Literary Variation of Indian Buddhist Stories in Chinese 志怪 (Zhi-guai) Novels

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Abstract: In "Literary Variation of Indian Buddhist Stories in Chinese 志怪 (Zhiguai) Novels," Wei Guo discusses Buddhist Sutra scriptures which have been a reservoir of inspiration for Zhiguai novels since their first introduction in Chinese literature. Buddhist texts were less relevant for the "documentary" tradition of Chinese literature owing to their rough structure, vague context, and lack of a sense of history and reality, since they were originally intended as texts of didacticism. Hence, in order to integrate these exotic literary materials with local aesthetic concepts, Chinese writers explored creative adaptations including the addition of adding detail, linguistic embellishments, and the endowment of each story with specific narrative scenes in terms of character, place, and time. Guo argues that Indian Buddhist stories have been remolded in Zhiguai novels and transformed from imaginary religious literature into figurative and documentary literature whereby the convergence of the source texts with the target texts shows the processes of formation of world literature(s).
Keywords: Buddhist Sutra; Sinicization; Zhiguai Novel; Mystery and Supernatural in Classical Chinese Literature

The Indian scriptures, being religious texts, do not teach in a dreary way, but rather in an interesting manner in that they elaborate their teachings through a vivid use of bizarre stories. These stories are highly literary due to their fascinating plots and imagination. Therefore, they soon became the source materials for early novels of 志怪 Zhiguai (anomaly accounts) of Wei, Jin and North and South Dynasties after being introduced to China. However, Zhiguai originated from historical biographies with a strong documentary character (Li 72), which was completely different from the aesthetics of Buddhist scripture stories, and the two could not be directly grafted together. Thus, the Chinese writers made creative adaptations. On the one hand, they borrowed the bizarre and interesting structure and plot of the Buddhist scriptures, and on the other, by setting up specific times and places, and adding witnesses, they turned the

originally crude and grotesque religious fantasy into a concrete and credible historical "fact."

These new stories, which combined the characteristics of both Chinese and Indian cultures, were rather popular in China and soon became the talk of the scholars and were even regarded as real historical records. It is thus clear that the Indian sutra stories did not circulate widely in their original form when they entered China, but underwent a series of transformations, a process that not only gave rise to the formation of new literary classics, but also had a profound impact on the local historical writing.

I. THE ADAPTATION OF BUDDHIST STORIES BY ZHIGUAI

The adaptation of the sutras by Zhiguai is mainly reflected in the borrowing of the narrative structure and plot, which are the easiest to imitate with strong artistic effects. Although the writers never explicitly admitted their stories to be derived from the sutras, the high degree of similarity in language and structure suggests an intentional imitation from one to the other. For example, in *A Garden of Marvels*, there is a story of a compassionate parrot that exhausts itself while attempting to save its fellow creatures from a forest fire and is rewarded by devas (Hall & Ames 184).

Despite no direct evidence for the origin of this story, almost all scholars refer to a story in 旧杂譬喻经 *The Old Assorted Avadanas Sutra*. The reasons are threefold: First, the text, structure, plot, and idea were almost identical; second, this type of story had never been seen in China before, while it was found in a variety of texts in India with similar variants; third, both works appeared and were popular in southern China, and the translation of *The Old Assorted Avadanas Sutra* predated *A Garden of Marvels* by two years.

Therefore, the story of the "parrot putting out the fire" no doubt originated from the Buddhist scriptures. The vast majority of the stories were not copied in their entirety, as shown in this example. They were often substantially reworked, retaining only the narrative framework and the main plot of the sutra stories, while using traditional Chinese historical biographies as a model, and adding realistic and specific characters and backgrounds to further conform to the reading aesthetics and expectations of local readers.

