

## Article

# From the Imagination to the Reality: Historical Aspects of Rewriting Six Dynasties Buddhist Avadāna Stories

Wei Li 

College of Chinese Language and Literature, Henan University, Kaifeng 475001, China; lwhdbd@163.com

**Abstract:** In at least two aspects, Buddhist Avadāna literature shares a strong affinity with Chinese literature. One type of stories can be seen as parallel tales that bear striking resemblances to Chinese tales, while the other type has been assimilated by Chinese writers and transformed into Chinese tales. Regarding the first kind, there are many parallels between Buddhist and Chinese stories throughout the Six Dynasties (222–589), and it was only later that these stories were somehow compiled into collections that brought these parallels to light. As an example of the second type, in *linggui zhi* 靈鬼志 (*The Record of Magical Ghosts*) of the Jin Dynasty (265–402), the story of *waiguo daoren* 外國道人 (“the Foreign Master”) adapts the magical plot in which a man throws up a jug from the story of *fanzhi tuhu* 梵志吐壺 (“a Brahmin Spits a jug”) in the Buddhist text, yet it changes certain objects of the story to items with Chinese characteristics and develops new meaning. In *Xu qixie zhi* 續齊諧志 (*Further Records of Qixie [Supernatural tales]*), the famous *e’long shusheng* 鵝籠書生 (“the Goose Cage Scholar”, also known as the *yangxian shusheng* 陽羨書生 (“the Scholar from Yangxian”), takes the same story to another level. The structure of the story is changed, and a number of literati aesthetic interests are added, improving the literary color, smoothing down the language, and making substitutions in the text’s specifics, thus, bolstering the sense of realism and history. Meanwhile, in Liu Yiqing’s 劉義慶 (403–444) *Xuanyan ji* 宣驗記 (*Records Manifest Records of Manifest Miracles*), the Avadāna tale *yingwu jiuhuo* 鸚鵡救火 (“the Parrot Putting Out the Fire”) that he collected is not only associated with Buddhism but can also be seen as a commentary on the turbulent times and a hint of literati optimism if we view it in the context of Liu Yiqing’s *Youminglu* 幽明錄 (*Record of the Hidden and Visible Worlds*). The literary elites of the Six Dynasties drew inspiration from Buddhist Avadāna sources and imaginatively mixed them with historical circumstances to create Chinese fiction with new intentions. The rich resources of Avadāna literature from India and the fable tradition in Chinese literature create cultural conditions for these two sources to combine and mutually develop, forming a world of literature with colorful and meaningful stories.

**Keywords:** Avadāna literature; a brahmin throwing up a jug; the Foreign Master; the scholar from Yangxian; parrot putting out a fire



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## 1. Introduction

In Sarvāstivāda School of Sectarian Buddhism, Buddhist masters who specialized in telling Avadāna stories were called Avadāna-master (*piyu shi* 譬喻師 *dārṣṭāntika*).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, later storytelling also played an important role in the process of Ashoka’s practice of the secularization of Buddhism. In Six Dynasties, Avadāna as a literary form caught people’s eye as these stories were translated into China and titled *piyu* 譬喻 (Ding 1996, pp. 6–10; Yinshun 2011, pp. 486–500; Sharma 1985, pp. 3–12).<sup>2</sup> The term Avadāna has a strong link with Apadana and Jataka, see Sharma (1985, pp. 3–12). For the convenience of discussion, this article uses Avadāna Literature or the English term fable (story and tale) to discuss the stories cited. Of course, although Avadāna stories can also be found in other sections in Tripitaka, these sutras are mainly found in the category of Jātaka (*benyuan* 本緣, *bensheng* 本生 (life stories of Buddha or Bodhisattvas) and *yuanqi* 緣起 (fables or Avadāna)) in Tripitaka. This refers to various types of rebirth and karma stories of the Buddha, Maitreya,

Bodhisattvas, or disciples of the Buddha in their past and present lives. These stories are divided into five sections: sutras of the Buddha's original life (*bensheng* 本生), the Buddha's biography (*fozhuan* 佛傳), sutras of the Buddha and his disciples' stories (*fo ji dizi yinyuan* 佛及弟子因緣), the Dhammapada (*fajujing* 法句經), and the Avadāna sutras (*piyu* 譬喻). Sharmistha Sharma argues that Jātaka sutras are the predecessors of the Avadāna sutras and that the two are closely related, the difference being that in the Jātaka sutras, the Buddha himself is the hero, whereas in the Avadāna sutras, the Bodhisattva or Buddha's disciples are the protagonists of the heroic deeds (Sharma 1985, pp. 9–10).

Among these Avadāna sutras translated in the Six Dynasties, six of them are the most important ones, which are *Za piyu jing* 雜譬喻經 (*The Sutra of Miscellaneous Avadāna Stories*, one *juan*, T. 204, translated by Lokakṣema (Zhilou jiachen 支婁迦讖, d.u.) of Yuezhi 月氏 (a tribe in Central Asia around 200 B.C) in between the 1st year of Jianhe 建和 and the 3rd year of Zhongping 中平 (CE 147–186.), Later(East) Han dynasty 後漢 in Luoyang 洛陽); *Za piyu jing* 雜譬喻經 (*The Sutra of Miscellaneous Avadāna Stories*, two *juan*, T.205, author unknown, attached to the list of sutras from Later Han Dynasty); *Jiu za piyu jing* 舊雜譬喻經 (*The Sutra of Ancient Miscellaneous Avadāna Stories*, one *juan*, T. 206, translated by Indian (tianzhu 天竺) Monk Kang Senghui 康僧會 of Wu (229–280) from Three Kingdom Period (220–280)); *Za piyu jing* 雜譬喻經 (*The Sutra of Miscellaneous Avadāna Stories*, one *juan*, T. 207, collected by Bhikkhu Daolüe 道略 (d.u.)); *Zhongjing zhuanza piyu* 眾經撰雜譬喻 (*Avadāna Stories from Various Scriptures*, one *juan*, collected by Bhikkhu Daolüe 道略, translated by Kumārajīva (344–413)); and *Baiyu jing* 百喻經 (One Hundred Fables, four *juan*, T.209, translated by Qiunapidi 求那毗地 (Guṇavṛddhi, ?–502)).

These Avadāna texts, which serve as the foundation of the Avadāna scriptures, contain numerous significant Buddhist fables. However, in a broader sense, we should study the narratives of these stories in order to appreciate the intricacy of their storytelling and the message conveyed. This includes both the Jātaka and Avadāna stories, as well as other fable-like stories in other portions of the Tripitaka collections.

Buddhist Avadāna literature included several Chinese folktales that influenced stories that were forerunners of a corpus of tales that spread to Korea and Japan. Research has identified 52 different categories of Chinese folktales that are specific to the Chinese region and that are remarkably similar to narratives found in Buddhist scriptures. Some Chinese folktales, including “The cat dressed as a saint” (*maozhuang shengren* 貓裝聖人), “The geese carrying a tortoise” (*yanxiangui* 雁銜龜), “Killing each other in turn” (*zhanzhuang xiangsha* 輾轉相殺), “The villagers staring in the mirror” (*xiangmin zhaojing* 鄉民照鏡), and “The couple bet on not talking” (*fuqi dadu buyu* 夫妻打賭不語), have been influenced by several of the well-known stories from the *One Hundred Fables* (*Baiyu jing* 百喻經 T. 209).<sup>3</sup> These stories serve to highlight traditional characteristics of Avadāna literature, which are “a linking of things to each other, a transfer of evidence, and a mutual understanding of the retribution of good and evil”, and they also “improved the philosophical and social edifying functions of oral storytelling, resulting in the transmission of many exquisite works of elaborate ideas and profound connotations, which had a positive and powerful influence on the development of the literary genre of fable in China” (S. Liu 2010, pp. 91–101).

Buddhist Avadāna stories, including the folktales they influence, are so strongly linked to Chinese literature that they can be roughly split into two types. The first can be viewed as a parallel narrative that bears a striking resemblance to Chinese fables, such as the one found in the *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經 (*The Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*): “Then I observed a ploughman using a plough to prepare the ground. A shrimp ate a worm that had erupted from the ground. After that, a snake arrived and ate the toad. The peacock flew in and pecked at the snake”.<sup>4</sup> The story is strikingly similar in structure and meaning to the one in *Zhuangzi*: “Zhuangzi spied a cicada. When it just found a fine shade of the tree (leaves), it forgot (the danger of showing) its body; a praying mantis caught the cicada with its claws. When it got the cicada, it forgot its (the danger of showing) its body; another bird came and profited in the end. (This suggests that people) would forget about the truth when they see the benefits.” (Guo 2012, p. 695; Zhuang 2013, pp. 164–65)<sup>5</sup> This is one of Zhuangzi's

most famous fables, which was cited in many texts in later times (X. Liu 1987, pp. 212–13; Han 1980, p. 359).<sup>6</sup>

This is not the only case. For instance, there is a fable in *Bintoulutulushe wei youtuoyanwang shuofa jing* 賓頭盧突羅闍為優陀延王說法經 (*The Sutra of Venerable Pindola-Bharadvaja Teaching Dharma to King Udayana*) that reads, “It is likewise like a wild animal that sees a tree called Kimśuka (*zhenshujia* 甄叔迦, *Butea Frondosa*), whose fruit resembles flesh. Knowing it was not meat when he watched it fall to the ground, he went to devour it. When he saw that it wasn’t flesh, he reasoned that another one falling off the tree must be flesh. So it guarded the tree which also trapped him”.<sup>7</sup> The meaning and structure of this tale are similar to that of the Chinese idiom *shouzhu daitu* 守株待兔 (Guarded the Tree, Waiting for the Rabbit) in *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 (280–233 B.C.) (Hanfeizi 2016, p. 484; Hanfeizi 1964, p. 98).<sup>8</sup>

However, there is not necessarily a direct connection between this story and the ones that already exist in China, so it is irresponsible to draw any conclusions based solely on similarities. Buddhist Avadāna tales that were assimilated into the Chinese setting and transformed into Chinese tales fall into the second category. This is also the fundamental aim of this essay, to see how Buddhist Avadāna stories were accepted into literary fiction in the Six Dynasties.

These stories not only fulfilled a “missionary” function, delivering Buddhist doctrines, but also demonstrated their legitimacy by establishing a sense of history so they could be seen as Chinese tales. The Avadāna stories were able to change from being “imaginational” to “real” as a result, and they now had real importance in regard to the common people of that chaotic time. Then, the long decline of Chinese literature commenced, which began to develop an independent and complete classical language, influenced by the topics, narratives, and meaning of Avadāna tales, especially after the Tang and Song dynasties, when the fables created by Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 (1037–1101), Liu Ji 劉基 (1311–1375), and Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798) were deeply connected to the fables collected in the *Baiyu jing*. Numerous Chinese monks used Buddhist *piyu* to convey Buddhist philosophy in their sutras, and many of their songs and rhymes also contained implied *piyu* of various kinds (X. Li 2010, pp. 344–64).

Studies on Avadāna stories have mostly concentrated on the collection of sutras,<sup>9</sup> either on a single metaphorical classic or on metaphors in a single classic, from different perspectives such as lexical grammar, version transmission, tale type, linguistic style, or genre. However, there is a great need for improvement in both the case-by-case assessment of these metaphors and their comparative literary analyses, particularly when it comes to literary renditions of Buddhist narratives. The historicity of fables is finally thoroughly described, emphasizing that it was not just a product of literary inquiry but also a result of the writers’ own curiosity and in-depth understanding of their time. The cultural attitude and symbolism inherent therein are mainly illustrated by the tale of *yingwu jiuhuo* 鸚鵡救火 (a parrot extinguishing a fire).

## 2. The Collection of Parable Fables: A Parallel Comparison of Buddhist Avadāna Literature and Chinese Tales

### 2.1. *The Practice in the Country of the Sea* (*Haizhongguo Xiuxing Yu* 海中国修行喻)

#### 2.1.1. The Buddhist Text in *Za piyu jing*

The fifth tale in the *Za piyu jing* describes a small country inside the ocean that offers everything but *shimi* 石蜜 (toffee, *phāṇita*, Daniels 1995, pp. 279, 374; Meng 2007, p. 68).<sup>10</sup> Then, a merchant brings more than 500 carts of *shimi* to the king, trying to make more money. He then places the *shimi* in front of the palace gate, but it takes a while before anyone inquires about it. Therefore, he thinks it would look more virtuous if he offered the *shimi* as gifts to the Three Treasures so the king would follow his advice. Here, it is implied that worshipping the Three Treasures is extremely widespread in the nation where the narrative takes place. The basic topic of this story is that giving to the Three Treasures might earn favorable benefits. Furthermore, this can be seen as the main point of the out-layer of the storytelling. However, for the inter-layer of the story, the narrative emphasizes

the significance of persistently practicing Buddhism. The two themes are distinct in terms of storytelling, despite the fact that both might be viewed as devotional acts of the Buddhist faith.

