

Fan Zhen 范缜 (ca.450-515)

*Shenmie lun* 神灭论

Discussion on the destruction of the soul

或问：「子云神灭，何以知其灭也？」答曰：「神即形也，形即神也。是以形存则神存，形谢则神灭也。」

Someone asked: „You said, that shen is extinguished. How do you know about its destruction?” Answer: “Shen corresponds to (physical) form and (physical) form corresponds to shen. That is why as long as (physical) form exists, shen also exists, when (physical) form retreats shen is extinguished.”

问曰：「形者无知之称，神者有知之明。知与无知，即事有异；神之与形，理不容一。形神相即，非所闻也。」答曰：「形者神之质，神者形之用，是则形称其质，神言其用，形之与神，不得相异也。」

Question: „(Physical) form is the denomination of not having knowledge, while shen is the illustration of having knowledge. Knowledge and no-knowledge actually are to be differentiated. What makes for shen and for (physical) form thus is structurally not to be taken as the same. To equate (physical) form and shen is something unheard of.” Answer: “(Physical) form is the substance of shen, shen is the function of (physical) form; that is how (physical) form may be denominated someone’s substance and shen may be called someone’s function. (Physical) form and shen cannot be made into a mutual difference.”

问曰：「神故非质，形故非用，不得为异，其义安在？」答曰：「名殊而体一也。」

问曰：「名既已殊，体何得一？」答曰：「神之于质，犹利之于刃；形之于用，犹刃之于利。利之名非刃也，刃之名非利也。然舍利无刃，舍刃无利。未闻刃末而利存，岂容形亡而神在？」

Question: „Now, if shen therefore is not substance and (physical) form not function and yet they are not to be taken as different, what then is their meaning?” Answer: “They differ in name, but are one in structure.” Question: “As their names are diverging, how could their substance be the same?” Answer: “The relationship of shen to substance is the same as

sharpness to knife; the function of (physical) form is the same as knife to sharpness; and still the denomination of knife is not the same as sharpness. But if I give up sharpness then there is no knife and if I give up knife there is no sharpness. I have never heard that knife did not exist while sharpness existed. How then could it be that the form dies and shen persists?”

问曰：「刃之与利，或如来说；形之于神，其义不然。何以言之？木之质无知也，人之质有知也。人既有如木之质，而有异木之知，岂非木有其一，人有其二邪？」答曰：「异哉言乎！人若有如木之质以为形，又有异木之知以为神，则可如来论也。今人之质，质有知也；木之质，质无知也。人之质，非木之质也；木之质，非人质也；安有如木之质而复又异木之知哉？」

Question: „The relationship of knife to sharpness is an exemplary explanation, but the relationship of (physical) form to shen actually is not like that in its meaning. How can I explain that? The substance of wood does not have knowledge while the substance of man does have knowledge. If man were to have a substance like wood but were to be different from wood in knowledge, would that not be (saying that) wood has a unity while man has a duality?” Answer: “Truly odd are your words! If man were to have the same substance as wood for its (physical) form yet on the other hand be different from wood for its shen, then how could they be compared at all? Now actually, the substance of man is a substance having knowledge while the substance of wood is a substance that does not have knowledge. The substance of man is not the same as the substance of wood; the substance of wood is not the substance of man. How could it therefore be compared with the substance of wood while on the other hand be differentiated from the knowledge of wood?”

问曰：「人之质所以异木质者，以其有知耳。人而无知，与木何异？」答曰：「人无无知之质，犹木无有知之形。」

Question: „Thus the reason for man’s difference from the substance of wood is its having knowledge. Would a man without knowledge then be different from wood?” Answer: “Man does not have a substance that has no knowledge, just as wood does not have a (physical) form that has knowledge.”

问曰：「死者之形骸，岂非无知之质也？」答曰：「是无知之质也。」

Question: „Could it really be that the remnants of the (physical) form of a deceased (man)

don't have the substance of not having knowledge?" Answer: "It actually is a substance without knowledge."

