

# Soushen ji 搜神記

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Entry tags: Chinese Religion, Daoism, Cosmology, Text, Religious Group, Yellow and Yangzi Rivers Region, Early Chinese Traditions, Miracle tales

The Soushen ji 搜神記 ("Annotations on searching for spirits") is canonically considered to be the first example of the zhiguai xiaoshuo 志怪小說 literary strand, which comprises novels or stories about extraordinary events, characterized by the presence of spirits, ghosts, and supernatural phenomena. The Soushen ji has been compiled during the first half of the IV century (more precisely, around the year 350) by Gan Bao 干寶, writer and historiographer at the Jin 晉 court (265-420) during the reign of Emperor Yuan 元. Since the Soushen ji is the first real anthology of passages on supernatural events that has come down to us, the first written records of numerous well-known Chinese legends, as well as the first descriptions of real and mythological characters that inspired later texts, can be traced to it. It not only influenced the later evolution of the zhiguai genre, but it also laid the foundation for the development of the later chuanqi 傳奇 (reports on extraordinary events) that developed during the Tang 唐 dynasty (618 - 907). As with most texts from ancient China, we do not possess the original edition of the text, but the work of later editors, and it is therefore impossible to determine precisely how the original text was structured. Regarding the contemporary audience's perception of the anomalous themes dealt with in the Soushen ji, not much is known, yet the affiliation to the zhiguai genre is undoubted, based on some peculiar characteristics of the text: - the title reflects the classic structure that usually characterizes anthologies on the subject: a verb indicating the research or narrative (sou 搜), followed by a noun explicating the supernatural, spiritual or anomalous content (shen 神), and, at the end, a character indicating the collection of documents itself (ji 記), since it consists of numerous independent pieces and not of a continuous and organic narrative; - the prose is classical but lightened by the insertion of non-essential grammatical particles that make it reminiscent of the spoken language, yet never trespassing into the vernacular; - the narrative is focused on extraordinary events, juxtaposed against a context of everydayness and normality. Regarding the dating of the work, the almost complete absence of references to Buddhism suggests that the collected stories are dated between the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Moreover, none of the dates or events mentioned are later than the year 323, so it can be assumed that all the events narrated are prior to that year. Yet, some interpolations on the text and the specification, through the insertion of the character Jin 晉, of the affiliation of the various emperors and eras to that dynasty (unnecessary for a reader belonging to the same historical period) prove its redaction by a later editor. Some references to the Soushen ji found in immediately later works confirm a dating around the year 350. These texts are: the Shui jing zhu 水經注 ("Commentary on the Water Classics"), the Soushen hou ji 搜神後記 ("Subsequent Annotations on searching for spirits") by Tao Qian 陶潛 and the Hou Han shu 後漢書 ("Book of the Posterior Han") by Fan Ye 范曄, whose thirteenth and fourteenth chapters find almost complete correspondence in the sixth chapter of the Soushen ji. The intent behind the writing of the Soushen ji, clarified by Gan Bao himself in the preface to the work, goes far beyond entertainment and is historical-didactic, stimulated by the author's strong interest in proving the great power of supernatural forces in a rational and coherent way. Thanks to the author's biography in the Jin shu 晉書 ("Book of the Jin"), we know the peculiar circumstances under which Gan Bao is said to have decided to start gathering the material for the drafting of the Soushen ji: some extraordinary events seem to have affected his family, namely at the death of his father and at the time of his brother's illness. Although the historicity of such events has not been proven, nor it is certain that such stories associated with Gan Bao's biography actually involved his family (and have not even been elaborated on after the author's death and associated with his name only later by historiographers), such facts are traditionally considered to be the prerequisite for the realization of the work. The structure of the work is very simple, the excerpts are collected into chapters based on a thematic rather than chronological choice, and the literary finesse is less accurate when compared to later works