Then, he finds a peaceful location to practice (Buddhism) and finally achieves the fruition of arhat. His accomplishments are so tremendous that they cause the earth to tremble, and the Indra (Śakra) and all the gods of all heavens come to congratulate him. Afterward, the bhikkhu questions Indra regarding the nature of the heavenly kingdom. Indra informs him that there are four enormous paradises in heaven. The bhikkhu then asks who these men are, and the emperor tells him the story of these three masters in detail:

Indra says, “There was a man in the kingdom of Vārānasī who was a monk and vowed to himself, ‘I will walk and wander around, never rest until I have achieved the fruition of *arhat* (*yīngzhēn* 應真)’. So, he walked around day and night, and his feet were broken and bled, and hundreds of birds chased and pecked at him. And beings of all heavens observed him, and all praised him. And there was a man in the kingdom of Rājagṛha, who was also a monk, and sat on a mat made of straw, and vowed to himself, saying, ‘I shall not rest until I have attained the Way [*dedao* 得道, obtain enlightenment]’. In his sleep, he asked someone to make an eight *cun* 寸 long (1 *cun* is around 3.33 cm) awl, and in his sleep, he stabbed his thighs with it, so that the pain would keep him awake. He achieved the fruition of arhat within one year. There was another man who was also a monk in the land of Kauśāmbī (the capital of Vatsā). He lived in a rocky chamber in a mountain which was dangerously steep, where no one could come or go. When the Māra-pāpīyān saw his exertion, he took the form of a water buffalo and came before the bhikkhu, snorting his nose and goring his eyes, in order to gore him down (*chu* 觸). The bhikkhu was terrified and thought, ‘This is no place where a buffalo can come and go. Why is it here? This must be the act of the devil?’ Then he said to king Māra-pāpīyān, ‘What do you want and why do you scare me?’ Māra-pāpīyān responded, ‘I saw you working hard, and I was afraid that you will get out my realm, that is why I came to scare you.’ The bhikkhu said, ‘The reason I become a monk to get out from the world. The Buddha has amazing appearance which I would love to see. Yet since the Buddha has passed away, that I could not be able to witness his appearance. I’ve heard that demons can transform into the form of the Buddha. I would like you to show that to me, then I won’t keep on practicing Buddhism.’ Immediately, the demon transformed into the Buddha standing before the bhikkhu, and then the bhikkhu meditate and achieved the fruition of arhat. And the deities of all heavenly realms praised his virtue endlessly. The demon regretted and felt sorrow, then he disappeared immediately”.

Indra said to the bhikkhu, “The deities never stop admiring these three people”. The bhikkhu said to Indra, “These three men know the truth on suffering and emptiness which can age and destroy the body. I had no intention of being despised by others, but I have sought the Way, and have come out of the three realms. This is also wonderful, and I can also achieve the fruition of *arhat*”. The deities replied, “Now we will return to heaven and inform everyone that there is no one better than you”. Then the deities saluted and departed. When the king heard that the owner of the *shimi* had diligently practiced the Way, he went and bowed down and thanked him, and he became the teacher of the kingdom. And the Three Treasures flourish, the country is at peace, the blessings (merits) and the saved people are uncountable”.<sup>11</sup>

First of all, the parable’s structure is extremely intricate. It highlights the idea of suffering, emptiness, and disintegration of the flesh while illuminating two layers of truth through a “mise en abyme” or “play within a play” structure (Mi 1970, pp. 10–17; H. Wu 2004, pp. 418–19; Ahn 2004, pp. 125–31).<sup>12</sup> On a superficial level, the narration of the tale is

cursory. The plot is about honoring the Buddha and gaining benefits and merits. It focuses on the dialogue between the man who gained the fruition of an arhat and Indra on the wonders of the heavenly realm in order to emphasize the importance of practicing Buddhism assiduously in order to obtain a great result. Indra's response is specifically about three cases on practicing Buddhism diligently. The narrative is then concluded, producing two congruent interwoven layers from story to doctrine. The inner tale that Indra narrates is three stories that all emphasize the value of persistence and success in spiritual practice. It is the same message that the Buddha wanted to deliver in the text.

### 2.1.2. *Xuantou Cigu* 懸頭刺股 (Hang the Head, Stab the Thigh)

The second of these three tales is remarkable in that it is similar to the ancient Chinese narrative of the *zhui cigu* 錐刺股 "stabbing of the thigh with an awl". Su Qin 蘇秦 (–284 B.C.) put a lot of effort into his studies despite failing ten times in his attempts to persuade King Huiwen of Qin 秦惠文王 (337–311 B.C.). Moreover, he was detested by both his wife and sister-in-law. Then, he worked hard on reading and finally succeeded. If ever he dozed while studying, he drew forth a gimlet and stabbed his thigh till the blood ran off at his heel and asked, "Where stands the man who persuades a ruler and will not put forth whatever wealth he has for honor and ministry?" When a year had transpired and his study was complete, he said, "here are persuasions meet for the rulers of our time" (Crump 1970, p. 57; He 1990, p. 75).<sup>13</sup>

Both stories highlight the importance of having a strong desire to achieve and persistence in the process. The difference is that in the Buddhist story, drowsiness in a practitioner is attributed to an assault from the five aggregates "*wuyin*" 五陰 (the five Skandhas) that is like a cover to one's mind. So ordinary mortals are readily blinded and unable to achieve enlightenment. The story also makes it crystal clear that the practitioner had the awl made and that it was eight *cun* long. The *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (*Grove of Jewels in the Garden of the Dharman*, completed 668) by Daoshi 道世 (?–683) collected this tale with few modifications: "*Baiyujing* says, 'A sage from the Vārāṇasī sat down and made the vow to himself, 'I shall never raise the heart for sleep until I have accomplished the Way'. He punctured his two thighs with an awl he made that was eight *cun* long, which left him unable to sleep for a year. And he achieved enlightenment in one year'".<sup>14</sup> This text emphasizes the one year it takes to achieve the Way (Enlightenment) while keeping the information that the awl is eight *cun* long and does not mention who must make the awl.

It is worth noting that clearly the *Zhanguoce* was written before the translation of the *Piyu jing*, and the two stories are parallel. However, Chinese monks noticed the similarities between the two stories and collected them together in the Buddhist encyclopedia of a later dynasty. For monks, of course, the thrusting of the thigh with an awl was not only a Buddhist Avadāna story written in the sutras but also a way of attaining liberation by disabling one's own body, as was performed by the monk Zhi Shun 智舜 (533–604) in the Sui Dynasty (581–618). He was known as the one who stabbed his thigh with an awl.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.1.3. The Collections of These Stories in Song Dynasty

In Chinese culture, *zhuicigu* 錐刺股 (using the awl to stab the thigh) comes in parallel with the story *touxuanliang* 頭懸梁 (hanging one's head on the beam), which tells the two stories of working hard. Mu'an Shanqing 陸庵善卿 edited the book *Zutingshiyuan* 祖庭事苑 (*Tales and Affairs of Ancestral Courtyard (of Chan School)*), in which he put stories of Su Qin, Sun Jing, and Zhi Shun together under the title "*Xuantou cigu*" 懸頭刺股 (hang the head, stab the thigh). Sun Jing 孫敬 (d.u.) was a scholar with the literary name of Wenbao 文寶. He spent all his time studying in his house. When he felt sleepy, he would tie a rope around his head and hang it from a beam. When he went to the city, people in the city called him a scholar who never left the house. Moreover, he declaimed the offer when the emperor asked him to be an officer. This story can be found in the book the *Xianxian zhuan* 先賢傳 (*Biography of the Former Sages*). Su Qin was a native of Luoyang. He and Zhangyi 張儀 (?–309 B.C.) both studied from Master Guigu 鬼谷 (d.u.). He had the practice of reading

until he was sleepy, then, using an awl and stabbing himself in the thigh, bleeding down to his ankles. This story can be found in *Zhangguoce*. Zhi Shun, an eminent monk of the Sui Dynasty, studied exclusively with all his attention inside temples without any other business. When his mind became delusional and could not be stopped, he would stab himself in the femur and bleed, or he would hug a stone or walk around the stupas, in order to forget about his troubles. Therefore, the scars on his thighs are mottled like colorful clothes. This story can be found in *The Biography*<sup>16</sup> by Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554).<sup>17</sup> The tale of the man who was stabbed in the thigh or hung his head on a beam is well-known in China, it is the symbol of working hard.

Mu'an Shanqing collected these three biographies in the same category. Putting three people together instead of the traditional two Chinese literati might be an echo of the three stories told in *haizhong guo xiuxing yu*. On the one hand, he acknowledges the similarity of the three tales in terms of their spiritual essence and provides a common framework for discussion. On the other hand, it also makes use of the legends of Sun Jing and Su Qin's immense fame to highlight the Buddhist monk Zhi Shun's spirit in practicing Buddhism without any indolence.

In the biographies of Buddhist monks, there are numerous cases of utilizing physical harm as a practice-motivating tool.<sup>18</sup> (Shi 2022, pp. 542–61; Jan 1965, pp. 243–68; Benn 2007, pp. 19–53) Zhi Shun was probably moved by the Buddhist Scriptures on devotion,<sup>19</sup> but it is also possible that he was inspired by the tales of Su Qin and Sun Jing so that he chose the awl to stab himself. It is impossible to pinpoint one single reason why he used an awl to stab his thigh. However, it is sure that in later monks' eyes, the emphasis of these stories is on a solid inner spiritual motivation and persistent faith, whether the story is about a man stabbing himself to fulfill the teachings of the Buddha or a man stabbing himself to read a book for success.

## 2.2. *Chengchuan Shiyu* 乘船失鈿 (*Taking the Boat, Lost the Bowl*) and *Kezhou Qiujian* 刻舟求劍 (*Mark the Boat for the Sword*)

### 2.2.1. *Chengchuan Shiyu*

*Chengchuan shiyu*, the 19th Fable collected in *Baiyu jing*, is another story that shares similarities with the Chinese tale *Kezhou qiujian*. The Buddhist story goes as follows:

Once upon a time, there was a man who dropped a silver bowl into the sea while crossing it. He pondered, "I'm going to make a mark on the water. I'll continue on my journey for now. But I'll come back for it later". He returned after two months of travel during which he visited Ceylon and many other countries. On seeing a river, he jumped into the water looking for the bowl he had lost before". What are you doing there?" people asked. He replied, "I have lost my bowl. Now I would like to get it back". People went on, "When did you lose it?" He answered, "I lost it crossing the sea". Again people asked, "How long ago did you lose it?" He answered, "I lost it two months ago". People asked, "Since you lost it two months ago in the sea, why are you looking for it here in the river?" He answered, "I made a mark on the water where I lost the bowl. This water looks the same as the other. There seems no difference. That's why I'm doing this". People went on, "Though all waters are identical, the place that you have lost it is there. How can you find it here?" Everybody jeered at him. The heretics, who do not practice the right religious belief, but a fallacious one, suffer from their useless mortification in seeking deliverance. Those men are just like the stupid man who has lost his bowl in the sea and looked for it in the river.<sup>20</sup>

This story is about a foolish man who, having lost a bowl, makes a note on a boat and tries to recover the lost object when he arrives in another place. Foolish men are a common theme in Buddhism, and their stories can be found in many places such as the *One Hundred Fables*. In Buddhism, people take foolish actions due to the Three Poisons (*sandu* 三毒). These three primary afflictions are desire (*tanyu* 貪欲, craving, *rāga*); anger,

(*chenhui* 瞋恚, aversion, *doeṣa*); and nescience (*yuchi* 愚癡, folly, *moha*). Furthermore, in the concept of *shi'er yinyuan* 十二因緣 (Twelve Links of Dependent Arising, *dvādaśa-astanga pratīyasamutpādais*), the first one is *wuming* 無明 (nescience, *avidyā*), which also refers to ignorance and unenlightenment. One of Buddhism's basic goals is to dispel ignorance by seeking out Perfect Wisdom. The greatest position among the three Buddhist disciplines of precepts, meditation, and wisdom is known as wisdom. In order to spread the Dharma, Buddhists have used a significant number of old Indian folktales about the wise and the foolish. In the story of *chengchuan shiyu*, apparently, the main character misunderstood the situation because he is foolish and lacking wisdom.