问曰：「若然者，人果有如木之质，而又有异木之知矣。」答曰：「死者如有木之质，而无异木之知；生者有异木之知，而无如木之质也。」

Question: „If we assume that that is the case, man can actually be compared in substance to wood and on the other hand be differentiated from wood in knowledge!" Answer: "A deceased (man) can be compared to the substance of wood while he does not have a difference from wood in knowledge, while a living (man) has a difference in knowledge from wood, but cannot be compared to wood in substance."

问曰：「死者之骨骼，非生者之形骸邪？」答曰：「生形之非死形，死形之非生形，区以革矣，安有生之人之形骸而有死人之骨骼哉？」

Question: „Aren't the bones of the skeleton of a deceased (man) not the bones of the (physical) form of a living man?" Answer: "The (physical) form of a living (man) is not that of a deceased (man) just as the (physical) form of a deceased (man) is not the same that of a living (man) as their realms have been severed. How then could the bones of a man at lifetime be the skeleton of a deceased man?"

问曰：「若生者之形骸非死者之骨骼，死者之骨骼则应不由生者之形骸；不由生者之形骸，则此骨骼从何而至此邪？」答曰：「是生者之形骸变为死者之骨骼也。」

Question: „If we were to assume that the bones of (physical) form a living (man) were not the same as the bones of the deceased (man's) skeleton then the bones of the skeleton of the deceased (man) would not derive from the bones of the (physical) form of the living (man). But if they do not come from the bones of the (physical) form of the living (man), where then do the bones of the skeleton come from to be lying there?" Answer: "It is the bones of the (physical) form of the living (man) that changed into the bones of the skeleton of the deceased (man)."

问曰：「生者之形骸虽变为死者之骨骼，岂不因生而有死？则知死体虽犹生体也。」答曰：「如因荣木变为枯木，枯木之质宁是荣木之体？」

Question: „If it is the case that the bones of the (physical) form of the living (man) change

into the bones of the skeleton of the deceased (man) would it not still be that death is based on life? Therefore we can know that the structure of death is still that of life.” Answer: “It can be compared to a green wood/ a tree changing to become a dried wood/tree. Could the substance of the dried up wood/tree actually be the same as that of the structure of a green wood/tree?”

问曰：「荣体变为枯体，枯体即是荣体。如丝体变为缕体，缕体即是丝体。有何别焉？」答曰：「若枯即是荣，荣即是枯，则应荣时凋零，枯时结实也。又荣木不应变为枯木，以荣即是枯，无所复变也。又荣枯是一，何不先枯后荣，要先荣后枯何也？丝缕同时，不得为喻。」

Question: „If the green structure turns to make for the dried structure, then the dried structure still corresponds to the green structure. This is like the structure of silk turning into the structure of a silk thread, the structure of the silk thread corresponds to the structure of silk.” Answer: “If we were to assume that dried were to be the same as green and green the same as dried, then it ought to be dried when it is green and firm as it is dried, just as green wood/trees should not change into dried wood/trees. If we were to take green to be the same as dried then again there would be nothing changing. And furthermore, if green and dried were to be one and the same, why are (tress) not died up first and green second and what is the reason for them instead needing to be green before they dry up? Silk and a silk thread being there contemporaneously cannot serve as a proper example.”

问曰：「生形之谢，便应豁然都尽。何故方受死形，绵历未已邪？」答曰：「生灭之体，要有其次故也。夫歟而生者必歟而灭，渐生者必渐而灭。歟而生者，飘骤是也；渐而生者，动植是也。有歟有渐，物之理也。」

Question: „When the (physical) form of the living retreats, this change should take place immediately and completely. Why then is it that those that receive death in their (physical) form suffer from an ongoing process until they finally end?” Answer: “The structure of extinguishment of live must have a reasonable sequence. Those that came to life suddenly will necessarily die suddenly and those that came to life slowly must also disappear slowly. Those that come to life suddenly are like a storm and those that come to life slowly are like the growth of a plant. The principle of things is such that some are sudden and some are slow.

问曰：「形即是神者，手等亦是神邪？」答曰：「皆是神之分也。」

Question: „If it is the case that the (physical) form corresponds to shen, then do its parts like the hand also correspond to shen?” Answer: “Both are elements of shen.”

