

## Article

# Cleaning and Healing: An Examination of the Ritual of Willow Twigs and Clean Water

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**Abstract:** *Yangzhi jingshui* 楊枝淨水 (willow twigs and clean water) are part of one of the most popular rituals used in Chinese Buddhist practices. In order to preserve dental health and eliminate bad odors, the Vinaya texts specify rules on chewing willow twigs as a form of tooth brushing in one's daily facial washing process. Willow twigs are also frequently employed in Esoteric (*mijiao* 密教) rituals, where they are accompanied by spells to create intricate ceremonies that have the power to heal illnesses, ward off bad luck, and bring about happiness and tranquility. For the development of this ritual in China, the usage of *yangzhi jingshui* was not originally connected to any particular deity, but later on, the ritual became primarily linked to Avalokitēśvara (Guanyin, 觀音), who was believed to use them as crucial tools for healing and saving lives. The symbolic meaning of using willow and water has been thoroughly discussed by Master Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) and then has since developed into the more complete *Repentance Practice of Guanyin* (*Guanyin chanfa* 觀音懺法). Using *yangzhi jingshui* to save people as well as trees is also an important aspect described in Buddhist biographies and Chinese novels, such as *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 [*The Biographies of Eminent Monks*], *Song Gaoseng Zhuan* 宋高僧傳 [Biographies of Eminent Monks in the Song Dynasty], and stories of collected in *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 [Extensive Records of the Taiping (xingguo) Period], *Lunhui Xingshi* 醒世輪回 [Reincarnation Stories to Awaken the World], and *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 [Journey to the West], which all demonstrate the rich cultural significance of this ceremony. Through the narratives of monks, the worship of Yangliu Guanyin, and its portrayal in the literature, *yangzhi jingshui* evolved from a cleansing tool in scriptures to a ritual object in Esoteric Buddhist healing ceremonies, ultimately becoming a common Buddhist practice. While new elements were added over time, its core themes of healing and purification have remained consistent.



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**Keywords:** willow twigs and clean water; rituals in Esoteric Buddhism; healing narratives; Avalokitēśvara

## 1. Introduction

Four major areas can be used to categorize the current study on the Buddhist practice of *Yangzhi jingshui* 楊枝淨水 (Willow Branch and Clean Water Ritual). The willow's religious and cultural significance is highlighted in the first category, along with its connection to Chinese and Indian medicine and its ability to ward off illness and disaster (Luo 2020). Studies on the various functions of willow in Eastern and Western ceremonies are also available (Syme 2014, pp. 29–60). The study of the image of the Willow-Bearing Guanyin (Yangliu Guanyin 楊柳觀音) falls into the second category. It focuses on the development of the image of Guanyin holding a clean water bottle (*jingping* 淨瓶) and willow branches (*yangzhi* 楊枝),<sup>1</sup> as well as the connection between this image and the Taoist deity Taiyi Jiuku Zhenren 太乙救苦真人 (The Celestial Worthy Taiyi, Who Delivers from Suffering).<sup>2</sup>

The third category is devoted to organizing the material on the therapeutic qualities of willows in Esoteric Buddhism (*mijiao* 密教), as well as the connection between the toothbrush and willow twigs and the function of the tree deity in curing ailments (B. Wang 1983, p. 109; K. Jin 1990, p. 150; K. Jin 1993, p. 114; Q. Wang 2014, pp. 75–79; Wu and Sunami 2024, pp. 103–12). Finally, the fourth group considers *yangzhi jingshui* in the context of Guanyin’s repentance method, particularly the Tiantai school’s emphasis on and development of Zhiyi 智顓 (538–597) (X. Huang 2023, pp. 76–93; T. Liu 2021, pp. 155–61; G. Huang 2017, pp. 111–46). The development of the Willow Branch and Clean Water Ritual itself and its literary portrayal, however, have received less attention in these studies. More investigation is warranted into the relevance and crucial role of the *yangzhi jingshui* ritual in the development of Guanyin belief.

This paper carefully reviews the material pertaining to the Willow Branch and Clean Water Ritual. It also explores the literary depictions of the Willow Branch and Clean Water Ritual via the prism of monastic biographies and Tang Dynasty novels, elucidating the intricate connections between texts, rituals, and stories. It reveals that monastic biographies are more closely aligned with the textual structure of Buddhist hagiographies, whereas novels offer a more comprehensive depiction of *yangzhi jingshui*, which is influenced by Guanyin belief and demonstrates a feminization trend that influenced literary expressions in later dynasties.

## 2. *Yangzhi* 杨枝 (Willow Branches) or *Chimu* 齿木 (Tooth Wood): A Translation Problem

### 2.1. The Benefits of Chewing Willow Twigs (*Jiao Yangzhi* 嚼楊枝)

In Buddhist scriptures, there are numerous praises for the purifying benefits related to willow twigs. *Zengyi a’han jing* 增壹阿含經 [Incremental Āgama, Skt. Ekōttarikāgama] states that “At that time, the Buddha told all *bhiksus*, ‘As Giving willow twigs to others has five virtues. What are the five? First, it removes bad breath; second, it removes saliva and spit; third, it promotes digestion in *shengzang* 生藏 (*āma-āsaya*, receptacle of undigested food); fourth, it prevents bad odor in the mouth; fifth, it brings clarity to the eyes. These, *bhiksus*, are the five virtues of giving a toothbrush to others. If good men and women seek these five virtues, they should remember to give willow twigs as a gift. Thus, *bhiksus*, you should learn and practice accordingly”. At that time, the *bhiksus* heard what the Buddha said and joyfully followed his teachings: “爾時，世尊告諸比丘：‘施人楊枝有五功德。云何為五？一者除風，二者除涎唾，三者生藏得消，四者口中不臭，五者眼得清淨。是謂，比丘！施人楊枝有五功德。若善男子、善女人求此五功德，當念以楊枝用惠施。如是，比丘！當作是學。’爾時，諸比丘聞佛所說，歡喜奉行”。<sup>3</sup> And *Huayan jing* 華嚴經 [Flower Ornament Sutra, Skt. Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra] also points out that chewing willow twigs is the first actions of the ten steps of a morning routine. And the act of chewing willow twigs as one wakes up possesses ten virtues: 1. It eliminates lingering food particles. 2. It dispels phlegm and illness. 3. It eliminates various toxins. 4. It removes dental plaque. 5. It results in fragrant breath. 6. It enhances vision. 7. It moistens the throat. 8. It prevents the lips from cracking. 9. It augments the voice and vitality. 10. It prevents food from tasting bland. After eating in the morning, everyone should chew on the betel twig. Various bitter and pungent substances, used as toothbrushes, when employed with care, possess such virtues. Then, after eating breakfast, everyone should chew willow twigs and [all] bitter things such as *chimu* 齿木 (tooth wood).<sup>4</sup> Although it is hinted here that not only willow branches but also other bitter tree branches can be used as toothbrushes and may serve the same purpose, in most cases, the concept of toothbrush wood is equivalent to or replaced by willow twigs.

## 2.2. The Misunderstanding of This Practice Caused by the Translation

The main focus of the Vinaya writings is the hygienic and cleansing properties of *chimu* 齒木 (tooth wood, Skr. *dantakāṣṭha*). Despite being interpreted as “yangzhi” 楊枝 (willow branch/twig), the twigs working as a *dantakāṣṭha* do not necessarily come from a willow. In general, monks may utilize willow branches directly as *dantakāṣṭha*; however, certain annotators are aware of this distinction. The medical effects of willows are acknowledged, but their purifying effect is thought to be more significant.

In Chinese, “Yangliu” 楊柳 can refer to both “poplar tree” (Yangshu 楊樹) and “willow tree” (Liushu 柳樹), or simply to “Willow tree”.

The translation of “Yangzhi” in Buddhist scriptures can also be understood as “Willow branch”. Monks and nuns should use *yangzhi* to clean their mouths after accepting food; otherwise, one might be at risk of falling into the destiny of hell.<sup>5</sup> Chewing *yangzhi* has several benefits, including improving digestion, reducing hot and cold feelings, increasing saliva production to detect flavors, getting rid of bad breath, and enhancing vision. In addition, Buddhist regulations specify where and how *yangzhi* should be chewed. Chewing it in or near a toilet is not allowed. Once chewed, it should not be inserted or placed carelessly somewhere to avoid causing inconvenience to others or offending deities. It should not be placed inside a restroom or under the root of a tree.<sup>6</sup>

Using *chimu* 齒木 properly under the precepts was a common practice among Buddhist monks in India. However, when it came to China, the twigs that were chewed changed from an Indian tree branch to willow branches. Yijing 義淨 (635–713) clearly recognized the pertinent distinctions and made an effort to update Buddhist practices in China. In *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳 [Buddhist Monastic Tradition of Southern Asia], he repeatedly explained how to chew *yangzhi* in various contexts. He used two expressions: *jiao yangzhi* 嚼楊枝 (chewing willow twigs) and *chimu* 齒木. He highlighted that chewing willow twigs is important and necessary. He also explained how to use *chimu* 齒木, but he claimed that *chimu* is not *yangzhi* and explained the difference between the two. There are three important texts to consider, as follows:

Therefore, it is said in several commentaries: that “It is considered disdainful not to chew a willow twig [to cleanse the teeth], not to wash one’s self after defecation, and not to distinguish between pure and impure food”.

“故諸論云，不嚼楊枝、便利不洗、食無淨觸，將以為鄙。”<sup>7</sup>

After having taken a meal, a monk must wash his hands, then clean and chew a willow twig to cleanse, brush, and pucker his teeth, as well as scrape his tongue, so as to make them all clean.

手必淨洗、口嚼齒木疏牙刮舌，務令清潔。<sup>8</sup>

Every day in the morning, a monk must chew a piece of tooth wood to brush his teeth and scrape his tongue, and this must be done in the proper way...In Sanskrit the tooth wood is known as the *dantakāṣṭha* (*danduojiasecha* 憚哆家瑟訛), *danta* (*danduo* 憚哆) means tooth, and *kāṣṭha* (*jiasecha* 家瑟訛), a piece of wood. We must not mistake the tooth wood for willow twigs...Twigs of a bitter, astringent, or pungent taste, the end of which may become cotton-like after being chewed, are best for using as tooth wood....In the whole country of India, the willow is scarcely seen. Although the translators used this name, the wood for the Buddha’s tooth wood was not actually from the willow tree. I have seen it with my own eyes at Nalanda Monastery. I am not trying to convince others about this matter, but my readers need not take the trouble to doubt it. Even in the Sanskrit text of the Nirvana Sutra, there is the saying: “At the time of chewing tooth wood...”Some monks [in China] use five or six small willow twigs and chew them all in their mouths, not knowing how to rinse out the dregs.

每日旦朝須嚼齒木揩齒刮舌，務令如法，盥漱清淨方行敬禮。若其不然，受禮禮他悉皆得罪。其齒木者，梵云憚哆家瑟訛，憚哆譯之為齒，家瑟訛即是其木。長十二指，短不減八指，大如小指，一頭緩須熟嚼，良久淨刷牙關……西國柳樹全稀，譯者輒傳斯號；佛齒木樹實非楊柳，那爛陀寺目自親觀。既不取信於他，聞者亦無勞致惑。檢《涅槃經》梵本云‘嚼齒木時矣。’亦有用細柳條，或五或六全嚼口內不解漱除，或有吞汁將為殄病，求清潔而返穢、糞去疾而招痾。或有斯亦不知，非在論限。<sup>9</sup>

This demonstrates how the material used for the toothbrush stick was mistranslated as “yangzhi” 楊枝 (willow twig), leading to Chinese monks adopting the common Indian subcontinental custom of chewing on toothbrush sticks as “yangzhi” chewing. Despite its natural ability to clean and even cure teeth, willow was rarely used as a chewing material in Indian rituals since willow trees were uncommon there. The usage of *yangzhi* as a toothbrush stick was undoubtedly condemned by Yijing, although this was not as strictly enforced in later disciplinary writings. They took a middle ground on this matter, claiming that willow was included in the category of *chimu*. For instance, in *Pini riyong qieyao* 毗尼日用切要 [Essential Daily Practices and Regulations of Vinaya] collected by Xuti 續體 (Jianyue 見月, 1601–1679), Xuti notes that there were four types of trees called “yang” 楊 (Populus or willow) that could be used as toothbrush sticks.

In Vinaya texts, it is called *dantakāṣṭha* (tooth wood). There are four types of willow, all of which can be used to brush teeth. The first is *baiyang* 白楊 (White Poplar, *Populus alba*), with round leaves. The second is *qingyang* 青楊 (Green Poplar, *Populus cathayana*), with long leaves. The third is *hongyang* 紅楊 (Red Poplar, *Populus × canadensis*) whose leaves turn red after the frost falls. The fourth is *huangyang* 黃楊 (Yellow Poplar, *Populus × euramericana*),<sup>10</sup> which is strong in nature and difficult to grow. Nowadays, people commonly use willow branches as toothbrushes. Willow (*Salix babylonica*) branches hang down, belonging to the category of Small Poplar (*xiaoyang* 小楊). If there is no willow available, what should we use to brush our teeth? It should be understood that all types of wood can be used for brushing teeth and are collectively referred to as *dantakāṣṭha* (tooth wood). Simply choose wood that is warm and soft (*wenhe* 溫和) and has a bitter taste to chew on. It is not limited to just one type of willow wood.

