

Why judge dee was an effective magistrate



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The “ Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee,” revolved around a very prominent district magistrate named Judge Dee Goong An, a man famous for his ability to solve mysterious cases. Judge Dee digs deep to solve each case and was successful because he combined the three philosophies of legalism, daoism and Confucianism. These philosophies provided him with significant morals, techniques and strategies to bring justice to the region. Legalism, daoism and Confucianism all played vital roles which allowed Judge Dee to be an effective magistrate. Without all three, he wouldn’t have been successful with his cases and maintained order and stability throughout the region.

One of the main rules in the philosophy of legalism was corporal punishment. Judge Dee effectively utilized this when he punished suspects in crimes in order to make the cases flow faster, which keep the peace and stability in the region. Because of these techniques he used, he was able to make guilty people confess quickly. For example, when investigating the case of the double murder, Judge Dee “ ordered the constables to let Warden Pang have hundred strokes with heavy bamboo” in order for him to confess his part in the crime (15). Because of this, Judge Dee eliminated another suspect in the murder case, and was able to proceed with his investigation. Additionally, when he ordered Hsu Deh-tai to be brought in for trial for “ The Strange Corpse” murder, Judge Dee managed to get him to confess by giving him “ fifty lashes with the thin rattan” and the “ great torture” on the cross (172). Although Hsu Deh-tai denied all allegations of having an adulterous relationship with Mrs. Djou, he eventually confessed to his guilt and gave Judge Dee the evidence to convict Mrs. Djou as well. As a result of this, Judge Dee proved the culprits guilty and was able to solve the murder and close

the case. Furthermore, when giving the punishments to the felons, it would have prevented future crimes from happening. Citizens would be hesitant and afraid of breaking the law because of what they saw when Shao Lee-huai, Hsu Deh-tai and Mrs. Djou received their cruel punishments for their crimes. Because of this deterrent, Judge Dee was capable of keeping the peace, stability and order in Chang-Ping.

Although Judge Dee used physical methods to solve cases, he also turned to daoism when there were particularly difficult cases. Daoism had a vital role in the book when Judge Dee was out of ideas of how to proceed with his investigation. Because daoism focused on a natural way in life and a person's connection with nature, Judge Dee was able to use this philosophy to his advantage multiple times. For example, when investigating the case of "The Strange Corpse," he had to find Bee Hsun's tomb among many grave mounds. However, in order to do so, Judge Dee conversed with the universe and said, "If Bee Hsun died a natural death, we shall probably not find his grave. But if he was dastardly murdered, his soul must still be hovering about near his dead body, and will manifest itself in some way or other" (45). Then after saying a silent prayer, there "appeared a dark shape of indistinct outline, floating towards them in midair," which "stopped near a lonely mound, standing somewhat apart from the others" (45). This turned out to be the tomb of Bee Hsun, and because of this discovery, Judge Dee was able to perform an autopsy to find a cause of death. Moreover, when the autopsy was about to begin, Judge Dee asked Bee Hsun, "Should you have met with a violent death...I ask you to show your presence by closing your eyes" (71). Of course to the horror and amazement of the spectators, "the dried out lids

of the corpse started to flutter, and closed over the eye-balls” (71). However, although his communication with the universe was well spent, Judge Dee still could not solve the Bee Hsun murder case. Therefore, he decided to “consult fate through [the] divination slips” (80). After reading a poem about Lady Lee, a “well-known...concubine of an ancient king,” Judge Dee reflected that the poem could’ve pointed to Mrs. Djou, who brought tragedy to her house after murdering her husband (81). Additionally, after using the divination sticks and not coming to a plausible explanation, Judge Dee decided to go to sleep. However, during the night, he had a dream regarding two lines of poetry, an acrobatic act and a corpse with a snake crawling out of it. Although these methods used and the “answers” Judge Dee received were not revealing at first, it pushed him in the right direction and eventually gave him enough clues to solve the case.

In addition to using methods from the philosophies of legalism and daoism, Judge Dee was mainly an effective magistrate because of his understandings of Confucianism. As a result of his education, Judge Dee was extremely successful as a magistrate because he knew when to combine various parts of the different philosophies together to solve a case, while also keeping the unity and cohesion in the province. For example, when Hsu Deh-tai was convicted, and was to be executed by strangulation, Judge Dee said, “his body shall not be publicly exposed” because of “the meritorious services rendered to the State by the said Hsu Deh-tai’s father and grandfather” (214). Another example was Mrs. Djou. Although Judge Dee tortured Mrs. Djou in order to get information or a confession, he was also merciful to her because she had to continue to look after her old mother-in-law. These cases

showed how Judge Dee combined the philosophy of corporal punishment with filial piety, virtue of respect for one's ancestors, a blend of legalism and Confucianism. Additionally, after the Judge convicted Hsu Deh-tai, he punished Dr. Tang, the head of the house, because of his irresponsibility in watching over his students. Judge Dee severely reprimanded him by saying, "...I could have you severely punished as an accessory. But in deference to your great achievements in the field of scholarly researches, I shall free you" under the condition that " You are strictly forbidden ever again to engage in the teaching of young students" (208). Although Judge Dee said he could have severely punished Dr. Tang, he didn't because of his high social standing; instead Judge Dee was very lenient.

Because of his ability to blend the two schools together, Judge Dee was a powerful and legendary magistrate. Although Judge Dee's methods were sometimes considered brutal by today's standards, in his time he was a magnificent judge. Because he was able to pull ideas and values from the three different philosophies, legalism, daoism, and Confucianism, and use them to his advantage, proved he was a very effective magistrate.