

Foreword

New Material and New Perspective: Interdisciplinary and Multi-sourced Research in Buddhist Narrative Literature

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Any oral and written text can be considered literature in the broadest sense of the word; and Buddhist texts are no exception. The literary quality of Buddhist texts is intimately integrated with Buddhist moral and religious teaching, and it ultimately serves soteriological goals. And the literary quality varies with genre: Pali Theravāda texts are simple and pure in style, whereas Mahāyāna texts are often magnificent and sumptuous. Among the most stylistically unique genres are *jātaka* and *apadāna* stories, the Buddha's biographies, hagiographies, and various secular forms of literature influenced by Buddhism, including poetry, novels, theatres, admonitory tracks (*quanshi wen* 勸世文), folk songs, popular sermons (*sujiang* 俗講), and song-tales (*baojuan* 寶卷). Each of these genres possesses a unique charm in its narrative style. And if we further consider the narrative techniques, and literary tropes and styles employed by Buddhists in India, Japan, the Korean Peninsula, Mongolia, and Tibet, then Buddhist literature would reveal an even more astonishing degree of stylistic diversity.

Buddhist influences in East and South Asian literature are first

and foremost observable in the many Buddhist themes, motifs, and personalities that occupy the secular stories, while Buddhist philosophy also became seamlessly integrated with all kinds of literary genres. For instance, the theatre piece *Dou'e yuan* 寶娥冤 [The Injustice to Dou E] and the novel *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 [The Dream of Red Mansions] both contain the Buddhist notion of karmic retribution. In terms of narrative style, Buddhism is at its most innovative in its interaction with the general population. Ever since it spread to China, Buddhism had already adopted many popular forms of communications, including sūtra-copying, singsong sermons (*changdao* 唱導), popular sermons, and transformation tableaux (*bianwen* 變文). These popular channels were being adopted by monks who wandered and preached in the countryside, or during feasts and dharma-assemblies, thus greatly facilitating Buddhism's spread in China.

Buddhist narrative has its own inherent logics. Buddhist logics (Skt. *Hetuvidyā*; Ch. *yinming* 因明) originated in India and serves deductive and dialectical purposes. It also implies uniquely Buddhist epistemology, phenomenology and hermeneutics. Buddhist logics grapples with the doctrinal issues at the heart of Buddhism, both as the tool for philosophical queries, and as the guiding principle for progressing through the stages of Buddhist praxis. These multivalent functions of Buddhist logics also mean that it has profoundly influenced Buddhist narrative literature.

The Buddhist doctrine of 'emptiness' instilled in East Asian literati a penchant to view life as ephemeral and impermanent; and had been silently transforming East Asian aesthetics since medieval times. For instance, the Mādhyamika view on the mind-matter relationship, as well as the Chan/Zen view on nature which was influenced by the Mādhyamika philosophy, instigated the uniquely Chinese notion of *jingjie* 境界 ('realm'). And the Buddhist emphasis on spiritual attainments also enriched the literary and aesthetic concept of *shen* 神 (lit. 'spirit'; 'mysterious,' 'unthinkable') that had been *developing* since the Six Dynasties (222-589), while the idea of 'sudden enlightenment' and 'inspiration' espoused by the Chan tradition propelled the Chinese aesthetic emphasis on *jingjie*, and enticed many literati to pursue mystical experiences that are of a 'taste beyond taste' 味外味.

In order to provide a comprehensive exploration of Buddhist narrative literature, and of the causal-logical issues associated with it, in the context of the larger Buddhist traditions of various regions, two partner universities of the Glorison Global Network for the Studies of Buddhism—Research Center for Buddhist Texts and Art at Peking University, and the University of British Columbia (UBC)—jointly organised the international conference, “‘Thus Have I Heard’: Patterns and Logics in Buddhist Narrative Literature” (‘如是我聞’: 佛教敘事範式與邏輯) from November 25 to 27, 2022. Originally planned to be held in a hybrid online and offline format, the conference was eventually changed to completely online due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The conference was embraced with enthusiasm by scholars at home and abroad, with a total of 43 papers received. In addition to the keynote speeches delivered by three prestigious scholars—Professor Victor Mair of Pennsylvania University, Professor Wang Bangwei 王邦維 of Peking University, and Professor Monika Zin of Leipzig University, papers presented to the conference were presented and discussed in the following 11 panels:

1. Rehearse the ‘Heard’ 既聞再問;
2. Speaking of the Buddha: Stories and Images 說佛畫佛;
3. Media, Metaphor and Message 媒介、譬喻、與訊息;
4. Stories of Theories 道其不可道: 佛教敘述對佛教理論的表現;
5. ‘Thus I have Heard’ vs. ‘Once upon a Future Time’ 既聞未聞、融鑄古今: 佛教敘述的時空穿越;
6. Balls across the Board (and Borders) 含英咀華、和光同塵: 佛教敘述的普適性;
7. Renderings Gendered 女身成佛, 頓悟性別?;
8. Logic and Trans-logic: Tension of Words and Silence in Buddhist Narratives 淵默雷聲、心行處滅: 佛教敘述中的語默張力;
9. Narrative Genres 敘述體裁;
10. Poem and Prose for Praising 歌辭交贊;
11. When the Mobile Meets with the Immobile: Text and Image for Buddhist Narratives 動靜會合、多維激揚: 佛教敘述中的文本與圖像¹

During the conference, panelists received constructive feedback and, through the intense discussions, gained many new insights and ideas about their own thinking about Buddhist narratives. Within a few months after the conference, most of the scholars submitted revised versions of their papers to the conference organisers. After further selection and editing, some of these papers have been published in special issues of journals.² The papers collected here are both those that have been published in journals and those that have been published for the first time. We hope that these quality papers will further advance the discussion of this important issue at a deeper and broader level.

On the occasion of the publication of this collection of essays, the editors would like to express their deepest respect and gratitude to the Glorisun Charitable Foundation and Dr. Charles Yeung for their generous sponsorship of the conference and the publication of this collection of essays!

¹ Detailed in <https://glorisunglobalnetwork.org/thus-have-i-heard-schedule/>.

² The English-language special issue, called ‘Buddhist Narrative Literature’, is from the journal, *Religions* (https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/X39021C84T), which includes fourteen papers originally submitted to our conference. More of the conference papers will be published in the *Hualin International Journal of Buddhist Studies* (in English) and its sister journal, *Hualin Guoji Foxue Xuekan* 華林國際佛學學刊 [International Journal of Buddhist Studies] (in Chinese). See <https://glorisunglobalnetwork.org/hualin-international-journal-of-buddhist-studies/>; <https://glorisunglobalnetwork.org/chin-hijbs/?lang=zh-hant>.