律中名曰齒木。楊有四種，皆可梳齒也。一白楊，葉圓；二青楊，葉長；三赤楊，霜降葉赤；四黃楊，本性堅緻難長。今咸以柳條當楊枝。柳條垂下，乃小楊也。若無柳處，將何梳齒？須知一切木，皆可梳齒，皆名齒木。但取性和有苦味者嚼之，不獨謂柳木一種。<sup>11</sup>

This paragraph indicates that the branches of different poplar species can all be used as toothbrushes, despite the fact that it appears to distinguish between poplar and willow trees. The most widely used is obviously willow, although other mild and bitter-tasting tree branches can be used in its place if willow is not readily available. The Indian concept that toothbrushes should be bitter since bitter-tasting wood is thought to have anti-inflammatory properties is obviously influencing the focus here. In contrast to the fiery feeling Yijing described with toothbrushes, Chinese traditional medicine has placed the emphasis on utilizing *wenhe* 溫和 (a Chinese traditional medical term to describe things that are not too strong or too cold) tree branches as toothbrushes. This demonstrates that although the toothbrush was originally formed from a particular kind of Indian tree, it was mistranslated as willow branches, assimilating into the customs and cultural meanings of willow trees and emerging as the most significant toothbrush type. Additionally, due to its dominating position, the idea of toothbrushes was extended to include willow-like poplar species; however, other tree species may be employed as well.

While some Dunhuang paintings show teeth cleaning, the majority of them show cleaning by using one’s fingers, and the particular pictures of cleaning teeth with tree branches do not identify the kind of tree. Nonetheless, these associated pictures do serve

as a reminder of how common the practice of chewing *yangzhi* or using toothbrushes made of this material might be in China.

There are tooth brushing pictures in 14 caves, including Cave 7, 9, 12, 25, 55, 98, 146, 154, 159, 186, 196, 361, and 454 of Mogao Grottoes and Cave 16 of Yulin Grottoes. They are distributed in *Maitreya Sutra* paintings and Raudraksa (Laoduchadou 勞度叉斗) murals. According to the tools used for tooth brushing, the tooth brushing pictures in Mogao Grottoes can be divided into two categories: one contains pictures of rubbing one's teeth with one's hand, and the other is pictures of tooth brushing with a chew stick. Only two pictures show tooth brushing with a stick (H. Wang 1990, pp. 20–23). The mural Laoduchaduo Contest with the Holy mainly depicts the story from ancient India, in which the minister Sudatta (Xuda 須達) of the kingdom of Shravasti purchased the garden of Prince Zhituo with gold to build a monastery and invite the Buddha to preach. However, the six heterodox schools, relying on the power of the king, opposed this and proposed a contest with the Buddha to decide whether to establish the monastery based on the outcome.

The mural vividly portrays the exciting scenes of the contest between the heterodox Laoducha and Shariputra, as well as the ultimate conversion of the heterodox.<sup>12</sup> After the heterodox converted to Buddhism, they accepted Buddhist rituals, among which was the practice of cleaning teeth with a toothpick, which is also depicted in the mural.<sup>13</sup>

In classical Chinese, the terms “Yang” (杨), “Liu” (柳), and “Yangliu” (杨柳) were often used interchangeably. Xu Shen's 許慎 (58?–147?) *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 [Origin of Chinese Characters] states that “Liu 柳, is a small Yang (*xiaoyang* 小楊)”. And “Yang is *puliu* 蒲柳 (willow by the river)” (Shen Xu 1988, p. 245). The term “Yangliu” frequently appears as well, but the core cultural concept revolves around the “willow tree”. The term “Yangliu” had already appeared in the *Shijing* 詩經 [Book of Songs]. In the poetry and prose of the Han and Six Dynasties, the imagery of the willow tree is rich and varied. The word “liu” (柳) sounds the same as “liu” (留), which means “to stay”. Willow trees are considered gentle, flourishing in spring, and in China, there is a cultural custom of breaking off willow branches to bid farewell. It embodies the sorrow of parting, the vitality of spring, the grace of femininity, and the impermanence of life. The willow holds rich cultural significance in Chinese tradition, with numerous folk customs associated with it. The willow is not only a symbol of fertility and worship but also central to the competitive activity of “shooting the willow” (*sheliu* 射柳). The practice of *sheliu* typically involves shooting arrows at willow branches or leaves, demonstrating skill, precision, and strength. The willow is also associated with rituals to pray for rain or ensure harvest, and willow branches are incorporated into dance ceremonies (Guan 2006, pp. 8–15). In the literature, “Yangliu” (actually referring to the willow tree) has become a symbol of parting and longing. The *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 [Classified Collection Based on the Classics and Other Literature], in its section on trees (*mubu* 木部), compiled records related to “Liu” and “Yang” before the Tang Dynasty under the title “Yangliu”, unifying them under this term (Xun Ouyang 1965, pp. 1930–33).

An interesting case of “Yangliu” specifically referring to the “willow tree” is found in a Tang Dynasty novel titled as *Kaihe ji* 開河記 [The Records of Building the Great Canal]<sup>14</sup>, which reports that Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty 隋煬帝 (Yang Guang 楊廣 569–618, r.604–618), while excavating the Tongji Canal 通濟渠, ordered the planting of willow trees along the riverbanks. He loved these trees so much that he bestowed the imperial surname “Yang” 楊 upon the willows (*liu* 柳). From then on, the willow tree came to be known as “Yangliu” (Jianguo Li 2015, p. 2676). Of course, this is a literary fabrication, yet it illustrates that in the context of ancient Chinese language, literature, and cultural customs, “Yang” and “Liu” should not be separated into two distinct trees as in botany. Instead, “Yangliu” is a cultural concept centered around the willow tree.

Moreover, the willow tree is believed to connect with spirits, convey human wishes, and possess magical powers to ward off evil spirits, dispel plague demons, protect and nurture children, and even pray for rain during droughts. It has functions such as blessing, exorcism, and healing. The Eastern Han Dynasty's *Shennong bencao jing* 神農本草經 [Divine Farmer's Materia Medica] reports that willow leaves can treat facial sores (J. Ma 1995, pp. 280–81). By the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343), in his *Zhouhou beiji fang* 肘後備急方 [Emergency Formulas to Keep on Hand],<sup>15</sup> had already clearly stated the medicinal value of willow trees (Ge 2015, p. 152). The Northern Wei Dynasty's 北魏 (386–534) *Qimin yaoshu* 齊民要術 [Essential Techniques for the Welfare of the People Agricultural] by Jia Sixie 賈思勰 (d.u.) mentions the custom of inserting willow branches in the first month to drive away ghosts (Jia 2009, p. 446). The Tang Dynasty's *Qianjin Yifang* 千金翼方 [A Supplement to Recipes Worth A Thousand Gold] by Sun Simiao 孫思邈 (?–682) and *Waitai miyao* 外臺秘要 [Arcane Essentials from the Imperial Library] by Wang Tao 王燾 (670–755) contain records of the medicinal functions of willow branches, likely influenced by Buddhism. The Ming Dynasty's *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 [Compendium of Materia Medica] by Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518–1593) also explicitly states that “Liu” is known as “small Yang” or “Yangliu”, and that the branches, leaves, and flowers of the willow tree have different medicinal functions<sup>16</sup> (Shizhen Li 2004, pp. 2031–32).

The Buddhist scriptures' records of the medicinal value of willow trees and traditional Chinese medicine's emphasis on the willow branch's ability to ward off plagues and harm led to the translation of “*dantakāṣṭha*” (a tooth-cleaning twig) as “Yangzhi” (willow branch) by monks, highlighting its cleansing and medicinal functions. The Tang Dynasty and later periods' emphasis on the medicinal value of willow trees is the result of the convergence of these two traditions. Of course, translating *chimu* as “willow branch” in the Tang Dynasty was indeed problematic, as the tree used for cleaning and healing in India was not necessarily the willow. However, upon arriving in China, it became integrated into the complex and long-standing tradition of Chinese willow culture; hence, “Yangzhi” specifically refers to willow branches.

### 2.3. Miracle Story Related to Yangzhi

Accounts also record stories of the Buddha chewing on willow twigs and spitting them out, after which they grow into trees immediately.

On the first day of the twelfth lunar month, the Buddha arrived at the testing ground. King Pasenadi had arranged for a meal to be offered on that day. In the early morning, he respectfully handed a toothbrush to the Buddha. After the Buddha received it and finished chewing it, he threw the remains onto the ground, and immediately, it sprouted and grew luxuriantly. The roots and stems shot up, reaching a height of five hundred *yojanas*, with branches and leaves spreading out like clouds, extending all around in the same manner. Gradually, flowers bloomed, each as large as a chariot wheel, and then fruits appeared, each as big as a five-*dou* container (around 50 L). The roots, stems, branches, and leaves were all purely made of various kinds of seven treasures, shining brilliantly with radiant colors, emanating light according to their hues, overshadowing the sun and the moon. Those who ate the fruits found their taste surpassing ambrosia, and a fragrance permeated in all four directions, delighting all who smelled it. As the fragrant wind blew, it caused the branches and leaves to touch each other, producing harmonious sounds that eloquently expounded the essential teachings of the Dharma, which were never found to be tiresome by those who heard them. For all those witnessing this transformation of the tree, their respect and faith doubled and were purified. The Buddha then taught the Dharma, catering to their needs, and their minds were all enlightened. Many aspired to follow the Buddha, achieving fruition and ascending to heaven.

臘月一日，佛至試場，波斯匿王，是日設食，清晨躬手授佛楊枝，佛受嚼竟，擲殘著地墮地便生，蓊鬱而起，根莖踊出，高五百由旬，枝葉雲布，周匝亦爾。漸復生華，大如車輪，遂復有菓，大五斗瓶，根莖枝葉，純是七寶若干種色，映燦麗妙，隨色發光，掩蔽日月。食其菓者，美踰甘露，香氣四塞，聞者情悅；香風來吹，更相撞觸，枝葉皆出和雅之音，暢演法要，聞者無厭。一切人民，覩茲樹變，敬信之心，倍益純厚。佛乃說法，應適其意，心皆開解，志求佛者、得果生天，數甚眾多。<sup>17</sup>

This story, through a depiction of a scene from the Buddha's daily life, unfolds a miraculous tale, thereby highlighting the Buddha's supernatural abilities and the devoutness of the people to him. The focal point of the entire story lies in the instantaneous transformation of the willow twig into a towering tree, emphasizing the rapidity of the event, the extreme height of the tree, and the exceptional and sublime nature of the scene. The tree also becomes a symbol and metaphor for the Dharma itself. *Pusa bensheng man lun* 菩薩本生鬘論 [The Treatise on the Garland of Bodhisattvas Jātaka Stories, Skt. *Jātaka-mālā*]<sup>18</sup> tells a similar story, with few details changed.<sup>19</sup>

This type of story has two important influences. Firstly, it can be regarded as the prototype for the story in the *The Biography of Eminent Monks* where Fotucheng saves a tree with willow branches and clean water. At the same time, this plot was also featured in some novels of the Tang Dynasty. Secondly, related holy relics were formed around this story. The earliest record of this relic can be seen in the Great Country of Vaisakha recorded in Faxian's biography.<sup>20</sup> *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記 [A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang] also wrote about it in Song Yun 宋雲 (fl. 518–522) and Huisheng 惠生's (aka Huisheng 慧生, fl. 518–522) adventure to the western regions.

Twenty paces to the south of the stupa were a spring and a rock. The Buddha, whose nature was pure, once chewed a willow branch. After it was stuck in the ground, it grew. After some time, it had grown into a huge tree, known by the Indians *p'o-lou*.

婆樓。塔南二十步，有泉石。佛本清淨，嚼楊枝，植地即生，今成大樹，胡名曰婆樓。<sup>21</sup>

Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) encountered such relics in his travels as well.

Below the cliff to the north of Strong Elephant Stupa is a *nāga* spring, where the Tathāgata and arhats washed their mouths by chewing willow twigs after eating the meal offered by the deity. They planted the twigs in the ground, where they took root and grew into the dense wood that exists now. Afterward, people built a monastery in this place called Pinḍaka ("Chewing Willow Twigs") Monastery.

象堅窳堵波北山巖下有一龍泉，是如來受神飯已，及阿羅漢於中漱口嚼楊枝，因即種根，今為茂林。後人於此建立伽藍，名鞞鐸佉 (唐言嚼楊枝)。<sup>22</sup>

More than fifty paces further to the southeast, inside the enclosure, is an extraordinary tree, eight to nine feet high with two branches. The Tathāgata once chewed a piece of willow twig [to clean his teeth] and threw the used twig to the ground, where it took root and grew into this tree. Although a long time has passed, the branches never increase or decrease in number.