pertaining to the same genre (e.g.: the *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異 written by Pu Songling 蒲松齡 in 1740). Moreover, unlike other later zhiguai or chuanqi works, it is not declared to be literary fiction: it is defined as a chronicle of extraordinary events, mostly gathered from older sources, and, to a lesser extent, also from contemporary events. The bibliographical sources from which the author certainly drew are at least thirty-three and among the various titles, one can mention the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, the *Guoyu* 國語, the *Han shu* 漢書, and, above all, the *Yijing* 易經. In the preface to the text, Gan Bao states that none of the facts narrated were invented by him. The repetition of some anecdotes, which unequivocally represent different versions of the same event or references to the same folkloric tradition, supports the author's assertion. Again in the preface, Gan Bao justifies the possible presence of errors or imprecisions due to eventual inaccuracies in the sources: this is a typical problem of historical and historiographical work in relation to the accuracy and truthfulness of the testimonies. This emphasizes Gan Bao's goal of discussing the supernatural through the tools of chronicle and historiography, to prove the veracity of such events to the skeptical contemporary public. Based on Gan Bao's biography in the *Jin shu* 晉書, Gan Bao wrote a text in 30 chapters entitled *Soushen ji*, while the received text consists of 20 chapters. Scholars agree that the original work was lost in the early years of the Song 宋 dynasty (960 - 1279) and that the version consisting of 464 passages, divided into twenty chapters, is actually an accurate Ming-era reproduction, based on collections of passages from the periods of the Six Dynasties, the Tang, and Song Dynasties. It was Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (a Ming scholar, historian, poet, literary theorist, and owner of one of the most well-stocked libraries of the time) who recompiled the text based on various sources accessible to him. The oldest account of the *Soushen ji* in 20 chapters is part of the collection *Bice Huihan* 秘冊彙函 ("Collection of Secret Volumes"), compiled by Hu Zhenheng 胡震亨 and engraved on wood in 1603. The reduction in the number of chapters from 30 to 20 is presumed to be due to the gradual loss of passages during the various recompilations of the text. None of the passages included in the collection are particularly long, the shortest being less than ten characters, while the longest does not exceed five hundred characters. The language used is the classical language (as for all tales of anomalies from the Chinese Middle Ages): although some of the material included was evidently taken from oral sources, in fact, the text was written to be read in the same way as historical texts. Some of the many themes that emerge in *Soushen ji*: hagiographic accounts of the lives and deeds of immortal beings; good and bad omens associated with pre-Han cosmology based on the interaction between yin and yang and the Wuxing 五行 (five phases); dozens of different types of spirits and demons; unusual and miraculous births; encounters with the death and resurrections; medical and magical prescriptions; accounts on metamorphoses, demonic possessions and exorcisms; strange animals with unusual powers.



Date Range: 100 CE - 350 CE

Region: Eastern Jin - 382 CE

Region tags: Asia, East Asia

From Tan Qixiang's "A Historical Atlas of China"

### Status of Readership:

- ✓ Elite
- ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

## Sources and Corpora

### Print Sources

Print sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Gan Bao, HUANG Jun 黃鈞, CHEN Manming 陳滿銘 (ed.), *Soushen ji* 搜神記, Taipei, Sanmin shuju, 2014.
- Source 2: Gan Bao, DE WOSKIN, Kenneth J., CRUMP, James. I. Jr. (ed. and transl.), *In search of the*

supernatural: the written record, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996.

– Source 3: Gan Bao, Men'sinkov, Lev N., МЕНЬШИКОВ, Лев Н. (ed. and transl.), Zapiski o poiskach duchov (Soushen ji), Записки о поисках духов (Соу шэнь цзи), St. Petersburg, Zentr «Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie», 1994.

## Online Sources

Online sources used for understanding this subject:

– Source 1 URL: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&res=839038&remap=gb>

– Source 1 Description: Full text - Chinese Text Project

## Online Corpora

Relevant online Primary Textual Corpora (original languages and/or translations)

– Source 1 URL: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&res=839038&remap=gb>

– Source 1 Description: Full text - Chinese Text Project

# General Variables

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## Materiality

### Methods of Composition

– Incised or Inscribed



#### Method of inscription

– Other [specify]: The oldest version of the text in 20 chapters appears in the Mice Huihan 秘册彙涵 ('Collection of Secret Volumes'), compiled by Hu Zhenheng 胡震亨 and engraved on wood in 1603.

– Printed with moveable type



#### Number of sheets

– Bound

### Medium upon which the text is written/incised

– Wood



#### Species

– Specify: Field doesn't know

Was the material modified before the writing or incising process?

