

Article

# Animals in Medieval Chinese Biographies of Buddhist Monks

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Received: 11 April 2019; Accepted: 21 May 2019; Published: 28 May 2019



**Abstract:** In this paper, I examine the presentation of animals in medieval Chinese Buddhist biographies. These biographies tell stories about strange animals, whose behavior signals that they are far from ordinary—some local deities, underlings of such deities, or even former friends from a past life. By focusing on two biography collections separated in time by over 100 years, in this paper, I argue that the differing presentation of animals reflects the changing fortunes of Buddhism in China, from its early establishment to its successful reception by the imperial court.

**Keywords:** Buddhism; China; snakes; birds; tigers; monks; biography

## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I examine the presentation of animals in medieval Chinese Buddhist biographies (Kieschnick 1997). These biographies tell stories about strange animals—animals that behave in unusual ways and sometimes turn out to be much more than ordinary animals. They may be local deities or underlings of such deities. They may also be a former acquaintance who has been reborn as an animal and reveals his true identity in order to make a special request to a monk. Animals typically appear in specific types of stories. For example, animals appear when monks are meditating in mountain caves, when rain magic is performed in the midst of a drought, or at the death and funeral of monastic leaders.

These stories situate animals around liminal themes of utopian visions, transitions, and transformations. Victor Turner, building on Van Gennep's classical study of rites of passage, wrote of structure and *communitas*. Rites of passage mark transitions in their candidates' standing within the rigidly hierarchical society ("structure"). In the course of a ritual, candidates are taken out of this "structure" into a liminal and non-hierarchical "*communitas*" and then returned to the structure, occupying a different place within the hierarchical "structure." Outside of the hierarchical "structure", the liminal space of "*communitas*" may be represented as contradicting the familiar structural relationships within the society (Turner 1969, pp. 125–30, *et passim*).

We may read the stories about the unusual relationships between medieval Chinese Buddhist monks and animals as representing the "*communitas*" in the sense proposed by Turner. The larger context of the stories examined here is the gradual introduction and consolidation of the Buddhist community in medieval China. Within this larger context, a variety of local and concrete transitions and transformations occur. Animal stories in monastic biographies, framed around utopian stories of *communitas*, illustrate these local transitions and transformations. In earlier stories describing the origins of Buddhist communities in early medieval China, the transition involves the transformation of local, non-Buddhist sacred spaces into Buddhist sites.<sup>1</sup> Over time, as Buddhist communities became

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Faure spoke of "two types of vision of space" in characterizing a similar phenomenon (Faure 1987, p. 343).

more firmly established in medieval China, biographies of well-established monastic leaders highlight their deaths and describe the responses of the communities they left behind. Thus, different kinds of stories about strange behaviors of animals emerge.

In this paper, I will examine a number of stories about tigers (Chen 2012, pp. 151–209), snakes (Faure 1987; Chen 2019), and birds, drawing my examples from two biographical collections, one compiled in the early sixth century by Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554) and the other in the seventh century by Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667). Huijiao's *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (T. 2059) covers the period from 67 to 519 CE and contains 257 principal biographies and 243 appended secondary biographies.<sup>2</sup> Daoxuan's *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* (T. 2060) expands Huijiao's collection, following its basic format (with some modification). This collection contains 340 principal biographies and 160 appended secondary biographies.<sup>3</sup>

Huijiao's collection compiles biographies from the beginning of Buddhism in China. Daoxuan was active in the early Tang dynasty, following the blossoming of state support for Buddhism in the preceding Sui dynasty (581–617). As a striking gesture of state support, Sui emperor Wendi (r. 581–604) on several occasions during the Renshou era (601–605) distributed relics all over the realm; a number of eminent monks transported these relics to the location where stupas were constructed to house them permanently. These monks reported miraculous signs observed at the time of the relic installation. Biographies of these monks appear in Daoxuan's collection (Chen 2002, pp. 51–107).

Huijiao's carefully constructed stories introduce us to several important themes of animal narratives. The same themes appear in Daoxuan's collection, though their emphases appear to shift. Typically, the stories in Daoxuan's collection are brief, in many cases no more than passing references, and appear standardized and formulaic. Birds appear frequently in Daoxuan's collection in stories about death and funerals. Such stories are less conspicuous in Huijiao's earlier work and may have become more popular in later periods.

For each animal, I first examine stories from Huijiao's collection. I identify and explain certain key issues that animate these narratives. I then turn to Daoxuan's examples to illustrate how the emphases shifted.

## 2. Tiger Stories

### 2.1. Huijiao's Collection

The entry on monk Faan 法安 (dates unknown) in the exegete section of Huijiao's collection tells the following story:

During the Yixi period (A.D., 405–408) a tiger appeared in the Xinyang 新陽 District and harmed villagers. In a large shrine in this District, a building was constructed under a tree. Well over a hundred people lived in the village [at some distance from the shrine]; every evening one or two persons encountered the tiger outside the village and were killed. Faan was travelling in the District and came to the village. The villagers, fearing the tiger, had already closed the village gate. Faan meditated under a tree [near the shrine building]. Toward dawn the sound of the tiger was heard, as it dropped the corpse it was carrying on its back on the northern side of the tree. When the tiger saw Faan, it jumped, delighted and

<sup>2</sup> I identify the cited passages by their locations in *Taisho Shinshū Daizōkyō* (Takakusu and Watanbe 1932) and the recent annotated Japanese translation of Huijiao's collection (Yoshikawa and Funayama 2010).

<sup>3</sup> According to its preface, Daoxuan's collection is dated 645. The collection must have been completed in one form at this date. However, the content of the widely circulating version indicates that Daoxuan continued working on his collection beyond this date, adding further entries, until close to his death. Guo Shaolin critically edited and punctuated Daoxuan's collection (Guo 2014). Old Japanese manuscripts recently made accessible to scholars shed light on the complex relationship among the different versions of Daoxuan's collection (Institute of Japanese Manuscript Study 2014).

surprised, and lay down before him. Faan preached and conferred precepts on the tiger. The tiger, squatting on the ground, did not move; after a while it went away.

Villagers chasing the tiger came to the tree. Seeing Faan there, they were astonished. They took him to be a divine person and told the story everywhere in the District. People in the District came to worship Faan. From then on, the tiger stopped harming the villagers. People converted the shrine building into a Buddhist temple and requested Faan to stay there. Fields and gardens in the area were donated (for its upkeep). (T. 2059: 50.362c1–10; *Kōsōden*, vol. II, p. 257)

This story contrasts two images of the tiger. On the one hand, it is a frightening animal that routinely killed the villagers, but, on the other hand, it is also a tame animal that honored monk Faan and behaved as a pious human follower. The tiger was delighted to see a virtuous monk, listened to him respectfully, and received the precepts. Receiving the precepts here would mean accepting Faan's Buddhist message and becoming a lay follower. Observing the extraordinary behavior of the tiger, the villagers took Faan to be a divine person and donated the shrine building to him, turning it into a Buddhist monastery. Two spheres are clearly separated in this story. The villagers live in an area secured by a gate that was closed during the night. The monk travels and the tiger roams outside the secured village area. The encounter between the monk and the tiger takes place in this potentially dangerous area outside the village.

