

Refusing a Gift of Gold at Midnight

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The ancient scholar Yang Zhen lived in the Hongnong Region during the Donghan Dynasty (25-220 A.D.). He was very diligent in his studies and accumulated a wealth of knowledge. He taught for more than twenty years and was well known as a learned scholar. When he tried to pursue official positions later, people all thought that he was too old, but he was very determined. When General Deng Zhi heard of Yang Zhen's good reputation, he hired him even though Yang Zhen was over fifty years old. Later, Yang Zhen became the Chief Official in Jinzhou County and Donglai County.

When Yang Zhen was passing through Changyi County on his way to accept the position in Donglai County, the official in Changyi, Wang Mi, who had obtained his position through the recommendation of Yan Zhen, brought 11 pounds of gold to him around midnight. Mr. Yang Zhen declined the gift, saying, "As your old friend, I understand you, but you don't understand me, why is it so?"

Wang Mi answered, "It is around midnight, and no one would know."

Yang Zhen replied solemnly, "The heaven knows, the earth knows, you know, and I know; how can you say that no one knows?"

Wang Mi was embarrassed and carried the gold back.

Later, Yang Zhen was in charge of Zhuo County. He was very fair and just, and his whole family lived a simple life. They always walked when going out. His friends tried to persuade him to leave some property to his offspring. He replied with a smile, "I am leaving my reputation of being an uncorrupted official as inheritance to my children, isn't that riches enough?"

Story from *Zizhitongjian* - "*The Comprehensive Mirror for Aids in Government*," compiled by Sima Guang between the years 1067 and 1084 during the Song Dynasty, and first printed at Hangzhou City in 1086. The whole work comprises 294 chapters, and it covers the period from 403 BC to 959 AD.