– Other [specify]: Field doesn't know.

Was the text modified before the writing or incising process?

– Other [specify]: Field doesn't know.

## Location

Is the text stored in a specific location?

[Note at which point in time, for reference, if known; select all that apply]

– No

Is the location where the text stored accompanied by iconography or images?

– No

Is the area where the text is stored accompanied by an-iconic images?

– No

## Production & Intended Audience

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### Production

Is the production of the text funded by the polity?

– No

Is the text considered official religious scripture?

– No

Written in distinctly religious/sacred language?

– No

### Intended Audience

What is the estimated number of people considered to be the audience of the text

This should be the total number of people who would serve as the intended audience for the text.

– Field doesn't know

Does the Religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members?

– No

Are there clear reformist movements?

(Reformism, as in not proselytizing to potential new conservative, but "conversion" - or rather, reform - to the "correct interpretation"?)

– No

Is the text in question employed in ritual practice?

– No

Is there material significance to the text?

– No

## Context and Content of the Text (Beliefs and Practices)

### Context

Is the text itself accompanied by art?

– No

Are there multiple versions of the text?

– Yes

Notes: According to Gan Bao's biography included in the 82nd chapter of the Jin shu 晉書, Gan Bao wrote a text in 30 chapters entitled Soushen ji 搜神記. Yet, the received version of the Soushen ji consists of 20 chapters. Scholars agree that the original work was lost in the early years of the Song 宋 dynasty (960 - 1279) and that the version consisting of 464 passages, divided into 20 chapters, is an accurate Ming reproduction. It was Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (a Ming scholar, historian, poet, literary theorist, and owner of one of the most well-stocked libraries of the time) who recompiled the text based on various sources accessible to him. The oldest account of the Soushen ji in 20 chapters appears in the collection Bice Huihan 秘冊彙函 ('Collection of Secret Volumes'), compiled by Hu Zhenheng 胡震亨 and engraved on wood in 1603. The reduction in the number of chapters from 30 to 20 is probably due to the gradual loss of passages during the recomplings of the text. There are three other texts entitled "Soushen ji", not related to the author Gan Bao: a one-chapter text found among the Dunhuang 敦煌 manuscripts, supposedly written by a person named Ju Daoning 句道興, not by Gan Bao; a text in 8 chapters published in Shang Weijun's 商維濬 Baihai 稗海, imbued with Buddhist content (only one version of this text contains Gan Bao's preface); a six-chapter text from the Xu Daozang 續道藏, which speaks of the three schools of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, which would become prevalent in China only centuries after Gan Bao's death.



Are multiple versions viewed as proper?

– Yes

↳ If multiple versions are proper, is there a differentiation among versions by any means?

– Yes

↳ Age of extant version of text?

– Yes

↳ Content of text?

– Yes

↳ Ritual purpose of text?

– No

↳ Is there debate about which version is proper?

– No

Is the text part of a collection of texts?

– No

Notes: Although the text does not start out as part of a collection, the oldest extant version of the *Soushen ji* in 20 chapters is part of the collection *Mice Huihan* 秘册彙涵 ('Collection of Secret Volumes'), compiled by Hu Zhenheng 胡震亨 and engraved on wood in 1603.

If the text is not explicitly scripture, is it part of another important literary tradition?

– Yes

Notes: The *Soushen ji* is the first known collection of texts pertaining to the *zhiguai xiaoshuo* 志怪小說 literary genre and had a great influence on the evolution of the genre itself. The *zhiguai* made its way into the context of Chinese prose around the time of the fall of the Han dynasty (220), as a literary genre straddling literary fiction and the reporting of real or verisimilar events. The *zhiguai* (a term attested already in the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, that found systematic use in reference to the literary category only during the late Ming 明 (1368 - 1644)), developed as an evolution of Han and pre-Han cosmographic literature, and experienced rapid growth throughout the period of the Six Dynasties (Liuchao 六朝 220 - 589), in response to the political and social instability due to the collapse of central power. This was by no means the only literary genre in which prodigious events appeared, but it is distinguished by the centrality of these events in the stories and the awareness of their strangeness, on the part of both the author and the reader. Even today, the centrality of this work in the evolution of the *zhiguai* genre is evident in the need to resort to the term *Soushen ji* or *Soushen ti* 搜神體 in reference to numerous later collections that have used it as a reference model. The cultural-historical context obviously played a role in the development of the genre: political fragmentation led to a phase of cultural and literary ferment which, coinciding with the collapse of Han orthodoxy and the consequent decline of the concept of literature at the service of the government, prompted the literati, once chronographers and historiographers at the imperial court, to focus on new ideas and experiences, either real or fantastic, reflecting the changed reality in which they were now living.