The story of taming the dangerous tiger in Faan's biography concludes with a note that the building in which Faan spent the night became a Buddhist monastery. Here, the tiger-taming story is in fact a temple origin story, which, in turn, is framed as a biography of its founder.<sup>4</sup>

The biography of Bo Sengguang 帛僧光 (287–396), a meditation master, tells a similar story about the monastery at Mt. Shicheng 石城 in Shan 剡:

Sengguang travelled to this mountain at the beginning [of] the Yonghe period (A.D., 345–356). Local people told him that dangerous animals lived on the mountain, and, fearing the mountain deities' violent mischief, people had stayed away for a long time.

Sengguang was not afraid; he got a path cleared and went into the mountain. After walking a few miles, he encountered powerful wind and heavy rain. A band of tigers roared. On the southern side of the mountain Sengguang found a rock cave, where he stayed and meditated. In the morning, the rain stopped, and he walked to the village, begged for food, and returned to the mountain in the evening.

Sengguang repeated this for three days, when the mountain deity appeared to him in a dream. Some [of the deity's attendants] had taken on the form of a tiger, and others were in a snake's body. They vied with each other in [an attempt] to frighten Sengguang. But the monk was not scared at all. Three days later he again saw the mountain deity in a dream; the deity presented the mountain to Sengguang, explaining that he had moved to Mt. Hanshi 寒石 in Zhang'an 章安 District.

After this, people were able to collect firewood and move freely on the mountain. They served Sengguang, attending to his needs. Other meditators and scholars came and built huts at the side of the cave, gradually turning the site into a monastery, called Yinyue 隱岳 ("Hidden Mountain"). (2059: 50.395c7–17; *Kōsōden*, vol. iv, p. 33)

This too is a monastic origin story. In this story, ferocious animals (tigers and snakes) had harmed the local people for a long time. However, in a dream to a powerful meditator monk, these animals

<sup>4</sup> A similar pattern appears in other biographies: Guṇavarman (377–431) (340c11–24; i, 280–281); Zhu Senglan 竺僧朗 (dates unknown) (354b19–21; vol. ii, p. 149).

reveal themselves to be attendants of the mountain deity. Sengguang was an intruder. Behaving like a local ruler, the mountain deity first attempted to frighten him away, but Sengguang remained immune to the threat. Acknowledging the superior spiritual power, presumably of the monk's meditation, the deity then moved away, offering the mountain to him. Here, dangerous animals living away from the human community are presented as attendants of a mountain deity who, similar to a human patron, offered residence to the monk. This transition occurs in the half real and half unreal state of a dream.

A similar story, possibly an alternative version or closely affiliated with the above story, is told in another biography.<sup>5</sup> This biography of monk Zhu Tanyou 竺曇猷 (d. 396) immediately follows Sengguang's in the meditation chapter in Huichao's collection. As noted above, Sengguang's encounter with the mountain deity occurred at Mt. Shicheng of Shan. Zhu Tanyou also came to Shicheng of Shan, begged for alms, and meditated there. However, later, Tanyou moved to a rock cave in Mt. Chicheng 赤城 of Shifeng 始豐. He meditated there, and an exchange with the mountain deity similar to Sengguang's at Shicheng is said to have occurred for Tanyou at Mt. Chicheng:

Dozens of tigers came and squatted in front of him. Tanyou recited scriptures. When one tiger dozed off, Tanyou tapped on the tiger's head, asking why it wouldn't listen to the scripture. Suddenly, all the tigers left. A short while later, very large snakes appeared and circled around Tanyou. Moving back and forth, they raised their heads and tilted toward him. Half a day later, they went away.

A day later, a deity manifested himself to Tanyou, saying, "Since the Dharma master, powerful and virtuous, came to this mountain to stay, I, your disciple, present this cave to you."

An exchange followed:

Tanyou proposed to share the mountain with the deity, but the deity declined. The deity himself was willing to share, but [he feared that] his underlings, not having been civilized by exposure to the Buddhist teaching, might prove difficult to control. Other beings would come visiting from afar and might behave offensively to Tanyou. Gods and human beings follow different moralities. Therefore the deity had to leave. Tanyou asked who the deity was, how long he had lived in the mountain and where he intended to go. The deity identified himself as a son of Emperor Xia 夏; he had lived in the mountain over two thousand years; he would go to Mt. Hanshi, under the governance of his maternal uncle, and stay there [temporarily]. Eventually, he would return to the shrine in Shanyin 山陰.

(T. 2059: 50.396a1–14; *Kōsōden*, vol. iv, pp. 36–37)

Again, as noted above, the deity who offered the mountain to Sengguang said that he was moving to Mt. Hanshi.

We note that at least some of the tiger stories in Huijiao's collection are told as temple origin stories. These stories appear to reflect the larger historical setting; early Buddhist monasteries were established in uncultivated highlands (Gernet 1995, pp. 116–18).

Both Sengguang and Tanyou meditated in rock caves. Tigers and snakes appeared and threatened them or behaved disrespectfully to them. In Sengguang's story, the mountain deity first appears in a dream, and tigers and snakes are explicitly identified with the deity. Having failed to scare away the monk, the mountain deity returns a few days later and donates the cave to the monk. In Tanyou's story, the story of tigers and snakes appears first, without explicit reference to the mountain deity. However, as in Sengguang's story, the mountain deity appears shortly thereafter ("one day") and

<sup>5</sup> A brief reference to Bo Sengguang, as the name of a strange star, occurs later in Tanyou's biography, T. 2059: 50.395b11. The story of a miraculous stone bridge occupies a central place in Zhu Tanyou's biography. The story of the stone bridge is attributed to monk Bo Daoyou or Zhu Daoyou in the *Fayuan zhulin*, T.2122: 53.594c15, p. 16. Ref., *Kōsōden*, vol. vi, p. 42, note 3. Zhu Tanyou appears to have been known by these names in other transmissions.

donates the cave to the monk. At some level, these appear to be stories of conquest. They are also somewhat reminiscent of Māra's challenge in the life of the Buddha legend. Māra's challenges attempt to disturb the Buddha's meditation, and Sengguang and Tanyou are known for their practice of meditation.

The accounts of tigers described in the biographies of Faan, Sengguang, and Tanyou are not unique. A number of biographies in Huijiao's collection allude to the extraordinary ways in which tigers behave in the presence of powerful monks.<sup>6</sup> Yu Falan 于法蘭 (dates unknown) lived in the wild, taming tigers and rhinoceroses (T. 2059: 50.350a9; *Kōsōden*, vol. ii, p. 80). A tiger was always present in Huiyong's 慧永 (331–414) room (T. 2059: 50.362a21–2; *Kōsōden*, vol. ii, p. 251).

Zhu Fotiao 竺佛調 (dates unknown) also encountered a tiger on a mountain:

Around the time the sun set, a heavy snow started. He went into a tiger's den to spend the night. The tiger returned and lay in front of the cave, next to Fotiao. Fotiao apologized to the tiger for having taken his place, and the tiger drooped his ears and went down the mountain. (T. 2059: 50.387c27–29; *Kōsōden*, vol. iii, p. 351)

In another story, the ruler kept tigers in a cage and ordered to have Tanshi 曇始 (dates unknown) given to them as food, but the tigers crouched down and would not come close to him (T. 2059: 50.392b28–c1; *Kōsōden*, vol. iii, p. 413). Tanchao 曇超 (419–492) spent nights alone under a tree, but tigers and rhinoceroses did not harm him (T. 2059: 50.400a8–9; *Kōsōden*, vol. iv, p. 98). Huimi 慧彌 (440–518) went alone into Mt. Zhongnan 終南. Tigers and rhinoceroses did not trouble him (T. 2059: 50.408c17–18; *Kōsōden*, vol. iv, p. 248).

