

Moral Perspective as Depicted in the Archetypes on Divine— Human Perspective of *Dianshizhai Pictorial*

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This article examines the archetypes related to the divine-human perspective in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* and uses the basic theory of “Myth-Archetype Criticism” to analyze the concepts of moral perspective and the view of cause and effect reflected in the text. It summarizes the interactive modes and various archetypes of cause and effect in three contexts: gods to humans, humans to gods, and humans to humans, explores the social reality and the relevant views of moral perspective and causality reflected in the illustrated magazine, and reveals the archetype foundation of the narrative of moral perspective retribution in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* in the three dimensions of psychology, literature, and society.

Keywords: *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, divine-human perspective, archetype study, cause and effect retribution, view of moral perspective

Preface

In 1884, British merchant Meichao founded the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* (《点石斋画报》) in Shanghai, reflecting the psychological state and belief tendencies of the people of that time. In the concept of “gods” and “causality”, people’s behavior is characterized by a passive attitude of reverence towards the gods. As the awareness of gods and causality deepened, acts of kindness in human interactions became more proactive, reflecting the cultural characteristics and social changes of late Qing dynasty.

The Concept of Divine-Human Perspective in *Dianshizhai Pictorial*

In the illustrated magazine, the majority of common people and court officials depicted by the authors generally believe in immortals and witchcraft and hold an open and accepting attitude towards “gods”, “immortals”, “witches”, and other folk beliefs.

Divine-Human Perspective by the Authors and Society in *Dianshizhai Pictorial*

In some of the storylines in the illustrated magazine, the authors mostly hold an attitude of “respect but not full belief” towards the gods, while the common people are mostly in a state of ignorant belief. For example, in *Wind and Ripples* (《风卷燕脂》) (p. 12), the author dismisses the common people’s belief in gods as unfounded tales. Additionally, the author generally holds a negative attitude towards Buddhism, as seen in *Pilgrimage to*

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Jiuhua (《九华进香》) (p. 102), where he expresses disdain for the bustling crowd coming to worship the Buddha.

Expression of the Archetype of the Divine-Human Perspective at the Social Level

The archetype of the “Divine-Human Perspective” in this article refers to the basic concepts and images of “the relationship between gods and humans” in different beliefs within Chinese culture, as well as the images and symbols formed in historical development and the story archetypes formed in myths and folktales. These archetypes include the shaping of gods as creators, protectors, and educators.

The story archetypes related to the divine-human perspective are very common in the illustrated magazine. Apart from “predicting the influence of gods through extraordinary weather”, stories of gods and humans in the same plot are mostly about “receiving rewards/punishments from gods after doing good/evil deeds”. In *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, the relationship between gods and humans is closely linked to “cause and effect”. People’s actions are observed by “gods”, and doing good can be rewarded, while doing evil will be punished, reflecting the social moral restraint of the divine-human perspective.

The connection between gods and humans in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* is not reciprocal; it is a relationship of constraint and passive acceptance. This article argues that the depiction of social reality in the illustrated magazine reflects a transition from “immortal stories” to “realism”, revealing that people’s adherence to “interpersonal social morality” and “constraints of gods” stems from a collective unconscious fear, which exists in the subconscious of readers and authors, allowing authors and readers to resonate through the text.

Writing of the Cause and Effect Archetype in the Context of Gods in *Dianshizhai Pictorial*

Under the influence of gods, both good and evil perspectives of moral have clear patterns. This section will analyze the most prominent archetypes.

Good Acts Bring Good Rewards

- (1) An impending disaster, immortals predict, and advise.
- (2) A person who has always done good, immortals provide a way to avoid disaster, and the person follows it.
- (3) When the disaster strikes, only this person remains safe.

The archetype in *Avoiding Disaster through Good Deeds* (《行善免灾》) (p. 12) is a variation of the cause and effect archetype, in which the author emphasizes the description of the righteous person being protected in the face of a devastating flood, arousing the readers’ subconscious fear of floods and their admire of the righteous person. The essence of this archetype still lies in the desire for a fulfilling life and the fear of natural disasters, collectively shaping the association of this archetype with related works.

Turning From Evil to Good

- (1) A person commits a mistake and falls ill suddenly.
- (2) Medical treatment is ineffective, so they pray to the gods for help, correct their mistake, and engage in self-cultivation.
- (3) They gradually recover and are in a better state than before falling ill.

In *The Painter Stealing Souls* (《画师夺魄》) (p. 39), the author emphasizes the contrast between the painter’s complete lack of skill and the improvement in skills after recovering from the illness. This creates a sense of novelty and fear in the readers, achieving the author’s goal of curbing immoral behaviors like promiscuity in their work through unconscious psychological means.

