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The Changing Images of Zodiac Animals in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Literature

Ortaçağ Çin Budist Edebiyatında
Zodyak Hayvanlarının Değişen Görüntüleri

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Abstract

In a Buddhist text entitled Mahāvaipulya-mahāsaṃnipāta-Sūtra, that has only survived in its fifth century Chinese translation, twelve animals were portrayed as the reincarnations of Bodhisattvas who traveled to teach and enlighten sentient beings who were reborn in the bodies of animals. In the seventh and eighth centuries, Chinese Buddhist commentators incorporated indigenous Chinese thoughts of Yin-yang and Five-Phase theories to reinterpret these animals as demonic spirits who could corrupt the morality of Buddhist practitioners. This new development manifested the attempt of medieval Chinese Buddhist monks to help Buddhist ideas take root in Chinese society. It shows how medieval Chinese Buddhist literature transformed twelve animals from compassionate deities into animal demons to accommodate foreign ideas for serving the Chinese audience.

Keywords

twelve animals, Bodhisattva, animal demons, demonic spirits, medieval Chinese Buddhism

Öz

Sadece beşinci yüzyıla ait Çince tercümesi günümüze ulaşmış Mahāvaipulya-mahāsaṃnipāta-Sūtra adlı Budist metninde on iki hayvan, hayvanların bedenlerinde yeniden doğmuş duygulu varlıkları eğitmek ve aydınlatmak için seyahat eden Bodhisattva'ların reenkarnasyonu olarak tasvir edilmiştir. Yedinci ve sekizinci yüzyıllarda Çinli Budist tefsirciler, bu hayvanları Budistlerin ahlakını bozabilecek şeytani ruhlar olarak yeniden yorumlarken onu yerli Çin düşünceleri olan Yin-yang ve Beş Aşamalı teorileriyle birleştirdiler. Bu yeni gelişme Ortaçağ Çinli Budist rahiplerine ait fikirlerin o zamanki Çin toplumunda kök salması sonucunu ortaya çıkardı. Bu durum, Ortaçağ Çin Budist edebiyatının yabancı fikirleri aşinalıştırarak Çinli okuyucu kesimin istifadesine sunmak için on iki hayvanı merhametli tanrılardan hayvan şeytanlara nasıl dönüştürdüğünü göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

on iki hayvan, Bodhisattva, hayvan şeytanlar, şeytani ruhlar, ortaçağ Çin Budizmi

Introduction

In the medieval period, specifically from the fifth to eighth centuries in the Chinese historical context, the Buddhist community produced a voluminous literature, which became an invaluable resource for understanding the roles of animals in medieval religious life. This Buddhist literature not only included numerous translations rendered from Indic and Central Asian languages such as Gāndhārī and Tocharian, or which many original texts were lost, but also commentaries and collections of magical stories. In these texts, there were encounters and adaptations between Buddhist ideas and Chinese indigenous thoughts. Unlike many other world and local religions, Buddhism developed a sophisticated cosmology in which animals occupied one of the six realms for the birth, death, and rebirth of all lives or sentient beings in Buddhist terms. The Buddhist idea of reincarnation created a blurry boundary between humans and animals. In other words, in Buddhist literature, humans may be reborn as animals and vice versa, which also applies to gods and spirits. Drawing upon sources from medieval Chinese Buddhist literature centered on the *Mahāvaipulya-mahāsaṃnipāta-Sūtra* (hereafter abbreviated to *MMS*),[1] this paper examines how twelve animals first appeared as compassionate deities and then as demonic spirits in these sources and how Buddhist and Chinese intellectual traditions shaped this transformation.

The *MMS* is a sizeable collective scripture of early Mahāyāna Buddhist texts which did not survive in its entirety in any language. Some fragments in Sanskrit have been identified as parts of this significant scripture. However, its Chinese and Tibetan translations that perhaps represent substantial portions, have survived in numerous scrolls and manuscripts. This paper will focus on only a small part of the Chinese translation by Dharmakśema (曇無讖) (385-433) in 414-426. In chapter 23, twelve animals appeared as the reincarnations of Buddhist Bodhisattvas in a calendrical circle of twelve days. They would travel to the realm of animals to enlighten those sentient beings in suffering. This passage frequently appeared in

1 Chinese title: *Da fangdeng daji jing* (大方等大集經). A detailed textual history of this scripture is beyond the scope of this paper. For a comprehensive ethnographic study on this message in Japanese scholarship, see Minakata Kumagusu (南方熊楠), "Jūnishi kō (十二支考)," in *Minakata Kumagusu zenshū* (南方熊楠全集) 1 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1971), 5-610; this is a collection of a series of essays he published in a journal entitled *Taiyō*, during 1915-1924, which was later reissued as a monograph. In 1919, he also published an article on the twelve animals, see his "Shishin to jūnijū nitsuite (四神と十二獣について)," *Jinreigaku zashi* (人類學雜誌) 34, no. 8 (1919), reprinted in *Minakata Kumagusu zenshū* 2 (1971), 147-158.

numerous commentaries by the later generations of Buddhist masters who attempted to interpret this passage to the Chinese audience by incorporating indigenous Chinese ideas, such as the Yin-Ying (陰陽) and Five-phase (五行) theories. Nevertheless, in these interpretations in the following centuries, the twelve animals were transformed into demonic spirits who were said to corrupt the morality of Buddhist practitioners, thus losing their original identity as Bodhisattvas who attained enlightenment but remained to enlighten other sentient beings.