### 2.2.2. *Kezhou Qiujuan*

The story is similar to the story of the *kezhouqiujuan* in *Chajin* 察今 (On Examining the Current Situation) from *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (*The Spring and Autumn of Lü Buwei*) "Once a man from the state of Chu 楚 was crossing the Yangtze River. His sword fell into the water from his boat, therefore he quickly marked his boat and said: 'This is where my sword fell from. When the boat stopped, he went into the water to seek his sword following the mark he made. The boat had already moved, yet the sword stayed in the water without moving. If one seeks the sword like this, is it confusing?"<sup>21</sup> Originally, this fable focused on how to manage the country, then, the term was used to describe foolish people who do not change according to verified and changeable situations in the real world. The two stories are very similar, the difference being that in *Baiyu jing*, the man loses a silver bowl, while in the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, it is a precious sword. This type of fable can be found in folklore all over the world, including China.<sup>22</sup> (Tang 2001, pp. 49–51)

In China, fables on the fool often contained profound philosophies in their intriguing stories in the pre-Qin Dynasty (before 221 B.C). They gradually became a conscious creation as an important means for pre-Qin philosophers and political strategists, using lobbying methods, to argue and reason. Zhuangzi and Hanfeizi are famous for their fables, among which they also collect stories on the foolish actions taken by silly people.<sup>23</sup>

*Shishi liutie* 釋氏六帖 (*Buddhist Encyclopedia*) of the Five Dynasties (907–979)<sup>24</sup> (Du 1999, p. 356) simplified this story into the phrase *yushihuashui* 孟失畫水 (mark the water when the bowl is lost):

The *One Hundred Parables Sutra* says that a man went into the sea and lost a silver bowl. He marked (painted, drew) on the water and then left. Someone asked, "why did you draw on the water when you lost your bowl". He said, "After two months of marking the water, I came to look for my bowl in the water as this water is similar to the water earlier." This is like someone who holds the belief of none-Buddhism, seeing all the delusions.<sup>25</sup>

This complex story has been abbreviated, only showing the most representative act, using this act to emphasize its Buddhist meaning. As it is a Buddhist encyclopedia, it maintains the Buddhist meaning of this story in its original context.

A complicated fable's essence must be distilled, with details fading away and only its "meaning" remaining and being highlighted, in order to be effectively summarized. Of course, there are many other fables that have been transmitted in China. Some are just well-known Chinese tales or fables. Some have influenced Chinese writers' creations. On the one hand, this shows that there are many similarities between Buddhist Avadāna literature and Chinese literature, and some even influence Chinese stories. On the other hand, these stories work as bridges to cross the gap between Chinese and Indian cultures.

### 3. Focusing on Historical Truth: The Internal Logic of the *e'long shusheng* 鵝籠书生 "Goose Cage Scholar"

#### 3.1. *Fanzhi Tuhu* 梵志吐壺 (A Brahmin Spits Out a Jug)

##### 3.1.1. The Original Text

*Fanzhi tuhu* 梵志吐壺 (A brahmin spits out a jug) was the eighteenth story collected in *Jiuza piyujing* 舊雜譬喻經. The story is complicated, yet the main part of the story focuses on a prince's magical experience when he witnesses a brahmin's superpower (magical trick):

Once upon a time, a King severely oppressed women, and the Queen (his rightful wife) said to the prince, "I am thy mother, who has never seen the kingdom since I was born. I wish to go out and see it once. Please pass this request on to the king". Three times she asked for the same thing. Finally, after the third time, the prince spoke to the king, and the king took his advice. The prince rode the royal chariot by himself and went out on the road with his courtiers to welcome the Queen. She opened her tent by herself so that she might be seen. When the prince saw her misbehave so blatantly, the lady said, "I am so ashamed". The prince thought to himself, "Even my own mother acts as such, not to mention others?" At night he left the capital and wandered into the mountains. There was a tree by the road and a fine spring under it. The prince climbed up to the tree and saw a Brahmin walking into the water by himself. He brought food to eat after he took a bath. He used magic (a trick, *shu* 術) to pour a jug out of his mouth. Inside the jug, there was a woman and then they performed the conjugal act by a screen. Then the brahmin lay down to sleep, yet the woman then repeated the trick and spat out a jug, in which there was a young man. Then they slept together, and she swallowed the jug. Soon the brahmin got up, and he put the woman inside the jug and swallowed it. Then he left on his crutch after he swallow the jug. The prince returned and said to the king, "I will invite a master in front of all the courtiers. He will put his stick aside and show the magic of three people eating together". When the brahmin arrived he said, "There is no one else but me". The prince said, "You should take out the men and eat together". After three iterations of requests, the master know he couldn't stop it, so he took out the man to eat with him. The king asked the prince, "How do you know this?" He answered, "Let the man eat with her". The prince said to the woman, "Come out to the man and eat with him". He did not stop but went out to the man and ate with him. The king asked the prince, "How do you know this?" He said, "My mother wanted to see places in the kingdom, and when I was riding the chariot for her, she uncovered her hands to be seen. I realized that women are capable of much desire, so I faked a pain in my abdomen and returned home. I went to the mountain and saw a master hiding a woman in his stomach. This is adultery, and there is no way to stop such women from committing adultery, so I would like you to proclaim a law allowing people to come and go freely inside the palace". The king announced the rule in the palace that those who wish to do so can do as they wish. The Master (the Buddha?) said, "Women cannot be trusted anywhere in the world".<sup>26</sup>

Because of the story's complexity and wealth of analytically valuable aspects, Chinese writers are likely to have taken notice of it and included it in their works for intricate adaptations.

##### 3.1.2. The Narratives

First of all, this story uses the play-within-a-play narrative structure, with the outer layer telling the story of the king, the queen, and the prince and the inner layer nested in the story of the "brahmin spitting out the jug", which is intertwined with the story of the queen's moral failings and the woman's deceitful words to illustrate the truth that "women cannot be trusted in the world". To demonstrate the fact that women cannot be trusted, the

tale of the queen's virtue and the woman's dishonest words and actions are highlighted. As in a Russian nesting doll, the inner narrative of "a brahmin spitting out the jug" has these layers with the man and the woman, then another man as the main characters.

In the tale, both the brahmin and the woman use deception to entice their loved ones, but only the woman is singled out for criticism. Although it is not mentioned as such in the text explicitly, the textual details appear to imply the reason for this value judgment. The main purpose of the brahmin spitting out the bottle to draw out the woman. However, the main point of the woman's magic is to introduce a young man. Furthermore, the detail of the lady sleeping with both her husband and her lover is a clear indication of the erotic nature of the woman's magic. The fact is that the woman receives more criticism, despite the fact that the brahmin (*daoren* 道人, the man of the Way) is the one who started the whole thing in the beginning. This seems to reflect a propensity towards the subjugation of women in India, where the tale is said to have originated. In addition, from the point of view of the "dharma of the world", the story itself shares the Buddhist doctrine that the "jug" might be the equivalent of the mundane world, in which people spend their entire lives tormented by lust and unable to end their lives, thus, becoming confused and comatose without ever escaping from the power of dharma.

### 3.1.3. The Magic Tricks from the Western Region

For Chinese monks and writers, the magic trick, "spitting out a jug", the focal point of the tale, possesses features of an external culture. In China, the writer's interpretation and rewriting of the tale were most likely affected by their experience of reading about such magic that originated in *xiyu* 西域 (the Western Region). If they lived or stayed in big cities such as Chang'an 長安 or Luoyang 洛陽, they might even personally see the tricks performed by monks or magic masters. Magic and illusionary tricks gained popularity in China after Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty (Han wudi 漢武帝, Liu Che 劉徹, 156–87 B.C.) opened the road to Western territories, according to the *Yinyue zhi* 音樂志 (The Records of Music) in *Houhanshu* 後漢書 (*The History of the Eastern Han Dynasty*): "illusionary magic arrived from the Western regions, especially from Tianzhu (India). When the road to the Western Regions was opened by Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, conjurers (*māyā-puruṣa*) started to come to China. At the time of Emperor An 安帝 (Liu Gu 劉祜, 94–125), the people from India (*tianzhu* 天竺) showed the emperor tricks that permitted them to amputate their own hands and feet, cut out their own bowels and bones. These tricks became popular since then". (Fan 1975, p. 1074) After the spread of Buddhism, foreign monks, particularly monks from the Western Regions in Central Asia, utilized a variety of deceptive methods to win over disciples while conducting missionary work in China. It is possible that methods like "spitting out a jug" had a basis in truth rather than being made up as literary fiction in Chinese people's eyes at that time. This indicates that the magic the fable tells is not only a literary description or imagination but something related to the real world.

### 3.1.4. *Hu* 壺 in Taoist Story

The "*hu*" 壺 plays an essential part when it comes to interpreting the story, as this element is also tied to the Chinese Taoist tradition, which has its own story of the *hugong* 壺公 "Sire Gourd".<sup>27</sup> (Ge 2010, p. 304; Company 2002, pp. 164–67; Mair 1996, pp. 185–228; Zeng 2014, pp. 137–56) Both tales are supernatural renderings of the *huzhong tian* 壺中天 "heaven (another realm) in a *hu*", which is a common depiction of an imaginary realm outside the real world in Sixth Dynasty narratives. (Senbō 1999, pp. 52–55) *Fanzhituhu* and *hugong* stories might be parables, and it is in the Sixth Dynasty that they connect with other and become the main body of the story in *waiguo daoren* 外國道人 (Foreign Master) in *Lingguizhi* 靈鬼志 (*The Records of Magical Ghosts*) by Xunshi 荀氏 (someone with the family name Xun), which influences the story of *e'long shusheng*.

### 3.2. *Waiguodaoren in Lingguizhi*

#### 3.2.1. The Similar Plots in *Waiguo daoren* and *Fanzhi tuhu*

*Linggui zhi* is attributed to a writer whose family name was Xun 荀氏 in the Jin Dynasty (266–420). In this book, the cultural traces of the “men in the jug” illusionary magic can be found; it was used to replace the beginning of the original Buddhist story. It puts the story in an actual historical year, that is, in the twelfth year of the Taiyuan Period 太元十二年 (388). The story starts with a magician, a master (man of the Way) with his superpower claiming he is from a foreign country and is able to swallow (*tundao* 吞刀) swords and spit out fire (*tuhuo* 吐火), pearls, jade and gold, and silver. The interesting part is that it notes that this magician receives the magic from a man with white clothes who was not a Buddhist monk (*shamen* 沙門 Sramana). This might indicate that the writer tries to hide the Buddhist track of this story and convince readers that this is a story with adventures and unbelievable events like other *zhiguai* stories in China. However, this might also be an explanation that *fei shanmen* 非沙門 (not a Buddhist monk) is used to describe the concept of *fanzhi* (a brahman) in the original text. *Houhanshu* records that conjurers (*māyā-puruṣa*) from the Western Region can make all kinds of transformations; they can spit fire, disintegrate themselves, and exchange the heads of cattle with horses, etc. (Fan 1975, p. 1684) When the *Hu* 胡 monks came to China to spread their teachings, they often used magic and tricks. There are many famous monks among them, such as Zhu Fahui 竺法護, An Huize 安慧則, Shi Tanhuo 釋曇霍, An Shigao 安世高, and Kang Senghui 康僧會, who were known to have attracted followers with their strange magic. (J. Zhang 1998, pp. 329–76)

Then the story continues, and the master saw a man carrying a shoulder pole (*dan* 擔) with a small cage the size of one pint (*shengyu* 升餘). He said to him, “I am very tired from walking and would like to get on your shoulder pole”. This *dan* is an item with Chinese characteristics as it only mentions *zhang* 杖 (a walking stick, or crutch) in the original Buddhist fable. Meanwhile, the concept or image of *zhang* might trigger readers to associate it with the Buddhist abbot’s staff. However, *dan* is more like something a Chinese farmer or gutter man would use on a daily basis. The bearer is very surprised and thinks he is a madman, so he says to him, “I can do it myself, but what do you want to do?” The man replied, “With your permission, I would like to enter your cage”. Then, the man says, “If you can enter the cage, you are a god (*shenren* 神人)”. Dialogues are crucial to the story’s adaptation since they enhance character development and credibility while also providing more information and improving the flow of the narrative. As evidenced by these exchanges, it appears that the carrier does not think the master can enter the cage, making it seem like a challenge or a wager on the master’s part. Moreover, because the master can do magical feats, the word “*shenren*” 神人 (amazing, godlike man, man with supernatural powers) functions as a keyword for him. Once more, this detail demonstrates the story’s *zhiguai* 志怪 (recording amazing event) nature.

Then the man drops his shoulder pole, and the magician enters the cage. An interesting detail is addressed here. The cage is no bigger, nor is the man any smaller. The bearer does not feel it is heavier than before (*long bugeng da, qiren yi bu geng xiao, danzhi yi bujue zhong yu xian* 籠不更大, 其人亦不更小, 擔之亦不覺重於先). This understanding or description of the space might be influenced by both Chinese tradition and Buddhist culture. As was shown earlier, in the Taoist story, Hugong lives inside his Gourd. This indicates that the space inside the gourd is much bigger than it seems.