Evil Acts Bring Evil Consequences

- (1) A person does something wrong and gets a terrible illness that cannot be cured.
- (2) They die without treatment.

In *Revealing One's Heart to Others* (《示人肺腑》) (p. 57), an old woman who mistreats an innocent girl eventually suffers a terrible illness, evoking fear and compassion in the readers, engendering negative emotions towards human trafficking and emphasizing the principle that “committing misdeeds leads to incurable and fatal illnesses.”

Subconscious Psychology in the Context of the Gods in *Dianshizhai Pictorial*

In the god-centered context of *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, authors and readers resonate in their collective unconscious. The essence of the collective unconscious in the world of gods is the fear that gradually develops into constraints on behavior, shaping principles and rules. These constraints affect societal culture and psychological concepts, combined with the rulers' policies and the indoctrination of mainstream theories, leading to the deep influence of the perception of cause and effect and the subconscious fear in Chinese culture.

Writing of the Cause and Effect Archetype in the Human Context of *Dianshizhai Pictorial*

Good Acts Bring Good Rewards

This article will discuss proactive and passive acts of kindness. People with inherently good intentions perform acts of kindness. There are generally two types of people with inherently good intentions. One is extremely poor and performs acts of kindness, as follows:

- (1) Poor people harbor good intentions.
- (2) They help the needy when encountering them.
- (3) They receive help from wealthy individuals due to their good behaviors.

In *The Honest Man* (《道不拾遗》) (p. 93), a pedestrian loses money and the beggar who finds it returns it to the owner, for which the owner pays him handsomely. The main character's act of returning the money, borne out of fear of criticism from society, still receives good consequences.

Forced to Do Good due to Societal Restraints

- (1) A person lives in poverty.
- (2) They realize a dishonest way to get rich.
- (3) After an inner struggle, they abandon such means and find another way to get rich, escaping their predicament.

In *Return of Lost Money* (《拾金不昧》) (p. 36), a person living in poverty finds silver coins one day and, fearing moral condemnation, returns the money to its rightful owner, receiving a generous reward. The protagonist's actions, motivated by the fear of public opinion and profit and loss, result in a positive outcome due to moral constraints and fear.

Evil Acts Bring Evil Consequences

- (1) A person commits a wrongdoing.
- (2) They are morally judged by the masses.
- (3) They suffer death, loss of wealth and status, or face public humiliation.

In *Entombing Oneself Alive* (《生入棺中》) (p. 13), a student suggests that they all hide in a coffin to scare their teacher, and as a result, six of them die. Later, the student who suggested the action is beaten to death by

the families of the six students. The student's initial intentions were to play a prank on the teacher, but they ultimately faced dire consequences. The author uses a gruesome ending to evoke fear in readers and persuade the public to avoid evil and do good.

Subconscious Psychology in the Human Context in *Dianshizhai Pictorial*

In the human-centered context of *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, the subconscious forms a connection between readers and the main characters. The essence of the collective unconscious in the human context is the inspiring and coercive power of similar role models. When readers identify with the protagonist's "similar" identity, they are inclined to relate to their own circumstances, thereby restraining their behavior in similar situations. This constraint is not an external coercive force but stems from the pursuit of morality and justice or the fear of societal moral judgment.

Conclusion

The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* generally highly praises acts of kindness and justice. For instance, in *Worthy Deeds* (《庸行可嘉》) (p. 28), the author greatly praises the young man's exhaustion to death as a result of serving his mother. Furthermore, the authors also express their commendation for righteous individuals through the depiction of their reaping of good rewards for their acts of kindness, as seen in *The Filial Beggars* (《孝丐》) (p. 99), where Sun, who always assists beggars, gains an extension of 30 years to her lifespan before her death.

On the other hand, the author generally holds a negative view towards despicable behaviors, as evident in *Revealing One's Heart to Others* (《示人肺腑》) (p. 57), where an old woman falls critically ill after committing wrongdoings, to the author's extreme abhorrence. Similarly, the author expresses disapproval of injustice through the portrayal of negative consequences for wrongdoers, as seen in *Gambling Becomes a Demon* (《爱赌成鬼》) (p. 61), which records the tragic death of a gambling addict and concludes with an exhortation: "May evil serve as a lesson for all!" (作恶者, 其鉴诸!).

The views on moral perspective reflected in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* embody traditional Chinese moral consciousness and the theory of cause and effect, presenting the subjective initiative of people in the context of gods. The authors, from the perspective of their era, used the format of the illustrated magazine to record the real social landscape of the late Qing Dynasty and bridged literature with real-life, making *Dianshizhai Pictorial* a vivid portrayal of the late Qing folk life and mentality.

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