In the story attributed to Faan examined above, the tiger listened to the monk's preaching and received the Buddhist precepts. Bo Sengguang and Zhu Tanyou countered the threat of the mountain deity with the power of meditation, and the deity responded by donating the mountain to them. Similar stories of tigers that highlight a wide range of Buddhist practices also appear in other biographies.

A tiger came and squatted in front of Sengsheng 僧生 (dates unknown) when he recited the Lotus Sūtra. When the recitation was finished, the tiger went away (T. 2059: 50.406c28–407a1; *Kōsōden*, vol. iv, p. 219). A tiger appeared when monk Shengjin 聖進 (dates unknown) was engaged in the ascetic *dhūta* practice under a tree. Shengjin sat straight and undisturbed, and seeing that, the tiger kneeled down in front of him and left (T. 2059: 50.382b20–21; *Kōsōden*, vol. iii, p. 281). When Faxu 法緒 (dates unknown) practiced *dhūta* in a cemetery, tigers and rhinoceroses did not harm him (T. 2059: 50.396c27–28; *Kōsōden*, vol. vi, p. 48). Hongming 弘明 (403–486) was meditating at the Yunmen 雲門 monastery. A tiger came into the room, but seeing the monk sitting straight and motionless, the tiger left (T. 2059: 50.408a9–11; *Kōsōden*, vol. iv, p. 236). These stories associated with various Buddhist practices suggest the flexibility of the general theme of the encounter between monks and wild animals.

## 2.2. Tigers in Daoxuan's Collection

A number of tiger stories appear in Daoxuan's collection. Typically, these stories emphasize the monk's remarkable relationship with tigers, still treated as fierce and dangerous animals. Take the following example:

Someone came to Deshan's 德山 (dates unknown) place. A tiger came chasing after the person. The guest hid under the bed and the tiger squatted by it. Deshan said to the tiger, "Is this person's flesh tastier than mine?", took off his clothes and offered himself to the tiger. The tiger rose and left for good. (T. 2060: 50.661c3–5; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1060)

<sup>6</sup> The following story attributed to Buddhayaśas (dates unknown) simply illustrates the young monk's supernatural knowledge and may not illustrate the kind of relationship between this monk and a tiger that appears in other stories listed below. Buddhayaśas and his teacher encountered a tiger in a field. The teacher was about to flee, but Yaśas said that the tiger had eaten his fill and would not harm people. As they traveled further, they saw a carcass (T. 2059: 50.333c21–2; *Kōsōden*, vol. i, p. 188).

Another example follows:

Snakes and mice lived together in peace [in the presence of Daoshun 道舜 (dates unknown)]. A tiger came and squatted by his side, and the monk would preach the Dharma. When people came around, the monk would let the tiger leave. Or, the monk would tell the tiger the day before not to come the following day. The tiger would then not appear the next day ... His attendants lived along side of the tiger, treating it like a household dog, never fearing the animal. (577a3–8; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 681)<sup>7</sup>

Several stories depict pacification of dangerous tigers and communal coexistence among a monk and tigers. When a large number of tigers roamed around villages, harming people, Zhikuan 志 (559–636), at the request of a military commander, arranged to have a vegetarian feast, conferring lay precepts on the tigers. By the evening, the tigers dispersed (T. 2060: 50.543c10–15; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 530). When a tiger disturbed a mountain temple, Shi Daochan 道禪 (458–527) went and stayed there, and the tiger troubles ceased (T. 2060: 50.607b3–4; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 820). Sengchou 僧稠 (480–560) and Tanxun 曇詢 (520–599) stopped the fight between two tigers with their walking staffs (T. 2060: 50.554a1–2; 559b 9–16; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, pp. 575, 598). Sengding 僧定 (d. 674) lived alone among many tigers in a mountain and often walked all night among groups of animals without any concern (T. 2060: 50.579b13–17; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 695).

Shi Zhixiang 釋植相 (dates unknown), in his travels, came to a place where Daoist priests were living:

They feared that [Zhixiang] might convert their followers to Buddhism and refused to let him stay there. Tigers roared all night around the building. The Daoists became afraid. In the morning they came after Zhixiang and received the bodhisattva precepts. (T. 2060: 50.646a15–17; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 988)

In this story, the tigers appear to have become followers of Zhixiang and threatened the hostile Daoist priests.

A tiger came to rescue Senglang 僧朗 (dates unknown). Captured by the Northern Wei army while traveling east, he and fellow students managed a miraculous escape. Going down a steep cliff in total darkness, they tied pieces of flags and ropes to a massive tree and shimmied down, hanging from the tree:

But the ground below was covered with sharp thorny shrubs; they could not find a place to put their feet. They were tempted to back up, but feared discovery by soldiers. Frightened, they clung to the ropes. But the ropes could not hold for long. Saying to each other that in their disastrous straight they could only appeal to Avalokiteśvara, they hit a rock [repeatedly] with their heads and meditated single-mindedly. Suddenly a bright light appeared from the direction of the sunrise, revealing a place to land among the thorny shrubs. As soon as they touched the ground the light disappeared. They realized that this was a miraculous sign. They congratulated themselves and went to sleep.

The dawn broke and they heard the search party of soldiers depart [ordered to capture them]. [Senglang and his fellow students] were still lost deep in mountains and valleys. As they followed the sun, they met a large tiger. The students lamented that having escaped from captivity they were now going to be eaten by a tiger. But Senglang disagreed, claiming that they were under miraculous protection, first of the miraculous light and now of this tiger;

<sup>7</sup> Monk 僧集 (dates unknown) is said to have kept snakes and mice, which were tame and ate food from his hands. They usually appeared together and refused to leave even when chased. When lay people came, they would hide (T. 2060: 50.569b13–16; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 643).

the holy being (Avalokiteśvara) was leading them to the escape route. The tiger patiently guided them and disappeared when they got to the right path. (T. 2060: 50.646c18–647a2; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 992)

In some stories, tigers offer their caves to a meditating or a traveling monk, without explicit references to monastic origin. During the summer, when Zhenhui 慧 (568–615) sat meditating in a tiger's cave, the following occurred:

the tiger moved away. The tiger came back in the fall and the monk returned the cave to the animal. A mountain deity was in charge of the calendar and warned the monk if he came too early or stayed too late. (T. 2060: 50.575a11–13; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 672)

Fachong 法冲, still alive in 664, came to a rock cave where wild animals lived and announced that he was going to spend the night there. The animals then left (T. 2060: 50.666a21–24; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, pp. 1078–79).

The theme of temple origin is present in some stories, but it does not receive the same degree of attention as in Huijiao's collection. The biography of Daomu 道穆 (dates unknown) tells a story in which the mountain deity first appeared as a snake and a group of roaring tigers:

Thunder and fierce wind shook the mountain, breaking up trees. A supernatural snake circled around the seat [of the meditating monk] and tigers roared. Daomu's mind remained peaceful, completely free from any thought about what was taking place outside. After seven days the animals disappeared. The monk climbed to the top of the mountain and looked around into the distance. To the east of the mountain was a steep cliff. To the west was a deep stream. [Daomu] decided to settle there for the rest of his life. The mountain deity appeared, apologizing for threatening him and identifying himself as the ruler of [the local] rice fields. The deity requested the monk to confer the Buddhist precepts on him. (T. 2060: 50.658b14–21; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, pp. 1047–48)<sup>8</sup>

Jing'ai 靜藹 (534–578) settled on Mt. Zhongnan, and a community of followers gathered around him. There was no spring at the place, and people traveled down a valley to a stream to get drinking water:

At one time, when his students stood attending to the monk in the evening, a tiger appeared and scraped the ground. In the morning people checked the ground and found it wet. When they scraped the ground further, a spring opened and its water flowed down to the valley stream ... The spring was named after this occurrence. (T. 2060: 50.626a20–23; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, pp. 906–7)

In this story, a tiger indicates the location of water, facilitating the formation of a monastic community. The story may thus be read as a somewhat oblique temple origin story.

