

Contribution

Truth and Its Reception: The Wonder and Metaphor of the Incorruptible Tongue in the *Lotus Sutra* Tradition

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IN my study of parasutraic narratives of the Tang period (618–907), I have noticed that there are a quite number of them that speak of the incorruptibility of the tongues of devotees. Mostly biographies of monks, these narratives typically end with the passing of these monks and the wonder of their tongues surviving cremation or remaining intact after burial. Of greater interest is that these narratives are almost always associated with the *Lotus Sutra*. In my survey of Tang parasutraic compilations, this motif is never found in *Diamond Sutra* narratives and only once found in a narrative related to the *Garland Sutra*.¹ The rest of the accounts are found in the two principal parasutraic texts of the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* 弘贊法華傳 (A Chronicle for Widely Extolling the *Lotus Sutra*) and the *Fahua chuanji* 法華傳記 (A Record of the Transmission of the *Lotus Sutra*).² What accounts for this? How does this motif come to be associated with the tradition of the *Lotus Sutra*? What can it tell us about how the *Lotus Sutra* was conceived in medieval China? These are the questions that this article sheds some light on.

The Incorruptible Tongue in Chinese Buddhism: Suwa Gijun's Study

More than two decades ago, Suwa Gijun 諏訪義純 pointed out the association between the wonder of the incorruptible tongue and the *Lotus Sutra*.³ Based on a study of narratives with this motif in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (Sequel to the Biographies of Eminent Monks),⁴ *Hongzan fahua zhuan*, and *Fahua chuanji*, Suwa made three observations: (1) The wonder of the incorruptible tongue is not the sole province of Buddhas, sages or eminent monastics; it is also accessible to ordinary monks and laypeople since a few of the narratives are about lesser known monks and laypeople. (2) Almost all the accounts mention the protagonists' intonation of the *Lotus Sutra* while they were alive. The incorruptible tongue seems to be the result of the intense

intonation of the *Lotus Sutra*. (3) Although some accounts mention the worship of the tongue by individuals, quite a number of them mention collective worship by communities. From this, Suwa extrapolated that the wonder seems to be intimately related to communities that intone the *Lotus Sutra*.

To trace the origin of this phenomenon, Suwa first attempted to establish the importance of scriptural intonation — whether it was venerated — in Indian Buddhism and its connection to the wonder by citing one passage each from two sutras translated by Kumārajīva, the translator of the most preferred translation of the *Lotus Sutra*.⁵ The first is from chapter 19, ‘Merit of the Dharma Masters’, of the *Lotus Sutra*, which states that those who accept and uphold, read, recite, explain and preach the *Lotus Sutra* or transcribe it will gain abundant virtues of the six sense faculties — eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. The second is a passage from the *Longer Sukhāvātīvyūha-sūtra* on those who, having heard the Dharma, rejoice, and accept and uphold the sutra, read, recite and practice it, gaining unfathomable merit. Suwa had selected sutras translated by Kumārajīva for good reason, because, according to the translator’s biography, his tongue remained intact after his cremation. However, both of these passages could hardly be considered proof of the important place of scriptural intonation since they also mention other scriptural practices usually enjoined by Mahāyāna sutras. Moreover, the first passage from the *Lotus Sutra* also mentions the acquisition of virtues of the other five sense organs due to these scriptural practices.

If the first two passages failed to establish the importance of scriptural intonation and its connection to the wonder, the third passage cited by Suwa from the *Dazhidu lun* 大智度論 (Treatise of the Great Perfection of Wisdom) provides more definite evidence.⁶ According to this account, a monk of a certain country, who recited the *Amitābha-sūtra* and *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, claimed that he saw Buddha Amitābha and his retinue at the time of death. After he was cremated, his disciples found that his tongue survived the fire. The account explains that Buddha Amitābha came for the monk because he had recited the *Amitābha-sūtra* and his tongue was intact because of his recitation of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*.⁷ Since this is the earliest extant account of the incorruptible tongue as a result of sutra recitation, Suwa is probably correct to credit Kumārajīva with importing the belief of the incorruptible tongue into China, since he is also the translator of the *Dazhidu lun*. Furthermore, the wonder is also associated with the biography of the translator. Although the foreign provenance of

the wonder is supported by the *Dazhidu lun* account, it is much less certain whether the tradition of the incorruptible tongue, as a spiritual attainment of scriptural recitation, was established in the Indian Buddhist community, as Suwa seems to believe.⁸

In China, Suwa thought that the belief in the incorruptible tongue was related to the establishment of communities or societies (*yiyi* 義邑) devoted to the intonation of the *Lotus Sutra* as he went on to provide evidence of such societies. Towards this end, Suwa first extrapolated that there was probably one related to the *Lotus Sutra* since the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* biography of monk Baoqiong 寶瓊 (504–584) mentions a community devoted to the recitation of the *Dapin bore jing* 大品般若經.⁹ In the biography of Zhiyan 智琰 (564–634), Suwa surmised the existence of a *Lotus Sutra* society by associating the monk's intonation of the *Lotus Sutra* with the monthly meeting he had with five hundred benefactors, two pieces of unrelated information found in it.¹⁰ While both of these do not prove the existence of *Lotus Sutra* societies in the early Tang period, their later existence is confirmed in the form of an inscription Suwa mentioned, at a Longxing Monastery construction dating to the seventh year of the Taihe era (833), which refers to a 28-member *Lotus Sutra* society in the city of Jin in Shanxi.¹¹ With this, Suwa again extrapolated that such societies are evidenced in four of the accounts (3, 7, 11, 15) of the incorruptible tongue he surveyed.¹² But on closer examination, only one of them — account 11 — might indicate the existence of such societies, although not conclusively.¹³

Therefore, Suwa did not provide convincing evidence of the relationship between *Lotus Sutra* societies and the belief in the incorruptible tongue. Furthermore, Suwa's conclusion that the belief in the incorruptible tongue, which disseminated in China owing to Kumārajīva, was incorporated in religious societies that specialized in scriptural recitation or that the belief was associated with devotion to different sutras,¹⁴ which gave birth to various recitation societies, is untenable, given that it seems to feature in the *Lotus Sutra* tradition exclusively.

The Wonder in Parasutric Narratives

Although the textual evidence associating the wonder of the incorruptible tongue to the practice of scriptural intonation is first found in the *Dazhidu lun*, it is doubtful that the tradition of the incorruptibility of Kumārajīva's tongue found in his biography is related to this association, especially when the translation of the *Lotus Sutra* does not

figure prominently in his biography nor does it mention that Kumārajīva recited the *Lotus Sutra*. The biographical mention of the incorruptibility of Kumārajīva's tongue, rather, might have subsequently inspired the association between the wonder and the *Lotus Sutra* as exemplified by the collection of narratives of the incorruptible tongue in the two eighth-century parasutraic compilations mentioned earlier.¹⁵ Although there are quite a number of accounts of monastics who recited the *Lotus Sutra* in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (Biographies of Eminent Monks), the only mention of the incorruptible tongue in it is not related to any of these accounts.¹⁶ This suggests that the association between the incorruptible tongue and the recitation of the *Lotus Sutra* had not been firmly established when the biographical collection was compiled at the beginning of the sixth century.