There is a dilemma in the creation of Zhiguai. That is, it needed to preserve the twisted and bizarre literary features of the sutra stories, while not violating the genre requirements and aesthetic concepts of historicity and realism. In order to achieve this goal, the writers transformed the story in terms of both plot and non-plot elements. The former was embedded in the plot, including the actuality of the story's protagonist, the setting of a real and concrete background (such as time, place, and social life, etc.), and the emphasis on the "human-like" qualities of the anomalies. The latter "non-plot elements" were not related to the story itself, but a kind of added circumstantial evidence, mainly in two ways: First, the writer emphasized the actuality of the story in the preface, and second, he set up other credible witnesses or objects. We will illustrate this with specific examples below. For most sutra stories, the ultimate purpose is to interpret the doctrine, while the narrative is only a means, so they often do not set up specific characters, but appear in a typological capacity. For example, the "one monk" can represent the whole group of monks, and the "one merchant" who gave up his layman and converted to Buddha actually implies that all merchants should accept the Buddha's teachings.

However, this vague characterization also has its drawbacks. Namely, it does not create a concrete and distinct image, which produces an illusory literary style. As a tributary of historical literature, the style and aesthetic concept of Zhiguai require that the characters be specific. Therefore, while drawing on the framework of the Buddhist scriptures, a "real" protagonist must be added. There are two kinds of "real" characters here: The first is a famous character who actually existed in history, and the second is a minor character not found in historical biographies or even completely fictionalized, but is given specific information, such as name and place of origin, so as to make readers believe that he or she is real. A typical example for the first kind comes from *Records of the Hidden and the Visible Worlds*:

> Huan Wen, a minister in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, intended to usurp the throne. A nun then came from afar in the summer and bathed herself next door. Wen peeped in and saw the naked nun, who first cut her belly open with a knife, and the internal organs of her body came out. Then she broke her feet and chopped off her head and hands. When the bathing was over, Wen asked, "Why did you mutilate yourself like this?" The nun said, "If you want to be the emperor, you will undergo the same sufferings" (Lu 167).

Huan Wen (312-373), a famous minister in the Chinese history, attempted to usurp the throne, but died of illness before he could act. The central framework of this story is that a nun admonishes Huan Wen not to commit usurpation by demonstrating the magic power of dismembering her body, and its plot and intention are very similar to 佛说比丘尼现变经 *Buddha's Sutra on the Present Transformation of Bhikkhuni.* There was a group of "debauched and lascivious people" in Śrāvastī who saw the nun bathing in the river and were tempted to commit indecent acts. The nun taught them by showing her divine power:

> She took her eyes out and put them in her hand, saying: "You are all attracted by my appearance, but now you have no preference for this since I am now blind." Then she took the internal organs of the body out, and broke her hand and feet, asking: "Are you still attracted to my appearance?"

They were horrified, but understood the truth of "impermanence," and repented and converted to Buddha (Zhu 100). Both stories use the plot of the bhikkhuni's magical power of "disintegration and restoration of the body" to advise others not to do unlawful things, and there should be an intertextual relation between them. However, the difference between the two is also obvious: the characters in the sutra are a group of unidentified villains, but when transplanted into the story, the main character becomes the historically real Huan Wen. In addition, the story reinforces the real Huan Wen's arrogant and domineering character, adding a sense of authenticity for the reader. After such adaptation, the narrative framework of the Buddhist scriptures and the local historical biographies were perfectly integrated to form a new literary paradigm, which was not only copied by later works of *Signs from the Unseen Realm* and *Further Records of an Inquest into the Spirit-Realm*, but was even adopted by "the biography of Huan Wen" in the official history of 晋书 *The Book of Jin.*

However, there were limitations in tinkering with famous historical figures, so it was more common for writers to create "specific fictional characters," where the main character was historically unknown or even unidentified, but further details such as name, place of origin and official position were added to make the character seem real. For example, the scholar Duan Chengshi (? - 863) in Tang Dynasty found the story called "The Scholar of Yangxian" in 续齐谐记 *(Qi Xie's Records Continued),* which

was derived from the *The Old Assorted Avadanas Sutra* (Duan 1672-1673). In the sutra, there is no other information about the identity of the story except that the story is told by a prince. Although its main character is not a real historical figure, the writer of "The Scholar of Yangxian" carefully added his name and place of origin—Xu Yan in Yangxian (now Yixing, Jiangsu Province), and records his subsequent official position — 兰台令史 Lantai Lingshi (Shanghai Classics Publishing House 1006-1007). Details such as name and place of origin are enough to convince the reader of the authenticity of the person, and the official position further strengthens the credibility of the story, because his duty was to be in charge of books and historical materials. In other words, Xu Yan was not only a government official, but also a historian, so the events he experienced and recounted naturally have a high degree of reliability.