次東南垣內五十餘步，有奇樹，高八九尺，其幹兩披，在昔如來嚼楊枝棄地，因植根柢，歲月雖久，初無增減。<sup>23</sup>

The first story is said to be in the Kapiśā (Jiabishi guo 迦畢試國), while the second is in the Magadha country (Mojietuo guo 摩揭陀國). This shows that this story has been widely circulated in different places for a long time. That is to say, for a long time, Chinese people have known this story and the related worship practices from the literature.

### 3. Yangzhi Jingshui in Esoteric Buddhist Rituals

Willow twigs are also frequently employed in Esoteric Buddhist rituals, where they are mixed with mantras and clean water to create intricate ceremonies that have the power to heal illnesses, ward off bad luck, and bring about happiness and tranquility. The usage

of willow twigs and purified water was not originally connected to any particular deity, but later on, Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin 觀音) used them as crucial tools for healing and saving lives. The symbolic meaning of using willow and water has been thoroughly discussed by Master Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597), which is one of the most important steps of the repentance ritual related to Guanyin. Although the practice of chewing on *yangzhi* (willow twig) is extensively mentioned in the Vinaya texts and is associated with specific contexts of maintaining dental and oral health, Buddhist records of *yangzhi* for treating illnesses and dispelling evil spirits are primarily concentrated in Esoteric texts. In terms of historical development, the practice was introduced during the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties, mainly emphasized in different scriptures, particularly represented by the *Qifo bapusa suoshuo datuoluoni shenzhou jing* 七佛八菩薩所說大陀羅尼神咒經 [The Divine Spells of the Great Dhāraṇīs Taught by the Seven Buddhas and Eight Bodhisattvas, T. 1332].

Although the *Qing guanshiyin pusa xiaofu duhai tuoluoni zhou jing* 請觀世音菩薩消伏毒害陀羅尼呪經 [The Sutra of Invoking Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's Dhāraṇīs to Eliminate Poisonous Harm, T no. 1043] was translated into Chinese during the Eastern Jin Dynasty, the ceremony of *yangzhi* and clean water was not specifically associated with Avalokiteśvara in the stories and literature of the Six Dynasties period. During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, Zhiyi of the Tiantai School highlighted the religious significance of *yangzhi* and *jingshui* in his annotations to the *Qing guanshiyin pusa xiaofu duhai tuoluoni zhou jing*, making it an important part of Avalokiteśvara's repentance method. Explanations of how *yangzhi jingshui* water can treat illnesses and what illnesses they can treat appear in other Esoteric scriptures. This period was also significant for the combination of *yangzhi jingshui* with Avalokiteśvara. During the Song Dynasty, figures such as Zunshi 遵式 perfected Avalokiteśvara's repentance method, and the ceremony of *yangzhi jingshui* became one of the most representative rituals of Avalokiteśvara.

### 3.1. Introduction in Early Esoteric Buddhism Texts

The *Guanding zhao wufang longwang she yidu shenzhou shangpin jing* 灌頂召五方龍王攝疫毒神咒上品經 [The Supreme Scripture of the Divine Dhāraṇī of Invocation of the Five Dragon Kings and the Subjugation of the Epidemic Poison] in *Foshuo guanding jing* 佛說灌頂經 [The Consecration Sutra Spoken by the Buddha] details the use of willow and poplar in dispelling illnesses. It narrates the story of a bhikṣu named Chanti (*Chanti biqiu* 禪提比丘) who used willow branches and spring water to aid the people, enabling the nation to overcome sickness and drive away epidemics.

Upon arriving at that place, they saw the willow twig chewed by the bhikṣu Chandi, which had been thrown onto the ground and grown into a tree. Beneath the tree flowed a clear spring. All the people then worshiped the tree, as if they were seeing Chandi himself. They broke off branches from the willow tree (*yangzhi* 楊枝), drew water from the spring, and brought them back home. They used the willow twigs to ward off the illnesses among the sick people and sprinkled them with the water. All of the sick people then felt refreshed, their bodies became cool, and all their illnesses were healed.

往彼住處見禪提比丘所嚼楊枝擲地成樹，樹下有清泉水。諸人民輩即禮拜此樹，如見禪提在世無異，折此楊枝取下泉水還歸到家，以楊柳枝拂除病者，以水灑諸病人輩悉得休息，身體清涼百病除愈。<sup>24</sup>

This story does not conflict with the narrative style of the stories about the Buddha's sacred relics. For example, in the *Luoyang qiellan ji* and the later *Da Tang Xiyu Ji*, one can see records of the Dragon King Temple before the story of the Buddha chewing on the willow twig, but they are two separate sacred relics. The importance of the story included in the *Foshuo Guanding Jing* here lies in its clear demonstration of the function of tooth-cleaning by chewing the willow twig to the healing power of a magical willow tree. The Buddha

threw the chewed willow twig (*chimu* 齒木) on the ground and it grew into a tall tree. The tall willow tree itself became a new center of worship with healing powers. In the narrative, the focus of the willow twig actually shifted. However, this story extends the miraculous healing power of the willow twig of the Buddha to ordinary monks, becoming the origin of stories on eminent monks in *Gaoseng zhuan* and even later stories of using willow twigs to heal sickness.

*Qifo bapusa suoshuo datuoluoni shenzhou jing* 七佛八菩薩所說大陀羅尼神咒經 [The Divine Spells of the Great Dhāraṇīs Taught by the Seven Buddhas and Eight Bodhisattvas, T. 1332] can be dated to the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century (Strickmann 1996, p. 73). This sutra was later collected into *Tuoluoni zaji* 陀羅尼雜集 [Miscellaneous Collected Dhāraṇīs] (Koichi 2014, p. 4 and 229n1). The characteristic of this scripture is that it first mentions the names of the ghosts that cause diseases, and then proposes the rituals for treatment. Four types of diseases can be treated by rituals involving willow branches and water. One of the records is about treating headaches by chanting over a willow branch seven times and then hitting the patient fourteen times with the willow branch.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, the willow branch also plays an important role in treating alcoholism (*shijiu gui* 嗜酒鬼), and the complex ritual involves chanting, preparing urn water, placing seven willow branches in the urn, sprinkling water in four directions, washing the face three times, and drinking the water three times.<sup>26</sup> Another disease caused by a ghost named *zhidounashitugong gui* 支都那是土公鬼 can be cured with the same ritual; however, it is unclear what this ghost or this disease refers to. Another disease caused by the ghost of delusion (*yangu* 厭蠱)<sup>27</sup> can be cured by willow and water ritual. Three liters of water are contained in a copper pot with a white silk cloth covering it. Seven willow branches are placed crosswise on top, and the incantation is recited three times and then seven times. After use, it is discarded in the toilet.<sup>28</sup>

This shows that in the Esoteric Buddhist rituals before the Sui Dynasty, rituals related to willow branches had already been introduced, one as a story prototype and the other as specific spiritual practices. These practices were further developed in the Tang Dynasty. Besides the expansion of the scope of disease treatment in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, another prominent feature was the gradual independence of the Willow Branch and Clean Water Ritual, which became a unique ritual for Guanyin (the Bodhisattva of Compassion).

### 3.2. *Yangzhi Jingshui* in Other Esoteric Texts

In the *Tuoluoni ji jing* 陀羅尼集經 [Dhāraṇī Collection Scripture]<sup>29</sup> compiled in the fifth year of the Yongzheng Period 永徽五年 (654) by Atikūṭa (or Atigupta, Adiqu duo 阿地瞿多, fl. 652–654),<sup>30</sup> the use of *yangzhi jingshui* exhibits some more characteristics.

Firstly, there are two different translations for *yangzhi* 楊枝 (poplar branch) and *liuzhi* 柳枝 (willow branch): *yangzhi* refers to the *chimu* 齒木 (tooth wood) when used as a chewing stick for cleaning the mouth before various ceremonies. The primary function of the *yangzhi* is to clean the mouth before ceremonies,<sup>31</sup> and its secondary function is to determine good or bad fortune.<sup>32</sup> *Liuzhi* 柳枝 (or *liu* 柳) refers to the willow branch or willow used throughout various ceremonies.

Secondly, the willow branch and clean water are not two indivisible parts of a complete ritual, but rather one of the many elements in a complex ceremony that are connected in specific contexts. The main ritual functions of willow focus on healing and decoration, while the water pot is associated with cleansing and purification. In the All Gathering Maṇḍala Ritual, willow can be used in many ways. In the preparation the night before the ritual, each participant is given a willow branch, chews on its tip, and then throws it forward. The direction in which the willow branch lands determines whether it is auspicious

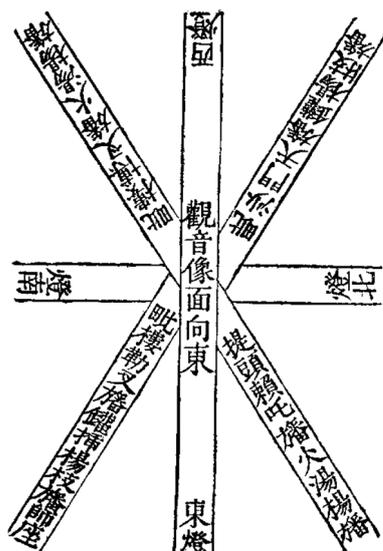
or not, which might be influenced by other ceremonies in India, such as ones recorded in *Brhatsamhitā*. When preparing the water pot, numerous leaves, including willow and bamboo branches, are also used as decoration. The roof over the ritual area is covered with willow branches. In addition to cleansing, the toothbrush-throwing ceremony is also performed during the preparatory stage of the core *abhiseka* ceremony. On the second day, when the ritual ground is solemnized, the *āchārya* stirs fragrant mud with willow branches, accompanying it with incantations. On the sixth day after sunset, disciples receive willow branches. Willow branches are also used to seal the bottle on the seventh day.<sup>33</sup>

Thirdly, Guanyin plays a pivotal role in the process of unifying the two elements: willow branches and clean water. *Tuoluoni ji jing* systematically incorporates the Esoteric ceremonies related to Guanyin (Koichi 2014, pp. 4–9). In various ceremonies involving the use of willow branches, there are ceremonies closely related to Guanyin. In these ceremonies, willow branches and clean water appear simultaneously, becoming two essential elements. And one seal (*yin* 印) called *shenyin* 身印 (the seal of the body) dedicated to Guanyin should be practiced every day: “If one can wash their hands every day and chew on a willow twig, rinse their mouth clean, put on new and clean clothes, recite the spell one hundred and eight times, and also chant the name of Guanyin Bodhisattva, Guanyin Bodhisattva will be pleased with this practice. Furthermore, take a clean water pot and fill it with clean water. Use this seal to impress the spell twenty-one times. After one night, use to wash your hands and face, and no evil person or ghost will be able to harm you.”

“若能日日洗手而嚼楊枝，淨漱口已，著新淨衣，誦呪數滿一百八遍，兼念觀世音菩薩名字，作此法者，觀世音菩薩歡喜。又取澡罐盛滿淨水，以此印印呪二十一遍，經一宿已，用洗手面，一切惡人及鬼神等不能惱害”。<sup>34</sup>

Fourthly, combined with spells and complicated rituals, willow branches are widely used in various contexts to treat various skin diseases, febrile diseases,<sup>35</sup> diseases of livestock such as cows and horses,<sup>36</sup> headaches,<sup>37</sup> insect bites,<sup>38</sup> ghost possession,<sup>39</sup> and even mental illnesses such as madness caused by demons<sup>40</sup>.

Apart from the *Tuoluoni ji jing*, there are also abundant records of willow branches being used to cure diseases and exorcise evil spirits in many other translated Buddhist scriptures of Esoteric Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty, such as treating malignant sores, headaches, malaria, and even resisting ghosts and fox demons, exerting the effect of exorcising evil spirits (Luo 2020, pp. 36–36). Some of these rituals are closely related to Guanyin, such as those described in the *Qianshou qianyan Guanshiyin pusa mu tuoluoni shen jing* 千手千眼觀世音菩薩姥陀羅尼身經 [Dhāraṇī Incantation of the Thousand Handed, Thousand-eyed Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, T no. 1058]<sup>41</sup> translated by Bodhiruci (Putyiliuzhi 菩提流志, 572–727) and the *Guanzizai pusa dawduoli suixin zhou jing* 觀自在菩薩怛曇多唎隨心呪經 [Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva’s Dawaduoli Freely Fulfilling Wishes Dhāraṇī Sutra, T no. 1103b]<sup>42</sup> translated by Chitsū (Zhitong 智通, fl. 605–653) in the third year of the Yonghui Period 永徽三年 (653).<sup>43</sup> *Guan zizai pusa dawaduoli suixin zhoujing* even demonstrates in detail how to build a mandala using a clean water pot and willow branch (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Willow Branch Used in Mandala Ritual<sup>44</sup>. (CBETA online, accessed on 17 March 2025. <https://dia.dila.edu.tw/uv3/index.html?id=Tv20p0470#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=480&xywh=-995,-1,4133,3000>.)

