



PROJECT MUSE®

---

Sinitic Buddhist Narratives of Wonders: Are There Miracles  
in Buddhism?

Chiew Hui Ho

Philosophy East and West, Volume 67, Number 4, October 2017, pp. 1118-1142  
(Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.2017.0096>

Philosophy East and West



A Quarterly of  
Comparative Philosophy  
Volume 67 - Number 4

University of Hawai'i Press

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/673998>

## SINIC BUDDHIST NARRATIVES OF WONDERS: ARE THERE MIRACLES IN BUDDHISM?



**Chiew Hui Ho**

School of Languages and Cultures, University of Sydney  
chiewhui.ho@sydney.edu.au

In ordinary usage, the term *miracle* is employed very broadly in modern times. It often refers to a highly improbable or extraordinary event with welcome consequences or an outstanding example of something, such as a miracle drug or an economic miracle. In my study of Chinese Buddhist stories relating marvelous and wondrous events, much of the modern conception of miracle is certainly not applicable. Indeed, the modern Chinese term *qiji* 奇蹟 (lit. strange/wonderful trace), a translation of *miracle*, has never been used to refer to wondrous events in Buddhist literature. Nevertheless, wondrous events recounted in Indian and Chinese Buddhist works are referred to by modern scholars of Asian studies as “miracle tales,” largely because the term *miracle* has been used to refer to supernatural and wondrous events in Christian theology.

According to David Weddle, the word *miracle* “originates in Middle English and enters our vocabulary via Old French from the Latin *miraculum*,” which comes from the root *mirari*, “to wonder” (Weddle 2010, p. 21). A miracle, therefore, may generally be considered as an act or event—extraordinary or unusual enough—that evokes wonder. Such a usage presupposes a human response to particular acts or events, and certainly does not pose much of a problem to its application in Asian religion (ibid.). Yet scholars of Buddhism are hesitant in their use of the term *miracle*—a term with distinct connotations in Western religious history—to characterize Buddhist tales relating marvelous events and the wondrous intervention of Buddhist deities or the efficacy of scriptural devotion.

This essay argues that this hesitation is rooted in an understanding of the miraculous that is grounded in the Enlightenment philosophical critique of Christian theology. To highlight the differences between the nature of miracle in this Western context and that of wondrous phenomena in the Buddhist context, this essay first shows that Indian Buddhist marvelous phenomena are embedded within a different worldview. It further argues that wondrous events found in Chinese Buddhist narratives—although still established on Indian Buddhist presuppositions—are best understood with reference to Chinese correlative cosmology, which has embedded at its core the indigenous concept of sympathetic resonance (*ganying*)—an idea that influenced medieval Chinese representations of Buddhism and exerted a profound impact on Chinese Buddhist ontology and soteriology. While this concept informs the Chinese understanding of Buddhist wonders, the semantic range of the wondrous in Chinese Buddhist narratives is expanded, and the wondrous are further differentiated by

various Sinitic Buddhist designations, such as *yingyan* 應驗 and *lingyan* 靈驗, according to the nature of the wonders. The essay concludes with a detailed discussion of *lingyan*, probably the most common term used to refer to such Chinese Buddhist narratives from the medieval period to the present.

### *The Use of Miracle*

When using the term *miracle* to describe Buddhist tales relating marvelous events and the wondrous intervention of Buddhist deities or the efficacy of scriptural devotion, scholars of Buddhist studies often qualify their usage and explain the term as it is construed in the Western tradition. While introducing “Buddhist miracle tales” in a recent volume on the *Lotus Sutra*, Stephen Teiser and Jacqueline Stone explain:

Although scholars often use this term, it represents something of a misnomer. “Miracle” in English implies a divine intervention that temporarily suspends the natural order. Stories of the kind referred to here, however, describe events that, while remarkable or even awe-inspiring, are nonetheless presented as instances of a universal—and therefore eminently natural—causal law. (Teiser and Stone 2009, p. 34)

While they acknowledge that the term *miracle* is a “misnomer” when applied to Buddhist tales, it is nevertheless adopted in their book. Other scholars, cognizant of this issue, also offer some justification for their use of the term in their works. In her examination of tales recounting marvelous encounters with Bodhisattva Dizang (Skt. Kṣitigarbha), Zhiru first acknowledges that in Western religious discourse the term *miracle* “refers to the suspension of the laws of nature or some form of divine intervention in the workings of the cosmos ultimately attributed to the power or grace of the cosmic creator.” She then hints at the problem of using the term by pointing out that “Buddhist cosmology stipulates a universe revolving around the paths of rebirth dictated by the rational workings of *karma*, a principle of moral causation,” and thus “miraculous” experiences are “in some sense always bound to the principle of moral causation.” For the lack of a better term, however, she justifies her usage of *miracle*:

But insofar as the experiences recounted are viewed as extraordinary in the sense of extending beyond daily functions and normal patterns of rationality, it is appropriate to call them “miracle tales.” This usage is especially apt for narratives relating uncommon experiences attributed to divine intervention, which results from sincere veneration of a deity. (Zhiru 2007, p. 168)

Thus, while the word *miracle* was reserved for referring only to wondrous acts of God in Western intellectual discourse, it came to refer to acts of intervention carried out by Buddhist deities in the study of Buddhism. What is problematic about the use of *miracle* in Buddhism as pointed out by these scholars is simply that while miracles in the Judeo-Christian tradition are generally considered the result of a violation or suspension of natural law, marvelous feats and wondrous events in Buddhism are not. Moreover, while miracles in the Western context refer specifically to acts of

divine will, wondrous events might not necessarily be so construed in Asian religious traditions.

The hesitation and reservation voiced by these scholars of Buddhism with respect to the use of the term *miracle* is in fact rooted in an understanding of the miraculous that has dominated modern intellectual religious discourse—one grounded in the Enlightenment philosophical critique of Christian theology. Indeed, the connotations of *miracle* that are of philosophical and scholarly interest are less subjectively oriented than modern usages, and discussion of miracle in the intellectual history of the West is often confined to the uses to which religion—theistic religion in particular, specifically of the Judeo-Christian tradition—puts that word.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, objects of wonder refer to God's will and power as worked through the various marvelous acts of Jesus and the other prophets, which were originally described as prodigies, wonders, powers, or signs.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that these words do not carry the connotation of overriding the natural order, as *miracle* came to be defined following the Age of Enlightenment. Early conceptualizations of miracle in the West—discernible in the writings of early theologians—in fact did not initially entail the connotation of a violation of the workings of nature, although the natural world and its nature were clearly important considerations to them when they philosophized about the nature of miracles. For instance, for Saint Augustine (354–430), a miracle is held not to be contrary to nature, but only to our knowledge of nature (Brown 2011, p. 275; Mullin 2000, p. 440). Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), while arguing that miracles “are done by divine agency beyond the order commonly observed in nature,” did not assert them to be violations of nature (Levin 2011, p. 291). In the seventeenth century, John Locke (1632–1704) proposed that a miracle is “a sensible operation, which, being above the comprehension of the spectator, and in his opinion contrary to the established course of nature, is taken by him to be divine” (Locke 1824, 8:256).

Indeed, although *miracle* was understood differently in various Western and scholarly traditions at various times,<sup>2</sup> since the Enlightenment almost all major discussions of the miraculous in the context of Western religion are carried out with reference to David Hume's (1711–1776) influential and provocative definition and discussion of miracle. In his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume ([1748] 2007, p. 127) offered a two-part definition of miracle: “A miracle may be accurately defined, a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent.” The first part puts in precise terms that a miracle is an event that would not have happened in the ordinary course of nature, whose actions, forces, and so on would not be adequate to bring it about. A miracle is thus beyond the workings of nature and perhaps contrary to the laws of nature. The second part ascribes this transgression of nature to an agent, “the Deity,” or “some invisible agent.” In a way, these two parts constitute two necessary criteria for an act or event to qualify as a miracle, neither of which is a sufficient condition in itself; that is, being a violation of natural law by itself is not enough for an act or event to qualify as a miracle, as it must also be an expression of divine will.

Hume certainly had his reasons for defining *miracle* in terms of violating the laws of nature. Hume was in fact responding to Christian apologists who were then trying to establish the existence of God by appealing through natural reason and experience. Because Hume was challenging the idea of a natural theology and the task of authenticating alleged revelations by proving that their claims could be supported by miracles, he defines *miracle* in a way that captures and expresses what most Christians of his time would have meant when they talked about miracles (Basinger 2011, p. 23). Hume's definition is of course not without its problems, but since the Enlightenment period it has been an important point of departure for subsequent discussions of miracle, thus becoming a source of controversy in Western intellectual history.