However, the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, which was compiled a century and a half later, contains at least seven accounts of the incorruptible tongue related to the recitation of the *Lotus Sutra*. Except for one collected in the section on monastics who engaged in self-immolation, the other accounts are collected in the section on those who specialized in scriptural recitation. These accounts are also included in the two parasutraic writings of the *Lotus Sutra*. While derived from or inspired by the sutra, these writings are parasutraic in the sense that they are analogous or parallel to the sutra but different and separate from it, and their content might go beyond it. Apart from their commentaries, sutras in medieval China were propagated through such auxiliary writings that played a crucial part in the formation of the system of religious veneration and devotion directed towards them.¹⁷ The *Lotus Sutra* was no exception.

As their titles imply, the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* and *Fahua chuanji* are works composed to document the transmission of the *Lotus Sutra* in China. Composed by Huixiang 惠詳 in 10 rolls, the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* chronicles the transmission of the *Lotus Sutra* from the Eastern Jin 東晉 (316–420) to the Tang — the latest record is dated 706 CE — with accounts classified into eight categories — images, translation, mental cultivation, self-immolation, and the explication, recitation, reading and copying of the sutra.¹⁸ The *Fahua chuanji*, also in 10 rolls, was probably composed slightly later, given that the latest record is dated 716 CE.¹⁹ The compiler Sengxiang 僧詳 divided the work into 12 sections. The first six are dedicated to the textual transmission of the sutra, that is, sections such as the development of the text, its translations, the various traditions it inspired, associated treatises and commentaries and prefaces to works related to it. The next six

sections consist of biographical accounts of devotees that recount the sutra's efficacy derived from explicating, reciting, reading, copying and listening to the intonation and preaching of the sutra, and making offerings to it.

A comparison of these two parasutraic writings indicates that the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* contains more instances of references to the incorruptibility of the tongue — 21 cases in 18 accounts, including all the seven cases collected in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*. On the other hand, the *Fahua chuanji* contains nine instances, of which eight are already collected in the *Hongzan fahua zhuan*.²⁰ These instances in the *Fahua chuanji* are all found in the section on practitioners who recited the sutra. While most accounts in the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* are found in the section on recitation (15 cases in 12 accounts), some concern other activities related to the sutra: An account on Kumārajīva is found in the section on translation; the explication and self-immolation sections contain two accounts each on the incorruptibility of the tongue. It is noteworthy that most of these accounts are collected in sections related to four of the five scriptural practices (*wuzhong xing* 五種行) encouraged in Mahāyāna sutras — scriptural explication, recitation, reading and copying.²¹ Basically, these parasutraic narratives differ considerably from those that detail the textual history and transmission of the sutra because they are meant to document how people, who engaged with the sutra, experienced scriptural efficacy.

In his study of these accounts, Daniel Stevenson thinks that they are modelled after two narrative forms, “tales of the strange and extraordinary”, a genre of Chinese writings known as *zhiguai* 志怪, and “the tradition of the exemplary biography inspired by the Chinese dynastic histories”.²² Since the style of these *Lotus Sutra* accounts is the same as monastic biographies found in Buddhist biographical collections, such as the *Gaoseng zhuan* and *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, which are modelled after biographies in dynastic histories, they may be considered to be “inspired by the Chinese dynastic histories”.²³ However, the association between these *Lotus Sutra* accounts and *zhiguai* writings could be more tenuous. The *zhiguai* genre — which literally translates as “the recording of the strange” — is used to refer to writings in literary Chinese on the subject of strange, supernatural or inexplicable phenomena, which have their origins in early Chinese writings. Because the first Chinese Buddhist tales of wonders appeared and were compiled at the time when *zhiguai* writings were in vogue in early medieval China, Buddhist narratives of wonders are often considered to be closely related to them.

The first compilation of Buddhist stories dedicated to the salvific powers of Bodhisattva Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) was made by a Buddhist layman named Xie Fu 謝敷 (fl. late fourth century CE) at the end of the fourth century.²⁴ This collection, the *Guangshiyin yingyan ji* 光世音應驗記 (A Record of the Proven Response of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara) was followed by two other collections of Guanyin tales, the *Xu Guangshiyin yingyan ji* 續光世音應驗記 (Sequel to A Record of the Proven Response of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara) compiled by Zhang Yan 張演 in the early fifth century, and the *Xi Guanshiyin yingyan ji* 繫觀世音應驗記 (Further Sequel to A Record of the Proven Response of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara) by Lu Gao 陸杲 (459–532).²⁵ While the wonders of the bodhisattva found in these compilations may bear some superficial semblance to extraordinary events found in *zhiguai* writings, they are fundamentally different. Distinct from the body of *zhiguai* writings, which are “too eclectic to be generalized as to their characteristics, themes, and purposes, indigenous Buddhist narratives all seek, in their own ways, to further the cause of Buddhism”.²⁶ Moreover, there is nothing that “is strange, or at least not inexplicable” in them.²⁷

Although Stevenson has insightfully pointed out that these narratives are probably “closest in spirit to the exemplary biography”,²⁸ these accounts as they are collected in parasutraic compilations — like Tang *Diamond Sutra* narratives — are meant to illustrate scriptural potency through various wonders and to encourage devotion to and engagement with the sutra. Thus, they are commonly referred to as miracle tales, although this label has recently been called into question.²⁹ This is not only because the term “miracle” contains connotations informed by the Judeo-Christian conception of the miraculous, but also because the terms in Asian religions that it translates usually have broader semantic fields, which include a host of nuances not available in the English term. While the miraculous is often understood in relation to God and the world he created, and his capacity to suspend the laws he put in place at will, the wondrous in these parasutraic narratives is “better understood with recourse to Chinese Buddhist cosmological presuppositions because they are underpinned by both the age-old Chinese concept of *ganying* 感應 (sympathetic resonance) and the Buddhist doctrine of causality”.³⁰ An important concept in Chinese correlative cosmology, the former explains “wonders as natural responses — in a world of interdependent order — called forth when certain conditions are fulfilled”.³¹ On the other hand, these narratives remain Buddhist because the marvellous events and manifestations found in them can also be explained by the Buddhist law of causality operating in a world consisting of intricate webs of karmic

connection and human will, where *ganying* can be used to explain how an action (*karman*) could bring about a result or effect (*vipāka*).³² In parasutraic narratives, both concepts can be invoked to account for how Buddhist practice and devotion could call forth marvels and wondrous events.

