

ANTHOLOGIZING BUDDHISTS: A STUDY OF *AVADĀNA* NARRATIVES AND THE  
COMMUNITIES THAT READ THEM IN EARLY MEDIEVAL CHINA

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Tyson Joseph Yost

August 2013

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Tyson Joseph Yost, Ph.D.

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This dissertation is a study of *avadāna* narratives found in two related anthologies, the *Za piyu jing* 雜譬喻經 and the *Zhong jing xuan za piyu* 眾經撰雜譬喻. It has two related goals: to investigate what the Chinese translations can tell us about the functions of *avadāna* literature in Buddhist practice; and to see what *avadāna* literature can tell us about the Buddhists who translated and compiled them. My central argument is that the translation and compilation of *avadāna* narratives into anthologies offers clues about the context in which such anthologies were created. This in turn highlights the different concerns of various Buddhist communities and reflects alternate idioms of Buddhism in early medieval China.

I begin by investigating an *avadāna* narrative through the lens of Indian aesthetics of humor to illustrate the rhetorical function of the story. This approach shows that these narratives are carefully constructed literary productions that offer a window into both the world of the Indic society in which they were initially composed and the Chinese society which translated them. I then look at developments in literary theory to establish a framework that allows us to shift our focus from *what* is being read to *who* is doing the reading. I explore notions of the implied reader and the interpretive community as a means of understanding the kind of audience that is assumed in these narratives and the types of concerns the stories are seeking to address. Finally, I

investigate the textual form in which the vast majority of avadāna narratives are found: the anthology. Since anthologies are the conscious collecting, ordering and editing of pre-existing narratives, I argue that they illuminate the social context and ideological orientation of the communities that compiled them. By analyzing the structure and themes of these two anthologies we find reflections of two different Buddhist communities: one monastic centered, the other lay oriented. Such an approach provides a means to flesh out and nuance our understanding of Buddhist communities in early medieval China.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Tyson Yost was born in Salt Lake City, Utah and raised in Rigby, Idaho. He received his Associate's degree from Ricks College in Rexburg, Idaho in International Studies in 1999. In 2004 he received a dual Bachelor's degree in Comparative Literature and Asian Studies from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Tyson went on to study at the University of Chicago Divinity School and received his M.A. in Religious Studies in 2006. He was then accepted into Cornell University's doctoral program in Asian Literature, Religion and Culture and received his Doctorate of Philosophy in 2013. He is currently a professor in the History department at Brigham Young University-Idaho in Rexburg, Idaho. Tyson married Lindsie Nichol in 2003 and together they are the parents of four wonderful daughters.

For Lindsie and the girls

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation could not be completed without the support and encouragement of a number of people. While those who have aided in the process are too numerous to name, it is my privilege to acknowledge and thank those who have had a particularly important influence in the development of this study. Several professors during my undergraduate studies deserve special recognition for setting me on the path into the rarified world of Asian religion and literature. Scott Galer was the first to introduce me to the beauty of the Chinese language and literature; his support and friendship has continued for more than fifteen years now. David Honey served as a valued advisor and teacher of literary Chinese and was influential in my decision to pursue graduate studies in the field. Larry Peer taught me to both appreciate and critically investigate the influence of literature in society; it is from him that I began to first develop my interest in the relationship between literature and religion.

During my time completing a Master's degree at the University of Chicago both Guy Leavitt and Yigal Bronner were instrumental in teaching me the intricacies of Sanskrit grammar and sparking my interest in understanding the Indian world through its literature.

My time at Cornell University has been eventful and fulfilling. The students, faculty and staff in the Asian Studies Department and the Kroch Library have been extremely understanding through the highs and lows that come with doctoral studies. Of particular mention are those who have served on my dissertation committee; if there is anything of value in this dissertation it is due to their diligence and advice. I would particularly like to thank Lawrence McCrea for his patience and his willingness to always take the time to read through various Sanskrit narratives despite a hectic schedule. I have greatly enjoyed our discussions on Indian poetics and literature. I owe a debt of gratitude to Jane Marie Law who has always been a constant support and voice of

reason and praise. I would like to thank her for taking the time to walk me through the myriad works of religious theory and hermeneutics; Gadamer and Eliade became infinitely more accessible after our discussions. Daniel Boucher has been the single most influential figure in my academic development. I could not have found a better advisor to meet my needs as a graduate student. He provided the perfect combination of generosity and academic rigor that spurred me to think more critically while always providing the support I needed to continue my studies. I count it a great privilege to call him both my mentor and my friend.

I would like to thank my parents, Fred and Brenda Yost, for always supporting me in the pursuit of my goals, even when you might not have understood why I was pursuing them. I owe you more than I could ever say, but I hope that this can serve as a small token of my appreciation for all that you have done for me throughout my life. To my parents-in-law, Gordon and Wendy Nichol, for allowing me to marry your daughter and drag her across the country to live on a graduate student stipend with limited access to your grandchildren. I have always appreciated your support and kindness in welcoming me into your family.

And finally, to the most important people in my life: my wife, Lindsie, and beautiful daughters, Elaiza, Elainor, Adelaide, and Annelaise. This dissertation is as much your accomplishment as it is mine. I could not have completed this without you. You make life worth living and give meaning to everything I do. Lindsie, thank you for all you have sacrificed and endured as I sat in a quiet, air conditioned library reading all day while you toiled away at home alone with four very rambunctious children. Your love means the world to me.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Avś</i>	<i>Avadānaśataka</i> (Speyer 1906-09)
<i>CSZJJ</i>	<i>Chu san zang ji ji</i> 出三藏記集 (T 2145)
<i>Divy</i>	<i>Divyāvadāna</i> . (Cowell and Neil 1886)
<i>LDJJ</i>	<i>Liu du ji jing</i> 六度集經 (T 152)
<i>SWF</i>	<i>Xian yu jing</i> 賢愚經 or <i>Sutra of the Wise and the Fool</i> (T 202)
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> (Takakusu and Watanabe 1924-1935); texts are referred to by serial number followed by volume, page, register, and line numbers.
<i>ZJXZPY</i>	<i>Zhong jing xuan za piyu</i> 眾經撰雜譬喻 (T 208)
<i>ZPYJ</i>	<i>Za piyu jing</i> 雜譬喻經 (T 207)

## INTRODUCTION

Growing up I was an avid reader and was rarely without a book in hand. I consumed any story available, from the Fairytales of the Brothers Grimm to the old westerns of Lois L'Amour and the fantasy of J.R.R. Tolkien. But the stories I remember the most, the stories that influenced me more than any other, were the religious tales that infused every aspect of my upbringing. Being raised in a devout Mormon household, I was regaled with the tales from the Bible and Book of Mormon on a daily basis.

These stories weren't just a part of my religious education; they *were* my religious education. I still remember hearing about Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt and reading the stories of Lehi leading his family into the wilderness, Nephi building a boat to cross the sea to a promised land, and the brother of Jared convincing the Lord to touch stones to provide light for their journey. These stories fascinated me. They still do. I heard them at church on Sunday, at home from my parents, and I read them myself daily. They informed every decision I made and the goals and dreams I set for myself. They created me, my identity, my values, my world, and I can no more be separated from the influence these stories have on the way I think about and understand the world than I can be separated from the air I breathe and the water I drink to sustain my life.

These stories weren't just entertainment, though they certainly filled that function on numerous occasions. They were also didactic. The stories provided a means of assurance, escape, catharsis, and support. The reading and re-reading of these stories created my view of the world around me so that everything fit together according to the proper narrative. They provided a sense of identity, a sense of belonging and community. I could count on them to tell me how I

should act and think, and the values I should hold. Not only that, but it also felt safe and secure knowing that my parents, siblings and those that were around me knew the same stories too, and often talked about them and used them in their daily discussions. I belonged, in part, because I knew the same stories as everyone else.

As I continued to grow my interest in stories and reading grew with me. I began to turn my attention to the many Asian books and art that filled my home, collected during my father's time serving in Japan for the U.S. military. I was intrigued with the exotic writing and the foreign images that were so different from what I was familiar with. By the time I entered college I was determined to learn more about the stories and literature of Asia. I began to study Chinese, and then entered graduate school and began a diligent study of Sanskrit, eventually entering a doctoral program to study Buddhism. As I began to read Buddhist literature from China and India there was one genre that I turned back to again and again: the *jātaka* and *avadāna* narratives that recounted the previous births of the Buddha and his disciples. I can imagine these stories having the same influence on a Buddhist as the stories from my religious tradition had on me. This is why I have chosen to study Buddhist *avadāna* literature. This dissertation is my attempt to understand the function and role of *avadāna* in the development of Buddhist thought and practice, particularly as expressed in Chinese translation. It seeks to identify and better understand the type of reader and community which might have utilized such narratives and to what ends they were employed.

Before moving on with this study there are two fundamental questions that must be addressed. First, what is *avadāna* literature? What are the characteristics of the genre, the meaning of the word, and our understanding of its use in the Buddhist tradition? Second, why is the study of *avadāna* valuable for contemporary Buddhist scholarship? What can this study offer

to further our understanding of Buddhism during the early medieval period in China and India?  
Let us look at each question in turn.

### **What is Buddhist *Avadāna* Literature?**

There are two arguments for the etymology of the word *avadāna* among scholars.<sup>1</sup> J.S. Speyer argues that the word derives from the root *ava + dā*, meaning to “to cut off, to select,” and eventually coming to denote “glorious achievements.”<sup>2</sup> In Indian literature outside the realm of Buddhism, the term is most often used to indicate illustrious actions or feats performed heroically. Within the Buddhist context the term would then denote karmically significant actions, whether good or bad. Maurice Winternitz builds upon Speyer’s understanding of the word and defines it as “a ‘noteworthy deed,’ sometimes in a bad sense, but generally in the good sense of ‘a heroic deed,’ ‘a feat,’ with the Buddhists a ‘religious or moral feat’ and then also the ‘story of a noteworthy deed, or feat.’ Such a ‘feat’ may consist of the sacrifice of one’s own life, but also merely of a gift of incense, flowers, ointments, gold and precious stones, or the erection of sanctuaries.”<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, Max Müller derived the etymology from the root *ava + dai* meaning “to cleanse, to purify.” Thus Müller defines the word as meaning “a legend, originally a pure and virtuous act, an ἀπίστεια, afterwards a sacred story, and possibly a story the hearing of which

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<sup>1</sup> In the following discussion I rely heavily on the work presented by Reiko Ohnuma and Joel Tatelman in their study of the *avadāna* literature, each of whom provide a more detailed analysis than the brief overview presented here. See Ohnuma 2007, 38-39 and 290 fn. 31; and Tatelman 2000, 4-12. For a discussion of the meaning of the term used in Pāli sources see Cutler 1994.

<sup>2</sup> See the preface to Speyer 1906-09, i-v.

<sup>3</sup> Winternitz [1933] 1983, 277-278.

purifies the mind.”<sup>4</sup> Kanga Takahata continues this train of thought by arguing that it is “beyond doubt that the central idea underlying *avadāna* literature is...the purification of mind.”<sup>5</sup>

Most scholars today follow Speyer in their understanding of the etymology of the word, though it is still far from clear how the earliest Buddhists understood the original meaning and intent of the word. Joel Tatelman discusses the agricultural sense of *avadāna* as a term that “became identified with the central Buddhist doctrine of *karman*, the moral causality of volitional action, in which the deeds one ‘sows,’ performs, in a given birth, ‘bear fruit’ or are ‘harvested,’ produce their results, in subsequent births.”<sup>6</sup> Thus for Tatelman, following the etymology laid out by Speyer and others, *avadāna* came to “denote a karmically significant deed—good or evil—and, eventually, ‘one’s ‘harvest,’...a biography which depicts the workings of karma in the life of an individual or individuals.”<sup>7</sup>

This understanding of the term relates to the definition given by John Strong in his study of the *Aśokāvadāna*:

An *avadāna* is a narrative of the religious deeds of an individual and is primarily intended to illustrate the workings of karma and the values of faith and devotion. It can often be moralistic in tone, but at the same time there is no denying that it has certain entertainment value. The *avadānas* were and are still used by Buddhist preachers in popular sermons and as such have often been compared to the *jātakas* (stories of the Buddha’s previous lives). Unlike the *jātakas*, however, the main protagonist of the *avadāna* is usually not the Buddha himself, but a more ordinary individual, often a layman.<sup>8</sup>

Based off this definition, Strong discusses *avadāna* in terms of being a ‘karmic history’ or ‘karmic biography’ that describes how acts done in the past have created present conditions for an individual. As such, *avadānas* typically consist of a three part narrative structure to reflect the

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<sup>4</sup> Müller 1881, 50 fn. 183.

<sup>5</sup> Takahata 1954, xxi-xxiv.

<sup>6</sup> Tatelman 2000, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Tatelman 2000, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Strong 1983, 22.

relationship between past actions and future consequences. This tripartite structure consists of (1) a story of the present that establishes the current circumstance of the narrative actors, (2) a story of the past which describes the deed or action performed in the past that produces the present condition and (3) a juncture that links the actors of the past with their current births in the present. Not all *avadānas* follow this structure but it is a common convention of the genre as a whole, at least as seen in the Sanskrit sources that have received the most scholarly attention.

Strong's definition notes the correlation between *jātaka* and *avadāna* literature. The core criteria for determining the difference between a *jātaka* and *avadāna* narrative is whether the story is about a previous birth of the Buddha. Thus, if a story is recounting a previous birth of the Buddha it is technically considered a *jātaka*. If it recounts the previous life of anyone other than the Buddha it is considered an *avadāna*. As Reiko Ohnuma argues, based on the fundamental relationship of each genre, "*jātakas* can be seen as a subset of *avadānas*, and any *jātaka*, in theory, could be called an *avadāna* (while only some *avadānas* could be called *jātakas*)."<sup>9</sup> Thus while a *jātaka* could be considered an *avadāna*, not all *avadānas* are *jātakas*. With this relationship in mind, and for the purpose of clarity and ease of discussion throughout the dissertation, there will be no distinction made between *jātaka* and *avadāna*.

In the Chinese source material that will be discussed throughout this study there is no real distinction made between the two genres. Many of the stories that are recorded in each of the *avadāna* anthologies we will be looking at are technically *jātaka*, in that they deal with a previous birth of the Buddha, but they are in no way distinguished from the other narratives that are technically *avadānas*. That being the case, for the purpose of clarity and ease of discussion

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<sup>9</sup> Ohnuma 2007, 39.

throughout this dissertation I will make no distinction made between *jātaka* and *avadāna* as the source material does not make this distinction either.

Despite this understanding of the etymology of the *avadāna* in the Pāli and Sanskrit sources, it appears that the Chinese may have understood the term somewhat differently. They render the term *avadāna* as *piyu* 譬喻 which is best translated as “illustration,” “parable,” “simile,” or “metaphor.” This correlates closely with the way some Buddhist *śāstras* describe *avadāna* as a synonymous with *dr̥ṣṭānta* (“example”), *upamā* (“simile”), and *aupamyodāharaṇa* (“illustration by way of a simile”).<sup>10</sup> When we begin to look closely at *avadāna* sources translated into Chinese during the early medieval period we see that these narratives do not particularly fall in line with the traditional understanding of the genre as outlined above. Rarely do we find these narratives following the tripartite formal structure that is common for most Sanskrit *avadāna* narratives. And, though karma certainly plays an important role in these narratives, it is not at all clear that these stories are designed specifically to show the workings of karma or karmically significant acts. Indeed, it is often the case that the Chinese *avadānas* will explore a wide variety of themes and doctrines that are not traditionally understood as being within the scope of the *avadāna* genre found in South Asian sources. In addition, many of the Chinese translations of *avadāna* can be more reliably dated and most often predate the South Asian source material. It is for this reason, among others, that the Chinese translations can prove to be a valuable source in the study and understanding of *avadāna* literature and its uses in early Buddhism. With this basic understanding of the meaning of *avadāna* and the value of Chinese sources in understanding the genre we can now turn to the additional question of “why even

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<sup>10</sup> See Ohnuma 2007, 291, fn. 31.



study *avadāna* at all?” What value can the study of such narrative literature serve in our study of Buddhism?

### **Why Study Buddhist *Avadāna* Literature?**

It has been argued that a preponderance of the evidence used in the study of Buddhism is textual, at the expense of other equally viable sources of information.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, even with this preference towards textual evidence in Buddhist studies there is a further imbalance in favor of a particular *kind* of text that garners the majority of scholarly attention at the expense of other literary forms. Despite the attention given to Buddhist narrative literature by early Western scholars such as Éugene Burnouf, Sylvain Levi, and others, the dominant trend in Buddhist studies has been to almost universally focus on the philosophical and doctrinal texts at the expense of the voluminous story literature of the tradition. Such an imbalance has not gone unnoticed by contemporary scholars who offer their own interpretation of this trend in Buddhist studies and have sought to correct this imbalance in their own work.

Charles Hallisey argues that it has been a standard practice in Buddhist Studies to portray:

sophisticated Buddhists as employing stories, including some that are not particularly ‘Buddhist,’ to communicate doctrines that the Buddhist *lumpen* could not otherwise understand. Hand in hand with this came the corollary that such stories, although intended as illustrations of Buddhist doctrine, have frequently distorted it, and thus could never be taken as representative of ‘real’ Buddhist thought.... While there is also considerable evidence that raises important doubts about the general accuracy of this composite interpretive model, it is now so embedded in the general scholarly consensus about what constitutes proper Buddhist thought that it has become completely naturalized in the scholarly literature about Buddhism.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Schopen 1991, 1-23. Schopen argues that more attention should be given to the archaeological evidence that is available and more easily dated than the textual evidence. In addition, Schopen contends that due to the protestant influence in religious studies in the West Buddhist scholars have tended to over emphasize a certain kind of religious text above other forms of evidence.

<sup>12</sup> Hallisey 1996, 309.

Hallisey indicates that this “two-tiered sociology of knowledge” between the Buddhist elite and the simple masses has been exposed and openly questioned by many scholars of Buddhism, including those who are doing work in *avadāna* and *jātaka* studies. Thus Hallisey quotes from John Strong that:

The volumes of the Pali canon which neatly line the shelves of buddhologists in the West are generally not found in the bookcases of Buddhists in Southeast Asia. What is there is mostly “extracanonical”: *jātakas* (stories of previous lives of the Buddha), collections of legends from the commentaries, tales of the adventures of saints, accounts of other worlds, anisamsas (stories extolling the advantages of merit making), ritual manuals, anthologies of sermons, secular tales, historical chronicles, grammars and primers. For most Buddhists, these are the sources that are read and repeated, the texts that best illustrate the Buddha’s teachings.<sup>13</sup>

Hallisey continues along this trajectory by quoting other well-known scholars that all argue that Buddhist story literature has been relegated as unimportant folktales despite the fact that one primarily learns to be Buddhist through listening to the many stories that are told from the tradition over and over again. As a result of this relative neglect of Buddhist narrative literature, Hallisey concludes that contemporary scholars find themselves in the position of having to ask, as if for the first time after years of productive scholarship, “what did Buddhists learn from their stories and how did they learn from them?”<sup>14</sup>

Steven Collins echoes this same sentiment and highlights the potential that the study of Buddhist narrative literature offers to contemporary scholars. Collins notes that, “it is, surely, no more than common sense to recognize that people react to problems, ideas and events by telling stories about them.... In the study of Hinduism, it would hardly be novel to insist on the fact that narratives are just as important as doctrinal or philosophical texts to our understanding of its

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<sup>13</sup> Strong 1992, xi quoted by Hallisey 1996, 310.

<sup>14</sup> Hallisey 1996, 310.

intellectual history, as well as of its cultural and religious history more generally.... In the study of Buddhism, however, this suggestion might still appear to be something new. Although in the early days of the modern academic study of Buddhism many narrative texts were made known, since that time there has been little serious work on Buddhist stories beyond the vital task, still scarcely begun, of providing editions and translations of them.”<sup>15</sup>

This challenge to pay closer attention to Buddhist narrative literature is being taken up by a number of scholars. Andrew Skilton investigates versions of the *Kṣāntivādinavadāna* to better understand issues of concern in the development of early Mahāyāna thought. Skilton argues that the different versions of this particular *avadāna* might reflect “a certain kind of religiosity and maybe even a different kind of community.” Thus the narrative literature holds particular value “for illuminating historical problems that are often construed largely in doctrinal terms.”<sup>16</sup> Additionally scholars such as Reiko Ohnuma, Joel Tatelman, Naomi Appleton, and many others are continuing to pursue the study of Buddhist *avadāna* and *jātaka* literature in order to better understand the social and doctrinal developments of the Buddhism in the South Asian context.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, with this new surge of scholarly interest and attention paid to Buddhist narrative literature there is still a large body of evidence that has been left relatively ignored by most scholars: the Chinese collectanea. This dissertation seeks to address this deficiency and complement the previous work that has been done in Buddhist *avadāna* literature.

The value of stories as a medium of religious instruction is highlighted in the work of Kirin Narayan and her study of storytelling in contemporary Indian society. Narayan argues that

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<sup>15</sup> Collins 1998, 121.

<sup>16</sup> Skilton 2002, 136.

<sup>17</sup> See Ohnuma 2007, Tatelman, 2000, and Appleton 2010 for examples of contemporary scholarship on *jātaka* and *avadāna* studies and Buddhist narrative literature. In addition to the study of the literature, much attention has been paid to the artistic representation of these stories as well. For some insight into the art historical aspects of *avadāna* studies see Dehejia 1990; Dehejia 1997; Abe 2002; Ahir 2000; and Brown 1997.

“while enjoying a story and imaginatively participating in its progress, listeners’ minds are made pliable to its moral thrust. As the stories become incorporated into listeners’ visions of the world, religious belief is bound up with the course of action the morals prescribe.”<sup>18</sup> Thus stories are used to teach, not just doctrine and theology in the religious context, but also the way to live life, how to function within a society, what things are of value, and how to interact with others. Stories form an important element in the creation of identity, both of the individual and the religious community. We are living narratives, the product of the stories we tell ourselves and each other. In this way, stories provide a sense of what to value and what to spurn. They offer a model for the reader to follow, and by so doing they create a community of likeminded individuals.

Thus, stories don’t just teach us how to act but also how we are to exist and interact with others. Stories can provide answers to the underlying anxieties of human existence and offer clues as to the social context and historical setting in which the narratives were used to address specific issues of concern. As Hans-Georg Gadamer argues, “we can understand a text only when we understand the question to which it is an answer.”<sup>19</sup> When viewed this way, the narrative form which is virtually ubiquitous in all religions traditions (the parables of Jesus, the legends of Hinduism, the stories recounted by the Buddha) provides insight into the questions that were of ultimate concern to the religious communities that employed such stories as an answer.

Based upon this view of story literature, this dissertation has two related goals: to investigate what the Chinese translations can tell us about the function of *avadāna* literature in Buddhist practice; and to see what *avadāna* literature can tell us about the Buddhists who

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<sup>18</sup> Narayan 1989, 244.

<sup>19</sup> Gadamer [1975] 2004, 363.

translated and compiled them. The argument of this dissertation is quite simple: the translation and compilation of *avadāna* narratives into anthologies offers clues about the context in which such anthologies were created, which in turn highlights the different concerns of various Buddhist communities and reflects alternate idioms of Buddhism in early medieval China. As translations, these narratives offer a window into both the world of the Indic society in which they were initially composed as well as the Chinese society which collected and translated them.

### **The Two *Avadāna* Anthologies Used for this Study**

*Avadānas* taken from two Chinese anthologies will be used throughout this dissertation and will serve as primary examples for the discussion. Chapter three in particular will provide a detailed study of the thematic content of the anthologies on a broader scale. The *Za piyu jing* 雜譬喻經 (*ZPYJ*) and the *Zhong jing xuan za piyu* 眾經撰雜譬喻 (*ZJXZPY*) are two of a small handful of *avadāna* anthologies found in the *Taishō* edition of the Buddhist canon.<sup>20</sup> Both texts claim to be compiled (集) by the monk Dao Lüe (道略), and the *ZJXZPY* also claims to be a translation of the famous monk Kumārajīva (344 C.E. to 409 or 413 CE).<sup>21</sup> The *ZPYJ* contains a total of forty different narratives in one volume and the *ZJXZPY* contains forty-seven narratives in two volumes. There are nine narratives shared between the two collections. Chapter three will discuss the relationship between the two anthologies in more detail.

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<sup>20</sup> For the *ZPYJ* see T 207 and for the *ZJXZPY* see T 208.

<sup>21</sup> I have found no record or information on Dao Lüe outside the brief references found in several of the early Chinese catalogues listing him as the compiler of this particular *avadāna* collection. For more information on Kumarajiva see Zürcher [1959] 1972, 226-227 and 246-249; Ch'en 1964, 81-83 and 367-371; Tsukamoto 1985, 2:869-887; Sharma 2011; and Pelliot 2002, 1-19. Yang Lu offers an interesting approach to reading Kumārajīva's biography and provides information on the most relevant modern Japanese scholarship on Kumārajīva. See Lu 2004.

In the early twentieth century, the French scholar Édouard Chavannes translated five hundred *jātaka* and *avadāna* tales from the Chinese into French, including both these anthologies in full. Chavannes argues that both anthologies are in all likelihood revisions of an earlier collection that was compiled by Dao Lüe from among Kumārajīva's translation. This compilation was then subject to numerous changes at the hands of subsequent editors and thus we are left with two very different editions of an earlier anthology.<sup>22</sup>

The earliest record we have of the *ZPYJ* is found in the *Chu san zang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (*CSZJJ*), the earliest extant Chinese catalog of Buddhist literature compiled by Sengyou in the early sixth century C.E. (ca. 515). It lists the *ZPYJ* as a translation of Kumārajīva with the monk Dao Lüe as compiler.<sup>23</sup> So we know that some text by this name and attribution must have been in circulation in China sometime before the early sixth century CE. The *Zhong jing mu lu* 眾經目錄, compiled by Fajing in 594 C.E., preserves the same basic information. In the *Li dai san bao ji* 歷代三寶集, compiled by Fei Changfang three years later in 597 CE, additional information is listed in relation to the text, which includes the date of translation as November 405 CE.<sup>24</sup> This date is probably suspect. Kyoko Tokuno, in her study of the early Chinese Buddhist catalogues, notes that many of Fei's contemporaries, as well as most modern scholars, believe that some of the ascriptions in this catalogue were arbitrary. Tokuno notes that it is unlikely he had access to more information than previous catalogues, including the *Zhong jing mu lu* compiled just three years previous and to which he was a likely contributor. Additionally, there are other discrepancies in his methodology and internal inconsistencies between sections

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<sup>22</sup> See Chavannes 1910-1934, 2:1-2 for Chavannes' discussion of the dating and relationship between these two anthologies.

<sup>23</sup> See T 2145, 55: 11a.15. For an excellent discussion on the *CSZJJ* and other catalogues that will be referenced through this section see Tokuno 1990, 31-74.

<sup>24</sup> See T 2034, 49: 78b.4.

within the catalogue that call the reliability of the catalogue into question. None of the other catalogues provide any significant additional information. The *ZJXZPY* is not listed in any catalogues found in the *Taishō* edition and therefore it appears nearly impossible to determine when it was compiled into the form that we have now.

## **Chapter 1 Overview**

Chapter one will begin with a brief overview of recent developments in the scholarship on *avadāna* literature in Buddhist studies. This is designed to show the trends in scholarship that have developed in the past decade partly based on new source material from Central Asia that has come to light in recent years. We will see how the discovery of an *avadāna* collection from Gandhāra (modern day northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan) provides us with the earliest textual evidence of this type of literature, dating to roughly the first century CE, and sheds new light on how this material may have been understood during the time period. We will also investigate the role that *avadāna* narratives may have played in the transmission of Buddhism along trade and social networks throughout South and Central Asia. And finally, we will follow one scholar as he traces the development of a particular narrative across South Asia into China and Japan to show how the variations indicate different social and religious functions the narrative might have served for Buddhists in different regions and at different times.

After this review, the remainder of the chapter is dedicated to the study of a particular narrative in light of the aesthetics of humor developed in Indian literature. This is designed to show that *avadāna* narratives can constitute complex and sophisticated literature, contrary to the assumption that it is a simple and simple-minded literary form. In addition it will offer a preliminary glimpse of the function of *avadāna* and help us to better understand the socio-

cultural context in which such stories were created and shared with a particular audience in mind. Through a combination of understanding the aesthetics of humor and developing theories of the role humor can play in a social setting I argue that we can begin to understand the sort of community and audience such humor was attempting to address.

## **Chapter 2 Overview**

Chapter two continues to address the questions of audience and community, and establishes a context for the rhetorical function of *avadāna* literature through developments in modern literary theory. This chapter constitutes an attempt to develop a theoretical and methodological approach to the study of *avadāna*, taking into account developments in narrative theory, reader-response criticism, and reception studies. In particular we will explore the ideas established by Seymour Chatman on the difference between what he terms *story* and *discourse* as a means to establish the notion of the implied reader of a given narrative. Chatman argues that the way in which a narrative operates on the *story* level, the plot and sequence of events in narrative, and the *discourse* level, the way in which the events are presented so as to produce meaning for the audience, provides clues to the implied reader for a given narrative. This affords us a view of the kind of audience the author of a given narrative was attempting to address through the telling of the story.

The work of Stanley Fish and his concept of the interpretive community developed in reader-response criticism presents a method to contextualize an implied reader within a community that interprets a text within a given framework. Fish argues that the meaning of a narrative is found within the reader rather than within the text—that as a reader responds to the events presented in a narrative meaning is produced. Thus, meaning is found in the act of reading



a narrative and not in the narrative itself. Nevertheless, to avoid the danger of relativism, where any narrative can mean anything depending on the way a reader responds to it, Fish establishes the notion of the interpretive community. The interpretive community is the social setting and cultural context in which a reader resides that sets boundaries to the ways in which an implied reader might be able to respond to a given narrative and derive meaning from it. Every reader, whether implicitly or explicitly, is part of an interpretive community that aids in the understanding and production of meaning in the act of reading. Likewise a text, and the reading of a text, influences the development of the interpretive community and the form of understanding that a text can allow a community to develop. Thus a text and an interpretive community are in a reciprocal relationship where each influences the shape the development of the other.

Finally, Roger Chartier's approach to reception theory and the role that a text's physical form and organization plays in the production of meaning and interpretation sets a groundwork for our consideration of the *avadāna* anthologies found in the Chinese source material. Chartier argues that the relationship between the reader, the interpretive community, and the actual physical form of what is being read (or alternatively heard in an oral setting) influences the interpretation and understanding of a text. By looking at the way in which a narrative is packaged and presented to an audience we may also be able to understand the rhetorical function the text is attempting to serve, and understanding the function of a text will offer clues as to the social context in which such a text was produced.

### Chapter 3 Overview

In the final chapter we will follow up on Chartier's notion of organization and presentation of a text as a method for understanding the concerns that the authors or compilers of the text are seeking to address. This will provide insight into the characteristics of the socio-cultural context in which such texts were created to address those concerns. We will do this by focusing on the textual form in which the overwhelming majority of Chinese *avadāna* literature is found: the anthology. Chartier argues that the meaning of a work is not just in the words but in the packaging and presentation of the words as well. What the anthology offers us is a particular way of packaging and presenting words to the reader. The anthology is an artificial and deliberate repackaging of pre-existing words arranged, and sometimes edited, into a new configuration. It is the very ordering, rearranging, editing, and re-presenting of earlier texts that illuminates the interpretive community and presents a particular kind of *discourse* with minimal alteration of the *story* of a given text. Thus, an anthology offers insight into the *discourse* of a text in ways that other kinds of writings can't.

This chapter will present a brief introduction to the theory of the anthology which has only recently begun to emerge in the fields of religious and literary studies. It will then explore the role anthology plays in the preservation and transmission of Buddhist *avadāna* in general, followed by a detailed discussion of two distinct but interrelated anthologies of *avadāna* narratives found in the Chinese canon. By detailing the similarities and differences between these two anthologies I will argue that they indicate the existence of distinct interpretive communities that represent separate idioms of Buddhism available in early medieval China. Utilizing such an approach will show the value of Chinese *avadāna* in the contextualization of Buddhism in the early medieval period and expand our understanding of this genre of Buddhist literature.

## CHAPTER 1

### DECEPTIVE APPEARANCES: BUDDHIST *AVADĀNAS* IN A SOCIAL CONTEXT

I can trick you into learning with a laugh

W. S. Gilbert, *Original Plays: Third Series* (1895, 276)

But this too is true: stories can save us.

Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (1990, 213)

#### Introduction

*Avadāna* narratives enjoyed a fair amount of attention in the early years of Buddhist scholarship in the West. Eugène Burnouf, in his pioneering (though sadly overlooked) work *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien*, presents the first Western translations of a number of *avadāna* tales as well as the initial analysis of the genre within the larger context of Buddhist literature as a whole.<sup>25</sup> Léon Feer also devoted a large portion of his scholarly activity toward the study of *avadāna* narratives. He produced a complete French translation of the *Avadānaśataka* (*The Hundred Avadānas*, hereafter *Avś*) along with numerous shorter studies of various *avadāna* narratives.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Feer is the first to offer a standard general definition of *avadāna* literature. He defines *avadāna* as a narrative that explains the karmic connection between past actions and current events that is narrated by the Buddha. According to Feer an *avadāna* consists of four parts: and introduction describing the scene, a story of the present, a story of the past, and a

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<sup>25</sup> See Burnouf [1844] 1876, 209-390. For a recent English translation of this work including numerous translations of *avadānas* from various sources including the *Divyāvadāna* (*Divy*) and *Avś*, see Burnouf 2010, 247-409.

<sup>26</sup> See Feer [1891] 1979.

conclusion that connects the actors of the past with their present reincarnations and states the moral of the tale.<sup>27</sup>

This analysis of *avadānas* as didactic moral literature presented in a fairly rigid formal structure has remained at the foundation, consciously and unconsciously, of how scholars have treated this literature to this day.<sup>28</sup> The work of both these pioneering scholars provides us with some of the earliest translated Buddhist literature in the West, and the type of literature they regularly chose to present, though by no means exclusively, were *avadānas*.

While the study of *avadāna* literature has always played a role in Buddhist studies since the early work of Burnouf and Feer, it has largely been overshadowed by a strong preference among scholars towards doctrinal and philosophical texts.<sup>29</sup> Often, these narratives were seen as not belonging “to the higher regions of Buddhist teaching,” and viewed as “unworthy of ranging with the other sacred utterances of the Teacher dealing with points of the Lore” and thus relegated to a “subordinate place.”<sup>30</sup> In more recent times *avadāna* literature is enjoying somewhat of a renaissance in scholarly attention. John Strong has played an influential role in

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<sup>27</sup> Feer [1891] 1979, xi. Une instruction destiné à rendre palpable le lien qui rattache les événements de la vie présente aux actes accomplis dans des existences antérieures, le présent étant considéré comme le produit du passé. Ainsi tout Avadāna se compose essentiellement de deux récits : le récit d'un événement actuel, -le récit d'un événement passé qui l'a déterminé. Ce second récit, qui exige une connaissance complète des choses d'autrefois, ne peut pas être fait par le premier venu. Il n'y a que ce Buddha omniscient qui puisse évoquer de tels souvenirs ; et, comme ce Buddha est essentiellement un docteur, l'explication qu'il donne est nécessairement suivie d'une leçon, d'un précepte, d'une instruction appropriée, qui répond à la morale de nos fables. Un Avadāna se compose donc de ces quatre parties : 1<sup>o</sup> un préambule, qui exalte plus ou moins le Buddha en faisant connaître le lieu de sa résidence ; 2<sup>o</sup> un récit du temps présent, fait par un narrateur quelconque ; 3<sup>o</sup> un récit du temps passé, expliquant le récit du temps présent et fait par le Buddha ; 4<sup>o</sup> une conclusion, qui est le précepte donné par le Buddha à l'occasion des faits dont il vient d'être témoin et des souvenirs qu'il vient de rappeler. See the discussion on this passage in Lenz 2010, 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> See for example Tatelman 2004, 36-37 where he discusses the formulaic structure of *avadāna* as outlined by Feer, though without directly citing him. A similar representation of *avadāna* can be found in Iwamoto 1978, 41-44 and Strong 1985. Also see Ohnuma's analysis of *avadāna* in Ohnuma 2007, 35-39 where she cites Burnouf and Feer among many others in her discussion.

