



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Translation and Dissemination of Buddhist Texts in China: Centered  
On Jatakas**

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**ABSTRACT**

Two routes of diffusion emerged during the height of the translation and dissemination of Chinese Buddhist sutras, from the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties to the Tang Dynasty: the translation of elite Buddhism and the popularization of folk Buddhism. The Collection of the Six Perfections, a model for the translation works, introduced Buddhism into China by interpreting traditional Buddhist texts through the lens of Confucian philosophy. The Jataka stories were also associated with the spread of folk Buddhism, which preached to the public in a way that was seen as acceptable. These two paths enhanced one another and paved the way for the growth of Buddhism and the Jatakas in China. The appropriate method for this research study are the qualitative research techniques and the field work method. The results of article show the Buddhists texts in China were translated which were made localized to disseminate it according to the Chinese society.

**KEYWORDS** Bhuddists Texts, Jatakas, Localization, Translating the Literature

**Introduction**

Two distinct cultural regions arose in ancient Asia, which is when the Indian and Chinese cultural circles came to be. Though both cultural rings are situated physically inside Asia, there is a distinct separation between them due to the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau. In addition, there are notable distinctions in terms of racial backgrounds, languages, cultures, social systems, and natural environments like climate and terroir. As a result, the cultural spheres of China and India are entirely different and have developed separately over time (Zhu, 2022). Buddhism originated and flourished in the Indian subcontinent. However, as it spread across varied geographical locations and reached China, it had to face several challenges due to the differences in environmental conditions. This resulted in various symptoms of incompatibility that were observed in the process (Deeg, 2014).

Tang Yong tong, a renowned Chinese scholar worldwide, posits that the integration and development of heterogeneous ideas can be classified into three stages. The first stage involves the appearance of similarities and harmonization of different ideas. The second stage is the conflict stage, where differences in ideas are recognized. The third stage involves reconciling the differences by rediscovering the true harmony between the ideas. In this final stage, both the original and foreign cultures are transformed, and the outsiders have assimilated. This implies that the process of assimilation is more profound than merely adopting a new culture, as both the host and assimilated cultures undergo a transformation (Mu, 2019).

The evolution of the Jataka stories in China is like a mirror of Buddhism in China, which is a kind of exotic culture in China. Its spread and development is an excellent portrayal of the exchange and dialogue between Buddhism and Chinese traditional civilization.

The fundamental concepts and philosophical tenets of early Indian Buddhism are distinctly dissimilar from the traditional Chinese philosophical doctrines. Consequently, comprehending them was challenging for the Chinese populace in the early days. Some of the core principles of Indian Buddhism, such as karma, anatmya, and rebirth, were frequently misunderstood or misinterpreted by the Chinese Buddhists for an extended period. This misinterpretation eventually prompted several Chinese monks to travel to India to uncover the truth. Each narrative within Jatakas offers an in-depth understanding of a particular facet of existence through the lens of a specific organism. Together, these narratives surpass their selves and give rise to a more profound and integrated significance (Husain, Zaidi, & Bhalla, 2015). The incorporation of Buddhism and Jataka into Chinese culture by means of the Jataka narrative is a logically sound and reasonable method.

Buddhism, as a religious philosophy, consists of two distinct forms: an advanced and profound philosophical form (termed elite or high monk Buddhism) and a popular and simplistic belief form (termed popular Buddhism). This duality allows Buddhism to cater to the varying needs of individuals at different levels of intellectual and spiritual understanding (Li-an, 2019). In the case of the Jatakas, its dissemination and development in China also rely on these two ways: translation of sutra and dissemination of folk literature.

### **Literature Review**

After the spread of the Buddhism in different parts of the world a wide range of literature has been developed and research on Buddhist philosophy has been done. In China different centers were developed to translate the Buddhist knowledge into local paradigm and understanding. Some of the peer-reviewed articles are reviewed to understand the basic development of the Buddhism in China as a whole. By following the procedures used by anthologists to produce canon extracts, the research shows how anthologies make canon viable; in the process and propose a distinction between formal and practical canons. To do this, the researcher first demonstrate how, in order to confirm the canon's complexity and applicability, a selection of passages from *A Grove of Pearls* known as "Bathing Monks" effectively utilize a range of canonical source materials. Next the researcher explains how the extracts from "Bathing Monks" were further optimized using a single-page document that was stored in the Dunhuang cache (dating from the ninth century or before). Based on researcher findings, religious scholars should consider religious anthologies to be both textual repositories and resources that encourage religious individuals to peruse extensive. Same is the case with the Buddhists literature translation (Hsu, 2022).