The concept of *ganying* may be illustrated by the following *Hongzan fahua zhuan* narratives: When the discovery of an incorruptible tongue was reported to the Emperor, he ordered his official to investigate whether it had numinous power. Having gathered monks who were renowned for their devotion to the *Lotus Sutra*, they made offerings to it and prayed that it would manifest for them some form of sympathetic response (*ganying*). To this supplication, “the tongue and lips began to beat about on the altar top ... as though it were chanting”,³³ thus proving that it had numinous power. In another tale, the efficacy of the *Lotus Sutra* is vividly portrayed in the experience of an unnamed nun, who had devoted herself to the recitation of the sutra for more than 20 years. When she was at her wits’ end with regard to a local official who threatened her chastity, she supplicated and stated, “How could the *Lotus Sutra* be without proof of its efficacy (*lingyan* 靈驗)?” Following that, the sutra’s efficacy is proven when the local official’s “lower extremities were seized with a burning pain and his male member dropped off. Rivulets of perspiration streamed from his skin, leprous ulcers broke out over his entire body, and his eyebrows, beard, and sideburns all fell out.”³⁴ From these examples, it is clear that the synthesis of Buddhist philosophical insight and indigenous presuppositions, which explain how religious piety and practice could actually be effective, were also harnessed to provide proof of the sutra’s efficacy.

The *Lotus Sutra* and the Incorruptible Tongue

Beside the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* and *Fahua chuanji*, parasutraic works of other scriptures were also being compiled during the Tang period. In particular, four parasutraic tale compilations of the *Diamond Sutra* were made by lay Buddhists, the first in the middle of the seventh century, and one each in the beginning of the eighth century and the ninth and 10th centuries.³⁵ A few decades before the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* was compiled, a parasutraic collection of the *Garland Sutra*, the *Huayan jing chuanji* 華嚴經傳記 (A Record of the Transmission of the *Garland Sutra*), was compiled by the Huayan patriarch Fazang 法藏 (643–712).³⁶ Given the similarity between the categories employed by this work and those found in the later *Fahua chuanji*, it is possible that the latter was inspired by the former. In addition to this, another

parasutraic compilation of *Garland Sutra* tales, the *Huayan jing ganying zhuan* 華嚴經感應傳 (A Chronicle of the Sympathetic Response of the *Garland Sutra*) was published at the end of the eighth century.³⁷ When we survey these parasutraic collections of other cultic foci, the motif of the indestructible tongue is almost never found in them.³⁸ Given that the indestructible tongue was first associated with the *Mahaprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, how and why did the wonder of the incorruptible tongue come to be associated with the *Lotus Sutra* almost exclusively during the Tang period?

The inclusion of Kumārajīva's biography — first found in the *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集 (A Compilation of Records on the Translation of the Tripiṭaka)³⁹ — in the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* suggests that the compiler of the parasutraic compilation might have already conceived of a stronger connection between the sutra and its translator, which eventually led to the association of the incorruptible tongue with *Lotus Sutra* devotion, however tenuous it might be. Apart from this, the other early contributor to this association might have been the next earliest record of the incorruptible tongue — the biography of monk Fajin 釋法進 (aka Daojin 道進 or Faying 法迎; d. 444) collected in the *Gaoseng zhuan*. In this biography, Fajin's tongue is said to have survived his cremation, after the monk passed away from offering his own flesh to the hungry.⁴⁰ Except for mentioning that Fajin was rigorous in his learning and recitation, the biography does not mention the sutra he learned or recited. Therefore, the incorruptible tongue is not overtly related to any particular scripture or religious practice here. The only possible connection between the incorruptible tongue and the *Lotus Sutra* is the biography's mention that Fajin had more than 10,000 virtues, which could be related to the reference in chapter 19 of the *Lotus Sutra*, 'Merit of the Dharma Masters', to the abundant virtues the Buddha said a devotee of the sutra could attain:

If good men or good women accept and uphold this *Lotus Sutra*, if they read it, recite it, explain and preach it, or transcribe it, such persons will obtain eight hundred eye virtues, twelve hundred ear virtues, eight hundred nose virtues, twelve hundred tongue virtues, eight hundred body virtues, and twelve hundred mind virtues. With these benefits they will be able to adorn their six sense organs, making all of them pure.⁴¹

Here the Buddha is seen as encouraging the acceptance and upholding of the sutra by declaring that those who "read it, recite it, explain and

preach it or transcribe it” would attain a huge amount of virtues of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. It is interesting that this passage is also cited by Suwa to draw a connection between the recitation of the sutra and the tongue, even though its main point is that the six sense organs, the receptacles of knowledge, could be purified by embracing the scripture through those acts. While this passage does not refer to the tongue alone, it is possible that the reader, well versed in the *Lotus Sutra*, might have thought of this passage when she read or heard that Fajin had more than 10,000 virtues, especially when the biography later mentions that Fajin’s disciple Sengzun 僧遵 was proficient in the recitation of the *Lotus Sutra*. This later piece of information might well have led one to extrapolate Fajin’s affiliation with the *Lotus Sutra* and its practices. Although tenuous, the appearance of certain unrelated elements together in the same space might have led to their association later. An example of this is discernible from the biography of the monk Zhizhan 志湛, which appears in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*’s section on monastics known for the recitation of sutras.⁴² Although the motif of the incorruptible tongue is not associated with him, it is, however, associated with monks whose biographies are appended to his biography. By the time his biography came to be recorded in the massive Song encyclopedia *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (The Extensive Record Compiled during the Taiping Era), the account relates that his tongue did not decompose long after he was buried.⁴³

As the title of chapter 19 of the *Lotus Sutra* implies, the virtues of the sense organs are merit acquired by the Dharma masters from their embrace of the sutra and its practices. These virtues enable them to acutely perceive the nature of things through sight, smell and sound, to dispense the Dharma with their “wonderful” voice, and to acquire “pure bodies ... such as people delight to see”. By acquiring the virtues of the mind, their minds are purified so that they “master immeasurable and boundless numbers of principles”. Although the chapter does not mention the incorruptibility of the sense organs as a result of scriptural practices, this idea is suggested in an early narrative — found appended to Zhizhan’s biography in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* — about the discovery of a pair of lips and a tongue on the slope of Mount Dongkan in Bingzhou (modern Taiyuan, Shanxi) during the reign of Emperor Wucheng of Northern Qi 齊武成帝 (r. 561–565). A memorial about the discovery presented to the emperor prompted an inquiry about the unusual phenomenon. To the emperor’s inquiry, monk Fashang 法上 (495–580), the head of the Buddhist order, answered thus: “This is the recompense of nondecay of the sense faculties that is achieved

by devotees who [ritually] keep the *Lotus Sutra*. It is proof that [this individual] recited [the scripture] more than a thousand times over.”⁴⁴ This idea, of course, is not without precedent since it is, as we have noted, already found in the *Dazhidu lun*.