Twelve Animals as Reincarnations of Bodhisattvas in the *MMS*

Chapter 23 of the MMS describes a Buddhist cosmology whereby many Bodhisattvas appeared like animals. It said that there are many Bodhisattvas in the world. They could appear in the form of any sentient being in the six realms, such as gods, demigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and demons, and travel around the realm of Jambudvīpa (worldly continent), teaching and transforming sentient beings. It tells that there are four seas and four mountains surrounding this realm of Jambudvīpa. In the south, there is a mountain of lapis lazuli, which is called the tide. On this mountain, as the reincarnations of Bodhisattvas, three animals, namely a snake, a horse, and a sheep, resided in three caves, respectively. They all cultivated the compassion of the listeners of Buddhism. A tree deity, a guardian, and five hundred attendants served as their companions. The three animals received offerings as Bodhisattvas. In the west, there is a mountain of rock crystal. There are three caves for the Bodhisattvas who appeared as three animals: a monkey, a rooster, and a dog. They also help cultivate the compassion of the listeners of Buddhism. A fire god, a guardian, and five hundred attendants serve as their companions. There is a mountain of silver in the north, with three caves for the reincarnation of three Bodhisattvas, appearing as three animals: a pig, a mouse, and an ox, who help cultivate the compassion of the listeners of Buddhism. A mountain deity, a guardian, and five hundred attendants serve as their companions. There is a mountain of gold in the east, with three caves for three animals as the reincarnations of Bodhisattvas: a lion, a rabbit, and a nāga, who, again, cultivate the compassion of the listeners of Buddhism. A water deity, a guardian, and five hundred attendants serve as their companions. In total, there are twelve animals. They travel across the realm of Jambudvīpa from day to night, receiving venerations from sentient beings in the six realms. The MMS states that these animals have accomplished their merits and virtues. In the place of the Buddhas, they would make profound and serious vows of taking turns to travel around for the purpose of teaching and transforming sentient beings each day in a circle of twelve days. For example, on the first day of the seventh month, the mouse begins to travel around to teach and transform all sentient beings who are reborn in the body form of the mouse,

depriving their evil deeds and advising them to cultivate good deeds. Then the next day, another animal would come and replace the mouse. On the thirteenth day, the mouse starts the journey again. In the same way, this scheduling also runs for twelve months and even twelve years.[2]

Several striking points should be noted here. First of all, this passage tells us that each animal was a Bodhisattva and all twelve animals, as the reincarnations of the Bodhisattvas, lived in places beyond the realm of Jambudvīpa, which means that they are enlightened beings but remain to teach sentient beings. In other words, they accomplished their merits and virtues and became Bodhisattvas, being revered by sentient beings, including heavenly and human beings. Since they were Bodhisattvas, they could come out of their dwelling caves and appear in the form of animals in this worldly realm for teaching and transforming sentient beings. They are responsible for teaching and transforming those sentient beings who are reborn as animals. They follow a calendrical order of twelve days, twelve months, and twelve years and come out by the turns of twelve animals. Nevertheless, as a typical Mahāyāna idea, the Bodhisattvas could transform themselves into whichever body form of six categories of sentient beings, including beasts, as long as they wish, for the sake of teaching and transforming other sentient beings, to cultivate merits and virtues.

Moreover, the twelve animals listed in the passage of the MMS reflect a strong Indo-centric worldview. It starts from the mouse and is followed by the ox, lion, rabbit, nāga, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig, which is different from the Chinese list of twelve zodiac animals that includes a tiger, rather than a lion.[3] Second, it also touches on the ancient Indic concept of the material world constructed by four great elements. According to the passage in the MMS, these animals are said to reside in the caves of four mountains where eight female deities and their attendants served as companions. Among these eight female deities, four of them are named after the tree, fire, wind, and water, symbolizing the four great elements in ancient Indian cosmology. Third, this passage mentioned four mountains in four cardinal directions surrounding the Jambudvīpa world, which started from the south, followed by the west, the north, and the east. In the south, the three animals included a snake, a horse, and a sheep. In the west, the three animals included a monkey, a rooster, and a dog. In the north, the three animals were a pig, a mouse, and an ox. Whereas in the east, the three animals were a lion, a rabbit, and a nāga. Interestingly, from the perspective of medieval Chinese Buddhists, this arrangement seems to

2 *Dafangdeng daji jing*, juan 23, *T*. 13, no. 397: 167b-168b.