<sup>29</sup> See de Jong 1987 for an overview of Buddhist studies in the West.

<sup>30</sup> Speyer [1902] 1958, v. This preface to Speyer's edition of the *Avś* provides a wealth of information on the text and *avadāna* literature. It also provides insight into the typical way in which *avadāna* literature was categorized and treated in comparison to other Buddhist texts and genres and reinforces the previous formulaic and subordinate status of this type of literature in Western scholarship.

this revitalized interest with his study and translation of the *Aśokāvadāna* and subsequent work linking *avadāna* literature with the cult of Upagupta and relic worship. Strong has been followed by a number of scholars including Jonathan Walters, Reiko Ohnuma, Joel Tatelman, and others, each providing their own nuanced approach to *avadāna* studies.<sup>31</sup> In particular both Ohnuma and Tatelman have endeavored to approach these narratives through the lens of literary and genre theory in an attempt to treat them as more than formulaic didactic tales and to more fully elucidate their role in early Indian Buddhism.

What we find in much of the Western scholarship on *avadāna* is an attempt to further nuance the definition of the genre and delineate the various styles and functions between *avadāna*, *jātaka*, and other related texts and narratives. For the most part, this emphasis on the literary aspects of *avadāna* has focused upon internal and formal components rather than the broader context in which these narratives (in various forms) are found. Indeed, most recent *avadāna* scholarship has primarily focused on issues of genre—questions dealing with internal literary and intertextual concerns—and has been almost exclusively based on a relatively small number of interrelated Sanskrit texts.

Timothy Lenz, in his study of a recently discovered collection of *avadānas* from Gandhāra dating to the first century C.E., takes note of this general trajectory in *avadāna* studies and problematizes it by noting that these “Gāndhārī *avadānas* cannot be placed comfortably into a “standard” *avadāna* package.”<sup>32</sup> He continues by noting that typically many of the Gandhāran *avadānas* fall outside the general definitions and characterizations of this literature as presented

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<sup>31</sup> See Strong 1983; Walters 1997; Tatelman 2000, 4-10; Ohnuma 1997, 22-64; and Ohnuma 2007, 26-50.

<sup>32</sup> Lenz 2010, 6. See also Lenz’s discussion of *pūrvayoga* (previous birth stories) in Gandhāran sources and their relationship to *avadāna* literature in Lenz 2003, 92-110.

in modern Buddhist scholarship. In my own readings of various Chinese *avadānas* I am inclined to say that the same holds true of the Chinese materials as well.

*Avadāna* scholarship has generally been inward looking, focusing on what is read and not on who is doing the reading or the context in which the reading occurs. Is it possible to shift perspectives slightly? To shift the focus away from the narrative just enough to catch a glimpse of the world that encircles the story in order to see who might have collected and read these stories and why? The most recent scholarship on Buddhist story literature indicates that not only is this possible, but that it is the next logical step. Preliminary studies are encouraging in their results. A brief survey of the recent work of Naomi Appleton, Michael Radich, and Jason Neelis add credence to Lenz's critique of previous *avadāna* scholarship as they look to understand the literature in its social, historical, and cultural context. This is not to say that further discussion and study of *avadāna* in light of genre theory is of no value. Rather, by expanding our understanding of the context surrounding Buddhist *avadānas* we may come to a new insight into the genre.

Naomi Appleton works on *jātaka* narratives, stories recounting the Buddha's previous births. As she and numerous scholars before her have noted, "the genres [of *jātaka* and *avadāna*] overlap, rather than being in opposition. It is possible for a story to be both a *jātaka* and an *avadāna*."<sup>33</sup> Considering this to be a case, I find that her comments and work on *jātakas* to be directly relevant to the study of *avadāna* literature as well. Of particular importance is her critique of the prioritization of the "formal aspects of *jātakas*, over and above their ideological features."<sup>34</sup> While Appleton acknowledges that the earlier studies of the formal features of *jātaka* were a necessary and valuable "springboard," she now seeks to move forward, arguing that "an

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<sup>33</sup> Appleton 2010, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Appleton 2010, 6.

understanding of the history or structure of a text is very different to an understanding of the history or pattern of a text's influence on a community or religious tradition."<sup>35</sup> For this reason Appleton argues for the need to treat these stories within their "textual and societal context."<sup>36</sup>

Appleton seeks to understand the relationship between the biography of the bodhisatta (bodhisattva) and *jātaka* literature. She argues that this literature is rather more complex and dynamic than the simple moral and didactic label that is so often placed upon it. Her study shows that the *jātaka* story literature underwent numerous developments and was placed within a wide variety of contexts. She concludes that these stories operated on two levels: the first demonstrates the magnificence of the Buddha and his teachings (operating as part of the sacred and cosmic biography of the Buddha), and the second provides Buddhists with a means of sharing in that biography. Thus she argues that *jātakas* can serve both as an example, as well as an icon or object of worship, and can operate on a variety of levels in different contexts.<sup>37</sup>

Jason Neelis's recent book on Buddhist transmission and trade networks takes a different approach towards *avadāna* than Appleton. Neelis is attempting to understand how this literature operated in the broader contextual setting of merchant mobilization into regions outside of India proper. He argues that "Buddhist transmission...was symbiotically related to parallel processes of commercial and cultural exchanges."<sup>38</sup> One of the ways in which this process of cultural exchange can be traced is through an evaluation of the differences that occur across the wide variety of *avadāna* narratives; and then to question "why Buddhist authors and transmitters chose to feature particular narratives and individuals."<sup>39</sup> Although coming to definitive conclusions about the "imagined audiences" and various cultural and social forces at work in

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<sup>35</sup> Appleton 2010, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Appleton 2010, 10; see pp. 1-19 for the full discussion on this issue.

<sup>37</sup> Appleton 2010, 147-157.

<sup>38</sup> Neelis 2011, 1-2.

<sup>39</sup> Neelis 2011, 47.

shaping the texts is difficult, Neelis argues that such efforts will help to “reveal links between Buddhist intellectual networks” and help scholars to find “common patterns of cross-cultural transmission.”<sup>40</sup>

Neelis investigates the relationship between early Buddhist transmission and trade networks in the Northwest borderlands of South Asia. He notes that a feature of Gandhāran *avadāna* texts and artistic representations is to domesticate Buddhist narratives to regional places and characters. These narratives are often modified to incorporate place names and important political figures as a Buddhist strategy to “establish a locative connection between Gandhāra and the Bodhisattvas, Śakyamuni Buddha, and prominent figures within the Buddhist tradition.”<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the inclusion of such contemporary historical figures was also likely intended “to acknowledge their religious patronage and appeal to a regional audience.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Neelis also notes that many of the *avadāna* narratives most often represented at various junctions along trade routes emphasize the relationship of the Buddha and Buddhism with the merchant class. Neelis argues that merchants played significant roles as patrons and agents of transmission as is reflected in the narrative literature and artistic representations that “indicate Buddhist efforts to make special appeals to affinities with these groups of potential patrons...and amply demonstrate a strong nexus between Buddhist institutions and economic networks.”<sup>43</sup> While *avadāna* literature only represents a small portion of the evidence that Neelis presents in his overall argument, it is significant for our purposes because it is one of the few attempts to use this literature to illuminate the socio-cultural context of Buddhism outside of India proper during the first few centuries of the Common Era.

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<sup>40</sup> Neelis 2011, 48.

<sup>41</sup> Neelis 2011, 254.

<sup>42</sup> Neelis 2011, 255.

<sup>43</sup> Neelis 2011, 316.



In a similar manner, Michael Radich traces the development and variation of the Ajātaśatru narrative across multiple sources from classical India to modern Japan. While the Ajātaśatru narrative is not specifically an *avadāna* (or even a *jātaka*) it is still a popular Buddhist story found in a wide variety of sources, and elements of which are also included in certain *avadāna* collections. Radich argues that this story “was highly plastic and underwent constant further development in many of the texts in which it appears,” and that “great variety was the norm, not the exception” for this particular narrative throughout Buddhist literature in both India and China.<sup>44</sup> Not only was there great variety within the Buddhist tradition, but Radich also seeks to show that “traditions we ordinarily think of as quite widely separated from one another were sharing material and/or drawing on common sources.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, Radich indicates that our sparse understanding of the extremely complex relationship between various versions of this narrative “points to the likelihood that our extant evidence represents merely the scattered fragments, which have endured by chance, of a once much fuller tradition.”<sup>46</sup>

Radich envisions the Ajātaśatru narrative as “a loose set of plastic raw materials for creative elaboration, or as a frame upon which innovative ornaments could be hung.”<sup>47</sup> He continues along this line of reasoning to show that “transformations evinced by the narrative are most likely the product of complex sets of plural factors...quite extrinsic to the concerns explicitly addressed at the level of the surface of the narrative itself.”<sup>48</sup> The narratives therefore carry with them the imprint of historical and cultural forces as they travel through different regions and cultures at various times in history. This being the case, Radich concludes that by tracing variations in narrative ‘families’ in connection with their broader historical context “it

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<sup>44</sup> Radich 2011, 31-32.

<sup>45</sup> Radich 2011, 32.

<sup>46</sup> Radich 2011, 73.

<sup>47</sup> Radich 2011, 103.

<sup>48</sup> Radich 2011, 131.

may be possible in some degree to ‘read’ those forces off from the imprints they leave in the malleable material of the narrative itself.”<sup>49</sup>

Radich’s specific concern is to show the development of this narrative in relation to its use in modern psychological theory on the Oedipal complex and the notion of Japanese exceptionalism. Radich’s work shows that there is much more to the role this narrative has played in various developments in Japanese psycho-analytic theory and that the way in which this narrative was manipulated and changed at the hands of various scholars is not unique to the modern era, but has been the standard *modus operandi* throughout history. With this being the case, his work offers us a template for approaching other narratives in order to illuminate the socio-cultural contexts in which these stories were manipulated and changed for different ends according to the needs of their authors and collectors.

While these scholars represent a shift in theoretical approaches and concerns with this literature in their individual work, they are also primarily dealing only with Sanskrit and Pāli versions of *avadāna* narratives (with the exception of Radich just discussed). There is, of course, nothing wrong with this except in so far as the study of a limited number of highly stylized and interrelated Sanskrit *avadāna* anthologies has dominated the way all other *avadānas* are studied, if they are even studied at all. Indeed, with rare exceptions, the study of *avadāna* literature has been almost entirely focused on a few select Sanskrit and Pāli collections available to us with much less scholarly attention being directed toward other sources, particularly the Chinese materials. These Chinese texts represent rather extensive and comparatively early translations of Buddhist *avadāna* literature, some of which can be dated more accurately than the South Asian

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<sup>49</sup> Radich 2011, 134. An additional insight that Radich offers in his evaluation of the Ajātaśatrua narrative is in what he describes as the tension between the particular and universal. While he relates this most specifically to the use of this narrative vis-à-vis psychoanalytic theory and the Oedipus complex, I believe this tension is apt for our discussion of *avadāna* in general, particularly with the historical trend to adopt a generalized universal definition of the literature at the expense of comparing regional characteristics.

sources. The most significant exception to this neglect of Chinese *avadāna* sources is found in the French translation of 500 narratives from the Chinese by Édouard Chavannes published almost a hundred years ago. Little has been done since.<sup>50</sup>

This chapter is a first step in rectifying this neglect of the Chinese *avadāna* sources. I will show that despite the commonly held definition of *avadāna*, the Chinese sources show a literature that is more than simple didactic tales intended to show the workings of karma. I will do this by examining the way in which one specific tale utilizes humor and deception to illicit a specific reaction from the audience. I will also show how this rhetorical strategy helps contextualize our understanding of Buddhist communities within the broader socio-cultural milieu of early medieval China during the first few centuries of the Common Era. It is my intent that doing this will show the value that the Chinese source materials offer us in our study of Indian Buddhist literature, particularly in relation to *avadāna* narratives.

## **Humor in Indian Buddhist Literature**

One of the challenges in studying Chinese translations of Buddhist literature is in understanding the literary culture from which that literature was translated. Because the story we are studying in this chapter is a translation of a narrative that derives from the Indic world, we must first understand something of Indian poetics (and for our purposes here, Indian poetics of humor) before we can hope to understand the rhetorical strategy of the text in question. In addition we will also want to establish a general position on the social function humor plays in

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<sup>50</sup> Chavannes 1910-1934 is the single biggest contribution to the study of Chinese *avadāna* in Western scholarship. See also the contribution made by Bagchi [1945] 2011.

literature in order to begin to contextualize the narrative within a community of readers. To that end, we will make a brief diversion before attending to our story.

When a narrative incorporates comedic elements it is not doing so simply to entertain (though that is part of it); it is engaging in cultural commentary and social control. Yet seeking to understand the social commentary of humor is no easy task, especially when dealing with a foreign language and culture. Humor is, we might say, a very difficult subject to define.<sup>51</sup>

So how did classical Indians define humor? Lee Siegel, in presenting a detailed study of humor in classical Sanskrit literature, notes that early Indian aestheticians used the Sanskrit term *rasa* (meaning “flavor” or “taste”) as a metaphor to describe aesthetic experience. According to these early theorists basic emotions such as love, anger, fear, courage, and sadness carry a particular *rasa*, or ‘flavor,’ that can be produced through the literary or theatrical experience. Each ‘flavor’ is shaped by particular methods of representation and rhetorical ‘spices’ to bring about the desired taste for the audience to experience. The flavor of the comedic is a mood “which arises out of an opposition to, or parody of, any of the aesthetic flavors. It is realized through sentimental travesty, through the intentional failure or breakdown of one or more of the codified moods of art. The comic *rasa* is experienced when something tastes funny, when representations of the emotions of love, courage, or sadness fail to produce the corresponding and expected amorous, heroic, or tragic *rasas*.”<sup>52</sup> Thus actions that are incongruent with the expected response to a given situation provide the core ingredient for humor.

Gregory Schopen uses classical Indian notions of humor and trickery as a means of exploring texts that have traditionally been treated as neither very literary nor very humorous. Schopen has convincingly argued that the Buddhist *vinaya* or monastic literature be treated first

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<sup>51</sup> For the most comprehensive discussion of the topic of humor in Sanskrit literature see Siegel 1987.

<sup>52</sup> See Siegel 1987, 7-10.

and foremost as both ‘Indian’ and ‘literature’ rather than as simply a rule book governing the behavior of monks and nuns. That this type of literature has not been typically viewed as literary—let alone as entertaining and humorous—is perhaps no real surprise, given that the *vinaya* is primarily preoccupied with establishing an extensive list of regulations and precedents for the monastic order in contrast to the narrative sections Schopen focuses upon. Nevertheless, Schopen argues that we may well then rely upon established Indian aesthetics to explore the existence of the comedic within the literature. Specifically, Schopen shows how ‘learned’ monks are treated with disdain in a comedic manner because of the way in which they employ Buddhist doctrine for their own personal benefit.

Two primary elements in Indian aesthetic theory on the humorous that Schopen draws upon are the notion of incongruity and the stock character of the *vidūṣaka* or “buffoon.”<sup>53</sup> For traditional Indian rhetoricians, the comedic or humorous arises from situations of impropriety and incongruity. One laughs at things that shouldn’t happen or at things that don’t happen in the way one would expect them to; these are often not separate events. Frequently these elements of impropriety or incongruity are enveloped in the character of the “buffoon” or *vidūṣaka* who is typically presented as a character incorporating elements of extreme gluttony and sexual appetite and engaging in trickery and deception.

A simple example to illustrate this point should suffice. A story from the *vinaya* recounts how Upananda and other monks are invited to a monastery that has recently received a large donation from several merchants. In short order Upananda and his compatriots eat their way through the monastic resources until there is only a small portion remaining that is reserved for caring for the sick and therefore forbidden to be used for other purposes. Upananda, serving in

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<sup>53</sup> See Schopen 2007, 204-211 for a discussion of these elements.

the stock role of buffoon and trickster, cites a scriptural passage to convince his host that the remaining food should be consumed as well. In this way Upananda uses his knowledge of scripture to fill his gluttony at the expense of the monastic resources intended for the sick. Schopen argues that such a story relates the “incongruity between what an obviously learned *bhikṣu* [monk]...says, and the reason he says it, the incongruity between the citation of both formal doctrine and *sūtra* for the purpose of fooling an old *mahallaka* and filling his belly.”<sup>54</sup> In short, the monk Upananada in this, and various other episodes throughout the text, perfectly incorporates the stock characteristics of the buffoon and provides a link to the comedic as understood in classical Indian literature. Thus, this element of incongruity, often employed in the representation of the buffoon or trickster, acts as a primary means of conveying humor in a comedic situation.

For Schopen, one of the aspects of this humor, found in a text delineating the proper rules of decorum for monks, is to present ‘learned monks’ who “often quote text and ‘doctrine’” (typically to fulfill their own selfish appetites) as the butt of the joke. Yet one thing that Schopen does not do in his analysis is attempt to explain why a *vinaya* text would seek to display a ‘learned monk’ in such humorous light. Schopen’s intent is to show that established notions of humor do in fact exist within the *vinaya* text, and he leaves it at that. Yet, the question still remains: why would the authors of this text choose to represent learned monks as comedic fodder? What rhetorical force does such humor possess in this type of literature? Although the discussion and theorizing on the rhetorical and social function of humor is a long one and far too

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<sup>54</sup> Schopen 2007, 207.

complicated to adequately deal with here, there are several insights from its scholarly treatment that are worth our consideration.<sup>55</sup>

The sociologist William Martineau describes humor as acting either as a social lubricant designed to “initiate social interaction and to keep the machinery of interaction operating freely and smoothly,” or as an abrasive whereby such friction “may modify the character of the interaction.”<sup>56</sup> Operating under this premise, Martineau presents a model for analyzing the variety of possible social functions humor may serve based upon a framework of intragroup and intergroup structural settings. The three structural settings of humor are found operating (1) within a single group; (2) between two groups but with the focus on the internal structure of one group; and (3) between two groups with the focus on the interaction between the two in a reciprocal manner. Additionally, within these three group structures there are four variables of analysis: (1) the actor (who initiates the humor), (2) the audience (who is exposed to the humor), (3) the subject (who is the ‘butt’ of the humor), and (4) the judgment (is the humor disparaging or esteeming). According to Martineau, when these variables are taken into account in relation to their respective social structures then a variety of possible social functions of humor can be assessed.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, the French philosopher Henri Bergson defines humor “as first and foremost a means of correction.”<sup>58</sup> The situations or elements of actions that are comedic are the very actions or situations that society seeks to repress or modify and so it follows that laughter’s function is to “intimidate by humiliating.”<sup>59</sup> For Bergson, humor and comedy serve as social

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<sup>55</sup> For an introduction and overview of developments in the discussion and study of humor from the view of various disciplines see Martineau 1972, 99-114; Genova 2011; and Roedelein 2002.

<sup>56</sup> Martineau 1972, 103.

<sup>57</sup> See Martineau 1972, 114-124.

<sup>58</sup> Bergson 1911, 194.

<sup>59</sup> See Bergson 1911, 198. See also Sprigge 1988, 39-65.

correctives to maintain the status quo. Additionally, Bergson also allows that humor serves in the added capacity of disrupting mindless social behavior. That is, beyond simply acting as a social corrective, humor also can be used by various elements in society as a means of rebellion and social critique. Bergson argues that humor serves the dual function of enforcing certain socially accepted forms of behavior while also acting as a means of shocking one out of routine behavior to bring about social and self-reflective awareness. However, Bergson notes that this is accomplished only after the audience is led to identify and sympathize with the object of laughter.

In this respect there is a parallel between Bergson's notion of humor as a social corrective and Martineau's proposition that humor serves to maintain in-group conformity or social boundaries between groups. For Martineau, one of the functions of humor is to create an 'other' which can be the object of sympathy or derision and ultimately leads to solidifying a community's boundary in opposition to others that do not conform to the social roles defined by the group. Thus, for Martineau, humor is used specifically to identify and denounce any improper or incongruous behavior that the group is seeking to diminish or that contradicts established norms.<sup>60</sup> Such an interpretation fits well with Bergson's analysis of the function of the comedic as a means of social control while also, seemingly paradoxically, attempting to jolt people out of routine and mechanical behavior.

Schopen's analysis clearly shows that Buddhist writings have employed elements of the comedic as defined in Indian aesthetic theory via displays of a "buffoon" engaging in deception and incongruent actions. Martineau and Bergson offer us several possible explanations as to what rhetorical weight such humor attempts to serve. With these ideas in mind, let us now turn to an

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<sup>60</sup> For an interesting study that employs these aspects of both Bergson and Martineau, see John Clarke's recent book on visual humor in Roman art wherein he attempts to reconstruct the cultural context and social dimensions in which certain visual representations would be both humorous and meaningful. See Clarke 2007.



*avadāna* narrative where we may highlight the comedic elements and explore the possible rhetorical function such humor may serve. The following *avadāna* is the eighth story found in the *ZPYJ*.<sup>61</sup> As it is untitled I have dubbed it *Deceptive Appearances*.

### Deceptive Appearances

Formerly, in north India, there was a master carpenter who very skillfully created a woman out of wood whose beauty was without equal and when adorned with clothing looked no different from a real woman. Coming and going she was able to serve drinks and look after guests except she was unable to speak. Now, at this time in south India there was a master artist who was greatly skilled in painting. The master carpenter, hearing of him, prepared a delicious feast and invited the master artist for a visit. After the artist arrived, he then had the wooden girl serve drinks and provide food from dawn till dusk. The artist, unknowingly assuming it to be a real girl, greatly desired her and couldn't get her out of his thoughts.

Then with the setting sun the carpenter turned in for the evening and requested that the artist might stay for the night. He placed the wooden girl at his side to attend him then said to his guest, "I deliberately left the girl so that you could spend the night together." After the host left, the wooden girl stood at the edge of the lamp light. The guest called to her yet she did not come closer. The guest thought the girl didn't come because she was shy, so he drew closer and pulled her by the hand and then, finally, realized it was wooden. Now, being humiliated, he thought to himself, "My host has deceived me. I should repay the favor." Thereupon the artist employed a stratagem.<sup>62</sup> He painted his own image upon the wall which was exact in appearance and dress and with a rope tied around his neck to appear as if he had hung himself. He painted a fly and bird perched on him pecking at his mouth. After finishing he closed the door and hid under the bed.

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<sup>61</sup> T 207, 4: 523c.29-524a.20, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 8.

<sup>62</sup> The Chinese word which I have translated as 'strategem' is *fangbian* (方便). This is Kumārajīva's standard translation for the Sanskrit *upāyakaśālyā*, a Buddhist technical term referencing a Buddha or bodhisattva's capacity to teach certain truths or employ various stratagems in a manner that will best help the listener to achieve enlightenment. However, the difficulty is in understanding this term in this context since the normative use of this phrase is in reference to the Buddha's particular insight and ability to awaken people to the very truth of their existence as impermanent beings bound by karma and thereby in need of liberation. This will be discussed in further detail later on. See Pye [1978] 2003, 1-17 for a discussion of Kumārajīva's use of this term and how it is particularly employed in Chinese sources.

At dawn the host arose, he noticed the door was still unopened then he peered inside and only saw the image of his dead guest hanging on the wall. The host, terrified, thought he was really dead. He then broke down the door and entered to cut the rope with a knife. At this the artist came out from under the bed. The carpenter was greatly ashamed. Then the painter said, “You were able to deceive me, and I was able to deceive you.” The passions of the guest and host disappeared and no longer burdened them. The two men said one to the other, “People of the world deceive each other, what else is there than this?” Then both men, producing faith and understanding deception, each abandoned all they held dear, left the householder life and cultivated the Dharma.

Given our earlier discussion on the comedic elements found in Indian aesthetic theory, let us briefly explore aspects of this narrative to see if they match up with the categories we would expect to find to make such a story humorous in Indian literature. Again, the two primary elements we are looking to find are incongruity and deception, especially in relation to the character of the *vidūṣaka* or “buffoon.”

We will start in the middle with the artist’s amorous advances towards the wooden girl carved by the carpenter. The theme of the artist’s lustful thoughts towards a nonhuman, though cleverly designed, contraption is playing with a well-known motif in Buddhist discourses on gender and sexuality. The presentation of the artist’s desire for an inanimate object echoes elements of the practice of *aśubha-bhāvanā*, or foulness meditation. This practice encourages monks to meditate upon the various stages of decomposition of a female corpse in the charnel grounds as a cure for sexual appetites. The point of such a practice is to systematically break down the human body into its various constituent parts and thereby deconstruct the ‘object’ of desire rendering it devoid of any permanent status and eliminating attachments to it as an object of desire and lust.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> For a discussion of Buddhist attitudes towards the female body, sexuality and meditation on foulness see Wilson 1996.

In the case of this narrative we find the author playing with the concept of impermanence and desire, only instead of desiring a living being that ultimately will breakdown and decompose into various impure components, the artist makes the mistake (and in this context the humorous error) of desiring an inanimate object that only has the appearance of a female body. The painter's desire for a piece of wood is conceptually equal to any other man's lust for any other woman, not because they are constitutionally identical, but because the desire is generated by similarly false conceptions.

This interpretation of the narrative's intent to display the folly of desire due to ignorance is supported by another version of this narrative found in the Tocharian *Puṇyavantajātaka*.<sup>64</sup> This narrative opens with a warning that even if a person possess a beautiful appearance they are still devoid of an inherent essence and are therefore like a carved figure or a painting. The moment when the artist is tempted by desire for the still unrecognized wooden carving created by the carpenter is greatly expanded in this version. It consists of a number of verses describing the folly of love, the danger of desire, and a protracted discussion on the impropriety of such an act because the artist is a guest in someone else's home. Ultimately the artist succumbs to his desire and approaches the wooden girl, who falls apart at his touch. The artist is then struck with the realization of the ugliness of passion and his ignorance to the truth that all living beings are devoid of an inherent essence.<sup>65</sup>

Additionally, as an interesting aside that further supports this interpretation, there is another possible allusion to this narrative found in the story of Subhā found in the

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<sup>64</sup> See Tamai 2012, 169-175. Tamai provides a transliteration of the Tocharian along with a preliminary translation.

<sup>65</sup> See Tamai 2012, 172-173 for a somewhat imperfect English translation of this episode.

*Therīgāthā*.<sup>66</sup> This narrative recounts the story of the nun Subhā who is followed into the forest by a young man who is enamored with her beauty and attempts to convince her to come live with him. Subhā refutes his advances by giving a sermon on the foulness of the body and the ignorance of our true nature. Within her discussion she makes two references that seem to allude to the imagery we find in the narrative of *Deceptive Appearances*. She states:

For I've seen lovely wooden figurines, puppets,  
put together with cords and pegs,  
being made to dance about.  
When these cords and pegs are taken away,  
tossed aside, defaced, scattered,  
not to be found, broken into fragments,  
what will you set your mind and heart on there?

Just so these puny bodies do not exist without these things;  
since they don't exist without these things,  
what will you set your mind and heart on there?

Not as I have looked upon a little picture  
plastered on the wall with yellow pigment,  
not so have you looked upon this body;  
mere human judgment is worthless.<sup>67</sup>

The story concludes when Subhā pulls out her own eye and offers it to the young man in an attempt to both show the foulness of the human body and to cure him of his desire for her. The reference to the “wooden figurine” and the “picture plastered on the wall” seems to indicate that such examples were used to illustrate the folly of desire and the nature of human existence as devoid of any real essence. Both of these examples further reinforce our reading of this episode in *Deceptive Appearances*.

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<sup>66</sup> The following discussion relies upon Wilson 1996, 166-169. The Subhā narrative is also found in the *ZPYJ* and will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

<sup>67</sup> Wilson 1996, 167. I have relied upon Wilson's translation.

The true humor of this event in the narrative arises from the artist’s misperception of the reality of the situation—a reality the artist remains blissfully ignorant of while the audience is informed from the very beginning. Thus, the audience is in on the joke and comes to taste the flavor of the comedic as they anticipate the moment when this deception is revealed. As the author sets up this comedy of error, the underlying theme of the folly of sexual desire is highlighted by the unavoidable (and humorous) result of failed love.

The very fact that in the sentence leading up to the revelation of this desire the wooden girl spends the day waiting upon the artist, serving food and drink from dawn till dusk, complicates this desire as well. Does his sexual desire arise because of her beautiful form mentioned at the beginning of the narrative or is it a result of her ceaseless service in providing him with food and drink, thus filling his gluttony? The narrative leaves it somewhat ambiguous but it does serve us well to remember the role of the *vidūṣaka* that the master artist fills through the course of the narrative, even if in a slightly more subtle way than we find in other humorous Sanskrit texts. In connection with this portrait of the master painter as buffoon, Siegel mentions two particular traits of the *vidūṣaka* as being both gluttonous and insatiably amorous (though often with both desires left unfulfilled as part of the comedic outcome).<sup>68</sup> Yet, it is quite evident that the artist is both filling his gluttony for food as well as his sexual appetites, and all of this is made to be more humorous for the audience since it is only the artist himself who is “unknowingly considering *it* to be a real girl.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Siegel 1987, 199-205.

<sup>69</sup> *Bu zhi wei shi zhen nü* 不知謂是真女, see T 207, 4: 524a..5.

In addition to this notion of the gluttonous buffoon, we have the additional flavor of failed love. The painter, as described from the outset of the narrative, is infatuated with the wooden girl and clearly desires her. The audience observes this evolving scene with full knowledge of the artist's unavoidable failure in his pursuit of love. This is a primary means of conveying the comedic in literary and theatrical performance. Bharata, an early Indian aesthetician, notes that the comic arises out of and is done in mimicry of the amorous.<sup>70</sup> As Siegel notes, "The failure of love is the triumph of comedy."<sup>71</sup> So it is in the case of this narrative: the amorous intentions of the painter are doomed to inevitable failure due to the nature of the object of his desire. The 'failure of love' comes when he realizes that he has been tricked by the carpenter, leading to his own attempt at deception in retaliation.

This then brings us to another comic element to be found within the narrative, that of trickery and deception. We will see that there is an additional nuance added to this level of trickery in that there appears to be a potentially conscious addition of technical terminology to the comedic flavor of the text. This comes in the form of the term used to describe the painter devising a plan of retribution. The Chinese term used is *fangbian* (方便), which is Kumārajīva's standard translation of the Sanskrit *upāyakaūsalya*, often rendered into English as "skillful means." This term has particular reference to the Buddha's capacity to teach the Dharma to all variety of beings according to their needs. In particular the context often refers to the Buddha's capacity and willingness to use tricks as a means of setting people on the path to liberation. Indeed, we often find in

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<sup>70</sup> *Naṭyaśāstra* 6.39-40.

<sup>71</sup> See Siegel 1987, 10. Note specifically his discussion of Bharata's notions of the love and the comic throughout this entire section.

various *sūtras* and narratives the Buddha going to great lengths—even by means of deception—to teach others and ensure their spiritual growth.<sup>72</sup>

Such deception is seen as being a particularly important skill of the Buddha and bodhisattvas that allows them to teach ordinary beings about the true Dharma. Yet, in our narrative this same term is used in reference to one who is clearly not a Buddha or bodhisattva and does not have the best intentions in mind for the object of his deception. Rather, the deception is clearly intended as an act of retribution and revenge. Nevertheless, the final outcome of such a skillful stratagem does eventually lead to spiritual insight for both the carpenter and artist.

This unexpected, or at least seemingly unorthodox, use of a well-known technical term harkens back to one of the primary points brought up in Schopen's study of humor in the *vinaya* literature. Schopen clearly illustrates that one of the central facets of humor in several of the narratives was the representation of a learned monk using his knowledge of Buddhist scripture and doctrine for personal profit. The humor of those situations arose from the very act of employing doctrine and quoted scriptures towards unintended ends which are contextually incongruent with orthodox interpretations and standards. Similarly, when the artist decides to employ a 'skillful stratagem' to get retribution for being deceived, the audience is presented with a contradiction between how such a technical term is traditionally understood and how it is actually applied in this situation. Thus the expectation that arises with the term *fangbian* and the actuality of its application in the narrative creates a moment of contradiction and thereby produces a comedic effect.

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<sup>72</sup> For an in-depth discussion on this concept see Pye [1978] 2003.

Yet there is perhaps even more being conveyed by this notion of deception in the narrative. Sarah McClintock explores the literary character of the Buddha represented as a trickster.<sup>73</sup> She argues that deception and trickery are used in various Buddhist narratives to jolt people “from their habitual perceptions and...demonstrate through humor, surprise, and visual display what cannot be demonstrated through ordinary discourse.”<sup>74</sup> The trickster is represented in Indian aesthetic theory as a means of producing comedic flavor. Siegel notes that “through his lies, pranks, games, and jokes, turning the world upside down, the trickster...is the guardian of humor, prompting us to laugh at ourselves, to take nothing seriously, to realize that profundities are but vain inventions of desperate intelligence.”<sup>75</sup> The use of trickery or deception in matters of love allow the audience to laugh when they “see through deceptions” and are ‘in’ on the joke as one seeks to trick others in their quest to fulfill or inhibit another’s socially improper sexual desire.<sup>76</sup>

McClintock is directly concerned with showing how the portrayal of the Buddha as a trickster in various legends is used to challenge and negate “conventional social realities” while at the same time introducing new paradigms for engaging those same realities.<sup>77</sup> Her presentation of the Buddha as a compassionate trickster offers insight into how deception might also be operating in our own text. McClintock argues that the representation of the Buddha as trickster illuminates his paradoxical capacity to operate within conditioned reality without being trapped by the consequences of his actions.

Being in what McClintock terms the “liminal status as the embodiment of the

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<sup>73</sup> See McClintock 2011, 90-112.

<sup>74</sup> McClintock 2011, 93-94.

<sup>75</sup> Siegel 1987, 292.

<sup>76</sup> Siegel 1987, 13-18.

<sup>77</sup> See McClintock 2011, 99.



unconditioned state of *nirvāṇa*” allows the Buddha to operate in such a way as to “disrupt and destroy the ordinary perceptions that keep people trapped in the suffering of conditioned existence.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, one of the primary effects of presenting the Buddha as trickster is to “provoke startling transformations in his disciples’ ordinary perceptions of the nature of reality.”<sup>79</sup>

While the narrative under consideration does not involve the Buddha as a trickster, I believe the same principle is being applied. That is, through narrative representation of trickery and deception the false conception of reality and desire is exposed and the ultimate means of liberation through social withdrawal is promoted. The fact that this is often presented through comedic and humorous literary conventions may offer clues to the rhetorical function that such comedic representations are designed to serve in this context.

I would like to point out that this is not the only instance of humor and deception among the narratives found in the *ZPYJ* collection. Two brief illustrations from narratives found in the same anthology will help to establish a pattern in the rhetorical usage of humor and deception by the collector(s) of the *ZPYJ*. In a story found just before *Deceptive Appearances* we read of a monk who has been cast out of the monastery for violating the monastic code. Weeping and wailing, he is met by a local spirit and together the two devise a plan to trick the local village into giving their donations to the expelled monk rather than to the monastery from which he has been cast out. The spirit places the monk on his shoulder and, turning invisible, flies through the air over the village. This

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<sup>78</sup> McClintock 2011, 108-109.

<sup>79</sup> McClintock 2011, 109.

leads the villagers to believe that he was unjustly condemned and as a result present food offerings to the deceiving monk rather than to the monastic community.

This deception, however, ends poorly for the rogue monk, who plummets to his death after being dropped by the spirit when he flees from his superiors for fear of being caught in his deception. In this story the act of deception occurs when a monk feigns superior spiritual attainments in order to obtain donations. The end of the narrative makes the moral of the tale clear by stating that a practitioner should engage in self-cultivation and not rely upon the power of others.<sup>80</sup> In this case, the rhetoric of deception seems to function very differently from what we find in *Deceptive Appearances* in that this story is a warning against presenting false claims to superior spiritual attainments. Making such claims will lead to your downfall (literally, in the case of the monk in the story). The tale acts as a warning to those monks who might be tempted to rely on some other power or act of deception to present an aura of superiority in order to increase donations from the laity.