This magical space that is distinct from the real world can also be found in Buddhist texts. The famous Buddhist metaphor *xumi jiezi* 須彌芥子 states that something as enormous as Sumeru can be put in something extremely tiny and numerous such as a mustard seed (*sarsapa*). This idea is vividly described in *Weimojie jing* 維摩詰經 (Vimalakīrtinird-eśa Sutra), in which the layman Vimalakīrti pretends to be sick and Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī comes to visit him. Then, they have an intriguing debate on what nonduality (*bu'er* 不二) means. However, it is not only these two in the room, Vimalakīrti uses his supernatural faculties (*shentong li* 神通力, *abhijñā*) so that all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, disciples of the Buddha, and all heavenly beings, demons, and ghosts can fit into his small room. The

Śāriputra said, “Noble sir, it is astonishing that these thousands of thrones, so big and so high, should fit into such a small house and that the great city of Vaisali, the villages, cities, kingdoms, capitals of Jambudvīpa, the other three continents, the abodes of the gods, the nagas, the yakshas, the gandharvas, the asuras, the garudas, the kimnaras, and the mahoragas—that all of these should appear without any obstacle, just as they were before! 居士! 未曾有也! 如是小室, 乃容受此高廣之座, 於毘耶離城無所妨礙, 又於閻浮提聚落、城邑, 及四天下諸天、龍王、鬼神宮殿, 亦不迫迮”. Then the Licchavi Vimalakīrti responded with the Sumeru mustard seed metaphor: “The bodhisattva who lives in the inconceivable liberation can put the king of mountains, Sumeru, which is so high, so great, so noble, and so vast, into a mustard seed. He can perform this feat without enlarging the mustard seed and without shrinking Mount Sumeru. Mount Sumeru’s primary (fundamental) mark (sva-lakṣaṇa) as it was before 若菩薩住是解脫者, 以須彌之高廣內芥子中無所增減, 須彌山王本相如故”.<sup>28</sup> (Thurman 1976, p. 52).

The expression of *wusuo zengjian* 無所增減 (without increase or decrease) is very helpful to our understanding of the phrase, “the cage is no bigger, nor is the man any smaller in the text 籠不更大, 其人亦不更小”. One can presume that *wusuo zengjian* indicates that Mount Sumeru does not become smaller while the mustard seed does not grow larger. There is a little discrepancy between the two lines. In the sutra, it put weight on Mount Sumeru’s primary (fundamental) mark, which might indicate the *wusuo zengjian* mainly focuses on the unchangeable size of Mount Sumeru. However, the emphasis on the relative spatial relationships between the cage and the man is considerably more apparent in the narratives of *waiguo daoren*.

After walking for dozens of *li* 里 (one *li* is around 500 m), the man relaxes under a tree to eat; the bearer orders food and says, “I have my own food”. He refuses to come out. Then, the magician just stays in the cage, bringing out all his food and tableware. This is the same plot of spitting out the jug with a woman in it, with colorful details.

Then the master repeatedly spits out a woman, about twenty years old, with extremely beautiful clothes and appearance, and they eat together. When they finish eating, her husband lays down. The woman says to the bearer, “I have another husband outside my family (*waifu* 外夫) who wants to come and eat with me; but when my husband wakes up, you must not tell him”. The woman then pours a young husband from her mouth and then they eat together in a cage. This woman’s lover is described as a younger husband (*nianshao zhangfu* 年少丈夫). The original Buddhist literature made mention of the fact that the lover was younger than the husband and that he was treated as a husband because he shared meals and beds with the woman. The woman’s age and appearance, however, were not stated in the original Buddhist text.

When her husband moves and is about to get up, the woman puts her lover in her mouth. The husband gets up and says to the bearer, “We can leave now”. Then, he takes the woman into his mouth, and other things he spits out.

### 3.2.2. New Plot in *Waiguo daoren*

The narrative then takes a fresh turn and gains new significance. Then, the man arrived in the country (*guozhong* 國中). He does not specify which country it is; however, the word *guozhong* may indicate it is inside China. At least, the reader might assume it is inside China or the capital of the state he is in. There is a wealthy family in the area when the man first arrives, but they are cruel and crafty. The master tells the bearer that he will show how to prevent the wealthy family from being stingy. Therefore, the last part of the story shifts into a narrative on being generous.

The master then makes his way to the wealthy man’s home, where he finds a horse that the rich man adores, and it is chained to a pillar. The horse then gets lost, and the wealthy man is unable to locate it. The following day, he discovers it in an unbreakable jar (*wudou ying* 五斗罌 a clay jar with the capacity of *wudou*, around 37.5 kg), but he does not know how to get it out of the jar. This detail is reminiscent of a cage that does not expand but holds people or objects that are larger than it appears.

The master then suggests that he prepare food for 100 people nearby to keep them from becoming hungry. When the wealthy man follows the master's advice, his horse is discovered in its original location. The next day, his parents disappear from their bed. After the wealthy man feeds 1000 people as the master recommends, his parents find their way home.<sup>29</sup> (Lu 1973a, vol. 8, pp. 316–17; Kao 1985, pp. 121–23).

Filial piety plays a significant importance in traditional Chinese moral systems. One of the most crucial values is respecting and honoring one's parents. Following the spreading of Buddhism to China, some tales and aspects of Buddhist culture pertaining to filial piety for parents were amplified and developed into significant cultural riches. For instance, the Great Maudgalyayana entering hell to rescue his mother is intimately tied to the popularity of the *Yulanpen* Festival in China (Karashima 2013, pp. 288–305; Mair 1983, pp. 87–122).<sup>30</sup>

In *waiguo daoren*, the stingy rich man's parents disappear and show up due to the master's magic or superpower. This plot is placed after the loss and recovery of his treasures, implying that parents are naturally more important. This shifts the theme of the story one step closer to the theme of filial respect for parents, making it another major theme, second only to generosity. The first part of *waiguo daoren* focuses on magic tricks or supernatural powers, which can be seen as one of the themes or main messages the author wants to send, yet it is kind of obscure. So the main theme of this story seems to be generosity. As far as the reader's reading experience is concerned, the story of the parents, which caps off the entire work, also seems to have a deeper meaning because filial piety develops into an amazing plot line.

The story concludes with a scenario involving the parents that is absent from the original narrative and conveys a new lesson about showing generosity to common people and filial piety to one's parents. Given that generosity is one of the six perfections in Buddhist practice and that there are numerous works in which the Buddha, a Bodhisattva, or a good man donates food and drinks to the needy, the idea of generosity is not difficult to comprehend.<sup>31</sup> It is challenging to pinpoint the source of Xunshi's inspiration; nevertheless, the plot involves two instances of telekinetic tricks.

However, Xunshi does not demonstrate in *waiguo daoren* how the master could make the wealthy man's horse and parents appear and disappear overnight. Chinese fiction sometimes involves taking something out of thin air or relocating anything thousands of kilometers away without anybody noticing. Zuo Ci 左慈 (d.u.), who performed this type of magic in front of Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220), may be one of the most well-known examples of that time.<sup>32</sup> (Gan 1996, pp. 8–10) As magic is one of the many intriguing topics in *zhiguai* stories,<sup>33</sup> (Yin 2017, pp. 156–64) this may imply that the focus on magics becomes an essential theme in *waiguo daoren*.

### 3.3. *E'long Shusheng* 鵝籠書生

#### 3.3.1. The Story Line

The famous tale *e'long shusheng* 鵝籠書生 "The Scholar with a Goose Cage" (also known as "The Scholar of Yangxian"), which tells the tale of Xu Yan 許彥 (顏), a scholar from Yangxian (currently Yixing City, Jiangsu Province) who travels with a goose cage on his back, was created from a tale by Wu Jun 吳均 (469–520), a writer of the Liang Dynasty (502–557) (Yao 1973, p. 698).<sup>34</sup>

At the very beginning of Wu Jun's adaption, he gave the main character the typical Chinese name of Xu Yan, noting that he is a scholar from Yangxian 陽羨. When Xu Yan was meandering in the Mountains of Sui'an 綏安 (Fujian Province), he met a scholar, aged seventeen or eighteen, who was lying on the side of the road and asked to be put in a goose cage, saying that his feet hurt. It can be assumed that the husband in the first two of the stories is older than the wife and her lover, but in this story, the main character's age is changed, suggesting that age is no longer a significant factor in adultery. Instead, the story focuses on the trickster's (magician) behavior and execution rather than the adultery itself.

The scholar then enters the cage, but the cage is no wider and the scholar no smaller. He sits with the two geese and is not surprised. The geese are not frightened. When the scholar comes out of the cage, he tells Xu Yan he will prepare food for him. The key distinction is that while communal feeding and spitting out of the jug occur inside the cage in *waiguo daoren*, they occur outside the cage in *yangxian shusheng*. Nevertheless, when the scholar spits out a plate of food, the jug vanishes in the narration. Furthermore, there is no jug present when he spits out his wife, which almost suggests Wu Jun left out it on purpose to hide its traces back to the story of *waiguo daoren*, which links the Buddhist text originally. Then comes the part of the story where the man is asleep and the woman summons her lover, revealing a fresh conversational detail in which she apologizes to Xu Yan.

After the husband and wife fall asleep, the wife's lover has a female lover, according to the myth, adding another twist. The noticeable detail is that in *waiguo daoren*, the act of spitting out the jug and people eating together happens inside the cage, but in *yangxian shusheng*, it is outside the cage. Furthermore, Hu disappears in the storytelling as the scholar spits out the plate with food. When he spits out his wife, there is no jug in the middle of the process. Then there is the plot with the man sleeping, and the lady invites her lover, with the new detail of a conversation where she explains and says sorry to Xu Yan.

After the husband and wife fall asleep, the wife's lover spits out another woman, adding another layer to the idea that she has a female lover. The male lover then puts his lover in his mouth when the husband wakes up, and the wife then puts her lover in her mouth before the husband finally puts his wife in his mouth. The scholar leaves Xu Yan a plate with a date on it and states Xu Yan's formal title (J. Wu 1934, pp. 3–4; Kao 1985, pp. 161–63), but the account does not describe generosity as *waiguo daoren* did.

### 3.3.2. Significant Shifts in Wu Jun's Story

In addition to these adjustments, there are four more crucial shifts.

First, there is a considerable shift in the narrative structure. The first narrator now tells a story about the adventure rather than continuing with the Buddha's primary metaphorical teaching of Buddhist theory. The bucolic tales of the barnyard officials have replaced the fundamental principles of Buddhist doctrine. There is less of an edifying feeling. The narrative returns to the world of fiction in the tradition of "none official records from low-rank officials" (*baiguan yeshi* 稗官野史), which is full of fantastical elements. Rather, it has a historical undertone that refers to looking for the weird and recalling the strange. As it was demonstrated in *yiwenzhi* 藝文志 (Records of Books) of *Hanshu* 漢書 (*The History of the Han Dynasty*), "The stream of novelists emerged from street talkers, low-ranking officials, and people who listened to scribblings" (Ban 1962, p. 1745).

Second, the plot develops more logically, and the literary effects are improved. The narration is also more sparkling, and the language is more fluid. The woman is "fifteen or sixteen years old, her clothes were gorgeous, and her look was wonderful", for instance, which clarifies the woman's age, attire, and appearance. Additionally enhanced is the characters' interactional conversation. The character interactions become more complicated, and the tale progresses more naturally and fluidly. The reasons behind the actions of the characters are more apparent. For instance, the story does not begin with some fictional country with a king's family but with someone who meets a scholar on the road. Then, the master asks Xu Yan for a favor as his feet hurt from walking, which seems natural as it might really happen in daily life. After the lady hosts a banquet for Xu Yan, he collapses intoxicated, and it is at this time the lady tells him that although she and the scholar are a couple, they are not happy together. That is why she keeps the young man in her mouth and asks Xu Yan to keep the secrets for her. This explains why she shows the trick of taking out the man in front of Xu Yan.

In the earlier story in *Zapiyujing*, *Fanzhi* is the key player in the tale as the brahmin lies at the center of all the narratives, yet he is observed by the prince. As opposed to being the main character in "The Scholar in the Goose Cage", Xu Yan serves as an observer and a recorder with a strong sense of self. That is to say, it is as if he gains an independent identity.

The ethical drama between the scholar and the woman and her boyfriend is placed in center stage. This shift in identity also alludes to the cultural setting in which the Buddhist tales were first shared with Chinese writers. At the time, the Chinese literary elite were not Buddhist adherents or practitioners, but rather, out of wonder and curiosity, they soberly discovered the fantasy or literary appeal of the Buddhist tales. That is why in the story of *Yangxian shusheng*, it seems Xu Yan has a more independent identity compared to the earlier versions of this story.

Third, the message or the meaning of the fable is delivered differently. The premise of the original tale is the cultural devaluation of women in the setting of their poor position in India, a cultural thread that undoubtedly had echoes in China. In *Shishi liutie*, this story was under the title *nüzi nanzhi* 女子難制 (Women are difficult to control), which states that, “*Piyujing* says, once a prince of the monarch was on a voyage after the sun had set. In order to escape from wolves and tigers, he climbed a tree. Then a brahmin comes to the tree and spits a jug out of his mouth. Then the lady comes out of the jug. The brahmin lies down to sleep after they have sex. The lady also spits a jug out of her mouth. A man comes out of the jug and they have sex. The next day, the prince goes to the palace and commands the brahmin to prepare meals for three people, it is then that people learn that women are difficult to control”.<sup>35</sup>

However, in Wu Jun’s story, to construct a text about an odd interaction amongst literati, *Qi Xu qixiezhi* relies more on the narrative’s framework. This technique focuses on a tale with a particular Buddhist allegory as a literati anecdote while being far less preachy. The moralizing substance of the stories about women steadily diminishes from *The Foreign Master* to *The Yangxian Scholar*, and the narrative paradigm shifts from a straightforward condemnation of women to a more intricate narrative motivation, becoming a showcase for the author’s talent.