3 Zhang Xing and Chen Huaiyu, "From Lion to Tiger: The Buddhist Changing Images of Apex Predators in Trans-Asian Contexts," in *Animals and Human Society in Asia: Historical and Ethical Perspectives,* eds. Rotem Rosen, Michal Biran, Meir Shahar, and Gideon Shelach (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 331-353.

correspond with the notion that the Indian sub-continent was the center of the world in the Indo-centric worldview.

The most cited modern scholarly edition of the *MMS* in the *Newly compiled Buddhist Canon in the Taishō period* (Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō) published in Japan was based on the Korean edition carved in the tenth century,[4] which does not reflect the original structure and vocabulary of the text that was translated in the early fifth century. In fact, in the editions printed in China in the following centuries, the order of the four directions beyond the Jambudvīpa realm was modified by the Chinese compilers by starting from the east, followed by the south, the west, and the north. This obvious Chinese Buddhist modification reflected the Chinese Buddhist transformation from the Indo-centric worldview to the Sino-centric worldview. The Chinese Buddhist narratives often regarded the east, where China is located, as the primary direction, which is also the direction where the sun rises.

Further, the MMS tells that the four mountains beyond the Jambudvīpa realm refer to the mountains of lapis lazuli, crystal, silver, and gold, which corresponded to the four jewels in Buddhist culture. Perhaps the lapis lazuli was valued in South Asia, so the lapis lazuli world was listed first. Yet, in ancient China, gold was valued more than many other treasures. So, the gold in the east was listed first. The orderly arrangement of these four jewels and their relevant directions seems to be another piece of evidence for transforming the Indo-centric worldview to the Sino-centric worldview.

More importantly, in reading the Chinese versions of the *MMS*, the changing cardinal directions for the mountains where animals dwell should be understood by looking into its historical root in the political culture of ancient China.[5] In ancient Chinese texts, such as the turtle bone inscriptions and the *Book of Documents* (Shangshu 尚書), the four directions were commonly ordered as the east, the south, the west, and finally the north. But in some other texts, such as the *Zuo Commentary on the Spring and Autumn* (Zuozhuan 左傳) and the *Record of Rites* (Liji 禮記), the positions of south and west were switched i.e., east, the west, the south, and the north. However,

4 The stone scriptures preserved in the Fangshan (房山) area carved in 1063 preserved an early version of the MMS. The corresponding passage appeared in the stone tablet numbered in Chinese character "you 有," located in the no. 212 scripture in the seventh cave of the Fangshan area. The order of the four mountains started from the south, and then the west, the north, and the east.

5 For a study of the four directions in ancient Chinese political thought, see Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chapter two: "Sifang and the center: The Cosmology of Ruling China," 23-74. However, she does not elaborate on the order of the four directions. Also see Laurent Sagart, "The Chinese Names of the Four Directions," *Journal of American Oriental Society* 124, no. 1 (2004), 69-76.

both make the east the primary and foremost position, which might reflect a Chinese Buddhist concept.

From the cultural geography perspective in the Buddhist tradition, early Buddhist literature often introduced and explained four continents (*catvaro dipah*) of the world by starting from the continent in the south, which appeared as Jambudvipa. This is not a random appearance but reflects the cosmological worldview of people in ancient South Asia, where Buddhism began to flourish. Hence, unsurprisingly this cosmological worldview was built upon South Asian centrism. As Akira Sadakata 定方晟pointed out, in early Buddhism, or using his words, pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism, the four continents spread out by surrounding the Sumeru Mountain and one of the four continents, Jambudvipa, was modeled the sub-continent of India. So, he highlights that the features of the Jambudvipa, as illustrated in early Buddhist literature, reflected the world geographical knowledge of ancient Indian people.[6] The Buddhist text *Mahāratnakūṭa-sūtra* claimed that the *Jambudvipa* was unique because it was much larger than the other three continents, with one hundred million yojana in width. It has four times more cities than the other three continents. Moreover, these cities were very magnificent, peaceful, joyful, and prosperous. Most importantly, the Buddha resided in this continent.[7] Ancient Buddhism seems to attempt to glorify this continent that modeled the subcontinent of South Asia, where the Buddha was born, grew up, reached the enlightenment, and preached his Dharma.

As per the cross-cultural translating practice, in early medieval China, some Chinese Buddhist translators seemed to have modified some common expressions for fulfilling the expectations of Chinese readers, such as the order of the four directions, which was associated with the issue of ordering the four continents of the world. While exploring the organizing process of Buddhist translations, it should be noted that the monks and laypeople who were educated in traditional Chinese culture played important roles in transcribing, editing, and proofreading. However, foreign monks brought in and spoke out the original source versions of Buddhist literature. Some Chinese officials appointed by the emperor also followed imperial edicts to read and authorize the final versions. Therefore, it would not be surprising to see that the final versions of Buddhist translations used the order of the four continents that followed traditional Chinese literary conventions, which started from the east rather than from the south as the original version was produced in South Asia. The cultural geography in early medieval China impacted the vocabulary, sentence structure, and idioms of early Chinese translations of Buddhist literature.

