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Deciphering the Interaction between Daoism and Buddhism in the Wei-Jin Period Tale of "The Golden Pot of Futi"

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Abstract: The story of Futijinhu 浮提金壺 ("Golden Pot of Futi") in Shiyiji 拾遺記 (Record of Gleanings), whose authorship is traditionally attributed to Wang Jia (王嘉) from the Eastern Jin Dynasty, appears to be a Daoist rendition at first glance, reimagining the legend of Laozi's *Daodejing*. However, upon closer examination of the depiction of "Golden Pot of Futi", the characters with "Shentong Shanshu" (神通善書, supranormal cognition and exceptional writing ability) and the narrative of writing and its outcomes, it becomes evident that this tale harbors a multifaceted Buddhist essence. In the tale, one can observe the changes and diversity in the early methods of translating Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, the references and adaptations of Buddhist imagery and narratives by Daoists, the understanding and imagination of materials used for writing Buddhist scriptures and early iconographic forms, and even the author's insights and responses to the evolving religious landscape of their era. When placed in a broader historical context, exploring the Buddhist elements in this tale further aids in understanding the dynamic interactions between Buddhism and Daoism during the Wei and Jin periods.

Keywords: *Record of Gleanings*; Futi; golden pot; supranormal cognition; Buddhism and Daoism

1. Introduction

During the Eastern Jin Dynasty, the esteemed Daoist Wang Jia (王嘉) (?–387) frequently interwove Buddhist terminology and narratives into his work *Record of Gleanings*. Scholars such as Wang Guoliang, in his book Weijin nanbeichao zhiguaixiaoshuo yanjiu 魏晉南北朝志怪小說研究 (Research on Strange Stories in the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties), traced the story of "Stork Extinguishing Fire" (G. Wang 2008, p. 57) in *Record of Gleanings* back to the Buddhist tale of "Parrot Extinguishing Fire". Li Jianguo, in the Tangqian zhiguaixiaoshuo jishi 唐前志怪小說輯釋 (Annotated Collection of Strange Stories Before the Tang Dynasty), suggested that the story of "Muxu Zhiguo" (沐胥之國, Land of Muxu) in *Record of Gleanings*, with terms like "Sindhu" and "Buddha", is also linked to Buddhism (J. Li 2011, pp. 393–95). Wang Xingfen, in her paper titled Shiyiji foxueyingxiang tanyuan 拾遺記佛學影響探源 (Exploring the Influence of Buddhism in Record of Gleanings), surveyed the entire book and identified nearly ten stories clearly derived from Buddhist scriptures, with the additional observation that the two characters with "Shentong Shanshu" (神通善書, supranormal cognition and exceptional writing ability) in the story of the Futijinhu 浮提金壺 ("Golden Pot of Futi") also have their origins in Buddhist scriptures (X. Wang 2010, pp. 69–72). However, previous researchers have not fully appreciated the significance or delved deeply enough into the interpretation of the "Golden Pot of Futi" story. However, the attention and depth of interpretation given to this story by previous scholars still fall short. This deficiency is mainly evident in the fact that prior researchers have not conducted a thorough examination of the Buddhist details present in various aspects such as language, imagery, characters, and plot within "The Golden Pot of Futi". Addressing these gaps would greatly contribute to our understanding of the early propagation and development of Buddhism. Furthermore, within Record of Gleanings, the "Golden Pot of Futi" serves as a crucial reflection of the author's religious beliefs

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and stance. Any religious propaganda that sanctifies the origins of religious leaders and core works serves to convey the religious stance and foster unity among believers. This study examines how the Daoist Wang Jia, the author of the tale, incorporates elements from Buddhism into the legendary narrative of the putative founder of Daoism, Laozi. Yet, it is truly intriguing that a story written by a Daoist figure about Daoist leaders and core Daoist works is imbued with Buddhist elements. By analyzing this story, it becomes clearer why Record of Gleanings by Wang Jia exhibits such pronounced Buddhist influences, why Buddhist elements are introduced into the significant legend of Laozi's writing, and whether such alterations contradict Wang Jia's religious stance as a Daoist. Moreover, it raises questions about the source of Wang Jia's understanding of Buddhism and why the tale deliberately conceals traces of Buddhism. Exploring these questions necessitates a comprehensive exploration of the Buddhist elements within this particular narrative.

2. The Buddhist Undertones in the Language, Objects, and Characters

The story of "Golden Pot of Futi" in Record of Gleanings represents a fresh retelling of the legend surrounding Laozi's writings. It begins with the presentation of exotic offerings from the land of Futi, wherein the critical object, the "Golden Pot of Futi", is introduced. Although initially seeming to be a mere golden ink pot containing exotic ink, closer scrutiny of its appearance and descriptions of its extraordinary powers reveal layers of as-yet-unrecognized Buddhist influences.

The following is a translation of "Golden Pot of Futi" from Volume 1 of Record of Gleanings:

> From the land of Futi, two individuals with supranormal cognition were offered. They appeared both aged and youthful, capable of concealing their forms while projecting their shadows and hiding their shapes when their voices were heard. From between their elbows emerged a golden pot measuring four inches, adorned with the engravings of five dragons, sealed with blue clay. Within the pot lay a dark liquid akin to pure ink; when sprinkled upon the ground or stones, it formed characters resembling those of seal and clerical scripts. They chronicled the genesis of the cosmos and human relationships, aiding Laozi in crafting the Daodejing, extending to ten thousand words. Their writings were inscribed on jade tablets, bound with golden cords, and stored in jade boxes. Day and night, they toiled tirelessly, their bodies weary, and their spirits drained. When the ink in the golden pot ran dry, the two individuals excavated their hearts and drained their blood to replenish the ink. They then extracted marrow from their brains to use as substitutes for ink when their blood was depleted, even resorting to their own marrow as candles. When their marrow and blood were entirely exhausted, they found remnants of elixirs in the jade tube and used them to anoint their bodies, which then became as robust as before. As Laozi said, "Further eliminate the superfluous, preserving five thousand words". Upon the completion of the scripture, the two individuals vanished without a trace. (Wang 2015, p. 80)

The term "Futi" is a transliteration from Sanskrit, an abbreviated rendition of the Buddhist term "Jambudvipa". (南閻浮 Nanyanfuti/閻浮提 Yanfuti/南贍部洲 Nanzhanbuzhou) is one of the geographical concepts in Buddhist mythology, referred to as one of the "Si Da Bu Zhou" (四大部洲, Four Continents). Among the three transliterations, "Yanfuti" is the earliest recorded, as seen in Volume 3 of Huilin's Yiqiejingyinyi 一切經音義 (Sounds and Meanings of All the Words in the Scriptures), where it explains "Jambudvipa" as follows: "The pronunciation is 'ran', with a departing tone. This is the general name in Sanskrit for this great land. In ancient translations, it was sometimes called '諺浮' (Yanfu) or '琰浮' (Yanfu), both of which are corruptions of Sanskrit. The correct Sanskrit pronunciation is 彌謨 (mimo)" (Shixuanying and Huilin 2012b, p. 528a). From the explanations in *Sounds and Meanings of All the Words in the Scriptures*, it is evident that "Yanfuti" is an old translation for Nanzhanbuzhou (Jambudvipa), showing the changes between phonetic transliteration and semantic translation during the translation process of the Buddhist scriptures