Symbolism of the Tongue

Although the above elements might have each played a part in establishing the incorruptible tongue as a hallmark of the votary of the *Lotus Sutra*, the association might also have been supported by how the tongue was conceived in the Buddhist tradition in general, how it was perceived within the *Lotus Sutra* tradition in particular, and how the indestructible tongue was perceived in Kumārajīva’s biography, which promoted it as an important part of the *Lotus Sutra* lore.

In Buddhist epistemology, the tongue — along with the other four sense organs — is associated with one of the six sense bases or faculties (*indriya*), forms of subtle matter located within the organs that enable them to function. Together with their corresponding sense objects (*ālambana*), the six sense faculties form the twelve sense fields (*āyatana*), which serve as the bases for the production of consciousness. The contact (*sparśa*) between a sense faculty and its object leads to a specific sensory consciousness (*viññāna*). The tongue, thus, is one of the bases of cognition. The *Lotus Sutra*, as mentioned, promises that the five sense organs — and thus the bases of cognition — could be purified and virtues gained through the five scriptural practices. With respect to the tongue, the sutra states:

If good men or good women accept and uphold this sutra, if they read it, recite it, explain and preach it, or transcribe it, they will gain twelve hundred tongue virtues. Whether something is good tasting or vile, whether it is flavourful or not, and even things that are bitter or astringent, when encountered by the faculties of this person’s tongue will all be changed into superb flavours as fine as the sweet dew of heaven, and there will be none that are not pleasing.⁴⁵

But apart from being a base of cognition, the tongue is also responsible for verbal action (*vākkarman*; *yuye* 語業), and thus may be considered in relation to one of the three conduits (*tridvāra*; *sanmen* 三門) — speech — through which deeds (*karma*; *ye* 業) are produced. Along with bodily and mental actions, speech as verbal deed could create wholesome or unwholesome effects. Traditionally, the unwholesome course of verbal

action includes four: false speech (*mṛṣāvāda*; *wangyu* 妄語 / *wangshe* 妄舌), divisive or malicious speech (*paśunya*; *lijian yu* 離間語 / *liangshe* 兩舌), abusive speech (*pāruṣya*; *ekou* 惡口), and frivolous prattle (*saṃbhinnapralāpa*; *qiyu* 綺語). These four are part of a traditional category of 10 unwholesome deeds (*akuśala-karmapatha*; *eye dao* 惡業道), which includes also the three physical deeds of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct and the three mental deeds of covetousness, ill-will and wrong views. For those who have committed unwholesome verbal deeds, the sutras abound with discussion of the kinds of punishments they would undergo: their tongues would be cut⁴⁶ or torn apart;⁴⁷ they would drop off⁴⁸ or shrink by themselves.⁴⁹ On the contrary, among various rewards, the tongue of a person who encourages others to listen to the *Lotus Sutra* will not be “dry, black or too short”.⁵⁰

In opposition to the 10 unwholesome deeds are the 10 wholesome ones, which include the four verbal deeds of speaking truthfully, speaking harmoniously, speaking kindly and speaking sensibly. According to the *Lotus Sutra*, when a practitioner’s tongue is purified through scriptural practices, it also acquires qualities that enable the practitioner to engage in the verbal action of conveying the truth of the Dharma: “If with these faculties of the tongue he undertakes to expound and preach in the midst of the great assembly, he will produce a deep and wonderful voice capable of penetrating the mind and causing all who hear it to rejoice and delight.”⁵¹ Furthermore, wholesome verbal deeds would bring good recompense. For example, in its enumeration of the 32 marks of the Tathāgata, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* explains that the Buddha has a long and broad tongue because he had cultivated the 10 wholesome deeds and with them instructed others.⁵² Associated with the wholesome deeds, the long broad tongue in this case could be conceived as a symbol of both verbal virtue and the power of speech.

With regard to the dispensation of the Dharma, the tongue could also symbolize the truth spoken by the Buddha; for instance, the Buddha in the *Shorter Sukhāvātyūha-sūtra* urges trust in the Dharma presented therein after praising the Buddha-field and telling his audience that each of the Buddhas in other quarters also praises and “covers his own buddha-field with his tongue and then reveals all that is in it”.⁵³ As much as this could be a “mixed metaphor expressing both the power of speech and the incorporation of the realm of speech into that of the mind and the vision of a Buddha”,⁵⁴ the Buddhas’ gesture of covering their Buddha-fields with their tongues before revealing it seeks to reaffirm — and reassure their audience of — the truth of their revelation. In chapter 21 of the *Lotus Sutra*, ‘Supernatural Powers of the Tathāgata’,

the Buddha and all the Buddhas extend their long broad tongues until they reach the Brahma heaven for a hundred thousand of years after the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas who emerged from the earth vowed that they would preach the sutra far and wide. This act, as the Buddha goes on to explain, is one of entrusting those bodhisattvas and mahasattvas with the sutra:

If in the process of entrusting this sutra to others I were to employ these supernatural powers for immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of *asaṃkhyā kalpa* to describe the benefits of the sutra, I could never finish doing so. To put it briefly, all the doctrines possessed by the Tathāgata, all the freely exercised supernatural powers of the Tathāgata, the storehouse of all the secret essentials of the Tathāgata, all the most profound matters of the Tathāgata — all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra.⁵⁵

Not only is it an act by the Buddha and other buddhas to entrust the sutra to the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas, it is one that represents them as bearing witness to the vow made by the latter. Moreover, the Buddha also implies that the act could also bear testimony to the fact that what the Buddhas had realized is all contained in the *Lotus Sutra*, which reiterated what the Buddha said earlier: “The Buddha has nothing but truthful words.”⁵⁶ Although the mention of the Buddha’s display of his long broad tongue can also be found in scriptures other than the *Lotus Sutra*, the tongue as a symbol of truth is probably a contributory element in the creation of the trope of the incorruptible tongue as a hallmark of the votary of the *Lotus Sutra*.

Kumārajīva: Discipline and Truth

In addition to the factors already discussed, the charisma and the life story of Kumārajīva might also have played an important role in the way the wonder features in the *Lotus Sutra* tradition. Although there is no way for us to ascertain the details of Kumārajīva’s biography, the final vow he is said to have made before his passing is undoubtedly significant. The exact words are as follows: “Now, I shall make a true and sincere vow before the assembly: ‘If what I have transmitted is without errors, then may my tongue remain unscorched after my cremation!’”⁵⁷

While his vow may be taken by others to testify to the accuracy or rigour of his translations, there is probably more to it for it might have been related to some episodes in his life. His biography seems to display a certain amount of concern regarding Kumārajīva's having broken his monastic vows on two counts. The first happened after the Chinese general Lū Guang 吕光 (337–400) successfully attacked Kucha and took him away. We are told that Kumārajīva was humiliated by Lū Guang, who forced him to drink alcohol and break the monastic vow of celibacy. The second count is his having his own household together with 10 concubines, apparently under the order of the ruler Yaoxing, who hoped that he would produce offspring as outstanding as Kumārajīva. While we will never know the truth of these matters, his biography seems to display a degree of unease about them, as we can see from an episode when Kumārajīva welcomed Vimalākṣa, the Vinaya Master from whom he received instruction in the Buddhist discipline, when the latter visited him. During the reception, Vimalākṣa asked Kumārajīva how many disciples he had, to which he replied that although there were some 3,000 pupils who received teachings from him, he did not receive the respect due a master owing to his having accumulated grave karmic hindrances (*karmā varaṇa*).⁵⁸ Here, Kumārajīva — or rather, his biographer — might have in mind his violation of monastic vows.

