and *ming* are always used nominally of the spirits and verbally of the kinds of intelligence possessed by the spirits and attained by man to the degree that he approaches sagehood.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Szabó points out that according to Mawangdui documents it is possible to attain *shenming* through communication with the spirits.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, Szabó describes *shenming* as a “spirit-like” intelligence that is related to a balance of judgment, rather than “thinking reflectively or logically analyzing

12. Szabó, “The Term *Shenming*,” 271.

13. Szabó, “The Term *Shenming*,” 267.

14. Szabó, “The Term *Shenming*,” 256.

15. Constance A. Cook, *Death in Ancient China: The Tale of One Man’s Journey* (Leiden, London: Brill, 2006), 22.

16. Szabó, “The Term *Shenming*,” 257.

17. Szabó, “The Term *Shenming*,” 257.

18. Szabó, “The Term *Shenming*,” 261.

problems.”<sup>19</sup> After Graham, he concludes that *shenming* is a spiritual vision that the sages possess, a “clairvoyance” or “illumination”;<sup>20</sup> this spiritual illumination endows the sage with “the benevolence (*ren* 仁) of heaven and the righteousness (*yi* 義) earth,” which makes him capable of discerning the myriad things.<sup>21</sup>

As I will argue below, in *Mozi*, this “vision” or “illumination” translates into the ability to mete out punishments and rewards without fail. *Mozi* promotes government by a sage ruler who combines the natures of both heaven and earth—he is a human and a ghost at the same time. He is Heaven’s proxy on earth; therefore, notions of *ming* such as “deification” (Maspero) and “spiritual communication” (Defoort) will prove crucial to our understanding of *ming* in *Mozi*.

As for the distinction between *shen* and *ming*, apart from standing for earth and heaven respectively, Szabó quotes Xun Shang:

隱藏謂之神，著見謂之明。

The concealing is called *shen*, and the manifesting is called *ming*.<sup>22</sup>

We will see how in *Mozi* the sage does just that: undergoes a transformation into a ghost-like being through personal communication with a spirit (*shen*) and manifesting it to the world through bringing justice and maintaining a perfect government (*ming*).

Finally, Szabó asserts that *shenming* means seeing from and through the heart. He quotes Xunzi who “thinks that the heart (*xin* 心—the organ of both emotions and thinking), which is constituted by *qi*, is “the lord of the *shenming*” (*shenming zhi zhu* 神明之主).”<sup>23</sup> *Ming* are the spirits of the ancestors, who have insight into peoples’ hearts; they know the past and see the future. So does a sage person, whose mind has been transformed, though his body still keeps a human form. As Szabó points out, *ming* comes from Heaven, and as I will demonstrate, this can be also deduced from *Mozi* “Ming gui.”

### What Does Master Mo Want to Prove?

As the following analyses of the surviving *Mozi* “Ming gui” chapter and the excavated manuscript “Gui shen zhi ming” will show, Mohist argument about the spirit world may appear to be shifting from one point to another, but it remains consistent and firm when it comes to the problem

19. Szabó, “The Term *Shenming*,” 254–55.

20. Szabó, “The Term *Shenming*,” 257–58.

21. Szabó, “The Term *Shenming*,” 269.

22. Szabó quotes Xun Shuang; Szabó, “The Term *Shenming*,” 264.

23. Szabó, “The Term *Shenming*,” 268. The translation is that of Szabó.

of “discernment” (*ming*). Master Mo is not trying to prove that ghosts exist, but that they mete out punishments and rewards; not all ghosts do that, but only those who are *ming*; it does not need to be ghosts, but anyone, as long as he is *ming*; *ming* is necessary for the execution of justice and it is the concept of *ming* that binds Master Mo’s argument together.

Let us first consider the grammar and style of the received *Mozi* text. The treatise presents the term *guishen* 鬼神 as a denomination for beings who are not humans; it functions as a binomial, sometimes interchanged with *gui* alone.<sup>24</sup> This is a characteristic lexical feature of *Mozi* and suggests that no distinction is made between *gui* and *shen*; the text is not concerned with the typology, but with the functions of the spirits.

All of the information concerning the ghosts, such as their actions, functions, attributes, and other characteristics, are invariably expressed by means of the construction with the possessive particle *zhi* 之; thus, instead of saying “*whether ghosts exist or not*,” we find:

鬼神之有與無之別

[the distinction between] the ghosts’ existing or not;

and instead of a SVO “*the ghosts are able to reward the worthy and punish the violent*,” we find:

鬼神之能賞賢而罰暴<sup>25</sup>

[the fact of] the ghosts being able to reward the worthy and punish the violent.

As I am going to show below, this important detail helps in the understanding of what kind of ghosts and which aspects of their nature the text is talking about. For instance, Master Mo discusses instances of ghosts seen by people:

有嘗見鬼神之物，聞鬼神之聲<sup>26</sup>

There are those who have seen the appearance of ghosts and heard the sound made by ghosts.

By applying the possessive *zhi* construction, the text emphasizes the material aspect of the ghosts, their visual image, and other features perceptible by human senses; it is not just any kind of evidence of the spiritual presence, but its concrete, physical form.

24. E.g., in 今執無鬼者曰：鬼神者，固無有，the character 神 is omitted in the first part of the sentence, but used in the second, in the same context; *Mozi jiangou*, 223.

25. *Mozi jiangou*, 222.

26. *Mozi jiangou*, 224.

For his argument about the existence of ghosts, Master Mo presents five pieces of empirical evidence: accounts of ghosts seen by people.<sup>27</sup> In each story that Master Mo tells, ghosts mete out well-deserved punishments and rewards: people who were innocently put to death return as ghosts and punish the culprit.<sup>28</sup> It is very important to observe that these five short episodes, which are presented to the skeptics as evidence of the existence of ghosts, at the same time introduce another argument about the ghosts' ability to punish crime and reward virtue. While the examples do intend to prove the physical presence of ghosts, they also serve as a moral lesson and a warning. As I will show below, the stories are illustrations of the actions of a specific type of ghost—the “discerning” type—and, by extension, of their function in the world. The ghosts presented in these examples do not simply “exist”; they are not only physically present, but rather they also make their presence known for a reason. The plots in these episodes are very similar, with only the names of the people and places changed. As variations on a similar theme, they demonstrate that events such as this one are not singular, accidental, or random.<sup>29</sup> They happen predictably, according to a rule. Each episode concludes with a promise that whoever commits injustice will suffer misfortune, because:

鬼神之誅，若此其僭遽也!<sup>30</sup>

The ghosts' meting out punishment will be as swift as in this [given] case!

This assertion, pronounced in the text by “lords and fathers who want to instruct their ministers and sons,”<sup>31</sup> demonstrates that the ghosts'

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27. Master Mo alone asserts the historicity of these accounts; they are not mentioned in any other sources.

28. E.g., King Xuan of Zhou puts to death his minister, the Earl of Du, even though he had committed no crime. Before he dies, the earl warns the king that if ghosts and spirits do not exist, this will be the end of the matter, but if they do exist, then within three years he, the Earl of Du, will let the king know about it. Sure enough, after three years, the earl reappears as a ghost and strikes the king dead in front of everybody. *Mozi jiangou*, 224.

29. Roel Sterckx observes that the five incidents quoted by Master Mo as evidence take place across geographical space on the Spring and Autumn period map: Zhou (central), Qin (west), Yan (northeast), Song (south), and Qi (east), which is meant to strengthen the rhetoric of Mozi's claim to apply his doctrine universally; Sterckx, “*Mozi* 31,” 101. The stylistic uniformity of the narrative also indicates that the ghosts' pattern of action is always the same wherever and whenever it occurs.

30. *Mozi jiangou*, 230. One of the episodes is a “positive” example, where Duke Mu of Zheng is rewarded for his virtue. *Mozi jiangou*, 227–28.

31. 為君者以教其臣，為父者以警其子; *Mozi jiangou*, 226.

response to certain types of human behavior is automatic and infallible. Master Mo sums up this section with an important warning:

雖有深谿博林，幽澗毋人之所，施行不可以不董，見有鬼神視之。<sup>32</sup>

Even in a deep valley and in a dense forest, in dark and abandoned places where nobody lives, one must always act with caution, because there are ghosts and spirits watching.

Master Mo's emphasis shifts from the existence of ghosts to their function; the emphasis is clearly on the ghosts' "ability to see"—*shi* 視, and therefore, no matter where one goes, one will not manage to escape from their surveillance. In effect, Master Mo's proof that ghosts exist turns out to explain *why* they exist, or even in *what circumstances they come to existence*, and to assert their infallibility in performing their duty.

But do ghosts never fail to punish? And is it always ghosts who mete out the justice? In the following part of the "Ming gui" chapter, Master Mo's argument to that effect seems either flawed or not to the point. He refers to three ancient documents that are supposed to serve as evidence of the existence of ghosts, but never actually mention ghosts and merely indicate that the rulers in the past performed sacrifices. He also brings up the instances of King Jie of Xia and King Zhou of Yin, who were punished for their crimes, as illustrations of the infallibility of justice and the impartiality with which the ghosts execute it; this group of evidence, however, is even more opaque, because the instances narrated by Master Mo do not involve ghosts at all, but instead the punishments are meted out by humans and labeled as "*ming* punishments" *ming fa* 明罰.<sup>33</sup> As we can see, while one component of Master Mo's initial thesis (*gui*) has been dropped, the other one (*ming*) comes to the fore.