In a different vein we find another narrative in the collection humorously presenting deception in a positive light as a means of catching those who feign superior power and spiritual insight. In this version of the fairly well-known *Jyotiṣkāvadāna* we find a unique addition to the story.<sup>81</sup> Jyotiṣka is hosting a group of non-Buddhist ascetics, the very ascetics who attempted to deceive his father which led to the death of his mother and his own miraculous birth from her funeral pyre. As these ascetics enter his house and sit down to eat their meal they all laugh and smile, claiming to have just seen a monkey

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<sup>80</sup> See T 207, 4: 523b.7-24.

<sup>81</sup> For more information on the *Jyotiṣkāvadāna* see Baum 2002; Panglung 1981, 168-171; and Härtel 1981, 93-106. Andy Rotman is also preparing a forthcoming translation of this narrative as found in the *Divy*.

fall into a river from 500 miles away. Jyotiṣka, seeing through their deception, tricks them by presenting them with delicious food underneath a layer of rice while all the other guests are presented with their food placed on top of the rice. The ascetics are insulted that they are given nothing but plain rice while the other guests are presented with the best food. As they get up to leave Jyotiṣka further provokes them by asking how it was possible that they could see a monkey fall into the water from 500 miles away yet fail to notice the delicious meal hidden underneath a layer of rice? The ascetics leave, recognizing Jyotiṣka as a devoted disciple of the Buddha, and immediately begin to plan their revenge.<sup>82</sup> In this case the rhetoric of deception is akin to that found in *Deceptive Appearances*. Jyotiṣka, as opposed to both the carpenter and artisan, immediately sees through the deception of the six ascetics and their claim to the spiritual attainment of far-sightedness. Like the artisan, however, he chooses to play a trick in retaliation to the original deception wherein the recipients fail to recognize the truth of the situation until it is too late.

In each of these narratives we see representations of deception along a spectrum of meanings. The story of the rogue monk details deception in a negative light: a monk decides to trick the local villagers into believing he has spiritual attainments to win donations and eventually dies as a direct result of his deception. Alternatively, we see Jyotiṣka using deception as a means of revealing the fraudulent ascetics that have made false claims to the spiritual attainment of far-sightedness. The result of this episode is two-fold: first, it reveals the lies of the non-Buddhist ascetics. Second, it solidifies Jyotiṣka's position as a true disciple of the Buddha and his eventual ordination as a monk.

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<sup>82</sup> See T 207, 4: 527a.25-b.28. We will return to this particular narrative and a variation of it found in the *ZJXZPY* in chapter 2.

Similarly, in *Deceptive Appearances* the deception propagated by the painter's skill at life-like representation, equal to that of the carpenter's creation of a wooden girl, serves as the vehicle for the transformation of perceptions. Once both see through the deception they are compelled to react in a specific manner. Ultimately this use of deception is used as a transformative discourse whereby the very process of seeing through a deception provides the impetus for action.

The message would appear to be quite clear: we constantly misperceive and treat the false image as if it were real. This is emphasized through the use of very distinct tropes of humor under classical Sanskrit poetic theory. The humor and entertainment employed as the vehicle for conveying the message is not the main point, but the message is directly reinforced by the method of presentation. The method is part in parcel of delivering the message, for the very foundation of humor as understood in the traditional Indian literary sphere comes as a result of contradiction and misperception. As Marshal McLuhan has said: the medium is the message.

Thus, the very setting of the narrative reinforces the point of the story and supports the conclusion that the things that we perceive and take to be real are, in fact, false. This in turn leads to the final conclusion that the appropriate consequence of such a realization is to abandon all one holds dear (*she suoqinai* 捨所親愛) and leave the householder life (*chujia* 出家) to engage in religious practice (*xiudao* 修道). The term *chujia* (出家), literally meaning to leave home, is a standard term used for when one becomes a monk. Thus the final result of the narrative leads to the conclusion that the world is full of false and deceptive appearances and the only way to truly escape them is to become a Buddhist monastic. Yet, if such a serious moral is the point, the question still

remains: within what context does such a message make sense? Does humor serve a particular social function, or is it simply good entertainment used to reinforce a particular teaching?

### **The Social and Rhetorical Function of Humor**

To answer this question let us now return to Martineau's attempt to provide a model for evaluating the social function of humor. Remember that he provided a three part structure of inter- and intragroup relations and that based upon the variables of actor, audience, subject, and judgment one could come to a conclusion about the social function humor was attempting to provide. Martineau's model thus provides us a means to analyze the social function of the humor found in our narrative. The difficulty, however, is in determining which form of group interaction we are dealing with since we do not as yet know who the author or intended audience was for this narrative. Fortunately, for our purposes we do not necessarily need to determine all the variables within the specific group interaction as we may be able to come to some conclusions based upon a process of elimination. That is to say, at this point in our study we cannot identify exactly who wrote this narrative, or even who may have collected it into this anthology, nor are we able to specifically say much about the audience. But, we can explore the variations of potential explanations based upon Martineau's model through evaluating the subject and judgment of such humor which I believe to be quite clearly presented in our story.

We know, for example, that in essence both the carpenter and artist are the 'butt' of the joke. They are engaging in acts of deception, fulfilling the typical roles of the buffoon through their gluttony and failed love, and are susceptible to the mistake of accepting the false as real. As a consequence of their mutual deception they eventually awaken to their condition and ultimately

leave family and society to become monks. We can read this situation in several ways according to Martineau's analysis. First, the carpenter and artist are lay Buddhists who move toward a monastic profession. According to Martineau this would fall into the category of disparaging humor within intragroup communication of a Buddhist community, in which case he argues that the social functions of such humor can operate either to control and solidify in-group behavior or to introduce conflict and group disintegration.

Second, if we assume the carpenter and artist are non-Buddhists who decide to engage in Buddhist practice, this would fall into Martineau's second model representing intergroup communication where the focus is on the structure of only one of the groups. In our case the narrative is focused upon those who come to recognize worldly deception and decide to become Buddhist monks. In the case of disparaging humor of the outer group, again the carpenter and artist are the 'butt' of the joke who then decide to engage in Buddhist practice, in which case Martineau provides for the possibility that such humor functions to either increase morale and solidify the in-group or introduce and foster hostility toward the out-group.

The third model provided by Martineau of intergroup communication with equal interaction and relationship between two groups seems not to apply to this particular narrative, as clearly the group constituting the carpenter and artist is presented as submitting to the Buddhist view. There is no equal interaction or mutual representation of humor between groups presented in our tale. In other words, the humor of this narrative is unidirectional, either directed internally toward certain members of an in-group or externally toward an out-group with no mutual dialogue between groups taking place. It therefore does not fit within the third structure provided in the model.

What remains then, according to Martineau's model, are only a limited number of possible functions for the humor found in our tale. The possible interpretations that I have outlined above lead to the conclusion that the rhetorical function of humor in this narrative is being used to control, solidify, or disintegrate the in-group or to foster hostility towards the out-group. Of these possibilities it seems that neither disintegration of the in-group nor hostility towards an out-group seems plausible given the rhetorical force that appears to make sense in the context of our narrative. That is to say, the narrative is clearly not seeking to disintegrate a Buddhist society, nor is it at all apparent that it is seeking to foment hostility towards any particular out-group, though it does contrast itself at times with other ascetic traditions. This leaves us with the possibility, according to Martineau's model, that the social function of humor as found in this tale is seeking to increase morale, exert social control, or solidify the in-group. This would appear to be the case regardless of which of the two possible models of inter- or intragroup dialogue are in operation in this narrative. For either of the possible social structures outlined in Martineau's model the results are the same. Additionally, none of the remaining potential functions that we see operating according to this model are really in conflict with each other. That is to say, it seems plausible that the rhetorical function of such a tale could be easily seeking to serve all three functions of increasing morale, control, and unification of group identity without any necessary conflict between them.

In light of Martineau and Bergson's argument that humor allows for both social control and group solidarity as well as providing means to jolt one out of complacency *Deceptive Appearances* presents a strong blend of both positions. This last point in particular seems to resonate with the ethos of this narrative. It is through the tragically comedic events of the story that both the carpenter and artist are jolted into the realization of the deceptive appearance of

their creations and thereby become aware of their mistake in accepting the false reality of the world around them. In a very real sense Bergson's understanding of the use of humor to shock us out of the ordinary and mundane conformity of everyday society and awaken us to the reality of that which is around us is an apt means of expressing the apparent rhetorical force of this particular *avadāna*. It is only once both men come to an understanding and feel shame for the absurdity of their actions as a result of their deception that they realize the truth of their situation. They are in essence jolted into a new understanding of reality and then enter the monastic vocation. Thus the order of the normative Buddhist social hierarchy is maintained and reinforced and control is exerted over improper or incongruent behavior in favor of a unified group that accepts the presented reality of their situation. The impetus for such a realization comes by seeing through deceptive representations.

Humor in particular, as Martineau argues, creates the divide between self and other, in-group and out-group, and thus forms personal and group identity. For, the extent to which one understands and accepts certain behaviors as laughable is the extent to which one will also identify with a particular group that espouses the same view. Birds of a feather flock together, as it were. Thus we see that at the end the two protagonists state that "People of the world deceive each other, what else is there than this?"<sup>83</sup> The emphasis here is not necessarily on the deceptive appearance of things per se, but particularly on the actors and agents within the social structure. It is the people themselves that are deceiving each other and there is nothing other than this deception within society. Thus, the solution to such a realization is to leave 'people' behind. As such, the monastic ideal of leaving society is reinforced as the correct course of action.

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<sup>83</sup> 世人相誑惑，孰異於此? See T 207, 4:524a.18.



This understanding echoes Paul Ricoeur's writings on one of the social functions of narrative. Ricoeur argues that, "The identity of a group, culture, people, or nation, is not that of an immutable substance, nor that of a fixed structure, but that, rather of a recounted story."<sup>84</sup> For Ricoeur, group identity, and the resultant socially accepted behavior, is created by a shared myth that models proper actions and world views for those that accept the narrative as valid.

Thus, for those who would find the story of *Deceptive Appearances* valid, one of the functions humor serves is to create a sense of community and reinforce or enable the acceptance of a particular virtue or thought that is central to the in-group's defining characteristics. When reading *Deceptive Appearances*, we can well imagine a monastic audience that is able to both laugh at the characters' misperceptions and resulting comedy of errors while at the same time feel confidence in their ability to understand the difference between delusion (brought about by desires and attachments) and reality. This also has the added effect of reinforcing the moral of the narrative that claims renunciation is the one true solution to the suffering that comes from desire and attachment. This is, of course, a normative claim that a monastic author or collector would well seek to promote. It is also a claim that we could well imagine being made in the face of a breakdown in those monastic commitments.

Such an interpretation is supported by Kirin Narayan's assessment of the role of humor in modern Indian religious folk narratives used by Hindu ascetics. Narayan explains in her ethnography that humor is used to bind an "audience in laughter," suspend "hierarchy to generate the warm bonds of *communitas*," and challenge "established patterns of thought."<sup>85</sup> This challenge is directed towards worldly attachments and desires. In short, to quote from W. S.

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<sup>84</sup> Ricoeur 1995, 7; see also the detailed discussion and analysis of Ricoeur's thoughts on the relationship between identity, community and narrative in Kaplan 2003, 47-99 especially 89-99.

<sup>85</sup> See Narayan 1989, 182.

Gilbert, the epitaph at the beginning of the chapter sums up the point quite nicely: “I can trick you into learning with a laugh.”<sup>86</sup>

In the final analysis, then, we find that humor reinforces the ultimate goal, indeed it makes perceiving the real goal possible since humor highlights the divide between what is false and what is real. The fact that we hold on to and desire false realities is so sad that it is funny, and the only thing that can be done is to laugh at it and give it all away. In this context Siegel’s insight into the role of humor is particularly appropriate when he notes that “the phenomenal world was frequently described by Indian philosophers as cosmic trickery: empirical reality is *māyā* [illusion], a hoax, a joke... getting the ultimate joke then, might be liberation. Comedy might be religious gnosis.”<sup>87</sup>

## Conclusion

I have attempted to show that the categories of humor found in classical Indian aesthetics are in full operation in this Buddhist *avadāna* narrative. I have argued that this use of the comedic serves such potential rhetorical functions as creating and sustaining group identity and morale, acting as a social corrective, and illustrating the deceptive incongruence between appearance and reality. Such rhetoric reinforces the conclusion that true liberation is attained by abandoning desires and attachments and engaging in the monastic vocation. This rhetorical force of the comedic as it operates in Indian literature is aptly described by Siegel when he states that:

As defined by Indian cosmology, seen from the distant viewpoint of the gods, watched with detachment and considered without sentimentality, all human actions and aspirations are in essence comical. Wisdom is getting the joke.... We are as funny as we are sad, and

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<sup>86</sup> Gilbert 1895, 276.

<sup>87</sup> Siegel 1987, 15.

as sad as we are funny. Until liberation is attained, until there is nothing at all, humor...is, in the face of ultimate things, one—if not the only—alternative to despair.<sup>88</sup>

Yet this laughter in the face of despair is only one of the aspects we find operating when humor is employed in this *avadāna*. For this story is not just simply a way of coping with the despair of limited human capacities, faulty desires, and deception at the hands of another. No, it is also foregrounding the very state we find ourselves in as humans trapped in the cycle of birth and death with no apparent means of escape. It is the conflict between our desires and the consequences of those desires that keeps us stuck in this unsatisfactory state of existence that leads to the very deception that we tend to foist upon ourselves in our current condition. Indeed, the story reinforces the notion that our problem is the tendency to treat false appearances as if they were real. Accepting such an explanation then requires a solution. As Siegel has mentioned in relation to the Buddha's renunciation, "The comic vision, in both its satiric and humorous forms, has its source, perhaps, in the very revelation that inspires the renunciation of the Buddha: satire is laughter at the vices and follies to which humanity is driven by the agonies of old age, disease, and death; humor is laughter in spite of disease, in acceptance of old age, in surrender to death. Comedy can be refuge, if not redemption; its laughter can be solace, if not release."<sup>89</sup>

By bringing the contradiction of appearance and reality to the fore the very humorous state of our existence is manifest and a solution to such difficulties is modeled for the reader at the end of the narrative: leave all attachments and desires behind and engage in religious practice. So the final answer to the contradiction of appearance and reality is to leave it all behind, and that is perhaps the most shocking and unexpected solution we could imagine. That is serious humor.

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<sup>88</sup> Siegel 1987, 372.

<sup>89</sup> Siegel 1987, 5.

That is also the solution that we would expect from a Buddhist monastic community. It is a self-justification for a particular view in the face of alternative explanations. Such a reading of the narrative presented here provides clues to the context in which such a story would be translated and collected. It shows us a picture of a community that is concerned with preserving a certain world-view challenged by other explanations.

Yet questions still remain. If part of the rhetorical force of humor in this narrative is to facilitate the identity of an in-group community, what does this community look like, who are its potential members, and what problems are they contending with for which this literature serves as an answer? In short, what is the audience of this narrative? While I have argued that one potential interpretation is that of a monastic community, it is by no means certainly the case, at least as far as we are able to tell from this single narrative. It might also be plausible that such rhetorical devices were designed to entice outsiders to join a particular community whereby they could then be free to ‘laugh at’ those who are deceived by human action and false identity just like the characters in the story. Was this meant to be a narrative designed to teach lay Buddhists? Non-Buddhists? How does this *avadāna* fit into the overall scheme and theme of the rest of the collection; is it an anomaly or do we find humor and a similar rhetoric in other narratives of the collection; what might this tell us about the audience and collectors of the anthology as well as the socio-cultural context of Buddhism during this time period?

While these questions will be dealt with in the following chapters, I do hope that it has become clear that by no means is this short, but typical, *avadāna* a simple didactic tale that follows a formulaic pattern as described in much of the literature discussing the Sanskrit *avadāna* collections. I also hope that it has become clear that it is indeed a very literary text that employs much of the Indian literary aesthetic in its presentation.

Additionally, I believe this chapter has shown some of the benefits of studying the Chinese translations of Buddhist *avadānas*. As translations, these narratives offer a window into both the world of the Indic society in which they were initially composed as well as the Chinese society which collected and translated them. This particular narrative is more than a simple tale designed to teach the principles of karma and thus prompts us to further re-examine this genre and the possibilities it offers us for better understanding the context of early Buddhist communities in South and East Asia.

Yet this potential still remains unproven. So now the task at hand is to further explore what developments are taking place in contemporary literary theory that may allow us to engage this rich literature in such a way as to better understand the socio-cultural and historical context of Buddhist *avadāna* literature during the first few centuries of the Common Era. As this chapter has shown, these narratives present their own deceptive appearances.

## CHAPTER 2

### UNCOVERING THE INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY

We can understand a text only when we have understood the question to which it is an answer.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* ([1975] 2004, 363)

#### **Introduction**

We ended the previous chapter by offering one plausible description of the intended audience of an *avadāna* narrative. However, as I noted at the end of the last chapter, several questions need to be answered before we can sketch a picture of the context in which these narratives were translated, gathered and circulated. We turn our attention now to one of a number of possible approaches that may provide access to the community of Buddhists that reside in the background of these *avadāna* collections.

This concern for viewing the community behind the text reflects a growing move to shift attention away from *what* is being read to *who* is doing the reading. This shift is a hallmark of developments in modern literary theory and has influenced other academic disciplines as well, including religious studies. In his critique of the term ‘religion’ as it is often used in scholarly discourse to describe some monolithic and reified entity that acts on its own, Robert Campany argues that we should avoid “picturing religions as really existent things in the world” because doing so skews our understanding of the topic of study. He continues by stating that “religions do not exist, at least not in the same way that people and their textual and visual artifacts and performances do. And when religions are metaphorically imagined as doing things, it becomes

hard to see the agents who really and nonmetaphorically do things: people.”<sup>90</sup> This argument is, in essence, an attempt to shift attention away from the idea of a reified “ism” (such as “Buddhism” or “Daoism”) and focus instead on the people that are acting and relating to each other within a given social context.

Elsewhere, Company discusses the pitfalls of thinking of religions as “holistic entities” that grow over time while maintaining some authentic, essential core and argues that it is more practical to think of religious traditions as “constantly changing repertoires of resources created and used by participants in imagined communities of identity, discourse, and practice.”<sup>91</sup> Thus, for Company, our examination of the texts and other artifacts that stem from a community’s practice of a religious tradition will offer “glimpses not of the historicity of this or that specific occurrence but of the environments in which these types of occurrences were held to take place and how people responded to them.”<sup>92</sup>

Jonathan Walters offers a similar argument in his discussion of the role of Buddhists in world history. He asserts that “Buddhist history was not made by “Buddhism”; rather, it was made by Buddhists. Buddhists, not “Buddhism,” dominated, spread, taught, received patronage, and ceased to exist in India; “Buddhism” was never there in the first place.”<sup>93</sup> Walters seeks to shift attention away from what he calls the “Buddhological construct” that stems from nineteenth century colonialism and instead focus on the real agents of religious action: Buddhists. Such a shift in focus requires that modern scholars “rethink the questions to which the primary evidence

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<sup>90</sup> Company 2003, 319.

<sup>91</sup> Company 2012, 30. In using the term “imagined communities” Company is drawing upon the work of Benedict Anderson and his notion of the imagined community in relation to the development of the ‘nation’ in recent history. For more information on the way in which Company is using Anderson’s work see his discussion in Company 2003, 316. See also Anderson 1983, 1-7.

<sup>92</sup> Company 2012, 30.

<sup>93</sup> Walters 1998, 14.

is viewed as a series of answers.... More precisely, we need to ask what...questions *Buddhists* were asking when they composed the ‘evidence’ in the first place.”<sup>94</sup>

Based upon this shift in scholarly focus expressed by Company and Walters, our concern in this chapter will be to trace developments within literary theory and its application in religious studies to serve as a theoretical model for how we might read these *avadāna* narratives to better contextualize them within the milieu of early Chinese Buddhist communities. This is an attempt to create a framework and vocabulary for approaching the *avadāna* collections in order to tease out the various social, religious and communal concerns for which this literature was presented as an answer. I will show that a conjunction of various developments in literary and religious studies over the past four decades has provided us with a theoretical framework that aids in teasing out the context of the Buddhist communities in which and for whom these *avadāna* narratives and collections were translated and/or compiled.

In setting forth this theoretical framework I am drawing from the remarks made by Jonathan Culler on the nature of theory in modern academia. Culler argues that “theory involves speculative practice...that challenge received ideas.... So doing, they incite you to rethink the categories with which you may be reflecting on literature.” In short, the main thrust of recent theory in the humanities “has been the critique of whatever is taken as natural, the demonstration that what has been thought or declared natural is in fact a historical, cultural product.”<sup>95</sup> For Culler, the end result of theory so conceived is “the questioning of presumed results and the assumptions on which they are based. The nature of theory is to undo, through a contesting of premises and postulates, what you thought you knew.”<sup>96</sup> Theory, then, is the attempt to examine

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<sup>94</sup> Walters 1998, 10-11.

<sup>95</sup> Culler 2000, 14. See also pages 7-17 for Culler’s concept of theory as an academic genre and its place in academia.

<sup>96</sup> Culler 2000, 16.



previous assumptions from different perspectives so as to reveal unexamined biases and come to a more nuanced understanding of the topic.

While I am not seeking to produce a work in the genre of ‘theory’ as Culler defines it, I am attempting to employ several disparate theoretical ideas that are distinct yet interrelated in their concerns as a means of rethinking the category of *avadāna* which has otherwise been accepted as a defined and understood form of literature. I am seeking to further clarify exactly what it is we can do with Buddhist *avadāna* literature, and what is problematic about how we have treated it in the past. It is my hope that this approach will open new possibilities in our examination of these *avadānas* so as to better understand the communities that read them.

There are three specific theoretical developments that will be discussed in this chapter. These three notions are: (1) the interpretive community proposed by Stanley Fish, (2) the narrative theory of Seymour Chatman, specifically the distinction he makes between story and discourse and the notion of the implied audience, and (3) Roger Chartier’s more recent work on what he terms the “history of reading” and the relationship between the ‘text as object’ and the interpretive community. Through an evaluation of these three independent, yet interrelated, notions I seek to approach Buddhist *avadāna* literature in a way that expands our understanding of the narratives and the community of Buddhist believers that existed behind them. Thus, my ultimate goal in applying such a methodology is two-fold: (1) to seek to further elucidate what Buddhist *avadāna* literature actually did within Buddhist practice, and (2) to further understand the communities that surrounded these narratives and created these texts. These are not mutually exclusive goals, but rather are intricately tied together. As we are able to more fully answer one aspect the other also increasingly becomes clearer to our view.

In this sense I am both seeking to enact a hermeneutics of recovery and a hermeneutics of suspicion at the same time. A hermeneutics of recovery in that I am seeking to recover the context of the interpretive community in which these narratives were read, what the authors or compilers of these tales were intending to do with the narratives, what meanings they intended to convey and the role they played in Buddhism during this early medieval period. A hermeneutics of suspicion in that I am also seeking to reveal unexamined or unstated assumptions that are built into these texts. Examining such assumptions will clarify the concerns and preoccupations that a given interpretive community held in contradistinction to other communities that also employed the same narratives or collections of narratives for other purposes. These two ideals are by no means exclusive or contradictory but rather act in concert to allow a more clearly refined image of the very cultural and religious setting we are seeking to illuminate. In this way what is being attempted here is less an effort of literary interpretation of the narratives, though some form of that will necessarily be attempted. Rather, it is a form of ‘symptomatic’ interpretation—that is, to use these *avadānas* as a window into deeper concerns and trends within an interpretive community for which these narratives act as a ‘symptom’ pointing to alternate concerns and issues that are otherwise hidden from our view.<sup>97</sup>

This is, in my view, a legitimate use of any text, and one that is often used in various academic disciplines, but it is not without problems and difficulties. We must keep in mind that we will be reading these narratives against the grain to glean historical and social data from texts that had a different purpose. Therefore we must tread cautiously so that we do not try to do more than is possible with the source material available to us. One of the best ways to do this is to

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<sup>97</sup> Culler 2000, 65-68.

establish and be constantly aware of the text's own rhetorical intent and use.<sup>98</sup> Given what we have established in the first chapter, part of what this and the following chapter will ultimately seek to accomplish is to more accurately describe and highlight the formal and rhetorical discourse that Buddhist *avadānas* seek to establish.

After discussing the theoretical principles pertinent to this study, I will review the work of several scholars that have already employed various aspects of these theories in their approach to both Buddhist and Biblical texts. Finally, a specific case study will allow us to catch a glimpse of the possibilities such a methodological approach affords us in our approach to individual narratives before expanding to a broader discussion of the character and uses of *avadāna* anthologies in the next chapter.

### **Stanley Fish and the Interpretive Community**

Stanley Fish is one of several significant figures in literary studies who has for several decades now sought to shift scholarly attention toward a reader oriented discourse. For Fish, the emphasis on the reader comes as part of a 'close-reading' method intended to emphasize aspects of the act and process of reading so as to explore the questions of interpretation and meaning. By pursuing such a line of thought, however, Fish comes to the conclusion that 'meaning' is not a natural, stable 'thing' that exists inherently to be found inside a text. Indeed Fish asks, "Why should two or more readers ever agree, and why should regular, that is, habitual differences in the career of a single reader ever occur? What is the explanation on the one hand of the stability

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<sup>98</sup> Keenan 1994, 20.

of interpretation (at least among certain groups at certain times) and on the other of the orderly variety of interpretation if it is not the stability and variety of texts?”<sup>99</sup>

The answer to this dilemma comes in what Fish calls the interpretive community: “Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around.”<sup>100</sup>

Fish uses the concept of the interpretive community to refer “not to a collection of independent individuals who, in a moment of deliberation, *choose* to employ certain interpretive strategies, but rather to a set of practices that are defining of an enterprise and fill the consciousnesses of the enterprise’s members. Those members include the authors and speakers as well as their interpreters. Indeed they are *all* interpreters.”<sup>101</sup> Thus, Fish argues that authors and readers are not separate agents with different objectives and intentions, but rather compose a community involved in the same task of interpreting meaning. With such reasoning he then argues that, “Readers who perform in the ways I have been describing...do not ride roughshod over an author’s intention; rather they match it by going about their business at once constrained and enabled by the same history that burdens and energizes those whom they read. Like all interpreters they are engaged in the project of determining intention, of asking ‘What does he or she or they or it *mean*?,’ but that determination itself depends on the assumption...of an intention...imputed to the author and directive of the reader’s activities.”<sup>102</sup> It is with this understanding of ‘interpretive community,’ consisting of both authors and readers unified in

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<sup>99</sup> Fish 1980, 171.

<sup>100</sup> Fish 1980, 171.

<sup>101</sup> Fish 2001, 36.

<sup>102</sup> Fish 2001, 37.

determining intention and meaning that Fish argues a community shapes the text rather than the general assumption that the text shapes the community. “Interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading (the pure act of perception in which I do not believe); they are the shape of reading, and because they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as it is usually assumed, arising from them.”<sup>103</sup>

In part, Fish is seeking to navigate a means of reading a text that accounts for meaning not as an inherent element of the text but as an interpretive result from a community of likeminded readers. Such an understanding is designed to avoid the two extremes of complete relativism and total determinism. Fish writes:

The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the ‘true text,’ but the truth will be that each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being. This explains...why there are disagreements and why they can be debated in a principled way: not because of a stability in texts, but because of a stability in the makeup of interpretive communities and therefore in the opposing positions they make possible. Of course this stability is always temporary (unlike the longed for and timeless stability of the text). Interpretive communities grow larger and decline, and individuals move from one to another; thus, while the alignments are not permanent, they are always there, providing just enough stability for the interpretive battles to go on, and just enough shift and slippage to assure that they will never be settled.<sup>104</sup>

This then accounts for the variation in meaning and interpretation and avoids a decline into relativity.

Fish’s ideas are, of course, not without their critics. Indeed, the debate and discussion is long and complicated and beyond the scope of this current project. Nevertheless, as one critic has recently acknowledged, despite disagreeing with much of Fish’s position, “no one doubts that

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<sup>103</sup> Fish 1980, 168.

<sup>104</sup> Fish 1980, 171-172.

interpretive communities exist, or that they change from time to time.”<sup>105</sup> Some have cogently pointed out that the position taken by Fish in his method of criticism and the ‘way of reading’ that takes place within an interpretive community shifts from an “ethical reading,” the idea of the search for truth and the ‘objective knowledge’ of the meaning of a text (the domain of traditional literary criticism), to a political reading: that is, a way of reading and interpreting that serves the needs and ends of the critic and the interpretive community (at the expense of the text).<sup>106</sup> This criticism leveled against Fish is indeed a valid argument. However, in terms of the intent of this study it is actually a criticism that will be, for us, a valuable means of understanding the operation of an interpretive community. For our particular interest is in the very ‘political’ reading of an interpretive community of Chinese Buddhists that existed at some point in the late-fourth or early-fifth century C.E. and who collected a group of *avadāna* narratives. We must be cautious, though, to ensure that it is *their* ‘political’ reading rather than our own that is exposed.

We can catch glimpses of the interpretive community scattered throughout a number of the *avadānas* found in the *ZPYJ* and the *ZJXZPY*. A prevalent element in the majority of the narratives is the ending maxim and/or explanations that attempt to explicitly define the meaning or concern of the narrative. In the *ZPYJ* collection this final conclusion most often takes the form of the phrase *ci yu* 此喻 [this illustrates that...], followed by a brief explanation of the meaning of the different elements of the narrative. The *ZJXZPY* does not use this phrase at all, except for the few times it happens among the nine narratives shared between the two texts. Instead, the *ZJXZPY* has two alternate methods not found in the *ZPYJ* for presenting the themes and morals. Often there is an opening line explaining the theme as an introduction leading into the narrative

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<sup>105</sup> Brooks 1995, 252.

<sup>106</sup> For a small sample of the discussions and critiques of Fish, see Moore 1986, Bagwell 1983, Begraunde 1983, Culler 1982, and Brooks 1995, 244-258.

proper. The opening line of the very first narrative of the collection serves as an example of this as it states that, “The wise know that wealth cannot be preserved forever just like...”<sup>107</sup> and then continues with the narrative proper. Additionally the ending maxim is then often preceded by the phrase *shi yi* 是以 which in this context I would translate as “this is taken [to mean that]...” followed by a simple explanation or maxim. It is at these points in the *avadānas* that we can catch glimpses of the interpretive community and the meaning it creates in the narratives. Often many of the narratives are quite short and simple in scope and thus susceptible to multiple interpretations. It is only once the explanation is given that the various elements of the story will come to have any significance.

In the case of those narratives that are shared between the *ZPYJ* and *ZJXZPY* there are often competing interpretations of the meaning of the narrative. Thus the *Jyotiṣkāvadāna* recounts the story of a boy who is miraculously born while his mother is being cremated. His father had been tricked into killing her by a group of Brahmins trying to foil a prophecy of the boy’s birth given by the Buddha.<sup>108</sup> The narrative resumes after Jyotiṣka has grown up and invites these very same Brahmins to his home for a meal. When the Brahmins claim to have supernatural vision Jyotiṣka puts their claims to the test: he serves them their food hidden under piles of rice. The Brahmins become offended at having only been served plain rice, and Jyotiṣka questions their claims to supernatural sight when they can’t even see the food beneath their very noses.

At this point the narratives that have been identical in each of the two anthologies diverge. One recounts how the monks then leave angrily and begin to plan their revenge against the Buddha and Jyotiṣka with traps and poison. The other narrative shows Jyotiṣka choosing to turn

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<sup>107</sup> 智者思惟財物不可久保，譬如，T 208, 4: 531b.10.

<sup>108</sup> This story was discussed in chapter one above.

away from the Brahmins in order to follow the Buddha as a monk. Thus, while both narratives are virtually word for word until the very last line, each ends with a very different point of emphasis and interpretation. One highlights the persecution that comes from exposing the hypocrisy and false claims of religious competitors; the other emphasizes following the Buddha and becoming a monk. Given that this is the only point of divergence between the two narratives it becomes clear that at some point different interpretive communities must have made a slight change in order to address a specific concern. It is at these points of variance between the shared narratives of the two anthologies that different interpretive communities come to light.<sup>109</sup>

As Fish argues, the proposition of an interpretive community shifts the reality of meaning away from being ‘something’ that exists independently within the text to being ‘something’ that exists within the community of readers. For many, then, the real difficulty of such a proposition is that it leads to an ambivalence or relativity to any given text; there is no inherent meaning to any given literary work outside the meaning given to it by the community. In this way it is argued that, “Rather than the text producing community beliefs, community beliefs produce the text.”<sup>110</sup> If we can better understand the ways whereby a given interpretive community of Buddhist practitioners in fifth century China literally produced texts, and given that we know little of the community itself, we now have the possibility of beginning to unlock clues as to their historical and cultural context. In the very creation of these texts and the interpretations given to them we can begin to see what was of concern to them, that these narratives reflect the needs, desires, intentions and purpose of the communities that used them. Thus, through a critical study of the tales themselves we may hope to tease out various unknown details that can give us insight into a phase of Buddhist development that might otherwise be lost to us.

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<sup>109</sup> T 207, 4: 527a.25-b.28 and T 208, 4: 536b.24-536c.27, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 21 and *ZJXZPY* Story 22.

<sup>110</sup> Moore 1986, 716.



The question before us is how to understand exactly what was being created and what questions and concerns were being expressed for which these created narratives were seen as providing some answer. Thus, this critique of reading as a political act is the very aspect we wish to uncover and which will hopefully provide us with valuable information. Yet, how might we more effectively gain access to the interpretive communities of any given narrative? This is a particularly apt question considering that Fish understood the idea of the interpretive community within the realm of hermeneutics and literary studies and not necessarily, as I am partly seeking to apply the concept, as a means of uncovering a real historical and cultural contextuality. Here is where the narrative theory of Seymour Chatman will provide a useful mode of analysis.

### **Seymour Chatman: Story and Discourse, Implied Author and Audience**

Seymour Chatman's narrative theory provides a complementary method for understanding the concerns of the interpretive community. Chatman elucidates a distinction in the narrative elements of *story* and *discourse*. *Story*, thus constituted, consists of the "what" that occurs in the narrative. *Discourse* is the "how" by which the story is transmitted. Through the interaction of these two narrative elements, meaning is construed by the reader. Chatman presents a difference between reading and what he calls "reading out," that is to say the difference between a "surface or manifestation level of reading" and working through "to the deeper narrative level."<sup>111</sup> This reflects notions of surface structure and deep structure found in the work of Noam Chomsky and the translation theory of Eugene Nida.<sup>112</sup> It is with this distinction in mind that I argue that the traditional understanding of *avadāna* has primarily

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<sup>111</sup> Chatman 1978, 41. For a more detailed explanation see pp. 1-42.

<sup>112</sup> Nida 1975.

operated at the level of surface structure, the ‘story’ or formal level of narrative, while rarely dealing with issues involving discourse and the deep, or dynamic, level of narrative.

Just as the *story*, the ‘what happens’ of the narrative, is akin to the surface structure of any linguistic mode of communication, so too the *discourse*, the ‘how’ of the message conveyed, is a product of the deep structure and passes from the narrative into the audience and culture beyond the bounds of the text. The deep narrative is dependent upon the surface structure for its existence but also extends beyond it, so that the discourse of a narrative, just like the deep structure of linguistic communication, is more than simply the sum of its parts. Likewise, just as the discourse is conveyed by the story and at the same time extends beyond the story, so too the discourse is also somewhat independent of the form in which it is conveyed. Thus the same discourse can be conveyed by different stories as well as different forms. In our case here, there are multiple stories given in the form that is collectively known as *avadāna*.

As John Keenan notes, “By focusing not on the story level, but on the discourse, one is led to examine not the historicity of the story...but rather the rhetorical strategies whereby the underlying discourse communicates its meaning and tries to attain its desired result.”<sup>113</sup> I would add that this focus on the discourse not only allows us a glimpse into possible meanings and intents of the text but also then gives us a glimpse of an interpretive community surrounding the narrative for which such a text acts as a tool for promoting their world view and understanding.