It is not unknown to scholars of Asian religions that this understanding is grounded in a particular milieu of Western intellectual discourse. But the word *miracle* proves so convenient as a general term to refer to "similar" events and phenomena in Asian religions that it has come to be widely adopted in scholarly as well as non-scholarly circles. And given the influence of this understanding of miracle, the adoption of the term in the study of Asian religions has also been marked by a sense of unease, as indicated by the qualifications of the term used in the context of Buddhism.

Aside from scholars of Asian religions, scholars of Western and comparative religion have lately opted to modify the definition of the term to allow them to discuss "miracles" in other religions, especially wondrous events in non-Judeo-Christian traditions.<sup>3</sup> For example, Weddle, in his study of "miracles" in various religious traditions, allows for a definition that admits divine interventions other than those of God (Weddle 2010, p. 4). The term seems so handy that a modification is even sanctified in an entry in *The Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, where John Kieschnick (2004, p. 981), after noting that there are no miracles in the Buddhist tradition according to a strict Christian interpretation of the word, proposes that the term can be put to good use by adopting "a looser definition":

A looser definition of the term, however, harking back to its original meaning as "object of wonder," allows miracles to be understood as extraordinary events that, because they cannot be explained by ordinary human powers or the everyday functioning of nature, evoke a sense of wonder. This looser definition proves useful to describe a wide variety of phenomena, including omens and other extraordinary changes in the natural world, acts of the Buddha and his disciples, and supernatural powers acquired through meditation. . . .

Such modifications of the definition of *miracle* no doubt will prove to be useful in the study and comparison of religions, bridging gaps in different fields and facilitating dialogues among scholars of religion. Still, they are not unproblematic. While they may cater both to the Western sense of miracle as well as wondrous phenomena in Asian cultures, they may also skew representations of the wondrous in non-Western traditions, since such modifications are, after all, based on a definition steeped in Western religious connotations.

Despite modifying the definition of *miracle* to include intervention by beings other than God, Weddle highlights “miracles as transcendent event.”<sup>4</sup> Transcendence, however, has specific meanings in the Western religious context. Claimed by some to be one of the defining characteristics of the Judeo-Christian God, it stands in contradistinction to the concept of immanence that is often thought of as an important feature of Asian religions. While this is not a place to delve into a major philosophical discussion of these issues, it suffices to say that Weddle’s definition of miracle might not only obscure the tension between transcendence and immanence in both Western and non-Western wonders but also import ideas that are not originally part of non-Western religious traditions.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, if we were to subscribe to modified definitions like Weddle’s, it might preclude a clear understanding of the nature of various wondrous acts and events recounted in Buddhist tales.

### *Indian Cosmology and Buddhist Wonders*

Without getting entangled in the debate over whether miracles of the Judeo-Christian worldview are violations of the normal course of nature, let it be said that they occur due to a supernatural agency that specifically refers to God, and in a world created by Him. On the other hand, the Buddhist sense of wondrous events, phenomena, and acts has its basis in an Indian cosmology that consists of multiple realms (*lokas*), each of them inhabited by different types of beings. In this cosmology, the human world is but one of the many realms. Beings from other realms could at times appear in realms other than their own. Gods, for instance, could appear in the human realm, and their actions could result in phenomena deemed wondrous by humans. The Indian conception of the universe, therefore, admits the relativity of wonders: what appears normal to gods might appear as wondrous to the average human (Davis 1998, pp. 9–10).

The powers that are available to gods are also said to be achievable by those human beings who cultivate themselves or attain them through various means: sacrifice, austerities, meditation, knowledge, devotion, or rituals. Patañjali’s treatise on yogic practice details the spiritual capacities or supernormal powers attainable by its practitioners: a knowledge of the past and future; understanding the language of all creatures; an ability to read minds, disappear, enter another’s body, glow brilliantly; levitation, and much more (Gethin 2011, p. 217). Yogis thus could strive to acquire the same powers enjoyed by various categories of gods in the divine regions. These powers, again, are not solely the preserve of yogis. They could be acquired by other people through medicine, alchemical means, esoteric arts, austerities, and so on (Granoff 1996, p. 87).<sup>6</sup>

Indian practitioners considered these supernormal powers to be potential human capacities theoretically available to all rather than special gifts from God or other divinities. While such powers are beyond the reach of most humans too fettered by mundane existence to engage in activities that would enable them to achieve them, they are nonetheless attainable. Therefore, in the Indian worldview, divine intervention is not necessary for the production of wondrous feats or events. According to

Phyllis Granoff (1996, p. 81), this is a pan-Indian belief that holds that “any religious practitioner who had reached a certain stage of cultivation possessed supernatural powers or *iddhi*.” Hence, the Indian worldview need not ascribe wondrous phenomena to a single source of agency but instead attests to a variety of possible agents inhabiting the universe, such as gods, heavenly beings, and, therefore, spiritually advanced humans.

Buddhism grew out of this worldview that entertains many possibilities for the wondrous, one which does not view such wonders unambiguously as acts of God or acts invested by God’s intervention. In a cosmology of multiple worlds and different realms, wondrous events such as those connected to the life of the Buddha need not be “seen as divine purpose intervening in the natural order of things[;] they are rather part of the profound cosmic order of things (*dhamma-niyāma*)” (Gethin 2011, p. 220).<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the unusual events that accompanied the Buddha’s birth, career, and *parinirvāṇa* can be explained as happening due to the participation of other beings inhabiting this manifold universe.

With regard to the possibility of acquiring supernormal powers by human beings, the Buddha is said to share many of the powers enjoyed by the gods.<sup>8</sup> In fact, some sources explain that the Buddha was born in the human realm, and not in the realm of the gods, because his powers would then be easily recognizable in the human realm. Had the Buddha been born among the gods with whom he shared so many powers, they would not be impressed by his powers (Granoff 1996, pp. 80–81).<sup>9</sup> Consequently, Buddhist texts acknowledge the positive effects of the display of such powers by the Buddha for the propagation of Buddhism, as people were impressed by them and thus convinced of the greatness of the Buddhist faith.

Not only did the Buddha possess supernormal powers; his followers and other religious adepts are also said to have possessed them. Granoff (1996, p. 82) points out that the *Prātihārya-sūtra* of the *Divyāvadāna* notes the possession of such powers by Buddhist practitioners as well as those who had practiced religious austerities. As such, there are many accounts of the Buddha and his followers engaging in contests of supernormal feats with rival ascetics and religious adepts in early Buddhist texts of the Pāli canon.

In the Pāli canon, supernormal powers accessible to Buddhist practitioners who engage in mental cultivation are often referred to as higher knowledges (Pāli *abhiññās*; Skt. *abhijñā*), of which there is a well-known class of six: (1) knowledge of various supernormal powers (*iddhi-vidhāññāṇa*);<sup>10</sup> (2) “divine ear” (*dibbasotadhātu*), the ability to hear from afar;<sup>11</sup> (3) knowledge of comprehending the mind or cognizing the thoughts of others (*cetopariyaññāṇa*; *paracittavijānana*), (4) knowledge of recollection of past lives (*pubbenivāsānu-ssatiññāṇa*); (5) “divine eye,” or knowledge of passing away and rebirth (*dibba-cakkhu*; *cutūpāpātāññāṇa*); and (6) knowledge of the destruction of the influential defilements (*āsavakkhayaññāṇa*) (Clough 2010, pp. 410–411).<sup>12</sup> In the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*, these higher knowledges are preceded by the Buddhist practitioner’s attainment of four progressive meditative states (*jhāna*; *dhyāna*) (Clough 2010, p. 416).<sup>13</sup> They are, therefore, the by-products of the practice of meditation and may be acquired before full awakening.

The first five higher knowledges are regarded as mundane (*lokiya*) achievements since they are attainable by both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. The latter three, also known separately as the three knowledges (*vijjā; vidyā*), are especially significant in Buddhism, as they are essential to the Buddha's awakening. The Buddha is said to have attained them when he achieved awakening under the Bodhi tree (Clough 2010, pp. 423–424; Gethin 2011, p. 219). Of these three knowledges, the last is the most important because it is accomplishable only by the Buddhists. This knowledge thus sets Buddhists apart from non-Buddhists because when a Buddhist gains this knowledge, the first five knowledges he possesses are considered superior to those possessed by non-Buddhists since he is not tainted with “influential defilements” (*āsava*s) (Clough 2010, p. 411). As a result, it is said that the sixth higher knowledge “prevents misuse or misinterpretation of the other five higher knowledges” (p. 429).