Perhaps, the biography's unease or preoccupation with the monastic discipline should be considered together with what Kumārajīva said before he made the final vow. In this final section of his biography, after mentioning that he had undertaken to translate the scriptures despite his ignorance, Kumārajīva went on to express regret that he had not been able to revise the *Shisong lü* 十誦律 (*Daśa-bhāṇavāra-vinaya*). It is significant that a *vinaya* text is mentioned, given that the biography has introduced various elements related to Buddhist discipline up to this juncture. Thus, Kumārajīva's final vow could be seen to culminate from these elements to allay possible doubts people might have regarding his translation and transmission of Buddhism, which explains the biography's preoccupation with Buddhist discipline. This in turn could have originated from ideas regarding the sanctity of Buddhist texts and the people who produced them found in Buddhist scriptures. For instance, an account in the *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (A Pearl Grove in the Garden of Dharma) tells of the defilement of a copy of the *Diamond Sutra* due to the copier's consumption of meat.⁵⁹ When considered together with Kumārajīva's final vow, it is possible that the last episode was employed by his biographer to allay those doubts and to set the record straight that despite having broken the precepts, Kumārajīva had

been truthful as far as his translation and transmission of Buddhism were concerned. Whether his final vow as presented in the biography had an effect on the reception of his translation is uncertain, but his translations were indeed well received as later history was to tell.

The Highest Truth and Its Reception

Although not of the same nature, one can also perceive in the *Lotus Sutra* a preoccupation with the audience's reception of its teachings — the highest or ultimate truth the Buddha is about to expound. Central to the *Lotus Sutra* is its proclamation of the truth of a single vehicle and the eternal Buddha, which is so radical and runs counter to earlier teachings so much so that the sutra is at pains to convince its audience. The revelation of this truth begins in chapter 2, 'Skilful Means', when the Buddha praises the wisdom of the Buddhas and claims that none of the śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas could comprehend it.⁶⁰ Adding further bewilderment to his audience, the Buddha emphasizes that he had previously taught by "employing countless skilful means".⁶¹ The bewilderment of his audience is thus expressed:

Now for what reason does the World-Honored One so earnestly praise skilful means and state that the Dharma attained by the Buddha is profound and difficult to understand, that it is very difficult to comprehend the meaning of the words he preaches, that not one of the śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas can do so? If the Buddha preaches but one doctrine of emancipation, then we too should be able to attain this Dharma and reach the state of nirvāṇa. We cannot follow the gist of what he is saying now.⁶²

This bewilderment is reiterated by Śāriputra, the wisest of all the Buddha's disciples, who beseeches the Buddha to explain what he said:

World-Honored One, what causes and conditions lead you to earnestly praise skilful means, the foremost device of the Buddhas, the profound, subtle and wonderful Dharma that is difficult to understand? From times past I have never heard this kind of preaching from the Buddha. Now the four kinds of believers all have doubts. We beg that the World-Honored One will expound this matter. For what reason does the World-Honored One earnestly praise this Dharma that is profound, subtle and wonderful, difficult to understand?⁶³

To Śāriputra's plea, the Buddha expresses his hesitation to expound the truth: "If I speak of this matter, then the heavenly and human beings throughout the worlds will all be astonished and doubtful."⁶⁴ Despite his initial hesitation, the Buddha eventually decides to reveal the truth after Śāriputra's third request. But just as the Buddha is about to explain, 5,000 members of the audience leave the assembly. Described as "persons of overbearing arrogance", the Buddha explains that these people think that they have attained the final truth when they have not.⁶⁵ Although a minor episode, their departure affirms the Buddha's hesitation and anticipates the radicality of what he is about to expound, which might not all be easily understood and accepted. What the Buddha says next demonstrates the sutra's concern that people might reject the truth that is about to be revealed:

A wonderful Dharma such as this is preached by the Buddhas, the Tathāgatas, at certain times. But like the blooming of the udumbara, such times come very seldom. Śāriputra, you and the others must believe me. The words that the Buddhas preach are not empty or false.⁶⁶

Having thus assured his audience, the Buddha proceeds to explain that all Buddhas appear in the world for one reason — to lead everyone to Buddhahood. Towards this end, he had previously taught different paths — the three vehicles of śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva — leading to different goals, but they are all skilful means. Although not the final teaching, these teachings have provisional validity as they culminate in the ultimate truth that he is about to teach. That is why the Buddha, at the outset of the chapter, says, "The World-Honored One has long expounded his doctrines and now must reveal the truth."⁶⁷ In this way, the Buddha then reveals the one vehicle of Buddhahood, and asserts that "there are not two vehicles, much less three!"⁶⁸ Having revealed the one vehicle, the Buddha again urges: "Śāriputra, you and the others should with a single mind believe and accept the words of the Buddha. The words of the Buddhas, the Tathāgatas, are not empty or false. There is no other vehicle, there is only the one Buddha vehicle."⁶⁹

As to the question why — if there is only the one vehicle — he had earlier taught his followers the doctrine of the three vehicles, the Buddha replies that his followers at that time were not yet ready to comprehend or accept the highest truth, thus he had taught them the three vehicles according to their inclinations. That is, he had employed skilful means in order to guide them on the Buddhist path and gradually prepare

them towards greater understanding so that they could comprehend and accept the truth.⁷⁰ He then illustrates his point through a series of parables, one of the most famous being the parable of the burning house. In this parable, the protagonist, a householder, promises his children three carts drawn respectively by goat, deer and ox to entice them out of the burning house but later — when they had left the burning house — grants them each instead a great white ox cart.⁷¹ Through this parable, the Buddha explains that the earlier doctrines, delivered in the 40 years after his earthly awakening, represent provisional truths, which were meant to lead his followers to the highest truth to be expounded in the *Lotus Sutra*.