Shakya Muni Buddha formed his sangha and developed his concepts while journeying across the "Great Magadha." Although it cannot be positive of the exact language the Buddha spoke, the earliest known teachings of the Buddha were recorded in Pali. Buddhist literature that uses Pali terminology and grammar often correspond with the inscriptions on Buddhist stupas constructed both during and after Ashoka's reign, including the Sanchi and Bharhut stupas in the Magadha region. To reach out to downtrodden people who could not comprehend Pali, didactic tale figures were carved on the railings and gates surrounding the stupas. Buddhism as an organization and a

religion started to spread outside of the Great Magadha after the Buddha's passing. Linguistic barriers have to be overcome by the Buddha's disciples (Liu, 2023). The Śyāma jātaḥ is widely known for its depiction of a loyal son who takes care of his blind parents. It has been translated into multiple textual versions, illustrated in reliefs and murals, and widely circulated throughout the Buddhist world. Prior research on the story's transmission in China has mainly concentrated on its portrayal of filial piety and its resonance with the Chinese context; however, a careful examination of surviving visual depictions of jātaḥ stories brings to light historical and regional disparities that have often been overlooked in relation to the reception of Śyāma jātaḥ's didactic teachings in early medieval China. Although the story has flourished in North China (including the Central Plain and the Hexi Corridor). By placing the story's textual and visual traditions within the greater historical environment of displaying Buddhist stories and filial paragons in the sixth century, examine the uneven adaptation of the Śyāma jātaḥ within Chinese visual culture. According to my research, during the textual translation process of the story in third- and fourth-century China, the multiple-faceted topic of the story was reduced to filial devotion. It also demonstrates that the story's visual legacy had to be negotiated and overcome in order to be incorporated into the local filial piety curriculum. Two historical aspects can be linked to these difficulties: the rise in popularity of other jātaḥs that included teachings on charity in ear, and the revival of pre-existing artistic traditions showing Chinese filial sons (Zhao, 2023).

### Role of translators in introducing Jatakas

During the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties, a number of Buddhist classics were recorded that primarily documented the Jatakas. Among these classics, *Pusa ben yuan jing* (菩薩本緣經) by Zhiqian in The Three Kingdoms, *Collection of Six Perfection* by Kang shenghui in The Three Kingdoms, (Nattier, 2008) *Sheng jing* (生經) by Zhu Fahu in the Western Jin, and *Sutra of Bodhisattva Jataka Practices*, which is lost and just collected in *Chinese Buddhism Cannon*. Additionally, there were several single Jataka stories such as *Yue Ming Bodhisattva Jataka*, *Nine Color Deer Jataka*, *Deer Mother Jataka*, *Prince Mupo Jataka*, and *Shanzi Jataka*, *Prince Xu Dana Jataka* and so on. Additionally, many Jataka stories can be found in the "Zengyi Ahan" in the Four Ahan and in the Law Collection (Qingqing, 2008).

The *Collection of Six Perfection* is a collection of 87 Buddha Jataka stories, which are considered to be the earliest and most significant Jataka stories for the spread of Buddhism in China. The translation of Buddhist texts in China often incorporated Laozi and Zhuangzi's allusions to cater to the public and gain followers. Confucian and Buddhist Monks also used a translation strategy that proved to be an important attempt to spread Buddhism further. Although it is uncertain if this was the beginning of using Confucian and Buddhist Buddhism, it was undoubtedly the most successful attempt at that time. The convents that were deeply immersed in Buddhist culture also had an impact on traditional Chinese culture. The translator, Kang Senghui, an expert in Buddhist culture, was also influenced by traditional Chinese culture. He possessed profound knowledge of Sinology and was known for his literary talent. His translation of the *Collection of the Six Perfection* was particularly noteworthy as he skillfully combined the Buddhist Mahayana doctrine of compassion and Confucian ideas, using Confucian terminology to achieve a vivid and acceptable effect. He successfully merged the principles of equality of sentient beings and filial piety with the school entrance thought, highlighting the advantages of the translation strategy of Confucianism and Buddhism. The translation of Buddhist classics into the Confucian language and the elaboration of Buddhist thoughts in a language that was acceptable to the Chinese people played a

pivotal role in the widespread adoption of the Jatakas in China. This approach not only accelerated the popularity of the text but also significantly enhanced the acceptance of Buddhism as a whole in China.