In South Asian Buddhist literature, the four continents in Buddhist literature often refer to the continent in the south *Jambudvipa*, the continent in the west

6 Akira Sadakata, *Buddhist Cosmology: Philosophy and Origins*, trans. by Gaynor Sekimori, with a foreword by Hajime Nakamura (Tokyo: Kōsei Publishing Co., 1997), 31.

7 *T.* 11, no. 310: 141b.

Aparagodaniya, the continent in the north *Uttarakuru*, and the continent in the east *Furvavideha*. In early medieval Chinese Buddhist literature, such as the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* [高僧傳]), both the land in the east (*dongtu* 東土) and the land in the middle (*zhongtu* 中土) referred to the Middle Kingdom, or in particular, the Central Plain, which was the central part of the Chinese empire. In the seventh and eighth centuries, some Chinese writers began to write about the four continents in the Chinese order, which started from the continent in the east. For instance, in his commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*, Huiyuan 慧遠 (523-592), a monk from the Pure Shadow Temple (Jingying si 靜影寺), said that the four continents under heaven started from the east and this continent was called *Furvavideha*,[8] which was a typical Sino-centric view. Later on, this Sino-centric order became even more common. In his *Record of the Western Regions of the Great Tang* (*Da Tang Xiyu ji* [大唐西域記]), Xuanzang 玄奘 also introduced the idea that in Saha world (Skt. *sahāloka*) or the world of the Earth, there were four continents, namely *videha* (*Furvavideha*) in the east, Jambudvipa in the south, *Godani* (*Aparagodaniya*) in the west, and *Kuru* (*Uttarakuru*) in the north. However, Xuanzang was a Chinese monk who spent a significant amount of time studying in South Asia. He seems to be ambivalent while discussing the four continents, which means sometimes he still holds South Asia in a higher place. When he commented on the features of these four continents, he again came back to the order starting from the south.[9] Xuanzang's understanding, perception, and conceptualization of the continent of Asia characterized the geography, climate, customs, norms, national characters, and economic modes of four peoples living in the land of Jambudvipa, which is Asia, as we can see. The landscape Xuanzang laid out seems to regard Mount Sumeru as the center of the world, and the order of four lands begins with South Asia, which refers to the land of the lord of elephants. The order of arranging these four lands in Xuanzang's narrative might suggest that he still held South Asia as the birthplace of Buddhism prior to any other continent.

Although Xuanzang's writing followed the order of four lands starting from the south, many other monks in the high medieval period (10th century and later) adopted the order of four continents starting from the east. For instance, in his commentary on the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, Chengguan 澄觀 states that the eastern continent looks like a half-moon. The southern continent looks like a carriage. The western continent looks like a full moon, and the northern continent looks like a square base.[10] In his *Outline of the Tian Tai Fourfold Teachings* (Tiantai sijiaoyi [天臺四教儀]), a Korean monk named Chegwan (10th century) also used the same order of the

8 *T.* 38, no. 1776: 514b.

9 Samuel Beal, *Xi you ji: Buddhist Records of the Western World* 1 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1906), 13-15.

10 *T.* 35, no. 1735: 583b.

four continents starting from the east while discussing the life spans of people in the human realm. In the eastern land within the human realm, people could live to be 150 years old. In the southern land, people could live up to 100 years old. In the western land, people could live up to 500 years old. And in the northern land, people could live up to 1000 years old. In these four continents, residents could enjoy happiness and endure suffering. While suffering, people should practice five ethics and five precepts. The five ethics were humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and integrity, which of course, refer to the core values of Confucianism. The five precepts were no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, and no intoxicants.[11] Interestingly, although the order of the four continents started from the east, based on this narrative, the people who lived in the northern land had the longest life span. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinayavibhaṅga* translated by Yijing 義淨also used the same order of the four continents within the human realm. It describes how to draw a painting of a wheel of life and death in five realms and the human realm; the four continents are marked in white color.[12]

As early as the sixth century, Chinese monks started to incorporate indigenous Chinese thoughts into their interpretations of the *MMS*. When Zhiyi 智顗 (538-597) wrote his *Great Calming and Contemplation* (Mohe zhiguan [摩訶止觀]), he introduced the theory of Five Phases (Wuxing 五行) while explaining the animal spirits in the *MMS*. He claimed that twelve beasts were cultivating their Buddhist compassion in the jeweled mountains and these beasts were lords of demonic spirits. For him, when a person was working on sitting in meditation, his or her mind might become deviant, which means that he or she fell into the seduction of the demonic animal spirits. When these demonic spirits attempted to seduce a Buddhist practitioner, they appeared in various body forms such as boys or girls, old adults, and birds or beasts. He continued to explain a strategy of distinguishing different animal spirits pursuant of fighting against their seductions. He suggested to follow the traditional Chinese idea of terrestrial branches for time divisions. One day could be divided into twelve units, and one unit has two hours. Within this two-hour unit, one animal demon would come to disturb the practitioner. For example, if it were the yin 寅 time unit, the tiger demon would come. If it were the chou 丑 time unit, the ox demon would arrive. Since there were more beasts and birds in nature, Zhiyi expanded the list of twelve animals in chapter 23 of the *MMS* to thirty-six beasts, which presented an entirely new cosmology in terms of time and space for animals as active spirits in a Buddhist context. According to Zhiyi, one two-hour time unit can be divided into three sub-divisions, so twelve time units originally for twelve zodiac animals based on twelve terrestrial branches can accommodate thirty-six animals. Zhiyi's

11 *T.* 46, no. 1931: 776c.

