
TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

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GOOD REVIEWS: THREE EARLY COLLECTIONS OF BUDDHIST STORIES*

These collections of Buddhist stories must be looked at together: they are very close to one another thematically, they continue and supplement one another, and as such they form a distinctive cycle of stories about Guanshiyin (“觀世音”, “Observing the Sounds of the World”, also known as Guanyin, 觀音), a *bodhisattva* of Mahayana Buddhism, the symbol and personification of the great suffering, whose Chinese name is a translation of the Sanskrit “Avalokiteshvara” [1]. In China Guanshiyin became famous since the time of Western Jin, when Kumarajiva (Jiumoluoshi, 鳩摩羅什, 344—413) translated the work “Miao fa lian hua jing” (“妙法蓮華經”, “The Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law”, “Saddharma Pundarika Sutra”), and in particular this cult grew since the emergence of the translation of the 25th chapter of “Miao fa lian hua jing” into Chinese in 406 — “Guan shi yin pu sa men pin” (“觀世音菩薩門品”, “Gates of *Bodhisattva* Guanshiyin, Opened for Everyone”), recounting acts and miracles of Avalokiteshvara. By the 5th and 6th centuries the cult of Guanyin had become one of the leading movements in Chinese Buddhism: that was the time when a large number of various images of this *bodhisattva* began floating around and the texts related to the image, including collections of prose with a plot, which we speak about in this section, were being widely spread [2]. Another reason for looking at these three works together has to do with the circumstances of their history and integrity, which we will discuss below.

We should begin by saying that we know two collections titled “Guan shi yin ying yan ji” (“觀世音應驗記”, “Records of Testimonies Concerning Guanshiyin”) [3]. Chronologically the earlier work (and the first collection of the kind in China) belongs to a Jin Buddhist hermit (*jushi*, “居士”, “layman”) named Xie Fu (謝敷, ca. 350 — ca. 400); D. E. Gjertson believes that this collection “was written prior to year 399” [4]. Here is what is known about Xie Fu — he spent over ten

years in the mountains of Taipingshan (in Jiangxi Province), knew well many famous Buddhist monks of his time, and said no to offers concerning employment, although a Jin nobleman named Xi Yin (郗愔, 313—384) promised a position of *boshi* (“博士”, “a learned man”) in the court [5]. The collection of Xie Fu has not survived to our time, but some of its material was borrowed by later authors before the text got lost. At least, the author of the second collection of the same name, a Liu-Song dignitary named Fu Liang (傅亮, 374—426) writes the following in the foreword:

These seven stories — from “Testimonies Concerning Guanshiyin” written by Xie Qing-xu [6] in one *juan*, [where there were] over ten stories, that [he] passed on to my late father [7]. I used to live in Gui[ji], but during the military unrest [8] I lost this [book]; having returned to that area I began looking for the manuscript, but alas, it did not survive. Seven stories out of it [I] knew by heart, the other ones, however, I could not remember and could not write them down. That is why I put together “Records” out of what I could remember — to the delight of scholarly men, of the same faith [that I am] [9].

It is clear from the cited piece that Fu Liang was a sort of a successor of the Xie Fu's affairs, having restored his collection by memory. However, today there is no way of telling whether Fu Liang reproduced the stories verbatim or he just recounted his own variations on the memorable plots. On top of that, the collection is not signed with the name of Xie Fu, but with his own: “Song *shangshuling* [10] Fu Liang from northern lands, second name Ji-you (季友)” [11]. So it must be admitted that “Guan shi yin ying yan ji” in the version of Xie Fu is irretrievably lost.

The second collection of the same name, as it was already mentioned above, is signed with the name of Fu

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