into Chinese. Since the first century AD, when Buddhism was introduced during the late Eastern Han Dynasty, monks from China and abroad began the thousand-year-long work of translating Buddhist scriptures. Through the medium of translating Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, more Buddhist stories and terminology became widely disseminated. The period of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, during which Wang Jia lived, was precisely when the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese accumulated and gradually demonstrated its dominant influence (W. Li 2011, pp. 90–137). *Record of Gleanings* directly adopts the Sanskrit transliteration "Golden Pot of Futi" used in early Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures as the name of the source of the core exotic item the "Golden Pot", thus revealing the connection between this tale and the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. In addition to directly borrowing the exotic name "Futi" from early Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures, the shape of the "Golden Pot of Futi" and its golden feature, as well as the peculiar traits of the black liquid it contains, are also closely related to multiple Buddhist elements frequently appearing in early Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures, such as "Yanfu Natuo Shu" (閻浮捺陀樹, jambu tree) and the "Yanfutan Jin" (閻浮檀金 the gold from the Jambunadi river). According to the translation of Foshuo lishiapitan lun 佛說立世阿毗昙論 (Explanatory Discourse about Abhidharmic Literature from Buddhavacana) by the Indian monk Zhendi (真諦) (499–569) during the Chen Dynasty, Jambudvipa is named after the "Jambu" that grows on the continent, with its roots covered in golden sand. The shared element of gold further connects the "Golden Pot of Futi" with the "Jambu".

In the "Nanyanfu Ti Pin Di Er" 南閻浮提品第二 (Chapter Two of the Southern Yanfuti Sutra), Volume 1 of Foshuo lishiapitan lun, it says:

> The Buddha said: "Bhiksu, there is a tree called jambu. Named after this tree, the land is called Jambudvipa. This tree grows in Jambudvipa, towards the north, south of the river. The base of this tree is positioned at the very center of the continent. Measuring from the center of the tree's base, east to west, it spans a thousand yojanas, showing full growth, a pleasing form, and beauty … The roots of the tree are entirely covered with golden sand … When the fruits ripen and fall to the ground, they split open of their own accord. If a bhiksu reaches into the fruit through the opening, extending his hand up to his arm, even his longest finger cannot touch the seed. Pulling his hand out, it becomes stained by the fruit, turning his arm red, as though it were dyed with the most esteemed red sandalwood sap in the world. The scent of the fruit can intoxicate the mind". (Takakusu 1983, pp. 174b–175a)

In terms of their depiction, the juice from the "jambu tree" and the black ink within the "Golden Pot of Futi" share notable similarities.

Huilin, in *Sounds and Meanings of All the Words in the Scriptures*, Volume 21, interpreting Huayanjing-Rulaixianxiangpin 華嚴經—如來現相品 (Buddhavataṃsaka-sutra—the Manifestation of the Tathagatas)—states:

> The gold from the Jambunadi river refers to a river in the Western Regions, situated near the jambu tree, with the gold being extracted from this river. The river is thus named after the tree, and the gold derives its name from the river. There's a belief that the juice of the jambu tree's fruit when it touches objects, turns them into gold. This gold then flows into the river, dyeing the stones to produce this special gold. The gold from the Jambunadi river is characterized by its reddish-yellow color, accompanied by a hint of purple flame-like brilliance. (Shixuanying and Huilin 2012a, p. 861a)

It is quite evident that the interpretation of "the gold from the Jambunadi river" in Sounds and Meanings of All the Words in the Scriptures and the depiction of the "jambu tree" in Foshuo lishiapitan lun offer differing explanations of the same phenomenon. By contrasting the Futi in the tale with the Buddhist scripture "Yanfuti (Jambudvipa)", the pot with the golden tree, the ink within the pot with the juice of the fruit, and the transfor-

mation of writing on stones with the transformation of objects into gold, we can roughly infer that the appearance and abilities of the "Golden Pot of Futi" in the tale are largely derived from a reimagining of the concept of the "jambū tree" in Buddhist scripture, where the fruit's black juice turns objects into gold. It is quite apparent that the core imagery of the "Golden Pot of Futi" is inspired by Buddhism, thus making it a fictional tale rooted in Buddhist legends.

The Buddhist undertones in the story of "Golden Pot of Futi" in Record of Gleanings extend beyond exotic objects. Various aspects of the characters' names and behaviors in the tale also reflect strong Buddhist influences. In Record of Gleanings, the exotic individuals presented from "the land of Futi" are referred to as "two individuals with supranormal cognition and exceptional writing ability". The term "Shentong" (神通, supranormal cognition) inherently resonates with Buddhist themes. Additionally, the description in the tale of these individuals who "appeared both aged and youthful, capable of concealing their forms while projecting their shadows, and hiding their shapes when their voices were heard" bears a striking resemblance to the concept of "Shenbiantong/Ruyitong" (神變通/如意通) (unimpeded bodily action) described in Chinese-translated Buddhist scriptures. This implies that the characters' uniqueness in this tale may also derive from Buddhist culture.

Unimpeded bodily action is one of the supranormal cognitions proclaimed by Buddhism to be attainable through the practice of Dharma. Unimpeded bodily action allows an individual to control all things and change their form at will. For example, in Mahaprajnaparamitasastra, translated by Kumarajiva during the Later Qin dynasty, it states: "There are three kinds of Unimpeded bodily action: the power to reach any place, the power to transform, and the holy wish-fulfilling power … The transformer can make the large small and the small large, one into many and many into one, and can transform all sorts of things at will" (Takakusu 1983, pp. 97c–98a). Furthermore, at the beginning of Buddhism's introduction to China, the Buddha was often depicted in Chinese accounts as having the ability to change his appearance at will. It is evident that the depiction and naming of the "two individuals with supranormal cognition and exceptional writing ability" in Record of Gleanings are deeply inspired by the Buddhist concept of "unimpeded bodily action", reflecting the portrayal of the Buddha that was popularized during the early spread of Buddhism in China. While some of these connections have been partially uncovered by previous scholars, the Buddhist essence within the characters of the tale goes even deeper.

The primary action of the "two individuals with supranormal cognition and exceptional writing ability" is to assist Laozi in writing the Daodejing. After the black ink in the four-inch "Golden Pot of Futi" runs out, the "two individuals with supranormal cognition and exceptional writing ability" sacrifice their own flesh and blood to replenish the ink and continue the task of writing the "Daodejing". This act of self-harm for the sake of writing religious texts is distinctly reminiscent of Buddhist ascetic practices. Self-mutilation is a significant aspect of Buddhist asceticism. "Blood scripture writing", the practice of using one's own blood as ink for copying scriptures by inflicting wounds upon oneself, was increasingly embraced by Buddhist monks in China during the Wei and Jin dynasties. The Damamuka-nidana Sutra, translated by Huijue of the Northern Wei dynasty, includes various Jataka tales set in "Jambudvipa" (the Buddhist term for the human world), where self-harm was employed as a means to accomplish the writing of Buddhist scriptures.