Culturally speaking, the logic behind the changing attitude towards women is more complicated. It is hard to tell if it is a more friendly approach to women or just a narrative trick. As Carrie Wiebe has argued, unlike similar tales in the Indian and Arab traditions, the Scholar from Yangxian directly depicts female desire and the vulnerability of men to this desire, even though the apparent moralizing of women does give way to a complex, interlocking, *mise en abyme* structure. However, if the story no longer focuses on the wife’s infidelity, the tale of the magician who regains his ability argues that “They make it clear that in public, women have no place and no power, even if they do complicate the heart of the matter. Just like the goose cage that becomes no bigger when a man gets into it, neither the world nor a man is really changed by the machinations of a woman” (Wiebe 2017, p. 94). However, no matter how this shift of the story is interpreted, from a Brahmin Spitting a Jug to *The Goose Cage Scholar*, it becomes more complex in its purpose and different in the messages it delivers.

Fourth, a significant number of textual features have been exchanged with new ones that emphasize their “actual” rather than “fictional” details, giving the text a stronger sense of history and realism. For instance, the fictitious reference to the brahmin becomes a Chinese scholar, and the entire incident is witnessed by a governmental officer, Xu Yan, the *Lantai lingshi* 蘭臺令史 (Orchid Pavilion, Hucker 1985, p. 13; Fan 1975, p. 3600)<sup>36</sup> diluting the original meaning of the Buddhists’ metaphorical instruction to the world). Although the time and place of the story are not particularly highlighted in the original literature, the adaptation unmistakably places it in Yongping’s third year (60). While the power of the original tale to admonish the reader comes from the authority of the king of the tale (typically fables in Buddhism are told by the Buddha and the Bodhisattva. Although sometimes the Buddha and the Bodhisattva do not appear, we can tacitly assume that the power of the tale still partially comes from the Buddha’s and the Bodhisattva’s pronouncements). The bronze mirror (*tongjing* 銅鏡) plays a significant part at the end of this story, which serves as a historical proof that the tale is accurate because it is a physical reminder of the past with a date on it (DeWoskin 1977, pp. 21–52; Gan 1996, pp. xxv–xxviii).<sup>37</sup>

Lu Xun emphasizes that “*Linggui zhi* 靈鬼志 by Xunshi also records the story of a foreign master getting into a cage, it is mentioned that the master comes from foreign country. Yet in Wujun’s writings, the master becomes a scholar in China”, and he also suggests that this process of Sinicization of Indian stories is very common in the Wei and Jin Periods (220–420). Since the Wei and Jin Dynasties, the Buddhist canon has gradually been translated, and the Tianzhu stories have also spread throughout the world. They evolved into a national possession because the literati enjoyed their novelty and utilized them, whether consciously or unwittingly. (Lu 1973b, vol. 9, p. 192) Of course, in Wu Jun’s case, his adaptation of this story was not an accident; rather, it was made with the explicit and definite goal of transforming it into a Chinese story. Yet his deliberate cover-up of the trace back to Buddhist text can be easily seen through by well-read people such as Duan Chengshi 段成式 (803–863) in the Tang Dynasty (Duan 2015, p. 1673).<sup>38</sup>

### 3.3.3. Taking Avadāna Stories into Historical Records

China places a high value on history and has a tradition of *shilu* 實錄 “actual recordings” (Ban 1962, p. 2378).<sup>39</sup> Stories of mystery and fiction must appear to have a reason and a vivid history when they enter fiction, in contrast to Indian tradition, which tends to turn history into legend and myth. This fixation on “true” history is actually a significant aspect of Chinese culture. The Indian culture has a propensity for turning historical events into folklore and myth. One of the strands of adapting Buddhist stories into Chinese culture is the enhancing of the historical dimension. In the Indian tradition, there is a propensity to transform history into legend and mythology. For instance, the famous story *Cao Chong chengxiang* 曹冲稱象 (Cao Chong [196–208] weigh the elephant) in *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (*The Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms*) originally comes from *Za baozang jing* 雜寶藏經 (*Samyukta-ratna-piṭaka*).<sup>40</sup> (Chen 1980, pp. 157–62) It is possible that the tale of the long-haired woman who gave up her hair to support the Buddha had an impact on Tao Kan’s 陶侃 (259–334) mother’s decision to shave her head in order to treat a visitor. (Wang 2006, pp. 121–22)

Since it is a characteristic of Chinese culture to attach importance to history, some Buddhist stories, once they entered the Han region, needed to draw on the authority of history to shape their own legitimacy rather than the sacredness of the Buddha himself, and this was the internal mechanism that constituted the change from “Brahmin spits out a jug” to “Goose Cage Scholar”. The important factor is its historicity. The narrative shifts from fiction to reality, and this reality is literary reality. A stage of understanding where “dream becomes reality” is symbolized by the Goose Cage Scribe and includes the fictitious works of the Six Dynasties.<sup>41</sup> (Gu 2014, p. 110) However, because of its Buddhist Avadāna Literary nature, the story is both fantastical and real. It is only by placing the fictional story in a realistic context that we can understand more deeply the intention and meaning of the metaphorical stories chosen by the literati.

## 4. Fable of the Time: The Cultural Significance of *Yingwu Jiuhuo* 鸚鵡救火 “Parrot Putting Out Fire”

### 4.1. *Yingwu Jiuhuo* 鸚鵡救火

#### 4.1.1. The Story in *Jiu Zapiyu Jing*

Selecting certain Avadāna stories with few modifications into a new collection is an intentional choice by authors, which allows the Buddhist stories to adapt new forms of life and meanings in the new cultural environment. The story of *Yingwu jiuhuo* 鸚鵡救火 (the parrot putting out the fire) of *Zapiyu jing* by Kang Senghui is a typical example of this kind of story. The story is quite simple, it goes as follows:

Once upon a time, a parrot flew to a mountain, where all the animals and birds lived in harmony and love for one another, not harming each other. The parrot mused to itself, “Even though this is nice, I cannot stay longer and I shall return. He then left. Yet a few months later, the mountain became engulfed in fire. When

the parrot noticed it from a distance, it dove into the water, scooped it up with its wings, and flew up into the air, dousing the flames with water from its feathers. And it went on like this. The deities of the sky said, “What a silly parrot! Why are you so stupid? Would you rather have a thousand miles of fire extinguished by the water of your two wings?” The parrot said to them, “How can I not put out the fire when I know about it. I have been a guest in the mountain, and all the birds and animals there are kind and good, and I cannot bear to see them (suffering)”. The deities of the heavens felt his kindness and extinguished the fire with rain.<sup>42</sup>

Although this fable is not told by the Buddha himself, and the relationship between causes in the past and effects of today does not appear in the story to illustrate certain Buddhist truths, it is not difficult to see that the parrot portrays a Bodhisattva’s spirit of uncompromising devotion.

When the fire is burning on the mountain, the parrot tries to extinguish it with its feeble strength, knowing that it cannot, but still tirelessly, because it was once a member of the mountain community and “all the birds, animals and beasts in the mountain are kind and good, and all are brothers”, so it “could not bear” (*buren* 不忍) to stand by and do nothing. The choice of this word connotes “benevolent” and “intolerant”, which might guide the viewers to both Buddhist and Confucian cultural connotations. Of course, from a Buddhist perspective, every sentient being cycles through life and death in the Six Destinies without seeing the end to it; meanwhile, the three realms are like a burning house.<sup>43</sup> The Bodhisattva, the Buddha, came forward to save all sentient beings from the fire. From the perspective of Confucianism, because birds and animals are “benevolent and good”, a gentleman is “tolerant”, and this is what Mencius called “compassion”, so he stepped forward to help the world. The two are united in “virtue goodness”.

From the narrative point of view, this story shares some similarities to Chinese tales, especially with *jingwei tianhai* 精衛填海 (The *Jingwei* Bird Fulfill the Sea)<sup>44</sup> and *yugong yishan* 愚公移山 (The Unwise Old Man Moves the Mountains).<sup>45</sup> In *Jingwei tianhai*, *jingwei* never stops putting stones into the ocean, even if it is as little as a bird, which is like the little parrot trying to stop the mountain fire with its small wings. Moreover, in *yugong yishan* 愚公移山 (the unwise old man moves the mountains), *Yugong* believes every effect counts when it comes to big ambitions to do good, and at the end of the story, the mountains that block his way out are carried away by gods touched by his devotion, which shares some similarities to the deities helping the parrot.

#### 4.1.2. The Story Collected by Liu Yiqing

The story is reproduced almost in its original form in the *Xuanyan ji* 宣驗記 (*Records of Manifest Miracles*) by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444) of the Liu Song Dynasty (420–479). As Lu Xun collected these stories into his *Gu Xiaoshuo Gouchen* 古小說鉤沉 (*Selected Collection of Chinese Classical Fiction*), we may view 35 of these stories in the book even though the whole form of this book is no longer available. Moreover, the *yingwujihuo* is as follows:

A parrot flew to another mountain, and the animals in the mountain continually cherished it. A few days later, a fire broke out in the mountain. When the parrot saw it from afar, it dove into the water to moisten its feathers and then flew to the mountain to sprinkle water on the flames. The deities of heaven said, “Though you have a will, how can your intention be enough?” The parrot replies, “Although I know I cannot (save it), I have lived on this mountain as a guest and the animals were good to me and they all are my brothers, so I cannot bear to see them (suffering).” “The deity of heaven was so impressed that he extinguished the fire. (Lu 1973a, vol. 8, p. 553)

There is little difference between the two tales, and formally, the *Xuanyanji* is simply a streamlining of the original tale, making the sentences neater and the message more fo-

cused. As for the significance of this anonymous Buddhist story, what is the significance of including this story in its entirety here?

Among all the members of his royal family, Liu Yiqing was the most cultured and talented in the literature, and his *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (*Account of Tales of the World*) stood out among the *zhiren* (records of people) books of the Six Dynasties, while *Xuanyan ji* 宣驗記 (*Records of Manifest Miracles*) was known as one of the most influential *zhiguai* novels that promoted Buddhism. At that time, there were numerous other works telling the stories related to Buddhism and legends about people with Buddhist beliefs, which Lu Xun calls *fufu xiaoshuo* 輔佛小說 (the fiction supporting Buddhism). They include Liu Yiqing's *Xuancianji* of the Liu Song Dynasty (420–479), Wang Yan's 王琰 (d.u.) *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記 (*Mysterious Records of the Unseen World*) in the Qi Dynasty (479–502), Yan Zhitui's 顏之推 (531–597) *Jilingji* 集靈記 (*A Collection of Mysterious Records*) of the Sui Dynasty, and Hou Bai's 侯白 (d.u.) *Jingyi ji* 旌異記 (*The Records of the Unbelievable*). These texts were generally written to document the apparent effects of sutras and images and to clarify the veracity of the testimonies. Later generations might dismiss them as fiction, but they were intended to shock the world and make it believe in them (Lu 1973b, vol. 9, p. 194).

The author of the Book of *Xuanyanji*'s, Liu Yiqing, was a well-known author during the Liu Song era. (Shen 1974, p. 1477) At that time, Buddhism was thriving, scripture translation and construction of images were commonplace, and everyone from the aristocracy to the literati to the poor were becoming more and more devoted to the religion. Liu Yiqing was one of the most prominent practitioners of Buddhism in his aristocratic family.

The sympathetic nature of the parrot putting out the fire is all the more priceless in the context of present-day times of forest fires. The parrot itself is charged with rescuing creatures in the mountains and forests as an embodiment of Buddha and a Bodhisattva, but more importantly, the tale also communicates the idea that faith in Buddhism can result in salvation. Only the sutra halls and cabins survive the fire that destroys hundreds of homes. It is considered to be the work of a deity.