From the preceding, it is clear that Buddhist practitioners were thought to attain supernormal powers in the same way that yogis attained psychic powers. These non-transferable powers attained by Buddhist practitioners are better understood as extraordinary mental and physical abilities consummated through training and practice. Thus, they are not miraculous in the Western sense but are natural insofar as they are by-products of the natural mental processes that result from the practitioner's mental training (Gómez 1977, p. 222).<sup>14</sup> Hence, their importance does not lie in themselves but in the fact that they are indicative of the successful spiritual progress of the practitioner along the path to liberation, particularly meditative attainment.

In another scheme, in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta*, the Buddha presents the wondrous in terms of the three wondrous acts (*pāṭihāriya*). Having twice refused Kevaḍḍha's request for a wondrous display of supernormal powers (*iddhi-pāṭhāriya*) to increase the faith of people, the Buddha responds to the third request by explicating the three wonders of supernormal powers (*iddhi*), mind reading (*ādesanā*), and instruction (*anusāsani*). The Buddha explains that although the first two abilities are also accessible to other religious adepts, only the Buddha's instruction is unique to Buddhism, and, because it leads to ultimate liberation, it is the greatest wonder (Gethin 2011, pp. 223–224).<sup>15</sup> This may be understood with respect to the sixth supernormal power: knowledge of the destruction of the influential defilements and Buddhist soteriology. Within the scheme of the six knowledges, the possession of the first five, also available to other religious adepts, does not constitute awakening. It is with the attainment of the sixth knowledge that the Buddha is able to provide instruction on how to attain the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice—the attainment of ultimate awakening or liberation with the destruction of influential defilements. Wondrous feats, as a result, are subordinate to the Buddha's instruction, and they are often presented as a means to giving instruction and pointing the way to liberation.

When the Buddha's instruction is considered the greatest wonder, the sense of wonder in Buddhism seems to be less about marvelous feats that are external and apparent, and even less about feats that are contrary to nature. Rather, the emphasis seems to shift from the external to the internal, from the physical to the mental: it is more about destroying impediments that prevent the Buddhist practitioner from perceiving reality as it really is—that which binds him to *saṃsāra*. Guided by the



Buddha's instruction and sustained in practice, the Buddhist practitioner is transformed internally as he achieves a higher state of consciousness and truly understands the nature of things. Thus, only the Buddha's instruction effects true wonders that lead the afflicted onto the path of liberation.

### *Wonders in Indigenous Chinese Buddhist Tales*

The idea that supernormal powers are the by-products of religious cultivation and are certainly indicators of one's level of spiritual attainment is also known and acknowledged in the Chinese Buddhist tradition. The list of five or six supernormal powers are expanded in the East Asian canonical literature and reinterpreted in indigenous Buddhist literature. In some Chinese commentaries, the six supernormal powers are expanded to ten supernormal powers, and with some variations.<sup>16</sup> The Indian categories, however, are seldom used in indigenous Chinese Buddhist writings. Accounts of monks of superior attainment found in Chinese hagiographical literature often described them as possessing supernormal powers that differ somewhat from traditional Indian categories.<sup>17</sup> For instance, the *Gaoseng zhuan* (Biographies of eminent monks) describes the Central Asian monk Fotudeng 佛圖澄 (d. 348)—often cited as an exemplary monastic who possessed supernormal powers and performed wondrous feats to propagate Buddhism—as being able to produce rain, predict the outcome of battles, and draw water from dried-up streams (Wright 1990, pp. 46–67).

The notion that supernormal powers can be obtained by spiritual cultivation can actually be found in other indigenous religious traditions, such as Daoism, which entertained such ideas as the attainment of longevity or immortality through spiritual practice.<sup>18</sup> This may explain why the Chinese representations of supernormal powers in indigenous Buddhist writings differ from those in Indian Buddhist sources. Kieschnick (1997, p. 70) has pointed out that the traditional Indian categories had “little impact on Chinese Buddhist narrative.” A recent study of the fifth-century Buddhist tale collection the *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記 (A record of signs from the unseen realm) by Robert Campany suggests that Buddhist supernormal powers had probably been sinicized according to the need to facilitate the propagation of Buddhism in early medieval China. Campany (2012, pp. 38–39) points out that in those tales where there is a contest between Buddhism and Daoism, Buddhist monastics are deliberately described as possessing powers ascribed to seekers of transcendence in early medieval Chinese literature.<sup>19</sup> As those accounts “deny that transcendents had any paranormal powers that Buddhist monastics lacked,” Buddhist monks are described as possessing not the traditional categories of supernormal powers but those that match their rivals’ (p. 39). Such tales suggest that the Chinese acceptance of Buddhism is not unqualified, and Chinese representations of wonders—in this case the spiritual powers possessed by Buddhists—were informed by native ideas and needs.

Many indigenous Chinese Buddhist stories of wonders associate Buddhists with unusual powers, sometimes in scenarios related to the propagation of Buddhism and at other times in contestation with adepts of indigenous religious traditions.

However, these tales constitute simply one type in Donald Gjertson's (1989) influential typology of Buddhist "miracle" tales.<sup>20</sup> According to Gjertson, there are three types of indigenous Buddhist tales. In addition to the above-mentioned, one kind of tale relates "accounts of divine intervention in times of need," and yet another illustrates the "efficacy of Buddhist piety" (p. 39). While these two types of tales are not totally unavailable in the Indian tradition, they seem to feature more prominently in Chinese Buddhism. The former is best exemplified by tales of Bodhisattva Guanyin's intervention, while the latter is represented by *Diamond Sutra* narratives. What is common to these two types of stories is that the dire situations confronting the protagonists in these narratives are overcome by responses from the deity or some other forms of agency. The prevalence of such narratives in Chinese Buddhism is due to the fact that this trope—as some scholars have highlighted—is well accounted for by the concept of *ganying* 感應 (lit. stimulus response) in Chinese cosmology.

### *Chinese Cosmology and Ganying*

Raoul Birnbaum (1986, pp. 134–137) is probably the first scholar to have called attention to the incorporation of the concept of *ganying* in Chinese Buddhism, in his study of visionary experiences of monastics on Mount Wutai. His work is echoed by a number of scholars who also note that *ganying* is prevalent in indigenous writings, especially Buddhist tales.<sup>21</sup> In his study of the *Lotus Sutra* tales, Daniel Stevenson (1995, p. 29) explains: "Implicit in virtually all of the miracle tales (and, indeed, Chinese Buddhist hagiography as a whole) is the age-old Chinese discursive structure of 'stimulus' (*gan*), 'response' (*ying*), and 'causal impetus or nexus' (*ji* or *jiyuan*)." The concept of *ganying* has its basis in Chinese cosmology, which is often described as correlative. In this cosmology, heaven, man, earth, and the myriad things are mutually related, interdependent, and complementary in an integrated, organic universe:

Such a cosmology is an orderly system of correspondence among various domains of reality in the universe, correlating categories of the human world, such as the human body, behavior, morality, the sociopolitical order, and historical changes, with categories of the cosmos, including time, space, the heavenly bodies, seasonal movement, and natural phenomena. (Wang 2000, p. 2)

In this understanding, also referred to as *yinyang-wuxing* cosmology, the universe, which is in a state of continuous flux, is conceived in terms of the cyclic progression or interaction of the five phases (*wuxing* 五行),<sup>22</sup> the *yinyang* 陰陽 binary (Sharf 2002, p. 79; Wang 2000, p. 6), and the primordial vital energy (*qi* 氣) that constitutes the myriad things.<sup>23</sup>

In this universe, according to Joseph Needham (1951, p. 230), "the harmonious cooperation of all beings arose, not from the orders of a superior authority external to themselves, but from the fact that they were all parts in a hierarchy of wholes forming a cosmic pattern, and what they obeyed were the internal dictates of their own natures." Because human beings and everything in the universe are "parts in a hierarchy of wholes forming a cosmic pattern," they can influence each other. This belief

is implied by the concept of *ganying*. According to Robert Sharf (2002, p. 83), “*ganying* is a mode of seemingly spontaneous response (although not in the sense of ‘uncaused’) natural in a universe conceived holistically in terms of pattern and interdependent order. Resonance is the mechanism through which categorically related but spatially distant phenomena interact.” Simply put, the concept of *ganying* may be explained thus: “things of the same category but in different cosmic realms were supposed to affect one another by virtue of a mutual sympathy, to resonate like properly attuned pitch-pipes” (Henderson 1984, p. 20).