问曰：「若皆是神之分，神既能虑，手等亦应能虑也？」答曰：「手等能有痛痒之知，而无是非之虑。」

Question: „If we thus assume that they both are elements of shen and shen has the ability to consider, then its parts like the hand should also have the ability to consider!” Answer: “Its parts like the hand have the ability to the knowledge of pain and itch, but do not have the (distinguishing) consideration between (morally) right and wrong.”

问曰：「知之与虑，为一为异？」答曰：「知即是虑，浅则为知，深则为虑。」

问曰：「若尔，应有二虑。虑既有二，神有二乎？」答曰：「人体惟一，神何得二？」

Question: „To know something or to consider, do you take it to be the same or to be something different?” Answer: “Knowledge corresponds to consideration; if it is superficial I take it to be knowledge, if it is deep then I take it to be consideration.” Question: “If so, then there should be two types of consideration and if considerations are twofold, is shen then also twofold?” Answer: “The structure of man is one, how could shen be twofold?”

问曰：「若不得二，安有痛痒之知，复有是非之虑？」答曰：「如手足虽异，总为一人。是非痛痒虽复有异，亦总为一神矣。」

Question: „If we take it not to be twofold, how could there be the knowledge of pain and itch and then again also the consideration on right and wrong?” Answer: “You may compare it to the hands and feet being different, yet together making up one man. Right and Wrong, pain and itch are likewise different, but still make up one shen.”

问曰：「是非之虑，不关手足，当关何处？」答曰：「是非之虑，心器所主。」

问曰：「心器是五藏之心，非邪？」答曰：「是也。」

Question: „If consideration on right and wrong do not belong to hands and feet, where do they belong to?” Answer: “Considerations on right and wrong are dominated by the capacity

of the mind.” Question: “(When you speak of) the capacity of the mind (do you mean) the mind as one of the five organs or not?” Answer: “It is (one of the five organs).”

问曰：「五藏有何殊别，而心独有是非之虑乎？」答曰：「七窍亦复何殊，而司用不均？」

Question: „What is the distinctive difference among the five organs, so that only the mind has the consideration on right and wrong?” Answer: “Are the seven apertures (of the human body) not also quite different and their specific functions unequal?”

问曰：「虑思无方，何以知是心器所主？」答曰：「心病则乖思，是以知心为虑本。」

Question: „Considering thought does not have a specific way; how then do we know that it is ruled by the capacity of the mind?” Answer: “When your mind is sick you will have weird thoughts; that is how we know that the mind is the root of considerations.”

问曰：「何不寄在眼等分中邪？」答曰：「若虑可寄于眼分，眼何故不寄于耳分邪？」

Question: „Why is (consideration) not entrusted to (other) elements of the body like the eyes?” Answer: “If considerations were possibly to be entrusted to the eyes, why should the eyes then not be entrusted to the ears?”

问曰：「虑体无本，故可寄之于眼分。眼自有本，不假寄于它分也。」答曰：「眼何故有本而虑无本？苟无本于我形，而可偏寄于异地，亦可张甲之情寄王乙之躯，李丙之性托赵丁之体。然乎哉？不然也。」

Question: „The structure of considerations does not have a root (in reality) therefore it is not possible to entrust them to the eyes. Eyes do themselves have a root and therefore you could not entrust them to another part (of the body).” Answer: “Why would eyes have a root (in reality) and considerations not? If they would not have their root in my (physical) form and could at random be entrusted to any other place then the feelings of a Mr. Zhang could be entrusted to the body of a Mr. Wang and the nature of a Mr. Li could be shifted to the structure of a Mr. Zhao. Now could that be the case? It certainly cannot.

问曰：「圣人之形犹凡人之形，而有凡圣之殊，故知形神异矣。」答曰：「不然。金

之精者能照，秽者不能照。有能照之精金，宁有不照之秽质？又岂有圣人之神，而寄凡人之器？亦无凡人之神，而托圣人之体。是以八采重瞳，勋华之容；龙颜马口，轩皞之状：此形表之异也。比干之心，七窍并列；伯约之胆，其大若拳：此心器之殊也。是以知圣人之定分，每绝常区，非惟道革群生，乃亦形超万有。凡圣均体，所未敢安。」