One more typical example is the evolution of the stories of Guanyin's spiritual experiences. The sutras only list various spiritual experiences, such as chanting Guanyin's name can make a person safe from fire, drowning, and diseases, without the illustration of plots and characters, whereas the writers of spiritual stories not only visualize Guanyin's power with stories, but also set up specific protagonists in its demonstration, thus reflecting the documentary nature. For instance, 系观世音应验记*Xi Guanshiyin Yingyanji* records the story of Liu Cheng, Fu Wanshou, Liang Sheng, and others, who were saved from the storm by chanting the name of Guanyin or scriptures, a concrete representation of Guanyin's compassion and spirituality in saving sentient beings (Dong 69-79). In short, the writers of Zhiguai not only kept the framework of the sutra stories, but also set up specific protagonists for them, which is one of the most direct and common practices of transforming religious fantasy into historical records.

In order to further enhance the authenticity of the story, Zhiguai also provides specific backgrounds (setting) for the characters' activities, including the time and place of the narrative, social folklore, and real historical events. Although the strange and bizarre experiences of the protagonists seem distant and unfamiliar to readers, the familiar backgrounds can easily make them resonate with the real world.

Except for the biographies of the Buddha, which are somewhat documentary in nature, the time and place of the sutra stories are often vague, generally using only "sometime," "in the past," "in a previous life,"

"a certain country," "a certain city," and so on to outline the general scope. In contrast, the majority of Zhiguai stories are set in real and concrete time and space. For example, the story of Yuan Zhizong's dream trip to a Buddhist temple in 祥異記 *A Record of Signs and Marvels* explicitly took place in a village in Zhongli County (around Fengyang in present-day Anhui Province) in 439 A.D. (Lu 265).

Moreover, in the era of hand-copied books, the temporal and spatial connections between the writers of books and their readers were very close, meaning that they basically shared the same experiences. Therefore, when writers of Zhiguai adapted the stories of Buddhist scriptures, they did not place them in a distant time and space but tried to stay as close to the lives of the readers as possible. For example, Zhiguai of the Southern Dynasty often took place in southern China, while those of the Northern Dynasty were mostly set in the north. And the stories were usually within one or two hundred years of the writers' era. This approach not only makes the writer more inspirational in the creation, but also further enhances the realism of the story.

Lastly, although the plot of Zhiguai pursues fantasy, the advancement of time and the transformation of place in the narrative are often the same as in the real world. For example, in 系观世音应验记 *Xi Guanshiyin Yinyanji*, the character Liu Sahe revived after his death and described his experience of entering the underworld: shortly after his death, he was bound by two people and "went northwest," then "went west," and then "went northwest again." He finally arrived at a large city similar to Chang'an, also known as Hell. Here he converted to Buddhism, underwent various punishments and was released after offsetting his sins, and woke up to find that he had been dead for seven days (Lu 301-304). In this story, although the main character is in the underworld, his experiences in time and space follow the logic of the real world, so the reader can substitute his own realistic experience into it, thus creating an immersive artistic effect on the one hand, and strengthening the authenticity of the story on the other.