↳ Cultural with religious implications?

– No

↳ Behavioral literature?

– No

↳ Other

–Other [specify]: the zhiguai xiaoshuo 志怪小說 literary genre.

## Content

Is the text - or does the text include - a ritual list, manual, bibliography, index, or vocabulary?  
(Select all that apply)

–Other [specify]: None.

Are there lineages or a single lineage established by the text?

– No

Does the text express a formal legal code?

– No

Formulating a specifically religious calendar?

– No

## Beliefs

Is a spirit-body distinction present in the text?

– Yes

↳ Spirit-Mind is conceived of as having qualitatively different powers or properties than other parts?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Spirit-mind is conceived of as non-material, ontologically distinct from body?

– Yes

↳ Other spirit-body relationship?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Within conceptions of the mind: are there distinct notions of psychological states or aggregates?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Do practitioners engage in debates about mind-body dualism?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Are debates framed in other ways?

– No

↳ Do practitioners distinguish between a corporeal body and an incorporeal soul or spirit?

– Yes

↳ Are there other sides or features of the debate?

– Field doesn't know

↳ What are historical mainstream and minority positions?

– Field doesn't know

Is belief in an afterlife indicated in the text?

– Yes

Notes: The text, being composed of separate and inconsistent short narratives, does not offer an unambiguous view of the afterlife. In some passages, it is described as being located in (or otherwise related to) heaven, somewhere else as an underworld, or, according to tradition, it corresponds to the Yellow Springs (huang quan 黄泉). Some of the passages describe a bureaucracy of the afterlife, even referring to practices of penal servitude of the dead (e.g. in ch. 4,74) or military practices and organizations of the dead (e.g. in ch. 5,98). The afterlife appears to be organized on a hierarchical scale, at the top of which is Tiandi 天帝, the Heavenly Emperor (e.g. ch. 5,98).

↳ Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group?

– No

↳ Is the temporality of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group?

– No

↳ Is there debate in the interpretation of the language of the afterlife?



– No

Is belief in reincarnation in this world specified in the text?

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Some of the stories in the text refer to people (especially couples) transforming into animals (for example birds) but it is not always clear whether they transform after death or not.

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses dicated in the text?

– No

Does the text indicate if co-sacrifices should be present in burials?

– Yes

↳ Human sacrifices present?

– Yes

Notes: The text, being composed of separate and inconsistent short narratives, does not offer an unambiguous view of the sacrificial offerings. According to Gan Bao's biography transmitted in the Jin shu 晉書, he became committed to demonstrating the actuality of the spirits' world as a consequence of extraordinary events that happened to his own family, one including a co-sacrifice of a woman. According to this text, when his father died, his mother forced the man's favourite maid to be buried with him. When, more than ten years later, Gan Bao's mother also died, the story narrates that the maid was still alive, because the ghost of Gan Bao's father kept bringing her food and beverages.

↳ Out-group humans sacrificed

– Field doesn't know

↳ In-group humans sacrificed

– Field doesn't know

↳ Other humans are sacrificed

– Field doesn't know

↳ Animal co-sacrifices present?

– Field doesn't know

Does the text specify grave goods for burial?

– Yes

Notes: Different passages in the text refer to different anecdotes, therefore the descriptions of burials

and grave goods vary according to the different passages.

↳ Personal effects?

– Yes

↳ Valuable/precious items?

– Yes

↳ Significant value? (Gold, jade, so forth)

– Yes

↳ Some value? (valuable, or useful objects)

– Yes

↳ Other grave goods?

– Yes

Are formal burials present in the text?

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The text refers to burials many times, yet, being it composed of unrelated narratives, the text does not refer to an univocal tradition regarding burials. We read about different kinds of tombs, close or distant from family houses, empty or inhabited by spirits, with different goods inside.