12 *T.* 23, no. 1442: 811a. Stephen F. Teiser, *Reinventing the Wheel: Paintings of Rebirth in Medieval Buddhist Temples* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2007), 60.

new interpretation is remarkable for its Chinese transformation of the twelve zodiac animals in the *MMS* in many ways. First, the tiger has replaced the lion in Zhiyi's list. Zhiyi's list was also expanded from twelve animals to thirty-six animals, even one hundred and eight animals. Second, in Zhiyi's new explanation, the animals were no longer the transformations or reincarnations of Bodhisattvas for serving the needs of sentient beings; instead, they became demonic spirits. They could divert practitioners away from right consciousness and corrupt their minds. They could also speak about auspicious and bad omens. Third, Zhiyi now began to incorporate the Chinese indigenous thoughts of twelve terrestrial branches and Five Phases (wuxing) into his theory. Twelve animals were regrouped based on five phases in his theory. These combinations and incorporation together seem to have transformed the Buddhist version of twelve zodiac animals as Bodhisattvas into a hybrid tradition mixed with Chinese theories of twelve terrestrial branches and five phases. Finally, Zhiyi also offered a strategy for eliminating the demon spirits. He said, if one knows the corresponding terrestrial branch for each animal demon, one could just call out the name of the animal, then the demonic beast spirit would disappear.[13] This operationalization of exorcism borrowed from early medieval Daoism.

From Twelve Animal Bodhisattvas to Twelve Demonic Spirits

The twelve zodiac animals appeared in various forms and images in medieval Chinese Buddhist literature. For instance, they appeared as animal guardians of twelve time units (shier shishou [十二時狩]) in Wonhyo's (617–686) Commentary on *The Treatise of Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (Dasheng qixin lun shu [大乘起信論疏]) and Fazang's commentary on *The Treatise of Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (Dasheng qixin lun yiji [大乘起信論義記]). Yet, in the sixth century, they appeared as demonic spirits in Zhiyi and Zhanran's commentaries on the passage from the *MMS*. The transformation from twelve guardians to twelve demonic spirits shows that the images of the twelve zodiac animals became negative and horrific with the appearance of new commentaries in the medieval period, which might indicate that some Chinese Buddhist commentators attempted to transform the original Buddhist tradition from South Asia into Chinese tradition in East Asia. This section will trace this transformation in the multi-religious, intellectual, and cultural context of medieval China. I suggest that Buddhism, Daoism, and other Chinese elements interacted with each other and collectively contributed to this transformation.

In the *MMS* context, twelve calendrical animals appeared as the transformation bodies of virtuous Bodhisattvas. These Bodhisattvas could appear as various body

13 *T.* 46, no. 1911: 115a-b.

forms of all sentient beings in six realms such as gods (*devas*), demigods, human beings, nāgas, beasts, birds, and other animals, for the sake of enlightening other sentient beings. They traveled around the human realm or Jambudvipa, teaching and transforming sentient beings. In other words, to teach and transform sentient beings, Bodhisattvas could appear in any form of a sentient being from one of six realms in Buddhist cosmology. This idea seems to be developed in the early Mahāyāna tradition, which means a Bodhisattva could come to this world in a transformed body for the purpose of helping sentient beings to eliminate karma and collect good deeds and merits. However, medieval Chinese commentaries by Zhiyi, Zhanran, Wonhyo, and Fazang, replaced the images of these Bodhisattvas with those of demon spirits, which seems to manifest the influence of the popular indigenous Chinese ideas of animal spirits in the early medieval period.

Different monks used different terms for the twelve zodiac animals in their commentaries on the MMS in medieval China. Zhiyi began to name these twelve animals as the enchanting calendrical demons (shimeigui [時魅鬼]) or just calendrical enchantments (shimei [時魅]), which means that, when these animals showed up, they would cast spells to deviate the mind of a Buddhist practitioner. As Zhiyi illustrated in his *Essential Methods of Practicing and Cultivating the Calming and Contemplating by Sitting Meditation* (*Xiuxi zhiguan zuochan fa yao* [修習止觀坐禪法要]), "Twelve calendrical animals could transform and change into various forms and materials, and some of them could appear in the forms of young ladies and old people, and even the horrible bodies and so forth, without a single form, deluding and tempting practitioners. These various spirits of enchantment (jingmei 精魅) who attempted to delude the practitioners would show up when their respective schedules came up. One should be capable of identifying them."[14] In Zhiyi's description, the order of the twelve calendrical animal spirits started from the tiger. They appeared to corrupt the minds of practitioners. As a solution for dealing with these animal spirits, Zhiyi said that the practitioners should identify these animals and loudly call out the names of these animal spirits; then the disturbance of these animal spirits could be eliminated.