#### 4.2. Fighting against the Demon in Youminglu

The stories written in the Six Dynasties period adapted the motif and plots of the Six Dynasties. In Liu Yiqing's *Youminglu* 幽明錄 (*Records of the Hidden and the Visible Worlds*),<sup>46</sup> (Z. Zhang 2009, pp.87–101; Y. Liu 2018) the tale “chanting of the Buddha to combat the ghosts” is taken from *juan* 4 of the *Zhuanji baiyuan jing* 撰集百緣經 (*Avadānaśataka*).<sup>47</sup> The story that Liu Yiqing cites is shorter than the original Buddhist story, and it goes as follows:

Next to the place of Song, there was a state that was close to *rākṣasas*.<sup>48</sup> The *rākṣasas* entered its territory several times, eating countless people. The king made an agreement with the *rākṣasas* that said, “From today each of the families in this state will have a special day of duty. On that day, the family on duty should send [a boy] to you. Please do not kill people randomly anymore”. A family of Buddha devotees had an only son aged ten who was the next boy to be sent [to the *rākṣasas*]. At the time of his departure, his parents wailed bitterly, and then chanted the name of Buddha wholeheartedly. Because Buddha's power was great, the *rākṣasa* could not get close to the boy. The next morning, the parents found that their son was still alive and they went back home together happily. From then on, the calamity of the *rākṣasas* ceased completely. [Lives of] people in the state had indeed depended on this family. (Y. Liu 2018, p. 62)

Compared with the original story, Liu cuts out the beginning of the fable in which the Buddha is telling the story and changes the end of this story by dropping the lines on the relationship between the characters and the Buddha and people related to him. In this Buddhist story, the three main characters, the king, the queen, and the prince in the past represent the Buddha, Yaśodharā (wife of Śākyamuni), and Ānanda. Moreover, it also cuts out many details of the conversations between the king and *rākṣasas*. More importantly, it leaves out the significant part where both the queen and the prince are willing to sac-

rifice their bodies to the *rākṣasa*. These changes may indicate that Liu's collecting of this tale changes from the significance of donating one's body to the belief of Buddhism, even though the latter theme already exists in the original Buddhist text but is not the story's primary point. Even though Liu leaves out the part of Buddha teaching the story, we can still note that it is Buddha or the belief in Buddhism that saves the prince. This is a new theme in the Six Dynasties when it comes to stories to save people in danger, as in earlier times. Most likely, it is deities or Taoist immortals who save people (the belief system of *tian* 天 Heaven), as it was discussed earlier in the story of *yugong yishan*. The Buddha, Bodhisattvas, or sutras related to them saving people becomes a common theme in novels in the Six Dynasties.<sup>49</sup> In the same chapter as the *rākṣasa* story of *Youminglu*, there is one of the most famous and well-discussed stories of Zhaotai 趙泰, Travels in Hell, in which the character travels to hell and comes back to life because of the teachings of the Buddha. After this, Zhao Tai's family are all devoted to serving the Buddha. These are the earliest stories of the Buddha as the savior in early medieval Chinese literature.<sup>50</sup> (Y. Liu 2018, pp. 132–37; Shi 2022, pp. 112–49; Company 1990)

#### 4.3. Parrot as the Self-Image of the Writer

##### 4.3.1. Parrot as a Bodhisattva

The Buddhist parables frequently feature parrots, who are typically portrayed as wise beings who are wonderful singers and are the epitome of wisdom. For example, in the twenty-ninth story of the *Liudu ji jing* by Kang Senghui, the Parrot King, one form of the Bodhisattva in one of his many lifetimes, is captured by a king, thus, illustrating that greed is like a net and desire is like a blade.<sup>51</sup> The king of parrots is the embodiment of wisdom and the Bodhisattva. The 56th story in the 6th *juan* of *Zhuanji baiyuan jing* tells a story in which a parrot gives birth to a king. The king was born as the son of a parrot because he had broken the precepts in the past.<sup>52</sup> This suggests that being in the destiny of the animal (as a parrot in this story) is a punishment. However, this does not mean that parrots are bad creatures. Another example of the parrot being an intellectual bird can be found in the fifty-eighth story from *juan* 12 of *Xianyu jing* in which the parrot hears the Four Noble Truths from the Buddha.<sup>53</sup> This story shows how birds such as parrots can hear the Buddha's teachings and benefit from them. It both emphasizes the profundity of the Buddha's teachings and demonstrates that even parrots have the intelligence to pay attention to his teachings. *Jinglü yixiang* 經律異相 (*Diverse Details of the Sutras and Vinayas*)<sup>54</sup> quotes a parrot-related story from *Zhangzhe yinyue jing* 長者音悅經 (*Sutra of Elder with Delight-sound*). In the story, a parrot is cherished by the king as it is good at singing. A vulture becomes jealous and imitates the parrot. However, it sings when the king is sleeping, which results in it being repulsed by the king and having its feathers clipped.<sup>55</sup> The parrot, who serves as the equivalent of the elder with beautiful voice in this fable, is undoubtedly portrayed favorably as well.

##### 4.3.2. Parrot as the Buddha

Furthermore, as shown in the case of the *Liudu jijing*, the parrot (or the Parrot King) could also be seen as an incarnation of the Buddha in a past life and could, therefore, correspond to the image of the Buddha.

The second *juan* of *Zabaozang jing* also contains the story of *yingwu jiuhuo*.<sup>56</sup> More importantly, the story contains two parts. The second half of the story of the parrot putting out the fire is almost the same as the story collected in *Zhuanji baiyuan jing* and Liu Yiqing's *Xuanyan ji*. However, the first half of the story in *Zabaozang jing* completes the story of the Buddha at the present time, telling the story of the Buddha on his way to the Southern Mountain Kingdom (*nanfang shan* 南方山), passing through a village where the people had been drinking and started a fire and, therefore, asked the Buddha for help. The Buddha said, "All sentient beings have three fires (*sanhuo* 三火): the fires of greed, anger and ignorance. With the wisdom-water (*zhishui* 智水), I can extinguish these three fires. If this

is true, the fire will be extinguished". When these words were spoken, the fire was instantly extinguished. The Buddha taught Dharma to them, and they attained the path of the Srotāpanna.<sup>57</sup>

*Zabaozang jing*, along with other four sutras, was translated by Kekaya 吉迦夜 in the time of Emperor Ming 宋明帝 (Liu Yu 劉彧, 439–472) of (Liu) Song Dynasty. Furthermore, it was re-translated (edited, chongyi 重譯) by Tanyao 曇曜 in the 2nd year of Yanxing 延興, Northern Wei dynasty 北魏 (CE 472) in Beitai 北臺. Kekaya was an important sutra translator during the reign of Emperor Wencheng of Northern Wei Dynasty 文成帝 (Tuoba Rui 拓跋濬, 440–465). He translated many Buddhist texts, some of which were written down (*bishou* 筆受) by the famous literary figure Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標 (462–521).<sup>58</sup>

The story of a parrot putting out a fire is also included in *juan* 11 of *Jinglü yixiang* in Liang Dynasty (502–557), compiled by Baochang. Here, it was titled as *wei yingwu xi-an-shen jiu shanhuo yi shen bao'en* 為鸚鵡現身救山火以申報恩 (For a parrot to show itself to put out a mountain fire in return for the kindness). Bao Chang states that this story was collected from the first *juan* (*shangjuan* 上卷) of the *Sengqieluo cha jing* 僧伽羅刹經 (*The Sutra of Saṃgharakṣa*). The phrase *shangjuan* indicates the sutra Baochang quoted was in two *juan*. Moreover, this one was translated by Dharmanandi 曇摩難提 (also known as Faxi 法喜, a Tokharian scholar-monk 兜佉勒), who came to Chang'an at the beginning of the Jianyuan Period 建元 (365–385).<sup>59</sup> However, this translation could not be found. Another version of the same sutra exists with the title *Sengqieluo cha suoji jing* 僧伽羅刹所集經 (*The Sutra Collected by Saṃgharakṣa*). This version of three *juan* was translated into Chinese by Samghabhadra (Sengqiebacheng 僧伽跋澄) and others of The early Qin Dynasty 苻秦 (351–394). This sutra is an account of the Buddha's practice in his previous life and his deeds in this life as a monk. The story of the parrot is contained in *juan* 1 of this version of the translation.<sup>60</sup>

In conclusion, there are two systems of the story of *yingwu jiuhuo* in Buddhist texts. The most popular one is related to the story of the bodhisattva, which is based on *Zhuanji piyu jing*, concentrating on the devotion of the bodhisattva. The other is the story of the Buddha's lifetime story, represented by the *Zabaozang jing*, which focuses on the Buddha's use of the fire of wisdom to extinguish the three poisons of greed, anger, and obscenity. Although there is no major difference in the main plot of the story, the emphasis and connotation of the two metaphors are different.

#### 4.3.3. Parrot as the Writer

As for the source of Liu Yiqing, one can assume that since *Zabaozang jing* was finished in the second year of its completion (472), and it is probable that Liu Yiqing (402–444) in the south did not see a version of the story that focused on the Buddha putting out a fire, he, therefore, relied on a version of the Bodhisattva's story based on the *Zhuanji baiyuan jing*, which was translated by Zhiqian (active from 223 to 253) of Wu (229–280) in the south.

*Jinglü yixiang* was finished in the fifteenth year of the Tianjian Period 天監十五年 (516),<sup>61</sup> which is later than the time of Liu Yiqing's writing. The source it quoted from, *sengqie luocha jing*,<sup>62</sup> is also about a fable of the Bodhisattva, so it is likely that the story of the Buddha putting out the fire was not spreading in the south in the time of Liu Yiqing.<sup>63</sup> As we have seen in the case of *e'long shusheng*, the intentional addition of detailed information is essential to the presentation of the text. Even though the book is about Buddhism, it is likely that Liu Yiqing purposefully conceals the fact that the parrot represents a Bodhisattva or the Buddha in his book *Xuanyan ji*.

Of course, we are not denying that the parrot represents the Buddha or the Bodhisattva. However, we must consider what this purposeful absence signifies for the text and what kind of cultural attitude Liu Yiqing has behind it. More importantly, we need to understand the image of the parrot in relation to the bigger context

In a chaotic time, holding a belief that one can chase away ghosts and fight demons (putting out the fire, saving people from war) is much more important than practicing the sacrifice of one's body as an act of that belief, at least in the fictional narratives and

stories created by writers in the Six Dynasties Period. These kinds of stories are somehow different from the self-immolation narratives in monastic biographies mentioned earlier, as the implied reader is different. For literati such as Liu Yiqing, even though he admired or had a strong connection with Buddhism, his main point might be bringing peace to his readers in a chaotic time by relating miracle stories and wonders from Buddhist texts. With the central message on how to survive a terrible time, there arose miracle writings related to Buddhism.

The sympathetic nature of the parrot putting out the fire is all the more priceless in light of the time with burning fires, both realistic and metaphorically speaking. The parrot itself is tasked with rescuing creatures in the mountains and forests as an embodiment of Buddha and a Bodhisattva, but more crucially, the story also expresses the idea that faith in Buddhism can result in salvation. As was recorded by Liu Yiqing in many places, “Only the sutra halls and cottages survived the fire that destroyed hundreds of homes. It was considered to be an act of a god.” (Lu 1973a, p. 551) This was another account of a fire that destroyed hundreds of houses in Wuxing County 吳興郡 (from Lin’an in Zhejiang province to Yixing in Jiangsu province) during the Yuanjia Period 元嘉 (424–435), but only the *jingtang* 經堂 cottage remained unburned, and people regarded it as a miracle. Another account is similar: “In the eighth year of the Yuanjia Period, the city of Puban 蒲阪 in the eastern part of the Yellow River was on fire and could not be saved. The only thing that remained unscathed was a large cottage and the statue of the Houses of the White Cloth (*baiyijia* 白衣家, temples). The people were so amazed that they were all inspired.” (Lu 1973a, p. 558)

This is a well-known allusion to the fact that the disaster did not harm the Buddhist temple or its statues, strengthening the populace’s confidence in Buddhism and bestowing blessings on them. The literati frequently added cultural and content metaphors of their time to their choice of material, and the “parrot putting out the fire” depicts such an image of someone coming forward in a world in turmoil. Buddhist fables are excellent “missionary” material. Societal expectation and underlying predisposition are no longer only Buddhist but also a larger product of the times and a particular expectation of the literati. That is to say, in the fable *yingwu jiuhuo*, the parrot represents not only the Buddha and the Bodhisattva but also reveals a responsible author with a grateful intention who uses literature to protect people from the perils they face on a daily basis. The fire that the parrot extinguishes is both a metaphor for real-life flames and a literal one at the same time.

## 5. Conclusions

Overall, Buddhist Avadāna stories have been incorporated into Chinese literature; nevertheless, the link between the two goes beyond simple parallelism or influence and involves complicated flux, intermingling, and the creation of an unrecognizable cultural river. In particular, when writing their novels, the literati took inspiration from Buddhist metaphorical stories’ basic form, major themes, and key story plots. Most crucially, they actively attempted to deflect cultural meaning by adapting the whimsical Buddhist tales into allegorical tales with grounded concerns based on the characteristics and historical developments of Chinese fiction. In addition to the text’s finer details, the significance of history and the care for the time period also stand out, elevating the metaphorical tales from works of fiction to ones with realistic meaning and social concerns.

Buddhist Avadāna literature, as a whole, acts as a parallel cultural resource for comprehending and applying tales of related themes across cultures. More importantly, they offer a first-hand source of material for the creation of literary fiction, serving as a significant source of inspiration for fictional texts in China. The novels of the Wei, Jin, and Northern Dynasties, in contrast, did not limit themselves to the religious significance of metaphorical tales but, instead, added more writing techniques and literary and aesthetic interests, especially enhancing their historical and cultural significance, turning the metaphorical tales from Buddhist fable-like texts into fiction with historical details. The narrative is changed from a Buddhist “story” to one that is a realistic text with a sense of historical authenticity.

