

A Life Debt Must Be Paid: The Mechanism of Attribution of Accomplices in Assault and Murder in the Qing Dynasty

WU Raozhu^{*}

In the Qing Dynasty, the design of the legal system as well as judicial practice show that the attribution of murder and of intentional assault resulting in death were handled in totally opposite fashion. All accomplices were culpable for the death according to the type of homicide. If a member of those responsible for a joint assault bore the main responsibility alone, the penalties of the other accomplices might be mitigated accordingly; if the principal in a murder could not bear full responsibility for the crime, the remaining penalties would be passed on to the others. All accomplices were jointly and severally liable for their life debts, and the dynamic balance of “a life for a life” and “several lives for a life” was maintained.

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^{*} Master of Law of Minzu University of China and presently a legal specialist at Xiamen Municipal Construction and Development Company, Ltd; wuraozhu@163.com.