Question: „The (physical) form of the sage man is the same as the (physical) form of an ordinary man, but there is a difference between the ordinary and the sage (man). Thus we can know that there is a difference between (physical) form and shen.” Answer: “That is not the case. Pure gold is able to shine, while something dirty cannot shine. Is the pure gold that is able to shine of the same substance as something dirty that is not able to shine? How could thus the shen of a sage man be entrusted to the container of an ordinary man. And in the same way it is not the case that the shen of an ordinary man is transferred to the structure of a sage man. That is why we find such extraordinary appearances as eight colors (in eyebrows) and double pupils<sup>1</sup> and outstanding characteristics as a forehead like a dragon or a horselike mouth<sup>2</sup> (with sages). These are differences in the outer appearance of the (physical) form. That the heart of Bi Gan had seven aligned openings and the gall of Bo Yue was as big as a fist<sup>3</sup> are specific aspects of the hearts (i.e. inner) vessels. By this we can know that the attributed lot of the sage man usually is separated from the usual spheres; it is not only set apart from the main group of the living for *dao*, but also exceeds the myriad beings in their (physical) form. I would therefore not settle for the assumption that normal and sage (men) are of the same structure.”

问曰：「子云圣人之形必异于凡，敢问阳货类仲尼，项籍似大舜，舜、项、孔、阳智革形同，其故何邪？」答曰：「珉似玉而非玉，鸡类凤而非凤，物诚有之，人故宜尔。项阳貌似而非实似，心器不均，虽貌无益也。」

Question: „As you said that the (physical) form of the sage men must be different from that

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<sup>1</sup> Classical texts attribute specific appearances to many of the legendary cultural heroes that have been taken as historical sages by Confucianism. Yao is said to have had eyebrows in eight different colors, Shun to have double pupils in his eyes,

<sup>2</sup> Huangdi is attributed with a forehead similar to a dragon and the legendary minister of the founder of the Xia dynasty Yu, Gao Yao with a mouth of a horse.

<sup>3</sup> The *Shiji* names Bi Gan as a member of the royal clan and prime minister of the Shang epoch. Bo Yue is the *zi* of Jiang Wei (202-264) a daring military commander of the Shu-Han in the time of the Three Kingdoms (208-280).

of ordinary (men), I would like to ask, what the reason is that Yang Huo was of the same (appearance) as Confucius and Xiang Qi is like the Great Shun;<sup>4</sup> (why is it that) while their wisdom is set apart their (physical) form is similar?” Answer: “Serpentine<sup>5</sup> looks like jade, but is not jade and a cock may be similar to the phoenix, but he is not a phoenix. As we have such similarities among things it will certainly also be the case with man. That Xiang (Qi) and Yang (Huo) have similarities in appearance (with Shun and Confucius respectively) while they do not have similarities in character shows that their mind disposition is not the same even though their appearance may not differ.”

问曰：「凡圣之殊，形器不一可也。圣人员极，理无有二，而丘且殊姿，汤文异状。神不系色，于此益明矣。」答曰：「圣同于心器，形不必同也。犹马殊毛而齐逸，玉异色而均美。是以晋棘、荆和，等价连城；骅骝、騶骊，俱致千里。」

Question: „Now, I accept that the difference (in appearance) between the ordinary and the sage (men) makes for a distinction in their vessels of (physical) form. The sage men are of round perfection and their principles are not split up. Yet Confucius and the Duke of Zhou<sup>6</sup> were of different appearance just as Tang and Wen<sup>7</sup> were of variant statures. That shen is not bound to appearance can easily be illustrate by this.” Answer: “The sages are the same in their types of mind/heart, while their (physical) form not necessarily is the same. This is like horses that may have different (colors of) hair, but may be equally fast or like jade of different color that my still be equally beautiful. That is the reason why (the jades of) Ji of Jin and He of Qin are both of high value and the horses Hualiu and Luli both can go for a thousand miles (a day).<sup>8</sup>

问曰：「形神不二，既闻之矣；形谢神灭，理固宜然。敢问经云『为之宗庙，以鬼飨之』，何谓也？」答曰：「圣人之教然也。所以从孝子之心，而厉偷薄之意。『神而

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<sup>4</sup> Yang Huo is a political antagonist of Confucius in the state of Lu and in the *Lunyu* there is a passage, where Confucius refuses to cooperate with him. The *Shiji* tells the lore that the military hero and warlord Xiang Yu (232-202) of the transition period between Qin- and Han-dynasty and the legendary ruler Shun both had double pupils.