While the writers of Zhiguai borrowed from the Buddhist scriptures, they also consciously localized them. The most direct means was the replacement of characters and locations with the Chinese counterparts. In addition, the writers subtly incorporate local social folklore into their narratives, so that the reader overlooks the Indian origins of the stories

and believes that they are originally Chinese events. An example of a successful adaptation is the aforementioned "The Scholar of the Yang Xian." In the scriptures, the main plot of this story is that a brahman (a person practicing layman) performed a puja under a tree and spit out a pot from his mouth with a woman in it, and they lied down together. After the brahman fell asleep, the woman also spit out a pot with a young man in it, and they lied down with him. Afterwards, the woman took the young man into the jug and swallowed him in her mouth. When Brahma woke up, he put the woman in the jug and swallowed her (Kang 514).

The first adaptation was made in 灵鬼志 *Linggui Zhi* written during the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420): First, the story was set in China in the 12th year of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (387); second, the plot of a foreign Taoist entering a small cage being carried by a passerby was added; third, the original "pot" was eliminated, and the Taoist spat out the woman directly from his mouth, and the woman also spat out the boy directly from her mouth. Wu Jun (469-520) inherited this adaptation and made further adjustments to the characters and details: First, the passerby, who was only a participant, became Xu Yan, the main character who witnessed the whole event, and the location of the story was clearly recorded as Sui'an Mountain in Yang Xian; second, the small cage was further specified as a goose cage (Shanghai Classics Publishing House 1006-1007). The characters and the changes in time and space have already been mentioned, but what is more intriguing here is the evolution of the "pot - small cage - goose cage." This adjustment may also have considerations for artistic effects: the omission of two pots makes the plot of the continuous gulping of people in the mouth compact. In addition, the scene in the pots is invisible, which may make people suspect the existence of a magic-like blindfold, while the changes in the cage are visible, thus more convincing to the readers of the Taoist magic (Shao 150-152).

But another important aspect is the different status of these objects in terms of Chinese cultural imagery. Although pots also have a long history in China, they were far less popular and representative than cages in a traditional agricultural society. As for the goose cage, it was not only a common apparatus in Jiangnan area, but also a literary model at that time. Wang Xizhi (303-361), the most famous calligrapher in Chinese history, loved geese and wanted to buy a good goose raised by a Taoist priest in Shangyin (now Shaoxing), but the priest asked him to copy Tao Te Ching

for exchange. Wang Xizhi gladly wrote it and returned with the goose in a cage (Fang 2100). This incident was not only admired by later poems, but also gave birth to a series of paintings, such as "Xizhi's Goose Cage" (painted by Chen Hongshou (1598-1652), 45.75cm across, 103.1cm long in exhibit at Zhejiang Museum). In all these literary works, the "goose cage" becomes an iconic image.

The love for goose among scholars in Wei, Jin and Six Dynasties was a common phenomenon. Chen Yinke ascribes this not to aesthetics, but to the fact that at that time the scholars in southeastern China believed in Taoism and in elixir. Goose meat was antidote for elixir (Chen 38). Although the status and popularity of Xu Yan in Wu Jun's adaptation cannot be compared with Wang Xizhi, he very likely came from a large and prestigious family for two reasons. First, the Xu family clan was prestigious in Danyang (now Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province). Xu Yan's hometown of Yang Xian was adjacent to Danyang, so he may have clan relations with these families. Second, in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, often only the sons of the prestigious families can do official work, and Xu Yan later served as 兰台令史 Lantai lingshi, which further confirmed his relationship with a large respected family in Danyang that practiced Taoism. If this deduction is correct, it is only logical that he carried the goose cage. It can be seen that, although Xu Yan is a fictional character, the writer has carefully designed it based on reality, so that his identity and behavior fit perfectly with the social class and customs of the time, which strongly supports the credibility of the narrative with rich details and relatable background.

The story of Song Dingbo catching ghosts is also cleverly integrated into the local Chinese folklore concept. Song Dingbo met a ghost on his night walk and deceived the ghost that he was also a ghost, so they walked together. Song Dingbo said that he was newly dead, so he did not know what the ghost feared. The ghost replied that he did not like human spitting. When they arrived at the city, Song Dingbo caught the ghost and turned it into a sheep and sold it. He was afraid of its change, so he spat on it (Gan 199). In the scripture's original version, there is no fear of human saliva by ghosts, neither does Indian Buddhism have such notion. On the contrary, there are many records in the scriptures that ghosts like saliva (Juqu 341). But in China, the fear of saliva by ghosts only became a common concept as late as the Eastern Jin Dynasty.