The biography of Facong 法聰 (died between 547–549) tells an elaborate story about tigers but also mentions several other animals:

Facong built his temple at Baima 白馬 spring of Mt. Sangai 傘蓋 in Xiangyang 襄陽 ... The prince of Jin'an 安 of Liang heard of the monk's reputation and tried to visit him at his

<sup>8</sup> This biography presents its subject Daomu as a relatively early figure. It thus mentions monks Sengzhan and Seng'an. Seng'an's *Xugaoseng zhuan* biography mentions the date of Wuping 4 of the Northern Qi (574). The biography also mentions Liu Qiu (427–495) of the Southern Qi. References are also made to inscriptions by Prince Xiao Yi of Liang dyanasty (r. 552–554) and verses attributed to Emperor Jianwen of Eastern Jin (r. 371–372). These references suggest a relatively early date for Daomu's life, though their veracity cannot be taken for granted. Still, the subject appears to be deliberately presented in a relatively early history of the Chinese Buddhist community.

meditation hut. At first, mounted soldiers following him turned around for no apparent reason. The prince was embarrassed and returned. At night he had a bad dream. Later, the prince tried again, but the horses turned around again. Only after the prince underwent purification could he proceed to the side of the temple building. Suddenly the valley was filled with a fiercely burning fire. After a while the fire turned into water, which then disappeared and a temple building appeared. Upon inquiry the prince learned that master [Facong] was practicing the fire and water meditation. On each side of the meditation seat was a tiger. The prince dared not approach further; Facong then touched the heads of the tigers, which made them lie down on the ground and close their eyes. Invited to come forward, the prince greeted the master respectfully and [then] told the monk about some tigers that were causing harm in his lands, requesting help. The monk meditated. After a while seventeen large tigers arrived. The monk conferred the Three Refuges on them, instructing them not to harm the locals. Facong told his disciples to attach a piece of cloth on the neck of each tiger and instructed the tigers to return after seven days. On that day the prince hosted a large feast. Many came, and when the tigers arrived the monk gave food to them and removed the cloth. The tigers stopped harming people.

A curious story follows:

On the day [of the feast] the monk took the prince to White Horse spring; there was a white turtle in the spring, which Facong picked up with his hand and ate, saying it was a female dragon. Facong also took the prince to Ling spring; there was a five-colored carp, which the monk again picked up with his hand and ate, saying it was a male dragon. The prince and his officials marveled and offered a generous donation. Then, dozens of bandits came to rob the donation. Roaring tigers blocked their path. Then they saw a giant human being leaning against the meditation hall. The pine tree on the side of the building reached only to his knee. Holding a vajra hammer, he was guarding the meditation hall. The prince reported all this to the court, and the court conferred on the hut the name of Chanju 禪居 Monastery. Facong resided there, providing spiritual assistance to people and keeping the area at peace. The court also ordered Xu Qin 徐擒 to construct Lingquan monastery near the place where Facong resided. [Northern] Zhou (557–581) court renamed [Chanju] as Jinglin 靜林. The Sui (581–619) changed it to Jingkong 景空. The Great Tang (618–907) kept the Sui designation.

When Facong lived in the monastery, white deer and white sparrows frequently appeared. They were perfectly tame and stayed there. Facong practiced compassion everywhere. Once he saw a butcher herding over one hundred boars. Facong said “Liberate, Śūraṅgama” three times; the rope that bound the boars became unbound and all the animals scattered. The butcher became angry and tried to harm the monk. The monk remained firm, unmoved. The butcher then repented and gave up his profession. Facong pronounced the same spell three times to a fisherman, who then could not pull his net ashore. (T. 2060: 50.555c1–556a4; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, pp. 581–82)

This complex story recalls some of the temple origin stories in Huijiao’s collection in which tiger caves are offered to newly arrived Buddhist masters. In Huijiao’s stories, tigers and other fierce animals are explicitly affiliated with mountain deities, who appear in dreams and offer the caves to the monks. Local deities do not appear in Facong’s story. The emphasis is on the different names that the ruling dynasties conferred on the monastery. The focus in stories involving tigers in Daoxuan’s collection appears to have shifted away from explaining the origin of temples and their facilities to marveling at the remarkable powers of the monks in question.

### 3. Snake Stories

#### 3.1. Huijiao's Collection

Snakes figure among the examples of dangerous and strange creatures, and they are often paired with tigers. In the stories about Bo Sengguang and Zhu Tanyou summarized above from Huijiao's collection, snakes are mentioned along with tigers. Tigers and snakes are also mentioned together as dangerous animals in the edict cited in the biography of the miracle-working monk Baozhi 保誌 (T. 2059: 50.394b28; *Kōsōden*, vol. iii, p. 442).

The entry on an early translator, An Qing 安清, also known as An Shigao 安世高 (dates unknown), includes an elaborate story of a snake (Miyakaya 1979, pp. 94–95). In this story, a snake plays a role as a dangerous and frightful animal, similar to tigers in the stories reviewed above. However, here, the deity who reveals himself and speaks is not just a local deity; he is also a reincarnation of a former fellow student of An Shigao.

Toward the end of Emperor Ling's 靈 reign (A.D., 169–189) An Shigao traveled south to avoid political disturbances, saying that he would visit Mt. Lu to bring salvation to his former fellow students. He reached the Gongting Lake shrine. The shrine was known for its [dangerous] miraculous powers and feared by boatmen . . . . An Shigao and fellow travelers offered a sacrifice to the shrine deity. The deity spoke through a medium, inviting the monk who was on one of the boats [namely An Shigao] to come to the shrine.

An extraordinary exchange between the deity and An Shigao followed:

The deity explained that in a past life in a foreign country he and An Shigao had undergone the ceremony of renouncing the householder's life at the same time and studied together. The deity was generous in giving donations, but because of his choleric temperament, he [was reduced in status and] became a shrine deity of the Gongting [lake]. His lifespan in this birth was to end soon. If he died in the lake, his large, long and ugly body would pollute it. He would have to move and die in the marshland to the west of the mountain. The deity was afraid that after death he would be reborn in hell. He offered a large amount of silk and other treasures in order to have a stūpa built and Buddhist rituals performed for his sake so that he would be reborn in a better realm.

An Shigao demanded that the deity reveal his body. The deity hesitated; his ugly body might frighten people. But the monk insisted and the deity raised his head from the altar. He was a giant snake. The length of its tail was unknown. The snake came close to An Shigao, and as An Shigao recited Sanskrit verses the deity shed tears like rain. Then it disappeared. An Shigao took the silk and left.

Wind filled the sails of the boats as they left the shore. Then, the snake appeared at the peak of a hill. People waved at it. After a while the snake disappeared. Soon the boats reached Yuzhang 豫章, where An Shigao built the East Temple with the treasures from the shrine.