Are there practices that have funerary associations presented in the text?

– Yes

↳ Do these practices take place at tombs/burial sites?

– Yes

↳ Do these practices take place for the veneration OR worship of the dead?

– Yes

↳ For the worship of a deceased person(s)?

– Yes

↳ For the worship of a deified human?

– Yes

↳ For the worship of a deceased hero?

– Yes

↳ For the veneration of a deceased person(s)?

– Yes

↳ For the veneration of a deified human?

– Yes

↳ For the veneration of a deceased hero?

– Yes

Are supernatural beings present in the text?

– Yes

Notes: Much of the content of the text concerns the actions of supernatural beings: deities from the Chinese traditional pantheon, such as Tiandi 天帝, Houji 后稷, Chang'e 嫦娥, etc.; supernatural beings, such as animals capable of transforming into human beings, or humans with exceptional powers; spirits of deceased humans; deities of mountains, rivers, and various remarkable places.

↳ A supreme high-god is present

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god is anthropomorphic or described in anthropomorphic terms

– Field doesn't know

↳ The supreme high god is a sky deity

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god is chthonic (of the underworld)

– No

↳ The supreme high god is fused with the monarch (king=high god)

– No

↳ The monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god

– Yes

Notes: In Imperial China, the emperor is called Tianzi 天子, Son of Heaven, since it is

believed that it is Heaven itself that confers the tianming 天命, the heavenly mandate, so that the emperor can rule over the Middle Kingdom.

- ↳ The supreme high god is a kin relation to elites
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god has another type of loyalty-connection to elites
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is unquestionably good
  - No
- ↳ Other features of the supreme high god
  - Specify: Tiandi 天帝 is named in various passages, yet it is not described in detail.
- ↳ The supreme high god has knowledge of this world
  - Yes
    - ↳ Knowledge is restricted to a particular domain of human affairs
      - No
    - ↳ Knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region
      - No
    - ↳ Knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region
      - Yes
    - ↳ Knowledge is unrestrict outside of sample region
      - Yes
    - ↳ Can see you everywhere normally visible (in public)
      - Field doesn't know
    - ↳ Can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home)
      - Field doesn't know
    - ↳ Can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives)

- Field doesn't know
- ↳ Knows basic character (personal essence)
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Knows what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight)
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Has other knowledge of this world
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Has deliberate causal efficacy in the world
  - Yes
  - ↳ Can reward
    - Yes
  - ↳ Can punish
    - Yes
- ↳ Indirect causal efficacy in the world
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Exhibits positive emotion
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Exhibits negative emotion
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Possesses Hunger?
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Can be hurt?
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Can be tricked?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Can be imprisoned?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Is it permissible to worship supernatural being other than the high god?

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god possesses/exhibits some other feature

–Specify: none

↳ The supreme high god communicates with the living

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The text does not refer to direct communication between Tiandi 天帝 and the living, yet in different excerpts Tiandi is said to send his emissaries to communicate with humans for various reasons.

↳ Does the text make communication with supreme high-god possible?

– No

Previously human spirits are present

– Yes

↳ Human spirits can be seen

– Yes

↳ Human spirits can be physically felt

– Yes

↳ Previously human spirits have knowledge of this world

– Yes

↳ Knowledge is restricted to a particular domain of human affairs

– No

↳ Knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region

– No

- ↳ Knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Knowledge is unrestricted outside of sample region
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Can see you everywhere normally visible (in public)
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home)
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives)
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Know basic character (personal essence)
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight)
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Have other knowledge of this world
  - Specify: none
- ↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world
  - Yes
    - ↳ Human spirits can reward
      - Yes
    - ↳ Human spirits can punish
      - Yes
- ↳ Human spirits have indirect causal efficacy in the world
  - Field doesn't know

- ↳ Human spirits have memory of life
  - Yes
- ↳ Human spirits exhibit positive emotion
  - Yes
- ↳ Human spirits exhibit negative emotion
  - Yes
- ↳ Human spirits communicate with the living
  - Yes
    - ↳ In waking, everyday life
      - Yes
    - ↳ In dreams
      - Yes
    - ↳ In trance possession
      - Yes
    - ↳ Through divination practices
      - Field doesn't know
    - ↳ Only through religious specialists
      - No
    - ↳ Only through monarch
      - No
    - ↳ Communicate through other means
      - Specify: none

