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# Treatise of the Exalted One on Response and Retribution

T'ai-Shang Kan-Ying P'ien  
Translated from the Chinese by  
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Containing Introduction,  
Translation, Explanatory Notes and Moral Tales

Edited by

Dr. Paul Carus

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by Keichyu Yamada

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## (A Description of Evil-Doers)

Yet<sup>[28]</sup> there are some people whose behavior is unrighteous.

Their deportment is irrational.<sup>[29]</sup>

In evil they delight.<sup>[30]</sup>

With brutality they do harm and damage.

Insidiously they injure the good and the law-abiding.

Stealthily they despise their superiors and parents.

They disregard their seniors and rebel against those whom they serve.

They deceive the uninformed.

They slander their fellow-students.

Liars they are, bearing false witness, deceivers, and hypocrites; malevolent exposers of kith and kin<sup>[31]</sup>; mischievous and malignant; not humane; cruel and irrational; self-willed.

Right and wrong they confound. Their avowals and disavowals are not as they ought to be.<sup>[32]</sup>

They oppress their subordinates and appropriate their merit.

They cringe to superiors to curry favor.

Insentient to favors received, they remember their hatred and are never satisfied.

They hold in contempt the lives of Heaven's people.<sup>[33]</sup>

They agitate and disturb the public order.

They patronize the unscrupulous and do harm to the inoffensive.

They murder men to take their property, or have them ousted to take their places.

They slay the yielding and slaughter those who have surrendered.

They malign the righteous and dispossess the wise.

They molest orphans and wrong widows.

Disregarders of law they are, and bribe takers. They call crooked what is straight, straight what is crooked, and what is light they make heavy.

When witnessing an execution, they aggravate it by harshness.

Though they know their mistakes they do not correct them; though they know the good they do not do it.

In their own guilt they implicate others.<sup>[34]</sup>

They impede and obstruct the professions and crafts.<sup>[35]</sup>

They vilify and disparage the holy and the Wise.

They ridicule and scorn reason and virtue.<sup>[36]</sup>

They shoot the flying, chase the running, expose the hiding, surprise nestlings, close up entrance holes, upset nests, injure the pregnant, and break the egg.

They wish others to incur loss.

They disparage others that achieve merit.

They endanger others to save themselves.

They impoverish others for their own gain.

For worthless things they exchange what is valuable.

For private ends they neglect public duties.

They appropriate the accomplishments of their neighbor and conceal his good qualities. They make known his foibles and expose his secrets. They squander his property and cause divisions in his family.<sup>[37]</sup>

They attack that which is dear to others.

They assist others in doing wrong.

Their unbridled ambition makes for power, and through the degradation of others they seek success.

They destroy the crops and fields of others.

They break up betrothals.

Improperly they have grown rich, and withal they remain vulgar.

Improperly they shirk<sup>[38]</sup> without shame.

They claim having done acts of favor and disclaim being at fault.

They give away evil in marriage<sup>[39]</sup> and they sell wrongs.

They sell and buy vainglory.

They conceal and keep a treacherous heart.

They crush that which is excellent in others.

They are careful in hiding their shortcomings.

Being on a high horse they threaten and intimidate.

With unrestrained barbarism they kill and stab.

Recklessly they cut cloth to waste.<sup>[40]</sup>

Without festive occasions they prepare cattle for food.<sup>[41]</sup>

They scatter and waste the five cereals.<sup>[42]</sup>

They trouble and annoy many people.

They break into others' houses to take their property and valuables.

They misdirect the water and light fires to destroy the people's homes.

They upset others' plans so as to prevent their success.

They spoil a worker's utensils to hamper his efficiency.

When seeing the success and prosperity of others they wish them to run down and fail.

Seeing the wealth of others, they wish them bankrupt and ruined.

They cannot see beauty without cherishing in their hearts thoughts of seduction.

Being indebted to others for goods or property,  
they wish their creditors to die.

When their requests are not granted they begin  
to curse and wax hateful.

Seeing their neighbor lose his vantage they  
gossip of his failure.

Seeing a man imperfect in his bodily features  
they ridicule him.

Observing the talent and ability of a man worthy  
of praise, they suppress the truth.

They use charms<sup>[43]</sup> for the sake of controlling  
others.<sup>[44]</sup>

They employ drugs to kill trees.

Ill-humored and angry they are towards teachers  
and instructors.

They resist and provoke father and elders.

With violence they seize, with violence they  
demand.

They delight in fraud, they delight in robbery,  
they make raids and commit depredations to get  
rich.

By artful tricks they seek promotion.

They reward and punish without justice.