Shortly after An Shigao left, the snake died. In the evening a youth appeared on the boat, knelt in front of An Shigao, received a blessing with spells, and suddenly disappeared. An Shigao told the boatmen that the boy was Gongting shrine's deity and that he had escaped his ugly body. Thereafter miraculous occurrences at the shrine ceased.

Later, people found in the marshland to the west of the mountain a corpse of a snake. From its head to the tail, it was several miles long. The place is the present Snake Village (*shacun* 蛇村) in the Xunyang 潯陽 Commandary. (T. 2059: 50.323b25–c22; *Kōsōden*, vol. i, pp. 39–41)

Similar to the tiger stories reviewed above this snake story is also framed as a local temple origin story. However, here, the deity is not only a local deity but was also an acquaintance of the monk. A different set of issues is introduced. This story also illustrates how the teaching of karmic rebirth brings together the two dimensions of our experience with animals: as alien and potentially terrifying beings but creatures with which we share very human emotions and attachments and, in some cases, a common history. The massive and ugly snake is identified as a fellow student and former monk. The animal offers generous donations, something expected of a human devotee.

This story of karmic rebirths is mapped around many transitions. The crossing of the lake is something of a spiritual crossing and culminates in the building of a temple with the gift that An Shigao received from the snake. In the course of the crossing, the lake deity died. An Shigao's former fellow student escaped from the body of an ugly snake and returned as a human boy to An Shigao on the boat.

In An Shigao's story, the snake is connected with death. Snakes and dragons are mentioned in stories about the death of other monks, marking a liminal moment of transition. Guṇavarman died sitting as if he entered into *samādhi*. Over a thousand monastics and lay people who gathered sensed strong fragrance and saw a very long creature that looked like a snake or a dragon appear from the corpse and rise up in the sky. No one could identify it by its name (T. 2059: 50.341b15–18; *Kōsōden*, vol. i, p. 291).

In the extended narrative about Zhu Daosheng's 竺道生 (355–434) death, the creature that rose up is called a dragon:

Thunder shook the Buddha Hall of Qingyuan 青園 monastery [in the capital city Jiankang]. A dragon rose up in the sky, illumining the Western wall . . . People said that since the dragon had now gone, Daosheng would also go. Unexpectedly Daosheng retired to Mt. Lu 廬 . . . He ascended the dharma seat, and when his lecture was about to end, [the audience] saw him drop his fan. He passed away while lecturing there. Sitting up straight, he leaned on the desk and passed away. He looked as if he entered *samādhi*. (T. 2059: 50.366c29–367a12; *Kōsōden*, vol. iii, p. 36)

Snakes and dragons are often assimilated with each other. Though a mythological animal, the dragon, in some cases, appears to be treated as an unusual snake. While stories of tigers are set in mountains and forests, snakes and dragons are affiliated with water.

In a rainmaking story told of Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416), a large snake is assumed to be a dragon:

When there was a drought at Xunyang 潯陽 Huiyuan came to the side of a pond and recited the Ocean Dragon Scripture.<sup>9</sup> Suddenly a giant snake (*jushu* 巨蛇) came out of the pond and went up into the sky. Shortly thereafter heavy rain fell. A rich harvest followed. The monastery where he was staying was then named the Dragon Spring temple. (T. 2059: 50.358a25–28; *Kōsōden*, vol. ii, pp. 201–2)

Dragons appear in many such stories about drought and rainmaking magic.<sup>10</sup> The entry for Tanchao 曇超, a meditation master, begins with a brief comment, noted above, that tigers and rhinoceroses did not harm him while he traveled in the Shixing 始興 and spent the nights under trees. It then tells an elaborate rain miracle story. While this monk was staying at the Lingyin 靈隱 monastery in Qiantang 錢塘, the deity in charge of the area appeared in a vision and made a request:

People at Fuyang 富陽 District had dug under the ground and destroyed the dragons' residence, causing the angry dragons to stop the rain for three hundred days. Now after

<sup>9</sup> T. 598, *Hailongwang jing* 海龍王經.

<sup>10</sup> Zhu Fotudeng 竺佛圖澄: T. 2059: 50.384a1–12; 385b14; *Kōsōden*, iii, 303; 319. Shegong公: T. 2059: 50.389b25–28; *Kōsōden*, vol. iii, p. 373.

over a hundred days wells and ponds have dried up and we have not been able to plant in the fields for a long time. You, the dharma master, are fully endowed with virtue and supernatural powers. If you go there, you will be able to cause rain miraculously and benefit people. The merits for accomplishing this will then be attributed to you. Tanchao said, “The power to raise clouds and bring down rain belongs to you. How could I accomplish that?” The deity said, “My people can only raise clouds, but cannot bring down rain. That is why I came [to you] to make this request.” Tanchao accepted the request, and the deity quickly disappeared.

Tanchao travelled further south for five days and reached Mt. Chiting 赤亭. There he recited spells and preached for the dragons. At night a crowd of dragons, all taking on human appearance, came to Tanchao [in a dream] and he preached to them further. The dragons requested that the Three Refuges be conferred on them. After receiving the Three Refuges they confessed themselves to be dragons. Tanchao then asked them to bring rain. The dragons looked at each other but said nothing. That night they appeared again in a dream, saying, “At first we made that vow out of anger. Now that we have received the master’s instruction on goodness, we do not dare to disobey. Tomorrow toward the evening the rain will definitely come. ”

Early the next morning Tanchao went to Linquan 臨泉 monastery and sent messengers to the district magistrate to have a boat sent out into the river and the Ocean Dragon Scripture recited. The magistrate requested the monks to set the boat afloat at Shishou 石首. When the recitation of the scripture ended, heavy rain fell. (T. 2059: 50.400a11–b2; *Kōsōden*, vol. iv, pp. 99–100) (Shinohara 1994)

In this story, somewhat reminiscent of the tiger stories reviewed above, the forms of dragons and human beings are clearly distinguished and contrasted. The dragons first appeared in a dream as human beings and only after receiving the Three Refuges did they reveal their identities as dragons. Apparently, it was because of this conversion that they eventually agreed to Tanchao’s request.

### 3.2. Snakes in Daoxuan’s Collection

The prominent theme in snake stories in Daoxuan’s collection is the peaceful relationship between the snake and the monk, as in Daoxuan’s tiger stories noted above. Under some monks’ example, snakes and mice live peacefully together, as noted above (Daoshun and Daoji).

In one story, a large black snake protected a meditating monk against a group of bandits. Huiyu 慧瑜 (564–643) built a grass hut on the side of a spring and meditated there for twenty-three years. A snake appeared and seemed to stand guard. At one point, a group of bandits tried to kill the snake. The snake emitted light from its eyes and the bandits all fell down: seven of them were dead, and three were revived with a spell (T. 2060: 50.537c4–12; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 503).