To his audience, this startling revelation that they had only learned the provisional teachings of the Buddha all this time and had achieved only provisional goals is understandably difficult to accept. Already this is prefigured by those who left the assembly before the Buddha began to reveal the truth. Because of the need to convince his audience of this truth that is “difficult to understand”, the sutra displays a certain preoccupation with affirming the truth of the Buddha’s word, which is repeated in the sutra. For example, in an important episode in chapter 11, ‘The Emergence of the Treasure Tower’, another Buddha named Prabhūtaratna appears to testify to the truth of the Buddha’s word:

At that time a loud voice issued from the treasure tower, speaking words of praise: “Excellent, excellent! Śākyamuni, World-Honored One, that you can take the great wisdom of equality, a Dharma to instruct the bodhisattvas, guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas, the *Lotus Sutra* of the Wonderful Dharma, and preach it for the sake of the great assembly! It is as you say, as you say. Śākyamuni, World-Honored One, all that you have expounded is the truth!”⁷²

Another notable example appears in chapter 15, ‘Emerging from the Earth’, where an “immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas” emerge from beneath the earth after the Buddha proclaimed that there would be beings “as numerous as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges” who would “protect, read, recite and widely preach the sutra after his extinction”.⁷³ Before the Buddha clears the doubt of his audience as to the identity of these bodhisattvas and mahasattvas, he again says, “The Buddha has nothing but truthful words, his wisdom cannot be measured. This foremost Dharma that he has gained is very profound, incapable of analysis. He will now expound it — you must listen with a single mind.”⁷⁴ Thereafter, the Buddha makes

a few startling revelations. First, he explains that those bodhisattvas and mahasattvas are his followers, which causes further bewilderment among his audience, who wonder how that is possible, given that it was not so long since the Buddha had achieved awakening under the Bodhi tree.⁷⁵ This leads to one of the most important chapters of the *Lotus Sutra*, ‘The Lifespan of the Tathāgata’, where the Buddha would reveal that he had, in fact, achieved Buddhahood incalculable eons ago, and his earthly life was yet another display of his skill-in-means, which he employed in order to inspire posterity to be rigorous in practice. Before the Buddha goes on to elucidate the extent of his lifespan and explain why he manifested his nirvāṇa, he again urges his audience to believe in his words three times at the beginning of the chapter:

At that time the Buddha spoke to the bodhisattvas and all the great assembly: “Good men, you must believe and understand the truthful words of the Tathāgata.” And again he said to the great assembly: “You must believe and understand the truthful words of the Tathāgata.” And once more he said to the great assembly: “You must believe and understand the truthful words of the Tathāgata.”⁷⁶

The Buddha’s constant reminders that he has spoken nothing but the truth and his repeated entreaties that his audience should understand that he has spoken truthfully seem to display a concern regarding the reception of his ultimate teaching — especially when his skilful means had often worked through deception.⁷⁷ This is discernible from the Buddha’s question about whether the father in the parable of the burning house is “guilty of falsehood” when he gives his children carts drawn by a great white ox instead of the other three carts.⁷⁸ In fact, a similar question is asked in the parable of the skilled physician, which the Buddha uses to illustrate why he employed his nirvāṇa as a skilful means. In this parable, the Buddha is likened to a physician whose children are poisoned to the point that they refuse his antidote. In order to cause his children to take his antidote, the physician resorts to sending them news of his death, which jolts them to their senses to consume his antidote and thus be saved. Regarding the physician’s deception, the Buddha asks, “Can anyone say that this skilled physician is guilty of lying?”⁷⁹

Parasutraic Literature and the Metaphor of the Incorruptible Tongue

In similar ways, the biography of Kumārajīva and the *Lotus Sutra* are concerned with the truth and its reception. Although more implicit in the former case, references to Kumārajīva's violation of monastic vows may be taken as part of its strategies to validate the truth. Besides the incorruptible tongue, which attests to the sanctity of the Buddha's word preserved in Kumārajīva's translations, other forms of validation can be found. For example, in a version of his biography collected in the *Jinshu* 晉書 (History of the Jin), Kumārajīva is portrayed as capable of ingesting needles as food and so discouraging other monastics from following in his footsteps — referring to his violation of monastic vows — as he proclaims that only those who are capable of doing so are qualified to have a wife.⁸⁰ Kumārajīva's proclamation and his marvellous feat have important implications. The marvel could be construed as an indication of his spiritual attainment, which seems to give him "licence" to flout monastic vows; after all, Mahāyāna scriptures abound with examples of bodhisattvas violating precepts for the greater cause. Like the incorruptible tongue, doubts about the sanctity of Kumārajīva's translations, which contain the Buddha's word, could also be preemptively dispelled by this episode.

When Huixiang, the compiler of the *Hongzan fahua zhuan*, included Kumārajīva's biography in his compilation, he appropriated the story of one of the most renowned figures in the history of Chinese Buddhism and made it a piece of parasutraic writing in the *Lotus Sutra* tradition. Although not directly related to the sutra, this inclusion had created an intimate association between the famous translator — especially important details of his biography — and the tradition. It is in this sense that parasutraic literature is considered analogous and parallel to the scriptural tradition it is employed to augment. Parasutraic works, however, consist also of different literary forms and content. Apart from biographies of related monastic personages, there are those that elucidate the textual and transmission history of the sutra, as well as those that contain narratives of its devotees, telling of their experiences of scriptural efficacy. It is mostly in these accounts that the wonder of the incorruptible tongue is found inextricably related to the *Lotus Sutra*. In these narratives, the wonder, first found related with Kumārajīva and the texts he translated, most notably, the *Dazhidu lun*, is linked to the practices enjoined by the sutra — and manifested in its practitioners.

Thus, although inspired by the sutra, the content of parasutraic literature may go beyond the sutra.

Mahāyāna scriptures, such as the *Lotus Sutra* and *Diamond Sutra*, have suggested new ways of making merit through devotional and ritual actions such as upholding, reading, reciting, explicating, and copying the sutra. Strongly advocated in these Mahāyāna sutras, these acts are said to bring immense merit.⁸¹ They form an important part of the emergent scriptural traditions of the Tang Dynasty — each supported by its own parasutraic literature — of which the *Lotus Sutra* is one. The parasutraic works not only supported these traditions, but also put forth unique and distinct interpretations that differentiated them from others. The association between the incorruptible tongue and the *Lotus Sutra* is one such element that distinguishes the tradition of the Sinitic reimagination of the Indic sutra which goes beyond the sutra itself. Recent research has shown that the *Diamond Sutra* was conceived within the tradition as the afterlife sutra par excellence through many parasutraic narratives of the return-from-death experiences of its devotees.⁸² Similarly, the *Lotus Sutra* in these narratives was conceived in terms of the metaphor of the incorruptible tongue, deriving from and conjoining related elements that surround the tradition — the survival of Kumārajīva's tongue and the sanctity of the Buddha's word preserved in his translations, the virtues of the tongue acquired through scriptural acts, how the tongue featured in the sutra as a symbol of truthfulness, and needless to say, the concern with truth and its reception in both the biography and the sutra.

As part of parasutraic literature, these *Lotus Sutra* narratives not only extol and propagate the sutra but also determine how devotees conceive the sutra and its tradition. How then did medieval Chinese conceive the *Lotus Sutra* through the wonder and metaphor of the incorruptible tongue? Given that the *Lotus Sutra* claims to teach the final truth, these parasutraic narratives undoubtedly validate the truth of the sutra, a truth — that has always been around but is not spoken — with which the tongue became coextensive, and thus incorruptible.