Let us now consider a related text from the same period that questions the ghosts' infallibility and reveals that the execution of justice depends on their *ming*.

### Execution of Justice

The concept of *ming* is the key to the Mohist understanding of ghosts. The excavated manuscript "Guishen zhi ming" from the *Chu Bamboo*

32. *Mozi jiangou*, 234.

33. E.g., in one of those stories we read: 天乃使湯至明罰焉. *Mozi jiangou*, 244. Johnston translates: "Heaven sent Tang to effect its clearly recognizable punishment." Johnston, *The Mozi*, 299. Riegel in his translation leaves *ming* out altogether: "Heaven thereupon ordered Tang to punish him." Riegel 268. The punishment on King Jie of Xia was executed not by ghosts, but by Tang acting on behalf of Heaven; as I will demonstrate, *ming* here has a different function and does not mean "clearly recognizable."

*Strips* in the Shanghai Museum Collection reveals that the ghosts' ability to mete out punishments and rewards depends solely on their being *ming*.

The text consists of 5 strips and 197 graphs, and is part of an eight-strip longer sequence. The initial part of the text is missing, and the remaining material, titled "Rong shi you Cheng shi" 融師有成氏, consists of two unrelated fragments separated by a graphic mark. Originally, the passage had no title; the current one was added by the scholars who worked on the edition of the text and is based on the opening and closing phrase in the text *gui shen you (you) suo ming you (you) suo bu ming* 鬼神又(有)所明又(有)所不明.<sup>34</sup> The speaker in the bamboo text is not identifiable, but because of the mention of "ghosts and spirits" *gui shen* 鬼神, the subject under discussion, as well as certain textual correspondences, some scholars believe that the passage is related to *Mozi*, going as far as considering it to be a missing part of the "Ming gui" triad.<sup>35</sup> Both Brindley and Sterckx discuss this problem at length, and convincingly argue against such definitive associations.<sup>36</sup>

However, the Shanghai Museum paragraph does discuss the ghosts' ability to reward and punish. The same theme in similar terms is pursued in various chapters of *Mozi*.<sup>37</sup> The crucial point of the debate is the problem of *ming*, and, as I will demonstrate, the same feature is present also in *Mozi*, where the very title of the chapter on ghosts, "Ming gui,"

34. See, e.g., Ding Sixin 丁四新, "Shangbo Chu jian "Gui shen" pian zhu shi" 上博楚簡《鬼神》篇注譯 ([http://www.bsm.org.cn/show\\_article.php?id=337](http://www.bsm.org.cn/show_article.php?id=337)).

35. Cao Jinyan believes that the dialog is between Mozi and his disciple, and that the text is a missing part of *Mozi*. He argues that the text does not fit into any particular *Mozi* chapter, and instead he assumes that it is a part of one of the missing essays in the "Ming gui" triad. See Cao Jinyan 曹錦炎, "Shanghai bowuguan cang Chu zhushu 'Mozi' yiwen" 上海博物館藏楚竹書《墨子》佚文, *Wenwu* 2006/07, 49; Li Ru and Liao Mingchun, albeit much more skeptical about the text's provenance, still generally agree that the text belongs to the Mohist canon; see Li Rui 李銳, "Du Shangbo wu zha-ji" 讀上博五札記; (<http://www.confucius2000.com/admin/list.asp?id=2251>); Liao Mingchun 廖名春, "Du Shang Bo wu, Guishen zhi ming" pian zhaji" 讀《上博五, 鬼神之明》篇札記 (<http://www.confucius2000.com/admin/list.asp?id=2250>).

36. I agree with Sterckx, who interprets the fragment as representing one of the competing traditions and fractions within Mohism or coming from a school that was in direct opposition to it; in other words, it may be loosely associated with Mohist canon or directly refer to it from a dissident standpoint. Sterckx argues that, expressing an opinion opposite to that in *Mozi*, the fragment may even be associated with Ru tradition. See Sterckx, "Mozi 31," 127–29. Brindley, on the other hand, rejects completely the idea of labeling a text based on the topic it discusses and associating it with any "school of thought." See Brindley, "The Perspicuity," 234–36.

37. See *Mozi* ("Ming gui" 明鬼; "Tian zhi" 天志; "Gong meng" 公孟).

introduces it. Therefore, it will be useful to consider the fragment in reference to the Mohist debate on ghosts.

Brindley and Sterckx provide detailed philological analyses and English translations of the text.<sup>38</sup> For the purpose of my discussion, I present below my own working translation of the passage. I agree in general with earlier translations, but I am less literal and more interpretative in the parts that are crucial for my discussion. I am following the transcription of Cao Jinyan 曹錦炎 from Ma Chengyuan's edition of the Shanghai Museum series, but I arrange the original text by the number of phrases instead of the bamboo strip number:<sup>39</sup>

1. 今夫鬼神有所明有所不明，則以其賞善罰暴也。
2. 昔者堯舜禹湯，仁義聖智，天下法之。
3. 此以貴為天子，富有天下，長年有舉<sup>40</sup>，後世遂之。
4. 則鬼神之賞，此明矣。
5. 及桀紂幽厲，焚聖人，殺諫者，賊百姓，亂邦家。
6. 此以桀折於鬲山，而紂首於岐社，身不沒，為天下笑。
7. 則鬼[神之罰，此明]以。<sup>41</sup>
8. 及伍子胥者，天下之聖人也，鷗夷而死。
9. 榮夷公者，天下之亂人也，長年而沒。
10. 女以此詰之，則善者或不賞，而暴[者或不罰。故]吾因加？
11. 鬼神不明，則必有故。
12. 其力能致焉而弗為乎？吾弗知也。
13. 意其力固不能致焉乎？吾又弗知也。
14. 此兩者歧，吾故[曰鬼神有]所明，有所不明。此之謂乎！

38. Brindley, "The Perspicuity," 216–17; Sterckx, "Mozi 31," 122–25.

39. Ma Chengyuan, "Gui shen zhi ming," 307–20. The Chinese transcription of the original bamboo text published in the Shanghai Museum volume retains some ancient graphs and provides their modern equivalents in parentheses. I omit the parenthesis and quote the final version on which all English translations are based.

40. Brindley and Sterckx read *yu* 譽 instead of *ju* 舉.

41. Editors supplemented five missing graphs in this line based on context; they do not appear on the original bamboo strip. I quote them in brackets, following Cao's transcription.

1. Nowadays, the ghosts are sometimes “ming,” and sometimes not “ming,” and thus they reward the good and punish the evil accordingly.<sup>42</sup>
2. In the past, Yao, Shun, Yu, and Tang were benevolent, righteous, sage, and wise, and the whole world modeled itself after them.
3. Therefore, they were honored with the position of Son of Heaven, and rich with the possession of the world, they enjoyed fame until old age, and the succeeding generations followed them.
4. Thus, as to ghosts rewarding, it is “ming” [evident/exemplary/discerning].<sup>43</sup>
5. On the other hand, Jie, Zhou, You and Li burned the Sages, killed the critics, robbed the people and brought disorder among the states.
6. Therefore, Jie was ripped apart on Mount Li and Zhou’s head was exposed at the Qi Altar, their deaths were not natural and they [were exposed] for the world to laugh at.<sup>44</sup>
7. Thus, as to ghosts punishing, it is “ming” [evident/exemplary/discerning].
8. Then, there was Wu Zixu, who was a Sage, but he was killed in a leather sack.
9. And there was Rong Yigong, who was a villain, but he lived long and died a natural death.
10. You can see from this that there is unrewarded good and unpunished evil. How should I explain its reason?<sup>45</sup>

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42. Brindley and Sterckx translate *ming* as “perspicuous” and “aware,” respectively. See Brindley, “The Perspicuity,” 216; Sterckx, “*Mozi* 31,” 122. Due to the complexity of the term’s meaning, which I am going to discuss and explain below, I leave it not translated. As I demonstrate, “ming” indicates a group of ghosts, therefore the term is better understood as part of a generic term *ming gui*; “some ghosts are *ming* and some are not” would be the best way of rendering the meaning of this line, but it is grammatically less literal.

43. I discuss the meaning of this line in detail below.

44. I agree with Brindley and Sterckx, and read *mo* 沒 as “to die an unnatural death,” i.e. to fail to live out the years of one’s life to an end; however, I also consider the physical aspect, suggested by *shen* 身, of the bodies (or body parts) not being taken out of sight, but instead preserved and exposed to the public.

45. Cao reads *ru* 汝 as 汝 “you”; and *jia* 加 as 嘉 “to praise”; “to support [an opinion]”; and a rhetorical question; Cao Jinyan, “Shanghai bowuguan,” 316–19.

11. If ghosts and spirits are not “ming,” there must be a reason for it.
12. Do they have the power to [punish and reward] but choose not to do it? I do not know.
13. Or is it that they definitely do not have the power to do it? I do not know it, either.
14. These two possibilities are the reason why I say that ghosts are sometimes “ming” and sometimes they are not “ming!”