The concept can be applied to different aspects of human affairs. When employed in the relationship between man and Heaven for the justification of political legitimacy, it can be used, for example, to explain why the Shang rulers lost the mandate of heaven to rule due to their lack of virtue, which was accompanied by omens and signs. These omens and signs, and the eventual demise of the Shang, were interpreted as Heaven’s warning and response to the despotic rule of the Shang regime. On the other hand, the triumph of the Zhou rulers was an indication of heaven’s approval, and thus their receipt of the mandate of heaven to rule (Yü 2001, p. 154). In this application of the concept of *ganying*, human actions, the stimuli, are believed to have “elicited” responses from heaven. Thus, according to Dong Zhongshu,

When a great ruler is about to arise, auspicious omens first appear; when a ruler is about to be destroyed, there are baleful ones beforehand. Things indeed summon each other, like to like, a dragon bringing rain, a fan driving away heat, the place where an army has been being thick with thorns. Things, whether lovely or repulsive, all have an origin. (Needham 1956, p. 282)<sup>24</sup>

When the action of the ruler could invoke a cosmic response, the concept of *ganying* could also be applied to the ordering of the empire and to gauging the strength of governance (Brokaw 1991, pp. 29–30). This explains the Chinese belief in the significance of omens and portents, taking them to mean heaven’s responses to the behavior of a ruler, and the tradition of historical writings during the Han with special focus on the observation of natural phenomena for signs and omens.<sup>25</sup>

*Ganying* can also be invoked to explain moral retribution, ritual efficacy, natural and astronomical cycles, political upheavals, and so on. It should not, therefore, be surprising to find that *ganying* also influenced the Chinese understanding of Buddhist thought and practice (Sharf 1991, p. 187). For instance, *ganying* can be used to explain how an action (*karman*) could bring about a resultant effect (*vipāka*).

### *Ganying in Chinese Buddhism*

In indigenous Buddhist narratives, *ganying* can be invoked to explain how the faith (*śraddhā*; *xin* 信) and devotion of Buddhists could call forth a response from the Buddhas or bodhisattvas. The term *ganying* has thus been used as an element in the titles of indigenous Buddhist tale collections. For example, one of the earliest collections of Buddhist stories is known as the *Ganying zhuan* 感應傳 (Records of sympathetic responses).<sup>26</sup> In fact, the Chinese compound *ganying* also occurs frequently in early

indigenous Buddhist narratives about the wonders, marvels, and effectiveness of devotion. An elusive term to translate into English due to its various connotations, *ganying* is rich in philosophical content and implications. Although variously rendered as “sympathetic resonance,” “cosmic resonance,” or “stimulus response,” these expressions fail to capture its meanings in any comprehensive manner. The sinograph *gan* may embody two senses. The early use of *gan* in the *Shijing* 詩經 (The book of songs) implies meanings such as “to sense, feel, touch,” and so on. In this sense, it refers to a subjective activity or event, in which the subject is aware of something or experiences something (Schuessler 2006, p. 250).<sup>27</sup> In the later *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (The spring and autumn annals of Lü) as well as in the etymological dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Explaining basic graphs and analyzing composite graphs), *gan* is defined as “to move a person’s mind/heart” (*gandong renxin* 感動人心) (Schuessler 2006, p. 250).<sup>28</sup> In this sense, *gan* refers to an activity that impresses or impinges on another. When applied to Buddhist tales, *gan* could therefore mean the eliciting of a response from the Dharma or the Buddha, or to be aware of or experience a response from the sacred. In most cases, it is both of these senses.

Although indigenous Buddhist tale collections cover various topics, such as karmic retribution, spiritually potent Buddhist images, sacred geography, and cultic objects, figures, and traditions,<sup>29</sup> what is common to all of them is *ganying*, the underlying principle of interaction between the supplicant and the Dharma—the supplicant is said to “affect” the karmic order or to “stimulate” (*gan*) the Buddha, thus eliciting a response (*ying*). Stevenson puts it succinctly:

As the *ganying* metaphor would have it, spiritual “presence” or “manifestation” (*ying*)—whether that presence be construed as the descent of the Buddhas, the arousing of the thought of enlightenment, auspicious omens, miraculous response, even enlightenment itself—is effected by the devotee “coming into sympathetic accord” or “tally” with the hidden sacred order and forg[ing] a “causal impetus or nexus” (*ji, jiyuan*) that “stimulates” (*gan*) a flow or manifestation of sacred power. Miraculous response, as such, is the function of a communicative interaction between the aspirant and the sacred order. . . . (Stevenson 1995, p. 429)

The earliest expressions of *ganying* in indigenous Buddhist tales can be found in accounts related to Bodhisattva Guanyin 觀音 (Skt. Avalokiteśvara), which began to appear during the Six Dynasties period (220–589) and were compiled into three collections. According to Campamy (2012, p. 44), the Guanyin tales are some of the “clearest narrative embodiments” of *ganying*. In these stories, *ganying* can be applied to explain the wondrous interventions of Guanyin, who never failed to respond to people who called upon him for help.

There is no doubt that medieval Chinese people understood the soteriological response of Guanyin to the invocation of supplicants in terms of a special relationship between them that is underpinned by *ganying*. This understanding is clearly illustrated by the following conversation between an imprisoned official Dou Chuan and a monk who advised him to seek help from Guanyin:

At that time the monk Zhi Daoshan was in the same camp, and he had previously known Chuan. When he heard of Chuan's imprisonment, he went to the cell to see him, and they spoke through the door. Chuan told Daoshan, "I am entrapped in a disastrous situation, and my lifespan has become a matter of hours. How can I be saved?" Daoshan said, "The method for your salvation is not to be found among humans. Only the Bodhisattva Guangshiyin can save you from mortal danger. If you can wholeheartedly invoke and take refuge in him, there surely will be a response to the stimulus (*ganying*)."<sup>30</sup>

From Daoshan's advice, the supplicant's invocation of Guanyin can be understood as "the initiating stimulus or trigger that, when it is sincere and desperate enough, is answered by Guanyin's response" (Yü 2001, p. 640).<sup>31</sup> According to Company (2012, p. 32), "appropriately sincere, intense, and sufficiently repeated acts of conscious devotion and supplication, acting as the stimulus, will elicit strikingly immediate and concrete responses from the Buddha, bodhisattvas, or spirit-beings supplicated."<sup>32</sup>

### *Sinitic Buddhist Understanding and Terms: Yingyan and Lingyan*

Although *ganying* is the underlying principle of the Guanyin narratives, the Guanyin tale collections are styled as *yingyan* 應驗 (lit. response and verification)<sup>33</sup> because *ganying* as it is implied in these stories is understood in anthropomorphic terms. Since the relationship recounted in these narratives is one between the Bodhisattva Guanyin and his supplicants, the emphasis is placed on Guanyin's intervention or responsiveness rather than on *ganying*, which suggests a more mechanical response. This is apparent from the third collection of Guanyin tales, where each tale is referenced—at the end—to a particular type of intervention that Guanyin promised in the *Lotus Sutra*.

In his discussion of *yingyan* with respect to early Chinese Buddhist narratives, which include the Guanyin tales, Company (1996b, p. 322) makes the following comment about *yan*:

*Yan* is essentially a hermeneutic term, denoting a particular function in the evaluation of data. In the juridical field, *yan* means confirming evidence or proof; to *yan* is to take up a claim and, based on an examination of the evidence, find it true. In the divinatory field, *yan* means a "sign," something by which fortunes or the trend of events can be judged, known, or recognized.

When applied to Guanyin tales, *yan* may include the various connotations mentioned above, from which we may derive something common—the element of verification or confirmation. That this connotation of *yan* should inform our understanding of Guanyin tales is corroborated by an understanding of the context of these tales and what they hope to achieve, or what their originators intended to convey when they told them. The Guanyin stories are based on the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, "The Universal Gate of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of World's Sounds," where Bodhisattva Guanyin promises to deliver people in a variety of difficult situations if they call upon him for help. When the originators of the tales—whether they

were the protagonists themselves, witnesses, or otherwise—transmitted these purported actual accounts of Guanyin’s response to the supplications of people, they were conveying that what the *Lotus Sutra* said was indeed true because Guanyin’s interventions as recounted in the tales confirmed or verified the promises Guanyin made. Therefore, when the compilers of Guanyin tales styled their compilations with the term *yingyan*, they meant them to be understood as records of the responses of Guanyin that verified the promises he is said to make in the *Lotus Sutra*.