Non-human supernatural beings are present  
– Yes



↳ Supernatural beings can be seen

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings can be physically felt

– Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world

– Yes

↳ Knowledge is restricted to a particular domain of human affairs

– No

↳ Knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region

– No

↳ Knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region

– Field doesn't know

↳ Knowledge is unrestricted outside of sample region

– Field doesn't know

↳ Can see you everywhere normally visible (in public)

– Yes

↳ Can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home)

– Field doesn't know

↳ Can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives)

– Yes

*Notes:* In some passages, the supernatural being is capable of knowing the intentions of humans and of understanding the real motives of their behavior.

↳ Know basic character (personal essence)

– Field doesn't know

↳ Know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight)

– Yes

- ↳ Have other knowledge of this world
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings can reward
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings can punish
  - Yes
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings communicate with the living according to the text?
  - Yes
- ↳ In waking, everyday life?
  - Yes
- ↳ In dreams?
  - Yes
- ↳ In trance possession?
  - Yes
- ↳ Through divination practices?
  - Yes
- ↳ Only through religious specialists?
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Only through monarch?
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Other?
  - Specify: The text is divided into numerous brief accounts, and in each account supernatural beings manifest in different (and often contrasting) ways.

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world  
– Field doesn't know

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion  
– Yes

Notes: In some passages, we see spirits feeling gratitude for a human who has been helpful, or piety for a human who is sick or destined to die, and these spirits often act to help humans.

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion  
– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings possess hunger  
– Field doesn't know

↳ These supernatural beings possess/exhibit some other feature  
– Specify: none

Does the text attest to a pantheon of supernatural beings?

– Yes

↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model?  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Organized hierarchically?  
– Yes

Notes: Tiandi 天帝 is often referred to as being on top of the hierarchical scale of deities.

↳ Power of beings is domain specific?  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Other organization of pantheon?  
– Specify: none

Are mixed human-divine beings present according to the text?

– Yes

↳ Mixed human-divine beings can be seen?

– Yes

↳ Mixed human-divine beings can be felt?

– Yes

↳ Do mixed human-divine beings communicate with the living according to this text?

– Yes

↳ In waking, everyday life?

– Yes

↳ In dreams?

– Yes

↳ In trance possession?

– Yes

↳ Through divination practices?

– Yes

↳ Only through religious specialists?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Only through monarch?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Other?

–Specify: The text is divided into numerous brief accounts, and in each account supernatural beings manifest in different (and often contrasting) ways.

Is there a supernatural being that is physically present in the/as a result of the text?

– No

Are other categories of beings present?

– Mysterious?

Notes: The text is imbued with anecdotes about supernatural and abnormal beings that are often seen as positive or negative omens. For example, strange animals, creatures born with more/less limbs

than usual, animals growing horns, inter-species births, animals and humans that change sex, etc. Many passages tell stories about animals, especially foxes, capable of transforming into humans, most often into beautiful women or knowledgeable men.

Does the text guide divination practices?

– No

Notes: The text does not guide divination practices, yet it often refers to divination, and in particular, it mostly refers to milfoil divination and to the Yijing 易經 (Classic of Change).

## Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present in the text?

– Yes

↳ There is supernatural monitoring of prosocial norm adherence in particular  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Do expectations of ritual offerings play a role in supernatural monitoring?  
– Yes

↳ Libations?  
– Yes

↳ Food?  
– Yes

↳ Animal sacrifice?  
– Yes

↳ Human sacrifice?  
– Yes

↳ Sacred objects?  
– Yes

↳ Daily life objects?  
– Yes

↳ Other?

–Specify: The text is divided into numerous brief accounts, and the various accounts describe different kind of sacrifices and offerings.

- ↳ Supernatural being care about taboos
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of coreligionists
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other religions
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other polities
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about sex
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about lying
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about honouring oaths
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about laziness
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about sorcery
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about non-lethal fighting
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about shirking risk
  - Field doesn't know

- ↳ Supernatural beings care about disrespecting elders
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about gossiping
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about property crimes
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about proper ritual observance
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about performance of rituals
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about conversion of non-religionists
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about economic fairness
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about personal hygiene
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about or expect the maintenance of the place?
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about other
  - Specify: Due to the high number of accounts, the characteristics of supernatural monitoring vary greatly.