The following is a translation of Volume 1 of Damamuka-nidana Sutra:

> Once again, the Venerable One spoke of a time long past, spanning countless eons, when in the great kingdom of Jambudvīpa, there lived a mighty king … The sage responded humbly, "I dare not defy the Master's command". Then, the Venerable One declared, "If you can peel your skin to make parchment, fashion your bones into pens, and mix your blood as ink to transcribe my teachings, only then will I impart them to you". Upon hearing this, Uttara, filled with joy and reverence for the Tathagata's instruction, eagerly complied. He immediately began to strip his skin, extract his bones for writing implements, and blend his blood with ink. Looking up, he earnestly entreated, "Now is the opportune moment.

> I implore you to proceed swiftly". At that instant, the Brahmin commenced reciting the verse … Upon completing the recitation, he personally took up the task of transcription, dispatching messengers to disseminate and reproduce the teachings. Consequently, all the inhabitants of Jambudvīpa were encouraged to recite, study, and embody the teachings as they pursued their spiritual paths. (Takakusu 1983, pp. 351b–351c)

Damamuka-nidana Sutra is a collection of Indian stories. After referencing the accounts of the compilation of the Damamuka-nidana Sutra found in Chusanzangjiji 出三藏記集 (Compilation of Notes on the Translation of the Tripiṭaka) by Sengyou (Sengyou 1995) of the Qi and Liang Dynasties, Chen Yinke concluded:

> "The Damamuka-nidana Sutra was originally notes taken by eight monks during their lectures. Upon examining the contents today, we found that it is indeed a compilation of Indian stories. From this, we can infer that the practice of using stories to elucidate the meanings of scriptures, prevalent in Central Asia at the time, likely originated in India and gradually spread to the East. Therefore, the structure of texts such as Dharmapada found in the current canon is indeed the authentic interpretation of Buddhist scriptures by Indians. The interpretation of scriptures in this land, such as the writings of the Tiantai Patriarchs, has already been Sinicized and differs from the works of Indian scripture exegesis. While scriptural teachings often incorporate stories, the interpretation of these stories can vary depending on the level of understanding and the context of the listeners, resulting in divergent interpretations of what may have originally been a single story or the amalgamation of two stories".[1]

Although the Damamuka-nidana Sutra may have been compiled later than the Record of Gleanings, the oral traditions passed down by the eight monks themselves likely underwent a long process of transmission. Furthermore, Buddhism's sanctification of writing scriptures began to influence China during the Wei and Jin periods. As John Kieschnick pointed out in The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture, scholars have not paid much attention to the changes in the attitude towards books brought about by Buddhists, namely, that books are the source of knowledge and divine power (John 2020, pp. 214–21). It can be seen that the origins of the sanctification of religious writing lie within Buddhism.

Since the "two individuals with supranormal cognition and exceptional writing ability" are characters with Buddhist connotations, and the plot of using blood instead of ink to assist in writing largely stems from the sanctified writing of Buddhist scriptures, it begs the question: Is the Daodejing of "ten thousand words" written by these two individuals also related to Buddhism? This deductive reasoning based on causality is viable, and beyond mere deduction, the literary portrayal in the tale also possesses many exotic features. While the description of the writing process and its outcome in the tale seems exaggerated and fictionalized, the tale appears to deliberately emphasize the stark differences between the materials, script, and presentation style used by the "two individuals with supranormal cognition and exceptional writing ability" and the traditional Chinese writing methods.

Firstly, the writing materials depicted in the tale are markedly different from traditional Chinese writing implements. The "black ink" found in the "Golden Pot of Futi" is clearly a product of literary imagination inspired by the ink material. Prior to the advent and widespread use of paper, palm leaves were the predominant writing medium in ancient India, referred to as "pattra" in Sanskrit and transliterated into Chinese as "Beiduoluo" (貝多羅), or abbreviated as "Beiye" (貝葉). As most of the literature introduced to China during that time was Buddhist, this writing medium originating from ancient India was generally referred to as "pattra-leaf scriptures". Due to the variance in writing materials, the ink used in the "pattra-leaf scriptures" differed significantly from Chinese ink. Traditional Chinese ink was primarily derived from partially burnt wood mixed with adhesive substances after collecting soot (Qian 2002, p. 125).

In contrast, ink in ancient India was often prepared by blending charcoal with adhesives (or vegetable oil) and boiling the mixture in water vapor. The ink was typically kept in liquid form prior to use, and metal vessels were commonly employed in the manufacturing and storage. Dr. Shrinath Vaidya M of the SDM College of Ayurveda, in his paper "Writing In Ancient India And Writing Materials", highlighted two main categories of ink used in ancient India. One type, known as Masi, was a black ink utilized to fill the carved grooves on palm leaves with a sharp pen, necessitating storage in an ink pot called a Masi-patra. The other type of ink was used directly for writing, requiring a cooking process of over twenty days using copper utensils. Compared to traditional Chinese ink, the black ink depicted in the "Golden Pot of Futi" tale is evidently more akin to the ink used in the "pattra-leaf scriptures" of ancient India. The Indian National Museum houses several ink pots dating back to around the 5th century BCE, typically small in size and predominantly made of metal. As illustrated in Figure 1, this is the ink pot preserved in the National Museum of India. Theses ink pots are mostly compact in size and are similar to those described in the tale.

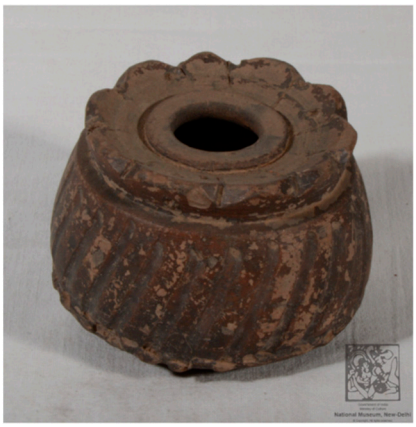

Figure 1. An ink pot adorned with lotus patterns from the Gupta Empire (circa 5th century AD). National Museum of India.

As shown in Figure 2, for religious sculptures dating from around the 6th century BCE preserved in the National Museum of India, one of the two attendants of the solar deity Surya, Panji, is portrayed holding an ink pot and pen, underscoring the significance of ink pots in Indian religious culture. Similarly, remnants of pre-Tang Dynasty Chinese Buddhist cave art depict attendants holding vessel-shaped objects, as seen in Cave 12 of the Maijishan Grottoes in Gansu. Moreover, early Daoist stone carvings from the Northern Wei period often feature Daoist immortals and worshippers in a similar fashion. From these remnants, we can observe the existence of the ink pot as a divine attribute in Indian sculptures.

In early Chinese Buddhist sculptures, the triad Buddha statues (triumvirate), appearing early and in relatively abundant numbers, also take on the form of a central figure flanked by two attendants. As noted by Akira Miyaji in his book Iconology of Parinirvana and Maitreya: from India to Central Asia (Akira 2009, p. 213), the form of the triad represents the Buddha sculptures of Gandhara-style, serving as the source for combination sculptures beyond standalone sculptures and jatakas-related relief works. Like other early Buddhist sculptures, the triad statues underwent a gradual process of Sinicization. However, the localization of the attendants' hand-held objects, as integral parts of the sculptures, has yet to receive proper scrutiny and tracing. Undoubtedly, this is related to the high susceptibility of Buddha statues' hands to damage. The story of "Golden Pot of Futi" can provide a clue to offer new insights into the form and specific characteristics of early Chinese Buddhist sculptures. Furthermore, Buddhist sculptures and even Daoist triad sculptures that emerged during the Northern Wei period under the influence of Buddhism present new iconographic perspectives for understanding this particular tale.