They indulge in comforts and enjoyments  
without measure.

They harass and tyrannize over their  
subordinates.

They terrify and threaten to overawe others.

They accuse heaven and find fault with man.

They blame the wind and rail at the rain.

They stir up party strife and law suits.

Unprovoked they join factious associations.<sup>[45]</sup>

They rely on their wives' and other women's  
gossip.

They disobey the instructions of father and  
mother.

They take up the new and forget the old.

Their mouth asserts what their heart denies.

Shamelessly greedy they are for wealth.



They deceive their father and their superiors.

They invent and circulate vile talk, traducing and slandering innocent men.

They slander others, yet themselves feign honesty.

They rail at spirits and claim to be right themselves.

They reject a good cause and espouse a wrong cause, spurning what is near, longing for the distant.<sup>[46]</sup>

They point at heaven and earth<sup>[47]</sup> to make them witnesses of their mean thoughts.

They even call on bright spirits to make them witness their degrading deeds.

When they ever give charity they regret it afterwards.

They borrow and accept without intention to return.

Beyond their due lot they scheme and contrive.

Above their means they plot and plan.

Their lusty desires exceed all measure.

Their heart is venomous while they show a  
compassionate face.

With filthy food they feed the poor.

With heresies they mislead others.

They shorten the foot, they narrow the measure,  
they lighten the scales, they reduce the peck.

They adulterate the genuine, and they seek  
profit<sup>[48]</sup> in illegitimate business.

They compel respectable people to become lowly.

They betray and deceive the simple-minded.

They are greedy and covetous without satiety.

They curse and swear to seek vindication.

Indulging in liquor they become rebellious and  
unruly.

With the members of their own family<sup>[37]</sup> they  
are angry and quarrelsome.

As husbands<sup>[49]</sup> they are neither faithful nor kind.

As wives<sup>[49]</sup> they are neither gentle nor pliant.

As husbands they are not in harmony with their wives;<sup>[50]</sup> as wives they are not respectful to their husbands.

As husbands they delight in bragging and conceit.

Always as wives they practice jealousy and suspicion.

As husbands they behave unmannerly toward their wives and children.

As wives they lack propriety to their father-in-law and their mother-in-law.

They make light of the spirit of their ancestor.

They disobey and dislike the commands of their superiors.

They make and do what is not useful.

They harbor and keep a treacherous<sup>[51]</sup> heart.

They curse themselves<sup>[52]</sup>, they curse others.

They are partial in their hatred and partial in their love.

They step over the well and they step over the hearth. They jump over the food and jump over a person.<sup>[53]</sup>

They kill the baby and cause abortion of the unborn.

They do many clandestine and wrong deeds.

The last day of the month and the last day of the year they sing and dance.<sup>[54]</sup> The first day of the month, the first day of the year, they start roaring and scolding.

Facing the north, they snivel and spit; facing the hearth, they sing, hum and weep.<sup>[55]</sup>

Further, with hearth fire they burn incense,<sup>[56]</sup> and with filthy fagots they cook their food.

In the night they rise and expose their nakedness.<sup>[57]</sup>

On the eight festivals of the seasons they execute punishment.<sup>[58]</sup>

They spit at falling stars and point at the many-colored rainbow.<sup>[59]</sup>

Irreverently they point at the three luminaries;<sup>[60]</sup> intently they gaze at the sun and at the moon.

In the spring they hunt with fire.<sup>[61]</sup>

Facing the north, they use vile language.<sup>[55]</sup>

Causelessly they kill tortoises and snakes.

## EXPLANATORY NOTES

28. All the following sentences are dependent upon this conjunction *Kou*, i. e., "if," in this way: "*If* some people do not behave righteously, (*if*) they are unreasonable, (*if*) they take pride in evil, (*if*) they inflict wounds," etc., etc., down to the last sentence of "*a description of evil-doers*." The main sentence begins with the part entitled "Punishment of Evil-Doers" with the words (1059 ff.): "for such crimes the controllers of destiny cut short people's lives." We break up this long-winded construction to render our English version more readable.

29. The word "reason" is not here the same as *tao*, mentioned above, but *li*, which means "logical correctness" or "rationality," i. e., "reason," in a secular sense. The meaning of the sentence here is that unrighteousness is not only against the *tao*, i. e., against religion, but even against common sense.

30. Stanislas Julien translates: "Regarder la méchanceté comme une preuve de talent."

31. M. Julien translates this sentence: "Divulger les fautes de ses parens."

32. Stanislas Julien translates: "Ne pas savoir distinguer les personnes qu'il faut rechercher ou fuir."

33. The expression "heaven's people" is a Confucian term, which is used in China in the same way as in Christian countries the phrase "God's people" would mean all those who bear God's image and are dear to the Deity.