After the collection of Six Perfections, no translated works of Buddhist texts in China contain more Jataka stories, which have a particular relationship with the folk literature sources of the Jataka sutra. However, the Jataka stories also appears frequently in Chinese Buddhist texts. Wang Huihui, a Chinese scholar, has identified over 50 Chinese Scriptures that contain more than 500 Jataka stories. Although some parts of these stories are repetitive, there are still approximately 300 unique tales. However, only 20 to 30 of these Jataka stories are widely known among the people (Huihui, 2016). Xuan Zang translated *Sacrifice Sutra* that included five Jataka stories in Bharhut: Prince Sacui feeding tiger, King Moonlight giving his head, Prince Xu Dana giving wife and children, King Chili giving yaksha with blood, and Brahman giving his body to get Dharma. There are four Jataka stories in the Biography of Buddhism, which is a travel book written by the eminent monk Faxian in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. According to Faxian, in the Gandhara region at the time, four Jataka stories, Prince Sachui feeding tiger, King Moonlight giving his head, King Kuaimu giving his eyes, and King Shibi cutting meat to save a pigeon, were carved on the tower for worshippers. Eliminating the repetition, there are four Bhakta in total. Additionally, there are seven Jataka stories that frequently appear in Buddhist texts and images (Huihui, 2016). There are some Jataka stories that are considered the most important based on their embodiment of the images in different places. These tales include: Prince Xu Dana Jataka, Six-tooth Elephant Jataka, One-horned immortal Jataka, King Shibi Jataka, King Deer Jataka, King Elephant Jataka, King Monkey Jataka, Nine-color Deer Jataka, Prince Mupo Jataka, Prince Shacui Jataka, Ru Tong Jataka, Shanzi Jataka and so on (Shufei, 2013). The Jātakas are widely represented in ancient sculpture and inscriptions, which further supports their significance as a text genre. Additionally, reciters of the Jātakas are considered a distinct class of bhāṇakas.

### **The evolution of the Jataka stories in folklore Literature**

During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, China's stability increased, and its national power continued to grow. By the time of the "Zhenguan" reign, China had achieved remarkable internal and external accomplishments. Communication between China and the West was highly developed at this time. Several foreign religions, including Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Islam, and Nestorianism, emerged and thrived in China. Buddhism, which originated from the Southern and Northern dynasties, was highly respected and prosperous among most emperors and nobles in the Sui and Tang Dynasties. Xuanzang and Yijing brought new Buddhism from India, and the esoteric teachings such as "no empty three Tibetanisms, kindness and fearlessness" infused new vitality into the original Buddhism. Meanwhile, the foundation of Chinese Buddhism had been established during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, and by the Tang Dynasty, various sects had formed with the emergence of eminent monks in China. Moreover, Buddhist beliefs and culture had deeply penetrated into the masses, and popular folklore and variations were widely prevalent. This foreign religion, Buddhism, had eventually become an integral part of the spiritual life of the Chinese people.

Elite Buddhism is a type of Buddhism believed by Buddhist intellectuals, including both monastic and non-monastic intellectuals. It's quite different from the "folk Buddhism" applied in daily life, but it's not a parallel trade. Elite Buddhism played a significant role in Buddhism's development in this period, where intellectuals or even senior intellectuals promoted its development. A good example is the Sutra translation team led by the venerable monk Xuan Zang. This team gathered almost the most top

translation and Buddhist academic talents in the Chinese Buddhist circle at that time, and accelerated the theoretical development process of Chinese Buddhism. However, one of the downsides of such groups and their work is that it's uncertain how many followers of their translation or preaching activities actually understand what's going on. The majority of ordinary believers follow them, especially the venerable monk Xuanzang, more for his personal charm, tenacity of character, and legendary journey west. It's unclear how many people appreciate the translation work or the preaching activities for their academic value. Even though there's no definitive data to support this view, after the Tang Dynasty, there were almost no monks comparable to the Great virtuous monks at that time, which can illustrate this point. Even the decline and disappearance of the only school of Knowledge (Faxiang School) founded by Master Xuanzang that can best embody the characteristics of Indian Buddhism after the Tang Dynasty all reflect the defects of elite Buddhism.