Figure 2. A stone sculpture from ancient India depicting an attendant holding an ink pot, dating back to around the 6th century AD. National Museum of India. The red circle highlights the ink pot image.

Furthermore, in Record of Gleanings, the description of the text produced by the "two individuals with supranormal cognition and exceptional writing ability" as being in "seal and clercial script", which highlights the difficulty in discerning and reading their written words, is a characteristic that aligns with ancient perceptions of foreign Buddhist scriptures. Ancient people often used "seal and clercial script" to categorize ancient, mysterious, or unfamiliar characters. For instance, Haineishizhouji 海内十洲記 (Records of the Ten Continents) states, "The characters in their books are written in seal script, and are not understood by the Han people".[2] During the Southern Liang Dynasty, Sengyou wrote in Huhanyijing wenziyinyi tongyiji 胡漢譯經文字音義同異記 (A Record of the Similarities and Differences in the Translated Scriptures of the Chinese and Barbarians), comparing the various changes in Chinese characters to the diverse and complex nature of foreign Buddhist scriptures. Sengyou said, "When writing scriptures in the West, although they originate from the same Sanskrit, there are often differences among the thirty-six kingdoms. Compared to those in the Central Plains, the variations are especially diverse, resembling changes in seal and clerical scripts (Sengyou 1995, pp. 12–13)". This illustrates that not only ordinary people had difficulty recognizing foreign Buddhist scriptures, but for eminent Han monks, the diverse changes in the scriptures due to the complexity of their foreign origins were also a challenge during the process of translating Buddhist scriptures. By contrasting the methods of binding and preservation, such as "written on jade tablets, bound with golden cords, and stored in jade cases", with similar practices described in the tale, the accomplishments, as depicted in the tale, are comparable to real-life pattra-leaf scriptures.

Wang Jia, the tale writer who lived during the Eastern Jin Dynasty, might have been able to read the translated Buddhist scriptures or gain an understanding of Buddhist concepts such as "Futi" and "supranormal cognition" through interactions with Buddhist monks. However, was it possible for people during the Wei and Jin Dynasties to have access to or to have understanding of the physical objects resembling the pattra-leaf scriptures, and could they have such a profound understanding of the way pattra-leaf scriptures were written?

Since Zhang Qian's diplomatic missions to the Western Regions during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Western Han Dynasty, many Western regions influenced by Buddhism have had frequent and convenient exchanges with China. The impetus from political and trade demands provided more convenient opportunities for the overland transmission of Buddhism to Han territory. The flow of traffic involved not only the travel of people, but also the circulation of goods. Although there is a lack of direct evidence of the transmission

of Buddhist scriptures as tangible objects into China, it is conceivable that human memory is limited, and the dissemination of a large number of Buddhist scriptures, in addition to relying on oral transmission, also required direct circulation through books as carriers.

Regarding the literary evidence, the renowned Sutra in Forty-two Sections, often associated with the legendary transmission of Buddhist scriptures by the White Horse during the Yongping era of Emperor Ming of the Han Dynasty (58–75 AD), is believed to have been directly transcribed from Buddhist scriptures held by Tokharestan in the Western Regions. It is highly likely that the original manuscripts provided by Tokharestan retained the form of pattra-leaf scriptures. Shidao Shi from the Tang Dynasty, in Fayuanzhulin 法苑珠林 (Grove of Jewels in the Garden of the Dharma), cited the Mingdineiji 明帝内記 (Inner Records of Emperor Ming), stating the following:

> "The White Horse gained renown for its miraculous events, and the White Horse Temple was established in Luoyang", adding, "The authentic pattra-leaf scriptures originated in the west". (Shidaoshi 2003, p. 2905)

Similarly, during the Southern Liang Dynasty, Sengyou, in Volume 7 of the Compilation of Notes on the Translation of the Tripiṭaka, says that, "Fang Guang Jing Ji (放光經記) recorded that Zhu Shixing from Yingchuan in the Great Wei Dynasty renounced the world in the fifth year of the Ganlu era, became a monk, and journeyed westward to the Kingdom of Khotan. There, he transcribed 90 chapters of authentic Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures, totaling over 600,000 words. In the third year of Taikang, his disciple Furutan (弗如檀), also known as Farao (法饒), was dispatched to deliver these scriptures to Luoyang … At that time, the monk from Khotan, Mokṣala, upasaka, and Zhushulan (竺叔蘭) from India transmitted orally, while Taixuan and Zhou Xuanming took notes together" (Sengyou 1995, p. 264).

Zhu Shixing (203–282 AD) was an early Han monk who traveled westward in search of the Dharma during the Wei and Jin Dynasties. Firstly, the original Buddhist scriptures that Zhu Shixing obtained for translation during the fifth year of the Ganlu era of the Wei dynasty (260 AD) likely originated from the Fanshuhuben 梵书胡本 (Brahmaṇa of the Barbarians) in the Khotan of the Western Regions. This suggests that, before being translated into Chinese, many Buddhist scriptures introduced to China probably retained the format of pattra-leaf scriptures. Secondly, the method of collaborative translation described in the citation involved one person orally transmitting the text while two others wrote it down, which mirrors the relationship structure of the characters in the tale. Dr. Siu Sai Yau points out in his A History of Collaborative Buddhist Scripture Translation in Medieval China that early Chinese Buddhist translation mainly involved three types: group translations, large-scale translation centers, and elite translation centers. The common method in small group translation was precisely the combination of oral transmission and written transcription, with the cited examples indicating that having two people writing down the text was one of the most frequent combinations (Siu 2024, p. 18).

Regarding archaeological evidence, since the 20th century, fragments of early pattra-leaf scriptures have been unearthed in various locations within China. For example, in the late 19th century, British explorer Marc Aurel Stein discovered a collection of scripture fragments resembling pattra-leaf scriptures at sites such as Dandan-Uiliq D. III and the Endere Buddhist monastery site in what is now Hotan, China. Dating back roughly from the 7th to 8th centuries AD, these fragments of early pattra-leaf scriptures provide evidence that ancient Buddhist scriptures in the Kingdom of Khotan (Hotan today) may have retained the form of pattra-leaf scriptures prior to this period. Through the combined confirmation of the literature records and archaeological findings, it is evident that before the Tang Dynasty, original scriptures or Western Region Buddhist scriptures retaining the form of pattra-leaf scriptures may have served as source materials for the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. As early as the late Han to Wei and Jin Dynasties, Chinese monks and scholars likely possessed some understanding of the form, production, and writing styles of pattra-leaf scriptures. As depicted in Figure 3, early Buddhist scriptures unearthed in China indeed take the form of pattra-leaves, similar to the format of the

pattra-leaf scriptures. The binding and storage of these pattra-leaf scriptures, as illustrated in Figure 4, also resemble those described in the tale.