### 3.3. Zhiyi's 智顓 (538–597) *Commentary on the Ritual and Its Development*

Qing guanshiyin pusa xiaofu duhai tuoluoni zhou jing 請觀世音菩薩消伏毒害陀羅尼呪經 [The Sutra of Invoking Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's Dhāraṇī to Eliminate Poisonous Harm, T no.1043] was translated by Zhunanti 竺難提 (Faxi 法喜, fl. 419–433). This sutra records how Guanyin Bodhisattva relieved the people of the country of Vesali from diseases and hardships, taught them to invoke the Three Jewels and the name of Guanyin Bodhisattva herself, and spoke of the divine dharinis to dispel evil karma and help them be free of harmful influences. The Buddha then proclaimed the virtues of the name of Guanyin Bodhisattva and the Dhāraṇī, spoke of the Great Auspicious Six-Character Verse to Rescue from Suffering and the Auspicious Initiation Dhāraṇī, and further explained to Sariputra the origin and virtues of these incantations.<sup>45</sup>

This scripture has always been valued by the Tiantai school in the Sui Dynasty (T. Liu 2021, pp. 155–61), and Zhiyi's commentary on this scripture (*Qing Guanyin jing shu* 請觀音經疏 [Zhiyi's Complementary on *Qing Guanyin jing*], T no. 1800) can be viewed as the most important one, in which he explained in detail the cultural significance of preparing willow twigs (*ju yangzhi* 具楊枝).

The fourth stage is to prepare willow twigs and clean water. There are two reasons to prepare willow branches, and clean water has two meanings, one is for encouragement and another for preparation, which are precisely for responding to different people. The swaying of the willow branch represents wisdom (*hui* 慧). The clear and tranquil water represents concentration (*ding* 定). The willow branch also carries two meanings: one is to brush away, which corresponds to the meaning of "elimination" (*xiao* 消) mentioned above; the other is to brush off, which corresponds to the meaning of "suppression" (*fu* 伏) mentioned above. Furthermore, brushing away also corresponds to the "elimination" of annihilation. Brushing off corresponds to "elimination" in the sense of removal. The clear water also has two meanings: one is to wash away, which corresponds to the meaning of "elimination"; the other is to awaken, which corresponds to the meaning of "suppression". Water also has four meanings: washing away, moistening, awakening, and tranquility. Washing away corresponds to the "elimination" of annihilation. Moistening refers to the "elimination" of removal. Awakening corresponds to the "suppression" of overcoming. Tranquility corresponds to the "suppression" of pacifying. Furthermore, washing away

refers to the elimination of harmful influences and the great compassion to alleviate suffering, which is the meaning of wisdom. Moistening represents great kindness and the bestowal of happiness, which is the meaning of concentration. Awakening is the meaning of wisdom. Tranquility is the meaning of concentration. Understanding this, it is clear that among the ten types of practitioners, each has their own wisdom and concentration. The alleviation of suffering and the bestowal of happiness each have their own meanings of elimination and suppression.

第四、即具楊枝淨水者，此是勸具兩因，正為機感也。楊枝拂動以表慧，淨水澄淨以表定。楊枝又二義：一拂除，即對上消義；二拂打，即對上伏義。又拂除對消滅之消二，拂打即對消除。淨水二義：一洗除，即對消義；二惺悟，即對伏義。水又四義：一洗除、二潤漬、三惺悟、四安樂。洗除對消滅之消，潤漬對消除之消；惺悟對除伏之伏，安樂對平伏之伏。復次洗除對消伏毒害、大悲拔苦是慧義，潤漬是大慈與樂是定義；惺悟是慧義，安樂是定義。明此約十種行人自各有定慧，拔苦與樂各有消滅伏義。<sup>46</sup>

Zhiyi explores the symbolic meaning of preparing willow twigs and clean water, especially the meaning of certain action or moves during the ritual, concentrating on the significance of *xiao* 消 and *fu* 伏 in the title of the sutra as well as the two core concepts of “wisdom” and “concentration”. The concept of *xiaofu* 消伏 was discussed in the beginning of Zhiyi’s momentary: “*xiao*” means to eliminate (*xiaochu* 消除), and “*fu*” means to suppress and regulate (*tiaofu* 調服). Therefore, the scripture says “Eliminate the three obstacles and be without evil, with the five eyes complete, one achieves enlightenment. Only eliminate the sickness, not the Dharma”. “消除三障無諸惡，五眼具足成菩提。<sup>47</sup> 但除其病，不除其法”。<sup>48</sup> This is also the main concept or the core Dharma of this sutra. Zhiyi further elaborates on the specific applications and manifestations of these concepts in practice. Waving the willow branches is a move of wisdom and clean water is the symbol of *ding* 定 (meditation and stability). So, by sweeping away and washing away, one can achieve the goal of eliminating evil karma and harmful diseases and obtain awakening, peace, and happiness. Zhiyi also states the ten steps of the ritual known as the *Guanyin chanfa* 觀音懺法 in the later dynasties, which are as follows: 1. Prepare the sacred site. 2. Perform rituals of respect. 3. Burn incense and scatter flowers. 4. Recite and remember. 5. Prepare willow branches. 6. Invoke the Three Jewels. 7. Recite incantations. 8. Present and explain. 9. Perform bowing rituals. 10. Sit in meditation. Among the ten steps of the ritual, eight of them are derived from *Qing Guanyin jing*, while the other two, namely solemnizing the site and confessing repentance, are actually necessary for the practice of repentance rituals.<sup>49</sup>

Zhiyi’s student Guanding 灌頂 (561–632) compiled *Guoqing Bailu* 國清百錄 [One Hundred Records from Guoqing (Monastery)] and named this ritual *Qing Guanyin chanfa* 請觀音懺法 (The Ritual of Repentance on Invoking Guanyin). This explains some details of the language used in this ritual; after reciting the name of the Buddha, one should pronounce the following sentences three times: “I now have prepared willow branches and clean water. Only wish for Great Compassion (Guanyin) to receive it kindly”.<sup>50</sup> Although the meaning of preparing willow branches and clean water is clearly evident in Zhiyi’s commentary, it remains to be shown how to practice it in words. Specifically, using the symbol of Guanyin to welcome Guanyin and reciting it three times signifies the importance of this action as it serves as a link or a bridge of transformation between the Buddha, the Three Jewels, and Guanyin.

In the Song Dynasty, Zunshi 遵式 (964–1032) compiled *Qing Guanshiyin pusa xiaofu duhai tuoluoni sanmei yi* 請觀世音菩薩消伏毒害陀羅尼三昧儀 [The Ritual of the Three Samadhi of the Ddhāraṇī of Invoking Guanyin Bodhisattva to Eliminate Harmful Influences], which also describes the practice of the Guanyin repentance method.<sup>51</sup> Zunshi’s revised version provides a more detailed explanation of the operational methods of the ten rituals and further supplements the contemplative content of the truth of reality and the

underlying principles of the ritual practices with annotations in the ritual sections. Finally, it discusses the great merits of studying and practicing confession methods to encourage practitioners. Through Zunshi's revision and enrichment, the "confession method of invoking Avalokiteśvara" has become a confession practice that combines both practice and contemplation, which not only achieves the religious belief purpose of healing illnesses and eliminating evils, but also allows for a deep understanding of the truths of Buddhism (G. Huang 2017, pp. 111–46). Shi Zhiyuan's 釋智圓 (976–1022) *Qing guanyin jing chanyi chao* 請觀音經疏闡義鈔 [A Collection of Explanation on The Sutra of Invoking Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva] in 4 *juans* also discussed this ritual.<sup>52</sup>

Through the Masters of the Tiantai school, especially Zhiyi's explanation, *yangzhi jingshui* became representative symbols of the Avalokiteśvara. The miraculous powers of the Avalokiteśvara Dharma in eliminating and suppressing harm, as well as the simplicity and ease of practicing the method of invoking by name, facilitated the spread and development of Avalokiteśvara beliefs. The image of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva as compassionate, powerful, and responsive to prayers was widely circulated among the people, forming a culture of Avalokiteśvara. Even the Buddhist symbolism and religious connotations of the image of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva were somewhat diluted (T. Liu 2021, pp. 155–61).

## 4. The Literary Representation of This Ritual

### 4.1. Records in *Gao Seng Zhuan*

In *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 [The Biographies of Eminent Monks], Jivaka (Qiyu 耆域, d.u.) saved sick people and trees. Fotucheng 佛圖澄 (232?–348) brought Shile's 石勒 (274–333) son back to life using the ceremony of willow twigs and clean water.

In the biography of Fotucheng, there is also a story about him using the willow branch incantation to revive a person who died from a fatal illness. When Shi Le's 石勒 (274–333) beloved son, Shi Bin 石斌, suddenly fell ill and died, Shi Le sought medical help. Fotucheng used the willow branch incantation to bring him back to life. It was precisely this miraculous event that made Shi Le even more respectful of Fotucheng. He also raised many children in temples and, on the eighth day of the fourth month (the Buddha's birthday), personally went to the Buddhist temple to bathe the Buddha statue and pray for his offspring.<sup>53</sup>

The biography of Jivaka (Qiyu 耆域) records many of his miraculous acts, and one of them implies that he used *yangzhi jingshui* to save people:

When Teng Yongwen 滕永文, someone from Nanyang 南陽 (in present Nanyang, Henan Province), the Prefect of Hengyang 衡陽 (in present Hengyang, Hunan Province), was in Luoyang, he stayed in Manshui Temple 滿水寺. Having been ill for years without recovery, with both legs cramped and unable to walk, Qiyu visited him and asked "Do you wish to recover from your illness?" He then took a cup of clean water and a willow branch, used the willow branch to touch the water, and recited a spell to Teng Yongwen. He repeated this three times. Afterward, he grabbed Yongwen's knees with his hands and ordered him to stand up, and immediately, Yongwen was able to walk as before.

時衡陽太守南陽滕永文在洛，寄住滿水寺，得病經年不差，兩腳攣屈不能起行。域往看之，曰：“君欲得病疾差不？”因取淨水一杯，楊柳一枝，便以楊柳拂水，舉手向永文而呪。如此者三。因以手搦永文兩膝令起，即起行步如故。

There were also several dozen dead and dried *bodhi* trees (*siwei shu* 思惟樹) in this temple. Qiyu asked Yongwen how long these trees had been dead. Yongwen replied "For many years". Qiyu then recited a spell to the trees, using the same method as he did for Yongwen. Soon, the trees sprouted new shoots and became lush and vigorous.

此寺中有思惟樹數十株枯死。域問永文，此樹死來幾時？永文曰：“積年矣”。域即向樹呪，如呪永文法。樹尋萐發，扶疎榮茂。<sup>54</sup>

In the first story, both elements of willow branches and clean water are present, accompanied by the action of sprinkling water on people and the use of incantations for healing. From a narrative perspective, this can be seen as an imitation of the scriptural tales where the Buddha or Guanyin Bodhisattva saves people using willow branches. The second story employs the same method to revive a dead tree, which can also be regarded as a reproduction or development of the tree growing plot in the scriptures. It is noteworthy that before these two stories, there is another tale of Qiyu using a bowl (*yingqi* 應器) to cure illnesses.

The practice of monks using willow branches and water to heal illnesses and resuscitate trees, as described in the 'Biographies of Eminent Monks', can be viewed as a fusion of the two types of stories found in Buddhist *jataka* tales: saving people and saving trees. In the Tang Dynasty, based on this tradition, other elements and plots from novels of the Six Dynasties were incorporated to expand the literary representation of *yangzhi jingshui*.

#### 4.2. Stories from the Tang Dynasty Recorded in *Taiping Guangji*

*Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 [Extensive Records of the Taiping (xingguo) Period] was compiled by Li Fang 李昉 and others in the third year of *Taiping Xingguo* 太平興國三年 (978). This book encompasses a wide range of topics, including stories of gods, goddesses, immortals, demons, ghosts, tales of retribution, and many more. It contains several Tang Dynasty miraculous stories related to the therapeutic properties of willow trees, which can aid in our comprehension of the role of the *yangzhi jingshui* in novels.

##### 4.2.1. *Guangyiji* 廣異志 [A Vast Collection of Miraculous Stories]

*Guangyiji* 廣異志 by Dai Fu 戴孚 (fl. 757–779)<sup>55</sup> gathered two anecdotes connected to the healing effect of willow. The first one, Wei Canjun 韋參軍 (Wei, the Military Administrator), lists Wei Canjun's superpowers, including the ability to heal a woman with a willow branch.

As he<sup>56</sup> was passing through Kaifeng County 開封縣 (in present Kaifeng, Henan Province), the mother of the County Magistrate was suffering from a fox demon's enchantment (*humei* 狐媚)<sup>57</sup>. Many sorcerers (*shushi* 術士) had tried but failed to cure her. There was a Taoist priest who was skilled in seeing ghosts. He told the magistrate "I have recently seen various retinues, indicating that an unusual person (*yiren* 異人) has entered the territory. If you can find this person, your mother's illness will surely be cured". The magistrate then sent someone to look for this person. After several days, they reported that this person had arrived at an inn in the county and suggested that the magistrate should go and meet him personally. The magistrate went to see Wei, and respectfully invited him over. Wei smiled and said "Did the Taoist priest tell you about me? However, for the sake of your mother, I will humble myself and help you. It's fortunate that I have met you, and your mother's illness will surely be cured. Tomorrow, from the county bridge to your home, you should minimize the number of people around so that the civilians can see me. I will go there and dispel the demon. Also, you should go home and clean up, and prepare incense for my arrival". The magistrate did as Wei said. The next day, Wei arrived at the magistrate's home and saw his mother. He asked about her illness and sprinkled water with a willow branch on her body. Suddenly, an old white fox demon descended from the bed and slowly walked to the county bridge, and then disappeared. The magistrate tried to give Wei some gifts, but he refused them all. After serving as an official for a year, Wei told his wife "I will die next month. After my death, you should marry the judge of this prefecture, and you will have three children". Everything happened as he had said.