When it is applied to Guanyin tales, the term *yingyan* may be rendered as “verifying responses” because *yan* in this context clearly denotes verification, confirmation, and so on. The “verifying responses” recounted in the tales thus may also be understood as signs, proofs, or evidence of Guanyin’s fulfillment of his promises, especially in those situations described in the *Lotus Sutra*. Here, *ying* encapsulates two layers of meaning: the generic response that reacts to the stimulus as well as Guanyin’s responses that serve to verify his promises that finally come true. This may explain why, in modern usage, *yingyan* refers to something that comes true, such as a prediction coming true.<sup>34</sup>

Besides *yingyan*, indigenous Buddhist narratives of wonders are also often later styled as *lingyan* 靈驗 (lit. numen and verification). For instance, the first known *Diamond Sutra* tale collection, compiled by Xiao Yu 蕭瑀 (575–648), is called the *Jin’gang bore jing lingyan ji* 金剛般若經靈驗記 (A record of the proven efficacy of the *Diamond Sutra*).<sup>35</sup> Sharing the common denominator *yan*, the *yingyan* of Guanyin narratives and the *lingyan* of the *Diamond Sutra* tales reveal a common and yet important function of these Buddhist works—to verify or prove “the truth and efficacy of Buddhist teachings” (Campany 1996b, p. 323). More specifically, they also prove the power of Bodhisattva Guanyin and the *Diamond Sutra*. While *ganying* informs the Chinese understanding of Buddhist tales and provides an explanation underlying the workings of events recounted in them, what separates Buddhist tales styled by *yan* from other indigenous and pro-Buddhist ones is that the former aims to signal, prove, or verify (*yan*) the veracity of those events already accounted for by *ganying*.

*Diamond Sutra* tale collections are styled *lingyan* for good reason. As implied in *Diamond Sutra* tales, *ganying* is best interpreted in naturalistic terms because the relationship here is one not between a deity (e.g., Bodhisattva Guanyin) and his supplicants but rather between an inanimate scripture and its supplicants. As a scripture, the *Diamond Sutra* could not respond to its supplicants as Guanyin did; thus, its responses are not as straightforward as those recounted in Guanyin tales and are conceptualized differently. In Guanyin stories, the bodhisattva’s interventions and responses are more direct and are theorized as the fulfillment of the promises made in the *Lotus Sutra*. As a result, his interventions verify the claim of the scripture as Guanyin’s promises “come true.” On the other hand, how could wondrous events experienced by protagonists in *Diamond Sutra* tales verify the *Diamond Sutra*’s claim of the immense merit to be gained from devotion to itself, especially when the scripture does not specify how its power would be manifested?

What the originators and compilers of *Diamond Sutra* tales understand to constitute the verification of the Buddha’s claim in the *Diamond Sutra* is revealed by their

use of the term *ling* 靈 (lit. numen; efficacy) with *yan* 驗 (lit. verification) to describe the stories. As noted previously, there are two senses of *ganying*: (1) the inducement of a response from the sacred and (2) the experience of the response. The claim of the *Diamond Sutra* is proved by a conceptualization of its responses that underscore the second sense of *ganying*—as an experience of the response of the *Diamond Sutra* that is not merely meaningful but religiously significant and relevant to the protagonist. This conceptualization thus takes the experience of the protagonist as its point of departure, determining how and what the experience of the response means to the supplicant. The term *ling* is pivotal to this notion because it determines what constitutes a significant and relevant experience that verifies the claim of the *Diamond Sutra*.

The term *ling* has many connotations, among which are “shaman,” “divinity,” “felicity,” “spirit,” “numen,” and—most important to the subsequent understanding of Buddhist wonders and marvels—“efficacy” (Hanyu da zidian bianji weiyuan hui 2006, p. 4082). Perhaps the following example of the usage of *lingyan*, used in an encounter between the monk Fotudeng and the Northern ruler Shi Le 石勒 (274–333), might demonstrate “efficacy” as the principal meaning of *ling*, and thus help us understand what *lingyan* actually means:

He [i.e., Shi Le] summoned Fotudeng and enquired, “What miraculous efficacy (*lingyan* 靈驗) does Buddhism have?” Fotudeng knew that Shi Le did not understand profound doctrines and would only be able to regard magic as evidence (*zheng* 徵) [of the power of Buddhism]. Accordingly, he said: “Though the highest teachings are remote [from the general understanding] we can take nearby things as proof (*zheng* 證) [of the efficacy of Buddhism].” Thereupon, he took his begging bowl, filled it with water, burned incense, and said a spell over it. In a moment there sprang up blue lotus flowers whose brightness and color dazzled the eyes. Shi-Le was convinced by this. . . .<sup>36</sup>

What is at stake here is the efficacy of Buddhism. In the encounter above, Shi Le summons Fotudeng after learning that the latter had predicted that he would succeed in conquering China and that Fotudeng would be his teacher. To determine the veracity of Fotudeng’s words, Shi Le asked him to provide evidence or proof that Buddhism was efficacious. By conjuring up the blue lotus flowers, Fotudeng proved that he had supernormal powers and demonstrated the efficacy of Buddhism because these powers are the result of Buddhist cultivation.

#### *Lingyan: Proving the Efficacy of the Diamond Sutra*

When applied to *Diamond Sutra* tales, *lingyan* may thus refer to the phenomena and events recounted in the stories as evidence or proof of the efficacy of the *Diamond Sutra*. Therefore, the term *lingyan* in the title of Xiao Yu’s collection of the *Diamond Sutra* tales is better understood as the “proven efficacy” or the “proofs of the efficacy” of the *Diamond Sutra*. With this, we can understand why the term *lingyan* came to be employed in the area of medicine, where it is used to refer to some cure, medication, or procedure as efficacious, or effective.<sup>37</sup>

In what way, then, is the *Diamond Sutra* considered efficacious? What constitutes a proof of its efficacy? Since the *Diamond Sutra* has repeatedly claimed that devotion to it, in terms of accepting, upholding, reading, reciting, and copying it, would bring forth immeasurable merit, a proof of its efficacy would entail proving these claims—whether it is really the case that such devotional acts would bring about immeasurable merit. Because the sutra itself does not stipulate how the merit achieved will be manifested, this has provided futile ground for devotees to conceive of the merit attained due to scriptural devotion in terms of their various concerns and situations, as attested by many of the stories. In the following tale, the merit achieved by the protagonist is conceived as the protection he received from emerging unscarred from a fall:

Qi Yantong of Weizhou (modern Longxi, Gansu), for his whole life, had always recited the *Diamond Sutra*. Previously, he served as Wulao District magistrate under Li Mi (582–618). Because rebels broke into the city and were searching for him, as they wanted to kill him, Yantong was frightened and panicked. He immediately climbed over the city wall and headed east; daringly he jumped into a creek in the valley. The gorge was deep and steep, over a few hundred *zhang*. Down he went, and without realizing it, he reached the bottom, landing safely on a huge rock, as if someone had caught hold of him. Calmly, he sat upright. Some time passed before he got up. Finding himself without any injury, Yantong himself thought it strange. Utterly happy and frightened at the same time, he could not stop sighing in relief. From then onward, he himself knew of the mighty power of the great venerable *Diamond Sutra*. Having truly known of the great magnitude of the power of the scripture and the inconceivable merit [obtained from upholding it], he deepened his faith in and veneration of it, and assiduously received and upheld the scripture, not daring to take it lightly and arrogantly.<sup>38</sup>

The significance of *Diamond Sutra* stories thus lies in how the wondrous events are conceived by the protagonists to be manifestations of the merit they achieved and thus representative of the efficacy of the sutra, rather than the verification of the responsiveness of a certain deity. *Diamond Sutra* tales are thus better understood as recounting the experiences of devotees who received some sort of numinous (*ling*) response (*ying*), usually in times of need, attesting or proving (*yan*) the efficacy (*ling*) of the sutra elicited (*gan*) by their Buddhist piety. While this indigenous understanding is informed by Sinitic ideas, it does not go against the basic tenets of Buddhism because the wonders can also be taken “as instances of a universal—and therefore eminently natural—causal law.” Indeed, the prolonged and consistent scriptural devotion of the protagonist (cause), which may be construed as a form of religious practice, had enabled him to accumulate merit that resulted in him averting a dangerous situation unscarred (effect).