Whatever its provenance and relationship with the received text, the excavated passage seems to echo the argument in *Mozi* “Ming gui” chapter about ghosts punishing the vicious and rewarding the worthy. However, whereas *Mozi* emphasizes on several occasions that the punishments and rewards are meted out invariably and without fail, the excavated text puts that principle in question. Here, the speaker presents a dilemma: Why is it that some virtuous people perish unrewarded, while villains get away with their evil?

In response to this problem, the “Gui shen zhi ming” speaker fails to come up with a definitive and clear explanation. Instead, he concludes that the ghosts are sometimes *ming*, and sometimes not *ming*. While exact reasons why it is so remain unclear, the speaker allows two options: the ghosts might choose to be *ming* or not; alternatively, some of them are or are not *ming* by nature. The first possibility suggests that ghosts act on a whim, for unknown reasons; but the second one implies that there are in fact two kinds of ghosts, those who are *ming*, and those who are not.

Examples from the text above—(lines 4 through 7)—allow us to analyze what *ming* means:

則鬼神之賞/罰，此明矣。

Following the conventional reading of the term *ming* in the context of *Mozi*, we would translate this as “Thus, as to ghosts rewarding/punishing, it is evident (‘ming’).”<sup>46</sup> But it could also be translated as: “Thus, as to ghosts rewarding/punishing, it is [an example of] ‘ming’.” And since the topic of the bamboo text is the *ming*-ness of ghosts, this reading is more reasonable.

The ghosts fulfill their duty of rewarding good and punishing evil when, or if, they are *ming*; it is also correct to say that they are *ming*, or

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46. Compare “Thus, it is clear from these [examples] that ghosts and spirits rewarded them,” Brindley, “The Perspicuity,” 216; “And so, that ghosts and spirits rewarded them is evident [from these examples],” Sterckx, “*Mozi* 31,” 123. Sterckx also proposes the reading “this is due to their clear percipience,” Sterckx, “*Mozi* 31,” 123, n. 60.

it is *ming* that happens, when they act accordingly. The term, then, should be understood as the ability of ghosts to distinguish between right and wrong, which results in taking a relevant action: reward or punishment—execution of justice. Ghosts who are *ming* are ghosts who discern.

*Mozi* seems to present the ghosts as impartial and infallible agents who mete out rewards and punishments on the people. This argument stands in a clear contrast with the “*Gui shen zhi ming*” fragment, which points out instances when good is not rewarded and evil not punished. As we have seen, Master Mo’s argument for the existence of ghosts in *Mozi* ends with a closing warning that the ghosts are able to see everything and reach everywhere, even in deep valleys, dense forests, and distant places. In the last section of the “*Ming gui*” treatise, we find the same assertion, but with some interesting developments:

故鬼神之神，不可為幽間廣澤山林深谷，鬼神之神必知之。鬼神之罰，不可為富貴眾強，勇力強武，堅甲利兵，鬼神之罰必勝之。<sup>47</sup>

Because of the *ming* of ghosts and spirits, it is impossible to hide even in dark and abandoned places, in vast marshes, mountain forests, or deep valleys; the *ming* of ghosts and spirits will penetrate it. The punishment of ghosts and spirits cannot be warded off by wealth or nobility, the power of multitude, bravery, military strength, resistant armor, or sharp weapons. The ghosts’ punishing will prevail over them.

We encounter here the expression “the ‘*ming*’ of ghosts and spirits” (*gui shen zhi ming* 鬼神之神), the same as in the bamboo manuscript. Master Mo does not claim that there is no way to escape from the ghosts’ punishing; what he does say, more exactly, is that there is no escape from the ghosts’ *ming*.

Rather than maintaining, as before, that ghosts will see transgressions wherever they occur (*jian you gui shen shi zhi* 見有鬼神視之), here it is the *ming* of the ghosts that instead will see, or *by means of which* the ghosts will know the wrongdoers wherever they go and seek them out (*gui shen zhi ming bi zhi zhi* 鬼神之神必知之).

This is not a mere stylistic and grammatical variation, but an entirely different statement. As opposed to the ghosts’ simply seeing or watching people, here we have a condition, a special quality or characteristic of the ghosts that enables them to perceive things. The grammatical construction of the phrase (using the possessive particle *zhi*) makes it clear the ghosts need to possess *ming* in the first place in order to be able to

47. *Mozi jiangou*, 244.

fulfill their tasks; only when they have it are they infallible, and there is no way to escape from them.

Such an understanding of *ming* changes entirely our reading of the “Ming gui” chapter in *Mozi*. As the excavated document reveals, these ideas of Master Mo are based on the principle that, in order to be able to mete out punishments and rewards, ghosts need to be *ming*, and thus capable of discerning right from wrong.

The excavated fragment does not only reflect debates within Mohism, as proposed by Sterckx, but it shows that the problem lies somewhere else, namely in applying concepts.<sup>48</sup> There may have been disagreements within Mohism concerning the existence and effectiveness of ghosts, but the understanding of *ming* was completely different: ghosts were only potential “carriers” of it—not all of them had that power, and their intervention did not always seem to be required.

### *Ming gui*—“Illuminated Spirits”

As the bamboo text suggests, *Mozi* “Ming gui” discusses one particular group of ghosts. In this section, I demonstrate that this group, called “ming gui,” was well known beyond *Mozi*, and that ghosts belonging to this group were not expected to punish anyone who did something wrong. The external literature will help solve the puzzle of why some crimes go unpunished. It reveals the applicability of *ming*—when and what acts are to be punished, and how. I also examine the complexity of the term *ming*, which involves not only the discernment between right and wrong actions, but more importantly, it is an insight into the human heart and the ability to read people’s true intentions. This analysis will help us comprehend Master Mo’s argument and the place of *ming* in it. Ghosts were not just Heaven’s “police” and *ming* was not merely their “sharp vision” that allowed them to spot any crime wherever it was committed.

In her study on covenant texts excavated at urban remains of the Eastern Zhou state of Jin (770–221 B.C.E.), Susan Weld observes that each text contains a formula bidding the “far-seeing spirits”—*ming gui* 明鬼—to

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48. “If proven to be Mohist, at most this new piece of evidence suggests that there were voices questioning the absolute nature of the Mohist thesis on certain spirit intervention. This reflects rivalry of ideas between different branches of Mohism, but does not express any Ru context. At best it demonstrates that the idea of spirit intervention in response to human behavior was debated.” Sterckx, “*Mozi* 31,” 139.

punish anyone who would breach the covenant.<sup>49</sup> Weld presents Text 1:9 as an example of a “loyalty covenant text”:

- I. [If I], Hu
- II. A. Dare to fail to strip bare my heart and vitals in serving my lord; or
  - B. Dare to fail to thoroughly adhere to Your covenant and the mandate granted in Ding gong and Ping si; or
  - C. Dare, in any respect, to initiate breaking of the faith, or dispersion [of the alliance], causing an interruption in the guardianship of the two temples; or
  - D. Dare to harbor the intention of restoring Zhao Ni and his descendants to the territory of the state of Jin or join in a faction to summon others to covenant [with them];
- III. May our former rulers, far-seeing, instantly detect me; and
- IV. May ruin befall my lineage.<sup>50</sup>

The text allows us to identify the spirits as “former rulers”—the ancestors of the covenanters. As we can see, the emphasis is put on their ability to “detect” the culprit; hence, *ming* is rendered as “far-seeing.” This notion harks back to Master Mo’s warnings about ghosts being able to track the evil down “even in a deep valley and a dark forest.”<sup>51</sup> In Weld’s interpretation, the supernatural powers are “called on to enforce the stipulations.”<sup>52</sup> In Text 1:9, it is the potential culprit who determines the conditions under which he would deserve a punishment. In other words, the judgment does not lie within the capacity of the spirits, but the people participating in the covenant; if, for instance, the covenanter committed any other kind of wrong, the ghosts would not need to go after him; the spirits merely keep the covenanters in check, so that they do not dare to break the covenant, another function similar to that articulated in *Mozi* “Ming gui.”<sup>53</sup>

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49. Susan Weld, “Covenant in Jin’s Walled Cities: The Discoveries at Houma and Wenxian,” a dissertation presented by Susan Roosevelt Weld to the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations (Cambridge: Harvard University, MA, 1990).

50. Weld, “Covenant,” 353.

51. *Mozi jiangou*, 234.

52. Weld, “Covenant,” 353.

53. 今若使天下之人，偕若信鬼神之能赏贤而罚暴也，则夫天下豈亂哉！“Now, if we cause all the people in the world to believe that the ghosts and spirits have the ability to reward the worthy and punish the violent, how could there be any chaos in the world!” *Mozi jiangou*, 222.

*footnote continued on next page*

Weld concludes that all texts belonging to the realm of covenant, oath, and curse, “represented the attempt to draw on the powers of the spirit world to create binding obligations in the human world.”<sup>54</sup> Covenants are representations of special new bonds established between the covenanters, based on faithfulness and sincerity. In addition to Weld’s discussion, I propose to consider the particular role of *ming* in this human–spirit relationship. The spirits are able to screen faithfulness and sincerity only by means of *ming*; at the same time, these virtues are manifestations of *ming* in the human world. *Ming*, therefore, is indispensable to the execution of a covenant.