途經開封縣，開封縣令者，其母患狐媚，前後術士不能療。有道士者善見鬼，謂令曰：“今比見諸隊仗。有異人入境。若得此人。太夫人疾苦必愈”。令遣候之。後數日白云：“至此縣逆旅，宜自謁見”。令往見韋，具申禮請。笑曰：“此道士為君言耶？

然以太夫人故，屈身于人。亦可憫矣。幸與君遇，其疾必愈。明日，自縣橋至宅，可少止人。令百姓見之，我當至彼為發遣，且宜還家，洒掃焚香相待”。令皆如言。明日至舍。見太夫人。問以疾苦，以柳枝洒水于身上。須臾，有老白野狐自牀而下，徐行至縣橋，然後不見。令有贈遺，韋皆不受。至官一年，謂其妻曰：“後月我當死。死後，君嫁此州判司，當生三子”。皆如其言。（F. Li 1961, p. 3681; Shiren Li 2014, p. 633）

In this story, three details stand out in particular. The first is Wei Canjun’s identification, which is important in figuring out whether or not others outside of a particular religious community can employ willow branch water as a therapeutic technique. The second feature adds a distinct layer to the story: although the willow branch water’s main function is healing, it accomplishes this by defeating a fox demon to cure the sufferer. The third one, the belief that willow branches can be used to ward off sickness or spirits, comes from Esoteric Buddhist rituals.

For the first issue, the story does not identify Wei; it just tells readers that he was from Runzhou or that he was an official in Runzhou 潤州 (present-day Zhenjiang, Zhejiang Province). No other information is available to suggest whether he has any Buddhist ties. The fact that the Taoist priest referred to him as a *yiren* 異人 (a talented and extraordinary individual) and that the sorcerers were unable to cure the illness before he treated the mother of the magistrate of Kaifeng seem to indicate that his method of subduing the fox demon with water from willow branches had some connection to Taoism, or that the background of this story is more Taoist. However, what is certain is that this story highlights the use of this method by ordinary people or non-Buddhist monks to save lives.

The use of willow branches and clean water to defeat the fox demon can be seen as a combination of Buddhist rites and indigenous Chinese culture, especially the fox-related folklore. In novels from the Han Dynasty to the Six Dynasties, the most common story was of shamans or Taoist priests taming foxes or snakes to cure patients’ “charm diseases”, but the use of *yangzhi jingshui* refines the subduing process, highlighting the ritual’s natural ability to subdue demons. However, in this context, the introduction of *yangzhi jingshui* serves to refine the process of subjugation, underscoring the ritual’s inherent power of subduing.

The narrative of Wei Canjun is plausibly derived from and structurally indebted to the story of Marquis of Shouguang 壽光侯 recorded in *Soushen ji* 搜神記 (*In Search of the Supernatural*).

The Marquis of Shouguang 壽光 was a person who lived during the reign of Emperor Zhang 漢章帝 (Liu Da 劉烜 56–88, r. 75–88) of the Han Dynasty. He was able to subjugate hundreds of ghosts and all kinds of demons, ordering them to bind themselves and show their true forms. A woman in his village was afflicted by a demon, and the Marquis subjugated it (*he* 駭), revealing a several-*zhang*-long (丈, one *zhang* is around 3.3 m) big snake. The snake died outside the gate.

壽光侯者，漢章帝時人也。能劾百鬼衆魅，令自縛見其形。其縣人有婦，為魅所病，侯為劾之。得大蛇數丈，死於門外。<sup>58</sup>

By adding a great deal of information and dividing up the many aspects of the original Shouguang Hou story among the characters, Wei Canjun’s story can be seen as an extension of the Shouguang Hou story. The basic framework is around a proficient numerologist who uses mystical techniques to control otherworldly beings in order to cure illnesses. In these accounts, women’s ailments are collectively referred to as “charm”, which can be interpreted as a state of madness or obsession induced by spirit possession. However, the snake in the original story is replaced with a “fox”, making the ailment more akin to an overabundance of sexual desire. Additionally, Wei Canjun and a Taoist priest who is skilled at ghost perception are given some of the tasks that were previously ascribed to

Shouguang Hou. The storyline that the Taoist monk was skilled at “seeing” (*jian* 見) ghosts in this situation highlights the priest’s deep understanding of supernatural issues in addition to indicating his capacity for ghost perception. The fact that Marquis Shouguang was able to make the ghosts and demons display their own forms can be interpreted as a new development of the detail. Despite this, the Taoist priest is still unable to personally cure the mother of the Kaifeng County magistrate’s illness, which is why the story of Wei Canjun’s fortunate meeting and subsequent treatment is so detailed. The original story does not elaborate on the technique used, only referring to “frightening away”, or subduing and conquering. Here, Tang Dynasty novelists used their creativity to enhance the story by drawing inspiration from Buddhist texts which involved *yangzhi jingshui*. In Buddhist tradition, *yangzhi jingshui* were originally thought to have healing properties, and they were more frequently used in miraculous stories with a medical theme. In this instance, they are amalgamated with the narrative logic of conquering supernatural beings from Six Dynasties novels. This narrative logic and underlying thread of conquering supernatural forces might be more comprehensively understood within the broader context of Zhiyi’s expansion of the symbolic import of the Willow Branch and Clean Water Ritual.

This story may also be directly influenced by Esoteric practices discussed earlier. Among these rituals, one typical example can be found in *Foshuo qijuzhi fomu xin da zhunti tuoluoni jing* 佛說七俱胝佛母心大准提陀羅尼經 [The Buddha Teachings on the Great Dhāraṇī of the Goddess Cundī, Seven Koṭīs of Buddha-Mothers], which was translated by Divākara (Dipoheluo 地婆訶羅, 613–687) in the second year of the Chuigong Period 垂拱二年 (686).<sup>59</sup> This sutra mentions the practice of using a willow branch to treat illnesses or exorcise ghostly possessions in two places.

Again, there is another method. Draw the form of the sick person in front of him/herself, chant over the willow branch, and beat the patient with it. Then, this person will also be immediately cured.

復次有法，於病者前墨畫其形，呪楊枝打之，亦便除差。<sup>60</sup>

Again, there is another method. If there is a sick person who is possessed by a ghost is far away, one should chant over the willow branch seven times in total, send it to the patient and ask someone to hold it and beat the patient with it, and the patient will also be immediately cured.

復次有法，若有病人為鬼所著，身在遠處，應呪楊枝具滿七遍，寄人持打，即亦除差。<sup>61</sup>

The other two versions of this scripture record similar methods, but with some differences in details, and some are more elaborate.

If someone is possessed by a ghost and the possessed person is far away and cannot travel by themselves, or the practitioner cannot go there themselves, they should take a willow branch and recite the mantra 108 times, then send someone to take it to them, saying “Are you going to stay or go? This person was sent here with this willow branch to beat you. If you do not leave, you will certainly be harmed.” If [the ghost] still does not leave, [the person with willow branch] should beat the patient and then the ghost will leave.

復有一法：若有人被鬼所著，復身在遠處不能自來，或行者不能自去，應取楊枝念誦一百八遍，遣人將去，”彼云：“汝住汝去，某乙遣將此杖鞭汝。汝若不去，損汝無疑”。若不去，鞭之即去。<sup>62</sup>

Another method is as follows: If someone is suffering from a disease caused by evil spirits, take a willow branch or *maocao* 茅草 (thatch), recite a mantra, and brush the patient’s body with it, and the illness will be cured immediately.

又法：若人患鬼魅病，取楊柳枝或茅草，誦真言拂患者身，即得除愈。<sup>63</sup>

Another method is as follows: If someone is possessed by evil spirits or is ill, and they are far away and cannot travel themselves, or if the person who knows the mantra cannot go to them, take a willow branch, peach branch, or flowers and recite the mantra over them

108 times. Then, send someone to the patient with these items, brush the patient with the branch, or let the patient smell or be hit with the flowers. The evil spirit will immediately leave, and the patient will recover.

又法:若人被鬼魅所著, 或復病者, 身在遠處不能自來, 或念誦人又不往彼, 取楊柳枝或桃枝或花, 加持一百八遍, 使人將往病人所, 以枝拂病人、或以花使病人嗅、或以花打病人, 是魅即去, 病者除差。<sup>64</sup>

These materials demonstrate that, in addition to other plants, willow branches are the primary focus of this practice. The practitioner can send someone to the patient if they are too far away, provided that person is carrying the willow branch that has been blessed with a mantra. It is important to note, nevertheless, that these procedures do not include *jingshui* 淨水 (clean water). This implies that the use of willow branches and clean water is more intimately linked to Guanyin-related rites; alternatively, it may be argued that Esoteric Buddhism theoretically influences how *yangzhi jingshui* are used. However, from a ritualistic standpoint, their usage is probably impacted by the Tiantai school's modification of Guanyin's repentance technique, which is in turn a creative adaptation of Esoteric rituals by Tiantai school intellectuals like Zhiyi.

In another story recorded in *Guangyi ji*, Huan Yanfan 桓彥範 (653–706), Lord of Fuyang 扶陽王,<sup>65</sup> encountered a monster in the wilderness, but fortunately he used a willow branch to defeat the monster.

He came across a large willow tree. Fan broke off a branch and used it to strike the monster. The sound was crisp, as if hitting something hollow. After several strikes, the monster crawled away. Fan chased it even more urgently and it led him into an ancient tomb. When daylight came and he took a closer look, it was just a broken mask of Fangxiang 方相 (a demon-quelling spirit in ancient ceremonies).

“遇一大柳樹, 範手斷一枝, 持以擊之, 其聲策策, 如中虛物. 數下, 乃匍匐而走. 範逐之愈急, 因入古壙中. 泊明就視, 乃是一敗方相焉”. (F. Li 1961, p. 2945)

Although this story does not seem to fall within the category of ritual healing, it still demonstrates the function of willow trees in driving away evil spirits.

#### 4.2.2. The Story of Xu Hanyang 許漢陽

*Boyi zhi* 博異志 [Collection of Numerous Strange Stories] by Shen Guzi 神谷子 (Zheng Haigu 鄭還古)<sup>66</sup> records a story of four people drawn in a river witnessed by Xu Hanyang 許漢陽.

When they were rescued from the river, three were already dead, and one of them, though seemingly alive, seemed to be drunk. A witch (*wunü* 巫女) sprinkled water with a willow branch on him and recited an incantation. After a while, he said “Last night, six or seven daughters of the Dragon King of the Sea and their female cousins (*yi zimei* 姨姊妹, female cousins from the mother's side) came back to Dongting Lake and had a dinner party here. They choose four of us, and prepared wine. Because there were not so many people and I didn't drink much, I managed to come back”.

“其一人, 雖似活而未甚. 有巫女以楊枝水灑拂禁咒, 久而乃言曰: “昨夜水龍王諸女及姨姊妹六七人, 過歸洞庭. 宵宴於此處, 取我輩四人做酒. 掾客少, 不多飲, 所以我卻得來”. (F. Li 1961, p. 3434; Jianguo Li 2015, p. 1398; Shiren Li 2014, pp. 1198–99)

In this story, the witch using *yangzhi jingshui* to save someone might be a literary manifestation inspired by the tale of Guanyin as *yangzhi jingshui* is the symbol of Guanyin. To relieve suffering and save all living things, Guanyin is described in the Buddhist literature as holding a willow branch, dipping it into clean water, and then lightly sprinkling it. Here, this sacrosanct and benevolent deed is credited to the witch, who similarly sprin-

kles and recites spells with water from willow branches, allowing the ostensibly inebriated protagonist—who has, in fact, experienced a fantastical event—to narrate the events of the night before.

From a textual perspective, it is clear that *yangzhi jingshui* have evolved into a crucial plot point, infused with a supernatural quality that perfectly complements the narrative's overall tone. However, we might also hypothesize that the origin of this story may represent the indigenous religious or narrative acceptance of Guanyin's *yangzhi jingshui*. As a result, the main character in this tale is a witch rather than Guanyin, and the whole plot echoes the spirit of Taoist or generic supernatural tales.

The role of the female characters in this narrative is another significant feature. The three guys are invited to drink by the Ocean Dragon King's daughters and their female relatives (female cousin from the mother's side). These particular details are fascinating.