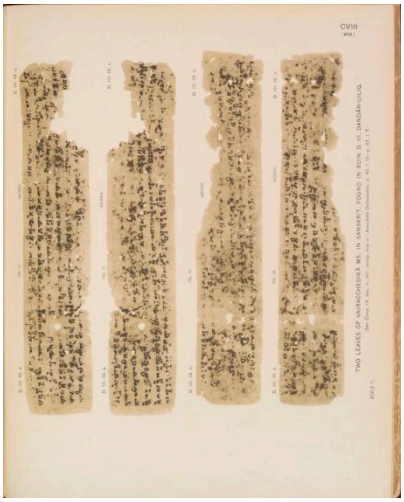

Figure 3. A fragment of the Vajracchedika, presented in the form of a double-sided pattra-leaf scriptures in Sanskrit, originating from the Dandan-Uiliq D. III Site in today's Hotan region (Aurel 2009, p. 108).

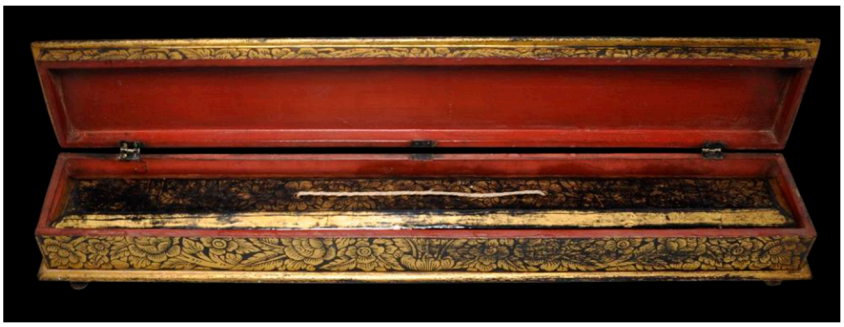

Figure 4. A pattra-leaf scripture preserved in the British Library, cataloged as OR.16893.

In previous studies of the literature, more attention has been directed towards the influence of Wang Jia's identity as a Daoist on his composition of Record of Gleanings. However, there has been a tendency to overlook the impact of Wang Jia's personal life experiences and the broader historical backdrop of his narrative craft. As stated in Book of Jin, Volume 95, Records of Wang Jia: "Wang Jia, styled Zinian, hailed from Anyang in Longxi" (Fang 1974, p. 2496). Anyang in Longxi was situated in the northeastern part of Qin'an County, within Tianshui City, Gansu Province. This area has been positioned along the Silk Road since its inception during the Western Han Dynasty. This route traversed through the Guanzhong region, crossed the Longshan (隴山), passed through the Hexi Corridor, and served as the primary conduit leading to the Western Regions.

During the Eastern Jin Dynasty, where Wang Jia lived, the Longxi region not only served as a gateway for foreign monks entering China, but also witnessed the rise of local regimes that embraced Buddhist doctrines. Buddhist activities flourished in this region during the Eastern Jin period (Yan 2007, pp. 9, 94). According to *Book of Jin*, Wang Jia secluded himself in the mountains and forests of present-day Weinan (渭南) and Lantian (藍田) regions in his early years, which were also situated along the Silk Road. Being born and raised in areas adjacent to the Silk Road provided Wang Jia with ample opportunities to encounter various exotic tales and products from foreign lands. Content related to Buddhism might have entered Wang Jia's field of vision during this time. The novelty of unfamiliar experiences in his early life could have served as a catalyst for imagination, and

enriched the sources of inspiration for his fiction writing. This may well be the initial and significant reason why Record of Gleanings is imbued with Buddhist elements.The following 4 pictures of cultural relics are the confirmation and examples of the above discussion.

3. The Buddhist Elements Embedded in the Central Plot

Through the analysis presented above, it becomes apparent that the portrayal of the "two individuals with supranormal cognition and exceptional writing ability" aiding in writing is rooted in imaginative reinterpretations of early foreign Buddhist scriptures. Consequently, the entire narrative serves as a tale, blending Buddhist and Daoist scriptures, aimed at conveying its own religious observations and perspectives. Within the dominant Confucian intellectual framework of native China, and amidst the prevailing religious ambiance of Daoism, Buddhism, as an imported faith, faced a fundamental challenge from its inception in China—how to swiftly garner trust and admiration across various social classes.

During Buddhism's initial dissemination, its ability to adapt to indigenous Chinese culture emerged as a critical strategy for its rapid acclimatization and growth in the Chinese milieu. As numerous Buddhist scriptures were translated and introduced, and as the Chinese Buddhist community expanded, Daoism found itself in a position of being passively relied upon by Buddhism. Particularly during the phase of vigorous Buddhist scripture dissemination, Daoism confronted the task of navigating Buddhism's influence and seeking higher status in the interplay between the two faiths. These inquiries, or rather the historical contexts experienced by both Buddhism and Daoism, are likewise reflected in the central plot of the "Golden Pot of Futi" story within Record of Gleanings.

The tale subtly merges Buddhism and Daoism into a singular entity by ambiguously suggesting that Buddhist scriptures serve as the foundational text for the Daoist masterpiece, the Daodejing, thereby blurring the origins of both religions. The underlying motive behind this narrative device bears a striking resemblance to the legend of "Laozi Huahu" (老子化胡, Laozi Converting the Barbarians), which conflates the founders of Buddhism and Daoism.

The portrayal of the principal–subordinate relationship between Buddhism and Daoism depicted in the "Golden Pot of Futi" story is also rooted in the Daoist perspective. Despite the extreme sacrifices made by the "two individuals with supranormal cognition and exceptional writing ability" with Buddhist backgrounds, the ultimate authority to edit the scriptures remains with Laozi, the putative founder of Daoism. In the tale, Laozi assumes an authoritative role akin to Confucius' authority in "Shan Shi" (刪詩). Through the comparison between Buddhist scriptures and the *Daodejing*, the tale subtly suggests that the verbosity of Buddhist scriptures is undesirable, while the authority of the Daodejing surpasses that of the extensive Buddhist scriptures.

A deeper interpretation of the "Golden Pot of Futi" story easily evokes parallels with the popular legend of "Buddhist scriptures orally transmitted by Yicun (伊存)" prevalent during the Wei and Jin dynasties.

In the *Book of Wei*, Volume 30 of Records of the Three Kingdoms, Pei Songzhi cites the Weilue·xirongzhuan 魏略·西戎傳 (Weilue·Western Barbarians) by Yuhuan (鱼豢), which states:

> In the first year of Yuan Shou during the reign of Emperor Ai of the Han Dynasty, the disciple Jinglu (景盧), a scholar-official, was dispatched by the King of Tokharestan to orally transmit the "Buddha Sūtra", declaring that the one who would restore it is this person. The "Buddha Sūtra" includes disciples named Linpusai, Sangmen, Shuwen, Baishuwen, Bhiksu, and Chenmen, all of whom are designated as disciples. The content of the "Buddha Sūtra" differs from that of the Chinese Laozi Classic, as Laozi traveled westward, passed through the Western Regions, reached India, and taught the barbarians. The names and titles of the disciples of the Buddha amount to twenty-nine, but they cannot all

> be listed here in detail, so they are summarized briefly as such. (S. Chen 1964, pp. 859–60)

Fang Guangchang's Futujing Kao 浮屠經考 (A Study of the Pagoda Sutra) points out that the Futujing 浮屠經 (Pagoda Sutra) mentioned in the "Weilue" is actually a Buddhist scripture, while the "Laozi Classic" naturally refers to the Daodejing. Therefore, in this tale, the Buddhist scripture is similarly regarded as a more elaborate version of the *Daodejing*. It can be inferred from phrases like "Laozi Xichuguan" (老子西出關, Laozi traveling westward) that "Buddhist scriptures orally transmitted by Yicun" is an extension and reinterpretation of the legend of "Laozi Chuguan" (老子出關, Laozi's departure) that "Mozhi Qisuozhong" (莫知其所終, no one knows his whereabouts) recorded in the Records of the Grand Historian.