<sup>5</sup> 珉 is a stone that is said to look similar to jade, but is not defined as jade, somewhat in the way serpentine is distinguished form jade.

<sup>6</sup> Dan 旦 is the personal name of the Duke of Zhou, legendary co-founder of the Zhou dynasty and moral hero of Confucius.

<sup>7</sup> Tang is the legendary founder of the Shang dynasty and King Wen the founding king of the Zhou dynasty. Both were seen as example of moral rule by Confucius.

<sup>8</sup> The two named places are places for the production of proverbially excellent jades. The two horses are said to be two of the eight legendary horses of king Mu of Zhou, named in the *Chushu jinian*.



明之』，此之谓矣。」

Question: “That (physical) form and shen are not twofold I have now heard from you. Thus, once the (physical) form retreats, shen is extinguished as well. This then should be a certain and adequate principle. Therefore, I would like to ask about the passage in the classics that reads ‘Doing the (offers to the ancestors) in the ancestral temple you offer them by the means of ghosts’<sup>9</sup>. What does it mean?” Answer: “It is a method of teaching of the sage men. By that he follows the mind(set) of the filial son and warns of lazy and frivolous thoughts. ‘Shen means illuminating something’<sup>10</sup> is a saying that refers to that (idea).

问曰：「伯有被甲，彭生豕见，坟索著其事，宁是设教而已邪？」答曰：「妖怪茫茫，或存或亡。强死者众，不皆为鬼，彭生伯有何独能然？乍人乍豕，未必齐郑之公子也。」问曰：「易称『故知鬼神之情状，与天地相似而不违』，又曰『载鬼一车』，其义云何？」答曰：「有禽焉，有兽焉，飞走之别也。有人焉，有鬼焉，幽明之别也。人灭而为鬼，鬼灭而为人，则未之知也。」

Question: „When Boyou was killed (his ghost disturbed Zheng)<sup>11</sup> and Peng Sheng was seen as a pig<sup>12</sup>. The text is quite clear about these events. Could it really be that they only made them up to teach (people)?” Answer: “Strange things are everywhere, some persist and some disappear. People that suffer a violent death are multitude and not all of them turn into ghosts, why should Peng Sheng and Boyou especially be like that? (In the recount) there is a man and there is a pig and not necessarily everything is the prince of Zheng (i.e. Boyou).” Further question: “The *Yi(jing)* says ‘thus knowing the situation of ghosts and spirits (shen) makes you be in tune with heaven and earth and not go against them’ and it talks of a ‘cartload of ghosts’. What is the meaning of that?” Answer: “There are birds and beasts all around; the difference is that one fly and the other walk. There are men and ghosts all around; the difference is that one is obscure and the other clear. Whether man, when he is

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<sup>9</sup> This is a modified passage from them *Liji*, ‘Wen sang’. Instead of 为之宗庙，以鬼飨之， the original reads 祭之宗庙，以鬼飨之， so that the 为 here probably is also to be interpreted as offering 祭. Legge reads the 鬼 as a state of disembodiment of the son doing the offers and not as a spirit that that acts as a medium, which follows standard comments. If you interpret ghostly spirit as shen and shen as spiritual force then this seems to fit the argument of the *Shenmie lun*. The quote can also be found in the *Xiaojing*.

<sup>10</sup> The quote is from the ‘Xici chuan’ in the *Yijing*.

<sup>11</sup> This refers to a story in the *Zuozhuan* (昭公七年). Boyou was killed in civil war and later on people would shout in the city that the spirit of Boyou had come back and that would create chaos among the inhabitants.

<sup>12</sup> This also refers to a story in the *Zuozhuan* (桓公十八年). After dying it is said that Peng Sheng turned into a pig.

extinguished becomes a ghost and ghosts, when they are extinguished become men, is something that is impossible to know.”