Zhanran 湛然, another monk from the Tiantai tradition, followed Zhiyi and used the same term. Zhanran first pointed out that the so-called twelve calendrical animals in the *MMS* were the same as the twelve zodiac animals in five phases.[15] Apparently, Zhanran attempted to interpret the twelve animals in the *MMS* in terms of Chinese ideas of the five-phase theory. Since these twelve calendrical gods looked like animals, they were called calendrical animals. Zhanran also expanded the number of

14 *T.* 46, no. 1915: 470b.

15 *T.* 46, no. 1912: 407b-c. For a study on Zhanran, see Jinhua Chen, "One Name, Three Monks: Two Northern Chan Masters Emerge from the Shadow of Their Contemporary, the Tiantai Master Zhanran (711-782)," *Journal of International Association for Buddhist Studies* 22, no. 1 (1999): 1-91.

calendrical animals to one hundred and eight to fit a grand theory, including the ideas of five phases, five cardinal directions, and three stages of each of four seasons. He was perhaps the first Buddhist monk who connected twelve calendrical animals in Buddhist text *MMS* with the twelve zodiac animals in the indigenous Chinese cosmological tradition. On the one hand, Zhanran accepted twelve animals as calendrical animals in early Buddhism; on the other hand, he also introduced Chinese ideas of twelve zodiac animals and five phases in constructing a new concept of twelve animals in the *MMS*. In his commentary, he said that these animals appeared in accordance with when they were scheduled to do so. Each hour one animal would show up. When the enchantment of an animal came up, or an animal demon came up, upon calling its name it would disappear. So Zhanran said that the animal demons were frightened when their names were verbalized by people.

Furthermore, the practitioners should not only know their names but also recognize their forms to prevent them from showing up to disturb people and commit malign acts. As I will show below, this idea and method of dispensing animal demons seems to be familiar in Chinese tradition in the early medieval period, emanating from the Chinese indigenous and Daoist traditions.

So why did Zhiyi and his later generations transform these twelve calendrical animals as the reincarnations of Bodhisattvas into demonic animal spirits? Or why did these Chinese Buddhist writers choose demonic spirits to replace the reincarnations of the Bodhisattvas as the new images of twelve zodiac animals? The root of the idea of demonic spirits was not from the Buddhist tradition, but Chinese indigenous culture. In Chinese Buddhist literature, the term "enchanted spirit" first appeared in a text entitled *Treatise on* Śākya *Mahāyāna* (*Shi moheyan lun* [釋摩訶衍論]), which was attributed to Nagarjuna and was translated into the Chinese language by Vṛddhimata (Fatimoduo [伐帝摩多]) in 401. This text states that there are four obstacles against mind cultivation that could appear in the form of human beings. These four obstacles were demons (Skt. *mara*, Ch. *mo* [魔]), non-Buddhist teachings (Skt. *anya-tīrtha*, Ch. *waidao* [外道]), ghosts (*gui* [鬼]), and gods (*shen* [神]). In the Buddhist context, demons refer to the demonic Mara and his associates, and the anya-tīrtha refers to non-Buddhist forces. When the Buddha was meditating under the Bodhi tree, he was challenged, seduced, enchanted, and tempted by the Mara and various transformations and avatars of evil forces. Eventually, the Buddha defeated these evil forces and achieved enlightenment. However, these evil forces continued to bother other Buddhist practitioners. The Buddhist concept of animals as demonic spirits is illuminated in the *Treatise on* Śākya *Mahāyāna*. According to this text, ghosts refer to the so-called ten big ghosts and their numerous attendants, and spirits refer to fifteen big spirits and their numerous attendants. The tenth type of ghost is the ghost of animals, such as the scorpion, tiger, and lion. The fifteenth type of god is called the god of spirits of enchantment (jingmei shen [精魅神]). The gods of spirits of witchcraft appeared as animals as their avatars based on the daily schedule of

these animals. The Buddhist concepts of "mo (魔)" and "waidao (外道)" cannot be found in Chinese culture before Buddhism introduced them into China. Nevertheless, similar concepts of ghosts and gods can also be found in the indigenous Chinese tradition. The demonic spirits in Zhiyi's writing seem to suggest that the Buddhist idea of demonic spirits was mixed with the Chinese concept of ghosts.

Why did Zhiyi and Zhanran choose the spirits of enchantment to interpret the animal avatars in the *MMS*? For me, they both attempted to make Buddhist teachings and ideas accessible and understandable to Chinese readers who were more or less familiar with the Chinese concepts of demonic animal spirits. In medieval Chinese literature, the animals as demonic spirits who could seduce and corrupt human minds seemed to have been a shared idea in both the Buddhist textual community and non-Buddhist textual community. Therefore, Zhiyi introduced this idea in his interpretation of the twelve zodiac animals in the *MMS*. Zhiyi might also utilize this idea to compete with the Daoist tradition since the latter often advocated that Daoist priests could exorcise animal demons by calling out their names in early medieval China.