Appendix: *Lotus Sutra* Narratives of the Indestructible Tongue

No.	Suwa 1997 ^a	Protagonist	XGSZ 50.2060 ^b	HZFH 51.2067 ^c	FHZJ 51.2068 ^d
1	–	Kumārajīva		15a12–c2 (translation)	
2	6	Silla monk 釋緣光		20a17–b13 (explication)	61c25–26 (recitation)
3	17	Monk Shi Zhiyan 釋智嚴		20c22–21a29 (explication)	
4	10	Servant in the household of Jiang Wang 蔣王家		26a10–18 (self-immolation)	
5	9	Nun sisters of Jingzhou 荊州	683c26–684a7 (self-immolation) Note: Appended to biography of monk Shi Huitong 釋會通	26a19–b5 (self-immolation)	94a18–29 (recitation)
6	1	Monk from Wuhou Monastery 五侯寺 of Fanyan 范陽	686a13–15 (recitation) Note: Appended to biography of monk Shi Zhizhan 釋志湛	31a21–23 (recitation) Note: Appended to biography of monk Shi Zhizhan	64a28–b2 (recitation)
7	2	Monk from Yongzhou 雍州	686a15–17 (recitation) Note: Appended to biography of monk Shi Zhizhan	31a23–26 (recitation) Note: Appended to biography of monk Shi Zhizhan	64b4–8 (recitation)
8	3	Tongue uncovered on Mount Kan in Bingzhou 并州 看山掘地得舌	686a17–29 (recitation) Note: Appended to biography of monk Shi Zhizhan	31c6–17 (recitation)	64b10–22 (recitation)

No.	Suwa 1997	Protagonist	XGSZ 50.2060	HZFH 51.2067	FHZJ 51.2068
9	-	Layman Wang Fanxing 王梵行		32c19-c27 (recitation) [no cremation]	
10	4	Monk Shi Huixiang 釋慧向		32c28-33a12 (recitation)	
11	5	Nun Farun 法潤		33a12-16 (recitation) Note: Appended to biography of monk Shi Huixiang	
12	7	Monk Shi Zhiye 釋智業		34c13-28 (recitation)	
13	8	Baekje monk Shi Huixian 釋慧顯	687c09-19 (recitation)	36b07-17 (recitation)	64c23-65a4 (recitation)
14	11	Monk Shi Yishu 釋遺俗	690a17-26 (recitation)	36b28-c10 (recitation)	67a8-20 (recitation)
15	14	Layman Yang Nan 楊離		37b24-c2 (recitation) Note: Appended in biography of Shi Facheng 釋法誠	
16	12	Layman Shi Heshi 史呵誓	690a29-b8 (recitation) Note: Appended to biography of Shi Yishu	37c25-38a2 (recitation)	67a22-b1 (recitation)

17	13	Monk Shi Daozheng 釋道正	38a2–5 (recitation) Note: Appended to biography of Layman Shi Heshi
18	18	Daoist Shichong 史崇	38c14–21 (recitation)
19	19	Madam Quan 權氏女	38c21–23 (recitation) Note: Appended in biography of Daoist Shichong
20	20	Monk Shi Hongzhao 釋弘照	39b14–40a2 (recitation)
21	–	Monk Shi Fayuan 釋法眼	42a03–b5 (reading) Note: Tongue cannot be cut
22	22	Monk Fuyuan 福緣	73b7–b21 (recitation) Note: Tongue emits light

^a Accounts 15 (meditation), 16 (vinaya), 21 (meditation) in Suwa 1997 are not associated with the *Lotus Sutra*.

^b *Xu gaoseng zhuan*

^c *Hongzan fahua zhuan*

^d *Fahua chuanji*

Notes

- ¹ See *Huayan jing chuanji* 華嚴經傳記, T51, no. 2073: 155a10–b9. In this account about Śikṣānanda (652–710), the translator’s tongue is said to remain intact after his cremation. (For the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* [T], citations are given in the following manner: Title, collection initial with volume number, serial number of the work, page number and applicable register, column number.)
- ² For a brief introduction to the *Hongzan fahua zhuan*, see Stevenson 1995 and 2009. These collections will be discussed later in the section, ‘The Wonder in Parasutric Narratives’.
- ³ Suwa 1997.
- ⁴ The 30-roll *Xu gaoseng zhuan* was compiled by Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) as a sequel to Huijiao’s 慧皎 (497–554) *Gaoseng zhuan* (Biographies of Eminent Monks). It includes the biographies of eminent monks who lived in the period from 519 to 665. Like the *Gaoseng zhuan*, it has 10 sections, which include 414 major biographies and 201 subordinate biographies.
- ⁵ Suwa 1997, 319.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 320.
- ⁷ *Dazhidu lun*, T25, no. 1509: 127a9–14. Without noticing that the two scriptures are related to two wondrous phenomena, Suwa (1997, 320) thought that the belief was also linked to the *Amitābha-sūtra*.
- ⁸ Suwa (1997, 325)’s argument for this based on the *Dazhidu lun* account is weak, especially when the incorruptible tongue is not found in the traditional Buddhist categories of supernormal powers attained through spiritual practice.
- ⁹ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T50, no. 2060: 688a12–16. The *Dapin bore jing* is a reference to the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (Perfection of wisdom in twenty-five thousand lines).
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, T50, no. 2060: 532a16–22. It is clear from the biography that Zhiyan’s intonation of the *Lotus Sutra* is unrelated to the monthly meeting.
- ¹¹ Suwa 1997, 323.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ Accounts 3 (*ibid.*, 304–5) and 7 (*ibid.*, 307–8) merely mentions the gathering of monks for worship, while account 15 (*ibid.*, 312) is not related to the *Lotus Sutra*. Account 11 (*ibid.*, 310) mentions that the people of the entire district came to venerate the incorruptible tongue and embrace the sutra. But there is no mention of a *Lotus Sutra* society.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 326.
- ¹⁵ Lu 2004, 14n24.
- ¹⁶ Compiled by Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554) and completed in 519, the 14-roll *Gaoseng zhuan* contains 257 major biographies and 259 subordinate biographies of eminent monks who lived from 67 to 519 (453 years). Its divided into 10 thematic sections, such as translators, exegetes, those who discard their bodies, sponsors of religious works and sermonizers. The biographies of monks who were well known for their recitation of scriptures are contained in roll 12 (T50, no. 2059: 406b14–9a26). The incorruptible tongue is mentioned in the biography of monk Fajin 法進 (d. 444; T50, no. 2059: 404a29–b21) collected in the section on those who discard their bodies. See the following section for a discussion on this biography.
- ¹⁷ See Ho 2019, 31–33.
- ¹⁸ For a brief introduction to this collection, see Stevenson 1995 and 2009.