During the Sui and Tang dynasties, the spread of Buddhism led to the necessity of dharma transmission. To propagate the Dharma, Buddhist activities centered in the temple became the primary means of dissemination. As a result, the development of the Jataka Sutra was inevitable and had a profound impact. It even gave rise to a new form of Chinese popular literature - the literature of lecture-singing. The method of storytelling while singing the main idea in verse undoubtedly originated from the Indian Buddhist tradition. The Jataka stories, originating from the temple, eventually made their way to the ancient Chinese playground "Wazi" (瓦子), becoming an integral part of the lives of the Chinese people. That is a major development of folk Buddhism in China.

Dunhuang, located along the Silk Road, is a significant hub of culture and art that played a vital role in the spread and development of Buddhist culture in China. During the Tang Dynasty, Buddhism flourished and the monks, in order to promote folk Buddhism, produced two forms of rap art - "*Bian Wen*" (变文) and "*Su Jiang*" (俗讲). These forms of rap art were specifically aimed at the common people and helped to spread Buddhist teachings to a wider audience. *Bian Wen*, a form of Chinese narrative literature, and *Su Jiang*, a spoken language used to teach Buddhism, share similarities with the Jataka Stories. These similarities include their primary aim of spreading Buddhist teachings and their accessible content that the public can easily understand. *Bian Wen*'s literature, in particular, utilizes stories (including *Nidana*, *Abhiṅskramaṇasūtra* and *Jakas*) to teaching Buddhist sutras, while *Su Jiang* incorporates folklore and legends to promote virtuous behaviour and encourage people to perform good deeds. Although *Su Jiang* later included more secular content, its underlying theme of promoting filial piety and good deeds remained unchanged, with the religious concepts of karma and the retribution of good and evil being used to encourage such behaviour. These stories, which fall under the category of Buddhist literature, have deep roots in the are reflected in *Bian Wen* and *Su Jiang* (Zhenduo, 2009).

During the spread of Buddhism, the individuals responsible for teaching the sutras to people were known as sutra teachers. They were proficient in Brāhma and rereading. Lecturers were responsible for sharing the classics with the people. The speaker played a significant role by engaging in conversation with the lecturer during the lecture and assisting in delivering the lecture. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties, these activities were mainly monopolized by intellectual elites such as monks and nobles. However, in the Tang Dynasty, a "*Fu jiang shi*" (复讲师) emerged who delivered the lecture after the lecturer, and thus, this person was called a repeat lecturer (Shiren, 2015). 69-80 During the Tang Dynasty, there were Buddhist monks who actively preached to the public, travelling around to spread their teachings. In later years,

wandering and marching monks continued this tradition of preaching to the people. As the Middle Tang Dynasty approached, Su Jiang also began to give lectures known as "laity." The format of these lectures was similar to those given to the monks, but the audience was now laypeople. The content of these lectures mainly consisted of relatable stories that were approachable to the general public, such as Nidana and Jataka stories.

During the Wei and Jin Dynasties in China, there was a notable effort to translate and disseminate Buddhist sutras. This movement was particularly focused on the Jataka tales, which are stories about the previous lives of the Buddha. These translations played a significant role in the development and spread of Buddhism in China, and the Jataka tales became an important part of Chinese Buddhist literature.

### Effects of the Jatas Translation on Chinese Buddhism

Avadāna-masters were Buddhist teachers who were experts at narrating Avadāna stories, according to the Sarvāstivāda School of Sectarian Buddhism. Furthermore, the process of Ashoka's secularization of Buddhism was significantly aided by subsequent storytelling. Avadāna attracted attention as a literary form in the Six Dynasties, when these tales were translated into Chinese and given the title piyu 譬喻. Naturally, these sutras are mostly found in the Tripitaka category of Jātaka (benyuan 本緣, besheng 本生 (life stories of Buddha or Bodhisattvas), and yuanqi 況起 (fables or Avadāna), although Avadāna stories can also be found in other portions of the Tripitaka. This is a reference to several kinds of rebirth and karma tales about the Buddha, Maitreya, Bodhisattvas, or Buddha's followers in previous and current lifetimes. Sutras of the Buddha's initial existence (besheng 本生), the Buddha's biography (fozhuan 潛傳), the stories of the Buddha and his disciples (fo ji dizi yinyuan 潛及弟子因筭), the Dhammapada (fajujing 法句經), and the Avadāna sutras (piyu 譬喻) are the five portions of these tales. Sharmistha Sharma contends that the Avadana sutras came from the Jataka sutras, and that the two.