Elsewhere in extant literature, too, ghosts are evoked not merely for formulaic reasons and their “illumination”—*ming*—is transcendent. In *Yili* 儀禮, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 classifies the “illuminated spirits” *ming shen* 明神 as “Heaven’s Supervisors of Covenants” 天之司盟.<sup>55</sup> Also in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 they are singled out as covenant ghosts.<sup>56</sup> Here, however, their job is as much supervising the covenants as scrutinizing the hearts and intentions of the covenanters. As in the Houma texts, the parties appeal to the spirits to oversee their promise to keep the agreements and invite them to destroy whoever dares to fail in his covenant obligations.

E.g., in the covenant between Jin and Chu (Cheng XII, 2) we read:

有渝此盟，明神殛之，俾隊其師，無克胙國。<sup>57</sup>

If anyone shall breach this covenant, the *ming* spirits shall kill him, they shall make his armies perish, so that he will not be able to retain his state.

As in *Mozi*, the *ming* spirits are in charge of meting out justice; here, still, their role is more limited. “Covenant ghosts” specialize in one particular task, which is overseeing these particular agreements; they do not reward all good and punish all evil wherever and whenever it occurs. Moreover, it does not seem as though there is any room for deliberation: ghosts will be “activated” automatically should the covenant be broken, with no choice but to act. *Mozi* extends this function of the “*ming gui*” into other areas of life, thus making them more “universal”—they mete

54. Weld, “Covenant,” 3.

55. *Yili*, 13.328, ch. 27, 7a–9a.

56. “*Ming shen*” appear in covenant context in Zhuang 32, ZZ13, 181, ch. 10, 21b; Xi 28, ZZ13, 274, ch. 16, 25b; Xi 28, ZZ13, 275, ch. 16, 28a; Cheng 9, ZZ13, 447, ch. 26, 24b; Cheng 12, ZZ13, 458, ch. 27, 5a–5b; Xiang 9, ZZ13, 530, ch. 30, 33a; Xiang 11, ZZ13, 546, ch. 31, 19a; Ai 12, ZZ13, 1026, ch. 59, 3a.

57. *Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981), 856.

out punishments and rewards to anyone who deserves them; in a way, Master Mo liberates the *ming* ghosts of the restrictions of their formulaic role—he de-formularizes them.

However, further analysis of the *Zuo zhuan* passages shows that the role and capacities of *ming* spirits can be much more complex; apart from overseeing the oaths and detecting a breach, the spirits also scrutinize the covenanters' truthfulness (*xin* 信).

Take, e.g., the account in which Jin wishes to renew the covenant of Maling (Cheng IX, 2):

季文子謂范文子曰：德則不競，尋盟何為？范文子曰：勤以撫之，寬以待之，堅彊以御之，明神以要之，柔服而伐貳，德之次也。<sup>58</sup>

Ji Wenzhi said to Fan Wenzhi, "[Jin's] virtue is weak; what is, then, the use of renewing the covenant?" Fan Wenzhi replied, "By supporting [the feudal lords] with diligence, by treating them with generosity, by defending them with determination, by having the *ming* spirits bind [and oblige] them, by being lenient with those who submit, but cracking down on those who are disloyal, we shall achieve the next best degree of the true virtue."

The spirits do not participate in the covenant automatically, whenever summoned; one needs to be worthy of their presence. Their attendance reflects one's own moral status. Jin needs to cultivate its virtue in order to win the spirits' recognition and collaboration. By having the spirits bind the covenant, Jin can demonstrate the validity of its leadership amongst the feudal states.

The meaning of a covenant is explained on the occasion of Wu seeking to renew its covenant with Lu (Ai XII, 3):

公不欲，使子貢對曰：盟，所以周信也，故心以制之，玉帛以奉之，言以結之，明神以要之。寡君以為苟有盟焉，弗可改也已。若猶可改，日盟何益？<sup>59</sup>

The Duke [of Lu] was not willing [to renew the covenant], and dispatched Zigong with a reply, saying, "A covenant serves as the confirmation of faith. Therefore its terms come from the heart [of the participants]; jade and silk are presented with it; it is spelled out using words; and the *ming* spirits bind it. Our ruler reckons that once a covenant is made, it cannot be changed. If you change it, you could just as well make a [new] covenant every day, but what would it be good for?"

58. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 842–43.

59. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 1671.

Covenants are not meant as threats, and ghosts are not mechanical executors of justice in case of a breach; they are needed to “bind” *yao* 要 the covenant—a service that requires their consent. A covenant, we are told, is a “confirmation of faith”; the ghosts’ consent to approve it depends on the truthfulness and the virtue of the parties involved in it. The spirits know the true intentions of the covenanters, because they are *ming*, and if there is no faith, they will not bind the covenant. This notion is clearly pronounced in the following passage (Xiang IX, 8):

楚子伐鄭。子駟將及楚平，子孔、子蟠曰：與大國盟，口血未乾而背之，可乎？子駟、子展曰：吾盟固云唯強是從，今楚師至，晉不我救，則楚強矣。盟誓之言，豈敢背之？且要盟無質，神弗臨也。所臨唯信，信者，言之瑞也，善之主也，是故臨之。明神不蠲要盟，背之，可也。<sup>60</sup>

The viscount of Chu invaded Zheng. Zisi intended to make peace with Chu, but Zikong and Zijiao said, “We have just made a covenant with the great state [of Jin]; how can we break it when the sacrificial blood on our mouths has not even dried yet?” Zisi and Zizhan replied, “The terms of our covenant say, “Follow the stronger”; now, the army of Chu has arrived, but Jin does not come to our rescue, therefore Chu is the stronger. How would we dare to go back on our words spoken during the covenant? Besides, when a covenant is made under force, it lacks substance; therefore the *ming* spirits will not oversee it. They attend [the covenant] only when there is sincerity. As for one that is truthful, his words are [as genuine] as jade, and goodness is his master, and therefore [the *ming* spirits] attend. *Ming* spirits cannot be forced to accept a covenant; thus, it can be broken.”

Ghosts’ capacities reach beyond punishing the people who break an oath or even beyond executing justice universally; the power attributed to them is not about how far their sight and supervision can reach. Instead, *ming* ghosts are able to see peoples’ intentions and to evaluate them in moral terms; it is not as much the punishment itself as the judgment that really matters. *Ming* is the ability to discern right from wrong, not to track down the culprits wherever they hide. The ghosts perceive the oath-breakers not only after the covenant is “formally” broken, but at the moment the latter conceive their insincere thoughts.

Zisi and Zizhan are not afraid to breach the covenant, because, in moral terms, they do not feel responsible for the breach; they trust the ghosts’ *ming*—their moral discernment. Since Zheng acted under pressure, the covenant is invalid—the covenanters did not want it in their

60. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 971.

hearts. Ghosts will not only do the justice, but also see that justice is done.

Perhaps the most revealing thing about the “ming” spirits is an account in the *Zuo zhuan* that is not at all related to a covenant (Zhuang XXXII, 3):

秋，七月，有神降于莘。惠王問諸內史過曰：是何故也？對曰：「國之將興，明神降之，監其德也；將亡，神又降之，觀其惡也。故有得神以興，亦有以亡，虞、夏、商、周皆有之。」王曰：若之何？對曰：「以其物享焉。其至之日，亦其物也。王從之。內史過往，聞虢請命，反曰：虢必亡矣。虐而聽於神。神居莘六月。虢公使祝應、宗區、史黹享焉。神賜之土田。史黹曰：虢其亡乎！吾聞之：國將興，聽於民；將亡，聽於神。神，聰明正直而壹者也，依人而行。虢多涼德，其何土之能得？」<sup>61</sup>

In autumn, in the seventh month, a spirit descended in Xin. King Hui [of Zhou] asked Neishi (historiographer of the interior) Guo: “What is this all about?” to which [Guo] replied: “When a state is about to rise, *ming* spirits descend to it to witness its virtue; when [the state] is about to collapse, the spirits also descend to it to observe its corruption. Therefore, there are cases when the reasons for the spirits’ visit is [the state’s] glory, but also downfall. It happened to the Yu, the Xia, the Shang, and the Zhou alike.” The King asked, “What shall we do?” “Give it the offerings appropriate to the day on which it arrived.” The King did accordingly. The Neishi went ahead [to proceed with the offerings], when he heard that [the ruler of] Guo solicited entitlement [from the spirit]; when he returned, he said, “Guo surely will collapse, [its ruler] is vicious and deluded by spirits.”

The spirit remained in Xin for six months. The duke of Guo sent Zhu (invocator) Ying, Zong (ancestral spirit attendant) Qu, and Shi (historiographer) Yin to sacrifice to it. The spirit presented [the duke] with land. Shi Yin commented, “Guo’s downfall is imminent! I have heard that if a state is going to rise, [its ruler] takes orders from the people; when it is going to collapse, it takes orders from spirits. Among spirits, those who are intelligent and discerning, upright and straight, and of one mind act according to people’s actions. Guo accumulated lots of meager virtue, how can it acquire land?”