The proven efficacy of the *Diamond Sutra* is an important and unique feature of *Diamond Sutra* accounts due to the fact that the *Diamond Sutra* is an inanimate object. While the inanimate nature of the sutra might limit its “responsiveness” to its supplicants, it also opens up possibilities about how its relationship with supplicants may be represented and construed. In many *Diamond Sutra* accounts, the salvific power of the sutra is executed by and manifested in terms of proxies through whom



the sutra's "work" is done, its responsiveness and potency are experienced, and, thus, its efficacy is proved. In the following tale, many proxies—not only of the *Diamond Sutra* but also of the *Lotus Sutra*—come to the rescue of the protagonist:

Before turning twenty, Yuan Zhitong, a native of Longcheng District in Tianshui Commandery (modern Tianshui, Gansu), had long observed the precept of abstinence. He read and recited the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Diamond Sutra*, and other sutras, and repented six times daily without missing a day. At twenty, Zhitong was enlisted into the Qingde Superprefecture Guardsmen. He was well known in the military group decreed to attack the White barbarians. Between his hometown and the land of the White barbarians, there were more than ten thousand *li*. While on the road, he kept up his ritual observances and recitations day and night without fail. When they reached the borders of the Southern barbarians, the government army was defeated in battle, and the soldiers fled. At that time, there were more than a hundred fellow guardsmen who did not know where to take refuge, with most of them injured or killed.

[Just as] Zhitong was panicking and had no way out of the situation, five persons, all of them riding mares, appeared unexpectedly and surrounded Tong. One of them went up to Tong and told him, "Do not be afraid; do not be frightened! You have fully cultivated merit. We have surrounded you, so you cannot be harmed." They traveled for more than seven *li* until they reached a pagoda. They then entered it to hide themselves. . . . [While Tong was in the pagoda,] two monks suddenly came to Tong and said, "*Dānapati*, you have recited the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Lotus Sutra*, and have worshipped and recollected all the Buddhas; this is inconceivable! We are also sent to rescue you. The five persons who rode on mares and surrounded you previously are all the manifestation of the power of the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra*. Similarly, we are here to rescue you and to prevent your enemy from harming you. Cultivate well good deeds, recite and uphold sutras, and do not become negligent. All protective deities and kings will constantly offer their protection to you." Having said these words, they then soared into the sky.

Tong passed through the day without taking food and was extremely hungry. In a moment, two children brought a bowl of cooked rice together with pickled vegetable and cakes. They gave them to Tong. When Tong finished eating, they told him, "Diligently cultivate merit and recite the *Prajñā Sutra*. Do not be negligent or stop doing so." After saying that, they soared straight into the sky. Tong shed tears and wept sadly. . . . Based on this encounter, [he understood that] all must be due to the power of the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Prajñā Sutra*.<sup>39</sup>

In three situations, different groups of people came to offer assistance to Zhitong. The two monks who later appeared to offer protection told Zhitong that they were there to offer protection like the five mysterious persons who rescued him earlier. Since they explained that the five persons were "all the manifestations of the power of the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra*," they, too, must be the same. Doubtless, the children who offered Zhitong food were the proxies of the sutras. As the proxies exhort Zhitong to maintain his devotion, just as the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra* urge these practices, they further affirm these practices as causes of merit that manifested in the form of the protection and aid he received. In this way, the efficacy of scriptural devotion can be proved even though the scriptures themselves, being inanimate, could respond indirectly to the supplicants through their proxies.

Although still based on the idea of *ganying*, the efficacy of the *Diamond Sutra* is also supported by the idea that “the sutra as embodiment of the eternally abiding dharma was deemed capable of producing the full range of benefits associated with, say, devotion to a given Buddha or bodhisattva” (Stevenson 2009, p. 135). As in the tale above, the benefits recounted in other *Diamond Sutra* tales, often of practical utility, are represented as achieving something positive, such as attaining longevity and good rebirth, or averting something negative, such as misfortune or even death. Furthermore, the efficacy of the sutra—as shown above—is thus proved by a rhetoric that both confirms and affirms the direct relationship between the experience of the protagonist and the claim of the *Diamond Sutra* in terms of the benefits and practical utility of devotion to the *Diamond Sutra*, that is, how efficacious it is with respect to the issues and problems faced by protagonists.<sup>40</sup> These rhetorical devices are important for representing the tales in specific ways so as to control how they would be received, as “other possible explanations for the reported events are preemptively discounted in favor of the one the narrative’s makers preferred”—the devotion of the protagonist to the *Diamond Sutra* becomes the only explanation for the benefits gained by protagonists that proves the efficacy of the sutra (Campany 2012, p. 16).

### Conclusion

Reference to indigenous Chinese Buddhist tales of wonders as “miracle” tales has often been marked by a sense of unease, especially as scholars of Asian religions are aware that the word *miracle* is used somewhat differently in Western intellectual discourse. It is indeed difficult to resist the convenience of a single term to translate the many terms in Asian religions that refer to wondrous phenomena and events. The use of *miracle* in these contexts—while facilitating scholarly discussion in different areas—might preclude a proper understanding of the wondrous in Asian traditions, whose typology and native terms are so diverse. With examples from Chinese Buddhism, the present essay thus cautions that the word *miracle*—even when modified or made looser in its definition to apply to Asian religion—might still not aptly capture the wondrous in its Asian contexts.

The conceptions of the wondrous in different traditions naturally differ because they are grounded differently in the cosmologies of the traditions. The world according to the cosmology of the Western tradition, derived largely from the Judeo-Christian worldview, is created by God and governed by the laws put in place by Him. God, however, occasionally intervened in affairs of the world as he worked miracles—according to one understanding—by suspending the laws of nature. Suspension of natural laws is understood to reveal the existence of a concerned deity, who, as creator of the world, has the capacity to suspend its laws at will. God, therefore, is transcendental in relation to the world. In the universe of Chinese cosmology, there is no god transcendent and separate from the world, and there is no heaven outside the universe to which human beings would plead for help. The wondrous is underpinned by a correlative cosmology of an “integrated, organic universe” and powered by *ganying*, a concept that explains wonders as natural responses in a world of

interdependent order, where things and people react to each other when certain conditions are fulfilled.<sup>41</sup>

Even though Sinitic Buddhist tales present a wide variety of the wondrous, such as auspicious signs, marvelous feats, and atypical events, they can fundamentally be understood by and explained in terms of *ganying* and the Buddhist law of causality. They are telling examples of the underlying *ganying* and causal law of the universe, manifestations of the karma that is really operative in events that the uninformed think of as miracles. For those who see the system, there is no anomaly, nothing really irregular or outside the law of karma. Although *ganying* is the philosophical underpinning of indigenous Chinese Buddhist tales, the wonders and marvels recounted in them are understood differently depending on the soteriological orientation of the stories. Guanyin tale collections are styled as *yingyan* narratives because they are understood as accounts relating Guanyin's responses to supplicants, which materialize the promises he made in the *Lotus Sutra*. On the other hand, *Diamond Sutra* tale collections are styled *lingyan* because their tales are conceived as accounts that prove the efficacy of the *Diamond Sutra*.<sup>42</sup> The efficacy of the *Diamond Sutra* is proved by establishing a necessary causal relationship between the protagonist's devotion and the wonders experienced or benefits gained. The wonders and benefits, conceived as solutions to genuine concerns or problems, are of particular meaning, significance, and relevance to the protagonists. Although we do not know how much the popularity of *Diamond Sutra* tales might have contributed to the currency of the term *lingyan*, the term indeed became widely used for referring to Chinese Buddhist narratives as well as non-Buddhist narratives of the wondrous and the marvelous from medieval times to the present.

## Notes

Scriptures in the East Asian Buddhist canons, *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (T) and *Manji shinsan dainihon zokuzōkyō* 卅新纂大日本續藏經 (X) are cited in the following fashion: Canon, volume number, scripture number: page, register (a, b, or c), and line number(s). For example, T8.235: 64b20 = Taishō canon, volume 8, scripture no. 235, page 64, register b, line 20. Citations of Pāli scriptures in the sutta collections, *Dīgha-nikāya* (D) and *Aṅguttara-nikāya* (A) are given according to the Pāli Text Society (PTS) system. For example, D III 33 = *Dīgha-nikāya*, volume 3, page 33.

- 1 – In the New Testament, miraculous acts of Jesus are described as “powers and wonders and signs” (Acts 2:22). The exact words used by the New Testament writers in describing these events are “wonders” or “prodigies” (τερατὰ), “powers” (δυναμεις), “signs” (σημεία), and, particularly by the apostle Paul, “graces of healing” (χαρισματα ἰαμάτων) and “effects of powers” (ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων). None of these terms seems to carry any entailments about the overriding of a natural order.