To trace this issue, I will briefly outline the idea of animism and its connection with the Buddho-Daoist ritual tradition in early medieval Chinese literature. Some early medieval Chinese literature, such as tales and histories, indicated the popularity of animism among monastic and lay communities, which believed that animal and plant spirits played active roles in daily life. In other words, there were differences between spirits and bodies. These spirits might appear in the body forms of humans, animals, and plants for disturbing the daily life of spiritual cultivators. This idea is different from what we saw earlier in the *MMS*. In the latter, the animals were Bodhisattvas but appeared as animal forms for teaching Buddhism and enlightening sentient beings. While these two ideas were encountered in early medieval China, some texts that appeared in this period seem to document this sort of encounter. For example, the *Scripture of Consecration* (*Guanding jing* [灌頂經]) offers a list of numerous spirits and demons, such as spirits of trees and woods, spirits of worms, spirits of birds, spirits of beasts, and spirits of stoves and doors. It claims that if someone wore a talisman, the spirits of beasts (e.g., lions, tigers, wolves, and bears) would hide and harm nobody.[16] According to Michel Strickmann, this scripture was a Buddhist apocryphal text that incorporated many indigenous Chinese thoughts into its content. Although some names of these spirits might originally come from the Buddhist tradition of South Asia, many names of spirits can be found in the Chinese indigenous tradition. Strickmann points out that the rise of this scripture in the six dynasties could be due to the spread of the thought of Final Dharma. The Final Dharma thought brought up the Buddhist sense of impermanence to the Buddhist community. The Buddhist community felt the threat of political and social disorder following the decline of Buddhist teaching. Therefore, evil spirits and demons appeared in the world to endanger the

16 *T.* 21, no. 1331: 503a.

cultivation of Buddhist followers. *The Scripture of Consecration* taught both Daoist talismans and Buddhist spells (Dharani) for defeating these evil spirits.[17]

The tradition of writing about demonic spirits has a long history in ancient China. In ancient Chinese texts such as Zuo Qiuming's commentary on the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* (Zuozhuan [左傳]), Du Yu's commentary on the *Record of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* [史記]), and Yan Shigu's commentary on the *Book of the Han Dynasty* (*Hanshu* [漢書]) the demonic spirits often refer to spirits who have the body forms of beasts for their claws and teeth that could harm or even deprive human lives. These beasts became so-called evil animals whose threatening images have appeared in numerous cultures across the world. For instance, in his commentary on the *Record of Grand Historian*, Du Yu noted that the demonic spirit had a human face, beast body, and four feet, which was produced by the exotic air of mountains and forests; and it often deluded humans. Typically, the evil spirits were portrayed as beasts with some human body parts, but with the nature of animality, not humanity, and their residence was associated with wilderness, such as mountains and forests.

It seems that different regions across China believed in different beast spirits. In the Southern Dynasties, evil spirits were said to appear as female bodies because they could enchant and delude other people. For example, in the *Book of the Chen Dynasty* (Chen shu [陳書]), it is stated that Zhang Lihua, the concubine of the last lord of the Chen Dynasty, was talented with enchantment and could delude other people. She set up a cult in the court for controlling the lord.[18] In the meantime, a belief in the fox spirit was also developed, which was later mixed with the idea of the female spirit.[19] Both Buddhism and Daoism in the Southern Dynasties accepted the idea that fox spirits could disturb their religious practitioners.

In the Northern Dynasties, cat and rodent spirits were more popular. In the Sui Dynasty, some women worshiped cat demons. Dugu Tuo (ca. 6th century), the step-brother of Sui Emperor Wendi's (Yang Jian, 541-604, r. 581-604) wife, once tried to command a cat demon to enchant Wendi's wife, but his conspiracy was uncovered and thwarted. So, Wendi ordered that Dugu Tuo should be killed. Wendi's wife requested to save Tuo's life by fasting for three days. Wendi eventually followed his wife's request and enacted a less severe punishment.[20] The rodent demon was

17 Michel Strickmann, "The Consecration Sūtra: A Buddhist Book of Spells," *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha,* eds. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Kyoko Tokuno (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 75-118; Michel Strimann, *Mantras et mandarins: le bouddhisme tantrique en Chine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 127-163.