问曰：「知此神灭，有何利用邪？」答曰：「浮屠害政，桑门蠹俗，风惊雾起，驰荡不休。吾哀其弊，思拯其溺。夫竭财以赴僧，破产以趋佛，而不恤亲戚，不怜穷匮者何邪？良由厚我之情深，济物之义浅。是以圭撮涉于贫友，吝情动于颜色；千锺委于富僧，欢意畅于容发。岂不以僧有多余之期，有无遗秉之报，务施阙于周急，归德必于在己！又惑以茫昧之言，惧以阿鼻之苦，诱以虚诞之辞，欣以兜率之乐。故舍逢掖，袭横衣，废俎豆，列瓶钵，家家弃其亲爱，人人绝其嗣续。致使兵挫于行间，吏空于官府，粟罄于惰游，货殫于土木。所以奸宄弗胜，颂声尚拥，惟此之故也。其流莫已，其病无限。若陶甄禀于自然，森罗均于独化，忽焉自有，怳尔而无；来也不御，去也不追，乘乎天理，各安其性。小人甘其垄亩，君子保其恬素；耕而食，食不可穷也；蚕而衣，衣不可尽也。下有馀以其奉其上，上无为以待其下。可以全生，可以养亲，可以为己，可以为人，可以匡国，可以霸君，用此道也。」

Question: „What is the practical advantage of knowing that shen is extinguished?” Answer: „The damage Buddhism does to political order and the destruction Buddhist monks bring to social customs spread incessantly and all over like a wild storm and thick fog arising. I deplore this obscuration and ponder on how to get rid of this addiction. Why would someone want to use up his property to follow the monks and worship Buddha rather than to cherish ones relatives or to have sympathy with poor and burdened people? The obvious reason for this is that there is a stress on feelings for one’s own good, while there is a lack of intention on community with things. Therefore, when a poor friend asks for some (rice) stingy feelings will show in their expression (of the one being asked), while a radiant glow will show in their appearance when they give thousands of bushels (of rice) to the wealthy monks. Isn’t that because the monks can make promises beyond our (realms), while (the friend) has nothing by which he could repay? The aid they give does thus not reach the urgencies of their surroundings but (expects) an effect returning upon themselves. Furthermore, (Buddhism) confuses them with unintelligible sayings and frightens them with the hardships of hell<sup>13</sup>, it lures them with empty but high-sounding sayings and delights them with the enjoyment of

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<sup>13</sup> Abi (diyu) 阿鼻(地狱) is the denomination of the lowest of Buddhist hells (Avici Naraka) named for example in the *Zhang a han jing* 长阿含经.

paradise<sup>14</sup>. Thus they give up the traditional dress of (Confucian) scholars and put on Buddhist robes<sup>15</sup>; they do away with sacrificial vessels and make use of the (Buddhist) alms bowl. All families give up the loved relatives and everyone interrupts his line of progeny. This will lead to soldiers' giving up their combat formation, empty offices in the government, food being consumed by idle travelers and finances being used up for Buddhist temples.<sup>16</sup> That is why evildoers cannot be won over while (Buddhist) chanting can be heard everywhere. If the (Buddhist) flow (into society) cannot be stopped, the problems (caused by) it will be boundless. If the molding (of things) relies on its self-becoming and the multitude of surrounding things are equal in their self-change, (then it becomes clear that) they suddenly are their of themselves and just as indistinctly they are not there (any more), their coming is not ordered (by someone) just as their leaving is not due to their being driven away. (Everything) rides on heaven's principles and each is according to its nature. The ordinary people should find their satisfaction among the dikes of fields while the noble man should keep up his simplicity. When farming (produces) food, foodstuff cannot be used up. When silkworms (make for) cloths, there will be no shortage of clothing. When the lower ranks (in society) have excess, they should offer them to their superiors, and the superiors should take care of the inferiors by non-action. Using this way, there can be a completion of life, one can support one's relatives, one can act for oneself as well as for others, the country will be save and the ruler can govern powerfully.

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<sup>14</sup> Doushuai (tian) 兜率(天) (Tusita) is the place of eternal happiness.

<sup>15</sup> Fengye 逢掖 wide sleeved piece of clothing ritually associated with traditional scholars, heng yi 横衣 indicates Buddhist robes.

<sup>16</sup> 游 travelers, is interpreted as Buddhist monks that are often attacked as being foreigners that came travelling to China; 土木 normally indicates public infrastructural buildings, but here out of context denominate a Buddhist structure.