In short, the transposition of Buddhist Avadāna stories into Chinese cultural contexts is a complex process. It requires not only that monks and writers become aware of the similarities between the stories in question and bring them into a unified system, as in the case of *xuanliang cigu*, which places the original Chinese stories (characters) together with Buddhist stories under the same theme. It was even more necessary, as in the case of Wu Jun and others, to take the initiative in adapting Buddhist Avadāna tales to their own interests. Xunshi focuses on magic tricks and concentrates on a new theme of filial piety to command the Chinese audience's attention. Moreover, Wu Jun, by virtue of his climactic narrative art, added a great deal of detail to make the story more Chinese, showing the close relationship between fiction and history that characterizes the Chinese fiction. Even direct quotations from Buddhist scriptures, such as Liu Yiqing's, not only demonstrate the rapid spread of Buddhism but also the literati's love of Buddhist Avadāna stories, which provided sustenance for the literati. At the same time, if a story like *yingwu jiuhuo* is examined in the larger context of the chaotic time, the contemporary connotations and cultural significance of Buddhist Avadāna can be better understood, thus, providing more room for interpretation in our understanding of the Chinese literati's use of Buddhist Avadāna stories.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For more introduction on this term, see the second *juan* of Master Kuiji's 窺基 (632–682) *Chengweishi lun shuji* 成唯識論述記 (Collection Commentary on Discourse on the Theory of Consciousness-Only), T.1830:43. 274a8–13. For all sutras cited from Tripitaka (T) in the article, see (Takakusu and Watanbe [1924] 1932).
- <sup>2</sup> Avadāna is translated as Abodana 阿波陀那 in Chinese, yet the more common term was *Piyu* 譬喻, which can refer to *upamā* (metaphor), *dr̥ṣṭānta* (teaching by example), *udāharaṇa* (principle and examples), and *avadāna* (fable). The Chinese term *Piyu* is more complicated. A detailed discussion of these terms can be found in Ding Min's 丁敏 work, see Ding (1996, pp. 6–10). Her research develops from Master Yinshun 印順法師 (1906–2005), see Yinshun (2011, p. 460). Another important book on the narratives in Avadāna literature and its acceptance in China can be found in Fan Jingjing 范晶晶, *Yuanqi: fojiao piyu wenxue de liubian*, 2020.
- <sup>3</sup> *Baiyu jing* might be one of the most important and influential Avadāna texts in China. It was collected by Sengqiesina 僧伽斯那 (ayusmat Samghasena, d.u.), a Mahayana master who lived around the 5th century. This book was translated into Chinese by Qiunapidi 求那毗地 (Guṇavṛddhi, ?–502) in Qi Dynasty (479–502). For notable English translations of this book, see (R. Liao 1981; Saṅghasena 1997; Levitt 2004). For the French translation, see Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues extraits du tripitaka chinois et traduits en francais*, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, [1910] 1962. vol. 2, pp. 147–230. For the German translation, see Wagner (2012).
- <sup>4</sup> *Xianyu jing* (The Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish), *juan* 8, translated by Huijue 慧覺 of Liangzhou 涼州, and this sutra was translated in Gaochang 高昌 in the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534), see T. 202: 4. 405b25–27.
- <sup>5</sup> Guo (2012, p. 695). One English version can be found in Zhuang (2013, pp. 164–65). The English term fable is often translated as *yuyan* 寓言 in Chinese, and Zhuangzi is one of the most important writers in writing fables. *Yuyan* can be taken as fables, yet in Zhuangzi's term, it is one of the *sanyan* 三言 (three [types of] words), with which he used “goblet words” to pour out endless changes, “repeated words” to give a ring of truth, and “imputed words” to impart greater breadth 以卮言為曼衍，以重言為真，以寓言為廣。 See Guo (2012, p. 1099). *Yuyan* is more like imputed words or supposed words, which refer to words or tales told by others. He states that metaphors are effective nine times out of ten and quotations seven times out of ten, but impromptu words come forth every day and harmonize within the framework of nature. Metaphors are effective nine times out of ten because they borrow externals to discuss something. 寓言十九，重言十七，卮言日出，和以天倪。寓言十九，藉外論之。 See Guo (2012, p. 947). For this English translation, see Mair (1994, p. 278). This sentence is ambiguous and might be interpreted in another way. Burton Watson translates this part as, “Imputed words make up nine tenths of it; repeated words make up seven tenths of it; goblet words come forth day after day, harmonizing things in the Heavenly Equality. These imputed words which make up nine tenths of it are like persons brought in from outside for the purpose of exposition”. See Burton Watson, *The Complete Work of Zhuangzi*, 234. However, it is still safe to understand *yuyan* as fables, parables, or just metaphors as Zhuangzi are full of these kinds of stories with deeper meanings. Furthermore, Victor H. Miror translates *yuyan* as metaphor. For more discussion on this topic, see Mair (1994, pp. 278–83). Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (145 or 135B.C.–?) *Shiji* 史記 (The Historical Records) comments

that “Zhuangzi writes works over 100,000 words (*shiyu wan* 十餘萬), generally all *yuyan*”, see Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 2143. *Zhuangzi* contains more than 200 fables. *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 also contains lots of fables. The middle and late Warring States Period (476–221 B.C) saw a flourishing of fables. Other books, such as *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*), *Mozi* 墨子, *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (*Lü Buwei's Spring and Autumn*), *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 *Yanzi's Spring and Autumn*, and *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, also contain many fables. Many fables that have been passed down from the pre-Qin era can be found in later volumes such as *Huainanzi* 淮南子, *Shuoyuan* 說苑 (*The Garden of Tales*), *Xinxu* 新序 (*New Records*), and *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (*Hanying's Commentary on the Book of Poetry*) in the Han Dynasty.

<sup>6</sup> Such as in Liu Xiang's 劉向 (BC 77–BC 6) *Shuoyuan* 說苑 (*The Garden of Tales*) (see X. Liu (1987, pp. 212–13)) and *Hanshi wai zhuan* 韓詩外傳 (*Hanying's Commentary on the Book of Poetry*), see Han (1980, p. 359).

<sup>7</sup> *Bintoulutuluoshe wei youtuoyanwang shuofa jing* 賓頭盧突羅闍為優陀延王說法經 (*The Sutra of Venerable Pindola-Bharadvaja Teaching Dharma to King Udayana*), translated by Qiunabatuoluo 求那跋陀羅 (Gunabhadra, 394–468) of Yuanjia Period 元嘉 (425–453), see T.1690:32.786b14–17.

<sup>8</sup> This idiom refers to someone who waits for gains without pains, which is a famous fable in *Wudu* 五蠹 (the Five Vermin) in *Hanfeizi*. See Hanfeizi (2016, p. 484). Burton Watson translates this fable as follows “There was a farmer of Song who tilled the land, and in his field was a stump. One day a rabbit, racing across the field, bumped into the stump, broke its neck, and died. There upon the farmer laid aside his plow and took up watch beside the stump, hoping that he would obtain another rabbit in the same way. But he got no more rabbits, and instead became the laughingstock of Song. Those who think they can take the ways of the ancient kings and use them to govern the people of today all belong in the category of stump-watchers!” See Hanfeizi (1964, p. 98). For the complete English translation of *Hanfeizi*, see W. K. Liao (1959).

<sup>9</sup> For example, Jing Sanlong 荆三隆 edited five *Avadāna* books with modern Chinese translations, commentaries, and studies, which are *Yueyu liujing* 月喻六經 (*The Collection of Six Avadāna Stories (Including the One About the Moon)*), *Jiuzha piyu jing* in 2 *juan*, *Zhongjing zhuanza piyu* and *Yiyu jiu jing* 醫喻九經 (*The Collection of Nine Avadāna Stories (Including the One on Medicine)*) and *Za baozangjing* 雜寶藏經 (*The Miscellaneous Treasure Sutra, Samyukta-ratna-piṭaka*, T 203).

<sup>10</sup> *Shimi*, which encompasses a variety of sugar cane products, from syrup to sugar crystals, is one of the seven medicines 七藥 in Buddhist medicine cultures. See Daniels (1995, pp. 279, 374). Meng Shen 孟詵 (621–713), a famous doctor of the Tang Dynasty, notes that the best *shimi* is from Persia 波斯 and the *shimi* from Shuchuan 蜀川 (Sichuan Province). In Meng Shen's time (*jin* 今, nowadays), it can also be found in the Dong Wu Region 東吳 (Wu of the Three Kingdoms is the east side of the Yangzi River, so Wu is also called Dong Wu to describe the area around Lake Taihu 太湖 and Suzhou 蘇州, Jiangsu Province), which is not as good as the ones in Persia. People produce *shimi* by boiling sugar cane juice and milk, and boiling makes them thin and white 此皆是煎甘蔗汁及牛乳汁, 煎則細白耳. A few *shimi* can be used to treat eye disease while taking the *shimi* product as big as a small ball; a medicine mix *shimi* with Chinese date and sesame is good for the five internal organs, especially the lung. See Meng (2007, p. 68).

<sup>11</sup> Lokakṣema, *Zapiyujing*, T.204:4.500a9–b24.

<sup>12</sup> This structure of Buddhist tales can also be called the grapevine structure (*putao teng* 葡萄藤), see Mi (1970, pp. 10–17). This two-layer structure was not common in novels or writings before Six Dynasties in China. However, it is very common in India and middle-east literature, such as in *The Pancatantra* (see Visnu Sarma, *The Pancatantra*, Penguin Classics, 2006) and *The Kathāsaritsāgara* (see Somadeva Bhatta, *The Ocean of Story*, Vol. 5, London: Privately. 1924–1928) of India tradition and in *Thousand and One Nights* in Arabic tradition. The sutra narrative style's multi-level narrative is the most distinguishing feature of Buddhist sutras. The first narrator, who is identified as “I” in the sutra's opening words, describes all that comes after “Thus I've heard”, which makes up the sutra's first narrative level. The first narrative layer typically starts with an account of the Buddha's presence in a certain location at a specific time, followed by information about how the speech came to be and, finally, a thorough description of the Buddha's discourse. The Buddha's account rises to the second level of narrative, where the story may be referred to as the meta-story and serves, typically, as an explanation of the sutra's genesis events. The Buddha is obviously also the author of the meta-story and the second narrator in the sutra, see H. Wu (2004, pp. 418–19). This results in the shift in Chinese narratives, which progressed from simple linear storytelling to sophisticated characterization, subtle cause-and-effect relationships, and a gripping plot in *zhiguai* 志怪 (chronicles of the strange) literature (see Ahn 2004, pp. 125–31).

<sup>13</sup> Crump (1970, p. 57). For the original Chinese text, see He (1990, p. 75).

<sup>14</sup> T.2122:53. 898a13–15. A parable text that is almost the same can be found in *Zhujing yaoji* 諸經要集 (*Essential Teachings*), T.2123, *juan* 10, see Daoshi, *Zhujing yaoji*, T. 2123:54. 99a24–26.

<sup>15</sup> Zhishun was a Chan Master in Sui Dynasty, the pupil of Sengchou 僧稠 (470–560) of Yunmen 雲門; the biography of Zhishun can be found in Daoxuan's 道宣 (596–667) *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (*Further Biographies of Eminent Monks*), see Daoxuan, *Xugaosengzhuan*, T.2060:50.569c20–570b14.

<sup>16</sup> Here Mu'an'shanqing made a mistake, as Zhishun's biography can be found in *Xugaoseng zhuan* by Daoxuan in Tang Dynasty as mentioned earlier, not *Gaoseng zhuan* by Huijiao.

<sup>17</sup> *Zutingshiyuan* 祖庭事苑 (*Tales and Affairs of Ancestral Courtyard (of Chan School)*), edited by Mu'an'shanqing, *juan* 6, see X. 1261: 64. 397c12–19.