The passage is a warning to all those who abuse and mishandle the spirits because of their misconceptions about them. The spirits are “luminous and prescient” *cong ming* 聰明—they can read peoples’ minds

61. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 251–53.

and see their true intentions, and they act accordingly, rewarding the virtuous and punishing the wicked; because of their *ming*, they cannot be manipulated. The ruler of Guo will not get new land, because he does not deserve it. It is within his human capacity to gain or to lose; the spirits only bear witness to the process—they observe the virtue. The ruler of Guo tries to bribe the spirit with offerings; instead, he should rely on his own virtue. A virtuous man does not solicit favors from spirits; instead, he has his own *ming*. Spirits come to him to “be present” *lin* 臨—to oversee and to authorize his reward, rather than to grant it upon him; thus, they recognize and expose his *ming*. It is not up to the spirits to dispense with things, but it is up to them to supervise and to authorize. The spirit in Xin “exposes” (*ming*) the duke’s vanity and corruption. The duke reveals the quality of his own virtue, in this case the lack thereof, by the way of dealing with the spirit. Judging by his behavior, everybody can see what kind of a ruler he is. The spirit does not need to take any further action to punish the duke—it is merely present, while the duke’s doom is his own doing.

In conclusion, the spirits’ being *ming* means that they can (1) see peoples’ intentions; (2) evaluate peoples’ virtue and truthfulness; (3) reveal peoples’ true virtue.

*Ming* is the spirits’ power to discriminate and to evaluate, and it is *ming* that defines them; without it, they would not be able to perform, therefore it is only the ghosts with *ming* that are fit for the job.

Moreover, as seen from the examples above, *ming* is a quality pertaining to humans. Performing faithfulness and sincerity is a manifestation of a person’s *ming*. A faithful covenanter is “far-sighted” like the spirit of his ancestor; he is illuminated with the *ming* of his forefathers by modeling himself after them, being faithful and sincere.

Thus, the “*ming gui*” emerge as a special group of punitive ghosts, commonly referred to during the period, whose function is meting out justice. The punishment or reward, rather than an “actual” doom, such as death or the destruction of army and state, may mean the exposure of the culprit’s true virtue or lack thereof. This concept of punitive ghosts is not particular to *Mozi*. Master Mo does not offer his own unique theory about what or who ghosts are, where they come from, and what they are like, and it does not introduce a new, original lore. Instead, Master Mo adopts a pre-existing concept—of a group of ghosts with these specific functions—and incorporates it into his own doctrine.

### “Sagely Illumination”—Transformative Power of *Ming*

In the *Zuo zhuan*, *ming* does not only apply to ghosts and spirits. More generally, it is an attribute of a sage and it stands for the quality of

“sagely illumination”; *ming jun* is a sage ruler who, like his ancestors—the sage kings of antiquity *ming wang* 明王—without fail distinguishes right from wrong and governs by means of justice. “Sagely illumination” has a transformative power: humans who possess it obtain a spirit-like insight into the nature of things; in fact, on some occasions they follow a special ritual that involves shamanistic techniques, in order to actually become spirits themselves.

As we saw in the episodes in *Mozi* “Ming gui,” a human must turn into a ghost before he can carry out justice. It is not another, “independent” ghost agent who will punish the culprit on behalf of the victim, but the victim himself, after becoming a ghost, i.e. after death. Moreover, as the stories show, the implementation of *ming* is always deferred—there is a promise that justice will be served in the future, and it is served after a precisely predicted period of time (*bu chu san nian* 不出三年 “before three years have passed”). In effect, Master Mo supports his view by means of historical evidence, and he persuades by presenting (and proving) specific predictions. Humans cannot punish; they need to become *ming*—in this case, turn into punitive ghosts—and only that entitles them to mete out the punishment. *Ming* is not valid without the transformation, hence the delay in the execution of justice. Three years is the regular mourning period after someone’s death, a time that marks the transition of the dead into his new identity;<sup>62</sup> it is this transformation of a human into a ghost that activates the fulfillment of the prediction. Knowing the future indicates that the human agent is “illuminated”—*ming*. Justice needs to be executed at the right time and not on a whim of the ghost; it takes *ming* to know when to strike and make it a legitimate punishment, so that it can serve as an example for everybody: a manifestation of justice—*ming*.

However, at the last stage of Master Mo’s argument for the existence of ghosts in “Ming gui,” we observe an interesting twist: it is not the ghosts who perform the execution of justice; while still rhetorically trying to prove that ghosts exist, Master Mo brings up examples in which justice is actually meted out by humans.

Master Mo argues that just punishment will be visited upon the culprits regardless of their social rank and wealth. He then goes on to prove it with the examples of King Jie of Xia and King Zhou of Yin. In both of

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62. According to Constance Cook, “the rituals in pre-Han China that marked transitions from death through the traditional three-year period of mourning (for an elite male with progeny) ensured the social identity of the deceased—an identity that would eventually link together all aspects of the deceased: the aspects resident in his tomb, in his spirit tablet in the temple, and in Heaven.” Cook, *Death in Ancient China*, 32.

these cases, Heaven destroys the tyrant by appointing a human to carry out what is described as Heaven's "*ming* punishment" (*ming fa* 明罰):

若以為不然，昔者夏王桀貴為天子，富有天下，上詬天侮鬼，下殃傲天下之萬民「。。。」，故於此乎天乃使湯至明罰焉。「。。。」故昔夏王桀貴為天子，富有天下，有勇力之人推哆、大戲，生列兇虎，指畫殺人，人民之眾兆億，侯盈厥澤陵，然不能以此圍鬼神之誅。此吾所謂鬼神罰，不可為富貴眾強、勇力強武、堅甲利兵者，此也。<sup>63</sup>

If someone thinks that this is not so, there is the case of King Jie of Xia who in antiquity was venerated as Son of Heaven and owned the whole world, but above he cursed Heaven and insulted ghosts, and below he abused and killed myriads of the people of the world, [...] and because of this Heaven sent Tang to carry out its *ming* punishment. [...] Thus in antiquity, King Jie of Xia was venerated as Son of Heaven and owned the whole world. He had men of great daring and strength Tuichi and Daxia who were able to tear apart a live rhinoceros or tiger and who directed the killing of people. The multitudes of Jie's subjects numbered in the millions, filling every marsh and hill. Nevertheless, he was unable to escape the execution of the ghosts and spirits. This is why I say that the punishments of ghosts and spirits cannot be resisted by wealth, nobility, strength of numbers, daring, power, strong armor, or sharp weapons, just as in this case.

Both examples Master Mo provides are empirical in nature and describe actual instances of historical figures that were punished for their transgressions.<sup>64</sup> It is noteworthy that, even though Master Mo's point is that ghosts unerringly punish the wicked and reward the worthy regardless of their station in life, this passage actually presents a human agent (Tang) meting out the punishment on behalf of Heaven and only later attributes the execution of justice to ghosts and spirits. Here, then, it is a human who takes up the role of the "discerning ghost"—the "*ming gui*"—that Master Mo presents earlier. In other words, according to Master Mo a human acting as a proxy of Heaven is in effect a ghost.

In order to prove that ghosts exist, Master Mo presents "ghost stories" as historical events—he "historicizes" them. By assuming that the narrated events actually took place, he, in effect, uses history—record of precedence from the past—as evidence supporting his argument. In contrast,

63. *Mozi jiangou*, 245–46.

64. The historicity of these (and other) episodes is, of course, questionable, but Master Mo assumed they were "historical events," as would any potential contemporary reader or interlocutor.

when using transmitted historical narrative to serve as his evidence, Master Mo turns it into accounts of the spirit world, in which historical—human—figures act as ghosts. In telling the tale thus, Master Mo interprets history: he attributes the downfall of the tyrants of antiquity not to human actors, but to Heaven's intervention in human affairs. When a just war takes place, it is by Heaven's will that the victorious army succeeds in punishing transgressions and is duly rewarded. *Ming* emerges as a divine quality—an "illumination" that originates from Heaven; meting out of punishments and rewards is coordinated with Heaven and endorsed by it.<sup>65</sup>

This transformation of the capacity from human to non-human (ghost-like) seen in the *Mozi* is not merely conceptual, but instead it is a reflection of an actual ritual practice of the time. The human agent executing justice on behalf of Heaven is not just a "replacement" for a ghost, but an actual one.

In his article about the meaning of the term *ming*, Henri Maspero discusses the mourning clothes *ming yi* 明衣,<sup>66</sup> he observes that, according to *Huainanzi* 淮南子, a general of an army, before going out to battle, had to go through a complex ritual in the ancestral temple that resembled a funerary ceremony. During the ritual, he would undergo a transformation: he would be treated as a dead person, and he would go into the battle wearing the clothes of the dead; upon return, he would go through the process again to reenter the realm of the humans.<sup>67</sup> In effect, the

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65. According to Wong and Loy, the distinction Master Mo makes between punishing and offensive war is marked by the approval of ghosts: "War only then is justified when providential ghosts appear." Wong and Loy, then, interpret *Mozi* episodes in which humans execute justice as punishments authorized and commissioned by ghosts. However, they do not examine the nature and provenance of the ghosts in question, or their actual function in relationship with humans. They never explain the terms they use in reference to ghosts ("agents of war"; "punitive ghosts"; "providential ghosts") and it is unclear if this nomenclature is linked in any way with the vocabulary used in *Mozi* (are "punitive ghosts" "ming gui" 明鬼?). Instead, Wong and Loy see ghosts as a rhetorical device, by means of which Master Mo shows the rulers a means of justifying their military campaigns. See Benjamin Wong and Hui-Chieh Loy, "War and Ghosts in *Mozi's* Political Philosophy," *Philosophy East & West* 53.3 (2004), 343–63. As I argue, it is not the ghosts' presence, but rather the transformative power of *ming* that matters. It is still ghosts who carry out the punishment, but they appear in a human form; or else, it is humans who undergo a transformation and act in the capacity of ghosts (become ghost-like).