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment in the text?

– Yes

- ↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known?

– Yes

Notes: The circumstances and the modalities of punishment vary greatly among the various

stories that compose the text.

↳ Done only by high god  
– No

↳ Done by many supernatural beings  
– Yes

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Done by other entities or through other means  
– Yes

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known?  
– Field doesn't know

Notes: The circumstances and the modalities of punishment vary greatly among the various stories that compose the text.

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in the afterlife?  
– Yes

↳ Highly emphasized by the religious group  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Punishments in the afterlife consists of mild sensory displeasure  
– Yes

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of extreme sensory displeasure?  
– Yes

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation as an inferior life form?  
– No

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in an inferior realm?  
– No



↳ Other form of punishment

– Specify: Being the text composed of various unrelated stories, the circumstances and the modalities of punishment vary greatly among the various passages. One example can be found in ch. 4,74 in which a man is condemned to penal servitude in the afterlife.

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime?

– Yes

↳ Highly emphasized by the religious group?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Consists of bad luck?

– Yes

↳ Political failure?

– Yes

↳ Defeat in battle?

– Yes

↳ Crop failure or bad weather?

– Yes

↳ Disaster on journeys?

– Yes

↳ Mild sensory displeasure?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Extreme sensory displeasure?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Sickness or illness?

– Yes

↳ Impaired reproduction?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Back luck visited on descendants?

– Yes

↳ Other?

–Specify: Being the text composed of various unrelated stories, the circumstances and the modalities of punishment vary greatly among the various passages.

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards in the text?

– Yes

↳ Is the cause/purpose of supernatural rewards known?

– Yes

↳ Done only by high god

– No

↳ Done by many supernatural beings

– Yes

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle

– Field doesn't know

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence

– Field doesn't know

↳ Done to enforce group norms?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Done randomly

– Field doesn't know

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in the afterlife?

– Yes

↳ Highly emphasized by the religious group?

– No

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of mild sensory pleasure?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Consists of extreme sensory pleasure?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Consists of eternal happiness?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Consists of reincarnation as a superior life form?

– No

↳ Consists of reincarnation in a superior realm?

– No

↳ Other?

– Yes

Notes: For example, being assigned a position of responsibility in a relevant Office in the afterlife.

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in this lifetime?

– Yes

↳ Highly emphasized?

– No

↳ Consists of good luck?

– Yes

↳ Consists of political success or power?

– Yes

- ↳ Consists of success in battle?
  - Yes
- ↳ Consists of peace or social stability?
  - Yes
- ↳ Consists of healthy crops or good weather?
  - Yes
- ↳ Consists of success on journeys?
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of mild sensory pleasure?
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of extreme sensory pleasure?
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced health?
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced reproductive success?
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of fortune visited on descendants?
  - Yes
- ↳ Other?
  - Specify: Being the text composed of numerous accounts, the modality of rewards are various according to the different accounts.

## Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present in the text?  
– No

Is an eschatology present in the text?

– No

### Norms & Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the text?

– No

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious text?

– No

Are there centrally important virtues advocated by the text?

– No

*Notes:* The text does not advocate any particular virtue, yet, in some passages, filial piety and other Confucian virtues are clearly defined as extremely important virtues possessed by the main character involved in the story. Chapter eleven in particular collects numerous stories about filial sons.

### Advocacy of Practices

Does the text require celibacy (full sexual abstinence)?

– No

Does the text require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence)?

– No

Does the text require castration?

– No

Does the text require fasting?

– No

Does the text require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods)?

– No

*Notes:* The text does not require forgone food opportunities, but some chapters narrate of people or supernatural beings that follow particular diets (e.g. eating only flowers, particular seeds, or mushrooms in order to obtain longevity).

Does the text require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations?

– No

Does the text require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of adults?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of children?

– No

Notes: The text does not require it, but at least one episode refers to the sacrifice of a couple of children thrown into a river, saved by the god that, in the end, returns them to the family (ch. 4,78).