Among these Avadāna sutras translated in the Six Dynasties, six of them are the most important ones, which are Za piyu jing 雜譬喻經 (The Sutra of Miscellaneous Avadāna Stories, one juan, T. 204, translated by Lokakṣema (Zhilou jiachen 支婁迦讖, d.u.) of Yuezhi 月氏 in between the 1st year of Jianhe 建和 and the 3rd year of Zhongping 中平 (CE 147–186.), Later(East) Han dynasty 後漢 in Luoyang 洛陽); Za piyu jing 雜譬喻經 Jiu za piyu jing 舊雜譬喻經 (The Sutra of Ancient Miscellaneous Avadāna Stories, one juan, T. 206, translated by Indian (tianzhu 天竺) Monk Kang Senghui 康僧會 of Wu (229–280) from Three Kingdom Period (220–280)); Za piyu jing 雜譬喻經 (The Sutra of Miscellaneous Avadāna Stories, one juan, T. 207, collected by Bhikkhu Daolüe 道略 (d.u.)); Zhongjing zhuanza piyu 眾經撰雜譬喻 and Baiyu jing 百喻經.

Nevertheless, it would be irresponsible to infer any inferences from this scenario based only on similarities as there may not be a clear correlation with the ones that already exist in China. The second type consists of Buddhist Avadāna stories that were incorporated into Chinese culture and became Chinese folktales. This essay's primary goal is to demonstrate how Buddhist Avadāna tales were incorporated into literary fiction during the Six Dynasties. In addition to serving a "missionary" purpose by imparting Buddhist principles, these stories also established a historical framework that allowed them to be recognized as Chinese folktales, proving their legitimacy. As a result,

the Avadāna stories were able to transition from being "imaginational" to "real," and they began to have actual significance for the common people living through that turbulent period. After the Tang and Song dynasties, when the fables written by Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 (1037–1101), Liu Ji 劉基 (1311–1375), and Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798) were closely linked to the fables collected in the Baiyu jing, the long decline of Chinese literature began. This was influenced by the themes, narratives, and meaning of Avadana tales.

## **Conclusion**

In general, Buddhist Avadāna stories have been merged into Chinese literature; nonetheless, the connection between the two entails complex flux, intermingling, and the formation of an unidentifiable cultural river, rather than just simple parallelism or influence. The fundamental structure, central themes, and narrative arcs of Buddhist metaphorical stories served as a specific source of inspiration for the literati as they wrote their books. Above all, by transforming the fanciful Buddhist stories into allegorical stories with grounded concerns based on the traits and historical developments of Chinese literature, they intentionally strove to deflect cultural significance. The significance of history and the attention to historical detail, in addition to the text's finer intricacies, are particularly noteworthy. These aspects elevate the metaphorical tales from works of fiction to ones with realistic meaning and social issues. The literature of the Buddhist Avadāna serves as a comparable cultural resource for understanding and utilizing stories with related themes that are found in many civilizations. More importantly, they provide a first-hand source of information that can be used to create literary fiction, which is why they are a major motivation for Chinese fiction writers. By adding more writing techniques and literary and artistic interests, the novels of the Wei, Jin, and Northern Dynasties, on the other hand, expanded on the religious significance of metaphorical tales and enhanced their historical and cultural significance, transforming them from Buddhist fable-like texts into fiction with historical details. The story is now a realistic text with a feeling of historical authenticity rather than a Buddhist "story." To put it briefly, the process of integrating Buddhist Avadāna stories into Chinese cultural contexts is intricate. Monks and authors must do more than only recognize the commonalities among the tales and integrate them into a cohesive framework, as demonstrated by xuanliang cigu, which unites Buddhist tales with traditional Chinese narratives around a common topic. As Wu Jun and others have shown, it was even more imperative that they take the effort to modify Buddhist Avadāna stories to suit their own purposes. In an effort to capture the interest of the Chinese audience, Xunshi focuses on magic feats in addition to a fresh take on filial devotion. Not only do direct quotes from Buddhist scriptures, like those found in Liu Yiqing's works, show how quickly Buddhism spread, but they also reveal how much the literati loved Buddhist Avadāna stories, which gave them food. On the other hand, the modern implications and cultural significance of Buddhist Avadāna can be better understood if a story like yingwu jiuhuo is examined in the larger context of the chaotic time. This leaves more room for interpretation in our understanding of how Buddhist Avadāna stories were used by Chinese literati.

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