The fear of saliva was also recorded in Kong Yue's book *Zhiguai* in addition to the story of Song Dingbo. It goes like this: When Lu Chong gave birth to a son with a female ghost and carried him home, people thought that the child was also a ghost, so they spat at him from a distance (Liu 87-89). It can be seen that people at that time believed that saliva could make ghosts lose their magic power. This idea probably came from the theory of "attacking poison with poison" in traditional Chinese medicine. Saliva is considered a kind of filthy thing, so it can restrain evil spirits. The writers were familiar with the local culture and customs (Dewoskin 36), so they incorporated them in their adaptation of the sutras, which not only enriched the storyline, but also enhanced the sense of place and authenticity of the narrative, thus producing a very good literary effect.

The story of Huan Wen and the Bhikkhuni cited historical figures to prove the actuality of the narrative, but it was not feasible to attach all the weird experiences to famous people. Therefore, the writers also took another approach. That is, although the main character and the plot was fictional, embedding them in real historical events can enhance actuality. For example, 宣验记 *Xuanyanji* records a story about a man named Che who was captured by the enemy during the war. His mother lit seven lamps in front of the Buddha and chanted the name of Guanyin, hoping that her son would escape. A year later, his son really escaped and came back, saying that he saw seven points of fire on the road to guide him, and after walking for seven days and seven nights, he returned home without realizing it (Lu 268).

The writer did not set specific information such as name and place of origin for the main character but placed the incident in the context of a real historical event. That is, Liu Yizhen (? ～424) was defeated by Helian Bobo (381-425) at Qingni (present-day Lantian, Shaanxi) and most of Liu's army was captured (Shen 1635). This was a major battle that changed the political trajectory and the course of history, leaving a deep impression on people at the time. With this as the background, the story proclaiming Guanyin's spirituality had a realistic backing, and even if it lacked narrative details, it would still give the readers a sense of documentary reality. By embedding such stories, the narrative cannot only be used as historical evidence of authenticity, but in turn can also be used to strengthen historical memory through literature, thereby gaining the sympathy of the world for Buddhism.

Some scholars hold that the "human-like" nature of the characters, living environment, and social structure of the Tang Dynasty legends can also enhance the authenticity of the stories (Ma 177-178). Similarly, the Chinese writers did not transcribe the sutra stories as they were, but rather absorbed their framework or plot, and filled them with characters and social relationships familiar to local readers. For example, in the story "Song Dingbo catching ghosts" in the sutra's original version, Magadha was a Buddhist country, rich and vast. Hearing about this, those who did not believe in Buddhism intentionally went there to buy ghosts. When Śakra heard this, he became a merchant and went to the marketplace to sell the ghosts (anonymous 507).

The main conflict in this story unfolds between Śakra and those who did not believe in Buddhism, with the ghost only serving as a prop in the religious struggle. After the adaptation, the character Śakra becomes an ordinary man, Song Dingbo, but his language and behavior are no different from those of an ordinary human, even though the story centers on the supernatural thing, ghost. Song Dingbo is so bold and crafty that he plays the simple-minded ghosts for fools and finally turns them into sheep and sells them (Gan 199). The story has completely lost its religious overtones, and the ghosts show distinct personality traits, with their ignorance, simplicity, and gullibility. The tragic end is symbolic of the lower-class people who were abducted and sold during the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties (Wu 5522-5526).