Similarly, the story of the "Golden Pot of Futi" also demonstrates a subversive significance similar to early Daoist legends. Although the legend of "Laozi Huahu" is more well known, it primarily promotes the hierarchical status of the founders of Buddhism and Daoism. As Erik Zürcher pointed out in The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China, the idea of converting the barbarians originated from the Daoist circles in the latter half of the 2nd century AD. According to this theory, Buddhism is merely the religion transmitted by Laozi after his journey westward to "convert the barbarians". Subsequent critics of Buddhism, especially Daoists, used this legend as a weapon to attack the Buddhist sect (Erik 2003, p. 375)". The legend of "Buddhist scriptures orally transmitted by Yicun" and the story of the "Golden Pot of Futi" are not limited to vying for absolute lineage inheritance. For instance, in the story "Golden Pot of Futi", the two individuals with supranormal cognition and exceptional writing ability contribute significantly by using their blood and flesh to assist in the writing of the Daodejing. After completing the writing task, they even demonstrate miraculous powers of bodily recovery, making it seem as if Laozi received assistance akin to that of celestial beings. Compared to the legend of "Laozi Huahu", the "Golden Pot of Futi" transfers the fate of Laozi's unknown whereabouts to the two characters with Shentong Shanshu, which also reflects the tale's mystification and sanctification of their identities. To some extent, the characters with Buddhist attributes in the "Golden Pot of Futi" story are participants in the crucial stages of Daoist core classic writing.

Wang Jia strategically hints at the advantages of Daoist writings in the details of the tale, leveraging the long-standing dependence of Buddhism on Daoism. This more subtle and gentle expression, compared to "Laozi Huahu" and "Buddhist scriptures orally transmitted by Yicun", may also reflect the religious environment and personal experiences of Wang Jia's time. Through Laozi's words, the tale expresses a judgment on the excessively intricate nature of the Buddhist scripture. Similarly, "Buddhist scriptures orally transmitted by Yicun" also criticizes the Buddhist scripture for being overly verbose by listing similar but differently translated terms such as Linpusai, Sangmen, and Shuwen.

Some researchers consider the Buddha Sutra described in "Buddhist scriptures orally transmitted by Yicun" as a specific existing Buddhist scripture, even regarding it as the first Buddhist scripture translated into Chinese. However, by comparing the similarities in plot and idea between the tale of "Golden Pot of Futi" and the legend of "Buddhist scriptures orally transmitted by Yicun", it is evident that instead of taking this legend as an actual translation of a specific Buddhist scripture, it is more appropriate to view it as an observation and summary of the common issues in the translation of Buddhist classics during the Wei and Jin dynasties.

Over more than two hundred years of tumultuous development spanning the Han, Wei, and Jin dynasties, Buddhism underwent significant changes in its dissemination and development. During the Wei and Jin periods, a large influx of foreign Buddhist monks entered China to propagate the faith, while the community of Han monks continued to grow, and the reach of Buddhism expanded into new regions. Regarding the quantity of translated Buddhist scriptures, due to the cumulative effect over time and the diverse back-

grounds and translation abilities of different monks, there was a noticeable trend toward increasing complexity and confusion in the translations during this period.

In terms of linguistic style, the long-standing strategy of Buddhist monks was to imitate the content and tone of Daoist works. Tang Yongtong summarized the impact of Zhiquan's retranslation of the Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra during the Western Jin Dynasty, imitating the style of the "Zhuangzi" and "Laozi", stating: "Subsequently, the 'Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra' flourished in the world, and the behavior of the monks was in line with the scholars. The philosophical interests of the 'Mahaaprajnaparamita Sutra' coincide with those of 'Laozi' and 'Zhuangzi', while the style of the eminent monks closely resembles that of the literati, thus promoting the profound influence of Buddhism in China" (Tang 2008, p. 88). Thus, the skepticism about the conflation of Buddhist and Daoist writings portrayed in both tales and historical accounts indeed aligns well with the true situation of Buddhist scripture translation during the Wei and Jin periods.

Since the introduction of Buddhism, the sources of Buddhist scriptures have been diverse, the languages used have been complex, and there has been no fixed rule for translation, resulting in an increase in the number of Buddhist scriptures, but making their content increasingly difficult to understand. However, this dilemma was greatly improved for the first time during the Eastern Jin Dynasty by the efforts of the monk Dao'an (道安) (312–385).

Dao'an established a monastic system, initiated a translation field for Buddhist scriptures, and compiled the first catalog of Buddhist scriptures, among other measures, to regulate Buddhist translation activities from multiple perspectives, such as institutions, organizational forms, and literature catalogs. An academic report by Shi Qing titled Dao'an fojizhenglide kunjingyufangfa 道安佛籍整理的困境與方法 (The Dilemma and Methods of Dao'an's Compilation of Buddhist Scriptures) pointed out that during the period of five nomadic tribes and three Han generals who founded 16 states, the northern society was turbulent, and wars were frequent. The translations of scriptures, vinaya, and treatises were all incomplete. In the face of the "partially complete, partially damaged" scriptures and the difficulty of reading, Dao'an, as a monk of learning, overcame numerous difficulties and tirelessly attempted to construct a complete Tripitaka system, compiling scriptures and clarifying texts (Q. Shi 2002, p. 2002). In both tales and legends, the figure responsible for simplifying and eliminating redundancies in the Buddhist scriptures is Laozi, while in reality, it was the monks represented by Dao'an who undertook the initial organization and standardization of translated Buddhist scriptures.

It is important to emphasize here that Dao'an had interactions with Wang Jia, the author of Record of Gleanings. Both the *Book of Jin* and Gaosengzhuan 高僧傳 (Biographies of Eminent Monks) record Dao'an's advice to Wang Jia to escape from worldly affairs before his death. The *Book of Jin*, in the biography of Wang Jia, records:

> "Master Dao'an said to Jiā, 'The world is full of turmoil, and you can leave'. Jia replied, 'You should go first; I still have debts to settle'. Soon after, Dao'an passed away, and then Jia was executed (X. Fang 1974, p. 2496)". Wang Jia likely died around the 12th year of Taiyuan (387 AD), while Dao'an's earlier interaction with Wang Jia can be traced back to the 9th year of Taiyuan (384 AD), when the ruler of Later Qin, Fu Jian (苻堅), consulted Wang Jia and Dao'an on certain matters. According to the *Book of Jin*, Wang Jia had already moved to Chang'an and hidden in the Zhongnan Mountains by the end of the Qinglong period of Later Zhao, around 351 AD. Dao'an arrived in Chang'an to spread Buddhism around the fourth year of Taiyuan (379 AD) after Former Qin attacked Xiangyang. Before that, Dao'an traveled and stayed in places like present-day Hebei, Henan, Shanxi, and Xiangyang in Hubei, while Wang Jia, after embracing Daoism, secluded himself in the mountains "without socializing with others". (X. Fang 1974, pp. 2496–97)