A large snake is also mentioned in Farong’s 法融 (594–657) biography. This monk constructed a meditation hut at Mt. Niutou 牛頭:

The building was still not finished when two of his disciples Daoqi 道綦 and Daoping 道憑 meditated at the site. At night an animal that looked like a sheep entered and kicked the two disciples, who remained undisturbed. Seeing that, the animal went out into the courtyard. Farong meditated inside a rock cave at the mountain. A massive snake (*shenshe* 神蛇) with bright eyes shining like stars raised its head and threatened him. It stayed overnight at the entrance of the cave, and seeing Farong undisturbed, the snake went away. Farong stayed there for one hundred days. Many tigers used to roam on the mountain and people stayed away. After Farong entered the mountain, people were able to go there without fear. A group of deer lay in front of Farong’s room and listened to him, showing no fear. Two large deer entered the temple and listened to the Dharma for three years and left. Farong was

compassionate to living beings; animals and birds gathered and took food from his hands. (T. 2060: 50.603c26–604a8; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, pp. 798–99)

In 645, Famin 法敏 (579–645) lectured on the *Huayan jing* at the Jinglin 靜林 monastery; a large snake lowered half its body down [from the ceiling?] above Famin's head. It was of golden color and emitted five-colored light. The snake disappeared after the lecture was over (T. 2060: 50.538c25–28; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 510).

Senglin 僧林 (dates unknown) went to a local shrine and meditated there:

Suddenly, a large snake coiled in front of him, raising its head in a gesture of paying respect to him. After Senglin conferred the Three Refuges on it, the snake left. (T. 2060: 50.646b12–13; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 990)

Later in the biography, a similar story about a tiger appears:

Senglin was meditating outdoors, and a tiger squatted in front of him. Lowering its eyes, the tiger looked at the monk, who then preached to it. After a while the tiger left. (T. 2060: 50.646b19–21; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 990)

We noted above that snakes and tigers are often mentioned side by side in Huijiao's collection. Tigers and snakes are also often mentioned together in Daoxuan's collection. In Zhixiang's biography, the tiger story reviewed above is followed by a story about a large snake:

Zhixiang once saw an angler and advised him to stop [harming living creatures]. When the angler refused, Zhixiang spat in the water. Suddenly a large snake raised its head, looked around, and came toward them. The angler consequently took refuge [in the Buddha's teaching] and renounced the householder's life. (T. 2060: 50.646a17–19; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 988)

In Daomu's 道穆 biography, mentioned above, snakes and tigers are paired as dangerous animals that threatened the meditating monk. In the entry on Deshan 山, the tiger story, also reviewed above, is immediately preceded by a story about a poisonous snake. The mountain was plagued with poisonous snakes, but his attendants walked around without fear. The bite of those snakes was believed to be fatal. One time, he was bitten. He washed the bite in a mountain stream and was immediately cured (T. 2060: 50.661b29–c3; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1060).

The emphasis in tiger stories in Daoxuan's collection shifted to accounts of peaceful co-habitation between monks and dangerous animals. The stories about snakes also appear to follow this same pattern. As dangerous animals, snakes are often paired with tigers, and the tame behavior of both is highlighted.

In Huijiao's collections, snakes are often assimilated with dragons. This association leads to a distinctive type of story about water and rain that is told only of snakes. The assimilation of snakes with dragons is also found, though less commonly, in Daoxuan's collection. During a severe draught, Daoxian 道仙 (dates unknown) is said to have knocked on the door of a dragon's hole and reprimanded the dragon; dark clouds gathered, and a heavy rain followed (T. 2060: 50.651b16–19; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1012). In a story about giving up fishing, Sengyai 僧崖 (488?–559?) is said to have seen a strange snake (*yishe* 異蛇); both its head and tail were red and over one *zhang* long. The snake went toward a body of water, raised its tail, and as it flew into the clouds, red light filled the field (T. 2060: 50.678b20–26; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1142) (Benn 2006). In these and other stories, snakes remain distinct from tigers and are supernatural creatures of unusual size and color that suddenly appear to monks.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> According to the biographies, Mingchen 明琛 was a master of snake magic; he could take on the form of a snake himself. T. 2060: 50.656a6–b18; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, pp. 983–84.

## 4. Bird Stories

### 4.1. Huijiao's Collection

Birds often appear in biographies of medieval Chinese Buddhist monks. Birds are often associated with death, but this association may have developed gradually over time. In biographies in Huijiao's collection, it is again the unusual communion between birds and spiritually advanced monks that is widely emphasized. The special relationship with birds often focuses on food.

An Qing, also known as An Shigao, understood the speech of birds and animals. One time, he saw swallows and explained to his companion, "The birds say that someone will send food". After a while, to the amazement of many, the food arrived as predicted (T. 2059: 50.323a26–28; *Kōsōden*, vol. i, p. 34).

Samghadatta 僧伽達多 (dates unknown), skilled in meditation, was once sitting on a mountain; he was thinking of skipping a meal when birds brought fruits and offered them to him. Recalling the story of monkeys offering honey to the Buddha, he accepted the food (T. 2059: 50.343c24–28; *Kōsōden*, vol. i, p. 329). At the end of his meal Guṇabhadra 求那跋陀羅 (394–468) always offered food to flying birds; they gathered and took the food from his hand (T. 2059: 50.345a8–9; *Kōsōden*, vol. i, p. 345). Sengche 僧徹 (373–452) once climbed a pine tree on the southern side of Mt. Lu and chanted; thereupon, pleasant wind brought many birds from afar and sang with him, creating a remarkable otherworldly scene (T. 2059: 50.370c10–11; *Kōsōden*, vol. iii, pp. 100–1).

The biography of Sengqun 僧群 (dates unknown) situates its bird story in the context of the monk's death:

[This monk] lived in a mountain hut and carried water by crossing on a tree trunk placed over a stream. At one time a goose with a broken wing spread its wings at the bridge and bit [Sengqun] as he was crossing over the log. Sengqun was about to raise his staff to push the bird [out of the way]. But fearing that he might harm the bird, he turned around and came back. He stopped drinking water and died several days later. Shortly before his death the monk told someone that as a child he had broken a goose's wing. The bird had become the cause of the monk's death. This demonstrates that karmic effects may appear within the same birth (*xianbao* 現報). (T. 2059: 50.404a11–13; *Kōsōden*, vol. iv, p. 173)<sup>12</sup>

### 4.2. Birds in Daoxuan's Collection

Though the emphasis shifts to the appearance of strange birds at the death and funeral of prominent monks, the theme of sharing food and the unusual communal relationship between monks and birds is also present in Daoxuan's collection. When Sengfan 僧範 (476–555) lectured, on various occasions, a goose, a sparrow, and a crow flew in and listened to him (T. 2060: 50.483c14–18; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 254). Sengyong 僧邕 (543–631) lived deep in the forest on Mt. Bolu 白鹿; deer lay before him and mountain birds ate from his hand (T. 2060: 50.584a3; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 714). When a Korean monk Cizang 慈藏 (dates unknown), in deep hiding, completely isolated from the outside world, and with little food remaining, prepared for death, strange birds (*yiniao* 異鳥) appeared, each holding food in its beak and offering it into the monk's hand. The birds and the monk shared the food (T. 2060: 50.639b3; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 965).

Sometimes birds are simply part of the religious community. When Huiyue 慧約 (451–535) conferred precepts on Liang Emperor Wu in 512, different species of birds appeared:

When the precepts were conferred a magpie (*qianqiao* 乾鵲) came up the steps as if to receive [the offering] of food. After the precepts were spelled out in the course of the ceremony, the bird flew away. When the meaning of the precepts was explained, two peacocks came

<sup>12</sup> Birds often appear in accounts of death in Daoxuan's biographies. However, the story is told differently there from this Sengqun story of karmic retribution.

running and would not leave. The birds listened to the emperor. The emperor said, “These birds are about to die and be reborn in a different realm.” A few days later the two birds died at the same time . . .