In Buddhism, *Hai longwang jing* 海龍王經 [Scripture of the Dragon King of the Sea]<sup>67</sup> is often associated with stories of treasure seeking in the Dragon King's palace and praying for rain. However, in this story, the Dragon King of the Sea does not appear directly; instead, it is his daughters and female relatives who take the stage. The story of Dongting Lake also reminds people of the story of the Dragon King of Dongting Lake and The Dragon Princess in "The Story of Liu Yi" (*Liuyi chuanshu* 柳毅傳書, Liuyi Delivered a Letter) in which the Dragon Princess of Dongting 洞庭龍女 was mistreated by her husband and in-laws. Fortunately, she met the scholar (*shusheng* 書生) Liu Yi 柳毅 who helped her deliver a letter to the Dragon King's palace in Dongting Lake. She was rescued and returned home. The Dragon Princess had developed feelings for Liu Yi and vowed not to marry anyone else, ultimately leading to their union after several challenges.<sup>68</sup> In the story, there is a lengthy description of Liu Yi's experience at the Biyun Palace 凝碧宮 (Green Cloud Palace) and the Dragon King's palace in Dongting Lake when he was delivering the letter. He was invited to a banquet where he enjoyed drinking and listening to music.<sup>69</sup>

The story of Liu Yi is influenced by some plot and structure of *Youxian ku* 遊仙窟 [Story of the Journey to the Immortal's Grotto] (Zhang 2010, p. 40). The difference between them lies in the detail of the witch sprinkling *yangzhi jingshui* and performing incantations.

Avalokiteśvara's feminization is a complicated subject, and this story's depiction of a female witch surely gives us some insight. Therefore, this straightforward tale actually combines various themes and can be viewed as a minor tale inside the larger story of Avalokiteśvara curing ailments.

#### 4.2.3. The Story of Kou Yong 寇郿

The story of Kou Yong was recorded in *Gan zhuan zi* 乾饌子<sup>70</sup> [A Taste of Supernatural Tales] by Wen Tingyun 溫庭筠 (812–866 or 824–882).

Kou Yong was a fortune teller and he purchased a small haunted homestead in Chang'an at an unusually low price due to a notice claiming that the house deed would be given to anyone who dared to live there. The homestead was described as having three main rooms, five wing rooms, about three *mu* 畝 (around 2000 m<sup>2</sup>) of land with elm and paper mulberry trees, and a tall screen door smeared with charcoal ash. Yong cleaned the house and rested alone, but on the fourth watch of the night, he heard a crying sound that seemed to move around without a fixed place. Seeking help, he asked the monk Puzhao 普照 of Faming 法明寺 in Chongxian li 崇賢里<sup>71</sup> to perform a ritual, but the crying did not stop. After seven days, Yong prepared a vegetarian meal for the monks, and during the meal, Puzhao saw something in the courtyard and chased it, exclaiming that the "bandit" had killed many people. He then instructed Yong to collect powder water (*fenshui* 粉水)<sup>72</sup> from seven households to eliminate all of the evil energy (*jiehui* 解穢).

Then, Yong went to the tall screen in front of the gate. He sprinkled a cup of water on the screen and beat it with a willow branch. The lower part of the screen, about four feet high, cracked, and the dirt suddenly fell off. Inside was a woman wearing a blue silk skirt, red pants, yellow shoes, and a red blouse. The clothes were all made of paper ashes. When the wind blew, they flew away in the courtyard, revealing a pile of scattered bones (F. Li 1961, p. 2725; Wen 2007, p. 217; Shiren Li 2014, p. 1587).

Then, they made a bamboo cage, put the servant girl's clothes inside, and buried it in a sandbank of the Wei River 渭水, instructing that one should not return here and also that they should prepare a meal with wine. After that, both adults and children no longer had to fear the homestead, and it was later heard that a servant girl who had done something wrong had been buried alive there in the past.

The main focus of this story is the female ghost's constraint, and *yangzhi jingshui* are employed as a means of both control and purification. As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that Kou Yong, the person who uses this technique, is a common intellectual with a moderate degree of financial expertise but not wealthy, as demonstrated by his purchase of a haunted property. Moreover, it is significant that the monk Puzhao instructs and mentors Kou Yong through the complex *yangzhi jingshui* rite rather than doing it himself.

This story demonstrates that although *yangzhi jingshui* are still part of a rite closely associated with Buddhism, this practice has become available to the general public, transcending religious borders. This accessibility denotes a loss of holiness and enigma, as a monk no longer has to perform the ritual in person. Nonetheless, there are two different ways to view this particular feature. First of all, it represents growth in the range of applications, the variety of practitioners, and the main purposes of this ceremony, making it a widely used practice. Second, the fact that the monk himself is skilled in this profound secret art still accounts for the ceremony's ultimate effectiveness.

#### 4.2.4. The Story of Yan Wu 嚴武 Stealing One Concubine

Lu Zhao's 盧肇 (818–882) "Yi Shi" 逸史 [Anecdotes History]<sup>73</sup> records a story titled "Yan Wu Steals one Concubine" (Yanwu daoqie 嚴武盜妾) (F. Li 1961; Shiren Li 2014, pp. 1843–44; Jianguo Li 2015, p. 1520)<sup>74</sup>. Yan Wu 嚴武 used to serve as the Military Governor of Xichuan 西川節度使 (in present Sichuan Province) in the Tang Dynasty. In his youth, Yan Wu was infatuated with a beautiful girl from the household of a military officer. He used money to lure her away. To escape pursuit, Yan Wu brutally strangled the girl and dumped her body into a river. Later, although Yan Wu rose to the position of Military Governor of Jiannan 劍南 (in present Sichuan), he suffered retribution due to his disbelief in ghosts and gods and his harsh punishment of those who discussed such matters. A Taoist priest visited him, exposed Yan Wu's crime, and made him face the ghost of the murdered woman. The woman accused Yan Wu of his brutality, saying that she had appealed to God and been granted permission for revenge, with Yan Wu's death scheduled for the next evening. Yan Wu was filled with remorse but could not undo what he had done. As predicted, he died at the designated time. And when the Taoist priest invited the female ghost to appear, he performed the ritual using a willow branch and clean water.

Only a young servant remained to serve by his side. Outside the hall, there was a small room to the east, which had also been cleaned and a door curtain hung. The Taoist priest sat outside the hall, with water in his mouth. He sprayed water while sweeping the ground with a willow branch, sitting there with his eyes closed and teeth clenched. After a while, shadows were seen moving inside the room, accompanied by sounds of long sighs and short groans. The Taoist priest said "Lady, you can come out now".

“留小僮一人侍側。堂廣外東間，有一閣子，亦令灑掃垂簾，道士坐於堂外，含水噴噴。又以柳枝灑地卻坐，瞑目叩齒。逡巡，閣子中有人籟嗟聲，道士曰：“娘子可出”。(F. Li 1961, p. 921; Shiren Li 2014, pp. 1843–44; Jianguo Li 2015, p. 1520)

This is a typical tale of a vengeful female ghost seeking revenge against a heartless man. It is noteworthy that the role of *yangzhi jingshui*, a magical tool wielded by the Taoist priest, has undergone a significant transformation. Inviting ghosts and spirits to appear has replaced their former purpose of taming monsters and spirits. Since this ritual produces a pure and sacred space, its focus appears to have shifted from conquest to obstacle removal, which calms, comforts, and even shows respect for the ghosts. The focus is on being an essential tool and medium for creating a sacred place, not on curing or conquering. This change returns us to *yangzhi jingshui*'s initial purpose in Buddhist culture. This story demonstrates how initially Buddhist rites have been incorporated into Taoist practices, with the protagonist, a Taoist priest, performing the magic.

#### 4.2.5. The Story of Wang Jushi 王居士

This story is about a layman from Changle 常樂, whose family name was Wang 王居士. One day, when visiting the Lingying Terrace 靈應臺<sup>75</sup> in the Zhongnan Mountains 終南山, he learned that the foundation for the Guanyin Hall 觀音殿 had been laid, but due to the treacherous mountain path, it required a significant amount of manpower and resources, specifically three hundred strings of cash, to complete the construction. Wang promised to bring the money within ten days. To raise the funds, Wang went to the capital and claimed that he could cure critically ill patients, offering this service in exchange for three hundred thousand coins to complete the construction of the temple in the mountains. There was a wealthy merchant in the Yanshou fang 延壽坊<sup>76</sup> who dealt in gold, silver, pearls, and jade. His fifteen-year-old daughter was gravely ill, and no doctor could help her. The merchant was willing to pay Wang to cure her. Wang left a magical pill, promising it would work, and took the money to pay the presiding monk, hoping to accomplish both tasks. The merchant, who also followed Buddhism, agreed and kept the pill in a small bottle. However, days passed without any improvement, and the girl eventually died. Her family began preparing for her funeral when Wang returned, only to be scolded and taken to the local authorities. Wang said “If I were truly so reckless with my words, how dare I return?” He asked to be let into the house to see the girl and found that she had been dead for a long time. He then ordered the room to be sealed, burned damp willow and locust trees to create thick smoke, placed the girl's body on a bed, and put several pills on her forehead and in her nostrils. He also placed a copper container filled with warm water over her heart. He carefully guarded the room until the smoke cleared. Checking the water, Wang said she could still be saved. He immediately ordered milk, crushed several pills, and dripped them into her mouth. Soon, she began to swallow, and was saved in the end (F. Li 1961, p. 542; Shiren Li 2014, p. 2566).

The identity of the lay Buddhist indicates the close relationship between Wang and Buddhism, and the reason for him to cure the young girl is to complete the construction of the Guanyin Hall. While it cannot be directly said that the healing methods he used were directly related to Guanyin, it can be said that his devotion to Guanyin was what motivated him to build the Guanyin Hall. Although the action of sprinkling water with a willow branch is not explicitly described in the story, both the willow branch and water play important roles, revealing some hidden connection between the willow branch, clean water, and Guanyin.

Furthermore, other stories of willow branches being used to cure illnesses are also recorded in *Taiping Guangji*. For example, in *Wenyi Lu* 聞異錄 [Records of Strange Tales],

there is a story about the fractured left rib of the Huai'nan Military Governor 淮南節度使 being replaced with a willow branch (F. Li 1961, p. 1131).

*Yangzhi jingshui's* functional range in Tang Dynasty novels grew steadily, occupying a dynamic spectrum made up of ideas like purification, healing, and subjugation that took on distinct functions as the main plot points of the books changed. The main characters carrying out this ritual were no longer limited to monks; they now included Taoist priests, eccentrics, witches, and regular people. What is most important, though, is that these stories increasingly featured female strength. In addition to being afflicted individuals, like the magistrate's mother in the story of Kou Yong, or participants in the story backgrounds, like in the story of Xu Hanyang, women were also the objects of *yangzhi jingshui's* effects, like female ghosts or foxes.

Female spirits were also transformed from being murdered or subjugated to being invited or contacted. In the story of Xu Hanyang, the procedure of *yangzhi jingshui* was even carried out by a witch. This is due to the incorporation of female characters in the Chinese literature, especially those from the Tang Dynasty, and is consistent with the ritual's natural cleansing and healing properties. The connection between this gender shift in storytelling and the feminization of the image of Guanyin requires more research.

It is impossible to claim that Guanyin, like all Mahayana bodhisattvas, possesses any gender traits. While this deity was typically portrayed as a dashing and serious young man in India, Southeast Asia, Tibet, and China prior to the Tang Dynasty, from the Five Dynasties period onwards, Guanyin began to undergo a process of feminization; by the Ming Dynasty, this transformation process had matured, and Guanyin became a fully Sinitized goddess.<sup>77</sup> The most famous female version of Guanyin's story would be Princess Miaoshan 妙善公主 in the Song Dynasty. This story can be seen as the creation of Chinese Buddhists as well as the result of the combination of Chinese culture and Buddhist culture (X. Huang 2023, pp. 76–93).

Naturally, this does not imply that every character in Tang Dynasty tales presents a feminine version of Guanyin. However, it is undeniable that one of Guanyin's most significant rituals or symbols, *yangzhi jingshui*, had already developed a strong bond with female characters before Guanyin was feminized in her biographies. It even became a significant religious practice for those closely associated with religion, like witches. Additionally, this ceremony developed into a powerful tool for curing women and even calling forth female ghosts.

#### 4.3. The Story of Sizhou Sengqie

Sizhou Sengqie 泗州僧伽 (Sangha of Sizhou, aka 泗州大聖, the Great Sage of Sizhou 627–710) was believed to be the incarnation of Guanyin; many of his miracle performances were recorded in *Songgaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 [The Song Dynasty Biographies of Eminent Monks], some of which were about him curing people.

Once, in Chang'an, Wu Youji 武攸暨 (663–712), the Marquis of the Imperial Palace,<sup>78</sup> was ill. Sengqie used water from a water jar to spray him and he recovered, and the story spread throughout the capital. Later, when other sick people came to him, some were cured by being stroked with a willow branch, some by washing a stone lion, some by throwing a water bottle, and some by confessing their sins. These cures were proven effective, and his efforts were not in vain.