We can see this dichotomy between *story* and *discourse* in many *avadānas* where the interpretation (*discourse*) presented for a narrative does not appear to match the events (*story*). We read of a monk who suffers as a hungry ghost because he broke a precept on the proper distribution of food to his fellow monastics during a time of famine. After the Buddha tells the

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<sup>113</sup> Keenan 1994, 13.

cause for the hungry ghost's suffering one expects the ending moral, because of its central importance to the plot of the story, to express the importance of keeping the precepts. Instead, the ending concludes that the Buddha had not told this story earlier for fear that the monks would not believe him and, in doubting the words of the Buddha, bring even greater punishment upon themselves than if they had committed the five heinous sins.<sup>114</sup>

Thus the ending moral presented to the audience from such a story is not explicitly to emphasize the consequences of a monk breaking a particular rule but that not believing and trusting in the wisdom of the Buddha brings even greater punishment than breaking monastic precepts. In such examples we see instances in which the *story* is separate from the *discourse*, or rhetorical force of the narrative. Thus, while the plot expresses the consequences of breaking precepts (in this case showing favor to a particular monk in the distribution of food) the discourse of the narrative unexpectedly addresses the importance of heeding the words of the Buddha.

This divide between *story* and *discourse* serves to expose the role of the interpretive community in presenting a particular interpretation for the meaning of the text regardless of the narrative direction it appears to take on the surface level. What the interpretive community wants the story to be about is wisdom and correctly understanding the Buddha regardless of what the plot seems to imply about the rhetorical force of the story. Such moments indicate points in which the interpretive community is exerting influence over the interpretation of a given narrative. At times these interpretations appear to fly in the face of the rhetorical force of the *story* and thus would represent attempts at influencing the *discourse* of a narrative to influence

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<sup>114</sup> T 207, 4: 523b.25-c.12, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 6.

the way that the tale is understood at the deeper level regardless of events that happen on the surface structure.

As Chatman notes, the important thing about this distinction between *story* and *discourse* is to understand the narrative in terms of communication—that there is a message conveyed within the narrative and specific rhetoric is employed in order to convey such a message. It is important to remember Fish’s notion of interpretive community in this process. As each narrative acts as a communication seeking to convey a meaning/message, it is incumbent upon the interpretive community to shape and understand the narrative and meaning based upon their fluctuating characteristics and needs.

Just as interpretive communities are shifting priorities and borders, so too will the narratives that they tell shift in their manner of story and discourse, a shift that I argue is visible through variation in the story and changes in the discourse. As different interpretive communities will seek to interpret a narrative in a given way, variations in the story of the narrative will occur as a means of further accentuating the discourse of a given community. Thus, as we saw with the *Jyotiṣkāvadāna* above, the shifts in the *story* between the two narratives also indicates a change in the emphasis of the *discourse* between interpretive communities. These variations and points of interpretation are seams in the patchwork of the narrative that indicate moments of disruption in the narrative according to the needs of various interpretive communities.

In setting forth this distinction between *story* and *discourse* Chatman is emphasizing the notion of narrative as a communication between and among authors and their audiences.

Chatman notes that, “narratives are communications, thus easily envisaged as the movement of arrows from left to right, from author to audience. But we must distinguish between real and implied authors and audiences: only implied authors and audiences are immanent to the work,

constructs of the narrative-transaction-as-text. The real author and audience of course communicate, but only through their implied counterparts.”<sup>115</sup>

For this particular study the implied author and implied audience will become the two primary elements essential to gaining access to the community behind the text. Chatman argues that the implied author is “reconstructed by the reader from the narrative. He is not the narrator, but rather the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative, that stacked the cards in this particular way, had these things happen to these characters, in these words or images. Unlike the narrator, the implied author can *tell* us nothing....The implied author establishes the norms of the narrative...the norms are general cultural codes.”<sup>116</sup> By evaluating how a given plot in the narrative is arranged and the sort of ideas, norms, and cultural codes that are embedded within the story we can reconstruct the implied author, which then offers us clues to the rhetoric and context of the given narrative.

In connection with the implied author, the implied audience equally offers valuable clues for our investigation. Chatman argues that, “The counterpart of the implied author is the implied reader—not the flesh and bones you or I sitting in our living rooms reading the book, but the audience presupposed by the narrative itself. Like the implied author, the implied reader is always present.”<sup>117</sup> The implied audience is the audience for whom the rhetoric of the narrative is intended, those to whom the narrative is seeking to share a specific communication. At no point is it necessary for the actual audience to mirror the implied audience. However, Chatman argues that for us, as real readers, to gain insight into the communication of the narrative it is essential to enter into a “fictional contract” wherein “the implied author informs the real reader how to

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<sup>115</sup> Chatman 1978, 31.

<sup>116</sup> Chatman 1978, 148-149. See also Booth 1983, 70-71.

<sup>117</sup> Chatman 1978, 149.

perform as an implied audience.”<sup>118</sup> John Keenan describes this process as the real reader adopting a “persona” for the duration of the narrative “so that we may experience the rhetorical impact of the narrative.”<sup>119</sup> As we do this, we gain insight into the message being communicated and, as in the case with the implied author, the more insight we gain into this communication the easier it will be for us to understand the communities behind such narratives.

### **Roger Chartier and the History of Reading: Text and/as Object**

One other important element that allows these ideas within narrative and literary theory to meld together into an applicable methodological approach to *avadāna* literature is Roger Chartier’s argument for the necessity of understanding a text’s form within this production of meaning for interpretive communities. Chartier, partly as a critique of reception theory, argues that:

The space between text and object, which is precisely the space in which meaning is constructed, has too often been forgotten, not only by the traditional sort of literary history that thinks of the work as an abstract text whose typographic forms are without importance, but also by the ‘aesthetic of reception’ that, in spite of its desire to historicize the readers’ experience, postulates a pure and unmediated relationship between the ‘signals’ emitted by the text...and the ‘horizon of expectation’ of the public to which those signals are addressed. In this perspective the ‘effect produced’ in no way depends upon the material forms that operate as a vehicle for the text. Still, those forms also fully contribute to fashioning the reader’s expectations and to calling for a new public or novel uses.”<sup>120</sup>

Chartier proposes a triangle relationship between the text itself, the object that conveys the text (i.e. the oral/aural performance, material form of the publication etc.) and the object that

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<sup>118</sup> Chatman 1978, 150.

<sup>119</sup> Keenan 1994, 18.

<sup>120</sup> Chartier 1994, 9.

grasps it (i.e. the listener/reader). For Chartier, who is particularly interested in the print culture of France in the 14-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the actual form in which the text is presented to the ‘reader’ is a significant element in the production of meaning—an element that he argues is usually absent in the areas of narrative and literary theory.<sup>121</sup> Thus when a text shifts from oral performance to printed material (such as with a Shakespearian play) or gets divided into verses (as developed with the Christian Bible) all such shifts in form influence the horizon of expectations for the audience and are instrumental in the production of meaning. It is this shift of emphasis from the author and text onto the reader that informs his conception of the history of reading versus the history of what is read. Much of this understanding is tied closely to the emphasis on the ‘interpretive community’ and a desire to understand a readers’ response to a given text.

Chartier is interested in some of the very same questions that occupy Fish, particularly “how the same texts can be differently apprehended, manipulated, and comprehended.”<sup>122</sup> For Fish, the answer comes from the idea of the interpretive community which forms, informs and constrains the act of interpretation for its members. Chartier agrees with this position but also adds the necessity of understanding how the very form in which any given text is presented to an audience also plays a substantial role in the production of meaning for that community. Indeed, Chartier ultimately argues that although the history of reading contains the paradox of trying to postulate a practice that can only be grasped at, it is through “constructing communities of readers as ‘interpretive communities’ (Stanley Fish’s expression), discerning how material forms

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<sup>121</sup> John Dagenais incorporates Chartier’s ideas into his study of the reading experience and manuscript culture during the Middle Ages, and reflects the same approach I am establishing in my study. For his discussion of Chartier see Dagenais 1994, 23.

<sup>122</sup> Chartier 1994, 8.

affect meaning...these are the routes laid out for anyone who wishes to understand as a historian the 'silent production' that is 'the activity of reading'."<sup>123</sup>

For our purposes this is an important addition to Fish's interpretive community. Fish refutes the assumed stance that texts create communities and posits that it is the other way around, that communities form texts while also arguing that these same texts constrain the possible interpretations and intentions of the community as well. Chartier also considers this relationship between text and community to be reciprocal and agrees that Fish is correct in understanding the shaping force that a community holds over textual production. At the same time he points out that a text, in its material form and mode of presentation etc., has a great deal to do with the production of meaning and the shaping of communities as well. For Chartier, this influence of text-as-object is not limited purely to the physical form of a printed book, but also extends to variations of the medium of a text, such as the move from an oral/aural to written transmission.

Chartier's approach also becomes an important corrective for certain aspects of Chatman's theory which fails to recognize the role that the formal textual object plays in the communication of meaning. Chartier would thus take issue with Chatman's assertion that, "the physical condition of a book (or other artifact) does not affect the nature of the aesthetic object fixed by it: *David Copperfield* remains *David Copperfield* whether it is read in an elegant library edition or a dirty, water-stained paperback version."<sup>124</sup> While Chartier would perhaps not disagree that the aesthetic object remains fixed, he would argue that the act of reading, and the meaning produced during such an act would certainly be influenced by its physical form, even if it is only a subtle influence. Thus, the difference between an elegant edition compared to a plain

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<sup>123</sup> Chartier 1994, 23.

<sup>124</sup> Chatman 1978, 27.



paperback would indeed affect the reception of such a work by the audience in the production of meaning. An embossed, leather bound, illuminated Bible will be received differently than the paperback copy placed in your hotel room nightstand. Chartier argues that this difference in reception will influence the way the text is read and the meaning that is produced in that act of reading.

But beyond even the physical presentation of the book-as-object, there are a host of variables that often go unnoticed but still influence the meaning a reader finds in the text. This point is exemplified in what some saw as a problematic move in adding chapter and verse divisions to the Bible. This was both a radical change to the text as well as to the physical presentation of the text to the audience. The move was seen by John Locke and others of the time as a disastrous distortion of the way the Bible was read as it disrupted its continued discourse, forming short aphorisms that would lead to misinterpretation and arguments based upon short, arbitrarily collected verses instead of a more complete reading of the work as a whole. In the case of the Bible the words were not changed, nor was there any substantive difference made to the *story*. Rather, it was the physical appearance—the grouping of specific sentences and ideas together in verse—that, as many at the time argued, disrupted the natural reading and meaning of the Biblical text.<sup>125</sup> The fundamental shift in the physical representation of the Biblical text radically altered the *discourse* of the narrative and influenced the manner in which the audience read and interpreted it.

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<sup>125</sup> See Chartier 1994, 11-12; and McKenzie 1986, 46-47.

## **Theory in Action**

Now that we have explored the fundamental theoretical framework through which we will explore Buddhist *avadāna* literature, I would like to present several previous studies that have endeavored to engage in a similar line of questioning. The purpose of so doing will be to explore specific modes of methodology in which these scholars chose to engage texts from their respective fields, as well as to highlight the benefits and limits of such an approach.

### **Raymond E. Brown and the Community of the Beloved Disciple**

The field of Biblical studies has employed many elements of literary theory to better understand and reconstruct the social context of early Christian communities, tracing their development through the first few centuries of the Common Era. Raymond E. Brown has been foremost in these efforts in his work on the history of the Johannine Community. Brown argues that since the Gospels of the Christian New Testament were written for an intended audience they give indirect information about the theological and social development of the audiences that preserved, shaped, and/or received these writings.<sup>126</sup> Because of the similarity of the theological concerns and literary representation of Jesus found in the Gospel and Epistles of John, Brown argues that this body of literature gives access to a specific community of Christians founded upon this early Christian writing. Thus Brown argues that “it may be that one can reconstruct more of the background of John than that of any other Gospel.”<sup>127</sup> Indeed, Brown supports this claim by noting that the apparent additions and redactions found in the Johannine writings

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<sup>126</sup> Brown 1997, 374.

<sup>127</sup> Brown 1997, 374.

indicate that the editor that “took the trouble to add to the evangelist’s work agreed with it substantially and was of the same community of thought. Indeed the style of the proposed additions shows respect for what was already written and a desire not to tamper with the established pattern.”<sup>128</sup> In addition, at the times when such changes reflect alternate theological emphasis these are best explained as developments in community thought that varied over time because of different social contexts and needs.

Brown argues that the Johannine writings reveal four phases in the development of an early Christian community that constituted the intended audience of the evangelist. These phases trace the development of a community of Jews that accepted Jesus as the Davidic Messiah and were thus alienated and expelled from the synagogues. This community then turned hostile to “the Jews” and developed a strong Christology that emphasized the divinity of Jesus and the importance of loving one another, while downplaying the need for apostolic and ecclesiastical authority since the Spirit alone was a sufficient teacher. The Epistles of John directly address the development of a schism within this community between those who over-emphasized Jesus’ divinity (moving in the direction of Docetism and Gnosticism) and those who stressed the importance of Jesus come in the flesh. The development of this schism then led to the eventual disintegration of the Johannine community as it developed a pastoral structure and moved closer to the larger “church catholic.”<sup>129</sup>

Brown’s work on the Johannine community is based upon the developments of literary theory that we have discussed earlier in this chapter. Brown suggests that “the Gospel must be read on several levels, so that it tells us the story both of Jesus and of the community that

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<sup>128</sup> Brown 1997, 367.

<sup>129</sup> See Brown 1997, 374-376 for a basic overview of these phases of development that he traces through the Johannine writings. For a comprehensive and detailed discussion of this community of early Christians see the initial study in Brown 1979.

believed in him.”<sup>130</sup> By approaching the Gospel literature in this way Biblical scholars such as Brown and others have argued that “the Gospels tell us primarily about the church situation in which they were written, and only secondarily about the situation of Jesus which *prima facie* they describe.”<sup>131</sup> Brown further references this proposition, insisting that the Gospels primarily “tell us how an evangelist conceived of and presented Jesus to a Christian community in the last third of the first century, a presentation that indirectly gives us an insight into that community’s life at the time when the Gospel was written.”<sup>132</sup> Secondarily, the Gospels, through source analysis, can indirectly reveal “something about the community’s history earlier in the century, especially if the sources the evangelist used had already been part of the community’s heritage.”<sup>133</sup>

Brown is cautious in his approach, warning that “one should distinguish between the evangelist’s own thought and how the Gospel might have been read by others who had their own presuppositions,” and that we shouldn’t confuse “reconstructive research” with “exegesis, which has to do with what the Gospel meant to convey to its reader.”<sup>134</sup> It is thus that he stresses that “while [this approach] explains many factors in the Gospel, it remains a hypothesis.”<sup>135</sup> So, while Brown accepts that such an approach can “detect Christian community life beneath the surface Gospel story,” it must be kept in mind that though we gain a “general knowledge about the life situation of the community...it is difficult to move to specifics.”<sup>136</sup> Thus, Brown is quite adamant to point out the limits of such an approach and warns of “overly imaginative deductions about ecclesiastical history from what the Gospels tell us...and even more cautious of the argument

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<sup>130</sup> Brown 1979, 17.

<sup>131</sup> Brown 1979, 17.

<sup>132</sup> Brown 1979, 17.

<sup>133</sup> Brown 1979, 17.

<sup>134</sup> See Brown 1997, 375 and fn 105.

<sup>135</sup> See Brown 1997, 375.

<sup>136</sup> Brown 1979, 18.

from silence, i.e., from what the Gospels do not tell us.” Despite these inherent limitations and potential pitfalls, Brown’s work has provided keen insights into the development of early Christianity and influenced a growing area of research within Biblical scholarship that has further nuanced the literary approach to studying the social context and development of early Christian communities.<sup>137</sup>

### **John Keenan: Reader-Response Criticism and Narrative Theory in Action**

Moving from Biblical studies to Buddhist studies, I would like to note several scholars who have incorporated a similar literary approach in their scholarship. John Keenan seeks to employ aspects of Chatman’s narrative theory and Fish’s interpretive community as a means of reassessing our understanding of the *Mozi li huo lun* which he argues has been widely misunderstood by contemporary scholars. Keenan argues that the text is seeking to draw the reader into a “reinterpreted version of the Chinese classics in light of the Buddha Path. And yet it must accomplish this in terms of the accepted Chinese notions of meaning and value. It is for this reason that our text is a hermeneutical essay and not an apologetic tract.”<sup>138</sup> Thus, what was previously seen as an apologetic tract filled with basic doctrinal misunderstandings is really an attempt at “mediating Buddhism within Chinese culture” in order to “persuade its readers to accept a Buddhist interpretation of the classical Chinese tradition.”<sup>139</sup> Because of the way in which scholars have attempted to read the text as a historical document rather than a rhetorical

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<sup>137</sup> For further information on general developments in literary and reader-response approaches in Biblical scholarship see Blomberg 1990; Bloom 1988; Fowler 1991; Funk 1988; Gowler 2000; Kingsbury 1997; Sawyer 1999; Segovia 1996; Staley 1988; Staley 1995; and Stribbe 1992.

<sup>138</sup> Keenan 1994, 24-25.

<sup>139</sup> Keenan 1994, 10.

narrative, there has been a fundamental misconception of its purpose and a similar misinterpretation of its meaning and value for scholars of early Chinese Buddhism.

Keenan expands on Chatman's notion of *discourse* arguing that it is the "rhetorical or symbolic expression by means of which that story is communicated, and it moves beyond the confines of the text itself to exercise its impact within an expanded horizon" and thus "the discourse is the telling of the story in its broad cultural context."<sup>140</sup> Keenan further argues that what is more important to understand than the "apparent" point of the text is the rhetorical means by which it operates to elicit a specific effect on a specific interpretive community. He states, "What counts as valuable in the ancient literature is not what the old texts themselves say, as if they could speak apart from the interpretive reading of later thinkers. Their language is not constative, striving to be accountable to an objective world, but performative, aimed in particular circumstances to achieve a desired effect. The values and truths of the classics, thus understood, were constrained by the interpretive community."<sup>141</sup>

Keenan argues that a Reader-Response approach, as he terms it, "might also be able to shed some light on the social context within which the text's rhetorical strategy could have been effective."<sup>142</sup> He calls upon the work of Chatman to show that plot, as a function of *story* and a mode of *discourse* operates on both a surface and deep narrative level. The plot must be believable to the reader, based upon accepted cultural norms and codes. Yet, at the same time the plot also operates as a function to present the *discourse* of the narrative, to convey the meaning which relies upon the surface structure but is more clearly a representation of the deep narrative, the meaning that is taken from the text by the implied reader.

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<sup>140</sup> Keenan 1994, 11.

<sup>141</sup> Keenan 1994, 29.

<sup>142</sup> Keenan 1994, 21.

Using Chatman's terminology, Keenan also argues that, "one can sketch the figure of the real author....only indirectly and obliquely, by posing questions that the text never intended to treat. But by asking such questions about the text's assumptions and the discourse crafted by the implied author, and how these square with what we in fact know from other sources, one can reach prudent and probable judgments as to its time and author."<sup>143</sup> In other words, through the application of Chatman's theory of story, discourse and the continuum from implied author to the implied audience we are able to come to certain conclusions and judgments about the interpretive community and context that surrounds the narrative.

In this approach taken towards the *Mozi li huo lun*, Keenan seeks to tease out certain cultural clues and contextual circumstances that would otherwise be obscured. Keenan notes that, "By highlighting the rhetorical strategy of a text, a Reader-Response approach can identify more clearly the role that the implied reader is to play.... This approach would also caution that a subsequent 'misreading' of a religious text for historical information...functions best when it recognizes that it is indeed a 'misreading' of the text."<sup>144</sup> In this way he recognizes that though such a critical approach is not unproblematic it opens up possibilities for understanding that otherwise would be lost to us, and that such an approach is best used when one is completely self-aware of the explicit "misreading" that is going on in contradistinction to the implied purpose of the narrative in the first place. It is in this sense then, that such an approach inherently assumes a symptomatic hermeneutic, that though the text may be addressing other concerns than the ones we are necessarily interested in, we are still able to read back from the discourse and rhetoric to fill in the gaps, as it were, of our understanding of the context that produced such texts in the first place.

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<sup>143</sup> Keenan 1994, 37.

<sup>144</sup> Keenan 1994, 37.

## Andrew Skilton: A Synchronic Approach to the *Kṣāntivādin* Narrative

We will now move from Keenan's work on a Buddhist polemical text to Andrew Skilton's literary-historical approach to a specific *avadāna* narrative. Skilton's analysis of an *avadāna* is particularly pertinent to this study, not only because it is directly addressing an *avadāna* narrative, but also because he is seeking to uncover the community and context behind these narratives. Skilton study of two versions of the *Kṣāntivādin* narrative served as the first impetus for my developing such an approach to the study of Buddhist *avadāna* literature. Indeed, while Skilton does not explicitly discuss any of the theoretical concepts that I have presented in this chapter (such as the interpretive community and the implied reader) they are implicitly employed in his study.

In his review of each version of the narrative Skilton argues that, "each recension of the story shows its own emphases, doubtless reflecting the immediate purposes as well as the broader religious and social climate of its redactor."<sup>145</sup> Indeed after a brief summary of several ancillary versions of the *Kṣāntivādin* narrative Skilton notes that each recension can be "seen as reflecting other concerns or circumstances of the redactor, either intentionally or otherwise."<sup>146</sup>

Skilton continues his analysis of two versions of this narrative found in the *Samādhirājasūtra* and another found in the *Mūlasarvāstivādin* Vinaya, each reflecting a certain symmetry with each other. Skilton argues that this symmetry and tension between what he argues are two roughly contemporaneous narrative versions suggests that they reflect differing Buddhist communities that were clearly aware of each other's existence and differed on the value

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<sup>145</sup> Skilton 2002, 117.

<sup>146</sup> Skilton 2002, 125.



of forest-dwelling for religious pursuits. For Skilton, such a reading of these two narratives from roughly the same time period is suggestive of a context for the development of early Mahāyāna Buddhism to which we otherwise have little or no access. Thus, Skilton argues that through the comparison of rhetorical strategies in roughly synchronous narratives we gain further insight into texts that reflect “a certain kind of religiosity and maybe even a different kind of community” and “begin to have rationally established sources for a study of the character of the early Mahāyāna in relation to its contemporary religious context.”<sup>147</sup>

While my concern is less in exploring the context for the development of Mahāyāna and more in understanding the role such narrative literature played within various Buddhist communities throughout India and China, the two concerns are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, Skilton is expressing one of the very real possibilities and applications such an approach affords us for religious studies in general, not just Mahāyāna Buddhism.

### **Putting Theory into Practice**

Now that we have established a means of investigating this literature and have looked at several studies that have attempted a similar approach, let us briefly examine an *avadāna* narrative as a preliminary test case. The following is the first *avadāna* found in the *ZPYJ*. After providing a translation of the narrative we will briefly look at gleaning possible clues about the interpretive community and the cultural context surrounding the narrative.

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<sup>147</sup> Skilton 2002, 136.

Formerly, at Queli Temple<sup>148</sup> there was a venerable, old monk who had obtained Arhatship. Having taken up a young novice, he went down to the city on alms rounds. His robe and begging bowl were very heavy, so he had the novice to carry them and follow behind him. While walking along the road the novice thought, “human existence is nothing but suffering; if I desire to avoid this suffering then what path should I join? He then thought, “the Buddha always praises the bodhisattva as superior. Today, I should generate bodhicitta.” As soon as he had this thought, his master, by means of a supernatural ability to read others minds, understood his thoughts. The master addressed the novice saying, “Bring the robe and begging bowl here.” The novice carried the robe and bowl and offered them to his teacher. The master then told him, “Walk ahead of me.” The novice moved to walk ahead and began to think again, “The bodhisattva path involves extreme effort and difficulty. If someone demands your head you give them your head, if they demand an eye then you give them an eye. These things are extremely difficult; it is not something I can do. It is not like the quick attainment of the Arhat who speedily obtains escape from suffering.”<sup>149</sup> The master again knew his thoughts and spoke to the novice, “Carry my bowl and robe again and follow behind me.” This happened three times. The novice was confused and surprised, not knowing what it meant. Advancing to their stop, he folded his hands [in reverence] and asked his master to please explain the meaning of it. His teacher responded, “Because you set out on the bodhisattva path three times, I accordingly placed you before me three times. Because you slid back from that aspiration three times I placed you behind me.” Why? Because the merit for aspiring to be a bodhisattva is superior to a trichiliocosm full of accomplished arhats.”

One of the first things we will notice about this *avadāna* is the absence of the formal patterns attributed to this genre. There is no story of the present, nor any connection between the characters. Instead what is presented is a simple story of the past. And, as the conclusion seems

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<sup>148</sup> This is the name of temple/monastery in *Quzhi* 屈支 (Kucha—northeast of Kashgar). See footnote 2 in Chavannes 1910-34 vol. 2, 1.

<sup>149</sup> This appears to be a reference to Buddhist narratives that recount the way in which a bodhisattva offers up various parts of his body, or his very life, upon the demands of a supplicant. For further information on ‘gift of the body’ narratives in Buddhist literature see Ohnuma 2007.

to indicate, its primary purpose is not about showing the workings of karma, (although there certainly is the notion of karma hinted at throughout the narrative). Rather, the conclusion leads the reader to consider the differences in merit between the bodhisattva and arhat path.

The implied author presents a virtually empty narrator who operates in the third person, knowing the thoughts and intents of the two characters of the story. Our story starts, as do nearly all the stories in this collection, with the indeterminate time marker “formerly” (*xi* 昔) before moving on with the story, briefly providing a location and establishing the characters. The narrator presents the thoughts of the novice and the supernatural abilities of his master, which allows him to gain insight into his disciples’ vacillation between the śrāvaka and the bodhisattva paths. The reader is given to see a monk who vacillates between two optional spiritual orientations, that of the arhat path and that of the bodhisattva path, each with their own merits and demands.

The implied audience is to understand and empathize with the conundrum of the indecisive monk. We are told that “the Buddha always praises the bodhisattva as superior” yet at the same time we are given to know that it “involves extreme effort and difficulty.” The events of the *story* provide us with an understanding of the *discourse* of the narrative as the master, who has accomplished the arhat path, moves the novice either ahead or behind him according to whether his resolve is to follow the bodhisattva path, or the less arduous path of an arhat.

What we seem to find in this narrative is an implied audience, likely to be a monastic community, that is very concerned with, and at times possibly even ambivalent about, the differing spiritual orientations available to them. The actual reader is asked to take up the role of the novice who finds himself at a crossroads and is unsure of which path he is to follow. Nevertheless, at the end the final intent of the narrative is clear: it argues for the superiority of

the bodhisattva over that of a *śravaka*. This, then, is a narrative involved with monastic deliberations about spiritual orientation rather than a narrative directed toward the lay or non-Buddhist. It is not designed to show the workings of karma and the connection between past and present events. We are given an image of a novice with at least some inclination towards the bodhisattva path being instructed by an arhat about the superiority of that path over the one that he clearly chose himself.

This is of course an incomplete and preliminary reading of the narrative but it provides clues about the concerns it is seeking to address and the type of community that would employ such a narrative. Indeed, rather than acting as a proselytizing narrative designed to teach non-Buddhists, this narrative seems designed to try to convince a monastic audience of the superiority (or at least validity) of the bodhisattva path. It is also addressing the concerns that monks might have about the difficulty and hardships associated with the bodhisattva orientation—the very cause of the novice’s internal debate. Thus the narrative allows the reader to take on the role of the novice and vicariously participate in his internal deliberations before coming to their own determination of the superiority of the bodhisattva orientation.

One of the questions we might ask is whether it is significant that this particular narrative was placed as the first story in the anthology. Is it setting a particular tone for the collection that thus influences the way a reader might interpret the remaining narratives that follow after? This question will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter.

## Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with establishing a theoretical framework in which we can ask certain kinds of questions of Buddhist *avadāna* literature in the hopes of better understanding the socio-cultural milieu in which such literature was formed and transmitted. In following such a train of thought we are engaging in a line of questioning for which this literature was not intended as an answer. Nevertheless, as Hans-Georg Gadamer argues, “a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back behind what is said, then we inevitably ask questions beyond what is said... We can understand a text only when we have understood the question to which it is an answer.”<sup>150</sup>

Indeed, this study is largely engaged in a hermeneutical reading that draws strongly upon the work of Gadamer. I understand that the hermeneutical work I am engaging in “is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness” and that a sense of understanding and meaning comes “in the play between the traditional text’s strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between.*”<sup>151</sup> I would like to apply this principle somewhat differently than Gadamer perhaps intended it. He argued that this tension between familiar and strange exists between the historical text and the present reader, yet I would like to apply this tension to the familiarity and difference that exists between various historical communities (interpretive communities) and argue that this tension is perhaps most prevalently seen in the tension of variance between alternating versions of the same narrative both synchronically and

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<sup>150</sup> Gadamer 2004, 363.

<sup>151</sup> Gadamer 2004, 295.

diachronically. This tension, evidenced through variation, indicates shifts in the horizon of expectations of various interpretive communities which will be glimpsed through our evaluation of implied authors and readers in our analysis of the various *avadāna* narratives we will explore over the next two chapters.

Thus we see that the combination of ideas from Stanley Fish, Seymour Chatman, and Roger Chartier create a network of theoretical views that enable us to catch glimpses of the context behind the narrative to further flesh out our understanding of these texts. In essence this approach is an attempt to treat these *avadāna* narratives as a two way mirror. As we attempt to look through the text we can see the interpretive community reflected in its story and discourse and we can then attempt to sketch a better understanding of who they are and what it is they are concerned with. It is this shift of emphasis from text to audience that will allow us to expand upon our traditional notions of *avadāna* and look at this literature in new ways, gaining new insights that will help illuminate the Buddhists that read them.

My approach is not intended to simply act as a reader-response criticism of a group of *avadāna* narratives. But it does seek to employ various aspects and ideas from that approach as a means of understanding the community from whom these narratives were formed with specific concerns in mind. In this respect, I am less interested in understanding the ‘meaning’ of the story, and more concerned with fleshing out the context in which the given story will have meaning.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ANTHOLOGY AND AVADĀNA LITERATURE

There is no anthological organization devoid of an ideological orientation. In the anthology, literary form, organization, even sequence, are all ideological subjects.

–David Stern, *The Anthology in Jewish Literature* (2004, 5)

#### **Introduction**

In chapter two of this dissertation we discussed how various developments in literary theory can help us approach Chinese *avadāna* material to better understand their ideological orientations. We discussed Chatman's distinction between *story* and *discourse*, Fish's notion of the interpretive community, and Chartier's emphasis on the organization and physical form of the text as ways of interpreting the production of meaning. In this final chapter we will follow up on Chartier's notion of organization and presentation of a text as a method for understanding the concerns that the authors or compilers of the text are seeking to address and by extension the characteristics of the socio-cultural context in which such texts were created to address those concerns. We will do this by focusing on the textual form in which the overwhelming majority of Chinese *avadāna* literature is found: the anthology.

For Chartier, the meaning of a work is not just in the words but in the packaging and presentation of the words as well. What the anthology offers us is a particular way of packaging and presenting other textual sources to the reader. The anthology is an artificial and deliberate repackaging of pre-existing texts arranged, and sometimes edited, into a new configuration. It is the very ordering, rearranging, editing, and re-presenting of earlier texts that illuminates the

interpretive community and presents a particular kind of *discourse* with minimal alteration of the *story* of a given text. Thus, an anthology offers insight into the *discourse* of a text in ways that other kinds of writings can't.

This chapter will present a brief introduction to the theory of the anthology which has only recently begun to emerge in the fields of religious and literary studies. I will then provide an overview of the role anthology plays in the preservation and transmission of Buddhist *avadāna* narrative literature in general, followed by a detailed discussion of two distinct but interrelated anthologies of *avadāna* narratives found in the Chinese canon. By detailing the similarities and differences between these two anthologies I will argue that they indicate the existence of distinct interpretive communities that represent separate idioms of Buddhism available in early medieval China.

If, as we discussed in chapter two, text and interpretive communities help shape each other then there exists the possibility that we can discover aspects of a community through the text that shaped, and was shaped by, that very community. As Robert Campany argues in his analysis of a collection of miracle tales from China at roughly the same time period, the narratives “did not begin their lives in a social vacuum. They were socially made, socially exchanged and transmitted.”<sup>152</sup> Thus collections of narratives from this time period become “an artifact of collective memory” and a narrative community that “left traces in the text.”<sup>153</sup> For our purposes, perhaps the most important element of Campany’s study of this collection of miracle tales is that the very nature of the compilation of these tales reflects “a particular style or idiom of Buddhism in action” because the compilation of narratives was “written with its participants

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<sup>152</sup> Campany 2012, 24.

<sup>153</sup> Campany 2012, 24.



in mind as their primary audience.”<sup>154</sup> Thus these narratives were intended to be persuasive and to wrestle with particular concerns and tensions that existed between various idioms of Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions available in China at the time. Like Campany, I also argue that these two *avadāna* anthologies represent “artifacts of how certain aspects of that [Buddhist] tradition were taken up and responded to by Chinese people in light of religious alternatives.”<sup>155</sup> To be sure, this is not an argument for a historically verifiable community marked in time and space but rather a community that depicts a certain way of thinking and viewing the world as reflected in and by a given compilation of narratives.

### **The Theory of the Anthology**

The anthology offers us a window into the context and construction of community in ways that other kinds of texts can't. Scholars have started to investigate the anthology for the insights this type of literature can offer us: “Anthologies [are] a theoretically interesting form whose potential for opening up discourse has yet to be sufficiently explored.”<sup>156</sup> It is also noted that there is no “general critical study of the process of anthologizing,” and that until just recently “no single volume was solely devoted to exploring any *aspect* of the editing and history of anthologies.”<sup>157</sup> Indeed, in his recent work *The Anthology and Jewish Literature*, David Stern remarks that there is an “absence of an existing ‘theory’ of the anthology.”<sup>158</sup> Paul Griffiths, in

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<sup>154</sup> Campany 2012, 31.

<sup>155</sup> Campany 2012, xiii. The entire introduction to his translation of the compilation of miracle tales has served as a model for my approach to this chapter and has greatly influenced the way in which I have come to think of this subject. It is well worth spending the time to read Campany's study in its entirety.

<sup>156</sup> Lawall 2004, 47. For a study on the history of anthology in Western literature, see Ferry 2002.

<sup>157</sup> Di Leo 2004, 6-7.

<sup>158</sup> Stern 2004, 1. Stern does, however, note several studies that deal with the issue of the anthology in various forms and functions, see 10 fn. 1.

his book *Religious Reading*, addresses issues of the anthology within religious studies, and in Buddhism specifically, by stating that the anthology was used “in the service of the creation, maintenance, and development of a religious account.”<sup>159</sup> In other words, the anthology was used to form and maintain tradition, but at the same time it contested it as well. Griffiths argues that the purpose of an anthology is for “superimposing the past upon the present, or representing the past to the present,” and that one of the many possible reasons for this is to “provide matter for the delectation, rumination, instruction, and transformation of those in the present for whom the past is being quotationally represented.”<sup>160</sup>

Though I agree with Griffiths’ assessment, I believe that there is more to be uncovered in the anthologizing process than simply superimposing the past onto the present. Anthologies allow for the reconstruction of the past to deal with new concerns in the present. It not only helps to maintain a tradition; it can also formulate new traditions from selections of the past. The selective gathering of disparate parts into a newly created whole provides means for a community or individual to rearrange, manipulate, and juxtapose whole texts—or carefully selected portions of texts—with other writings in ways that the original authors or community could never have anticipated. Thus, the anthology provides a lens to view the context of a given situation out of which such an arranged construction of texts, stories, narratives, and parts were organized in a specific manner to address specific kinds of concerns. As such, the investigation of anthologies as a particular form of religious writing (for which Griffiths’ work lays a foundation) is an invaluable resource to the history of religion—regardless of the tradition or time period.

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<sup>159</sup> Griffiths 1999, 182.

<sup>160</sup> Griffiths 1999, 101.