On the side of [Huiyue’s] Caotang 草堂 hermatage all creatures practiced compassion; deer gathered around tigers and rhinoceroses; wild ducks and sea gulls behaved in a friendly manner to hawks and falcons. Strange birds (*yiniao* 異鳥), their body red and with a kingfisher tail, flew around the trees. (T. 2060: 50.469b28–c17; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 185)

Other stories also mention strange birds. Birds can be special signs or participants in important rituals. In the entry for Facheng 法誠 (562–640) a strange bird (*yiniao* 異鳥) flew around in the room on several occasions. First, when he was proofreading very closely the scripture copied by calligrapher Zhang Jing, the following occurred:

a strange bird, of unfamiliar color and shape, flew into the hall. It circled around going up and down, coming down to the desk and again up above the incense burner. Quiet and observant, the bird appeared to be tame and friendly. After a while it went away. The following year, when the completion of the copying was celebrated, the bird appeared again. Tame and undisturbed as before, it made a sad and clear sound. In Zhenguan 1 (627) when a Thousand Buddha painting[s were] made, the bird appeared once more and sat on the artisan’s shoulder. Later, when offerings were made to celebrate the completion of the painting and copying of scriptures, the bird did not appear until mid-day. Looking toward the mountain peak Facheng was saying that the impurity of his conduct might be responsible for this, when the bird suddenly appeared, flew around making sounds, and bathed in the perfumed water and flew away. Similar occurrences were repeated many times. (T. 2060: 50.689a7–23; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1184)

The monk in this story takes the appearance of the bird as an auspicious sign—evidence of his own purity.

In another story, a dead bird comes back to life and signals the return to health of a gravely ill princess. Tiantai master Zhiyi 智顓 (538–597) performed a seven-day Golden Light repentance ceremony when no doctor could help her:

On the sixth day a strange bird (*yiniao* 異鳥) flew in and came to the altar, walked around and died. A short while later, the bird came back to life and flew away. The sound of pigs was also heard. Zhiyi said, “The signs appeared. The princess will be cured. The bird died and came back to life— this expresses that the coffin was closed but the corpse rises again. The strange sound of pigs indicates that the merits of the ceremony are realized”. (T. 2060: 50.567a13–17; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 632)

Later, Zhiyi secured an imperial edict prohibiting fishing in a coastal area and declaring it a lake for releasing living beings; Zhiyi returned to Folang. Yellow sparrows filled the sky, joyfully calling at the monastery building for three days. Zhiyi said that these sparrows were in fact the fishes that he had saved and had come to thank him (T. 2060: 50.567c16–18; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 634).

In Huijiao’s collection, birds do not appear to have a specific relationship with death, as we noted above, possibly with the exception of Sengqun’s story. However, in Daoxuan’s collection, birds are frequently mentioned in accounts of the deaths and funerals of eminent monks. The birds are often called “strange”. In these stories, the presence of birds serves to mark distinctively liminal moments. The monks for whom the appearance of birds at their death is noted in Daoxuan’s collection were typically leaders of important monastic centers. Their deaths would have marked moments of critical transitions for their communities.

At the time of the burial of Huiyue, a pair of white cranes circled above the tomb, uttering sad and tearful sounds (T. 2060: 50.470a10–11; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 186). When the tomb was dug for Daoqing

道慶 (565–626), a group of white cranes came down from the sky (T. 2060: 50.521b20–c1; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 426). When Faxiang 法祥 (–624) died, an [Amitābha] Buddha image was seen on the western wall, and a group of white cranes appeared from the west and flew into the chamber; they flew around three times and left (T. 2060:50. 523a23–28; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 436).

When Sengchou's 僧稠 (480–560) body was cremated on 560, hundreds of white birds flew above the cremation smoke, making distressed sounds of sorrow. After a while, they went away (T. 2060:50.554c27–29; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 577). As Tanxun's 曇詢 (520–599) death neared, the following occurred:

a strange bird (*yinia*o), neck white and body red, flew over the temple, uttering sad sounds. Closer to the time of death the bird came down. Not fearing people, first it went to the entrance of the room and then to the bed; it screamed in distress and its eyes became bloodshot. When the monk died, the bird flew away. (T. 2060:50.559b22–26; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, pp. 597–98)<sup>13</sup>

Some days before Zhixi 智晞 (556–627) died at Mt. Tiantai, birds and animals of strange colors and forms gathered on the side of the monk's room; they went around on the ground and flying up in the sky, cried in distress (T. 2060.582c8–10; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 709). At the time of Zhiqin's 智勤 (586–656) death, the sound of birds and animals screaming in distress filled the monastery. Monks were surprised but did not understand what it signified (T. 2060.643b15; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 964). When Fashun 法順 (557–640) passed away, two birds came into the room, making sounds of distress (T. 2060.654a4–5; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1024). On the day Daoying 道英 (560–636) died, thousands of birds gathered in the room, making sounds of distress. Two white birds flew over the coffin (T. 2060.654c15–16; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1027).

These stories of mourning birds derive their impact in part from their incongruity; the birds behave in non-bird-like ways and do not even look like ordinary birds. The birds in these death stories act just like human beings, grieving the passing of the master.

As noted above, Daoxuan's collection includes a large number of biographies of monks who oversaw the transportation of the Buddha's relics and their installation all over China during the Renshou period (600–604). Sui Emperor Wendi (r. 581–604) was a fervent supporter of the Buddhist community. Miraculously multiplying Buddhist relics appeared under his reign, and in a gesture reminiscent of the legendary emperor Aśoka's construction of stūpas in his realm, the Sui emperor sent out prominent monks to install newly discovered relics in stūpas scattered widely in his territory. When the relics were installed in the stūpas, unusual signs were observed. Birds are often mentioned in the accounts of these signs. These references are of interest partly because the distribution took place within a relatively short period, and thus, the virtually simultaneous appearance of these references to birds can be dated to this specific period.

In these references, the themes we have seen above are combined: unusual-looking birds appear on a momentous auspicious occasion, but they are also associated with death. In some cases, they also function as animal guides. Jingyuan 淨願 (–609), for example, transported relics during the Renshou period; when the party carrying the relic reached the destination, strange birds (*qijiao* 奇鳥) appeared, a group of thousands in five colors, flying above the water and coming near the boat as if to welcome and guide the monk to the stūpa site (T. 2060: 50.504c3, c6–8; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 351).<sup>14</sup>

The larger context of these stories is the funerary ritual following the death of the Buddha. The distribution of the Buddha's relics is an important episode in the widely circulating life of the

<sup>13</sup> The biographies of Sengchou and Tanxun tell very similar tiger pacification stories, as noted above. Tanxun studied under Sengchou, and these biographies might be related to each other in some way.

<sup>14</sup> Other stories are summarized in the Appendix A below.