18 Yao Silian et al, *Chen shu,* juan 7 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 131.

19 For a study on the fox spirit, see Xiaofei Kang, *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender, and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

20 Fang Xuanling et al., *Sui shu*, juan 36 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 1108-1109.

reported several times in the capital city when Wendi's son Yang Yong (562?-604) was the crowned prince. So, Wendi ordered one of his officials, Xiao Ji (525?-614?), to perform an exorcism for Yang Yong's palace to get rid of the rodent demons. Xiao Ji performed a Daoist ritual of exorcism by commanding gods to suppress these rodent demons.[21] It should be noted that many early medieval Chinese Daoist texts tell stories of exorcism. For instance, in its chapter on killing demons, a fifth-century Daoist text entitled the *Scripture of Divine Incantations of the Supreme Pervasive Abyss of the Most High* (Taishang dongyuan Shenzhou jing [太上洞淵神咒經] , juan 14), notes that if the demon king transformed himself into the bodies of birds and brought up the pandemic in the human realm, Daoist priests could erect a Daoist altar for performing an exorcism. The Daoist masters of three caverns could create ritual space, turn scriptures, chant spells, set up a feast, offer sacrifices, and pray to the gods to end the pandemic and bestow blessings. Many other Daoist ritual manuals also offer ritual methods for exorcising beast demons. In the Chapter on Petitioning to Officials of the *Book of Magic Writs of the Orthodox Oneness* (Zhengyi Fawen zhangguan Pin [正一法文章官品], DZ. 1218), the Daoist lord could command celestial generals and soldiers in charge of tiger and rodent demonic spirits.[22]

In the early medieval period, Buddhist ideas of reincarnation from humans to beasts were incorporated into some Daoist literature. Some Daoist texts said that deviant demons and beast spirits could corrupt men, and the beast spirits could seduce women. In the chapter on saving those in suffering of the *Scripture of the Most High from the Dongxuan Lingbao Canon Regarding Retribution and Karmic Causes* (Taishang dongxuan lingbao yebao yinyuan jing [太上洞玄靈寶業報因緣經], DZ. 336), a story tells that a tiger spirit deluded a woman who resided in the deep mountain, so she gave birth to four sons who had tiger bodies. Daoist priests helped her escape the delusion by offering spells, chanting scriptures, and bestowing precepts. The *Scripture of the Most High from the Dongxuan Lingbao Canon Regarding Retribution and Karmic Causes* also noted that the humans who received bad retributions from their evil deeds could transform their bodies into many beasts, such as rabbits, deer, pythons, tigers, eagles, dogs, foxes, and snakes. If one received the body of a snake, he or she could always be thirsty and hungry and was hunted by everyone who saw it. This scripture claimed that if one loaned property or money to someone else but intimidated the debtors, he or she could be reborn in the body of domestic beasts, such as a cow, sheep, pig, or dog. Hence, reincarnation as beasts and being hunted and killed became common in Buddhism and Daoism in the early medieval period.

21 Suishu, juan 78, 1775-1776.

22 For a discussion on dealing with rat plagues in this text, see Franciscus Verellen, *Imperiled Destinies: The Daoist Quest for Deliverance in Medieval China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2019), 112.

Conclusion

This paper started from a close reading of a message in the Chinese translation of the *MMS*. Twelve zodiac animals were portrayed as the reincarnated forms of Bodhisattvas who took turns to travel to different realms to teach those who were reborn in the life forms of animals and enlighten them. This message described a cosmological image of the Buddhist world centered on Mount Sumeru, with four continents and four seas surrounding this mountain. However, in this message, these four continents were arranged in a geographical order that started from the south international cardinal direction in the *MMS*. I suggest that this arrangement was due to the South Asia-centric worldview in early Buddhist cosmology. When the *MMS* was translated into the Chinese language, this South Asia-centered worldview was replaced with a Sino-centric worldview that considered the east as the first of four cardinal directions of four continents. The Chinese translation was processed and transmitted, which might indicate that in early medieval China, Buddhist writers and learners attempted to adapt Buddhist knowledge of geography and environment to meet the needs of Chinese Buddhist readers.

Furthermore, while commenting on the twelve zodiac animals in this message, many Chinese Buddhist writers, such as masters Zhiyi, Zhanran, and others, mobilized indigenous Chinese intellectual resources to interpret these animals. They attempted to establish corresponding relationships and connections between the twelve zodiac animals in the *MMS* and traditional Chinese theories of five phases and twelve terrestrial branches. In the meantime, they reinterpreted these twelve animals by introducing ideas of beast demons in the early medieval period across the boundaries of Buddhism, Daoism, and popular beliefs. Therefore, the original twelve animals in the *MMS* which appeared as compassionate Bodhisattvas later were transformed by medieval Chinese Buddhist writers into demonic beast spirits.

Appendix:

Zhiyi's interpretation combining five directions, five phases, and thirty-six beasts:[23]

Directions	East	South	West	North	Center
Phases	Wood	Fire	Metal	Water	Earth
Beasts	Wild cat, leopard, tiger, fox, rabbit, racoon, dragon, alligator, fish	Cicada, carp, snake, deer, horse, water deer, sheep, goose, eagle	Ape, gibbon, monkey, bird, rooster, pheasant, dog, wolf, dhole	Hound, pig, mythical beast, cat, rodent, mythical cattle, crab, tortoise	Osprey, dhole, turtle
	寅yin卯 mou辰 chen	己 ji午 wu 未wei	申 shen酉 you戌xu	亥 hai子 zi 丑chou	

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