In fact, the image and habits of most ghosts in the sutras are no different from those of humans (Jin 69-70). For example, in the Buddhist scriptures, there is a "Lord of Hell," King Yama, but he is not an administrator, but a savior, and has his own kingdom. This is an image that radiates divinity (Sun 74-75). However, in Zhiguai, Yama is interposed with the traditional Chinese 泰山府君 Taishan Fujun, and becomes the official in charge of the hell, with assistants and corresponding institutions, such as the palace, prison, and penal colony to judge and dispose of sinners, just like a replica of the government in the real world. These depictions show that the bizarre events recorded in Zhiguai are beyond the experience of everyday life, but not beyond the logic of everyday life. It was believed that they would actually happen in distant or hidden corners. Thus, the strange things that the Chinese Zhiguai stories focus on and describe are not the

kind of religious mysteries found in the Buddhist scriptures, but rather a reflection of real life in literature.

In some of these Zhiguai stories, the writers also used a special means to prove their authenticity. For example, 系观世音应验记 *Xi Guanshiyin Yinyanji* records that a man named Guo Xuan, who was imprisoned for something, believed in Guan Yin and later saw him in a dream, and woke up with his shackles free. However, the writer also retained another plot, that Guo Xuan saw a dignified monk, not a bodhisattva, when he was awake (Dong 112). This approach may seem to diminish the credibility of the story, but it actually highlights the writer's prudence, which leads the reader to believe that the events he or she recounts are true.

In addition to the above modifications in plot, the writers also try to enhance the authenticity of the narrative beyond the story by expressing their thoughts or listing testimonies. First of all, in the prefaces of the works, the writers often directly state that they are following the historian's tradition of factual recording, so that the events recorded, though bizarre, are not fictional. In other words, the writers were convinced of the authenticity of these stories. Lu Xun holds that people in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties thought that "although different paths lead to hell and man's world, the ghosts and humans were all real, so accounts of strange events in hell were not different from those happening on earth" (Lu 22).

Not only did the writers of Zhiguai stories believe from the bottom of their hearts that the stories they recorded were true, but they also wanted to win the trust of their readers, so they always made their intentions clear in the preface. Secondly, almost all researchers have noticed that the writers of the stories often set up witnesses or testimonies to prove that they really happened. For example, at the end of the story of "The Scholar of Yang Xian," the writer adds a passage not found in the scripture's original version: the scholar gave Xu Yan a large bronze plate as a souvenir, and later Xu showed it to a senior official named Zhang San. This part has little connection with the main plot, and its main function is to prove the authenticity of the story. From the perspective of literary aesthetics, the additional narrative strays from the story, destroying the narrative as a whole and reflecting the immaturity of Chinese fiction at that time. However, from the point of narrative function, it supports the

authenticity of the story, infusing the essence of Zhiguai into the form of "documentary," thus promoting the circulation of this genre.

II. THE INFLUENCE OF BUDDHIST STORIES ON THE WRITING OF CHINESE LITERATURE AND HISTORY

History, the foundation of the Chinese intellectual world (Zhao 5), not only has shaped the Zhiguai genre, but also has transformed the Indian sutra story through Zhiguai. As a narrative working with an elaborate structure, a twisted plot, and a strong religious backing, the sutra story has not been able to replace the Chinese tradition of history. However, the sutra story has integrated various genres to form a new literary paradigm that has profoundly influenced Chinese historical writing in several aspects.

First of all, the stories of Buddhist scriptures enriched the subject and concepts of Zhiguai and enhanced its literariness. The Chinese narrative tradition has always been underdeveloped in terms of content and artistry, even though Zhiguai has a long history of storytelling. For example, the most popular Zhiguai works in the Han Dynasty were mostly geography and museums outlining strange features of places without much plot (Hall and Ames 213-222). If those narratives do have something akin to a plot, its composition is not free from the influence of historical biographies, with the themes mostly on imperial anecdotes and spiritual signs of gods and immortals. These "plots" have relatively simple structures, techniques, and imagination that rarely go beyond witchcraft and Taoism. Buddhism has not only directly brought the stories such as "parrot putting out fire," but also provides new ideas in the concepts of time and space, retribution, and hell (Leng 81 & 123). These elements greatly enriched the range of materials and expressions of the Chinese Zhiguai novel, thus contributing to the maturity of this genre.