Based on their respective whereabouts, it is evident that Wang Jia had hardly any opportunity for deep interaction with Dao'an before the latter arrived in Chang'an. Their

interaction likely began after Dao'an's arrival in Chang'an to spread Buddhism, and ended five or six years before his death in the 10th year of Taiyuan (385 AD). During these five or six years, Wang Jia adhered to the Daoist practice of tranquility and inactivity, residing in Zhongnan Mountain and Daohu Mountain to avoid worldly affairs. Therefore, the chances for Dao'an and Wang Jia to meet were limited.[3]

Wang Xingfen, in "Exploring the Influence of Buddhism in *Record of Gleanings*", considers the interaction between Wang Jia and Dao'an to be another important source of Wang Jia's understanding of Buddhism, despite the influence of the era. However, based on the analysis of their interaction timeline in this study, their connection was not deep, and it does not align with the close and profound "life-and-death friendship" summarized in Wang Xingfen's work. Rather than interpreting Dao'an's advice to Wang Jia as a reflection of their friendship, it may be more appropriate to view it as a way to highlight their shared identity as religious leaders in turbulent times.

Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out that the widespread popularity of Buddhism in Chang'an served as a key motivation for the Daoist Wang Jia to subtly incorporate many Buddhist elements into the Record of Gleanings. The implicit disdain and rejection of Buddhism in "Golden Pot of Futi" paradoxically highlight the significant influence Buddhism had on Wang Jia's writing motivations. Before his dissemination of Buddhism in Chang'an, Dao'an was already a highly influential monk. During his residency in Xiangyang, Fu Jian held Dao'an in high regard, as recorded in Gaosengzhuan, where it is mentioned that Fu Jian once sent envoys to present Dao'an with various exotic Buddhist statues and textiles, including gold-leaf images, jeweled Maitreya images, and embroidered gold-thread images. These splendid foreign Buddhist artifacts later adorned the assemblies where Dao'an preached, adding splendor to the occasions (Huijiao 1992, pp. 179–80).

As a renowned monk with significant accomplishments and favor from the ruling class of the time, Dao'an quickly gained popularity among the common people in Chang'an after his arrival, leading to the spread of a saying in the city: "If one does not take Dao'an as their teacher in learning the doctrine, they cannot resolve difficult questions" (Huijiao 1992, p. 70). In terms of religious activities, Dao'an continued to lead extensive efforts in translating and revising Buddhist scriptures with his disciple monastic community after arriving in Chang'an.

Tang Yongtong praised the significance of Dao'an's translation of scriptures in Chang'an, stating: "The translation of scriptures in Chang'an began with Dharmarakşa and reached its peak with Dao'an" (Tang 2008, p. 202). In disseminating Buddhism and absorbing followers through the establishment of the translation field, the translation of Buddhist scriptures was no longer confined to the desks of a few translating monks. With the creation of the translation field, translating Buddhist scriptures became a lively religious activity, accommodating a large number of monks supported by the authorities, thereby adding another layer to the dissemination of Buddhism.

Dao'an's arrival profoundly changed the religious atmosphere in Chang'an, and the influence of Buddhism was significantly enhanced. Whether through the act of translation itself or in the establishment of a translation field, these were new developments after Dao'an's arrival in Chang'an, and were unique religious activities of Buddhism. The magnificent and exotic Buddhist gatherings also made the foreign characteristics of Buddhism an advantageous factor in attracting followers in such circumstances. How did such apparent changes in the religious environment affect Wang Jia, who also bore the responsibility of spreading teachings?

Beneath the facade of serenity and inaction, Wang Jia essentially carried the responsibility of a Daoist leader in disseminating teachings. His seclusion seemed more like a Daoist tactic to allure followers through mystique. As recorded in the Book of Jin—Records of Wang Jia: "Officials and nobles all respectfully came to visit, and scholars and gentlemen without exception regarded him as a master" (Fang 1974, p. 2496). It is evident that Wang Jia's Daoist propagation strategy was once highly effective. The most direct impact of Dao'an's arrival in Chang'an on Wang Jia was Wang Fu's consultation with both Dao'an

and Wang Jia, which also implied the ruler's testing and comparison of Buddhism and Daoism. These external changes and influences, along with the new experiences and insights from Buddhist gatherings, were bound to affect Wang Jia, and may even have triggered a sense of crisis in him.

If the plot of the "Golden Pot of Futi" does not solely derive from previous legends like the "Buddhist scriptures orally transmitted by Yicun", which denigrated Buddhist scriptures, then the adulation Dao'an received after his arrival in Chang'an, and the exotic elements present in the gatherings of Buddhist translation, are likely more direct external factors that inspired Wang Jia to write the "Golden Pot of Futi". The clandestine rivalry between Dao'an and Wang Jia seems to indirectly explain why the Buddhist elements in the "Golden Pot of Futi" story are so obscure, why the tale intentionally conceals its criticism of Buddhist scriptures under the guise of foreign and exotic themes, why the tale portrays a relatively positive and highly dedicated figure involved in compiling scriptures, and why the tale does not directly confront Buddhist monks throughout its entirety.

4. The Dynamic Interplay between Buddhism and Daoism as Reflected in the Story's Connotations

From the earlier legend of "Laozi Huahu" and tales like "Buddhist scriptures orally transmitted by Yicun" and "Golden Pot of Futi", these narratives all subtly express the Daoists' veiled criticism towards Buddhism's strategies of attachment and rapid expansion. However, does this veiled criticism represent a one-sided stance from the Daoist community, or does it reflect a mutual contest between Buddhism and Daoism? Focusing on the actual writings of Buddhism and Daoism during that time, when Daoists launched attacks on Buddhist scriptures with narratives such as "Laozi Huahu", "Buddhist scriptures orally transmitted by Yicun", and "Golden Pot of Futi", Buddhist monks reciprocated by critiquing Daoist scriptures in a similar manner.

For instance, in the Liu Song Dynasty, Xie Zhenzhi's Chongyu Gudaoshi Shu 重與顧道士書 (Another Rebuttal to Gu the Daoist) remarked: "Daoist scriptures are rudimentary, often contrived, akin to the 'Lingbao' (靈寶) and 'Miaoyin' (秒音), clumsily derived from the 'Lotus Sūtra'" (Yan 2009, p. 605a). Contrasting Xie Zhenzhi's observations with the "Golden Pot of Futi", Xie Zhenzhi deems Daoist writings to be overly "rudimentary", while Wang Jia's narrative subtly satirizes Buddhist scriptures as excessively "elaborate". Xie Zhenzhi describes Daoist scriptures as "derived" from the Buddhist "Lotus Sutra", whereas Wang Jia, inspired by the legend of "Yi Cun Teaching Buddhist Scriptures", views the "Daodejing" as the refined essence after "excluding" and "abridging" Buddhist scriptures. This comparison vividly illustrates the competitive yet integrative trends underlying the strategies of critique and engagement between Buddhism and Daoism during the Wei and Jin periods.