Buddha legend. In the story of Renshou stūpa distribution, this well-known legend is expanded in a distinctively Chinese setting.<sup>15</sup>

## 5. Concluding Comments

In many of the animal passages in biographies collected by Huijiao and Daoxuan, monks and animals demonstrate remarkable relationships. In the often utopian accounts of these relationships, animals behave strangely. Dangerous animals, such as tigers and snakes, submit tamely to the subjects of the biographies. In stories in Huijiao's collection, tigers first threaten the meditating monk, but the monk remains unmoved; in the end, the tigers turn out to be local deities or their messengers who offer the caves to the monk as the site of a future monastery. In Daoxuan's collection, the stories are less frequently framed as temple origin stories, but the monk's special relationship with wild and dangerous animals is still emphasized. In Daoxuan's collection, birds often appear in the accounts of the death of prominent leaders of monastic communities. The emphasis appears to have shifted from the founding of new monasteries to the transition of leadership in these communities. References to the appearance of strange birds in the accounts of miraculous signs that appeared at the imperially supported relic distribution indicate that Buddhism had become a central part of the imperial ideology of the recently unified China. The appearance of strange birds became a distinct feature of this legitimation strategy.

In this paper, I reviewed the animal stories in two Chinese Buddhist biographical collections, covering the period from the founding of Buddhist communities in China through its emergence as a major force in politics and society. These stories illustrate how the far-reaching and profound changes Buddhism introduced to medieval China were perceived, locally and tangibly, by their authors and readers.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Acknowledgments:** I would like to thank the organizers and participants at the "Buddhist Beasts" Conference at UBC in April 2018, Glorisan Global Network for Buddhist Studies for sponsoring the event, and the editors of this collection of papers, Reiko Ohnuma and Barbara Ambros, for their careful comments and suggestions.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Appendix A

Bird Stories in the Accounts of Renshou Relic Distribution in Daoxuan's Biographical Collection.

Shi Jingyuan 淨願 (–609): relic distribution during the Renshou period (T. 2060: 50.504c3, c6–8; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 351) (Story summarized above).

Shi Fayan 法 (–607): relic distribution in 604 CE; five black cranes came from the northwest direction, flew around the stūpa four times, and then flew away; white cranes circled above the stūpa; a five-colored snake-like creature coiled outside the sarcophagus (T. 2060: 50.505b25–26; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 354).

Shi Fazong 法總 (d. 605–616): relic distribution in 604 CE; a strange bird (*qijiao*), with a crow's tail and red beak, held an umbrella shaped cloud above the stūpa (T. 2060: 50.506a12–17; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 357).

Shi Lingcan 靈璨 (548–618): relic distribution during the Renshou period; at the time of placing the relic in the stūpa, a male peasant appeared above the casket and took the Three Refuges; upon further examination, the bird was not an ordinary pheasant, with five-colored feathers seldom seen in the world. (T. 2060: 50.506c2–8; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 359).

<sup>15</sup> Snakes and other animals are also mentioned in some accounts of Renshou relic distribution. Sengtān's 僧曇 (d. 605) biography tells a story about two small snakes (T. 2060: 50.506b12–15; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 358); Mingshun's 明舜 (547–606) entry reports that a five-colored small snake was found when the foundation for the stūpa was dug (T. 2060: 50.511a20–22; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 381); Shanzhou's 善冑 biography mentions eight boars and four black wasps, T. 2060: 50.519n25–27; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, pp. 417–18). As noted above, the biography of Fayan also mentions a five-colored snake.

Shi Huizui 慧最 (dates unknown): relic distribution during the Renshou period; an owl and a crane flew above the stūpa (T. 2060: 50.507b26; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 362).

Shi Linggan 靈幹 (535–612): relic distribution in 603 CE; crows screamed sorrowfully at the time the relics were placed in the stūpa (T. 2060: 50.518c5; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 414).

Shi Juelang 覺朗 (dates unknown): relic distribution in 604 CE; when he arrived at the monastery where the relic stūpa was situated, relics appeared miraculously; an entirely tame and fearless yellow sparrow disturbed the Buddha hall; then, it disappeared; three yellow sparrows and phoenixes were drawn on the cover of the stone sarcophagus (T. 2060: 50.612a26–29; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 843).

Shi Daomi 道密 (dates unknown): relic distribution in 604 CE; wild birds flew above the stūpa; they dispersed after the ceremony (T. 2060: 50.668a13–14; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1085).

Shi Zhiyin 智隱 (dates unknown): relic distribution during the Renshou period; when the relics were lowered, five-colored clouds came down and covered the sarcophagus; six large birds flew among the clouds and dispersed after the ceremony (T. 2060: 50.668b5–7; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1086).

Shi Daogui 道貴 (dates unknown): no dates given for relic installation; when the relics were installed twelve large birds, of unusual appearance and unknown name, appeared; they formed lines in the sky and, after reaching the area above the stūpa, disappeared (T. 2060: 50.670b23–25; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1097).

Shi Sengshun 僧順 (dates unknown): no dates given for relic installation; at the time of placing the relics in the stupa, nine white cranes flew over the stūpa; after the lowering of the sarcophagus they flew away in the northern direction (T. 2060: 50.670c11–12; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1098).

Shi Baoxian 寶憲 (dates unknown); no dates given for relic installation; when the boat carrying the relics got stuck, a white bird guided the boat back to the flowing stream of the river (T. 2060: 50.672a23–25; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1107).

Shi Falang 法朗 (dates unknown): relic distribution in 602 CE; the biography offers an elaborate account of auspicious signs; when the foundation of the stūpa was dug, a strange bird (*yiniao*), which looked like a parrot, bright green and yellow, walked around it; the bird did not fear people and only ate yellow flowers; three days later the bird died; then, images appeared on the sarcophagus; the prostrate Buddha was seen on the western side of the sarcophagus; the dead bird got up and walked to the image of the prostrate Buddha and stood there unmoving; there were three golden flowers above the bird (T. 2060: 50.672b9–11; 17–20; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, pp. 1108–9).

Shi Lingda 靈達 (–601): relic distribution during the Renshou period; at the time of the installation of relics two white cranes flew over the stūpa and went away after a while (T. 2060: 50.673a12–13; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1111).

Shi Mingyu 明馭 (dates unknown): relic distribution during the Renshou period; a large flock of birds flew above the stūpa (T. 2060: 50.674c15–16; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1119).

Shi Daosheng 道生 (dates unknown): the relic distribution in 602 CE; on the day of the installation of the relics, two white cranes flew above the stūpa and, when the ground was covered, they left (675a5–6; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1120).

Shi Faxing 法性 (dates unknown): relic distribution during the Renshou period; a pair of white birds flew around the stūpa (T. 2060: 50.675a18–19; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1121).

Shi Jingning 靜凝 (dates unknown): relic distribution in 602 CE; a white bird flew around the stūpa base and, after the relic placement, flew away (T. 2060: 50.675b15; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1123).

Shi Fakai 法楷 (dates unknown): the relic distribution during the Renshou period; an elaborate account of miraculous visionary signs mentions a yellow sparrow and a garuda. (T. 2060: 50.675c20–22; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1124).

Shi Daoyan 道顏 (dates unknown): the relic distribution during the Renshou period; when the relics reached the prefectural boundary, thousands of birds flew in a line to welcome the carriage (T. 2060: 50.676c13–14; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 1130).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Snakes and other animals are also mentioned in some accounts of Renshou relic distribution. Shi Sengtan's 僧曇 (–605) biography tells a story about two small snakes (T. 2060: 50.506b12–15; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 358); Shi Mingshun's 明舜 (547–606) entry reports that a five-colored small snake was found when the foundation for the stūpa was dug (T. 2060: 50.511a20–22; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, p. 381); Shi Shanzhou's 善冑 biography mentions eight boars and four black wasps, T. 2060: 50.519n25–27; *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, pp. 417–18). As noted above the biography of Shi Fayān also mentions a five-colored snake.