The argument of this chapter is simple: because an anthology is the gathering together of disparate parts from multiple sources into a new cohesive whole, its organization and themes reflect a particular interpretive community and offers clues about the concerns and context in which it was formed. The anthology acts as a tool in shaping and influencing the very tradition it is supposedly transmitting in a static form. By addressing a range of questions about form, purpose, and the context of the anthology, Griffiths establishes a basic blueprint from which more detailed and specific studies can progress, providing a beginning step in an area that has remained largely unexplored within religious and Buddhist studies.<sup>161</sup>

Some of the primary questions that Griffiths proposes we ask of anthologies to more fully understand their socio-historical context and purpose include: (1) principles of organization, (2) the importance placed by the anthology upon the display of quotations as such, (3) the length and number of cited materials, (4) the length of the anthology as a whole, (5) the nature of those parts that do not consist of excerpts or quoted material, (6) helps for the reader if any (such as subject or topic heads etc.), and (7) the compiler's explanation of the purpose of the compilation or otherwise addressing or offering explanations to the reader. All of these questions possess the advantage of being answerable within the work itself.

In addition, Griffiths also proposes that we can ask questions that require information from sources outside of the anthology, although these are more difficult, if not impossible, to answer. Such questions include: (1) dealing with the original source material from which the compilation is taken, (2) looking at whether the quotes are verbatim or if there are editorial insertions, and (3) looking at the sort of changes that are made and why (such as language choice and poetic style etc.). We can also ask specific extratextual questions such as: (1) what was the

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<sup>161</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Griffith's relevant questions in regards to the anthology see Griffiths 1999, 97-104.

socio-historical context of the compilation, (2) the methods of storage, (3) display and transmission of the anthology, and (4) what were the institutional and pedagogical practices of the time and place of the compilation. These sorts of questions can help us come to some conclusions about the purpose of the anthology and will provide significant insight in our attempt to deduce information about the compiler, the use of such an anthology, and the ideal reader of such a work.<sup>162</sup>

Since this chapter is only a preliminary exercise in investigating two specific *avadāna* anthologies found in the Chinese canon, we will not be able to address every question of the anthology that Griffiths proposes in his initial discussion of the anthology as a religious text. Instead I will focus primarily on intratextual evidence, particularly that of the religious themes and their organization within the anthology as a way of understanding their potential rhetorical use and context. As any quick review of Buddhist literature will make apparent, the bulk of Buddhist *avadāna* literature preserved for us from the regions of India and China exist as anthologies. This is not to say that *all* such literature is found in such collections, but it is to say that there seems to be a significant link between the anthology and this type of narrative literature in the Buddhist tradition. Indeed, Griffiths argues that the anthology itself is a form of writing that caters to the needs of preserving and transmitting religious traditions and thus serves as a very apt tool in the study of religion regardless of tradition or culture.

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<sup>162</sup> Griffiths 1999, 101-104.

## Anthology in Religious Studies

Though study of the role of anthology in the formation and transformation of religious traditions is an emerging development in religious studies, there are several recent examples in Christian and Jewish studies that illustrate the value of just such an approach. In his book, *Rethinking "Gnosticism,"* Michael Williams seeks to understand the collection of early Christian texts found in the Nag Hammadi library. Williams argues that the contents and organization of the collection helps modern scholars better understand the context in which such a collection was made and how it relates to developments of Gnosticism in early Christianity. He states:

Tractates seem chosen...for specific functions that they serve within codices. Rather than coming to us as a jumbled hodgepodge of traditions, the tractates come to us ordered. If we stand any chance at all of understanding the motivations for the collection(s) in the Nag Hammadi library, we will have to take these arrangements into account, for they offer us the most direct clues about how the writings in these volumes were understood by their fourth-century owners.<sup>163</sup>

For Williams the specific arrangement of the texts within the collection of the Nag Hammadi corpus serves to establish theological consistency among texts that might otherwise be seen as being doctrinally incompatible. Thus, texts that relate a revelation to an ancient prophet would be placed in such a way as to present itself as a precursor to the revelation of Christ. Williams concludes that, "The very repackaging and ordering of the material resolved, as it were, theological diversity among the writings. Each writing had its own function and could be interpreted in terms of that function in relation to the other works within the codex... We might consider the degree to which the intertextual relationships effected by codex production could

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<sup>163</sup> Williams 1996, 260. For a complete analysis of William's assessment of the Nag Hammadi Corpus see the entirety of Chapter 11.

have established hermeneutical perspectives in terms of which works that to us seem theologically conflicting could be read as components of the same message, conveying the same fundamental views and values.”<sup>164</sup> Thus, for Williams, the Nag Hammadi corpus intentionally organizes seemingly contradictory doctrinal ideas in such a way as to appear as part of a broader framework of ideas, thereby smoothing over doctrinal differences and resolving potential theological conflicts.

Williams argues that viewing a collection such as the Nag Hammadi, which in its disparate parts looks like the jumbled gathering of unassociated texts or narratives, from the broader perspective of an intentionally organized anthology helps to explain the function of the corpus. The sum is greater than its parts, as it were. It is by investigating the organization and nature of the collection that he calls into question previously held theories about the status of Gnosticism in fourth century Christianity. Indeed, Williams’ study attempts to reimagine very fundamental notions of the term Gnosticism and at the heart of his argument is his analysis of the organization of the collected texts found within the Nag Hammadi corpus functioned to resolve theological diversity.

In addition to Williams’ description of the role of anthology in understanding early Gnosticism, David Stern, in his introduction to the edited volume *The Anthology in Jewish Literature*, mentions five significant theoretical issues in relation to the study of the anthology. Although Stern presents these five issues solely in relation to the anthology in Jewish literature, I believe that they are applicable to the study of anthology in religious literature in general. The first issue Stern discusses is the literary form of the anthology including the size of quoted text and the manner in which it is presented and labeled by the compilers. This can range from

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<sup>164</sup> Williams 1996, 261.

numerous short works gathered together without being labeled, to larger selections and even entire works that are gathered together in what are essentially small libraries. For Stern the anthological form is significant since the style and method of arrangement can “radically alter and shape their readers’ reception and understanding of their contents according to how they are placed within the anthological context.”<sup>165</sup> Because of this Stern argues that “there is no anthological organization devoid of an ideological orientation. In the anthology, literary form, organization, even sequence, are all ideological subjects.”<sup>166</sup>

For example, as we saw at the end of the previous chapter, the *ZPYJ* begins with a narrative describing the internal struggle of a young novice trying to decide whether to follow the bodhisattva path. According to the argument presented by Stern this is a significant and intentional ideological orientation which is preceded by a sequence of further narratives that explore notions of proper monastic behavior and Buddhist teachings. The anthology then culminates with the last narrative presenting a grand description of the omniscience and omnipotence of the Buddha while repeating a phrase shared between the first and last narrative thus tying to beginning and the end together. This sequence takes the reader from the beginning as a young novice just starting on the bodhisattva path, through primary Buddhist teachings and ideals of normative behavior, and ends with a description of the Buddha in all his glory. Such sequencing and organization reflects an ideological orientation. We will speak of this sequence in more detail below.

Building on this point, Stern argues that in literary form a second distinction can be made between what he calls “explicit” and “implicit” anthologies—between works that explicitly present themselves as compilations of previous works and those that do not. Building on this

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<sup>165</sup> Stern 2004, 5.

<sup>166</sup> Stern 2004, 5.

distinction, anthologies may be viewed along a continuum based upon their principle of selection ranging from anthologies that are essentially archives that simply seek to preserve materials, to collections based on certain selection criteria but still remaining primarily dedicated to preservation of a wide body of material, to what Stern refers to as the “anthology proper” which is highly selective. Such a gradation indicates the variety of anthologies possible based on the different organization and selection decisions and on the explicit and implicit nature of the compilations.

Jeffrey Tigay illustrates aspects of the explicit and implicit anthology in Jewish literature, arguing that much of the Hebrew Bible is understood in modern scholarship to be implicitly anthological.<sup>167</sup> The Torah, for example, is a history composed from separate sources that evolved through a process of composition and conflation. Other books within the Hebrew Bible, however, are clearly explicit in their anthological tendency, such as Psalms and Proverbs. Ultimately, the entire Biblical text itself is an anthological endeavor and variation in the order and organization of the text exposes differences in the traditions that seek to employ it as a central text. Thus different codices of the Bible will end with Chronicles or Ezra-Nehemia, allowing the narration of the text to end with the return of the Jewish community. On the other hand Christian Bibles will follow the Septuagint and place the prophets at the end of the narrative in order to lead into the discussion of Christ found in the Gospels, thus making a natural bridge between the “Old Testament” as a prophetic precursor to the discussion of Christ as the prophesied Messiah.<sup>168</sup> Tigay argues that from the evolution, conflation and reordering the Biblical text we see that the “anthology is not only a literary phenomenon but an intellectual

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<sup>167</sup> See Tigay 2004, 15-26.

<sup>168</sup> See Tigay 2004, 15 and 27 fn. 4.



one as well.”<sup>169</sup> He argues that the precedent of the anthological process which was established in the formation of the Biblical text “set a pattern for subsequent Jewish thought.”

Such an understanding of the anthology draws attention to the second issue of interest in Stern’s discussion: the compiler or editor of the work. Focusing on the anthologist leads to questions about the production, publication, and motivations behind such works. Stern argues that the method of an anthologist is no mere passive act, but rather the work an anthologist does in the selection, presentation, and motivation of the anthologizing process can give “shape to a major moment of literary history” and leads him to ponder on what “we can learn from our anthologies about their often anonymous creators, and what can such knowledge about anthologizers and editors teach us about [a tradition’s] literary culture?”<sup>170</sup> Discussion of the role of the anthologizer is perhaps most often explored in relation to the process of canonization and the authorization or marginalization of specific works that are either included or excluded in the selection process.

Such questions of canonization are not relegated to the religious realm alone. The inclusion or exclusion of texts in the anthologizing process and the function that it serves is a significant topic in discussions about pedagogical practices in contemporary education, as the anthology increasingly becomes an important tool in the classrooms of modern high schools and universities throughout the world. Who decides what gets included, and what might such selections say about the function of an anthology when certain groups, cultures, or ideologies are underrepresented or excluded altogether?<sup>171</sup> If such issues are relevant in modern applications of

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<sup>169</sup> Tigay 2004, 26.

<sup>170</sup> Tigay 2004, 6.

<sup>171</sup> For a discussion on the issues of the use of anthology in modern pedagogy see Guillory 1995.

the anthology in educational practices, is it also conceivable that such ideologies were at work in earlier anthological processes as well?

We see something similar in the collection of Wisdom literature found in Jewish writings. The anthologizing of this type of literature, the short parables, wise sayings, and moralizing narratives, played a pedagogical role within the Jewish and other traditions of the ancient Near East.<sup>172</sup> James Kugel argues that wisdom was understood in ancient Near Eastern cultures as a body of knowledge that by its nature was too vast to be mastered by any one single individual. As such, the collection of the individual pieces of knowledge about the operations of the universe into anthologies that could then be shared with others was the natural response to the problem of preserving this vast body of knowledge. Such anthologies of wisdom “hardly constituted a single individual’s, or even an individual nation’s, undertaking....Charting wisdom was thus inevitably a collective, international enterprise, and one who wished to acquire wisdom had willy-nilly to learn from all true sages everywhere....By definition, then, any sage was an anthologist, and the wisdom book a *bouquet de pensées* gathered from here and there.”<sup>173</sup> Such anthologies of wise sayings, parables, and narratives classified under this rubric became implicit pedagogical devices designed to give the reader insight into God’s divine will. Such an understanding of the anthology as a pedagogical tool is an essential aspect of the way in which I feel we should conceive of the anthologies of *avadāna* literature that we will discuss in more detail below.

Questions about the various functions of anthologies lead to Stern’s fourth issue of interest: the role anthology plays in the formation, transformation, preservation, and transmission of tradition. While an anthology might pretend to merely present earlier writings, Stern argues that “the very act of selection can be a powerful instrument for innovation; juxtaposition and

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<sup>172</sup> See Kugel 2004, 32-52.

<sup>173</sup> Kugel 2004, 40.

recombination of discrete passages in new contexts and combinations can radically alter their original meaning.”<sup>174</sup> This is perhaps most acutely seen in implicit anthologies that attempt to mask their anthological nature, but it is applicable to anthologies of all kinds. The role of anthologies in the creation and preservation of tradition then leads to the final point that Stern seeks to make, which is the role that anthology can play in the creation of culture and community. For Stern the anthology serves as a “figurative, idealized space for imagining new communities of readers and audiences, for transforming the past into a new entity through conscious fragmentation, literary montage, and collage. In these works, political and cultural ideology takes on material form in the shape of the anthology...[and] raise[s] the question of the relation between ideology and literary production.”<sup>175</sup>

### **The Anthology in Buddhist Literature**

We now move our discussion from the theory of the anthology as broadly understood and applied in the study of other religious traditions to a more detailed discussion of the anthological character of Buddhist *avadāna* literature. This discussion is not meant to be a comprehensive investigation of all known anthologies of *avadāna* literature. Rather, it is intended to introduce several of the basic characteristics of *avadāna* anthologies from both India and China that have

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<sup>174</sup> Stern 2004, 7. As an aside, we can also look to the work of Bruce Metzger on the origin and canonization of the Christian New Testament as another well researched area that is apropos to the study of the anthology within a religious context. One of the central questions that Metzger asks in investigating the canonization of a disparate collection of books and epistles into a cohesive whole is whether the Bible represents an authoritative collection of books, or a collection of authoritative books. The distinction in such a question indicates where a tradition places the authority of a canonical text. Is canonical authority derived from the literary work itself, or is it found in those who have brought the pieces together to form the new work. Metzger offers an insightful discussion on elements of authority, canon, and anthological process that unfortunately cannot be dealt with in the scope of this dissertation. See Metzger 1987, particularly pages 251-300 for discussions that are relevant to our study of the anthology here in this work.

<sup>175</sup> Stern 2004, 7.

garnered scholarly attention in the past. In making mention of these *avadāna* collections I am not attempting to establish a direct relationship between *avadāna* anthologies found in India with those that exist in the Chinese sources. My intent is to compare and contrast different *avadāna* anthologies in order to highlight the similarities and differences between Indian and Chinese anthological tendencies which may then indicate the manner in which this literature was conceived and the functions it may have served for different Buddhist communities. This gives us an opportunity to further explore the potential insights anthology theory offers in establishing a social and cultural context for the formation of such collections within a given interpretive community. This is not meant to be an exhaustive discussion, but rather indicative of the conventions that existed in some of the most well-known examples of this literature presented to us by modern scholarship.

### ***Avadāna* Anthologies in South Asian Buddhism**

*Avadānaśataka*: The *Avadānaśataka* (*Avś*) and the *Divyāvadāna* (*Divy*) are by far the most influential and most studied of the *avadāna* anthologies from South Asia. The *Avś* is a collection of 100 (*śataka*) *avadāna* tales. These narratives are divided up into ten chapters of ten narratives each. Each decad contains a grouping of narratives that share a common relationship with one another.<sup>176</sup> For example, narratives that deal with predictions of future Buddhas or sinful monks are each collected into a specific grouping of ten stories within the text.

The *Avś* also served as a base text for other *avadāna* anthologies. These anthologies incorporated narratives from the *Avś* and by so doing also, at least partially, adopted its

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<sup>176</sup> See Feer [1891] 1979 for a complete French translation and introduction. See also the introduction to Speyer 1895.

organizing principle as well. Thus the *Kalpadrūmāvadānamālā* included paraphrases of the first two narratives from each decad of the *Avś* (except for the fourth, as is the case with each of these anthologies). The *Ratnāvadānamālā* adopted the third and fourth narratives, and the *Aśokāvadānamālā* adopted the tenth narrative from each decad into its collection. Such a clear dependence on the *Avś* indicates the interrelated nature of these *avadāna* anthologies. In addition, many of the stock phrases and clichés that are employed in the *Avś* are also adopted in these anthologies, as well as in the *Divy* which will be discussed shortly.

John Strong has argued for the existence of a group of monastics that specialized in the preservation and transmission of *avadāna* literature based upon a reference to such specialists in the *Kalpadrūmāvadānamālā* just mentioned above.<sup>177</sup> The pattern of organization that we find among many of the *avadāna* collections, the relative uniformity of the genre (at least among the interrelated South Asian Sanskrit collections), the stock phrases, the shared themes and tropes and the interrelated organization principle of the collections indicate that at least in India there was such a community of *avadāna*-specialists. At the very least such a specialization would account for the uniformity. Strong also argues that not only does the evidence indicate the existence of *avadāna*-specialists, but it is also indicative of the doctrine and context in which such a community of monastics would operate. For Strong the *avadānists* were most likely a group of monks who specialized in teaching non-Buddhists the basic workings of karma and other “well-defined and easily stated views.”<sup>178</sup> According to Strong, our understanding of *avadāna* literature seems to support this assertion. While this might be true, and even expected, given the nature and relationships of what we know of *avadāna* anthologies as they existed in South Asia; it is not clear that such a monastic specialization existed outside the subcontinent.

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<sup>177</sup> See Strong 1985, 862-81.

<sup>178</sup> Strong 1985, 867.

Considering, as will be discussed below, that the dating of our Chinese sources are contemporary with, and in some cases predate, many of the South Asian *avadāna* and *jātaka* anthologies it is conceivable that some of the development of *avadāna*-specialists and certain characteristics of the *avadāna* genre may have occurred after many of these narratives were translated and compiled in China.

***Divyāvadāna*:** The *Divy*, like the *Avś*, is another *avadāna* anthology that has been the subject of much modern scholarship. Eugene Burnouf was the first to study the collection in the West and produced a partial translation and extensive discussion of the text in his *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien* published in 1844.<sup>179</sup>

Both Edouard Huber and Sylvain Levi have shown that the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* was the source text for a number of the narratives included in the *Divy*.<sup>180</sup> Recently, Satoshi Hiraoka definitively resolved the dispute over the veracity of this argument and provided even further evidence to the direct extraction of these narratives from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*. The borrowing, in some cases, even being somewhat “sloppy” as the compilers of the *Divy* neglected to omit certain unnecessary portions of *Vinaya* specific details in the text.<sup>181</sup>

Despite the scholarship that has been produced on the *Divy*, the dating and history of the text is extremely problematic. Rotman, following Winternitz and Vaidya, argues that the text was produced sometime between 200-350 CE, but also acknowledges that information surrounding such a dating is elusive. It is certainly true that some of the narratives included in the *Divy* are of an early date, but it does not necessarily follow that the *Divy* anthology as a whole, as it is

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<sup>179</sup> See Burnouf [1844] 1876, 209-390 for his translations of various narratives. See also Burnouf 2010, 247-409 for an English translation. Andy Rotman has produced an English translation of the first seventeen narratives of the collection with the remaining narratives forthcoming, see Rotman 2008. In addition Hiraoka Satoshi has recently finished a complete translation of the collection into Japanese with a vast amount of scholarship on the text being included in extensive footnotes. See Hiraoka 2007.

<sup>180</sup> See Huber 1906, and Levi 1907.

<sup>181</sup> See Hiraoka 1998, particularly 424-426.

presently constituted, can be dated that early as well. Indeed, Konrad Klaus argues that the *Maitrakanyakāvadāna* found at the end of the anthology should be assigned to the poet Gopadatta and thus pushing the date of the collection to as late as the eighth century.<sup>182</sup>

To further complicate the issue of the *Divy* as a collection, Tatelman, citing Yutaka Iwamoto, notes that “there are only seven stories which occur in every manuscript [of the *Divy*] and that, of these, only two, the *Koṭikarṇāvadāna* and the *Pūrṇāvadāna*, always occur in the same place, as the first and second stories respectively. In fact, Iwamoto defines the *Divyāvadāna* as a collection of Sanskrit *avadānas*, the first two stories of which are the *Koṭikarṇāvadāna* and the *Pūrṇāvadāna*.”<sup>183</sup> This appears to mean that any anthology that contained these two narratives as the first and second stories in the collection would have been titled *Divy* regardless what other *avadānas* were included. Rotman takes this argument to indicate the possibility that the designation *Divy* was more a mark of genre than a title of a specific collection, and that “perhaps the *Divyāvadāna* was a brand name that marked its contents as valuable...but only delineated some of the stories that it contained.”<sup>184</sup> Thus, Rotman seems to be imagining a scenario where there were a number of different anthologies entitled

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<sup>182</sup> See Klaus 1983, 1-22, and the discussion in Tatelman 2000, 12-13. It can even be argued that the *Divyāvadāna* be dated even later, given the scarcity of manuscript evidence available. Who is not to say that it is a relatively late collection of much earlier material? This indicates one of the great difficulties in dating anthologies because of their very nature as compilations of extant material. Simply because an anthology contains very early narratives does not mean the anthology itself is also very old. Indeed an anthology can only be as old as the newest text in the compilation. As I have mentioned earlier, one of the potential problems we have with the study of *avadāna* is that so much of our understanding of this literature is based upon previous study of a limited number of interrelated Sanskrit collections, many of which are only available through late manuscripts and are notoriously difficult to date accurately. For example, the *Avś*, which was traditionally argued to be a second century text has recently been convincingly shown to be more accurately dated to the fourth century or early fifth century C.E., with the possibility of many late emendations added to the text, see Demoto 2006, 207-210. As Demoto’s analysis of the *Avś* eludes to, one of the advantages the Chinese source materials offer us is that they are often more accurately dateable (though not always) and typically more carefully preserved than Indic sources, and thus may give us access to a much earlier phase of the development of this material than Sanskrit manuscripts can provide. To that end the Chinese translations offer us useful insight into the state of early Indian narrative literature that cannot perhaps be found anywhere else.

<sup>183</sup> See Tatelman 2000, 12-13. Also see Iwamoto 1978b, 143-148.

<sup>184</sup> Rotman 2008, 15.

*Divy* floating around that were so entitled because they contained a core set of shared narratives. However, I think that rather than pointing to the existence of *Divāvadāna* as a “brand name” this indicates more the fact that *avadāna* anthologies in general were very permeable and prone to editorial changes according to the needs and concerns of the compilers.

What is perhaps most relevant to our purposes here is the organization and thematic content of the *Divy*. The text follows no recognized organizational structure, as contrasted with the structure of the *Avś* and related anthologies, and there is no indication of organization along thematic structures either. So, clearly not all Indic *avadāna* anthologies follow similar organizational structures. However, despite differences in organization, the narrative styles are related since the majority of clichés and stock phrases used in the stories are common between the two collections.<sup>185</sup> *Avadānas* in the *Divy* also follow, for the most part, the similar tri-part structure that we see in other South Asian *avadāna* anthologies.

In terms of the thematic content of the collection, Rotman argues that the narratives “tend to exemplify the inexorability of karma.”<sup>186</sup> Yet, at the same time they are more than formulaic Buddhist propaganda and “contain and embody rules and practices integral to a Buddhist identity...that function as a complex and interlinking moral code.”<sup>187</sup> For Rotman, the moral code presented in these narratives is more than just “pithy maxims” about the laws of karma. These stories present a complex “moral universe” that is rich in nuance and constitutes a highly developed literary genre.<sup>188</sup> To be sure, there is a wide range of variance in the literary quality of the narratives contained in the *Divy*, but it is also true that many narratives contained in this particular collection represent a highly polished and developed genre of literature. Thus Rotman

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<sup>185</sup> See the Introduction to Feer 1891 [1979].

<sup>186</sup> Rotman 2008, 2.

<sup>187</sup> Rotman 2008, 2.

<sup>188</sup> Rotman 2008, 2-3.



argues that while these stories are certainly didactic they are also entertaining. It is also clear that many of the narratives contained in this collection were highly influential and circulated widely in the Buddhist world.

As discussed in chapter one, there is clear indication that many of the *avadāna* anthologies known to us from South Asian sources were intricately related, sharing common organizational and stylistic characteristics with a common heritage and understanding of the *avadāna* genre. The fact that these interrelated anthologies have garnered the majority of scholarly attention in the study of *avadāna* literature also indicates the weighty influence such anthologies have had in our understanding of *avadāna* literature, sometime at the expense of other sources such as the Chinese anthologies we will be discussing below.

In relation to this point the Chinese translations of *avadāna* literature can provide some basis of comparison and insight into this problem of dating and understanding *avadāna* anthologies. For the most part the Chinese *avadāna* anthologies can be dated fairly accurately. Not only that, but in one particular case we are given information about the actual process of creating an *avadāna* anthology, which provides insight into the context and fluidity of the process of anthologizing this type of literature by early Chinese Buddhists. This being the case, let us look at two relevant anthologies in the Chinese sources to see what they can tell us about the anthologizing process and context for such literature during the early medieval time period.

### ***Avadāna* Anthologies in Early Medieval China**

The *Xian yu jing* 賢愚經 or *Sutra of the Wise and the Fool* (hereafter *SWF*) and the *Liu du ji jing* 六度集經 (hereafter *LDJJ*) are two *avadāna* anthologies that contain narratives from

Indic sources and were widely circulated in early medieval China. A brief look at these two prominent anthologies of Buddhist *avadāna* and *jātaka* narratives will help to indicate ways the Chinese may have collected, translated, disseminated and incorporated this type of literature during this time period. This discussion is not intended to be a comprehensive evaluation of either text but as a quick overview of each anthology to establish a pattern of treatment towards these types of collections by Chinese Buddhists.

***Xian yu jing***: The *SWF* was compiled and translated in China in 445 CE by a group of monks who had traveled to Khotan and recorded the stories that they heard while they were there and compiled them into an anthology. Victor Mair provides us with a valuable translation of an introduction to this anthology found in an early catalogue of Buddhist sources, the most pertinent portions of which I provide here:

The Kansu *śramaṇa*, Śākya T'an-hsüeh, Wei-te, and others, altogether eight monks, jointly resolved to travel from place to place, searching afar for sacred texts. At the Great Monastery in Khotan, they happened upon a Quinquennial Meeting. In Chinese, Quinquennial Meeting is "Five-yearly Assembly of Everyone in the Great Community." The various students of the Tripiṭaka each expatiated upon the jewels of the Law. They preached on the sutras and lectured on the *vinaya*, teaching according to their specialties. T'an-hsüeh and the other seven monks, following the circumstances, divided up to listen. Thereupon they vied in practicing the Central Asian sounds and split them into Chinese meanings. With intensive thought, they did a thorough translation, each writing what he had heard. They returned and arrived at Kocho, whereupon they assembled their translations into a single text. Having done so, they crossed over the shifting sands and carried it back to Liang-chou.

At that time the *śramaṇa* Śākya Hui-lang was the leading monk in Kansu. His accomplishments in the Way were deep and broad and he had a comprehensive grasp of

*vaipulya*. He considered that what was recorded in this sūtra had its source in *avadāna*, that what is illuminated by *avadāna* conveys both good and bad, and that the opposition between good and bad is the distinction between the wise and the foolish. Among sutras that had been transmitted in the past, there were already many entitled *avadāna*.

Therefore, he changed the name in conformity with the subject matter, calling it the *Wise and the Foolish*.<sup>189</sup>

While Mair's concern in his study is the linguistic antecedents to this text, his translation and analysis of this description of the process by which this collection came to China highlights several important facts about the text that are relevant to our purposes. First, the preface shows the degree to which Chinese monks were willing to edit and rearrange such narratives to suit their purposes—even going so far as to offer a new name to the collection. It is particularly interesting that the title was changed specifically because there were already a number of compilations of *avadāna* narratives available in Chinese. Connected with this initial observation is the fact that the Chinese monks found these stories valuable enough to memorize, translate, and preserve for a Chinese audience given that the description explicitly states that these monks were specifically traveling in a search for sacred texts to bring back to China. This is particularly important as the monks clearly had a wide range of texts and narratives from which they could choose and the teachings the monks selected are presented in this particular collection. This is not to say that these eight Chinese monks did not spend time and effort memorizing and collecting other texts, (they very well could have and it would not be expected to be mentioned in a description of the *SWF*) but it does indicate that, at the very least, this group of monks felt *avadāna* literature was worth expending the resources to memorize and translate for a Chinese audience.

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<sup>189</sup> See Mair 1993, 3-4. For the original Chinese see T 2145, 55: 67c.9-68a.1.

A second point of interest is the context in which these narratives were initially performed and in which the Chinese monks collected them for their anthology. These stories were initially heard in the context of a gathering of monastics in Khotan, on the southern Silk Route. Such a setting would certainly have provided a great variety of Buddhist scriptures and narratives being presented for a broad audience. Now, whether this context was exclusively monastic is not clear, though it seems unlikely not to have included laity in the audience. However, the point still remains that this was largely a monastic setting in which these particular narratives were being performed and it is by monastics that they are being collected, translated, named, and then disseminated to a Chinese audience.

Yet, while the introduction appears to give us a great deal of information, there are many questions left unanswered. Is the *SWF* based off an original Indic text or is it a random collection of narratives compiled by the Chinese monks in Khotan? And what were the exact method and criteria for compilation? Mair points out that the *SWF* appears to follow no organization principle and that the content and themes of the collection vary greatly. Additionally there is a disparity in the literary style and quality between different texts, as well as diversity in the transcriptions and translations of names and terms even within the same narrative.<sup>190</sup> Given that the *SWF* was translated into Tibetan and Mongolian and thus appears to have circulated widely, this anthology is worthy of much more time and attention. In particular there is much more information to be gleaned from this text (and the *LDJJ* discussed briefly below) on the anthological process and understanding of *avadāna* literature during this time period. However, in the interest of time and space I will set it aside for now as we move on in preparation to examine in more detail the *avadāna* anthologies I have chosen to focus on in this study.

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<sup>190</sup> See Mair 1993, 8-9.

*Liu du ji jing*: The *LDJJ* was translated by the monk Kang Senghui 康僧會 in the third century CE and is considered one of the earliest translations of *jātaka* literature in China. In her study of the *LDJJ*, Ching-mei Shyu argues that the collection is a mixture of both translations from an original Indic text as well as stories adapted from other already translated texts. According to Shyu the evidence of the text also points to the probability that Kang Senghui was also responsible for organizing the narratives according to the six Buddhist perfections (hence the name of the collection being *Scripture of the Collection of the Six Perfections*).<sup>191</sup> While the original source of much of the material is perhaps not clear, the organizational principle behind the material is. The fact that the narratives are organized according to the six perfections and that a similar pattern is followed in other known Indic collections of *jātaka* and *avadāna* narratives indicates that Kang Senghui may have been aware of other anthologies that were organized along similar principles. In any case, the *LDJJ* is one of the first translations of such literature in China whose influence was widespread among Buddhists for the next few centuries.

Another interesting insight that the *LDJJ* offers, according to Shyu's study, is in the treatment of women within the narratives contained therein. Shyu argues that there is a clear positive treatment towards lay women, specifically contrasted with a negative view towards nuns, indicating the possibility that the text is seeking to appeal to a lay female audience. It has been indicated by other scholars that lay women were most likely the primary contingent upon which a monastic community relied for donations and alms, the giving of which would serve as an impetus to tailor such narratives in an attempt to appeal to them for their support.<sup>192</sup> We see a similar attitude reflected in the *ZJXZPY* as discussed in more detail below.

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<sup>191</sup> See Shyu 2008. 64-68.

<sup>192</sup> Shyu 2008, 150-169. For further information on the economic support of women to the monastic community and the difference in the role that lay women and nuns play in Buddhist literature, see Lang 1986 and Falk 1980.

In this brief description of the *SWF* and the *LDJJ* a pattern begins to emerge. We see that both anthologies are considered to be important and influential forms of Buddhist writings by at least some contingent of the monastic community. Both contain translations of narratives many of which have Indic precedents but are found in compilations that are more than likely not Indic in origin. Thus such narratives and compilations were subject to emendations, editing, and reorganization according to the needs of the compilers and perhaps even as a means to serve specific functions within a Buddhist community. This shows that, at least within the Chinese context, anthologies of such narrative literature were valuable but also highly malleable. Bearing these thoughts in mind we now turn our attention to a discussion of two related *avadāna* anthologies and a comparison of the concerns found in each.

### **A Comparative Study of Two Chinese *Avadāna* Anthologies**

As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation the *ZPYJ* and *ZJXZPY* are two of a number of *avadāna* anthologies found in the *Taishō* edition of the Chinese canon.<sup>193</sup> While the *ZPYJ* is referenced in the earliest catalogues as a legitimate translation by Kumārajīva, there is no reference to the *ZJXZPY* in these same catalogues, making it notoriously difficult to date. Despite the difficulty in establishing a definitive date for either anthology, Chavannes argues that we are still more than likely dealing with collections of text that were translated in the early fifth century of the Common Era.<sup>194</sup> I tend to agree with Chavannes on this point given the evidence that we have with this text being listed as an authentic translation of Kumārajīva in the earliest catalogue. I feel it is fair to say, with mild reservations, that the *ZPYJ* can be dated to the late

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<sup>193</sup> For further information on these two anthologies please refer back to the discussion on page 11 above.

<sup>194</sup> See Chavannes 1910-34, 2:1-3 for a brief analysis of the text.

fourth or early fifth century Common Era. The *ZJXZPY* is more difficult to determine but my estimation is that it was formed at a later date and that the *ZPYJ* represents the earlier form of the anthology at the time of Dao Lüe's compilation.

There are several reasons for coming to this conclusion: First, in the *CSZJJ* it is the *ZPYJ* that is mentioned by name, with no mention of the *ZJXZPY* in any of the early catalogues. Thus this collection in one volume seems to be the earliest known version of the text attributed to Dao Lüe. Additionally, the nine narratives that are common between the two anthologies are spread throughout the whole of the *ZPYJ*, but arranged in sequential order in the *ZJXZPY* according to the order that they are found in the *ZPYJ*, but without any intervening stories. This suggests the probability that the *ZPYJ*, or some earlier version of it, served as the source for the *ZJXZPY* and that as the compiler of the *ZJXZPY* arranged stories from the *ZPYJ* the narratives were organized together sequentially as can be seen in the following table:

<b>Shared Narratives</b>	
<b><i>ZPYJ</i> Story Number</b>	<b><i>ZJXZPY</i> Story Number</b>
1	18
3	19
5	20
6	21
21	22
24	23
26	24
30	25
33	26

As can be seen, the nine shared narratives are sprinkled throughout the *ZPYJ* from the beginning to the end, while in the *ZJXZPY* they are arranged in a sequential order starting with the eighteenth narrative at the end of the first volume and continuing sequentially to the

beginning of the second volume of the anthology. In addition to the sequencing of the text it can also be noted that the nine narratives in common between the two collections are virtually identical—except for some incidental variations—with the caveat that five of the shared narratives contain one to three lines of additional text; all five of these additions to the shared narratives occur only in the *ZJXZPY* and start where the narratives in the *ZPYJ* end. These additional lines of text appear to be editorial insertions that offer further explanation, and in some cases alternate interpretations of the meaning of the theme of the narrative. This indicates that the *ZJXZPY* is reliant upon the *ZPYJ* and would indicate that it was compiled in the form we have it now after the *ZPYJ*, or a similar version to it, was already in existence.

### **An Evaluation of the Primary Concerns Exhibited by the Two Anthologies**

Having established a general time period and relationship between the two texts we will now turn to comparing the themes of each anthology. This discussion is intended to draw attention to what we may consider as the primary concerns the narratives address. From these concerns we can draw conclusions about the rhetorical function such a collection may have served for its implied audience. In providing this list I do not mean to present these as the only concerns or themes present in the stories. Indeed several of the stories are quite complex and offer a wealth of interpretive fodder—though many of them are also quite simple and generic with no obvious meaning apart from what the compilers provide outside their concluding explanation.

In presenting the concerns of these anthologies in this manner I am adopting the approach used in Robert Campany's recent study of a collection of Buddhist miracle tales from roughly



the same time period as these *avadāna* collections. As mentioned earlier, Campany's approach is to explore the salient themes of the collection to understand the religious concerns of a community that then represents a particular idiom of Chinese Buddhism. This discussion is designed to present a basic overview of the patterns, ideas, and concerns through which we might make certain judgments about the context of an idiom of Buddhism that occurs at this time period in early medieval China.