34. M. Julien translates: "Rejeter ses propres crimes sur les autres."

35. The words *Fang-Shu*, here rendered "divination" and "craft," denote first of all the practice of diviners; but it is here used in a general sense and applies to all skilled labor, especially the professions. M. Julien translates: "Arrêter l'exercice des arts et des métiers." He adds in a footnote: "According to the dictionary of the Fo Kien dialect, the *Fang-Shu* are (1) physicians, (2) men of letters, (3) painters, (4) diviners, (5) journalists, (6) merchants, (7) workmen, (8) fishers, and (9) woodcutters." (*Ibid.* p. 221.) For further information in regard to the Feng-Shui, see Dr. Carus' article "Chinese Occultism" in *The Monist*, Vol. XV, p. 500.

36. "Reason and virtue," i. e., *tao* and *teh*, are the two main subjects of Lao Tze's doctrine. We are at liberty to translate "reason and virtue," or "the way of virtue."

37. The term "bone and flesh" in Chinese means "family relations."

38. The meaning may be either "to escape punishment" or "to shirk duties."

39. "To give away evil in marriage" is a Chinese phrase.

40. Literally, "they cut and clip," which is a term in tailoring. The meaning of the sentence is that they are wasteful with material, and it goes without saying that it refers to wastefulness of any kind.

41. It is customary in China to kill cattle on festivals only, and it is considered improper and even irreligious to slay cattle for food without due occasion.

42. Wilful waste of food is rightly considered sinful in China.

43. Among the Chinese superstitions which are common also in other countries, is the habit of burying figures or worms, which are intended to represent some person, for the purpose of inflicting injury upon them, being a kind of black magic. This is called in Chinese "to bury vermin."

44. Stanislas Julien translates: "Cacher l'effigie d'un homme pour lui donner le cauchemar."

45. Associations or fraternities have always played an important part in Chinese politics. The Boxer movement is a well-known instance in modern times.

46. M. Julien translates: "Tourner le dos à ses proches parens et rechercher ses parens éloignés."

47. To point at heaven and earth or the stars is deemed disrespectful in China, and the habit of making them witnesses of mean thoughts is considered a defiance of the divine powers.

48 "Illegitimate profit" refers to the business not licensed by the authorities, such as was the opium trade before the Opium War.

- 49 The following sentences refer alternately to husbands and wives, which for clearness' sake has to be repeated in English.
50. Literally, "the room," viz., the one in which the wife lives. Denoting the sphere of the wife's activity, the word has become a synonym for "wife."
51. Literally, "outside." An outside heart means a "treacherous heart."
52. According to the rules of Chinese grammar, the objective case of "self" precedes the verb.
53. It is considered disrespectful in China to step over the well, the hearth, food, or a person.
54. While the Chinese celebrate New Year's Eve as much as is done in Western countries, the custom to sing and to dance on such festivals is considered highly improper.
55. No act that may be regarded as disrespectful should be done while facing the North, and also in presence of the hearth which is the most sacred place of the house.
56. The proper way to light incense in olden times was to strike a spark from a flint. To burn incense in the fire of the hearth is both disrespectful for the hearth and improper so far as the incense is concerned.
57. The command "not to expose one's nakedness in the night," is based upon an ancient notion, (viz., that spirits, angels, or demons may have intercourse with human beings,) a remnant of which is still preserved in the Old Testament (Gen. vi. 2), where we read that the sons of Elohim took to wives the daughters of men. One of the



Chinese stories appended to the *T'ai-Shang Kan-Ying P'ien* tells of a woman that conceived a changeling from a demon, and the Apostle Paul, for the same reason that underlies the notion of our present passage in the *T'ai-Shang Kan-Ying P'ien*, requests women to wear a head covering (1 Cor. xi. 10).

58. It is considered as irreligious to have executions take place on festivals, a custom which is paralleled in the Jewish law, according to which it is unlawful to have a man stoned or crucified on the feast day.

59. The word "rainbow" is here as in many other places represented by two words, the second of which means literally "colored cloud." See Note 9.

60. The three luminaries (or more correctly the three kinds of luminaries) are sun, moon, and stars.

61. Hunting by setting the underbrush on fire in spring when animals begin to hatch, is rightly denounced as cruel in China.

**Web link to the article:**

**<http://www.purelandcollege.org.au/Treatise%20of%20the%20Exalted%20One.pdf.pdf>**

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