66. Maspero, "Le mot *ming* 明," 258.

67. According to *Huainanzi* 淮南子 ("Bing lue xun" 兵略訓), during the ritual the general would sit facing the North as a coffin and the ruler of the state would sit facing the East as a mourning son; leaving for battle, he would exit through the "inauspicious gate" *xiong men* 凶門 in the western wall of the temple, as would a coffin on its way out after the funeral. Maspero compares this ceremony to a description of a funerary rite in

*footnote continued on next page*

general would lead the army against the enemy not as a human (a living person), but as a dead person—an ancestor (a living ghost). If we consider the fact that just wars conducted by virtuous rulers were always regarded as punitive expeditions, we can see how the general in the battle is acting in the capacity of a “ming gui”—he is punishing evil on behalf of Heaven, after having undergone an actual, both physical and spiritual, transformation from a human into a ghost.<sup>68</sup>

*Mozi* offers more insight into the relationship between Heaven, humans, and the ghosts in “Fei gong xia” 非攻下, where we can see more clearly how humans on punishing expeditions act as ghosts.

From the very outset of the chapter, Master Mo establishes the hierarchy of the three realms:

雖使下愚之人，必曰：將為其上中天之利，而中中鬼之利，而下中人之利，故譽之。<sup>69</sup>

Even the stupidest person will admit that praised should be the one who acts to the benefit of Heaven above, ghosts in the middle, and humankind below.

Master Mo positions ghosts as the intermediary between Heaven and humankind, and he insists that their interference is required, as if Heaven could not implement punishments or rewards without them. However, the examples he uses in “Fei gong xia” to illustrate the punishments visited upon those who practiced aggressive warfare prove that Heaven, instead of dispatching the ghosts, endows human agents with ghost-like powers to do the job.

Master Mo uses the same episodes as in “Ming gui,” except here the presence of the ghosts is actually pronounced. Heaven first expresses its wrath by sending down natural calamities, such as the sun coming out at night or rains of blood.<sup>70</sup> Then, as also occurs in “Ming gui,” Heaven appoints a human to do the punishing. In “Fei gong xia,” however, unlike in the “Ming gui” examples, a ghost appears to assist the human, as if to endorse and to reinforce the mandate of Heaven.

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*Liji* 禮記 (“Tan gong xia” 檀弓下), according to which part of the western wall of the temple would be torn down to carry the coffin out: 及葬，毀宗躡行; Maspero, “Le mot *ming* 明,” 258–59.

68. During the ceremony at the ancestral temple, by becoming ritually dead, the general would be endowed with Heaven’s mandate *ming* 命 to begin the expedition; all wars and battles in Zhou times were ritual acts; see Maspero, “Le mot *ming* 明,” 259.

69. *Mozi jiangou*, 140.

70. 日妖宵出，兩血三朝 (...); *Mozi jiangou*, 146. The list of disasters that Heaven has in store for people is actually quite entertaining to read, and includes such delights as a woman turning into a man 有女為男 or the sky raining meat 天雨肉.

Accordingly, when Tang is about to punish Jie, a spirit communicates with him and prepares the ground for destroying the offender:

少少，有神來告曰：「夏德大亂，往攻之，予必使汝大堪之。」<sup>71</sup>

Soon afterwards, a spirit came and told [Tang]: “The virtue of Xia is in great disorder, you should go ahead and attack them, I will make sure you win a great victory.”

Similarly, in the instance of King Wu punishing Zhou:

武王踐攻，夢見三神，曰：「予既沈漬殷紂于酒德矣，往攻之，予必使汝大堪之。」<sup>72</sup>

When King Wu took over the throne [from King Wen], he saw three spirits in his dream, who told him: “We have gotten Zhou of Yin completely drunk; you should go ahead and attack him, and we will make sure you win a great victory.”

Even though it is not spelled out directly, the text implies a shamanistic relationship between the ghosts and their human agents. Ghosts appear to be Heaven’s power descending upon the humans, entering their minds, and imparting to them divine knowledge and skills. Through dreams and other (unspecified) forms of communication, ghosts rectify the actions of people; they sharpen their vision and, perhaps most importantly, reveal to them the imminent future. All of the spiritual interventions narrated by Master Mo can be read as predictions of the villains’ doom and the chosen human agent’s certain victory. The ghosts do not act “on the ground”; as in the context of the covenant, they merely stand by and oversee the proceedings; they need human agents who, being transformed by them, act with, if not *in*, the capacity of punitive ghosts.<sup>73</sup> In “Ming gui,” Master Mo skips that step of spiritual transformation and presents only the final result, which is the deliverance of a *ming* punishment.

*Mozi* “Ming gui” does not explain ghosts, but it does reveal the metamorphosis powered by *ming* and necessary for the execution of justice. *Ming* is an illumination that comes from Heaven; it transforms humans into Heaven’s agents. The person acquiring it is able to discern right

71. *Mozi jiangou*, 149–50.

72. *Mozi jiangou*, 152.

73. I do not quote the first example mentioned by Master Mo in “Fei gong xia” (Yu punishing the You Miao), because the received Chinese text in that fragment is skewed and impossible to understand. It is clear, however, that “a spirit with a face of a man and a body of a bird” 有神人面鳥身 assists Yu at the final battle. He promises Yu victory and sees through it. Sun, 147; Johnston, *The Mozi*, 189; Riegel, *Mozi*, 186.

from wrong, mete out punishments and rewards, and see into the future—he is a sage. These are the principal qualities of a *ming jun*—the “illuminated” (sage) ruler, and we can see this concept developed and put into practice in the *Zuo zhuan*.

### The Sage (*ming*) Ruler—Example of Duke Wen of Jin

According to *Mozi*, the sage kings of antiquity always conducted rectifying campaigns and never engaged in aggressive wars.<sup>74</sup> The ability to correctly apply punishments is the defining trait of a sage:

古者王公大人為政於國家者，情欲譽之審，賞罰之當，刑政之不過失。<sup>75</sup>

The kings, rulers, and officers of the olden times in governing their states always took care to evaluate what to praise and what to condemn, made sure that the rewards and punishments were applied correctly, and that the implementation of corporal punishments was not abused.

The characters portrayed as sage rulers in the *Zuo zhuan* share the same principal functions and characteristics. Moreover, the mechanism of justice also echoes the one proposed in *Mozi*, where the sages are endowed with ghost-like powers and qualities.

The story of Duke Wen of Jin 晉文公 will serve as a perfect illustration to these points. The protagonist, Chong'er (Duke Wen), is modeled after King Wen of Zhou 周文公 and presented as a “cultural” (*wen* 文) hero.<sup>76</sup> He repudiates arms: he first refuses to fight his father, and all the wars he wages as Duke Wen are punitive expeditions; he is endorsed by the ghost of his late brother Shensheng, who appears to predict the doom of Yiwu, the illegitimate ruler in Jin, in the battle of Han;<sup>77</sup> and he

74. 若以此三聖王者觀之則非所謂攻也，所謂誅也；*Mozi jiangou*, 153.

75. *Mozi jiangou*, 130.

76. In his study on heroic tradition in China, C. H. Wang introduces the concept of “cultural heroism” and points out that in China “the display of martial power (*wu* 武) is never as worthy as the exhibition of cultural eloquence (*wen* 文).” In effect, according to Wang’s definition, in Chinese tradition a “hero” is a king who is a sage and who uses culture and virtue for his governance over the people, instead of arms. C. H. Wang, “Towards Defining a Chinese Heroism,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95.1 (1975), 27.

77. The narrative bears a significant similarity to the episodes quoted by Master Mo in “*Fei gong xia*.” It is Heaven who withdraws the mandate to rule Jin from Yiwu; his doom is predicted to take place in a battle for the sake of the enlightened ruler (Chong'er), and the ghost is the bearer of the tidings; he also prepares the ground for the punishment: “The Lord on High has allowed me to punish only the guilty one [Yi Wu]; he shall be defeated in Han.” 帝許我罰有罪矣，敵於韓 (Xi X, 3). Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 335.

establishes his rule in Jin and his hegemony over the entire Zhou domain by means of virtue and ritual. He is portrayed not as a “military” *wu* 武, but a *ming* and a *wen* ruler. The Narrator emphasizes three characteristic aspects of Duke Wen’s rule that put him in line with the sage kings—*sheng wang* 聖王—of antiquity and prove his “sagely illumination”—*ming*: (1) meting out justice by rewarding the virtuous, appointing the capable, and punishing the evil; (2) knowing, relying on, and transforming the people; and (3) being truthful—*xin*. He transforms the Zhou realm and his achievements are long lasting.<sup>78</sup>

In Xi XXIII (637 B.C.E.), Chong’er returns after nineteen years of exile to reclaim the throne in Jin, and along with his return comes also the final execution of justice. Characteristically, in the accounts of his return he is regarded as a dead person.