昔在長安，駙馬都尉武攸暨有疾，伽以澡罐水噴之而愈，聲振天邑。後有疾者告之，或以柳枝拂者，或令洗石師子而瘳，或擲水餅，或令謝過。驗非虛設，功不唐捐。<sup>79</sup>

Since then, Sizhou Sengqie has frequently, like the "Guanyin Bodhisattva", held a pure bottle in one hand and a willow branch in the other, miraculously regulating floods, healing illnesses, and saving people from calamities. In contrast to the biblical passages

and the accounts of monks using willow branches and clean water to cure ailments in the *Gaoseng zhuan*, this story clearly demonstrates the connection between Guanyin and *yangzhi jingshui*. Sengqie employs Guanyin's rituals and techniques specifically because he is Guanyin's embodiment. The Sizhou Sengqie belief began to take shape during the Tang Dynasty and reached its zenith during the Song Dynasty. The divine image of the Great Sage of Sizhou underwent an evolution process from a senior monk to a divine monk and then to a deity and Buddha. Among statues, one of the most typical images of Sizhou Sengqie is him holding a willow branch and a vase.<sup>80</sup>

Since Sizhou Dasheng is the recarnation of Guanyin, Wang Gong 王鞏 (1048–1117) also wrote about someone who was cured with willow and water by dreaming about Sengqie:

Teng You, who served as a supervisory official in Guangdong, suffered from typhoid fever and remained unconscious for a long time. In his dream, the Great Sage of Sizhou sprinkled willow branch water on him and said “The Song dynasty has boundless prosperity. As a subject, loyalty and uprightness are what you should pursue. Do not sway your will or alter your principles, and you will also have boundless blessings”. Upon hearing this, he immediately recovered.

滕友作監司廣東，患傷寒，不省久之。夢泗州大聖灑楊枝水，且語之曰：柞無窮，為臣者惟忠與正，無動汝志，無易汝守，汝亦有無窮之問。聽畢，遂愈。<sup>81</sup>

The depictions of using willow branches and clean water to treat illnesses can be found in *Gaoseng zhuan* as discussed earlier. And people who can be cured in dreams can be found in novels of the Six Dynasties as well as the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 [Further Biographies of Eminent Monks].<sup>82</sup> The story of Sizhou Sengqie organically integrated elements such as Guanyin, healing in dreams, and willow branches and purified water, making it a complex local story.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, this story was given significance of the times and political connotation. On the other hand, Sizhou Sengqie (aka Sizhou dasheng 泗州大聖) became the local Guanyin performing the duty of healing, naturally using the important ceremony of Guanyin's willow branches and clean water.

Naturally, Sengqie does not always employ willow branches and clean water because he is Guanyin's manifestation, but there are several instances of Sengqie showing up in dreams and eventually saving others during the Song Dynasty.

According to *Sungong Tanpu* 孫公談圃 [Lord Song (Sheng's) Garden of Tales] spoken by Sun Sheng 孫升 (1037–1099) of the Northern Song Dynasty and transcribed by Liu Yan-nian 劉延年 (fl. 1084–1104),<sup>84</sup> it recorded a story titled as *Sizhou Yongxi ta shengxiang youling* 泗州雍熙塔聖像有靈 [Miracle Response of the Holy Statue in Yongxi Pagoda of Sizhou]. When Liu Shiyan 劉士彥 was the governor of Sizhou, he fell ill, and his daughter sacrificed her flesh to Sizhou Sengqie. Sizhou Sengqie appeared in her dream and prescribed medicine, and finally, Liu Shizhu recovered.

When Liu Shiyan 劉士彥 was the governor of Sizhou, he fell seriously ill. His daughter cut off a piece of her thigh flesh to offer [to the tower of Sizhou Sengqie]. That night, she dreamed of Puguang 普光<sup>85</sup> (Sengqie) saying “I have brought you the medicine”. The next day, a nun from Xuzhou 徐州 (in present Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province), who was also Liu's fellow townsman, came to present a kasaya under the tower. Just as she was hanging the kasaya, a packet of medicine was found inside the sacred statue [of Sengqie], labeled “Medicine for treating wind-cold from Qin family, Liyang County, Hezhou”. After taking it, the fragrance filled Liu Shiyan's head, and Liu recovered that day.

劉士彥為泗州日，病甚，其女割股肉以進。夜夢普照云：“我已與汝取得藥來”。明日，有徐州尼，劉鄉人也，來獻袈裟於塔下。方掛塔之次，於聖像中得藥一貼，題云“和州歷陽縣秦家治風藥”。服之，香氣徹頂，即日遂安。(Sun and Liu 2012, p. 134)

Liu Shiyan 劉士彥 lived in the early Northern Song Dynasty and had contacts with Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105), and others. The popularity of Sizhou Sengqie during the Song Dynasty is demonstrated by this tale. Furthermore, Sizhou Sengqie's embodiment as Guanyin is reflected in the plot of his appearance in the dream of Liu Shiyan's daughter, as Guanyin appeared in monks' dream to cure their illness in monastic biographies. In Buddhism, cutting flesh is a traditional way for monks to show their commitment and self-sacrifice.<sup>86</sup> This story is special because, despite Liu Shizhu being the main character, the attention is on his daughter's filial piety and loyalty. It was the daughter's sincerity that moved Sengqie (or Guanyin) and made the healing possible.

This story developed further in the Southern Song Dynasty. Chen Yan 陳言 (1121–1190), a famous doctor of the Southern Song Dynasty, whose courtesy name was Wuze 無擇, recorded a story in his book *Sanyin ji yibingzheng fanglun* 三因極一病證方論 [Treatise on Prescriptions of Three Categories of Pathogenic Factors]<sup>87</sup> about Sengqie's medicine titled [Sengqie] yingmeng renshen san [僧伽]應夢人參散 [The Ginseng Powder of Sengqie's Response in a Dream]. It was said that in the Guiwei year of the Chongning Period 崇寧癸未 (1103), the famous calligrapher and painter Mi Fu 米芾 (1051–1107), who was the Doctor of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices (*taichang boshi* 太常博士) at that time, suffered from a prolonged illness due to the cold. He used the medicine that Liu Shiyan's daughter sought from Sengqie, yet the name of the medicine had changed to *Taiping zhou yangjia rensen san* 太平州楊家人參散 (Ginseng Powder of Yang Family from Taiping Prefecture). Moreover, the Imperial Medical Bureau was also selling it at that time, but it may not have been the original authentic recipe (Y. Chen 2007, pp. 107–8).

#### 4.4. Other Stories on Yangzhi Jingshui in the Ming Dynasty

##### 4.4.1. Story on Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283)

*Lunhui Xingshi* 輪迴醒世 [Reincarnation Stories to Awaken the World], the authorship of which is unknown, is a collection of classical Chinese novels that specifically focus on the theme of karma and retribution. Another way to characterize it would be as a novel-style book that promotes moral behavior. The author of this book is unknown, and it is not listed in any catalog. *Lunhui Xingshi* can be seen as some kind of successor to the *shishi fujiao zhishu* 釋氏輔教之書 (novels that promote Buddhism).<sup>88</sup> The novel borrows the legend of the Ten Kings of Hell from Buddhist scriptures, using the King of Hell to uphold justice for human affairs as a compiled collection of stories, totaling 187 tales, and often each story contains several smaller stories within it (Cheng 2008, pp. 1–17).

Among them is the story of Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283) seeking justice after death, in which *yangzhi jingshui* play a significant role in saving him:

Wen Tianxiang carried his own head and did not pass through the Ghost Gate. Instead, he went straight to the seashore, intending to seek out Emperor [Zhao] Bing 帝 [趙]昀 (1272–1279, r. 1278–1279). The Water God said “Lu Xiufu 陸秀夫 (1236–1279) has already taken Emperor Bing to see Yama”. Tianxiang immediately turned around and headed straight for Yama's court. Yama, recognizing him as Wen Tianxiang, hurriedly descended from his throne to greet him. Seeing that Tianxiang was holding his head in one hand and could not properly perform the ritual of greeting, Yama quickly fetched some willow branch water to wash Tianxiang's neck and tried to place the head back on it, but Tianxiang waved his hand in refusal. Yama said “Does the Prime Minister wish to see Emperor Bing in person before you put your head back on?” Although Tianxiang could not respond, his intention was indeed as such. So, Yama ordered the ghost soldiers to escort Tianxiang to the Carefree Palace to see Emperor Bing. Tianxiang, carrying his head in one hand and holding the emperor's sleeve in the other, knelt down and bowed. Although he could not speak, tears streamed down his face. Emperor Bing said “I have let you down, but you

have not let me down. I am the sinner for all ages, while you are the loyal minister for all generations. You should smile in the underworld. The one who will weep endlessly for a thousand years is me". Tianxiang wiped away his tears, bade farewell to Emperor Bing, descended from the throne, and saw Yama again. Yama washed him with willow branch water and placed his head back on, and he was completely fine. Yama ordered that a crown and belt be placed on him, just like at the banquet for Lu Xiufu, where the sounds of *sheng* 笙 and songs filled the ears, and flags and canopies were everywhere. Wen was also sent to heaven.

天祥自攜其首，不走鬼門關，竟至海濱，欲尋帝昺。水神云：“陸秀夫負帝昺謁閻羅已”。天祥轉身即走，竟至閻羅殿前。閻羅知其為文天祥，急下階相迎，因一手攜頭，不好行禮，急取楊枝水洗頸，以頭加上，天祥搖手不從。閻羅曰：“宰相思欲面過帝昺，方欲加首於頸上乎？”天祥雖不能答，而意則若此也。遂命鬼卒送天祥至逍遙宮，朝見帝昺。天祥一手攜頭，一手執帝袂，跪而且拜，口雖不語，而淚則湧流。帝昺曰：“朕有負於卿，卿無負於朕。朕為萬古罪人，卿為萬世忠臣也，卿當含笑於九泉。千年流不盡恫惶淚者，正朕之謂也”。天祥收淚，辭帝昺下階，復見閻羅，洗以楊枝水，而加其首，依然無恙。命加冠帶，亦如陸秀夫之宴，笙歌滿耳，幡蓋盈眸，亦送入天堂焉。(Cheng 2008, p. 453)

Through idealized literary tactics, justice is realized in this story. Even after his passing, patriotic hero Wen Tianxiang continues to be devoted to the emperor and the nation he represents. Although Zhao Bing was just seven years old when he passed away in real life, he apologizes to Wen Tianxiang in the story by placing the blame on himself. The narrative subtly conveys grief for the nation's demise, sympathy for the devoted minister, and the young Emperor's powerlessness. The story borrows the narrative structure of Buddhist trials in the underworld by Yama, but the focus is on the extreme praise for those who are loyal to the Emperor. This is not only reflected in Yama's initial greeting to Wen Tianxiang but also in Wen Tianxiang and others ultimately ascending to heaven. *Yangzhi jingshui* appear twice, and their specific function is to attach Wen Tianxiang's head to his body, allowing him to be reborn. Wen Tianxiang rejected the offer of being rescued the first time and only allowed Yama to perform this method after he saw Zhao Bing. Wen Tianxiang's act of seeking justice while carrying his own head is filled with a dramatic sense of eeriness, romance, absurdity, horror, determination, and strength. On the one hand, it emphasizes the magical effect of *yangzhi jingshui* in reviving the dead. On the other hand, *yangzhi jingshui* themselves are pure and noble, thus becoming a metaphor for Wen Tianxiang, the loyal minister. Another part of the same book also mentions Yama's attempt to use *yagnzhi jingshui* to rescue the deceased loyal minister Zhao (Cheng 2008, p. 453).

This book also mentions the magical properties of willow branch water in two other places. During the Jiaping period, a jealous woman named Qin Shishi killed six concubines of her husband. The six women came back to seek revenge, cutting off her head and then sprinkling willow branch water on it, which made her head reconnect. Finally, they forced her to die from poison (Cheng 2008, p. 370). There was also a plot where willow branch water was sprinkled on the ground to prevent fires (Cheng 2008, p. 270).

#### 4.4.2. The Famous Plot of Guanyin Saving the Ginseng Tree in Xiyouji

"Stealing and Eating the Ginseng Fruit (*renshen guo* 人參果, the magical fruit for longevity and immortal life)" (Chapter 24–26) is one of the most famous and interesting stories in Xuanzhuang's 玄奘 adventures in *Xiyouji* 西遊記 [Journey to the West]. When he and his three disciples arrived at the Long-Life Mountain Five Villages Abbey (Wanshoushan wuzhuang guan 萬壽山五莊觀), the abbey's master, Zhenyuan Great Immortal (Zhenyuan Dashi 鎮元大師), was away and had left two disciples to welcome them with ginseng fruits (*renshen guo* 人參果, the magical fruit of longevity and immortal life), which he declined as

they resembled infants. At the instigation of Zhu Bajie 豬八戒, Sun Wukong 孫悟空 (the Monkey King) stole three ginseng fruits and shared them with Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing. However, they were discovered by the disciples. In a fit of anger, Sun Wukong pushed over the ginseng fruit tree, and the four of them fled but were captured by Zhenyuan the Great Immortal who had returned. Then, Sun Wukong sought help from Guanyin Bodhisattva and ultimately revived the tree. After making amends, the master and disciples continued their westward journey.