### Concerns Discussed in the *ZPYJ*

**The Bodhisattva path:** The emphasis of the superiority of the bodhisattva and the bodhisattva vocation over that of an arhat is a dominant theme in the first few narratives of this anthology. The opening scene of the very first narrative paints a picture of a young novice struggling with the decision between the path of an arhat or of a bodhisattva. When the novice desires to be an arhat the teacher forces him to walk behind him carrying his robes and alms bowl, and when he chooses the bodhisattva path the teacher has him walk before him without any burden.<sup>195</sup> Such narrative inversion expresses the relative value that is placed on each aspiration. The novice wavers in his decision because of two points: First, since life is nothing but suffering, the arhat path offers a quick escape. However, the Buddha has clearly taught the superiority of the bodhisattva path (or so the text tells us) and thus the young novice desires to follow such a teaching. Yet, the boy wavers at the notion that a bodhisattva is required to give up all things that are asked of him, including his own eyes and head.<sup>196</sup> The sequence of events that take place as the novice wavers between the two paths clearly indicates on which side the

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<sup>195</sup> T 207, 4: 522c.5-20, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 1.

<sup>196</sup> 求頭與頭求眼與眼, see T 207, 4: 522c.13.

narrative stands, with the final conclusion announcing that a single bodhisattva holds more value than an entire trichiliocosm of worlds full of arhats.

This is the dominant theme in three of the first four narratives of the collection before finally moving on to other topics. And while this is a theme that is only really in force through the first few narratives the overall general pattern of organization of the anthology hints that this initial emphasis is intentional. That is, the very organization of the collection speaks to an overall design of an editor(s) intent on showing the pattern of growth and that comes through following the bodhisattva path. As mentioned above, the opening story in this anthology clearly indicates the superiority of the bodhisattva path. As the narratives of the anthology progress thematic focus shifts from the importance of choosing the bodhisattva path, to explaining the practices and actions necessary for a monk to develop the virtue and ultimate superiority of a fully enlightened Buddha. Thus, the progression of the *ZPYJ* mirrors the progression along the bodhisattva path. It intentionally starts with a young novice who waivers at the great difficulty of “giving the eyes and head when asked” and ends with the last story describing the Buddha in full power and capacity as a result of willingly giving his eyes and head when asked. It is the very act of quoting this very specific sentiment word for word (求頭與頭求眼與眼) in both the opening and closing narrative that speaks to the connection of the two narratives.<sup>197</sup> A novice might begin by asking, “Could I do it?” and the ultimate conclusion of the Buddha is, “Yes, I did do it.” The inclusion of such a specific element repeated at the beginning and end is no mere coincidence, and the overall pattern of the narratives throughout the anthology showing the progressive sequence of the power of the Buddha, his teachings, the workings of karma, the giving of alms and the body itself all speak to the practices necessary to achieve the status of an enlightened Buddha.

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<sup>197</sup> T 207, 4: 522c.13, and T 207, 4: 531a.29

In emphasizing the importance that the anthology appears to place on the bodhisattva aspiration in these early narratives I do not want to suggest that there is no room for the arhat path within the collection. In numerous narratives we see descriptions of both men and women attaining the status of an arhat and achieving liberation. In these narratives such an attainment is neither denigrated nor argued against as a legitimate achievement. However, as the very first narrative clearly states in its concluding line, and is reinforced in several of these early stories, the bodhisattva path is clearly a superior aspiration that brings with it a higher spiritual attainment and is thus of greater value.

At the same time that these first narratives are expressing the superiority of the bodhisattva path, they also speak to the specific concerns of a monk. How does one precisely follow such a path? What is the proper attitude towards wealth? How should one treat doctrines that appear to contradict previous teachings? How should monks behave toward one another? All of these are issues that take center stage at some point within the progression of the anthology. The pattern we see emerging from such an anthology is one of concern not just about which path to follow, but how one follows it—how should a monk act in any given context? The overwhelming answer is: according to how the Buddha taught you to act!

**Becoming a monk and exhibiting proper monastic behavior:** Twelve of the forty narratives in the *ZPYJ* directly address the theme of monasticism and proper monastic behavior. Such a theme appears in a secondary role in many other narratives as well. Exhibited in these narratives are both a concern about leaving the householder life and becoming a monastic, as well as what is the proper behavior once such a vocation has been chosen. Thus, we see a story that describes a carpenter and painter who have come to realize the illusory nature of desire and

leave all behind to become full time ascetics.<sup>198</sup> Elsewhere we are met with a story of two brothers who are both monks. The eldest chooses to spend his time in meditation without exhibiting generosity; the younger brother exhibits great generosity but spends no time in meditation. In his next birth the meditative elder brother is reborn as a human who again becomes a monk, but suffers hunger and starvation due to his lack of generosity in his previous life. The younger brother, on the other hand, is reborn as a royal elephant who is given every care and consideration by his handlers, yet suffers the consequences of a lower rebirth despite the comfort that he enjoys. The narrative concludes with the remark that both brothers are responsible for their plight due to their over-emphasis of one virtue at the expense of the other.<sup>199</sup> In another narrative we read of a monk who is cast out of the saṅgha for breaking the precepts and subsequently dies as he tries to deceive the villagers into thinking he has spiritual powers in order to win their donations.<sup>200</sup> We also read of a monk who stole food from a Pratyekabuddha and subsequently suffered greatly until Śākyamuṇi Buddha liberated him from his plight.<sup>201</sup>

In addition to narratives that address concerns about becoming a monastic and keeping the precepts we see other narratives that emphasize communal harmony and hierarchy within a monastic setting. Thus we find the story of a monk who pollutes himself by licking the feces of a fellow monk in an effort to degrade him by showing it to the other monks; in the very process of gossiping and exposing the faults of others this monk has degraded and polluted himself by his own actions.<sup>202</sup> This narrative is immediately followed by a story of a group of servants who believe that stepping upon the spit of their master will bring them good luck. One particular

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<sup>198</sup> T 207, 4: 523c.29-524a.20, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 8. This particular narrative was explored in great detail in chapter one.

<sup>199</sup> T 207, 4: 523a.7-27, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 3.

<sup>200</sup> T 207, 4: 523b.7-24, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 5.

<sup>201</sup> T 207, 4: 523b.25-c.12, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 6.

<sup>202</sup> T 207, 4: 525b.25-28, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 13.

servant is too slow and never has the opportunity to step on the spittle before the others. In an effort to be first and receive the good fortune the servant subsequently kicks his master in the mouth in an attempt to step on his spit before it even leaves his mouth. The ending maxim makes the point that gossip and raising objections to unvoiced opinions is like walking on spit before it even leaves the mouth.<sup>203</sup> The fact that such narratives are placed in succession hints at an attempt to nuance the importance of social harmony within close communal activity. While the second narrative does not specifically employ monastic characters, when taken in context of the previous narrative of the feces licking monk we can see a connection and draw a conclusion that such narratives are perhaps an attempt to overcome contentious and disharmonious interactions within a close monastic community.

Such a reading is further emphasized by other narratives that describe the need for hierarchy and harmony among the ranks of monastics. This is seen in a story describing the debate between the head and tail of a snake. The head claims precedence because it can see, hear, and eat and when the snake moves the head goes first. The tail objects by stating that without it the snake would never be able to move and thus render the skills of the head irrelevant. To prove its point the tail ties itself to a tree and refuses to move until it is near death and the head finally agrees that the tail can take precedence and go first. Slithering backwards, the snake immediately falls into a fire pit and dies. The comparison is made between a superior and inferior monk. If the superior senior monk cannot take control and lead the mediocre monks then they both fall into violations of the precepts and perish together.<sup>204</sup>

Finally, among these narratives we see great concern and emphasis placed on the importance of keeping the monastic precepts. Thus a monk who abandons the precepts and tries

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<sup>203</sup> T 207, 4: 525b.29-c.9, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 14.

<sup>204</sup> T 207, 4: 528a.12-23, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 25b.

to repent is likened to a man who seeks to smear manure on his back after asking his servants to whip him—it would have been better to never have been whipped in the first place.<sup>205</sup> However, the stories also seem to express the ability of well-intentioned and intelligent monks to break the precepts if it provides an opportunity to teach those who do not understand the Dharma. Thus a story conveys the acts of a monk who kisses the beautiful wife of a householder who is donating alms to him in the attempt to show the householder the dangers of desire and attachment even though it brings the monk physical harm and is a violation of the rule forbidding interactions between monks and women. The point of the story as expressed in the final line is that monks who truly understand the needs of their donors and patrons will do whatever is necessary—even to the point of violating the precepts—to instruct them in the true Dharma.<sup>206</sup> The juxtaposition of such narratives highlights a tension between the importance of keeping the precepts but willingness to break them for the good of others. This seems to suggest that the anthology is wrestling with the possibility that certain monks are, like the Buddha, capable of acting in ways that are contrary to the norm for the good of others because of their spiritual development and understanding of the Dharma.<sup>207</sup>

**Accepting and properly understanding the Dharma from an enlightened and authorized teacher:** This theme, and variations of it, plays out to some degree in many of the narratives found in this collection. We see it with the story of the hungry ghost that is suffering because of breaking a monastic precept in the way he distributed food. As mentioned earlier, a significant portion of the narrative is dedicated to describing the monastic context of this poor monk's misdeed, only to have the moral of the story shift at the very end to focus on believing

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<sup>205</sup> T 207, 4: 527c.9-20, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 23.

<sup>206</sup> T 207, 4: 527b.29-c.8, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 22.

<sup>207</sup> This of course resonates with the notion of Skillful Means found in many other Buddhist sources. For more information see Pye 1978.

the teachings of the Buddha. This story is then immediately followed by a tale describing a previous birth of the monk Mañjuśrī who is known for his great wisdom and understanding. The tale recounts that in a previous birth Mañjuśrī was a monk dedicated to austerities and well-practiced in the twelve dhūtaguṇas (行十二頭陀). At this time Mañjuśrī happened upon a bodhisattva who was teaching the doctrine of emptiness and the impermanence of all things, and refused to believe the teaching to the point of disputation and anger. Mañjuśrī was immediately swallowed up into hell because of his lack of faith. Upon his release from hell after many eons, Mañjuśrī realized that lack of faith brings significant karmic consequences and he dedicates himself to learning and gaining great wisdom. The narrative ends with the concluding statement: “This *avadāna* shows us that when the Buddha teaches wisdom to those who lack faith and denigrate it, even though at present there is a negative consequence, afterwards there is a great advantage.”<sup>208</sup>

We see here a progression and nuance to this particular theme over two successive narratives. While the content of the stories themselves do not seem to relate, the artificial juxtaposition of the two tales with the explanations that come at the end present a clear picture of the intent and function that the narratives serve in the anthology. While the *story* of the first narrative revolves around the consequence of a monk breaking a monastic rule and that of the second narrative is dominated by a debate about the doctrine of impermanence and emptiness (along with the consequences of not believing those teachings), the *discourse*—emphasized in the concluding maxims of both narratives—turns the attention to the Buddha as a teacher of wisdom and the consequences that arise from either following or disobeying his teachings. In the narrative of the hungry ghost it states that the Buddha did not discuss that monk’s previous life

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<sup>208</sup> T 207, 4: 523c.13-28, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 7. 此喻明佛說般若，不信誹謗，今雖有損，後大益也。 T 207, 4: 523c.27-28.

specifically to prevent his audience from suffering the consequence of not believing what he taught, a punishment greater than committing one of the five heinous acts.<sup>209</sup> In other words, the Buddha did not say anything before in order to protect his disciples until they were ready to hear and accept what he had to teach them. Alternatively, in the very next narrative about Mañjuśrī we are again told that the Buddha teaches wisdom, and though there are those, including a monk, who will not believe it, in the end (and despite the sufferings in hell that come from not listening) they will be better for it.

While in some ways it might appear odd, I believe the juxtaposition of two narratives that reflect contradictory insights is intentional and designed to highlight and nuance particular aspects of a given theme. Such a sequencing of narratives, where a particular theme is examined in a set of two or three stories one after the other—often with competing analysis of the meaning and application of the given theme—occurs regularly through the anthology. The dichotomy we see between these two particular narratives is a reflection on when and how the true dharma should be taught. In both cases the Buddha serves as the exemplar employing his skill as a teacher to know when to speak and when to keep silent. In the hungry ghost narrative he kept silent to protect those who would not listen; in the story of Mañjuśrī the truth was taught and, though he suffered for his lack of faith, the bodhisattva was better for having heard it—even to the point of becoming preeminent in wisdom and understanding of the doctrine of emptiness.

In other narratives we see an emphasis not just on the importance of hearing a true teaching but on correctly understanding the teaching and the role an enlightened master plays in that understanding. Thus, a story is recounted of the previous life of a sow the Buddha sees as he is walking. The sow was once the daughter of a king who asked about the nature of existence and

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<sup>209</sup> The five heinous acts being patricide, matricide, killing an arhat, spilling the blood of a Buddha, or causing a schism in the saṅgha.



the end of the cycle of rebirth. Unable to give an answer himself, the king offered a great reward to whoever could give an adequate response. A greedy Brahmin then approaches and though he doesn't have a real answer responds that "these things are empty."<sup>210</sup> The young daughter meditates on that answer, finds it satisfactory, and eventually is reborn in heaven before her rebirth as a sow. Although the young princess was practiced in meditation (and achieved a temporary rebirth in heaven as a result) she was unable to achieve true wisdom because she lacked a truly enlightened teacher.<sup>211</sup>

One of the interesting aspects of this story is the irony that the false sage did indeed speak the potentially correct answer, but because he was not an enlightened master he did not have the capacity to see the true wisdom in his answer. Likewise, the girl was also unable to truly develop the necessary wisdom out of her contemplation because of the lack of an enlightened teacher. The irony of the narrative, that the correct answer was given from a false teacher, highlights the need for the enlightened master within the process of developing wisdom. Additionally, a distinction is made between the practice of meditation and the development of wisdom. The two are highly intertwined, according to this narrative, and as we see in other narratives of this collection, but meditation without proper teaching does not always produce wisdom. Thus the absolute necessity of an enlightened teacher is highlighted by such a tale.

Other narratives also emphasize the importance of an enlightened teacher for the correct understanding of Buddhist doctrine. One story points out that finding an enlightened teacher is the first step in receiving the precepts and monastic ordination; another, the necessity of an enlightened teacher to properly apply the medicinal herbs of Buddhist teachings; and another points out that just like a king who has different ministers to attend to various aspects of ruling a

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<sup>210</sup> 此事都無所有也, T 207, 4: 526a.6.

<sup>211</sup> T 207, 4: 525c.10-526a.12, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 15.

kingdom so that any one minister is not overly relied upon, so too there is a multiplicity of Buddhist teachings which need to be correctly applied according to each context without relying on any one principle at the expense of others.<sup>212</sup>

Many of the narratives that focus on this particular theme also highlight four specific Buddhist teachings: Emptiness, Generosity, workings of Karma, and Wisdom (and by extension meditation).

**Emptiness:** This is discussed in a number of narratives found in the *ZPYJ*. We saw above in the story of Mañjuśrī that emptiness is presented as the quintessential Buddhist doctrine leading to liberation, but it is a doctrine that is difficult for even advanced monks to accept and understand. In the narrative that describes the various Buddhist doctrines as medicinal herbs used to cure the sick, the medicine of emptiness is presented as the cure-all for any disease; though a cure-all that is only effective in the hands of an enlightened physician who knows how to apply it correctly.<sup>213</sup>

We also read a brief description of the Buddha's main disciples attempting to feed a hungry ghost, only to have everything it touches turn to fire and burn its mouth until finally the Buddha intervenes.<sup>214</sup> This is followed by a story that describes rain transforming into jewels or fire depending on if it falls on celestial deities or hungry ghosts.<sup>215</sup> Both of these narratives are then explained in tandem as illustrating that all things are impermanent and empty, and that it is the good or bad merit of the individual that determines the result of their interaction with the

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<sup>212</sup> T 207, 4: 527c.9-20; T 207, 4: 529c.1-21; T 207, 4: 526c.21-527a.4; see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 23, 32, and 19.

<sup>213</sup> Note the description of the various medicines as being equated with the multitude of Buddhist teachings, while the best medicine is equated with the teaching of impermanence, 眾藥草者如諸法也，訶梨勒者如非常也，T 207, 4: 529c.13-14.

<sup>214</sup> T 207, 4: 523b.25-c.12, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 6.

<sup>215</sup> T 207, 4: 525b.20-24, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 12.

physical world.<sup>216</sup> Often the realization of emptiness is described as seeing past a deception, through an illusion, or as a burning fire that compels the individual to seek escape and enlightenment. Thus, emptiness is the doctrine that propels one onto the spiritual path towards generosity and wisdom; it is the panacea to life's ills, a cure-all that is dangerous if not handled properly.

**Generosity:** At least five stories in our collection are dedicated specifically to the theme of generosity, while many others deal with the topic tangentially. The first narrative to deal directly with the theme is the well-known *jātaka* that recounts the bodhisattva as a king of a herd of deer who offers himself in place of a pregnant doe under his protection.<sup>217</sup> Such a selfless act moves the king to release the bodhisattva and offer his protection. Another narrative relates the time when the bodhisattva is a king and allows a poor Brahmin to hand him over to a rival king for ransom money.<sup>218</sup> While these are examples of well-known Buddhist narratives expressing the importance of the perfection of generosity in the development of the bodhisattva, other narratives explore the difficulties associated with practicing generosity.

We read of a wealthy man who provides a meal for one hundred thousand monks. At the end of the meal the senior monk warns the host that he has reaped great punishment because of his generosity. The younger monks are shocked to hear such a prediction and ask how it is possible that generosity could bring about negative consequences. The senior monk then states that because of his generosity in providing a meal the wealthy host will reap even more wealth and status and become prideful. In his pride he will not adore the image of the Buddha, pay

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<sup>216</sup> 此二事明眾形無定質，隨罪福之所感也，T 207, 4: 525b.22-23.

<sup>217</sup> T 207, 4: 527a.5-24, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 20.

<sup>218</sup> T 207, 4: 530a.13-b.21, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 34a.

attention to the scriptures, or offer proper respect to the monks, and eventually will suffer great punishment because of such arrogance.<sup>219</sup>

**Karma:** What we see from the narrative just mentioned is concern over the workings of karma and its potential negative effects—not just the production of negative effects produced from bad actions, but also the potential for the great rewards earned from generosity to corrupt one in future births. This aspect of karma is explored in other narratives as well. We read of a butcher who claims that by butchering sheep he earns rebirth as a god in heaven and has done so over six lifetimes. The Buddha clarifies the situation by stating that the man has actually been reborn in heaven six times because he met a pratyekabuddha in a previous life and the good merit from honoring him led to his favorable rebirths. The Buddha continues by explaining that though the man is given the benefit of remembering his previous births he is not wise enough to realize the true cause of his good fortune and mistakenly ascribes it to being a butcher in between each of his births as a deva. Because of his lack of correct understanding of the karmic connections he will be severely punished once the karma from butchering sheep fully ripens.<sup>220</sup> Thus, not only can good karmic action pose the danger of pride and arrogance leading to greater sins, but incorrect understanding of the karmic connection between our actions and the results that they produce is equally dangerous; wisdom provides the key to understanding such connections and acting appropriately.

What becomes apparent in our discussion of the teachings of emptiness and generosity is how they are directly related to the notion of the workings of karma. Thus, while generosity is presented as a virtue, it is also a virtue that must be practiced with wisdom. Not because it produces bad merit, but because the abundance of good merit that generosity produces can easily

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<sup>219</sup> T 207, 4: 528c.11-28, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 28.

<sup>220</sup> T 207, 4: 529c.22-530a.12, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 33.

allow one to engage in an abundance of even worse acts as a direct consequence of that good fortune. Likewise, emptiness and impermanence are powerful in propelling one toward the path of liberation because an individual's interactions with physical forms devoid of any permanent substrata can reveal the workings of karma and awaken the individual to the deceptive and impermanent nature of this existence.

Robert Campany notes in his discussion of karma in a collection of Buddhist miracle tales that “the point of the stories is not simply to show karma at work. It is, much more precisely, to juxtapose the workings of karma with a different set of assumptions in order...to demonstrate that it is karma that is the correct teaching.”<sup>221</sup> Thus it should be pointed out here that karma is rarely the object of discussion; rather, it is the process by which the theme of discussion is carried out. Karma is the verb in the grammar of life—the action by which things come to be—and rarely the object of investigation for the narrative, except as it helps to clarify a given teaching or situation within the Buddhist worldview. This is somewhat different from what we see in much of *avadāna* narrative literature found in Sanskrit collections such as the *Avś* where showing the process of karma is of primary importance. Thus we find that many of the *avadāna* narratives found in the Sanskrit collections highlight the great rewards that come as a result of simple acts of devotion. This use and emphasis of karma is not what we find in the *ZPYJ*. In these narratives karma is not highlighted except as an explanation for why things are the way they are and it is used as a way to reinforce the importance of other aspects of Buddhist teaching. Wisdom and Emptiness are important precisely because the principles of karma are in effect. Most often karma is the means to an end in the discussion and not the end itself.

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<sup>221</sup> Campany 2012, 43.

What we see then is a fairly complicated navigation of three important principles of Buddhism that are often treated separately within the narrative literature, but yet are inseparable from the practical experience of a living community. It is an attempt to address multiple, divergent concerns and the outcomes of what is often treated as a very mundane and simple principle. Karma has real consequences and, despite first appearances, those consequences might not always be positive, even when rewarding positive actions.

**Wisdom:** In our discussion so far we have already begun to see the ways in which Wisdom is used to interrelate with the principles of emptiness, generosity, and karma. Within the context of the *ZPYJ*, the tensions and difficulties of these Buddhist principles are resolved by the development and practical application of wisdom. In the context of the *ZPYJ* Wisdom is presented as that which is taught by the Buddha and comprehended through meditation. We are warned that the Buddha speaks Wisdom and to not believe such teachings is worse than committing the five heinous acts.<sup>222</sup> Wisdom is also presented as the superior pursuit for monastics in a story of two brothers who become monks. The elder pursues Wisdom through meditation and the younger seeks fame from his broad learning and skill as a teacher. In the end it is the older brother who cultivated wisdom and becomes an arhat, while his younger brother eventually suffers in hell.<sup>223</sup>

Within the narratives wisdom goes hand in hand with meditation. Thus the elder brother gains his wisdom because of his dedication to the cultivation of meditation. Yet meditation alone is not enough. This is highlighted in the story of the young princess reborn as a sow mentioned previously. The young girl was well practiced in meditation but lacked an enlightened teacher to

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<sup>222</sup>此喻佛說般若，不信誹謗，其罪重於五逆，受地獄極苦也，T 207, 4: 523c.11-12. See also appendix, *ZPYJ* story 6.

<sup>223</sup> T 207, 4: 525a.16-b.8, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 10.

guide her to a correct understanding—even though she was given the correct answer to her initial question and meditated upon it, true wisdom never developed and such misunderstanding lead to her eventual unfortunate rebirth.<sup>224</sup>

The true power of wisdom, as expressed in these narratives, is its ability to resolve all karmic conditions and allow one to correctly apply Buddhist teachings for maximum results. Thus we read of a hungry ghost who aspires to enlightenment by meditating and gaining wisdom after being taught by the Buddha.<sup>225</sup> The danger of generosity creating a potential pitfall in the future is resolved by wisdom as well. We read of a Naga who is looking for a place to preserve a magic drop of water before it dries up and disappears. The solution to his conundrum is to hide it in the ocean because the ocean will never dry up and the drop of water will be preserved for future use. The drop of water represents wealth and generosity: on its own it will eventually dry out. But the Naga obtained wisdom and realized that by donating the water (wealth) to the ocean (Buddhism) his water would be preserved indefinitely. Thus, the conclusion is “if generosity is combined with wisdom then it is deposited in a place that will not run dry.”<sup>226</sup> In such a narrative Wisdom becomes the ingredient that resolves the insurmountable problems of karma and provides the insight necessary to properly apply Buddhist teachings.

**Superiority of the Buddha:** The theme that comes to dominate many of the narratives at the end of the anthology is the superiority of the Buddha. We see this elevation of the Buddha expressed through multiple aspects: through the saving power of the Buddha, the power of his vow, the greatness of his virtue, honor from celestial beings, and the ultimate superiority of his spiritual power and enlightenment. In one narrative the Buddha is placed supreme among the

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<sup>224</sup> T 207, 4: 525c.10-526a.12, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 15.

<sup>225</sup> T 207, 4: 525b.9-19, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 11

<sup>226</sup> 布施與般若合故，所置得處而不竭也，T 207, 4: 530c.19. See also T 207, 4: 530c.13-19, and appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 35.

Indian deities and serves as their exemplar and teacher.<sup>227</sup> Another recounts a previous birth of the Buddha as a king who was followed throughout his life by a heavenly being holding a golden halo at the command of the gods.<sup>228</sup> We read of the Buddha saving 500 merchants who think upon him when in danger.<sup>229</sup> We read of a man who obtains a miraculous rebirth because of a good deed and vow he made during his life. If such a reward is possible for this simple man how much greater is it for the Buddha who was perfectly virtuous in his acts and vows.<sup>230</sup> In other narratives it is stressed that the Buddha, as a bodhisattva, was absolutely virtuous in his actions and followed the teachings of the holy books faithfully and thus is supreme to all other beings. All of this is fairly standard fair in *avadāna* literature. Where this theme becomes significant is in the way the final narrative emphasizes this superiority and relates it directly back to the opening story of the anthology that discusses the dilemma of the novice in choosing to become a bodhisattva.

The last narrative in the anthology provides a comparison between the Buddha and the king of the gods who begins to think too highly of himself. After being taught by the Buddha, which involves a description of the previous births leading to his status as lord of the gods, Brahmā comes to realize the truth of the Buddha's teachings and becomes his disciple. The narrative then closes with a description of the superiority of the Buddha for if these deeds of Brahmā led to such a good rebirth then how much better is the Buddha who accumulated great vows and displayed his compassion to all people, who gave everything that was asked of him

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<sup>227</sup> T 207, 4: 529b.9-19, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 31a.

<sup>228</sup> T 207, 4: 530c.20-531a.2, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 36.

<sup>229</sup> T 207, 4: 529c.1-21, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 32.

<sup>230</sup> T 207, 4: 526c.11-20, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 18.



and whose body will fill the immensity of space and will exist in such an exalted state without end.<sup>231</sup>

Ending the anthology with such a grandiose description of the Buddha is as telling as starting the anthology with a young novice contemplating which path he should choose.<sup>232</sup> Thus, through the progression of the anthology as a whole we see a general trend in the organization and development—though by no means is the organization as methodical and explicit as we see in many of the South Asian anthologies or the *LDJJ*. The narratives that are expressly concerned with the importance of the bodhisattva path are followed successively by narratives that discuss various points of Buddhist doctrine including the teachings of emptiness, the importance of generosity, the workings of karma and the essential aspects of wisdom, until finally in the last few narratives we see a distinct emphasis on the greatness of the Buddha and his superior, elevated status among all the beings of the universe. The anthology begins with a young novice questioning which of the two spiritual orientations he should pursue and ends with the Buddha presented in all his glory and power. And that, in and of itself, is the answer to the young novice's question.

### Concerns Discussed in the *ZJXZPY*

**Wealth, Impermanence, and Suffering:** There are a number of narratives throughout the *ZJXZPY* that focus on wealth, impermanence, and suffering. In general they can be

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<sup>231</sup> 況佛於無量阿僧祇劫，積大誓願慈悲眾生，求頭與頭求眼與眼，一切所求盡能周給，身充虛空未足為大，塵數劫壽未足為多，T 207, 4: 531a.28-b.2. See also T 207, 4: 531a.3-b.2, and appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 37.

<sup>232</sup> Such an elevation of the Buddha is of course not unique to this tale. In fact, the relationship between *jātaka* and *avadāna* literature and such elevations of the Buddha has been commented on by numerous scholars. See Walters 1997.

considered as moral tales that take the form of exhortation towards proper expressions of compassion, use of wealth, and basic morality based upon a particular understanding that the nature of existence is impermanent and full of suffering. The very first narrative of the anthology is a discussion on the proper use of wealth and in many ways is less a story and more a sermon. It tells of a house that is on fire. A wise man will see beforehand the conditions of the fire and make arrangements to save the members of his household and possessions; a fool will not notice or understand the danger of the fire and will lose all his possessions in an instant for lack of preparation.<sup>233</sup> Fire represents the suffering and impermanence of this world: all things come to an end. Generosity is the proper use of wealth that provides the resources necessary for rebuilding and restoring the house (rebirth) that will inevitably be lost in the fire of existence.

Time after time in this anthology we see narratives that warn of the dangers of wealth and offer advice on its proper use. One story tells us that wealth is slippery and that pursuing it brings its own negative consequences, just like a man who tries to get more milk out of his cow by not milking it for a month. At the end of the month he still only gets one day's worth of milk and has lost all that he could have had over the previous weeks.<sup>234</sup> This narrative argues that it is better to be satisfied and charitable with what you do have rather than expending all your energy in the pursuit of more wealth, because you never know when you will lose everything and suddenly die. Holding on to your wealth without generosity is like trying to get more milk out of a cow by not milking it; it will only bring suffering and you will get nothing extra for your effort. The editors of the anthology then link the story of the un milked cow with a narrative equating wealth with a

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<sup>233</sup> T 208, 4: 531b.10-24, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 1.

<sup>234</sup> T 208, 4: 532c.13-24, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 6a.

poisonous serpent that will kill you unless you rely upon the words of the Buddha.<sup>235</sup> Indeed, wealth is so dangerous that not only will the serpent of wealth destroy the individual, it will also consume his family for seven generations. These two narratives are designed to work in sequence to show the danger of wealth and to provide a means of escape through reliance on the words of the Buddha and donations to the saṅgha.

Though wealth is dangerous it provides an opportunity to practice generosity.<sup>236</sup> Thus we see in the second narrative of the anthology the famous story of King Śibi who offers his own flesh to ransom a dove.<sup>237</sup> Elsewhere we are regaled with the tale of an old beggar woman who desires to donate a handful of peas to the Buddha but is forbidden by the king who is hosting a dinner for him. The Buddha, seeing the intentions of the woman, tells the king that her intention to donate peas has produced more merit than that produced from all the lavish gifts offered by the king at his feast.<sup>238</sup> Thus, wealth is not even necessary for the practice of generosity and having no more than even the intention to donate even something as small as a handful of peas is sufficient to produce good merit.

The foundation to the discussion of wealth in these narratives, the reason for its danger, is that it is impermanent and leads to suffering. And so we find the famous story of Kisa Gotami

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<sup>235</sup> T 208, 4: 532c.24-533a.12, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 6b. It is interesting to note the way in which these two narratives are completely intertwined within the text. It seems to indicate editorial efforts on the part of the compiler to make such an integration of the two narratives where the conclusion of one narrative becomes the opening line of the next one and they become linked together thematically. So we see at the end of Story 6a the explanation that “wealth is a danger to the body just like a snake that cannot obtain what it desires, for example...” (財物危身猶如毒蛇無得貪著。譬如...), T 208, 4: 532c.23-24. This is a pattern that is repeated in several different narratives where we find a sequence of interrelated stories that are specifically linked together by such editorial insertions designed to expand and nuance a particular theme. In this case the two narratives show the danger of wealth but also show a way out through relying on the words of the Buddha.

<sup>236</sup> See Kemper 1990 for a discussion on the role of wealth and generosity in merit making within the context of Buddhist monasticism.

<sup>237</sup> T 208, 4: 531b.25-c.24, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 2. For a comprehensive analysis of the Śibi *jātaka* see Meisig 1995. For additional references see Grey 2000, 391-397. For a discussion of this narrative's relationship to brahmanical sources see Parlier 1991.

<sup>238</sup> T 208, 4: 532b.24-c.12, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 5.

who begs the Buddha to save her son from death. The Buddha agrees provided she can provide him with fire from a household that has never known death. Unable to procure such a fire the mother comes to realize the nature of suffering and becomes a nun.<sup>239</sup> This is followed by a story of two jealous wives who kill each other's children over a sequence of lifetimes until the Buddha intervenes and teaches them that suffering and impermanence are the nature of existence and they are finally able to break the cycle of hatred.<sup>240</sup>

These narratives, and others like them in the anthology, advocate a particular ethical and moral behavior in light of the dangers of wealth and the realities of impermanence and suffering. Generosity and relying upon the words of the Buddha become key ingredients in overcoming such dangers.

**Karma and the power of simple acts of devotion:** Related to the previous theme is a strong emphasis on the karmic power of simple acts of devotion. A distinction is made here between generosity through the donation of food and money, as discussed above, and simple acts of devotion. Again, great emphasis in these stories is placed upon intention rather than completion of the action. A man seeks to offer flowers to the Buddha but dies before he is able to complete his act of devotion and is reborn as a deva because of his intention.<sup>241</sup> Elsewhere we see the direct karmic relationship between acts of devotion and the effect they produce when an arhat gives off a fragrant smell because he offered perfume to a bodhisattva in a previous life.<sup>242</sup> Karmic retribution is of course equal for good and evil deeds. Thus 500 blind men are abandoned in the wilderness by their guide as a result of them having abandoned the master for whom they

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<sup>239</sup> T 208, 4: 540a.9-27, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 36.

<sup>240</sup> T 208, 4: 540a.28-c.29, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 37. Additionally, see Hallisey 1996 for a discussion of this very narrative and the ways in which Buddhist narrative literature is used to teach ethical behavior to its audience.

<sup>241</sup> T 208, 4: 534b.8-29, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 12.

<sup>242</sup> T 208, 4: 541c.21-542a.28, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 41.

worked in a previous life.<sup>243</sup> And while devotion is important, such devotion must be directed to the proper object or personage. We read of a young boy who dies and is reborn as a deva because of his devotion to the Buddha. While living as a god he observes that his parents make continual offerings to his cremated remains. Seeing the error of this practice he transforms himself into a boy who beats a dead ox to force it to eat. The boy's father realizes the uselessness of making offerings to his son's remains and returns home where he makes offerings to the Buddha and becomes converted.<sup>244</sup>

In contrast to these many acts of simple devotion which provide immediate reward, several stories indicate that obtaining the greatest karmic rewards requires innumerable actions and lifetimes. Just like children who do not understand the dangers a father went through to bring pearls back to them from his travels, many do not understand that the greatest rewards and virtues are developed over numerous lifetimes and through great effort.<sup>245</sup> Additionally, even with great devotion and faith the rewards for such acts do not always come in the way that we think they will. The story is told of a woman who paid devotion to the Buddha every morning. Seeing her devotion the Buddha granted her a wish for her great merit. The woman wished for four sons: one to be a wealthy merchant, one to be a prosperous farmer, one to work in government and provide protection for the family, and one to become a monk. Shortly thereafter the woman gave birth to only one son and in her disappointment was overly cautious in protecting him. The son, seeking to honor his mother, set out and became a wealthy merchant, using his wealth to buy land and herds. With his newfound wealth and social status he married into a powerful family and began serving at court. Finally he asked leave of his mother to

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<sup>243</sup> T 208, 4: 539a.10-28, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 32.

<sup>244</sup> T 208, 4: 534c.1-21, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 13.

<sup>245</sup> T 208, 4: 537c.23-538a.15, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 27.

become a monk, at which point the mother realized the fulfillment of her initial wish from the Buddha.<sup>246</sup> Thus, through her devotion her wish was fulfilled, though not in the way she initially expected.

Throughout these narratives attention is paid to both the great acts of generosity and simple acts of devotion. We are given insight into the workings of karma: that good deeds produce good fruit and that black deeds produce black fruit. The reality of reincarnation, the power of faith, and the value of devotion and generosity are all reinforced.

**Precepts:** A significant portion of the *ZJXZPY* is dedicated to discussing the importance of keeping the Buddhist precepts. One of the first narratives in the anthology opens with the statement that, “There is nothing unobtainable for the man who observes the precepts, but the man who violates the precepts loses absolutely all.”<sup>247</sup> We are then told of a poor beggar who, after making offerings to a particular deva for over twelve years, is given a jar that will grant all of his wishes. The beggar becomes a wealthy man who possesses all that his heart could desire until he carelessly drops the jar and breaks it. Instantly all he had received from his wish-fulfilling jar vanished. The narrative ends with the observation that keeping the precepts is like possessing a magic jar that will grant your every desire and warns that we should not lose such a gift in a moment of carelessness.<sup>248</sup> Thus, great effort should be extended to make sure that the basic tenets of Buddhism are maintained. We see this theme repeated in numerous variations. Adherence to the precepts will save you at your time of need, like a man who is rescued from prison by his trusted friend,<sup>249</sup> the drunkard who overcomes his addiction and poverty by

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<sup>246</sup> T 208, 4: 539c.12-540a.8, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 35.