- 2 – Alternative understandings of *miracle* may be discerned from the medieval traditions of saints in the Christian tradition, as well as various traditions of Western Esotericism. In Process Theology, miracles are understood “not as violations of the laws of nature, but of intensifications of God’s healing energy as a result of the interplay of God’s visionary power and energy, our prayers, and the conditions of those for whom we pray” (Epperly 2011, p. 60).
- 3 – An example would be Weddle 2010.
- 4 – See Weddle 2010, pp. 14–18.
- 5 – For discussions of transcendence in the Western tradition, see Falconer 2003 and Stone 1992. A comparative discussion can be found in Hall and Ames 1998.
- 6 – See also Book 3 and 4 of the *Yoga Sutra*, translated in Woods 1966, pp. 16–19, 21–36, 39–42, 299–300.
- 7 – In a recent article, Fiordalis (2010) argued that the Buddha’s life can be considered a continuous act of wonder working.
- 8 – Citing the *Divyāvadāna*, Granoff (1996, pp. 80–81) points out that the understanding of the Buddha’s miraculous powers as identical to those of the gods was a belief widely held in Buddhism and was not just specific to the Buddhism of the Pāli commentarial texts.
- 9 – See also Sasaki 1992, pp. 9–10.
- 10 – These supernormal powers include the ability to replicate mind-made bodies of oneself, pass through solid objects, walk on water, fly through the air, touch the sun and moon, and ascend to the highest heavens.
- 11 – According to Clough (2010, p. 418), this is an expansive auditory ability in both extent and depth, enabling its possessor to perceive and understand sounds from different realms and beings.
- 12 – It is the liberating insight (*paññā*; Skt. *prajñā*) that enables the Buddha to realize *nirvāṇa* (Pāli *nibbāna*).
- 13 – According to the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*, which contains the *locus classicus* for the presentation of the *abhiññās*, it is upon attaining the fourth *jhāna* that one is able to cultivate the supernormal powers and the other *abhiññās* (*Sāmaññaphala-sutta*, D I 78–83 and II 87–100). For a discussion of this in relation to exegetical tradition, see Gethin 2011, pp. 219–220.
- 14 – Here, Gómez (2010, p. 513) has already proposed the term *wonder*, which he reiterated recently in order to “move our discourse away from another word upon which some religious groups claim exclusive rights: ‘miracle.’”
- 15 – This point is also made in the *Saṅgārava-sutta*, A III 60.
- 16 – The list of the “ten penetrations” (*shitong* 十通) and the penetrations themselves are scattered across different commentaries, notably in Chengguan’s

澄觀 (738–739) commentaries on the *Avataṃsaka Sutra*. Also, Daehyeon’s 大賢 (fl. mid-eighth century) commentary on the *Brahmā’s Net Sutra* lists ten supernatural powers. See *Fanwang jing guji ji* 梵網經古跡記, T40.1815:697c13.

- 17 – The *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (Biographies of eminent monks) devoted one roll to wonder-working monks. Such accounts can also be found in the *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (Pearly grove in the garden of dharma, T53.2122) and the *Ji shenzhou sanbao gantong lu* 集神州三寶感通錄 (A record of collected [accounts] of the responsive penetration of the three gems in China, T52.2106), both compiled in the seventh century. The third roll of the latter consists of biographical accounts of monks with supernatural powers. See *Gaoseng zhuan*, T52.2106:423–434. For more information on the *Ji shenzhou sanbao gantong lu* and its sources, see Shinohara 1998.
- 18 – Such a possibility can be discerned in the works of the famous Daoist, Ge Hong 葛洪 (284–363). See Campany 2002, pp. 18–97; Harper 1998, pp. 110–147; Lewis 2009, p. 200.
- 19 – See especially tales 8, 9, 10, and 15. According to Campany (2012, pp. 38–39), “every tale in which Buddhist or nuns are portrayed as working wonders by virtue of their enhanced powers implicitly positions these holy persons against an indigenous type—the wonder-working transcendent (*xian* 仙), or seeker of transcendence—and the two repertoires of attributed feats match up almost completely.”
- 20 – In his study of the *Mingbao ji* 冥報記 (A record of the hidden [workings of] retribution), Donald Gjetson (1989, p. 39) classified indigenous Chinese Buddhist tales into three types, one of which is “associated with famous monks or laymen, serving to demonstrate their high spiritual attainments.”
- 21 – See Campany 1993, pp. 264–265; Campany 1996b, pp. 212, 322–323; Sharf 1991, pp. 162–232; Stevenson 1995, pp. 29–30; Yü 2001, pp. 153–158.
- 22 – *Wuxing* refers to the five material elements: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. When applied to cosmology, “it is a system of classification that became predominant over other systems, synthesizing and standardizing the other systems through these five categories. . . . The five cosmic energies exist in constant interaction, conquering and generating one another in circular sequence” (Wang 2000, pp. 3, 75–128).
- 23 – Although these ideas can be traced to the Zhou (1111–249 B.C.E.), they received further treatment during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), particularly by the architect of Han Confucianism, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 B.C.E.), and his contemporaries (Yü 2001, p. 154).
- 24 – Also cited in Yü 2001, p. 154.
- 25 – According to Sharf (2002, p. 97), dynastic histories since the Han “typically included a chapter entitled ‘five phases’ which recorded occurrences of ‘unusual

phenomena' or 'wonders' (*guai*) including earthquakes, avalanches, feather-rain, and the birth of two-headed chickens."

- 26 – The *Ganying zhuan*, no longer extant, was compiled by Wang Yanxiu 王延秀 (fl. mid-fifth century C.E.), who was known to have belonged to an "abstruse learning" (*xuanxue* 玄學) group and served as a ritual specialist in the latter half of the fifth century. Only two brief quotations—but of questionable origin—are found in collectanea (Campany 1996b, p. 81). In addition to the *Ganying zhuan*, other Taishō and *Xuzang jing* tale collections that bear the term *ganying* in their titles include the *Da fangguang huayan jing ganying zhuan* 大方廣佛華嚴經感應傳 (T51.2074), the *Jin'gang jing ganying zhuan* 金剛經感應傳 (X87.1632), the *Jin'gang jing ganying fenlei jiyao* 金剛經感應分類輯要 (X87.1636), the *Huayan jing ganying lueji* 華嚴經感應略記 (X77.1532), and the *Huayan ganying yuanqi zhuan* 華嚴感應緣起傳 (X77.1533).
- 27 – Sharf (2002, p. 120) designates this range of meanings "epistemological" insofar as it implies an inner experience, perception, or cognition that may or may not correlate with an event in the external world.
- 28 – Also in Morohashi 1955–1960, 4:1132a. Sharf (2002, p. 120) designates this range of meanings as "ontological" insofar as to *gan* another person is to affect the mind of a being external to oneself.
- 29 – For example, the *Mingbao ji* places emphasis on karmic retribution, while Daoxuan's *Gantong lu* deals with spiritually powerful monastics as well as potent Buddhist images. Among the most important works on sacred geography are three related to Mount Wutai: Huixiang's 慧祥 (dates unknown) *Gu qingliang zhuan* 古清涼傳 (An account of old [Mount] Qingliang) (T51.2098); Yanyi's 延一 (dates unknown) *Guang qingliang zhuan* 廣清涼傳 (A comprehensive account of [Mount] Qingliang) (T51.2099); and Zhang Shangying's 張商英 (1043–1121) *Xu qingliang zhuan* 續清涼傳 (Sequel to the account of [Mount] Qingliang) (T51.2100) (Ruth Sasaki 2009, p. 203). Tale collections related to Buddhist deities include the Guanyin tale collection introduced earlier as well as collections related to Bodhisattva Dizang 地藏 (Skt. Kṣitigarbha), such as the *Dizang pusa xiang lingyan ji* 地藏菩薩像靈驗記 (A record of the proven efficacy of the images of Bodhisattva Dizang), compiled by a monastic in 989. There are also a few collections of tales related to the Pure Land.
- 30 – Tale 4 of the *Guangshiyin yingyan ji*, trans. Campany 1996a, pp. 94–95.
- 31 – This call for help is described in both scriptures and tales as an act of extreme concentration, intense sincerity, and sustained exertion. Campany (1996a, p. 84) has noted that the protagonist in peril is often described as calling on the bodhisattva "wholeheartedly" (*zhixin* 至心) or "single-mindedly" (*yixin* 一心), and so on.
- 32 – See also Campany 1993.