- ¹⁹ *Fahua chuanji*, T51, no. 2068: 84b22.
- ²⁰ See Appendix for all the cases contained in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, the *Hongzan fahua zhuan*, and the *Fahua chuanji*.
- ²¹ The five kinds of scriptural practices (*wuzhong xing* 五種行) is a traditional category often found in Mahāyāna scriptures. In chapter 10 of the *Lotus Sutra*, ‘Masters of the Dharma’ (Fashi pin 法師品), there are descriptions of the five kinds of Dharma Masters who (1) accept and uphold (*shouchi* 受持), (2) read (*du* 讀), (3) intone (*song* 誦), (4) explicate (*jieshuo* 解說), and (5) copy (*shuxie* 書寫) the *Lotus Sutra*.
- ²² Stevenson 1995, 425.
- ²³ The relationship between dynastic histories and biographical records of eminent monks is also discussed in Hureau 2015, 109–10.
- ²⁴ It originally contained more than 10 items and was given to a Kuaiji 會稽 (modern Shaoxing, Zhejiang) scholar-official named Fu Yuan 傅瑗, from whose household it was lost during the sack of Kuaiji in 399. Fu Yuan’s son Fu Liang 傅亮 (374–426) rewrote seven of the lost tales from memory and compiled them to form the current seven-item text. See a detailed study in Makita 1970. Also see Wang 1984, 302–03; Gjertson 1989, 16–19; and Campany 1993. A new annotated version is available in Dong 2002, 1–27.
- ²⁵ The second collection contains 10 tales in addition to a preface, while the third collection contains 69 tales with a preface. See a detailed study in Makita 1970 as well as Gjertson 1989, 19–20 and 27–28; Campany 1993. New annotated versions of these two collections are available in Dong 2002, 28–234.
- ²⁶ Ho 2019, 264.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.
- ²⁸ Stevenson 1995, 427.
- ²⁹ Ho 2017, 1119–22.
- ³⁰ Ho 2019, 34.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 266.
- ³² Ho 2017, 1127.
- ³³ *Hongzan fahua zhuan*, T51, no. 2067: 31c06–17, translated in Stevenson 1995, 440–41.
- ³⁴ *Hongzan fahua zhuan*, T51, no. 2067: 40a05–15, translated in Stevenson 1995, 443–44.
- ³⁵ For a discussion of these collections, see Ho 2019, 44–57.
- ³⁶ Although his disciple edited the text, most of this five-roll work was probably completed by Fazang 法藏 (643–712) before he passed away (Zhuru 2007, 333). Like the *Lotus Sutra* collections, this work chronicles the transmission and practice of the *Garland Sutra*. The first four chapters are concerned with the philology of its various texts, their transmission and translation, and the traditions they inspired. The last five chapters are concerned with practices related to the *Garland Sutra*, such as its explication, recitation, reading and copying. The last chapter is related to miscellaneous matters.
- ³⁷ Based on the original work of Fazang’s disciple, the eighth-century monk Huiying 惠英, this work (T51, no. 2074) was edited and published in 783 by the lay Buddhist Hu Youzhen 胡幽貞.
- ³⁸ An exception being an account in the *Huayan jing chuanji* mentioned in note 1.
- ³⁹ Edited by the monk Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518) and published around 515, the *Chu*

- sanjang jiji* (T55, no. 2145) is the first extant scriptural catalogue that includes listings found in an earlier catalogue by Dao'an 道安 (312–385), which is no longer extant. It is thus an important source for studying the early history of Chinese Buddhist scriptures and their translations. Kumārajīva's biography (T55, no. 2145: 100a23–102a13) is found in the section on translators of scriptures.
- ⁴⁰ Benn 2007, 28–30.
- ⁴¹ Watson 1993, 251 (with modification).
- ⁴² For a biography of Zhizhan, see *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 28, T50, no. 2060: 686a2–13. For instances of the incorruptible tongues of other monks appended to Zhizhan's biography see T50, no. 2060: 686a13–b14. It is worth noting that an early account of Zhizhan was first collected in the *Jingyi ji* 旌異記 (A Record of Manifested Marvels), which was composed by Hou Bo 侯白 (fl. late sixth century). It is uncertain whether the version found in the reconstructed *Jingyi ji* by Lu Xun (1967, 537–43), which is based on the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* version, is the same as the original version.
- ⁴³ The *Taiping guangji*, compiled under the editorship of Li Fang 李昉 (925–996) and published in 978 under imperial auspices, is an important source of pre-Song popular literature. 10 rolls of this encyclopedia are dedicated to parasutraic narratives, of which those of the *Lotus Sutra* are collected in roll 109. For Zhizhan's biography, see *Taiping guangji* 109: 95. (Citation of non-Buddhist primary sources with modern editions will be done in the following manner: Title, followed by roll number if applicable, page number.)
- ⁴⁴ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T50, no. 2060: 686a17–29, translation in Stevenson 1995, 441.
- ⁴⁵ Watson 1993, 259–60 (with modification).
- ⁴⁶ *Da boniepan jing* 大般涅槃經, T12, no. 374: 367c6, 385b21.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 433b17, 482a11.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 391b05.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 391b18.
- ⁵⁰ Watson 1993, 250.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 260.
- ⁵² *Da boniepan jing*, T12, no. 374: 535b04.
- ⁵³ Gomez 1996, 19–20.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 226n7.
- ⁵⁵ Watson 1993, 274 (with modification).
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 219.
- ⁵⁷ *Gaoseng zhuan*, T50, no. 2059: 333a2–3.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 332c19–21.
- ⁵⁹ *Fayuan zhulin*, T53, no. 2122: 421a27–b10. In the *Mingbao ji* 冥報記 (A Record of the Unseen [Workings of] Retribution), there is a tale about the importance of observing ritual purity when copying the *Lotus Sutra*, and its implied relationship to the power of the scripture (Gjertson 1989, 162–63). See also another account in the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* (Stevenson 1995, 450) that enumerates the details to maintain ritual purity while copying the *Lotus Sutra*.
- ⁶⁰ Watson 1993, 23.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 24 (with modification).
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 27 (with modification).
- ⁶³ *Ibid.* (with modification).
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 30.
⁶⁶ Ibid. (with modification).
⁶⁷ Ibid., 26.
⁶⁸ Ibid., 32.
⁶⁹ Ibid., 33 (with modification).
⁷⁰ Ibid., 34–37.
⁷¹ Ibid., 56–58.
⁷² Ibid., 171 (with modification).
⁷³ Ibid., 213.
⁷⁴ Ibid., 219 (with modification).
⁷⁵ Ibid., 219–23.
⁷⁶ Ibid., 224 (with modification).
⁷⁷ See Schroeder 2011.
⁷⁸ Ibid., 58 and 62. To this question, the sutra has Śāriputra explain in great length why this does not constitute a falsehood (Ibid., 58).
⁷⁹ Ibid., 229.
⁸⁰ Lu 2004, 24–25.
⁸¹ For a discussion of merit in Chinese Buddhism, see Kieschnick 2003, 157–64.
⁸² Ho 2019, 203–17.

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