<sup>247</sup> 持戒之人無事不得，破戒之人一切皆失，T 208, 4: 532a.18-19.

<sup>248</sup> T 208, 4: 532a.18-b.9, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 4a.

<sup>249</sup> T 208, 4: 539a.10-28, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 33.

keeping the precepts,<sup>250</sup> and the cook who is saved from the wrath of the king for refusing to butcher animals.<sup>251</sup> In each case it is devotion and a willingness to keep the five lay precepts (五戒) that provide solace and protection.<sup>252</sup>

The vast majority of the stories in the *ZJXZPY* that deal with the precepts are clearly emphasizing the five precepts required of lay practitioners. These stories are full of lay protagonists, from wealthy householders to beggars, cooks to drunkards. The precepts are described as a good friend or a precious jewel that can save you when you are in trouble and provide for your material needs. While it is clear that in the majority of cases the emphasis is on the lay precepts, an occasional story will emphasize the importance for monks to adhere to all the rules required of them as well. This is highlighted in the story of two monks that are traveling by boat with a group of merchants. When the ship sinks the junior of the two monks manages to grab a board to keep him afloat. The senior monk requests the board from his junior companion based upon the rule taught by the Buddha that senior monks should always be honored by their juniors. The younger of the two considers that it would be better to die than break the precepts and offers his wooden board, then sinks into the ocean. Because of his commitment to keeping the precepts he and all the merchants are saved by an ocean spirit. The end of the narrative explains that it is better to keep the precepts and die than to break them and live, and that the precepts are able to save beings from the torments of death.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> T 208, 4: 539b.22-c.11, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 34.

<sup>251</sup> T 208, 4: 541b.23-c.20, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 40.

<sup>252</sup> The five precepts required of all Buddhists are avoidance of lying, stealing, killing, intoxicants, and sexual misconduct. There are additional precepts that are required of novice initiates, and then an even larger number of rules that are expected of fully initiated monks and nuns.

<sup>253</sup> T 208, 4: 533a.13-26, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 7. 水神讚道人言：「汝真是持戒之人也！」以是證故寧持戒而死，不犯戒而生。是以戒德可恃怙，能濟生死苦。 T 208, 4: 533a.23-26.

Whether directed to lay practitioners or monks, the importance of the precepts is a clear theme running through many of the stories in this anthology. Keeping the precepts requires consistent practice and devotion. Doing so provides safety, wealth, comfort, and salvation in times of greatest need. It is interesting to note that while we find this same theme expressed in both anthologies there is a distinct difference in tone. In the *ZPYJ* the precepts offer a path to spiritual progress and wisdom. The *ZJXZPY*, in contrast, highlights the worldly benefits that come as a result of keeping the precepts, which is a theme we can well imagine would resonate with a lay audience.

**Proper personal interactions:** Stories in the anthology dealing with proper personal interactions address several different types of relationships. Several narratives emphasize the proper way for family members to interact with each other, particularly when dealing with the care of parents. This is highlighted in the events that occur after the Buddha teaches his disciple, Maudgalyāyana, that we cannot escape the familial relationships and obligations that are determined by our karmic predispositions. Hearing this, Maudgalyāyana claims that his spiritual power to move over great distances will allow him to escape such familial ties and he immediately jumps away to a great distance. He lands right in front of an old man who, thinking he is being attacked by a demon, hits Maudgalyāyana over the head. The Buddha then relates to his disciple that this old man was Maudgalyāyana's father in a previous life who he had conspired to attack and kill out of hatred, and that his own injury was the inescapable karmic consequence of his previous relationship with his former father. The story ends, then, with the admonition that we cannot escape the obligations of family relationships and thus should



maintain filial piety in our thoughts and words towards our parents.<sup>254</sup> This story highlights the relationship between our interaction with members of the household and the karmic consequences that come from such interactions. Stories in the anthology stress the delicate nature of interactions at strategically important moments in karmic development, such as at the moment of death. Thus we read of a man who is reborn as a snake because at the moment of death a servant had done something to anger him and that anger directly resulted in his unfortunate rebirth.<sup>255</sup>

Other kinds of relationships beyond the familial are also stressed, particularly the beneficial relationship between monk and laity. Thus the man in the story just mentioned, who was born as a snake because of his moment of anger at death, is able to cultivate a relationship with a monk that leads to his next rebirth as a deva and his ability to offer flowers in devotion to the Buddha. The monk-lay relationship is primarily characterized as one that should include mutual respect and watchful care. We see this in the story of a monk that regularly visits a butcher for meals but never warns the butcher of the consequences of killing living beings. When the butcher is reborn as a demon he seeks revenge on the monk for his neglect. Fortunately the monks are able to intervene on his behalf and make offerings to release him from his negative birth. The narrative ends with the admonition that “for the relationship between host and visitor to be profitable there must be remonstrance and correction, even if they fall into a negative

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<sup>254</sup> 慎莫作不孝之罪，是以人生處世，不可不慎心口而孝養父母也。T 208, 4: 535b.3-4. See also T 208, 4: 535a.22-b.4, and appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 15. This emphasis on filial piety is strengthened further by the selection of Maudgalyāyana as the protagonist that seeks to outrun, as it were, his responsibilities to his parents since Maudgalyāyana is perhaps most famously known in Buddhist literature for his exploits in traveling through the hell realm to rescue his mother in order to teach her the Buddhist dharma.

<sup>255</sup> T 208, 4: 535b.5-16, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 16.

rebirth there can be a good outcome. So we can say: A good friend is a great cause [of blessing].<sup>256</sup>

These narratives reinforce the point that any good relationship must include teaching and correction. This is particularly the case when it is a monk-lay interaction and it goes both ways—the laity should always speak up when they see improper behavior in the monks. However, the vast majority of stories that discuss this theme emphasize the obligation monks have to warn when they see improper behavior in others. In cases where such warnings are non-existent or unheeded monks have the opportunity to intercede for the benefit of others through offerings. Thus, proper relationships include teaching and warning others of the pitfalls of improper actions and intervening on another's behalf when negative fruits are produced.

**The value of learning the dharma:** Directly related to the last theme of proper personal relationships is the importance and value of learning the dharma. Throughout the anthology there are numerous stories that emphasize the obligation and great benefit that comes from hearing the dharma being taught from an authorized source.

Learning the dharma can occur through different modalities. Several stories describe the miraculous benefits of hearing scriptures recited. A bird is killed as it is perched in a tree listening to the recitation of scriptures and is reborn as celestial being. It immediately returns to offer flowers to the monk that was reciting scriptures at the moments of its death.<sup>257</sup> This and several other stories express a miraculous aspect to scripture recitation which is different from the *ZPYJ*'s emphasis on correct understanding from an enlightened teacher. This narrative shows

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<sup>256</sup>是以主客之宜理有諫正，雖墮惡道故有善緣，可謂善知識者是大因緣也！ T 208, 4: 538c.18-20. See also T 208, 4: 538c.1-20, and appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 30.

<sup>257</sup> T 208, 4: 541b.13-22, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 39. This narrative and others that we have seen highlight the concern several of these stories exhibit toward the impact your mental condition at the moment of death has on your next birth. Such stories emphasize the need to provide conditions conducive to calm states of mind at the time of death.

the miraculous effect of simply hearing something and does not necessarily focus on correct understanding or contemplation. Rather, it is an organic and natural consequence somewhat beyond the bird's control—and primarily because his heart was not disturbed at the moment of death (which is also what we see emphasized in some of the other narratives discussed above). In these stories, simply hearing the recitation of scriptures has a transformative effect described in one narrative as equivalent to eating precious jewels, and in another narrative as a magic branch that when burned turns all around it to gemstones.<sup>258</sup>

While some narratives stress the miraculous effect of hearing scriptures being recited, other narratives highlight the dedicated effort that is necessary in learning and memorizing the scriptures. We read of a wealthy layman who supports a young monk in his efforts to memorize the scriptures. Upon seeing how much his young charge is able to learn in just a few months of dedicated study the layman desires that in a future life he might have the opportunity to pursue such learning himself. Because of his financial support he is reborn as Ananda, the personal assistant to the Buddha foremost in knowledge of the scriptures.<sup>259</sup>

Sustained, dedicated study and adherence to the teachings of Buddhism act as an anchor when confronted with deception and false teachings. So, when a wealthy Brahmin who has been taught and converted by the Buddha is confronted the very next day by the evil god Māra in the guise of the Buddha, the young convert is able to resist all efforts of deception because of his firm understanding of the doctrine. The story reinforces the importance of this theme by concluding that, “the followers of Buddha must understand the profound teachings and then they

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<sup>258</sup> T 208, 4: 535a.12-21, T 208, 4: 538a.16-b.4, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 14b and 28.

<sup>259</sup> T 208, 4: 534c.22-535a.12, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 14a.

can discern in all cases between the words of the Buddha and aberrant teachings [of Mara]. This is why sound doctrine cannot fail to be studied: generosity cannot fail to be performed.”<sup>260</sup>

Through these narratives we see emphasis placed both upon the importance of learning the dharma as well as teaching it to others. While hearing the teachings can have miraculous effects, strenuous effort is also needed—it is imperative that effort be made to teach the dharma to others who do not know it yet. This aspect is confirmed in the concluding narrative of the anthology which tells of a young princess who is dedicated to Buddhism. A group of Brahmins who are opposed to the Buddha trick the king into offering his daughter as a sacrifice and thus block the Buddha’s access to the royal court. The daughter accepts her fate on the condition that she is allowed seven days to prepare. On each day before her sacrifice the princess takes part of the city with her to see the Buddha, where they hear him teach the dharma. After taking the entire city over five days, she then takes the king and his court on the sixth day. Upon hearing the Buddha, the king is converted and the plot is exposed. The Brahmins are forced to convert and eventually become arhats.<sup>261</sup> There are several aspects of this final tale that are worthy of notice. We see that through the acts of a lay practitioner the entire city is converted to Buddhism, including those who were attempting to prevent the spread of its teachings. This conversion comes from both meeting the Buddha and hearing him teach. In this and other narratives we see a strong emphasis on lay participation in spreading the teaching of Buddhism, as the doctrine has a powerful transformative effect, even upon those who are initially antagonistic to such teachings.

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<sup>260</sup>是故佛弟子要解深理，魔說佛說悉皆能知。是故義不可不學，施不可不修。T 208, 4: 533c.16-18. See also T 208, 4: 533b.14-c.18, and appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 9.

<sup>261</sup> T 208, 4: 542c.13-28, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 44.

## Concluding Remarks on the Two Anthologies

Comparing the themes of each anthology allows us to make certain conclusions. The *ZPYJ* is primarily addressing a monastic audience with monastic concerns. It opens with a young novice wrestling with the decision of which spiritual orientation to pursue, and while such a choice is not exclusively a monastic concern, it is framed within a monastic setting. Additionally, many of the narratives explore concerns of keeping monastic precepts, consequences for poor monastic behavior, and maintaining good monastic relationships. The majority of protagonists and actors in the narratives are monks and nuns (and when the laity is represented they are almost always from the elite class). Problems are most often resolved through appeal to what are considered primarily monastic practices, such as meditation, study of the dharma, and adherence to the monastic code. There is practically no mention of stūpa worship, paying homage to the Buddha or images of him, efficacy of cult objects or relics, reliance on the Buddha or bodhisattvas for salvation in time of trouble, or illustrations of the great rewards that come from simple acts of devotion or generosity—all of which are typical elements of many of the *avadāna* narratives found in the Indian anthologies.

On the whole, it appears the themes of the *ZPYJ* are concerned with the proper understanding and performance of the bodhisattva path, monastic community, and several specific Buddhist perfections: generosity, meditation, and wisdom. The progression of the anthology culminates in showing the ultimate superiority of the Buddha who obtained his merit as a result of following the bodhisattva path, adhering to the precepts, and perfecting virtue. It is also emphasized that practicing under the guidance of an enlightened teacher is essential in order to correctly understand and progress in following the Buddha. Thus the overarching point of

such an anthology is directed toward questions of authority in both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Much of the anthology addresses what would appear to be the everyday concerns of a monastic Buddhist: How do you deal with gossip and laxity in a monastic setting? Why are the precepts so vital? What about the hierarchy and social order of such a community? How do you maintain order along such a path? The answer to these concerns is explicit and direct: the precepts are of supreme importance and following the teachings of an enlightened teacher will help to ensure success in spiritual pursuits; failure to do so will be detrimental and costly.

The *ZJXZPY*, on the other hand, is clearly more lay oriented in its representation of Buddhism. A greater portion of principle agents within the stories themselves represent a wide range of lay practitioners, from an old widow who gives all she has to the Buddha, to wealthy merchants and kings. We see more examples of reliance on the Buddha for salvation and representations of great karmic reward for simple devotional acts and donations. In addition, we notice a stronger emphasis on what we might consider the basic principles of Buddhist teachings stressing the nature of impermanence and suffering, the dangers of wealth, and the need for generosity and compassion. We also see less emphasis on meditation and the development of wisdom than is found in the *ZPYJ*. Instead, many narratives emphasize the five lay precepts and encourage monks and laity to warn each other of potential dangers in following the dharma. In relation to this, there is also continual reassurance through many of the narratives that repentance is possible. Even if you have broken the precepts it is possible to come back. Learn the dharma, practice generosity, do good and keep the precepts and all that you may have lost or that you might desire can be yours. This shift in emphasis to the positive good fortune that can come as a result of Buddhist practice speaks of an audience that would be concerned with improving the

situation of their day to day lives rather than the elevated goal of achieving status as an enlightened Buddha.

In terms of organization and structure, the *ZJXZPY* differs significantly from the *ZPYJ* in that it is the less cohesive of the two anthologies. The narratives appear to be more eclectic in thematic content and less tightly interconnected. There is also a broader range of themes that appear to address the concerns of a more diverse audience. This is not to say that it does not incorporate themes and narratives that hold specific monastic concerns, but these are the exception rather than the rule. And, in general, when there are narratives that appear to be directed toward a monastic audience they tend to be concerned with issues of monk-lay interactions. It should be pointed out here that the narratives in the *ZJXZPY* where we see the heaviest concentration of themes addressing monastic concerns and featuring monastics as the principle actors are the very same narratives that are shared between the two anthologies. This indicates that perhaps the earliest core themes of the anthology were focused upon monastic concerns, and that as the *ZJXZPY* evolved at the hands of subsequent compilers additional themes were added in order to address alternate concerns of a more diverse audience.

Both anthologies clearly assume an audience that is familiar with the precepts and teachings of Buddhism as a whole and have displayed a willingness to follow that path. Neither of the two texts has the traits of a proselytizing tool used for teaching non-Buddhists, in that both assume a certain level of understanding. There are numerous intertextual references to other Buddhist narratives and a general assumption of an understanding of the precepts and commitments to be made by Buddhist adherents. And while, as is typical for *avadāna* narratives, there is a great deal of explanation about the workings of karma, it is not done in the nature of explaining the doctrine to those who do not understand it, but as a further explanation of how the

world operates. Explaining karma is not the purpose of either anthology; instead, karma is presented as the reason for why all the other themes discussed in the anthology are valid and operable.<sup>262</sup>

We also see that many of the stories in both collections are relatively generic and bland, to the point that the themes they are presenting can only be understood in light of the explanation that is given to them. That is, quite often a narrative is so generic as to lack any significant moral until a specific comparison and explanation is made. Alternatively, some narratives will appear to be addressing a particular theme, only to have a very different interpretation presented at the end despite a reading that might occur more naturally. Thus a story about trying to grasp the reflection of a gold nugget in a pool of water, which at first glance would seem to be about impermanence or the illusion of wealth, is explained as being a metaphor for keeping the monastic precepts—an explanation that only becomes apparent at the end when we are told that the gold nugget represents the precepts.<sup>263</sup> Likewise, a story about a monk who is reborn as a hungry ghost forced to eat burning iron pellets as a consequence of breaking the rules might naturally address the importance of keeping the precepts, but is instead shown to be about having faith in the teachings of the Buddha.<sup>264</sup> Such occurrences indicate that these narratives might best be viewed as raw material for the editors and compilers of the anthology to mold for their own use. The interpretations written at the end are like handprints left after the clay is molded to fit a specific purpose. In many cases the stories would be equally susceptible to alternate explanations, and at times seem to more naturally fit an alternate interpretation. However, the explanation at the end of many of the narratives provides the key to unlocking the meaning between the

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<sup>262</sup> The treatment of karma in these anthologies seems to be a significant departure from other *avadāna* anthologies. While I don't have time to go into more detail at this time, it is worthy of further discussion.

<sup>263</sup> T 208, 4: 542a.29-b.12, see also appendix, *ZJXZPY* Story 42.

<sup>264</sup> T 207, 4: 523b.25-c.12, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 6.



narrative object and the interpretation of its intended meaning, thus providing us with insight into the intentions and implied audience of those that compiled such narratives. This does not mean that we should assume these closing remarks are the correct interpretation but that they represent what the compilers and interpretive community accepted as the correct (or most salient) interpretation for their needs.

**Treatment of women between the two texts:** Another aspect of comparison between these two anthologies provides additional insight into the implied audience and social context for their construction. Nine of the forty narratives in the *ZPYJ* include a female character compared to seven in the *ZJXZPY*. While each anthology carries a relatively equivalent number of female characters, their treatment and presentation are radically different.

Of the nine stories in the *ZPYJ* that incorporate women, only three are significant actors in the plot.<sup>265</sup> In six of the narratives the women are nameless, voiceless objects used for the advancement of plot. These include a queen who becomes pregnant, a mother who is killed by her husband in an attempt to force an abortion, a pregnant deer that calls upon the king of the deer to save her from death, the wife of a Brahmin who is kissed by a monk in order to teach a lesson to her husband, and a wooden puppet that has the appearance of a real woman. These last two instances are particularly telling in that they incorporate much of the attitude that is present toward women in these narratives: they are objects to be admired and/or used for ulterior purposes. Thus in the story of the monk who seeks to teach a Brahmin patron of the dangers of desire and attachment by kissing the man's beautiful wife, no mention is ever made of attempting to teach the wife as well—she is merely the object to whom the Brahmin man is dangerously

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<sup>265</sup> For further information on all the narratives that incorporate women in some form in the *ZPYJ* see appendix, *ZPYJ* Stories 2, 8, 9, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, and 31b. The three narratives in which women are central characters in the *ZPYJ* are stories 9, 15, and 31b.

attached. Likewise the wooden puppet that was discussed in more detail in chapter one is an apt description of how women are primarily represented in the text: they are alluring, but also dangerous and deceptive.

In the three narratives in which women play a central role we see a mixed representation. In a version of the well-known *Bodhijātaka* we read of a husband and wife who are so dedicated to spiritual progress that they live together in a celibate relationship.<sup>266</sup> At one point they decide to become ascetics and travel together for a while until it is pointed out that it is improper for them to wander together, whereupon the husband sells his wife as a servant to a Brahmin and goes on his way leaving her to endure constant unwanted advances. He eventually meets the Buddha, becomes an arhat, and returns for his wife who then becomes a nun. Afterwards, the nun begins to teach the women of the king's harem and commits them to a time of celibacy. The king becomes enraged at this and forces the nun to become a member of the harem and stand in for the rest of the women in satisfying his sexual pleasure. At this the narrative ends stating that the nun is destined to endure such a situation because of karma from a previous birth.<sup>267</sup> Earlier we discussed the story of a princess who is dedicated to meditation but is unable to arrive at a correct understanding of the principle of emptiness. While her efforts in meditation lead to her rebirth in the heaven she eventually falls into a lower rebirth as a sow and it is in this state that the Buddha finds her and informs his disciple of her past history.<sup>268</sup> Finally, the last narrative to portray women in this anthology describes the story of a nun who rips out her own eye to stop the unwanted advances of a man she meets while wandering in the forest. The nun returns and

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<sup>266</sup> A version of this narrative appears in Ārya Śūra's *Jātakamāla*. See Koroche 1989, 133-139.

<sup>267</sup> T 207, 4: 524a.21-525a.15, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 9. Interestingly, in the *Jātakamāla* version of this narrative the nun is saved from the indignity of being forced to serve in the harem by her former husband, the bodhisattva, who steps in and teaches the king. The king converts to Buddhism and forgives the nun, allowing her to go her way unharmed. This portion of the narrative is never hinted at in the version presented in the *ZPYJ*.

<sup>268</sup> T 207, 4: 525c.10-526a.12, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 15.

relates the events to the Buddha who issues a rule that nuns are no longer allowed to walk in the forest alone.<sup>269</sup>

The story of the nun, known as Subhā from other sources, who rips out her own eye is one that occurs elsewhere in Buddhist literature and has garnered some scholarly attention. Liz Wilson discusses this particular story in her book *Charming Cadavers* and argues that by extracting her eye Subhā “transformed the object of [the man’s] obsession into an object of revulsion...the persuasive power of disgust should not be underestimated.”<sup>270</sup> Wilson explains further that such an act of bodily disfigurement by women is a common trope in the literature of a number of religious traditions. Its occurrence in this particular narrative, however, is different from similar occasions found in Christian literature where the disfigurement is done in an effort to maintain sexual purity. Wilson argues that it “would be more accurate to classify Subhā’s story under the rubric “the heroics of pedagogy” than “the heroics of virginity.” What Subhā did was to make a spectacle of herself for the education of a man too enthralled by her beauty to see the repulsiveness of her form.”<sup>271</sup> And so Wilson concludes that “self-disfiguring nuns like Subhā who edify men through heroic displays of their bodily repulsiveness...repudiate their role as agents of Māra. In so doing, these potential minions of Māra show themselves to be dutiful servants of their male counterparts within the *sangha*.”<sup>272</sup>

Each of these three narratives presents a mixed view of women. All three women are shown to have great dedication and skill in their spiritual practice. Two of the women are described as having attained the status of an arhat. Yet, for at least two of them (the story of the wife and the young princess) the narrative ends with the women in a less than admirable situation,

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<sup>269</sup> T 207, 4: 529b.20-29, see also appendix, *ZPYJ* Story 31b.

<sup>270</sup> Wilson 1996, 168-169. For another discussion of the Subhā narrative see Trainor 1992, 57-79.

<sup>271</sup> Wilson 1996, 175.

<sup>272</sup> Wilson 1996, 179.

either forced to endure the sexual pleasures of a king or to live as a pig despite their spiritual attainments.

Such stories display a mixed attitude toward women in the *ZPYJ*. On the one hand, on the few occasions where women play a central role within their respective narratives they are presented as capable of great spiritual advancement and heroic acts of courage. On the other hand at the conclusion of the narrative they are presented in a compromised, fallen status, or as a sort of object lesson for the benefit of the male members of the *saṅgha*. This is particularly true in the story of Subhā just discussed with the addition of the Chinese version of our narrative, where the conclusion of the story is not about the heroic and dedicated action of the nun; rather, the story serves as the impetus for a new rule restricting the movement of nuns outside the monastic walls. Thus the theme of this story does not focus on the problem of desire or on the significant spiritual progress of the nun but on the need to control the behaviors and acts of the female population within the monastic context. So, while these portrayals of women are at times positive the women are ultimately left in compromised positions. Such representations of women appear to be designed for the benefit of men that are subject to the difficulty of lust and desire, rather than as examples of proper behavior for women to follow. Such representations relay a sense of androcentrism and misogyny.

In contrast the *ZJXZPY* presents women in a more favorable light. Women play a significant role in six of the seven narratives that include female characters. These narratives highlight the miraculous benefits that are possible for women to achieve: from the simple donations of an old woman to the Buddha to the fulfillment of a woman's vow to have a son who will become a disciple of the Buddha. We see stories that address the suffering of women who have lost their children, find solace in the teachings of Buddhism and join the *saṅgha*. Most often

when women are depicted in this anthology they are central actors in the narrative (though the Buddha is never shown in a female birth), they often play important roles in promoting Buddhist teachings and practices, and almost universally end the narrative in a better position than when they started.

In particular the very last narrative of the anthology can serve as a model for the way the *ZJXZPY* portrays women in general. In the story where the daughter of the king is influential in converting her entire city, including the court and the Brahmin priests who opposed her, it is the woman that provides the opportunity for others to hear the Buddha teach, despite the persecution and opposition from other elite males. As the final narrative of the collection it also serves as a capstone to several of the primary themes that we see in the anthology and indicates a concern for the role of the laity, particularly lay women, in the promulgation of Buddhism. What is clear from this story and the others that represent female characters is that women are represented as generous, dedicated, and possess the capacity for spiritual progress.

This difference in the treatment of women between the two anthologies might further indicate the difference in the intended audience of the two anthologies. Where the *ZPYJ* seems geared toward a monastic audience and addresses specific monastic concerns, the *ZJXZPY* is not as limited in scope and covers a wider variety of concerns and themes. In particular, the latter half of the anthology is concerned with proper observance of the five lay precepts, the importance of generosity, and the giving of alms. It is perhaps no coincidence that the majority of narratives that portray women also occur in this same portion of the anthology as well. This may offer a clue that an attempt was made on the part of the editors of this particular collection to incorporate narratives that may have appealed to a community that included female patrons and donors. This is in contrast to the *ZPYJ* that clearly holds women in lower esteem and is not

particularly concerned with the way in which they are represented through the text. Again, this can perhaps indicate that the focus of the editors was on proper monastic behaviors and interactions. This reflects much of Buddhist literature that presents misogynist and androcentric tendencies.<sup>273</sup> That is not to say that nuns might not have been included as the intended audience of the *ZPYJ*, but that particular concerns of nuns was not an issue or, perhaps more accurately, that women by nature were part of the problem and thus a cause for particular concern and caution. In contrast, the *ZJXZPY* overwhelmingly presents female characters as more positive, generous, and dedicated agents in their practice of Buddhism.<sup>274</sup>

In the end, the comparison of the religious themes of these two anthologies has allowed us to postulate the intended audience for each of the collections and the religious concerns being addressed by them. As we have shown, anthologies offer us insight into the concerns and the context of the editors that compiled them and the communities for whom they were compiled. That being said, we should be cautious not to read too much into the capacity for an anthology to give us insight into the cultural context of its formation. There are, of course, limits to such an approach. However, the translation and anthologizing of the narratives represented in these two texts provides a window into a moment in the formation and transformation of Buddhist communities in early medieval China. The very composite and derivative nature that these anthologies display is itself a valuable source for seeing the points of contestation and concern for these communities.

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<sup>273</sup> See Sponberg 1992.

<sup>274</sup> For a more detailed discussion of women in Chinese *jātaka* and *avadāna* literature see Shyu 2008.

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation has endeavored to provide a modest step forward in the study of *avadāna* in early medieval China and constitutes merely an introductory attempt to establish groundwork for future study. As such, my primary goal has focused more on providing a frame for discussion, rather than on coming to a final conclusion. While *avadāna* literature is garnering increased scrutiny by Buddhist scholars, the Chinese materials have been relatively untouched; and so I have sought to present several aspects about Chinese *avadāna* in relationship to previous studies in hopes of stirring up further interest and scholarly attention. There has been a steady increase in scholarship of *avadāna* literature over the past several decades but there is still much left to do.

I began this study with a review of contemporary *avadāna* scholarship followed by a close reading of a narrative through the lens of Indian aesthetics of humor. This was done to show that the literary nature of *avadāna* provides clues to its potential rhetorical and social function. The use of humor within the narrative reinforces a normative claim about the problem of desire and suffering in the human condition and presents the solution of Buddhist monasticism as the only means of escape from that condition. We can imagine such a claim being made in the face of opposition to or a breakdown of those monastic commitments.

This indicates that, contrary to standard assumptions of this literature, *avadāna* narratives may have served a variety of functions beyond being simple didactic tales designed to show the workings of karma for a non-Buddhist audience. This includes being intended for a monastic audience to address specifically monastic concerns. Eric Zürcher indicates this possibility by noting that because of the simple and entertaining nature of these stories they “were used as

teaching materials for beginners” and were “said to have been compiled as a kind of elementary textbook to be memorized by junior monks.”<sup>275</sup>

Chapter two focused on utilizing developments in modern literary theory to provide a theoretical model for moving past the *story* level of a narrative and focusing on the *discourse* and the interpretive community that helped to shape the text. This is best characterized as an attempt to shift the focus from *what* is being read to *who* is doing the reading. The explanations at the beginning or end of the narratives and the variations in alternate versions of the same narrative become moments of contestation that indicate shifts in the horizon of expectations of different interpretive communities. This allows us to catch glimpses of the context in which such variations and reinterpretations came about and the types of concerns facing these communities for which these narratives were presented as an answer.

Chapter three expanded on these ideas by focusing on the way in which the compilation of *avadānas* into anthologies can illuminate the context in which they were compiled. I argue that the very ordering and organization of disparate narratives into a particular arrangement constitutes a form of interpretation that indicates the context and concerns of a community of readers involved in the production and transmission of that anthology. Thus, we see that the arrangement of the narratives in the *ZPYJ* indicates the concerns of a monastic community while the *ZJXZPY* indicates a broader audience with a greater diversity of topics treated in the various *avadānas* contained within it. Using anthologies in such a manner is still preliminary and much work is needed to further flesh out the methodology and value such an approach might offer.

At the conclusion of this dissertation there are still many questions left to explore. Unfortunately, this study has only been able to scratch the surface of the many enticing

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<sup>275</sup> See Zürcher 1995, 77. See also T 2049, 50: 345a.29-b.4.



possibilities this source material presents. I'd like to briefly offer a few areas that I feel are worth considering for future research.

Chapter one discussed the use of humor and deception as rhetorical devices within *avadāna* literature. I feel that there is still more to be done with this idea. It would be interesting to see if there are any parallels to this strategy in other genres of Buddhist literature. In so far as deception is a 'problem,' what is the range of solutions? If it is principally a matter of ignorance, why is renunciation the solution? Do other genres move in a different direction? And if so, what might this say about the respective interpretive communities and their response to such issues?

There is also much left unsaid about the nature and role of anthology in early medieval China. While this dissertation reviewed two *avadāna* anthologies found in the Chinese canon there are still many more that have yet to receive any serious attention. Additionally, both the *SWF* and *LDJJ* offer valuable materials for understanding the process of their compilation and translation. Unfortunately, by the time I came to realize this it was too late to incorporate such information more fully into this study. Doing a more detailed investigation of the compilation process and conducting a survey of the other known *avadāna* anthologies from the Chinese translations are the two next logical steps in the study of Chinese *avadāna* anthologies. In connection with this, I also feel that it is important that this material be translated for a Western audience to make it more easily accessible for other scholars that are working in *avadāna* scholarship. While many of the narratives in these collections are standard fare, there are many others that are quite unique and entertaining and worth sharing with a wider audience.

There is still much to be done to bring the Chinese *avadānas* into conversation with current Western *avadāna* scholarship. This scholarship has focused almost solely on the South Asian materials at the exclusion of the Chinese translations. A greater attempt needs to be made

to bridge this gap, as the Chinese *avadānas* are a valuable resource for clarifying our understanding of the material and offer a constructive soundboard for better gauging our understanding of this genre. To date, I feel that our perception of *avadāna* literature has been slightly skewed because we have failed to adequately incorporate the Chinese translations. This is not to say that the Chinese *avadānas* are the ‘holy grail’ for understanding this literature—as we have seen, some of it is quite bland and rather unexceptional—but it is to say that it provides an additional perspective and can thus help to clarify our view of the past.

One way that we can begin to incorporate the Chinese translations into *avadāna* scholarship is to pursue a comparison of these *avadānas* with other known versions found in the Indic sources. In the initial stages of this dissertation, I had planned on doing just such a comparison of the *Jyotiṣkāvadāna* in order to tease out the varieties of *discourse* and interpretive communities that might be reflected between the different versions but was unable to do so due to time constraints. I still believe that such an approach can be very fruitful and anticipate that this will become one of the next projects that I pursue in the near future.

It is my sincere hope that this dissertation has offered something of value to the study of Buddhist *avadāna* literature. I am confident that other more capable and erudite scholars will be able to make improvements on the preliminary findings presented here. At its heart, this dissertation is an attempt to jumpstart scholarly interest in the Chinese *avadāna* materials. I hope that this dissertation has shown that there is still much to learn from, and to be done with, the Chinese *avadāna* sources. As we continue to utilize the vast resources offered us by the Chinese translations we will be sure to increase our knowledge of *avadāna* narratives and the Buddhists that translated, compiled, and read them.

## APPENDIX

For this appendix I have maintained the numbering of each narrative as found in the *Taishō* edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon. In instances where two narratives are combined under a single listing I separate the stories and indicate this discrepancy with an “a” or “b” to distinguish them. Other information provided for each narrative includes the complete reference to the *Taishō* edition, reference to Édouard Chavannes’ French translation of each narrative as found in volume 2 of *Cinq cents contes et apologues: extraits du Tripitaka Chinois*, and the corresponding listing in Leslie Grey’s *A Concordance of Buddhist Birth Stories* where applicable. The synopses are taken from my own reading of the texts and are intended to provide a general plot outline and are not a full catalogue of all narrative events or thematic elements.

### *Za piyu jing* 雜譬喻經 (ZPYJ)

#### **Story 1**

**T 207, 4: 522c.5-20**

**Chavannes:** No. 156

**Shared Narrative:** See also ZJXZPY Story 18.

**Synopsis:** A novice vacillates between following the arhat and bodhisattva path, his master treats him differently depending upon his aspiration at the moment, and then finally explains to him the superiority of the bodhisattva compared to an arhat.

#### **Story 2**

**T 207, 4: 522c.21-523a.6**

**Chavannes:** No. 157

**Synopsis:** A king, who already has 999 sons, goes to great lengths to prepare for the birth of his next son after the mother shows signs of impurity during pregnancy. Although the other sons have developed and grown strong, wise, healthy, and capable none of them show all thirty two marks of a mahapuruṣa and thus are unworthy of aspiring to being a bodhisattva. The comparison is made between the king, representing Buddha, and the unborn son, representing a bodhisattva, who is superior to the other sons that represent monks of the arhat path.

#### **Story 3**

**T 207, 4: 523a.7-27**

**Chavannes:** No. 158

**Shared Narrative:** See also *ZJXZPY* Story 19.

**Synopsis:** Two brothers were monks in an earlier life, one was rigorous in following the precepts but very stingy and lacking in compassion, the other was very compassionate but lax in following the precepts. The rigorous brother is reborn as a human who again becomes a monk but suffers from extreme poverty and hunger (due to his lack of charity in the previous life). The other is born as an elephant and enjoys all the comforts of a royal court but suffers in a lower rebirth. The older brother visits the younger and explains that they had both sinned in their previous life.

#### **Story 4**

**T 207, 4: 523a.28-b.6**

**Chavannes:** No. 159

**Synopsis:** A musician wearies a household with his constant singing until they provide him with a cow as an offering to get him to stop. This represents the need for diligence in practicing the path without regard to the amount of time and effort it will take to obtain the final goal.

#### **Story 5**

**T 207, 4: 523b.7-24**

**Chavannes:** No. 160

**Shared Narrative:** See also *ZJXZPY* Story 20.

**Synopsis:** A monk who breaks the precepts is expelled from the monastic order and makes a bargain with a local demon to give himself the appearance of spiritual attainment. The demon, while invisible, carries the monk through the air in order to make him appear to fly. This deception wins him donations from the local village that were intended for the monastery from which he was expelled and calls the spirituality of the other monks into question. The deceptive monk is killed when he is abandoned by the demon in mid-flight as the demon fears being caught in his deception by officers of the deity *Viaśravana*.

#### **Story 6**

**T 207, 4: 523b.25-c.12**

**Chavannes:** No. 161

**Shared Narrative:** See also *ZJXZPY* Story 21.

**Synopsis:** *Maudgalyāyana* and his disciples see a hungry ghost punished by having to repeatedly swallow a burning iron pellet. The Buddha explains that this is a reincarnation of a monk who broke a precept by showing preference to his master in giving him more food than other monks during a famine. The Buddha did not reveal this knowledge earlier for fear that the monks would not believe him and thus suffer greater punishment than if they had committed the five heinous sins.