Secondly, not only did the stories of the Buddhist scriptures have a far-reaching influence on Zhiguai, but their role in Chinese fables, 变文 bianwen, drama and other narrative literary genres as well. For example, early Chinese fables were mainly narratives of animal personalization, but under the influence of Buddhist stories, they gradually evolved into human-animal dialogue narratives (Yuan 176). The fables in Liu Zongyuan's (773-819) literary creation, on the other hand, have their origins in Buddhist scriptures (Sun 186). 变文 Bianwen in folk popular

literature, heavily influenced by Buddhism, is mainly about the interpretation of stories from Buddhist scriptures (Zheng 145). 大目干连冥间救母变文 (The Story of a Buddhist Disciple Mulian Rescuing His Mother), being a representative example, was originated from 佛说盂兰盆经 *Ullambana Sutra*, aims at upholding the Buddhist tradition, while at the same time incorporates the Chinese concept of filial piety. This story has been widely disseminated in later generations.

As for drama, Hu Shih holds that many Buddhist scriptures are semi-fictional and semi-dramatic, directly or indirectly related to the development of Chinese drama (Hu 160-161). There are indeed many dramatic works based on the stories of Buddhist scriptures in later times, among which the two most influential ones are those on the themes of "Mulian saving his mother" and "Guanyin becoming a saint." In short, since China's local narrative tradition was not well developed, it became the most common choice of writers to enrich the content and to improve the artistic level with the inspiration from Buddhist scripture stories.

Finally, the stories of the Buddhist scriptures, after being adapted by Zhiguai, became the material for historical writing with a great influence on the content of Chinese historical texts. While Zhiguai were born out of historical biographies, the connection between them goes beyond that—more than one-third of the known writers of Zhiguai stories worked as historians, librarians, and archivists (Hall and Ames 177), whose main duty was to write annals of history. Their overlapping identities make the inclusion of Zhiguai in history rather naturally. The Buddhist histories and biographies are keen on citing from Zhiguai. The "Biography of Eminent Monks" has directly transcribed many Buddhist-related stories. For example, the "Biography of Qiyu" has referred to the story of the main character's treatment of diseases in the *Signs from the Unseen Realm* (Shi 364-366).

What's more, the story of Zhiguai also entered the horizon of orthodox histories, expanding the content and methods of traditional historiography. Some scholars have noted that it was very common in the Wei and Jin Dynasties to include Zhiguai in history. A typical example is the story of "Cao Chong weighing an elephant" in the period of Three Kingdoms, which came from 杂宝藏经 *MahUratnakUta* (Chen 17-20). In addition, 晋书 *The Book of Jin* also contains many stories from Buddhist scriptures, such as the aforementioned Huan Wen and the bhikkhuni (Fang 2918). In short, not only has Chinese narrative literature been

strongly influenced by the stories of the Buddhist scriptures, but the tradition of history itself has also drawn resources from them.

III. CONCLUSION

The sutra story, primarily a religious didactic means attached to the scriptures in India, branched out into another identity after its arrival in China, i.e., that of an independent literary work. This transformation, of course, did not occur naturally, but through the transformation of native writers based on historical biography. First, the basic plot of Zhiguai is extracted from the sutra stories; second, specific characters, settings and witnesses are added. In this way, the "imaginary" religious fantasy became a "documentary" historical literature, promoting the further maturation of Zhiguai, which gives birth to a new literary paradigm. This process also influenced other narrative genres in China, such as fable, 变文 bianwen, and drama, all with enriched content and expression.

More importantly, since the stories of Zhiguai originated from historical texts, they often shared a common writership. As a result, the stories of the Buddhist scriptures entered the field of historical codification through Zhiguai, providing a novel way of writing Buddhist historical texts and even official history. Although some scholars have argued that "Buddhism conquered China" (ZÜRCHER 73), the spread and acceptance of Buddhist sutra stories in China suggest that this process was not a one-way export, and much less a "conquest," but rather it is the result of a long-term confluence and acculturation of the cultures of India and China.

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