- 33 – The names of the three collections are *Guangshiyin yingyan ji* 光世音應驗記 (A record of the verifying response of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara), *Xu guangshiyin yingyan ji* 續光世音應驗記 (Sequel to a record of the verifying response of Guangshiyin), and *Xi guanshiyin yingyan ji* 繫觀世音應驗記 (Further sequel to a record of the verifying response of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara).
- 34 – For example, “His prophecy has come true” (*ta de yuyan yingyan le* 他的預言應驗了).
- 35 – Other examples include the *Dizang pusa xiang lingyan ji* 地藏菩薩像靈驗記 (X87.1638) and another collection of *Diamond Sutra* tales called the *Chisong jin’gang jing lingyan gongde ji* 持誦金剛經靈驗功德記 (T85.2743). Meng Xianzhong, the compiler of another collection called the *Jin’gang bore jing jiyuan ji* 金剛般若經集驗記 (X87.1629), probably had *lingyan* in mind, too.
- 36 – Biography of Fotudeng in *Gaoseng zhuan*, T50.2059:383c6–10, trans. Wright 1990, pp. 47–48, with changes.
- 37 – For example, “This medication is very efficacious, you will not feel the pain once it is applied [to the wound]” (*zhe yao hen lingyan, mo shang jiu bu teng le* 這藥很靈驗，抹上就不疼了).
- 38 – *Chisong jin’gang jing lingyan gongde ji* 持誦金剛經靈驗功德記, T85.2743: 157c27–158a6; Ho 2013, pp. 616–617, with changes.
- 39 – *Jin’gang bore jing jiyuan ji* 金剛般若經集驗記, X87.1629:455b1–c22; trans. Ho 2013, pp. 475–480, with changes.
- 40 – For an in-depth discussion of the rhetoric of *lingyan*, see Ho 2103, pp. 127–142.
- 41 – In this respect, we may note that Chinese-speaking people now still generally refer to Chinese Buddhist tales as *ganying gushi* 感應故事 (stories of sympathetic resonance) or 靈驗故事 *lingyan gushi* (stories of proofs of efficacy), but never as miracle stories (*qiji gushi* 奇蹟故事) in the modern context.
- 42 – Campany (2012, p. 31 n. 91) has in fact pointed out that the notion of efficacy (*ling*) is a more relevant indigenous notion than *ganying*.

## References

- Basinger, David. 2011. “What Is a Miracle?” In *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, edited by Graham H. Twelftree, pp. 19–35. Cambridge Companions to Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Birnbaum, Raoul. 1986. “The Manifestation of a Monastery: Shen-Ying’s Experiences on Mount Wu-t’ai in T’ang Context.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106, no. 1: 119–137.

- Brokaw, Cynthia J. 1991. *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brown, Colin. 2011. "Issues in the History of the Debates on Miracles." In *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, edited by Graham H. Twelftree, pp. 273–290. Cambridge Companions to Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Campany, Robert F. 1993. "The Real Presence for Joseph M. Kitagawa." *History of Religions* 32, no. 3:233–272.
- . 1996a. "The Earliest Tales of the Bodhisattva Guanshiyin." In *Religions of China in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., pp. 82–96. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 1996b. *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- . 2002. *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong's Traditions of Divine Transcendents*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2012. *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China*. Classics in East Asian Buddhism. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Clough, Bradley S. 2010. "The Higher Knowledges in the Pāli Nikāyas and Vinaya." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 33, nos. 1–2:409–433.
- Davis, Richard H., ed. 1998. *Images, Miracles, and Authority in Asian Religious Traditions*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Epperly, Bruce Gordon. 2011. *Process Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London and New York: T & T Clark.
- Faulconer, James E. 2003. *Transcendence in Philosophy and Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Fiordalis, David V. 2010. "Miracles in Indian Buddhist Narratives and Doctrine." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 33, nos. 1–2:381–408.
- Gethin, Rupert. 2011. "Tales of Miraculous Teachings: Miracles in Early Indian Buddhism." In *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, edited by Graham H. Twelftree, pp. 216–234. Cambridge Companions to Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gjertson, Donald E. 1989. *Miraculous Retribution: A Study and Translation of T'ang Lin's Ming-pao chi*. Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series. Berkeley: Centers for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California, Berkeley.
- Gómez, Luis O. 1977. "The Bodhisattva as Wonder-worker." In *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems: Studies in Honor of Edward Conze*, edited by Lewis R Lancaster, pp. 221–261. Berkeley: University of California Press.



- . 2010. "On Buddhist Wonders and Wonder-Working." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 33, nos. 1–2: 513–554.
- Granoff, Phyllis. 1996. "The Ambiguity of Miracles: Buddhist Understandings of Supernatural Power." *East and West* 46, nos. 1–2: 79–96.
- Hall, David L., and Roger T. Ames. 1998. *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hanyu da zidian bianji weiyuan hui 漢語大字典編輯委員會, ed. 2006. *Hanyu da zidian (ba juan ben)* 漢語大字典 (八卷本). 8 vols. Wuhan and Chengdu: Hubei Cishu Chubanshe.
- Harper, Donald. 1998. *Early Chinese Medical Literature*. London: Kegan Paul International.
- Henderson, John B. 1984. *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ho, Chiew Hui. 2013. "Tales of the *Diamond Sutra*: Buddhism on the Ground in Medieval China." Ph.D. diss., Stanford University.
- Hume, David. [1748] 2007. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter Millican. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kieschnick, John. 1997. *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography*. Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 10. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- . 2004. "Miracles." In *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, edited by Robert E. Buswell, Jr., pp. 541–544. New York: Macmillan.
- Levin, Michael P. 2011. "Philosophers on Miracles." In *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, edited by Graham H. Twelftree, pp. 291–308. Cambridge Companions to Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis, Mark Edward. 2009. *China between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties. History of Imperial China*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Locke, John. 1824. *The Works of John Locke, in Nine Volumes*. 12th ed. London: Printed for C. and J. Rivington.
- Morohashi Tetsuji 諸橋轍次. 1955–1960. *Dai kan-wa jiten* 大漢和辭典. 11 vols. Tokyo: Taishukan Shoten.
- Mullin, R. B. 2000. "Miracle." In *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, edited by Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason, and Hugh S. Pyper, pp. 438–440. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Needham, Joseph. 1951. *Human Law and the Laws of Nature in China and the West*. London: Oxford University Press.

- , ed. 1956. *Science and Civilisation in China*. Vol. 2, *History of Scientific Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sasaki, Genjun, ed. 1992. *Sārasaṅgaha*. Oxford: Pāli Text Society.
- Sasaki, Ruth Fuller, trans. 2009. *The Record of Linji*. Edited by Thomas Yūhō Kirchner. Nanzan Library of Asian Religion and Culture. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Schuessler, Axel. 2006. *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Sharf, Robert H. 1991. "The Treasure Store Treatise (Pao-tsang lun) and the Sinification of Buddhism in Eighth-Century China." Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan.
- . 2002. *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise*. Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 14. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Shinohara, Koichi. 1998. "Daoxuan's Collection of Miracle Stories about Supernatural Monks (*Shen-seng gan-tong lu*): An Analysis of Its Sources." *Zhonghua Foxue xuebao* 中華佛學學報 3: 319–379.
- Stevenson, Daniel B. 1995. "Tales of the *Lotus Sutra*." In *Buddhism in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., pp. 427–451. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 2009. "Buddhist Practice and the *Lotus Sutra* in China." In *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*, edited by Stephen F. Teiser and Jacqueline Ilyse Stone, pp. 132–150. Columbia Readings of Buddhist Literature. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Stone, Jerome Arthur. 1992. *The Minimalist Vision of Transcendence: A Naturalist Philosophy of Religion*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Teiser, Stephen F., and Jacqueline Ilyse Stone, eds. 2009. *Readings of the Lotus Sutra*. Columbia Readings of Buddhist Literature. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wang, Aihe. 2000. *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China*. Cambridge Studies in Chinese History, Literature, and Institutions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weddle, David L. 2010. *Miracles: Wonder and Meaning in World Religions*. New York: New York University Press.
- Woods, James, trans. 1966. *The Yoga-System of Patañjali*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Wright, Arthur F. 1990. *Studies in Chinese Buddhism*. Edited by Robert M. Somers. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Yü, Chün-fang. 2001. *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Zhiru. 2007. *The Making of a Savior Bodhisattva: Dizang in Medieval China*. Studies in East Asian Buddhism 21. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.