- 18 Self-immolation is an important action in the Buddhist tradition; Huijiao's *Gaoseng zhuan* collects 11 eminent monks on this topic. For the English translation, see Shi (2022, pp. 542–61). Suicide and self-harm can be traced back to different sutras, and the reason behind it varies. It might echo with the text from the Lotus Sutra or just an imitation of the Bodhisattvas in Jataka or Avadāna stories. It is also the highest devotion to the Buddha or just an act of dislike of the body and life. It can also serve as a tool to fulfill specific promises, as was shown in Zhishun's case. see Jan (Jan 1965, pp. 243–68). Committing suicide is the most extreme form of this self-immolation, and burning the body is one of these acts. Moreover, in the Buddhist biographies written by Huijiao and Baochang, miracles play a significant part; for more information on this topic, see Benn (2007, pp. 19–53). The story of Zhishun is an example of hard work and devotion towards Buddhism; his act itself also represents some heroic and miraculous sides of Buddhist monks.
- 19 Self-immolation can be regarded as one kind of donating (*bushi* 布施, *dāna-pāramitā*), which is one of the six perfections. Bodhisattvas donate all kinds of things, including their own body parts and life; these stories are collected in *juan* 1–3 in *Liudujiing* 六度集經 [*Six Pāramitā-sūtra*], translated by Kang Senghui. For the French version, see Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues extraits du tripitaka chinois et traduits en français*. Vol. 1, [1910] 1960, pp. 1–346.
- 20 T. 209: 04.545c7–19.
- 21 Lü (2009, p. 384). For the English translation, see Lü (2005, p. 619).
- 22 This is a typical story in folktales all over the world, see (Thompson 1933), Motifs J1922.1.
- 23 Their nationality or place of birth is a fascinating question to these stupid people. After Song 宋 (a state around Shangqiu, Henan Province, from whom over half of these fools originated) and Zheng 鄭 (a state around Zhengzhou, Henan Province), Chu has the third-highest concentration of idiots. See Tang (2001, pp. 49–51).
- 24 In the Tang Dynasty, *tiejing* 貼經 (cover characters of the text in Confucian Classics) is a common method used to test the students in the first round of the national exam. One should at least pass six times (*tie*) out of ten times, which is called *liutie* or *zhongliutie* 中六帖 (pass the six *tie*) if one wanted to pass as *jinsshi* 進士 (a successful candidate in the highest imperial examinations), see Du (1999, p. 356). In order to pass the exam, the students would make songs and rhymes of the classics to memorize the long passages. In this cultural background, Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) edited an encyclopedia under the title of *Baishiliutie* 白氏六帖 (*Bai Juyi's Encyclopedia on Literature*). This book collected idioms, phrases, and knowledge on poetry writing and the literature in general. Writing poetry is one of the subjects in the national exam in Tang Dynasty; maybe this book was used as a textbook as well as a simple dictionary of the literature. Under the influence of Bai Juyi, Yichu 義楚 (907–979) compiled the encyclopedia for Buddhist studies and monks in the name of *Shishi liutie* 釋氏六帖 (*Buddhist Encyclopedia*), presenting it in 954 to the court of Emperor Shizong 世宗 (921–959) of the Latter Zhou Dynasty 後周 (951–960).
- 25 B.79: 13. 462a5–6.
- 26 T.206:04.514a6–28. For the French translation of this fable, see Edouard, *Cinq cents contes et apologues extraits du Tripitaka chinois*, vol. 1, 37.
- 27 *Hu* 壺 is made from *hulu* 葫 (壺) 蘆 (gourd). The story of *hugong* was originally found in the biography of Fei Zhangfang 費長房 (d.u.) in *houhanshu* 後漢書 (*The History of Eastern Han Dynasty*), in which Fei learned Taoist magic from *hugong*, a doctor who lived in a *hu* or *hulu* with supernatural powers. Moreover, this story was collected and carried forward in *Shenxianzhuan* 神仙傳 (*Traditions of Divine Transcendents*) by Ge Hong 葛洪. For the original Chinese text, see Ge (2010, p. 304). For the English translation, see Company (2002, pp. 164–67). For further discussion, see (Mair 1996, pp. 185–228; Zeng 2014, pp. 137–58).
- 28 T14: 475. 546b20–27. For the English translation, see Thurman (1976, p. 52). However, this translation somehow left out the sentence “Mount Sumeru 's primary (fundamental) mark (*sva-lakṣaṇa*) as it was before 須彌山王本相如故”.
- 29 This story can be found in Xunshi 荀氏, *Linggui zhi* 靈鬼志 (*Records of Magical Ghosts*), in *Guxiaoshuo gouchen* 古小說鉤沉 (*Selected Collection of Chinese Classical Fiction*), see Lu (1973a, vol. 8, pp. 316–17). For the English translation see Kao (1985, pp. 121–23).
- 30 *Mulian jiumu* 目連救母 (Mulian Rescues His Mother or Mulian Saves His Mother From Hell), a well-known Chinese Buddhist narrative, was first recorded in a Dunhuang document from the early 9th century CE. It is an expansion of the traditional *Yulanpen jing* 盂蘭盆經 (*The Ullambanapātra Sūtra*), which was translated by Dharmarakṣa (Zhu Fahu 竺法護) between the 2nd year of Taishi 泰始 and the 1st year of Jianxing 建興, Western Jin dynasty (CE 266–313). See Karashima (2013, pp. 288–305). Much research has been written on this topic; for more information, see Mair (1983, pp. 87–122).
- 31 In *Dazhidu lun* 大智度論 (*Great Perfection of Wisdom, Mahāpāramitōpadeśa*), Mahākāśyapa selected 1000 people, and they all obtained the fruition of arhat later. The reason the number is 1000 is that in the past when Bimbisāra (?–493) achieved Enlightenment, he worshiped and fed 1000 monks, see T. 1509:25. 67c12–68a3.
- 32 Zuo Ci has the ability to execute a variety of magic tricks, such as fishing with a bamboo pole and obtaining magnificent fish from an empty basket, as well as traveling to Shu 蜀 (Sichuan Province) and obtaining fresh ginger there in a flash. Moreover, he could become invisible or turn into an animal (sheep) when he was hunted by Cao Cao. These stories were originally recorded in *Houhan shu* and later collected in books of the Six Dynasties such as *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 (*Traditions of Divine Transcendents*) and *Soushen ji* 搜神記 (*In Search of The Supernature*). For one English version of these stories, see Gan (1996, pp. 8–10).
- 33 In China, *baixi* 百戲 (various plays) included illusional arts, which had their origins overseas and flourished during the Han Dynasty. They were performed in regal courts. Later, the immortals and Taoist monks learned them and used them to create the raw materials for assembling supernatural stories, and these medieval Chinese supernatural novels served as the key to

understanding these tricks. These magic and illusional arts include moving quickly, being invisible, transforming, dislocating body parts, puppet performances, rainmaking, and other feats. Of course, in the fiction of the Six Dynasties, some of these feats are carried out by foreign monks or magicians from middle Asia, as in the case of the tale *waiguo daoren*, while others are carried out by Taoist monks or Chinese individuals endowed with superhuman abilities. For more information, see Yin (2017, pp. 156–64).

34 The biography of Wu Jun can be found in *juan* 49 of *Liangshu* 梁書 (*The History of Liang Dynasty*), which speaks highly of his writing style, saying that Wu Jun's writing is clear with a classical style (*guqi* 古氣); some people learn it and call it "Wu Jun's style". See Yao (1973, p. 698).

35 B.79:13.336a14–15. See (Lan 1986).

36 For the English translation of this official title, see Introduction in (Hucker 1985, p. 13). *Lantai lingshi* 蘭台令史 was established in the Eastern Han Dynasty, it was attached to the Imperial Censorate (*Yushitai* 御史臺). This position was responsible for writing reports to the emperor, composing, and distributing documents to others with a salary of six hundred *dans* 石 (one *dan* is around 60 kg) of rice, see Fan (1975, p. 3600). This position only ranks sixth of nine in the ranking system, so it is not a very high-ranked position. As for the traditional understanding of the authorship of fiction in China, as recorded in *Hanshu*, people tend to hold the idea that *xiaoshuo* 小說 (fiction) comes from low-rank officials.

37 DeWoskin, Kenneth noted that the techniques by which they were created seem to be those of the historian in the main, the systematic collection and arrangement of material from a variety of sources. Excepting Kan Pao 干寶, Wu Chun 吳均 (469–519, Hsu Ch'i-hsieh-chi 續齊諧記), and Hou Pai 侯白 (Sui Dynasty, Ching'i-chi 旌異記), the writers of *chih-kuai* from Liu Hsiang's time on tended to be more philosophically than historically oriented in their other writings. see DeWoskin (1977, pp. 21–52). The fact that some of those collections, such as Wu Jun's work covered in this article, are more philological does not negate the reality that authors in the Six Dynasties had a shared interest in historical records or that they try to make their fiction more like historical records. The distinction between literature and history is not as obvious as we experience nowadays. A typical example of that time is Gan Bao. According to *Jinshu* 晉書 and the preface of *Soushen ji*, Gan Bao is mainly known as a historian. He compiled the book of *Soushenji* to record different records of history; at the same time, Gan Bao's father had a maid returned to life after she was put into the tomb for a long time. So, Gan Bao tried to demonstrate that "the spirit world is not a lie" (*ming shendao zhi buwu* 明神道之不誣), and the nature of the narrative of *Soushen ji*, historical or none-historical is complicated. See Gan (1996, pp. xxv–xxviii). However, it is still notable that the strong connection with history is one of the most significant signatures within Chinese literature; therefore, the historical details added in *yangxian shusheng* separates the story from the original Buddhist text. The historian components of *yangxian shusheng* were a new adaptation that serve as the backdrop for the tale as it evolves to discuss women and magic tricks, even if the story eventually becomes more intricate and has many themes and meanings.

38 His deliberate cover-up of the trace back to Buddhist text can be easily seen through by well-read people such as Duan Chengshi 段成式 (803–863) in the Tang Dynasty. Duan recorded Wu Jun's story in his work *Youyangzazu* 酉陽雜俎 (*Miscellaneous Morsels from the South Slope of You Mount*), in which he pointed out this story came from *Zapiyujing* and commented that Wu Jun must have read about this story, being surprised by the narratives, thinking it to be extremely strange (*guai* 怪), see Duan (2015, p. 1673).

39 In the biography of Sima Qian in *Hanshu*, Ban Gu speaks highly of Sima Qian's writings. He states that well-read Liuxiang and Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53–18 B.C.) all praise Sima Qian for the talent of being a great historian. Sima Qian is great at narrating things and the reason behind them, with clear and simple, real yet refined words. His writings are straightforward with authentic records. He never wrongly praised nor hid the wrongdoings (of historical people, especially the people of the ruling class). This is called *shilu*, see Ban (1962, p. 2378).

40 For the development of this story, see Chen (1980, pp. 157–62).

41 The story had a great influence on later generations. In addition to *Youyang zazu*, which was mentioned earlier, writers and critics in the Ming and Qing Dynasty also like to quote or learn from this story, such as Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640–1715) and Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805). They learn from this story and even use it as a literary term to describe the magical narrative effect that goes beyond the boundary of real and imagination. The artistic charm of the novels was greatly enhanced. See Gu (2014, p. 110).

42 T. 206: 4. 515a1–10.

43 T.262:9.13a25.

44 *Jingwei* 精衛 bird was originally the youngest daughter of Emperor Yandi 炎帝. After she was drowned when swimming in the East Sea, she transformed into a bird and often carried twigs and stones from the west mountain to fill up the East Sea. For the English translation of this tale, see Wang and Zheng (2010, p. 97).

45 Yugong tried everything he could and brought his family together to move the Wangwu 王屋 Mountain and Taihang 太行 mountain. When he was teased and laughed at by the so-called *zhisou* 智叟 (the wise old nab), he announced that even if he could not do it within his lifetime, he had endless later generations who could carry out this mission. Then, the gods were moved by his ambition and persistence and moved away the mountains for him, see Yang (2016, pp. 167–69). Here, the use of Chinese words *yu* 愚 (silly) and *zhi* 智 (wise) is seen in a Taoist way. Laozi states that, "*daqiao ruozhuo* 大巧若拙 (A man of great skill behaves like an idiot. The most sophisticated appears to be simple)". See Chen Guying, *Laozi yizhu ji pingjia*, 236. For people, one good characteristic is *dazhiruoyu* 大智若愚, which refers to someone of great wisdom who behaves like a fool.

- 46 *Youminglu* is one of the most famous *zhiguai* 志怪 (accounts of anomalies, tales of supernatural) novels in the Six Dynasties and is also one of the first collections of stories influenced by Buddhism. For the textual history of this book, see Z. Zhang (2009, pp. 87–101). For the English version of *Youminglu*, see Liu Yiqing, edited and translated by Y. Liu (2018).
- 47 *Zhuanji baiyuan jing* 撰集百緣經 (Avadānaśataka), translated by Zhiqian 支謙, *juan* 4, see T. 200.4.218c16–219b17.
- 48 The Nation or Place of Song indicates that this story came from China instead of a metaphorical place in Buddhist texts. Moreover, *luocha* 羅刹 (*rākṣasas*) is one of the most famous demons in Buddhist literature. *Fanyimingyiji* 翻譯名義集 (*The Dictionary on the Translation of Buddhist Terms and Concepts*), *juan* 2, says that *luocha* refers to a fast (*suji* 速疾), horrifying, violent, and evil ghost. See T. 2131:54.1078c25.
- 49 For more information on this topic, see (Shi 2022, pp. 112–49; Company 1990).
- 50 For the English translation of this story, see Y. Liu (2018, pp. 132–37). For more discussion on this topic, see (Shi 2022, pp. 112–49; Company 1990).
- 51 T.03: 152. 17c1–22.
- 52 This story is titled as *yingwuzi wang qingfo yuan* 鸚鵡子王請佛緣 (The Avadāna story of the king, son of the parrot, inquires for the Buddha). See T.04: 200. 231a17–b27.
- 53 T.04: 202. 436c8–437a29.
- 54 *Jinglü yixiang* 經律異相 is an important Buddhist encyclopedia attributed to Baochang 寶唱. Baochang is a Chinese monk active during the Liang Dynasty 梁 (502–557), and he is one of the pupils of Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518).
- 55 T.53:2121. 195b7–196a18.
- 56 T.04:203. 455a4–b7.
- 57 T.04:203. 455a8–12.
- 58 T.55:2149.268c4.
- 59 T.49:2034. 75c25–26.
- 60 T.53: 2121. 60b27–c5.
- 61 T.49:2034. 99b5.
- 62 Even though it was a sutra translated in the north, it was written much earlier so that there was enough time for the translation to travel to the south.
- 63 It is slightly possible; however, we have no evidence for this, Liu Yiqing may have seen a parable of the Buddha with two parts. He deliberately omitted the reference to the Buddha putting out the fire.

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