Xie Zhenzhi's "Another Rebuttal to Gu the Daoist" aimed to counter the Daoist Gu Huan (顧歡)'s Yixialun 夷夏論 (Discourse on Yi and Xia), which rejected the Buddhist author, composed in the third year of Liu Song's Emperor Ming's Taishi reign (467 AD). However, Gu Huan's conclusion about the mutual attacks between Buddhists and Daoists, or his summary of seeking prominence through the amalgamation of the two religions, succinctly encapsulates the trend of competition and collaboration between Buddhism and Daoism during that era. Yixialun states: "Monks and Daoists frequently engage in disputes, both large and small, attacking each other. Some view them as separate realms, while others perceive them as one. This leads to considering differences as similarities and dismantling similarities as differences, the root of discord and confusion" (Yan 2009, p. 89a).

From Wang Jia's Record of Gleanings in the Eastern Jin Dynasty to Gu Huan's *Yixialun* in the Liu Song Dynasty, and then to Xie Zhenzhi's refutation in Another Rebuttal to Gu the Daoist, the mutual borrowing between Buddhism and Daoism in religious writings has been continuous. The intense competition between them, characterized by the rewriting of religious legends, attacks on each other's works, and attempts to appropriate

each other's achievements, was ongoing and fierce. It is through the in-depth interpretation of the Buddhist elements in "Golden Pot of Futi" from the Record of Gleanings, and particularly the tale's thematic reinterpretation, that one can confirm the fluctuating and continuous competitive relationship between Buddhism and Daoism during this period which spans over a hundred years in the Wei and Jin dynasties.

5. Conclusions

In addition to the two legends included in the historical records, re-examining the rich Buddhist elements in the "Golden Pot of Futi" from the Record of Gleanings offers a new reference for understanding the dynamic interplay between Buddhism and Daoism during the Wei and Jin periods. Early Chinese tales have traditionally been seen as "unofficial histories" or as a "complementation of history", yet their profound connotations and value are often overlooked in religious studies. In the case of the "Golden Pot of Futi", it reveals that early tales contained many traces of the dissemination of Buddhism, particularly the spread of non-commercial materials such as pattra-leaf scriptures, which are rarely documented in other literary sources. Moreover, within this tale, we also see how Wang Jia, a prominent Daoist scholar of the Wei and Jin periods, understood Buddhism, and how he wrote to defend and promote Daoist positions during a time when Buddhism was becoming more influential. The competitive and cooperative relationship between Buddhism and Daoism is more concretely illustrated through the figures of Wang Jia and Dao'an.

In A Brief History of Chinese Fiction, Lu Xun offers a seminal summary of the factors influencing the early development of Chinese fiction:

> "China originally placed faith in witchery. From the Qin and Han dynasties onwards, tales of immortals became prevalent, the witchery trend flourished towards the end of the Han Dynasty, and belief in ghosts grew stronger. Concurrently, Hinayana Buddhism also entered the Central Plains and gradually spread. All these led to the proliferation of books about ghosts and gods, filled with tales of the supernatural. Therefore, from the Jin Dynasty to the end of the Sui Dynasty, there was a proliferation of books featuring ghosts and gods". (Luxun 2005, p. 45)

The influence of both Buddhism and Daoism on the early development of Chinese fiction is profound and multifaceted. In other words, fiction also serves as crucial material for documenting the development of Buddhism and Daoism. Due to the severe loss of Buddhist scriptures before the Tang Dynasty and the difficulty in preserving oral traditions, further exploration of the Buddhist elements in fiction can still enhance our understanding of the early spread of Buddhism. Even today, the impact of exotic material culture on the formation of early Chinese literary imagery, such as the opening of the Silk Road, remains underappreciated. This marked the first significant influx of foreign goods into China since the Qin and Han dynasties.

For historical records like Sima Qian's Records of the Grand Historian, the sudden appearance of numerous foreign goods was a tale phenomenon they had to confront. While some tribute goods or high-value trade items may have been mentioned in historical records, foreign materials with weak trade attributes, such as written materials, were often overlooked by orthodox historical records. However, these overlooked aspects are precisely what made early Chinese fiction intriguing. The unfamiliarity and curiosity brought about by previously unseen foreign goods also served as a stimulus for the literary imagination. In previous studies, scholars focused more on the remarkable influence of Buddhist dissemination on the early development of Chinese fiction in terms of story inspiration and ideological concepts, often overlooking the covert history of non-trade-related cultural exchanges brought about by the spread of Buddhism. Historical records that focus on rare and precious exotic tributes or religious translations that interpret Buddhist doctrines often fail to capture the astonishment brought by numerous foreign items like pattra-leaf scriptures. Therefore, early Chinese fiction might inadvertently become a treasure trove for preserving imprints of such non-trade-related cultural exchanges from foreign lands.

The widely acknowledged Daoist identity of Wang Jia further deepens our understanding of the intricate connotation within "Golden Pot of Futi", which intertwine elements of Buddhism with tales about Laozi's writings. Wang Jia was not just a significant religious figure with roles of Fangshi (alchemist) and Daoist during the Wei and Jin periods, but was also a prominent figure in Louguan Daoism. Books such as Wang Shiwei's Louguandao yuanliukao 樓觀道源流考 (A Study on the Origin of Louguan) (Wang 2005, pp. 46, 49), research work such as Liu Yuxia's Weijinnanbeichao daojiaoyuwenxue 魏晉南北朝道教與文學 (Daoism and Literature in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties) (Liu 2012, pp. 290–93), and Du Zhun's Congshiyiji guanyufuxide jizai kan wangjiade zongjiaosixiang 從拾遺記關於伏羲的記載看王嘉的宗教思想 (Examining Wang Jia's Religious Thought from the 'Record of Gleanings' about Fuxi) draw upon historical records and Daoist literature to affirm Wang Jia's position in Louguan Daoism (Du 2012, pp. 121–25). Louguan Daoism particularly reveres the tales about Laozi's writings, considering him their founder and holding the Daodejing as their core classics. They especially emphasize the tale of General Yin Xi requesting Laozi's writings upon his departure from the pass.

If Wang Jia indeed leads this Daoist sect, the "Golden Pot of Futi" could challenge the traditional narrative of Laozi's departure, including the tale of Yin Xi. This would lend it greater symbolic significance, and warrants further in-depth exploration. If we take the doctrines of the sect as Wang Jia's guiding principles in his actions and writings, then the modification of the story of Laozi's departure in "Golden Pot of Futi" appears to be suspicious. Figures like Xiao Qi of the Southern Liang Dynasty, as the compiler of Record of Gleanings, might have had the opportunity to amend or supplement the text. The "Golden Pot of Futi" serves as an entry point in this regard. Nevertheless, in religious studies, the utilization and examination of such tales remain insufficient. Based on this literature review, these early Chinese tales represent crucial literary sources deserving further investigation.

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Notes

1 (Y. Chen 2011). Evolution of the Stories of Xuanzang's Disciples in "Journey to the West".

2 Originally authored by Wang Jia, the word "了" was amended to "书". Wang Guoliang made corrections based on texts such as "Introduction to Zhenxing" (真形序论) and "Yulan" (御览), among others (G. Wang 1993).

3 For details on the birth and death years of Dao'an, See (Tang 2008).

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