In Xi XXIII (637 B.C.E.), Duke Hui of Jin dies and his son Yu takes over as Duke Huai. He fears the return of his exiled uncle and the legitimate heir to the throne of Jin, therefore his first command is that nobody must follow “the fugitive”:

懷公立，命無從亡人。(Xi XXIII, 4)<sup>79</sup>

When Duke Huan ascended the throne, he commanded that nobody must follow the fugitive.

“The fugitive” here refers to Chong’er, who otherwise remains nameless in the text. This word choice has an emphatic function: it reveals Yu’s perception of Chong’er and defines his status. A “fugitive” (*wang ren* 亡人) is someone who has “departed,” who has left the boundaries of a certain domain, state, or realm. By extension, it is someone who “is no more,” a dead person. This is a play on words, since *wang* 亡 means “dead.” After a prolonged absence, Chong’er’s reappearance seems sudden, improbable, and unreal, as if he were returning from the dead, a specter-like figure; but more importantly, he is also regarded as a person coming to reclaim his right, and a savior who will put the state back in order.

The punitive aspect of Duke Wen’s return to Jin, and in effect his *ming*, is indicated at the very outset of the narrative. When Yu, trying to prevent Chong’er’s return, orders Hu Tu to summon his two sons—Chong’er’s partisans—back to Jin under the law of abolition, the minister refuses and says:

78. This assertion echoes Cook’s observation that the effects of the spiritual transformation of the sage’s heart “extended into eternity” *yanyong* 延永. Cook, *Death in Ancient China*, 22.

79. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 402.

若又召之，教之貳也。父教子貳，何以事君？刑之不濫，君之明也，臣之願也。淫刑以逞，誰則無罪？臣聞命矣。(Xi XXIII, 4)<sup>80</sup>

If I should summon them back, I would make them waver in their allegiance. How can a father who teaches his son to waver in his allegiance be your lordship's servant? Punishment without excess is the manifestation of the ruler's *ming* and the wish of the minister. If you mete out the punishments in a corrupt and excessive way for the sake of your own gratification, then who will be without guilt? I have heard your commands.

The minister was then put to death. Diviner Bu Yan 卜偃, upon witnessing these events, predicts the doom of Yu; he indicates that this is because of the quality of Yu's *ming*:

周書有之：乃大明服。己則不明，而殺人以逞，不亦難乎？乃大民不見德，而唯戮是聞，其何後之有？(Xi XXIII, 4)<sup>81</sup>

As one of the Books of Zhou put it,<sup>82</sup> "When the *ming* [of the ruler] is great, [the people] are obedient"; but when [the ruler] is himself not *ming* and puts people to death for his own gratification, is it not going to be hard [to achieve the obedience of the people]? When the people at large can see no merit, and executions are all they hear about, then how can [the ruler] have any posterity?

Both Hu Tu and Diviner Yan emphasize the importance of the punitive aspect of *ming* as an indispensable quality in a ruler. Yu—the illegitimate ruler in Jin—is unable to apply correct punishments, and thus is denied *ming*. Yan's judgment is devastating: no *ming* means no future. As a ruler, Yu will not be able to unite the people and consolidate the state; thus, he loses his legitimacy. It is Duke Wen and his *ming*—execution of justice—that both Hu Tu and Yan are anticipating and hoping for.

Thus, Chong'er's return has a salving quality—it is presented as a rescue of Jin from the hands of illegitimate and incompetent rulers. After nineteen years of exile, Duke Wen resumes the power in Jin and begins his rule from punishing the traitors and rewarding all of the faithful followers (*jin hou shang cong wang zhe* 晉候賞從亡者).<sup>83</sup> He exercises

80. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 403.

81. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 403.

82. *Shangshu* 尚書, V. ix. 9.

83. (Xi XXIV, 1) presents four accounts of Duke Wen's sense of justice: (1) He acknowledges his faithful follower Zifan 子犯 through a covenant, calling as witness the spirit of the [Yellow] River 河; (2) He punishes the traitors who plan to assassinate him, but he hears out and pardons eunuch Pi 披, even though the latter was twice

*footnote continued on next page*

power by appointing virtuous men, defending weaker states, and teaching and transforming the people by exposing them to the example of himself; he also seeks and heeds good advice.<sup>84</sup> Most importantly, though, his government has a strong transformative impact on the people. The text says:

晉侯始入而教其民，二年欲用之。子犯曰：「民未知義，未安其居。」  
[...] 民聽不惑，而後用之。出穀戍，釋宋圍，一戰而霸，文之教也。  
(Xi XXVII, 4)<sup>85</sup>

Upon entering the state, the marquises of Jin [Duke Wen] first educated the people, and after two years wanted to use them [in war]. Zifan said: "The people have not yet learned the principle of righteousness, so they have not yet been able to settle down and live peacefully." [...] Only when the people were able to receive the orders without mistake, then he used them. He drove out the Gu guards and relieved the siege of Song; he became a *ba*—hegemon—with only one battle, which was the effect of his *wen* training.

Duke Wen's victory is not a military, but a moral one. In all his actions, he relies on the people and works for their benefit; he cannot succeed without them, and *vice versa*, they cannot thrive without his leadership; he "illuminates" them, and by doing this, he proves, exposes, and transmits his *ming*.

In Xi XXV (635 B.C.E.), Duke Wen restores King Xiang in the Zhou capital. In Xi XXVIII (632 B.C.E.), he fights the battle against Chu, which confirms his hegemony. Before the battle, even the king of Chu recognizes Duke Wen as a sage and he understands that acting against him is futile:

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appointed as his assassin; (3) He admits an old attendant Touxu 頭須; he first rejects him, because Touxu stayed in Jin rather than following him into exile, but he changes his mind when Touxu argues that those who stayed were nonetheless his followers; and (4) He does not forget about Jie Zhitui 介之推, who once cut off a portion of his own thigh to feed Chong'er while in exile, even though Jie does not seek recompense. The accounts show that when rewarding the faithful, Duke Wen is flexible and considerate; he looks into each case individually and is willing to admit and amend possible mistakes; also, he is careful not to overlook even the smallest favors; Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 412–19.

84. In Xi XXVII (633 B.C.E.), when preparing for the battle with Chu, Duke Wen appoints the commander in chief after consulting Zhao Shuai 趙衰; the minister, following the principles of Xia laid out in the *Shu*, recommends a man versed in *Odes* and *Documents*; (Xi XXVII, 4), Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 444–46.

85. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 447.

無從晉師！晉候在外，十九年矣，而果得晉國。險阻艱難，備嘗之矣；民之情<sup>86</sup>偽，盡知之矣。天假之年<sup>87</sup>，而除其害<sup>88</sup>，天之所置，其可廢乎？(Xi XXVIII, 3)<sup>89</sup>

Do not pursue the Jin army! The Marquis of Jin was away [from the state] for nineteen years, and in the end he has succeeded in getting possession of Jin. He experienced all kinds of dangers, obstacles, difficulties, and hardships; he knows thoroughly the truthfulness and falsehood of people. Heaven granted him many years and removed from his way those who wanted to kill him; can someone installed by Heaven be disposed of?

Thus, the Chu ruler likens Duke Wen to a covenant ghost *ming gui* as a man for whom the people's feelings are transparent; he is appointed by Heaven to punish and reward them accordingly.

After the battle of Chengpu 城濮, where the Chu troops were defeated, Duke Wen and the army of Jin returned triumphantly to the capital. There, the Duke distributed lavish rewards and meted out punishments. The Superior Man commented:

文公其能刑矣，三罪<sup>90</sup>而民服。詩云「惠此中國，以四方」，不失賞、刑之謂也。(Xi XXVIII, 6)<sup>91</sup>

Duke Wen indeed does know how to mete out punishments, because he [executed] three criminals, and the people followed him. As the *Odes* say, "By applying virtue to the central state, one [applies it to] the four quarters," which depicts not failing in applying correct rewards and punishments.

Finally, the King of Zhou officially appoints Duke Wen as the "chief of the princes" *hou bo* 候伯. His hegemony was confirmed through a covenant with all the feudal lords. According to the narrative, the Superior Man—*junzi* 君子<sup>92</sup>—deemed this covenant "truthful,"

君子謂是盟也信，

86. Yang reads 情 as 實.

87. According to Yang, this refers to the nineteen years spent in exile—a length of time that was granted by Heaven to Chong'er so that he was able to return.

88. According to Yang, this is a reference to Duke Huai (Yu) and his follower Lü 呂 who were planning to assassinate Chong'er upon his return.

89. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 456.

90. A reference to three people guilty of treason during the battle.

91. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 472.

92. In the context of the *Zuo zhuan*, the "superior man" *junzi* 君子 is conventionally agreed to be Confucius.

and concludes:

晉於是設也，能以德攻。(Xi XXVIII, 3)<sup>93</sup>

In this military campaign, Jin was able to attack by means of virtue.