#### **Story 7**

**T 207, 4: 523c.13-28**

**Chavannes:** No. 162

**Synopsis:** In a previous life *Mañjuśrī* practiced the twelve dhutas of rigorous practice. Upon hearing a bodhisattva teach the principle of emptiness he rejected the teaching and left. He later encountered one of the bodhisattva's disciples who again teaches the doctrine of non-duality. This angers *Mañjuśrī* who is then cast down to the *Avīci* hell. After innumerable eons he is again

born as a monk and dedicates himself to wisdom and learning the true dharma teachings of the Buddha.

### **Story 8**

**T 207, 4: 523c.29-524a.20**

**Chavannes:** No. 163

**Grey:** The Deceived Brahman

**Synopsis:** A master carpenter tricks an artist into falling in love with a wooden automaton of his own creation. In retaliation the painter deceives the carpenter by painting his own life-like suicide upon his bedroom wall. Both artisans come to realize the foolish and ephemeral nature of existence and separate from their family to become monks.

### **Story 9**

**T 207, 4: 524a.21-525a.15**

**Chavannes:** No. 164

**Grey:** Hatthipāla, Mahākāśyapa, Yaśoda

**Synopsis:** A rich householder seeks aid from a tree spirit to help his wife conceive a son. Through various interventions by the gods a Brahmadeva consents to be born as their son and is promised to be protected from falling into the false traditions of the Brahmins. After a soothsayer tells the parents their son will follow the religious path, they seek to find him a beautiful wife. He says he will only marry a specific kind of beauty as a means of avoiding the marriage. But the parents send out priests who contrive a plan to find the specific kind of girl. Upon their success through a ‘stratagem’ a girl is found and forced to marry him. Neither want to be married and enter a pact to avoid sexual relations, but through intervention of the father they are eventually forced to stay in the same room. The husband, attempting to save the girl from a poisonous snake raises her arm while she is asleep and then both decide that it is best to become ascetics rather than remain in their current situation. While in the forest they are mocked for remaining together so the husband sells the wife and leaves. He eventually meets the Buddha and becomes an arhat. The wife is a slave but gets saved by her former husband who takes her to the Buddha where she becomes a nun. She enters the palace and teaches the king’s wives, convincing them to partake in a day of abstinence. This angers the king who requires the nun to stand in their place for ninety days (presumably to take their place during the sex act) as punishment and as a result of karma from a previous life.

### **Story 10**

**T 207, 4: 525a.16-b.8**

**Chavannes:** No. 165

**Synopsis:** Two brothers become monks. The older dedicates his time to wisdom and meditation and achieves the status of an arhat. The younger seeks worldly glory by becoming a famous and well-educated teacher at the expense of pursuing contemplation. The older brother warns the younger about the dangerous path he is following, but is ignored. At his death the younger brother recognizes his error but it is too late; he is reborn to a family not far from the older brother’s monastery and is looked after by his former brother who has discovered his true identity through meditation. After an accident the reborn younger brother dies as a child and goes to hell because of evil thoughts at death and his lack of prior contemplation. At this the older brother laments because it is too late.

**Story 11****T 207, 4: 525b.9-19****Chavannes:** No. 166

**Synopsis:** A disciple of the previous Sariputra Buddha had stolen food from a Pratyekabuddha in a previous life and suffered many kalpas as a hungry ghost and 500 generations as a human without sufficient food. Finally at the time of the current Buddha he again entered the monastic vocation but still did not receive alms and thus continued to suffer hunger. Maudgalyana, Sariputra, and Mahakaśyapa all gave him of their own alms but this was either stolen by birds, turned to mud, or his own mouth sealed up, thus preventing him from eating. Finally the Buddha himself gave him food from his own alms and he was finally able to eat because of the force of the Buddha's compassion. After hearing the Dharma he meditates and receives insight.

**Story 12****T 207, 4: 525b.20-24****Chavannes:** No. 167

**Synopsis:** A dragon causes rain to fall from the heavens. The rain changes into jewels when it falls on the gods, it is nourishing water when it falls on humans, and turns into fire that burns the hungry ghosts. This shows that there is no permanent nature to things, but that they change according to the karmic influence of the beings upon whom they come in contact.

**Story 13****T 207, 4: 525b.25-28****Chavannes:** No. 168

**Synopsis:** In order to show the faults of another monk, a mendicant licks the other's feces to show it to his fellow monastics not realizing that in his attempt to show the faults of another he has really only defiled his own mouth.

**Story 14****T 207, 4: 525b.29-c.9****Chavannes:** No. 169

**Synopsis:** Servants of a rich man determine that walking on his spit brings good luck. A servant who is too slow to ever get the chance to touch the spit first gets frustrated at this circumstance and decides to try a preemptive approach by placing his foot on his master's mouth just before he spits. When he is accused of attempting to rebel he explains his actions. This is analogous to those who would try to object to opinions that have yet to be voiced in a discussion.

**Story 15****T 207, 4: 525c.10-526a.12****Chavannes:** No. 170

**Synopsis:** On his way to beg for alms the Buddha sees a sow waddling in the sewage of the city and laughs. Ananda asks why the Buddha is laughing and the Buddha recounts a tale of a king who had a very beautiful daughter many kalpas ago. The girl spoke a verse about the ends and escape from Karma, but no one was able to provide her an answer. However, when the king offered a prize of jewels to one who could answer his daughter's question a greedy Brahmin stepped up and, not knowing the answer, stated that 'nothing exists.' The girl, not realizing he

was not really a sage, meditates on this answer and achieves the state of a Deva in the next life. However, because it was based upon a false understanding she used up her good karma as a Deva and was reborn as a pig wallowing in the mire. Thus, the girl could have attained wisdom if she had met an enlightened master but was instead unable to do so and ended up a pig.

### **Story 16**

**T 207, 4: 526a.13-b.19**

**Chavannes:** No. 171

**Grey:** Āmrapālī

**Synopsis:** A king develops a disease which his own doctors cannot heal. He calls a master healer from a distant land and after a time the healer cures his sickness. The king orders rich rewards be furnished to the healer in the form of animals, clothing, riches etc. but this is not known to the doctor because it is being supplied at his own distant home. On his way back he complains that after doing such a great deed for the king he has received no reward. Upon reaching his own kingdom he comes upon herds of elephants, animals, and even his own transformed home. He is amazed to find that they are the reward for healing the king and regrets his previous disappointment. This is related to doing good and bringing happiness to others. The doctor, in healing the King, has done a good act but expects immediate repayment for the good deed and is disappointed when he does not receive it. The reward for good deeds develops over time and will bring amazing rewards.

### **Story 17**

**T 207, 4: 526b.20-c.10**

**Chavannes:** No. 172

**Synopsis:** An evil rain falls on the kingdom and makes all who drink the water act crazy drunk for seven days. The king is able to determine that this is due to an evil cloud and takes precautions by covering a well so that it will not be contaminated. However all but the king still are contaminated and begin acting crazy by stripping naked and covering their heads with mud. Only the king remains normal. At this the court begins to believe that they are acting normal and the king himself is crazy and begin to plot a way to stop it. Seeing the danger the king decides to act crazy himself to fit in. After the madness passes everyone at court begins acting normal again except for the king who comes to court naked. When everyone acts surprised the king explains that when he was normal everyone said he was crazy and when everyone says they are normal they say the king is crazy. This is likened to the Buddha who is criticized and called crazy when he teaches the dharma.

### **Story 18**

**T 207, 4: 526c.11-20**

**Chavannes:** No. 173

**Synopsis:** In a previous life a poor man lived by carrying wood across a river to sell. One day the river was very deep and treacherous and the man nearly drowned as he crossed the river. Immediately after crossing he met and fed a Pratyekabuddha disguised as a monk. After the monk miraculously flew away he made a wish that he would be reborn so tall that the deepest river would not even come to his knees, and he gets his wish. If this is true for this one man how much more true is it for the Buddha who has created his body through countless vows and great deeds?

**Story 19****T 207, 4: 526c.21-527a.4****Chavannes:** No. 174

**Synopsis:** A prince goes to the mountains to live as an ascetic. On the death of his father the court brings back the prince who has been practicing austerities, but never learned the ways of the court. After returning to the palace he is presented with delicious food and enjoys it so much that he begins to rely on the cook for council in every area of state. He is quickly corrected by the court and is taught that for every area there is a specialist and therefore it is not good to rely on the cook in the areas in which he is not a specialist. This is related to the variety of scriptures: they each have an area of specialization and no one text will cover every area.

**Story 20****T 207, 4: 527a.5-24****Chavannes:** No. 175**Grey:** Nigrodhamiga, Subhadra

**Synopsis:** A herd of deer has two leaders, the true king and the bodhisattva. When the king of the local city came to hunt them the two deer kings approached and offered him a deal of two deer a day for his kitchen if he would allow the remainder of the herd to live peacefully on the land, thus providing for the king's needs as well as protecting the herd. The king agreed and all went according to plan until it came time for a pregnant doe to offer herself to the king's kitchen. The true king of the deer would not allow a substitute to be chosen in her place as that would not be fair. So the doe appealed to the bodhisattva who went in her place. When the king found out, he had the bodhisattva brought to him and all was explained. He changed the law so that deer should no longer be hunted and they still reside there now.

**Story 21****T 207, 4: 527a.25-b.28****Chavannes:** No. 176**Grey:** Āmrapālī, Jyotiṣka**Shared Narrative:** See also *ZJXZPY* Story 22.

**Synopsis:** A householder asks the Buddha to predict the gender of his unborn baby. The Buddha predicts that it is a boy and that he will eventually join the sangha as a monk. The householder is not convinced and asks six heretical teachers to come and predict the gender. In order to trick the father from believing the Buddha they lie to him and say that it will be a boy but that he will bring ruin upon his house. In an effort to force an abortion the mother dies and as she is burning at the charnel grounds Jyotiṣka is born miraculously. Once he grows older the six heretical teachers are invited to the home for a feast where they claim to have the spiritual power of far sight. Jyotiṣka tricks them by placing their food under a pile of rice and proving that they do not have any spiritual powers. The heretics prepare to get revenge as Jyotiṣka and his father leave to join the sangha.

**Story 22****T 207, 4: 527b.29-c.8****Chavannes:** No. 177



**Synopsis:** A monk seeks to play a joke on the Brahmin who is giving him food as a way of teaching him the danger of his situation as a wealthy Brahmin married to a beautiful woman. So he presents a riddle and then explains it by kissing the man's wife in front of him and escaping out the door while giving him the final teaching over his shoulder. This illustrates that sometimes concrete examples are necessary to teach others the truth.

### **Story 23**

**T 207, 4: 527c.9-20**

**Chavannes:** No. 178

**Synopsis:** A man goes to the city and sees a man putting horse manure on his back after being whipped. It is explained to him that this is done to help in the healing. The man returns home and seeks to show his family what wisdom he has gained by having his servant whip him 200 times and then putting manure on his back. This is likened to a monk who, after having met and enlightened teacher and receiving the precepts, breaks them and then comes again asking for forgiveness and to be reinstated to follow the precepts.

### **Story 24**

**T 207, 4: 527c.21-528a.3**

**Chavannes:** No. 179

**Shared Narrative:** See also *ZJXZPY* Story 23.

**Synopsis:** A Naga charmer takes a pitcher of water to a pond to catch a Naga. He utters a formula and conjures the image of fire burning the pond, marsh, mountains and sky. The Naga, seeing that he is surrounded by the image of fire, notices the pitcher of water and changes into a small shape to enter into it. The explanation is that the pond and surrounding areas (representing the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm) are full of burning desire and that we must enter nirvana (the pitcher of water) to escape it. Thus the Naga charmer is the bodhisattva that shows us the fire of impermanence and urges us to get rid of pride and enter nirvana.

### **Story 25a**

**T 207, 4: 528a.4-11**

**Chavannes:** No. 180

**Synopsis:** A stone on a path has been a hindrance for travel for a long time. After many years and the passage of numerous chariots it begins to crumble. A man, seeing its deteriorated state, strikes it seeking to remove the stone permanently. Suddenly a snake comes from out of the stone and swells to a great size, eating all the beings of the land in a day. The Buddha is like the snake in that after developing himself for innumerable kalpas there can be a rapid development of merit. Just like the rapid reward for evil acts, so too is the rapid reward for good.

### **Story 25b**

**T 207, 4: 528a.12-23**

**Chavannes:** No. 181

**Synopsis:** The head and tail of a snake are in conversation to determine which is the greatest between them. The head argues that it is greatest because it has sense organs such as eyes, ears and a mouth with which to eat and it goes first before the tail. The tail argues that it is greatest because without it the head would not be able to even move and within a few days would starve to death. To prove its point the tail wraps itself around a tree and refuses to move. The head

finally capitulates and agrees that the tail is the greatest between them. The tail thus lets go of the tree and leads the way, whereupon the snake immediately falls into a pit and dies. This is similar to a superior monk in the sangha who understands the doctrine but is unable to control the inferior monks and both fall into violations of the law and are lost.

### **Story 26**

**T 207, 4: 528a.24-b.9**

**Chavannes:** No. 182

**Grey:** Sammodamāna

**Shared Narrative:** See also *ZJXZPY* Story 24.

**Synopsis:** A fowler catches a group of birds. A large golden bird among those caught helps them escape by flying away inside the net. The fowler follows the birds, ignoring the comments by others that he'll never catch them. At sunset the birds fall to the earth because of disagreements about which way to go and the fowler is able to catch them again. The fowler is Pāpīyān (Mara?) and the net represents the snare of desire and the birds that disagreed on the right way to go are similar to the sixty two heretics that fall into hell.

### **Story 27**

**T 207, 4: 528b.10-c.10**

**Chavannes:** No. 183

**Synopsis:** While a group of 500 monks were sitting together in meditation and reciting the scriptures, thieves came and stole all their possessions leaving them with only their undergarments (nivāsana?). When they returned and explained this to the Buddha he asked why they did not try to stop the thieves. The response was that they did not think they were allowed to do so. The Buddha then grants them permission to scare thieves away as long as they made sure not to do any real harm. There then follows a teaching on not being attached to body, life, and possession, but not despising them either.

### **Story 28**

**T 207, 4: 528c.11-28**

**Chavannes:** No. 184

**Synopsis:** A wealthy man feeds 100,000 monks, many of whom have achieved the status of arhat. At the end of the meal the most senior monk warns the host that because of his generosity he has reaped great punishment. Those monks who were not spiritually developed called the old Elder crazy and asked how it was possible to gain punishment from such great generosity. The Elder explains that because of his act of generosity the wealthy man will gain great blessings and rewards, and in turn will become prideful and think he has done enough so that he won't adore the image of the Buddha or pay attention to the scriptures or offer proper respect to the monks and eventually will suffer great punishment because of such arrogance.

### **Story 29**

**T 207, 4: 528c.29-529a.17**

**Chavannes:** No. 185

**Synopsis:** Two poor men are looking to sell their jars of fermented milk. Because of the rain the roads are treacherous and one man decides to remove the butter from his milk before leaving, so that if he does fall and break his jar of milk it will not be a total loss. The other man takes no

forethought and sets out unprepared. When they both fall the man who was unprepared laments deeply his suffering while the other man is content and calm. The jar represents the body and the butter represents material possessions. When people cling to wealth they only think of the moment and forget impermanence; when they die they lose it all. The wise set aside their wealth through generosity so that when they die the good consequences of their acts (the real wealth) goes with them and there is no regret.

### **Story 30**

**T 207, 4: 529a.18-b.8**

**Chavannes:** No. 186

**Grey:** Dharmaruci

**Shared Narrative:** See also *ZJXZPY* Story 25.

**Synopsis:** 500 merchants set out on the ocean to look for precious treasure. As a giant fish is about to swallow their ship the captain tells the passengers to recite the Buddha's name. Upon hearing the name of the Buddha the fish remembers a previous life in which he was a monk who had broken the precepts and thus earned his lower rebirth as a fish. He stops chasing the boat and the merchants are saved. If the quick chanting of the Buddha's name can have such astonishing results imagine what would happen for those who keep his name constantly in their heart.

### **Story 31a**

**T 207, 4: 529b.9-19**

**Chavannes:** No. 187

**Synopsis:** A description of the creation of the world and the coming forth of Viṣṇu who then produces Brahma on a lotus blossom from whom comes the birth of the world and its inhabitants. Those who practice restraint of desires are said to thus practice the conduct of Brahma (brahmacarin). Because of this tradition when Buddhas teach they also sit on the lotus blossom in the same manner and teach the six perfections. Those who hear the teachings attain perfect enlightenment (anuttara-samyaksambodhi).

### **Story 31b**

**T 207, 4: 529b.20-29**

**Chavannes:** No. 188

**Grey:** Utpalavarṇā

**Synopsis:** A beautiful girl becomes a nun and attains the status of an arhat. One day when walking in the forest alone she is approached by a man who desires her and will not leave her alone. The nun teaches about impermanence of the body and asks what it is that he finds so desirable. He responds that it is her eyes and so she pulls out her right eye and offers it to him. Immediately his desire disappears. She returns to the Buddha and is given a new eye and the rule forbidding nuns to walk in the forest alone is instituted.

### **Story 32**

**T 207, 4: 529c.1-21**

**Chavannes:** No. 189

**Grey:** Āmrāpālī

**Synopsis:** The master healer Jivaka was well versed in the various medicinal remedies and was skilled in applying the herbs and medicines according to the needs of the patient. At Jivaka's

death the plants lamented because there was no one left with the skill to apply them according to the proper need. All wept except for a specific plant who considered itself the panacea to all diseases if applied correctly. Jivaka represents the Buddha who, like a skilled doctor, is able to use all sorts of remedies according to the needs of the patient. But once the Buddha is gone there is no one skilled in the various means. However, the consideration of impermanence can be a proper cure when there is no skilled physician available as in the passing away of the Buddha.

### **Story 33**

**T 207, 4: 529c.22-530a.12**

**Chavannes:** No. 190

**Shared Narrative:** See also *ZJXZPY* Story 26.

**Synopsis:** A butcher requests from king Ajatasatru that he be granted the privilege of slaughtering all the animals for the feasts and celebrations at the palace. This seems like an odd request to the king because of the karmic consequence of slaughtering animals, so he asks the butcher the reason for such a request. The butcher responds that in his previous lives he has been reborn as a deva and a butcher in alternating births and therefore has come to the conclusion that slaughtering animals has brought him the fortunate birth as a deva. This surprises the king and he thinks the butcher is not telling the truth. When he meets the Buddha he mentions the story and the Buddha says that the butcher is correct in knowing his recent births but is wrong as to the reason for obtaining such a high rebirth. He tells the king that several lifetimes ago the butcher had met a Pratyekabuddha and had paid homage to him and because of this deed was blessed with the merit of such a high birth. However, because of his acts as a butcher between each birth as a deva he will suffer in hell and then be reborn as a sheep for as many times as sheep he slaughtered. The butcher has a superficial understanding of his karma and thus has produced a false sense of what is appropriate. Similarly, many who perform meritorious acts also conceive of improper desires based upon incorrect understanding.

### **Story 34a**

**T 207, 4: 530a.13-b.21**

**Chavannes:** No. 191

**Grey:** Adīnapuṇya, Sarvaṃdada

**Synopsis:** A righteous king is very generous and his fame spreads through the land. A neighboring king suddenly decides to attack and the righteous king leaves the city to save his people from unnecessary war. While in the forest he meets a Brahmin who is on his way to request wealth from the righteous king. Upon learning of his fate he is very sad because of the lost opportunity. To console the Brahmin the king offers to allow him to turn him in for ransom money and the Brahmin agrees to do so. When they reach the evil king and tell their story he repents of his aggressive actions and restores the righteous king to his throne and leaves the kingdom in peace. This illustrates the virtue of the bodhisattva in his acts among men.

### **Story 34b**

**T 207, 4: 530b.21-c.12**

**Chavannes:** No. 192

**Synopsis:** There are two thieves. One uses the strength of his hands and only takes what is necessary, leaving enough for those from whom he steals. He is proud that he is known as a ‘good’ thief. The other is a thief that uses stratagems to take much more from his victims. The

first thief follows the second thief to learn his skills and sees the strategy by which the second thief is able to attain large amounts of money from a noble with very little effort. This is compared to the concept of anumodanā and the proper acts of a monk.

### **Story 35**

**T 207, 4: 530c.13-19**

**Chavannes:** No. 193

**Synopsis:** A naga possesses a magic drop of water that can cause it to rain anywhere in Jambudvīpa. Desiring to keep the drop of water safe it sought a place to keep it so it would not dry out. Finally it decided to place it in the ocean because that is a place that will never disappear. This is likened to a small donation which can produce a great reward. The donation combined with the wisdom of the naga to place it in the ocean (i.e. Buddhism) leads to a reward that does not ‘dry out.’

### **Story 36**

**T 207, 4: 530c.20-531a.2**

**Chavannes:** No. 194

**Synopsis:** The gods observed a king who was righteous and good to all beings and decided to reward him. To that end, a yaksa was ordered to constantly hold a golden wheel behind him. The yaksa remained this way until his death whereupon the wheel was returned to the divine treasury.

### **Story 37**

**T 207, 4: 531a.3-b.2**

**Chavannes:** No. 195

**Synopsis:** The king of the gods, because of his great longevity, begins to feel that he is superior to all other beings and acts in great arrogance. The Buddha, upon learning of this, takes his four great disciples and appears above the head of the king, inquiring why he thinks he is so special. The king answers that he has existed for such a long time in great peace that he assumed that he was superior. The Buddha states that he is omniscient and can see the beginning and end of the king’s existence. The king also knows some of his previous lives and so he tests the Buddha’s knowledge, whereupon the Buddha reveals that there are two causes for Brahmadeva’s longevity. The first is due to his having used his spiritual powers to save the lives of those on a ship about to sink at sea. The second is due to his having used all his wealth to save a village from the wrath of a king. Despite the king’s good fortune he will eventually die. Upon hearing this he develops feelings of faith and becomes a once-returner. Thus we see the great superiority of the Buddha, for if the king of the gods could win such rewards for a few good deeds how much better is the Buddha who has spent innumerable lifetimes doing good. Thus when the Buddha was required to give of his body he did and his superiority is unsurpassed and all encompassing.

## ***Zhong jing xuan za piyu* 眾經撰雜譬喻 (ZJXZPY)**

### **Story 1**

**T 208, 4: 531b.10-24**

**Chavannes:** No. 196

**Synopsis:** The wise know that wealth is impermanent and just like a wise man who sees a fire approaching will take steps to protect his wealth so that he can rebuild his home after the fire, so too will a wise man practice generosity to preserve and plant happiness for the future after he has died. A foolish man will not see the danger and will thus squander his time and lose all things in an instant. A miserly man is equally unprepared as he wastes his time jealously guarding his wealth without thinking about impermanence and death. The wise know all things are impermanent and take care to guard their wealth through good actions and thus plant the fruit for future happiness.

### **Story 2**

**T 208, 4: 531b.25-c.24**

**Chavannes:** No. 197

**Grey:** Sivi

**Synopsis:** The king of the Śibis offers his own body to ransom a dove from a hawk, both of which are disguised gods seeking to test the bodhisattva. When he shows that he is willing to give his whole body to ransom the dove it becomes apparent that he is a worthy being who has developed the virtue of generosity.

### **Story 3**

**T 208, 4: 531c.25-532a.17**

**Chavannes:** No. 198

**Synopsis:** A man traveling on business is asked to judge between two demons that are fighting over a dead body. One demon is mad at his judgment and rips him to pieces, while the other demon replaces his limbs and head with those from the original dead body. Thus the man finds himself at the end in a new body—his previous body having been devoured by the demons. He travels the next day and meets monks and asks about the nature of impermanence. Through the experience he comes to an understanding and achieves the state of an Arhat.

### **Story 4a**

**T 208, 4: 532a.18-b.9**

**Chavannes:** No. 199

**Grey:** Bhadraghaṭa

**Synopsis:** A poor man makes offerings to a Deva for twelve years. Finally the god takes pity on him and appears to him asking him what he desires. The poor man answers that he seeks wealth and power, and upon hearing this the god gives him a wish granting jar. The man soon has everything his heart could desire. In his generosity he invites numerous guests over and when his guests ask him how he became wealthy he tells them of his experience and shows the jar. In his pride he gets up to dance with the jar and carelessly allows it fall and break: immediately everything disappears. This is compared to one who does not keep the precepts. While one keeps the precepts he is able to enjoy the bliss of heaven, but the moment he is transported in pride to break the precepts he immediately loses the joy and protection he once valued.

### **Story 4b**

**T 208, 4: 532b.9-b.23**

**Chavannes:** No. 200

**Synopsis:** A king uses his war horses for working the grindstone until they only know how to walk in circles. When needed for battle they are useless and cost the king his kingdom because they had not been prepared to do anything but walk in circles

### **Story 5**

**T 208, 4: 532b.24-c.12**

**Chavannes:** No. 201

**Synopsis:** A king holds a great feast for the Buddha. An old beggar hearing of the feast donates some peas. Since her gift is full of proper intention and real sacrifice, especially compared to the king's gifts that really come from the people, she is to obtain more merit and happiness than the king.

### **Story 6a**

**T 208, 4: 532c.13-24**

**Chavannes:** No. 202

**Synopsis:** A man doesn't milk his cow for a month in the hopes of obtaining more milk as an offering to the sangha. He is disappointed when he does not get more milk. Like this man our lives are impermanent and wealth cannot be stored up for later use, thus the pursuit of wealth is dangerous.

### **Story 6b**

**T 208, 4: 532c.24-533a.12**

**Chavannes:** No. 203

**Synopsis:** A man gathers up jewels that were called a 'poisonous snake' by the Buddha. Upon learning of it the king punishes the man who, just before being executed, cries out that the Buddha was right about the treasure being a poisonous snake. The king releases him because of he remembered the words of the Buddha.

### **Story 7**

**T 208, 4: 533a.13-26**

**Chavannes:** No. 204

**Synopsis:** After a shipwreck a junior monk gives his board to a senior monk in order to keep the precepts. He is saved by a deva and honored for his diligence.

### **Story 8**

**T 208, 4: 533a.27-b.13**

**Chavannes:** No. 205

**Grey:** Man in Well

**Synopsis:** A man escapes prison but is set upon by a wild elephant, poisonous dragons, serpents and rats, yet still holds on to life for a drop of honey.

### **Story 9**

**T 208, 4: 533b.14-c.18**

**Chavannes:** No. 206

**Grey:** Sattubhastha

**Synopsis:** The Buddha converts a rich Brahmin after his disciples fail to do so. Mara attempts to trick him but the Brahmin sees through the deception.

**Story 10**

**T 208, 4: 533c.19-534a.7**

**Chavannes:** No. 207

**Synopsis:** A sramaṇera sees a beautiful naga and uses all his good virtue to change into a naga to be with her.

**Story 11**

**T 208, 4: 534a.8-b.7**

**Chavannes:** No. 155?

**Synopsis:**

**Story 12**

**T 208, 4: 534b.8-29**

**Chavannes:** No. 208

**Synopsis:** A man dies before being able to offer flowers to the Buddha and his good intentions leads to his being reborn as a deva. As a deva he fulfills his vow of offering flowers and, along with 84,000 other devas, obtains wisdom.

**Story 13**

**T 208, 4: 534c.1-21**

**Chavannes:** No. 209

**Grey:** Maṭṭakuṇḍali, Migapotaka, Matagoṇi, Sujāta-II

**Synopsis:** A deva takes the form of a small boy trying to feed a dead cow in order to show his former parents the futility of their food offerings and grief over his death in a previous life.

**Story 14a**

**T 208, 4: 534c.22-535a.12**

**Chavannes:** No. 210

**Synopsis:** A man supports a monk in learning scriptures and makes a vow that he too will have the ability to learn in a future life. He is reborn as Ananda, becomes a disciple of the Buddha and learns the scriptures.

**Story 14b**

**T 208, 4: 535a.12-21**

**Chavannes:** No. 211

**Synopsis:** Just like a little bird who, when fed on diamonds, becomes significant enough to scare a tree god, so too someone who has learned the scriptures, practiced meditation, and overcome the three poisons can make the gods fear them. If this is true for a disciple, then how much more true is it for the Buddha himself?

**Story 15**

**T 208, 4: 535a.22-b.4**

**Chavannes:** No. 212



**Synopsis:** Mulian is hit by an old man who was his father in a previous life, and who Mulian had desired to hit after an argument. Thus his injury came as a consequence of his previous anger.

**Story 16**

**T 208, 4: 535b.5-16**

**Chavannes:** No. 213

**Synopsis:** A snake claims to be the reincarnation of Ajita who, despite his many good works, was reborn as a snake due to getting angry at a servant right before his death.

**Story 17**

**T 208, 4: 535b.17-c.3**

**Chavannes:** No. 214

**Synopsis:** A miser afraid of losing his wealth carries it all with him. When he finally donates it to a stupa the act is a release and he obtains the stage of a stream enterer.

**Story 18**

**T 208, 4: 535c.4-20**

**Shared Narrative:** For more detail see *ZPYJ* Story 1.

**Story 19**

**T 208, 4: 535c.21-536a.14**

**Shared Narrative:** For more detail see *ZPYJ* Story 3.

**Story 20**

**T 208, 4: 536a.15-b.4**

**Shared Narrative:** For more detail see *ZPYJ* Story 5.

**Story 21**

**T 208, 4: 536b.9-23**

**Shared Narrative:** For more detail see *ZPYJ* Story 6.

**Story 22**

**T 208, 4: 536b.24-536c.27**

**Shared Narrative:** For more detail see *ZPYJ* Story 21.

**Story 23**

**T 208, 4: 537a.6-18**

**Shared Narrative:** For more detail see *ZPYJ* Story 24.

**Story 24**

**T 208, 4: 537a.19-b.7**

**Shared Narrative:** For more detail see *ZPYJ* Story 26.

**Story 25**

**T 208, 4: 537b.8-29**

**Shared Narrative:** For more detail see *ZPYJ* Story 30.

**Story 26****T 208, 4: 537c.1-c.22****Shared Narrative:** For more detail see *ZPYJ* Story 33.**Story 27****T 208, 4: 537c.23-538a.15****Chavannes:** No. 215**Synopsis:** The Buddha obtained enlightenment through great effort over innumerable lifetimes just like a man who travels far to obtain pearls for his children, but they do not understand the difficulty.**Story 28****T 208, 4: 538a.16-b.4****Chavannes:** No. 216**Synopsis:** A caravan goes to a jewel island. One man eats intoxicating fruit rather than gathering jewels and misses out, but brings home a branch instead. That branch has the power to turn objects into jewels when it burns. This is related to the practice of prajna: even after falling out of the way, recommitting oneself to practice brings great results.**Story 29****T 208, 4: 538b.5-29****Chavannes:** No. 217**Synopsis:** Monks raise two tiger cubs who are killed by a hunter and later reborn as twins. The twins are given back to the monks as novices and later obtain ahratship.**Story 30****T 208, 4: 538c.1-20****Chavannes:** No. 218**Synopsis:** A butcher repeatedly invites a monk for meals at his home, but the monk never says anything about all the killing the butcher does. After dying, the butcher is reborn as a demon who suffers continual cutting by a knife and demands the monk as a sacrifice. Instead the monk offers prayers and offerings in his behalf and saves him from his fate.**Story 31****T 208, 4: 538c.21-539a.9****Chavannes:** No. 219**Synopsis:** An evil king who never had a councilor to reprimand him for his evil deeds is born as an evil snake that tries to get revenge on his former kingdom.**Story 32****T 208, 4: 539a.10-28****Chavannes:** No. 220**Synopsis:** Five hundred blind men pay a man to lead them to the Buddha in order to avoid starvation. On the way the man robs them and they are left to pray to the Buddha for salvation.

This happened because in the past these 500 men had been paid to work for a householder but had run off.

### **Story 33**

**T 208, 4: 539a.29-b.21**

**Chavannes:** No. 221

**Synopsis:** A man seeking refuge for a crime he committed is turned away by an intimate friend. Later he is saved by a true friend who takes him to a foreign country and sets him up with all he needs.

### **Story 34**

**T 208, 4: 539b.22-c.11**

**Chavannes:** No. 222

**Synopsis:** A cook refuses to kill and prepare sacrifices for the king in order to fulfill the precepts as a disciple of the Buddha. The king attempts to kill the cook but because he kept the precepts his body is changed and he becomes like the Buddha and converts the kingdom.

### **Story 35**

**T 208, 4: 539c.12-540a.8**

**Chavannes:** No. 223

**Synopsis:** A woman worships the Buddha and requests four sons that can each take up a specific profession. The Buddha grants the wish but only one son is born. This son then proceeds to fulfill each of the four vocations, including becoming a monk and obtaining the status of arhat.

### **Story 36**

**T 208, 4: 540a.9-27**

**Chavannes:** No. 224

**Synopsis:** A woman seeks to die after her son passes away. The Buddha tells her he will revive her son if she can find a fire from a home wherein there has never been death. The woman realizes her error and becomes a srotapanna.

### **Story 37**

**T 208, 4: 540a.28-c.29**

**Chavannes:** No. 225

**Synopsis:** A principle and secondary wife are constantly causing grief for each other by killing each other's children over several lifetimes. An monk helps them realize the cycle of abuse and they finally realize their error.

### **Story 38**

**T 208, 4: 541a.1-b.12**

**Chavannes:** No. 226

**Synopsis:** An evil snake is used by a kingdom to punish criminals. After killing 72,000 men the Buddha takes pity on him and sends Sariputra to visit. Upon seeing Sariputra and looking him up and down seven times he is reborn as a deva for seven lifetimes and will be born as a Pratyekabuddha and then killed by an army of 72,000 men, upon which he enter nirvana.

**Story 39****T 208, 4: 541b.13-22****Chavannes:** No. 227**Synopsis:** A bird is reborn as a deva after hearing a monk recite scriptures.**Story 40****T 208, 4: 541b.23-c.20****Chavannes:** No. 228**Synopsis:** An old drunk living near Jetavana refuses to see the Buddha because he can't live without wine. Being in pain after a drunken accident he decides to see the Buddha who convinces him to take the five precepts and instantly change his ways (just like fire is burned or a garment is cleansed instantly).**Story 41****T 208, 4: 541c.21-542a.28****Chavannes:** No. 229**Synopsis:** An artist makes a painting of a woman in King Aśoka's palace. The king desires to have her as his wife and takes her away from her husband. The husband (and upaska) decides to become a monk. The wife cries at the smell of a flower that reminds her of her former husband. King Aśoka becomes angry and brings the monk to his palace and cannot get rid of the smell. The monk (Arhat) smells this way because in a former life he had praised and offered perfume to a bodhisattva.**Story 42****T 208, 4: 542a.29-b.12****Chavannes:** No. 230**Synopsis:** A father and son see gold in a pool of water. The son keeps trying to dig it out but is unsuccessful. The father looks up and sees that the gold in the water is just a reflection of the gold on top of the mountain and he is able to obtain the gold. The son is like the one who doesn't keep the precepts, the father is the one who does keep the precepts and will be reborn as a deva until he obtains Buddhahood.**Story 43****T 208, 4: 542b.13-c.12****Chavannes:** No. 231**Synopsis:** Indra is sad that people are not good enough to be reborn in his heaven. He and Brahman go to earth in the form of a lion and brahmin to trick the people into accepting the five precepts and performing the ten good deeds by threatening to eat them if they do not do good. In this way the heavens are filled with righteous people reborn there by following the Buddhist precepts.**Story 44****T 208, 4: 542c.13-28****Chavannes:** No. 232

**Synopsis:** Some Brahmins did not like the King's daughter worshipping the Buddha so they trick the king into trying to offer her as a sacrifice. The daughter accepts her fate on the condition that for seven days she be allowed to take a part of the city with her to see the Buddha. After taking the entire city over five days, she then takes the King and his court on the sixth day. They all convert and see the plot of the Brahmins who are forced to convert and eventually become arhats.

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