Does the text require self-sacrifice (suicide)?

– No

Notes: The text does not require suicide, but some episodes of suicide are narrated (e.g. chapter 16,382).

Does the text require sacrifice of property/valuable items?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of time (e.g. attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.)?

– No

Does the text require physical risk taking?

– No

Does the text require accepting ethical precepts?

– No

Does the text require marginalization by out-group members?

– No

Does the text require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household)?

– No

Notes: The text does not require participation in rituals, but various kinds of rituals, also small-scale rituals, are referred to in the narrative (e.g., the sacrifice to the stove god in ch. 4,88; family sacrifices in ch. 2,48)

Does the text require participation in large-scale rituals?

– No

Notes: Being a narrative text, it does not require participation in rituals, but various kind of rituals, also large-scale rituals, are described in it.

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present as indicated in the text?

– No

Does the text employ fictive kinship terminology?

– No

Does the text include elements that are intended to be entertaining?

– Yes

Notes: The text is the first collection pertaining to the zhiguai xiaoshuo 志怪小說 genre. The scope of the collection, according to the author's preface, is to prove the existence of the supernatural, but this kind of narrative resulted extremely entertaining for the reader, because of the presence of strange elements itself.

↳ Drama?

– No

↳ Comedy?

– No

↳ Tragedy?

– No

↳ Epic entertainment?

– No

Does the text specify sacrifices, offerings, and maintenance of a sacred space?

– Yes

↳ Are sacrifices specified by the text?

– Yes

↳ Animal sacrifice?

– Yes

↳ Human sacrifice?

– Yes

↳ Are there self-sacrifices specified by the text?

– No

↳ Are there material offerings present?

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The Soushen ji consists of numerous independent pieces. Thus, although several of these accounts refer to sacrifices and offerings, the methods of sacrifice vary widely.

↳ Is attendance to worship/sacrifice mandatory?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Is the maintenance of the place regulated by the text?

– No

Notes: The maintenance of the place is not regulated by the text, but in some passages there is a reference to the construction and the maintenance of sacred places and shrines.

## Institutions & Production Environment of Text

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### Society & Institutions

Society of religious group that produced the text is best characterized as:

– An empire

Are there specific elements of society that have controlled the reproduction of the text?

– An empire

Are there specific elements of society involved with the destruction of the text?

– Other

### Welfare

Does the text specify institutionalized famine relief?

– No

Does the text specify institutionalized poverty relief?



– No

Does the text specify institutionalized care for elderly & infirm?

– No

Other forms of welfare?

– No

## Education

Are there formal educational institutions available for teaching the text?

– No

Are there formal educational institutions specified according to the text?

– No

Does the text make provisions for non-religious education?

– No

Does the text restrict education to religious professionals?

– No

Does the text restrict education among religious professionals?

– No

Is education gendered according to the text?

– No

Is education gendered with respect to this text and larger textual tradition?

– Yes

Does the text specify teaching relationships or ratios? (i.e.: 1:20; 1:1)

– No

Are there specific relationships to teachers that are advocated by the text?

– No

Are there worldly rewards/benefits to education according to the text specified by the text itself?

– No

### **Bureaucracy**

Is bureaucracy regulated by this text?

– No

### **Public Works**

Does the text detail interaction with public works?

– No

### **Taxation**

Does the text specify forms of taxation?

– No

### **Warfare**

Does the text mention warfare?

– Yes

Notes: The text mentions different battles, both among humans and among supernatural beings (in particular among strange animals). In the case of battles among supernatural beings (e.g., snakes, dragons, etc.) war appears as a form of omen.



Does the text dictate how to control an institutionalized military?

– No



Does the text restrict/advocate for participation in exogenous military organizations?

– No



Does the text celebrate/bemoan protection/subjugation by an exogenous military force?

– No

### **Food Production**

Does the text mentioned food production/disbursement?

– Yes

↳ Does the text in question dictate how the religious group in question provide food for themselves?

– No

↳ Does the text celebrate/restrict food provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question?

– No

↳ Which of the follow are forms of ritual food production [choose all that apply]?

– Hunting (including marine animals)

Notes: The text refers to agriculture, hunting, gathering, fishing, etc. There is even an episode about a couple of people who practice cannibalism.

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