As shown before, truthfulness *xin* was an indispensable condition for a covenant to be valid. In his judgment about the covenant that made Jin the hegemon among the states, the Superior Man is not so much acknowledging its validity as he is recognizing the “sagely illumination” (*ming*) of Duke Wen. It is his participation in the covenant that validates it; he both oversees and guarantees the agreements. Able to mete out punishments and rewards, as well as transform the people and screen their feelings, Duke Wen guarantees that the agreement is *xin*—truthful. Indeed, he acts as a “*ming gui*.”

Duke Wen owes the hegemony to his “sagely illumination” *ming*, which, in turn, is the engine of his transformative power. By correctly executing justice, he educates the people and brings order not only to Jin but also to the rest of the Zhou realm.

Duke Wen fights for the right cause and does so by means of virtue. He is just and has a transformative influence upon the people. The King of Zhou acknowledges his hegemony through a truthful covenant and correct ceremonies. He is righteous *yi* and sincere *xin*, and he observes the ritual *li* 禮. He is the object, the medium, and the actor of *ming*. In effect, Duke Wen goes down in history as a great hero, one of the five hegemon *ba*, a virtuous and illuminated ruler *ming jun*, and is compared to the sage kings of antiquity. His story shows that justice is served in a timely manner.

A “*ming* punishment” presented in *Mozi* “*Ming gui*” is one that is (1) exemplary and “illuminating”: it illuminates the people by presenting them with an example of a wrong behavior and its consequences; and (2) is executed by means of the application of the faculty of “illumination”—the correct discernment of right and wrong—thereby guaranteeing that the punishment is just; and, finally, (3) is perfectly appropriate to the evil committed; *ming* indicates that the punishment is the punitive action of Heaven.

However, Heaven does not use the human agent instrumentally; rather, the latter is the one who perceives the will of Heaven and seizes the right moment to act. He changes his action to conform to the will of Heaven, which shows that he possesses the faculty of *ming*, and that, consequently, his action is a *ming* action—a punitive act inspired and supported by Heaven. He perceives Heaven’s will, and by taking his

93. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 467.

action, he makes it clear: he manifests (*ming*) his own “sagely illumination” (*ming*). Like Duke Wen of Jin, by revealing his divine quality, he reveals himself as a sage. *Zuo zhuan*:

良君將賞善而刑淫，養民如子，蓋之如天，容之如地；民奉其君，愛之如父母，仰之如日月，敬之如神明，畏之如雷霆，其可出乎？<sup>94</sup>

A good ruler will reward the good and punish the evil; he will care for his people as for his own children, sheltering them as heaven and accommodating them as earth; the people will then respect their ruler, love him as their own parent, regard him as sun and moon, worship him as ghosts and spirits, and be awed by him as lightning and thunder. How could such a ruler be ousted?

I will only add from myself that *shen* and *ming*, the two aspects of the sage’s nature, correspond with heaven and earth that shelter and accommodate his people, and that the two characters for sun (*ri* 日) and moon (*yue* 月) combine into the character for *ming* (明).

### Conclusion

In the concluding part of the treatise, Master Mo agnostically admits that acting as if ghosts existed is more important than the fact of their actual existence. He presents ghosts more as a concept than a real thing. Master Mo is calling for a new covenant. A sage ruler, “discerning” and “illuminated” (*ming*), will govern by meting out just (*ming*) punishments and rewards; the covenant will be bound by punitive ghosts (*ming gui*) whom the sage ruler will impersonate. The ruler will serve as an example (*ming*) to his people; the covenant will be truthful (*xin*), so the people will be willing to cooperate; the community will believe in punitive ghosts and trust in the justice guaranteed by their ruler, who will represent heaven.

Nicolas Standaert suggests that the reading of *Mozi* treatises has been overly influenced by their titles, and that title “Ming gui” does not at all correspond with the conventionally assumed contents of the chapter.<sup>95</sup> If we reconsider the meaning of the contents, then perhaps we should also translate *ming* in the title not as a verb “to explain,” but an adjective meaning “*ming* spirits.” Despite the incoherencies in the treatise, the doctrine laid out in it still holds together if we consider that its foundation is not the belief in the spirit world, but the power that makes the spirits efficacious.

As I demonstrated in this study, “Ming gui” is not exactly about ghosts, but about the quality of *ming*, and not about whether or not

94. Yang Bojun, *Chun qiu*, 1016.

95. Sterckx, “*Mozi* 31,” 138–41.

ghosts are *ming*, but which ghosts (or humans) are, when, and why. When Master Mo talks about ghosts, it is not all and any ghosts; and when he talks about humans, it is about those who were illuminated and have the power of ghosts. *Ming* is the concept that reinforces the social aspect of the doctrine, not the ontological one. Master Mo is agnostic about the ghosts—it is not really important if they exist or not; what really matters is that *ming* does.

In summary, *ming* is a divine force—“illumination”—that transforms both ghosts and humans into the agents of Heaven. It enables them to see the nature of things, such as distinguish right from wrong, and to execute justice, which is a foundation of good government.

On the most basic level, *ming* emerges as a special quality of a certain group of ghosts and it indicates their “punitive” function.

In a more universal sense, *ming* stands for “sagely illumination” and it refers to people—sages. They evaluate people and events from an ethical standpoint; they study the past, explain the present, and foresee the future. The temporal aspect of *ming* is very important—a sage knows *how* and *when* to act. *Ming* here possesses a transformative power—it raises the sages above average humans, endowing them with spirit-like qualities.

Finally, *ming* is the ability to understand and explain the nature of things, and it may refer to a person like Master Mo, or generally a “narrator,” who uses a narrative to illuminate others. In the treatise, Master Mo demonstrates that he understands the ghosts; he also explains past events, analyses the present state of affairs, and predicts what will happen in the future if certain principles are not observed. The act of explaining makes the punitive and illuminating quality of *ming* efficacious—only when people and governments understand and recognize the nature of things will there be harmony; therefore, the government must promote *ming* and put it into practice.

The bamboo document “Gui shen zhi ming” seems to undermine Master Mo’s claims that the ghosts are infallible in their execution of justice. I argued throughout this study that only punitive (*ming*) ghosts never fail; but even if we assume that some ghosts are *ming*, why is it then the case that sometimes they do not mete out justice? As I demonstrated, ghosts act only when it is relevant. As seen in other texts, *ming* spirits are not necessarily supposed to actually punish. They expose the wrongdoing by simply being present; they may also choose *not to be present* in situations when faith is being breached. Their action, then, is rather symbolic, and the punishment (or reward) moral. Punitive ghosts, especially, have a very limited function: they punish only specific kinds of offences, such as breaking a covenant. Unpunished evil and unrewarded good do not indicate that *ming* fails; it only indicates that in certain situations *ming* punishments are not applicable. This conclusion

may be illustrated with the often-quoted episode of Master Mo's illness, usually discussed as an example of inconsistency in the doctrine.<sup>96</sup> Here, too, a skeptic questions the ghosts' infallibility: When asked why ghosts are punishing him with illness when he committed no crime, Master Mo replies that illness is a natural occurrence that can have many reasons, thus having nothing to do with the ghosts or their *ming*; he is, then, reinforcing his argument about the infallibility of *ming*—ghosts have the right discernment (*ming*) and therefore know when it is their duty to act.<sup>97</sup> Mozi does not define terms and criteria of good and evil; it only applies them. Master Mo has a social agenda; he does not strive to explain the spirit world, but to promote its social applicability. He understands *ming* as an indispensable component of a good government.

The meaning and significance of *ming* extend far beyond Mozi and the capacity of this article. Further research would prove it crucial for understanding the nature and mechanics of prediction and prognostication, especially as applied in early Chinese historiography; *ming* is also the underlying concept of "timeliness" *shi* 時, understood as doing the right things at the right time.

### 墨子與鬼：《墨子》“明鬼”的明概念

齊百思

提要

本文論證《墨子》“明鬼”僅關注鬼神的一個種類，即具有“明”的鬼——明鬼。據《鬼神之明》戰國楚竹書鬼神不必都有明。據《墨子》有明鬼類專門處理“賞賢而罰暴”。明鬼此鬼類亦可見於其他戰國文獻如《侯馬盟書》或《左傳》。鬼神有明表示他們能夠探索各人的心思、識別好歹，由此明鬼專“司盟”，即懲罰有毀約行為的諸侯。完善國君謂“明君”，統治國家如明鬼一致處理賞罰而其“刑政之不過失”。

**Keywords:** Mozi, ghosts, sagely illumination, right discernment, justice punishments and rewards, Sage, covenant

墨子，明，鬼神，賞罰，明君，盟

96. Sterckx juxtaposes this episode with the bamboo text to demonstrate that skepticism about the ghosts' "ming" is expressed also in Mozi; according to him, when saying that they cannot cause illness, Master Mo admits that "spirits have only partial powers," Sterckx, "Mozi 31," 127. Brindley similarly concludes that ghosts are "incapable of controlling for other causes of illness and health or misfortune and reward," Brindley, "The Perspicuity," 221.

97. Mozi *jiangu*, 461–64.