During the process of rescuing the tree, the ritual *yangzhi jingshui* played a significant role. To underscore the importance of the willow twig, Avalokiteśvara even recounted a tale about a bet between her and Laozi. Laozi borrowed her willow twig and placed it in his elixir-refining brazier until it was completely dried and charred. Yet, upon her retrieval, the willow twig regained its original vitality (Wu 2010, p. 324; Yu 2012, p. 12). This anecdote not only highlights the remarkable regenerative powers of the willow but also subtly suggests the superiority of Buddhist doctrines over Taoist teachings. And the details not only highlight the importance of the willow twig but also emphasize the significance of the vase containing the clean water.

Then, the magical recovery of the ginseng fruit tree occurs as follows: “Dipping the willow twig into the sweet dew of her vase, the Bodhisattva then used it as a brush and drew on the palm of Pilgrim a charm that had revivifying power. She told him to place his hand at the base of the tree and watch for the sign of water spurting out. His hand closed tightly, Pilgrim went to the base of the tree and placed his fist on the roots. In a little while, a clear spring welled up from the ground.....They then handed the jade cups one by one to the Bodhisattva, who sprinkled the sweet liquid onto the tree with her willow branch as she recited a spell. Before long, she stopped sprinkling, and the tree turned green all at once with thick leaves and branches” (Wu 2010, p. 325–26; Yu 2012, p. 13).

This process is certainly a creative adaptation of the Buddhist story of saving the tree, with a great amount of detailed descriptions and literary expressions added. Moreover, the theme of Guanyin Bodhisattva saving the tree with a willow branch and clean water becomes even more prominent, making it one of the most widely known healing stories.

In several stories from the Qing Dynasty, Guanyin Bodhisattva appears in dreams to heal people’s illnesses and grant blessings for marriage. Another story tells of a spring called Yaquan 啞泉, whose water, if drunk, would turn people into mutes. However, drinking *yangzhi jingshui* could restore their health (Xuan 1999, p. 499). It has become a common storytelling pattern for Guanyin to heal illnesses using willow branches and clean water.

## 5. Conclusions

Chewing willow twigs was originally a native custom in India. It became a precept because of its use by the Buddha and further developed related mystical stories in the Jakata sutras. Around these stories, new sacred relic worship practices emerged in regions that revered Buddhism. In scriptures, there are also depictions of Guanyin Bodhisattva using willow twigs and clean water to save people. The narrative tradition of monk biographies continued this tradition, and novels further expanded its scope of use and cultural connotations, thereby forming a hierarchical narrative that echoes its power.

In terms of rituals, its role and methods in healing, exorcising ghosts, and dispelling evil spirits are mainly preserved in Esoteric scriptures. Due to the promotion by Zhiyi and others, it became a unique ritual of Guanyin Bodhisattva. Narrative literature in the Tang Dynasty and subsequent periods borrowed this important plot and concept but combined them with Chinese ghost stories, historical figures, novel traditions, and other elements to form a new textual world, which expands the cultural significance of this ritual.

There are other areas of this topic that can be further explored, such as in poetry, where the occurrence of *yangzhi jingshui* is frequently connected to Guanyin, primarily highlighting the central idea of healing ailments and preserving life. But the willow also serves useful purposes like adornment, providing gifts, and worship; therefore, it became a standard offering item. Therefore, these worship objects can also refer to Maitreya Buddha, not just Guanyin. In statues of Guanyin, initially, Guanyin was mostly depicted with lotus hands. The image of Guanyin with willow branches has a long history. The embryonic form of this image appeared in the Northern Wei Dynasty (S. Jin 2005, pp. 85–90), continued to develop in the Eastern Wei Dynasty, and was established during the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou periods (Song 2014, p. 66). According to different identities, Guanyin can be classified into Willow Branch Guanyin, Thousand-Armed and Thousand-Eyed Guanyin, Moonlight Guanyin, and White-Robed Guanyin. All of these forms of Guanyin hold a willow branch and a clean water vase (Zhao 2020, p. 147). In the Tang Dynasty, the images of Guanyin painted by artists such as Yan Liben 閻立本 and Wu Daozi 吳道子, as well as the Guanyin figures holding willow branches in Dunhuang murals, all exhibited a feminine aspect, which were important products of the localization of Buddhism (Sun and Sun 1995, pp. 1–15; H. Li 2018, pp. 56–60).

Later, this process of willow–Avalokiteśvara construction not only incorporated elements from other Bodhisattva statues but also blended the ideas of the Huayan and Tiantai Sects. Since the Song and Yuan Dynasties, numerous Buddhist hymns have been composed about willow branches, bottles filled with clean water, or clean water itself. More significantly, with the spread of the Bodhisattva religion, the imagery of willow branches has embodied a deep sense of Buddhist culture, leading to the emergence of the willow tree as a sacred plant in Buddhism (Xiaorong Li 2017, pp. 36–42). Since the Tang Dynasty, the belief and image of Willow-Branch Guanyin have spread widely within the borders of the Nanzhao Kingdom, and a large number of Willow-Branch Guanyin images have been discovered in this region during this period (Gong 2019). Willow, being flexible yet strong, represents Guanyin’s grace under pressure, femininity, and compassion (Martin et al. 1995, p. 39; Monagha 2010, p. 133).

Overall, through the medical narratives of monks, believers’ worship of Yangliu Guanyin, and the exaltation of Yangliu Guanyin in poetry and the literature, the transformation of *yangzhi jingshui* from cleaning objects in scriptural stories to daily tools in monastic precepts, and then to ritual implements in healing ceremonies centered on Guanyin in Esoteric Buddhism, evolved into common Buddhist offering objects. There have been new additions over time, but the central idea of healing and purification has mainly not changed.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Recent research on this topic can be found in (Song 2014, pp. 66–67; Xiaorong Li 2017, pp. 36–42; Sun and Sun 1995, pp. 1–15; H. Li 2018, pp. 56–60; Gong 2019; Howard 1990, pp. 1–12; C.-L. Chen 2010, pp. 211–30).

- 2 Zhao Yaci's 趙雅辭 believes that as the common implements of Guanyin and Taiyi Jiuku Zhenren (aka Taiyi Jiuku Tianzun 太乙救苦天尊), willow and vase have an interactive relationship. In terms of images, Guanyin holding willow and vase existed before Taiyi Jiuku Tianzun, which indicates the influence of Buddhism on Taoism; in terms of rituals, the practice of using willow and vases to drive away evil spirits and cure diseases comes from Taoist practice. Zhao further argues that this practice originated in China and is a tradition from the pre-Qin period to the Han Dynasty (see Zhao 2020, pp. 146–57).
- 3 *Zengyi a'han jing*, T no.125,2:2.703a10-17. For all sutras cited from Tripitaka (T) in the article, see (Takakusu et al. [1924] 1932).
- 4 *Huayan jing*, T no.293,10:11.713b5-19.
- 5 *Mishasaibuhexi wufen lü*, T no.1421,22:7.53b4-11;12.85c20-21.
- 6 *Mishasaibuhexi wufen lü*, T no.1421,22:27.177b9-14.
- 7 (R. Li 2000, p. 24); *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan*, T no.2125,54:1.207a22-23.
- 8 (R. Li 2000, p. 26); *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan*, T no.2125,54:1.207b22-24.
- 9 (R. Li 2000, pp. 32–34); *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan*, T no.2125,54:1.208c1-209a7.
- 10 Populus is the generic name for the genus of poplar trees in the family Salicaceae, representing a broad group that includes multiple species of poplar. For the Latin terms of these poplar trees, see (Hou et al. 2017, pp. 78–80).
- 11 X no.1115,60:159c11-13. X for (Wan) *xu zangjing* 卍續藏經. 150 vols. Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi 新文豐出版公司, Taipei, 1968–1970. Reprint of Nakano et al., comps., *Dai Nihon zokuōkyō*.
- 12 *Xianyu jing*, T no.202.04:10.420b14-c25. For the English translation, see (Mair 1993, pp. 46–48).
- 13 One such image in Dunhuang can be found on the website of Dunhuang Academy 敦煌研究院. Accessed on 8 July 2024, <https://www.dha.ac.cn/info/1425/3589.htm>.
- 14 Scholars such as Li Jianguo believe that this book is a work from the late Tang period (Jianguo Li 2017, pp. 1214–18). However, some scholars agree with Lu Xun's earlier assessment, believing it to be a legendary text from the Song Dynasty (Lu 1973, p. 247). For more information and literary characteristics on this novel, see (Jing Li 2012, p. 38).
- 15 For the textual history, content, and structure of this book, see (Bradley 2020, pp. 82–130).
- 16 For more information and related materials related to the function of willow in Chinese medicine, see (Luo 2020, pp. 56–62). The Salix L genus contains a variety of chemical compounds that have certain effects on analgesia, as well as anti-inflammatory, antioxidative, and blood sugar reduction properties (Zhao et al. 2010, pp. 10–14).
- 17 *Xianyu jing*, T no.202.4:2.362b8-19.
- 18 During the Xining Period 熙寧 (1068–1077) of the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127), it was translated by Shi Shaode 釋邵德, Hui Xun 慧詢, etc. This book records the deeds of the Buddha in his past life when he practiced the Bodhisattva path and explains its Dharma teachings.
- 19 On the morning of the first day of the month, the Buddha and the great assembly arrived at the place of discussion. On that day, King Shengjun 勝軍 (Viśuddhasimha) prepared a meal and, with a pure heart, personally offered a willow twig. After receiving it and chewing it, the Buddha threw the residue onto the ground. Suddenly, it sprouted roots and stems, which gradually grew tall and green, reaching a height of three hundred *yojanas*, with its branches spreading out to cover two hundred *yojanas*. Its leaves, flowers, and fruits were made of seven treasures and had various colors, each emitting light according to its hue. Those who ate its fruits experienced a taste like nectar. All the people who witnessed this miraculous transformation developed deep faith and respect, praising it as rare and wonderful. The Buddha, seizing the opportunity, taught them wonderful Dharma, and those who heard and understood it achieved the state of non-retrogression. See *Pusa bensheng man lun*, T no.160.3:2.335c20-28.
- 20 *Gaoseng faxian zhuan*, T no.2085,51:860b4-7. For one English version of this part, see (R. Li 1957, p. 43).
- 21 (Y. Wang 1984, p. 231); *Luoyang qielan ji*, T no.2092,51:5.1020a29-b2. Wang Yitong 王伊同 notes that the identity of this tree is unknown. Fan Xiangyong 范祥雍 argues that Polou 婆樓 might be another translation of *pituoqu* 鞞鐸佉 (transliterating of *dantakāṣṭha*, also known as *jiao yangzhi* 嚼楊枝, chewing willow branches) (Fan 2011, p. 312). Zhou Zumo 周祖謨 also points out it is *chimu* quotes from *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* by Yijing. And he further claims that Polou 婆樓 here is *khadira* in Sanskrit. See (Zhou 2010, p. 188). While Jin Kemu 金克木 wrote a short note under the name of Xin Zhu 辛竹, he argues that the tree of tooth wood (*chimu* 齒木) is called *neem* which tastes bitter and he personally tried it when he was in India. See (K. Jin 1990, p. 150).
- 22 *Da Tang xiyu ji*, T no.2087,51:1.875b1-4. (R. Li 1996, p. 39).
- 23 *Da Tang xiyu ji*, T no.2087,51:9.924a22-24. (R. Li 1996, pp. 251–52).
- 24 *Foshuo guanding jing*, T no.1331,21:9.523a8-13.
- 25 *Qifo bapusa suoshuo datuoluoni shenzhou jing*, T no.1332,21:4.558c3-4.
- 26 *Qifo bapusa suoshuo datuoluoni shenzhou jing*, T no.1332,21:4.559b4-10.
- 27 *Yangu* 厭蠱 in Chinese refers to the practice of using witchcraft to bring disaster upon others. In this context, it may refer to the name of a ghost that seduces and confuses people.
- 28 *Qifo bapusa suoshuo datuoluoni shenzhou jing*, T no.1332,21:560a1-5.
- 29 For the collection and development of this sutra, see (Strickmann 1996, pp. 132–6; 146–63; Ochiai 2003, pp. 59–83; Koichi 2014, pp. 4–9).

- 30 *Tuoluoni ji jing*, T no.901,18:1.785a29.
- 31 *Tuoluoni ji jing*, T no.901,18:3.807b11-13; 4.816c25-27;8.857b14-19.
- 32 *Tuoluoni ji jing*, T no.901,18:12.888a8-12.
- 33 For a discussion on the All Gathering Ceremony and the use of willow in the process, see (Koichi 2014, pp. 49–51; 74–76; 208–15).
- 34 *Tuoluoni ji jing*, T no.901,18:2.816c25-29.
- 35 *Tuoluoni ji jing*, T no.901,18:2.798a15-18.
- 36 *Tuoluoni ji jing*, T no.901,18:7.842c25-29.
- 37 *Tuoluoni ji jing*, T no.901,18:8.854a3-4;854a10-12.
- 38 *Tuoluoni ji jing*, T no.901,18:10.873b16-19.
- 39 *Tuoluoni ji jing*, T no.901,18:11.883c27-884a5.
- 40 *Tuoluoni ji jing*, T no.901,18:11.884a28-b5.
- 41 The thirteenth seal of the Thousand-Handed, Thousand-Eyed Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is called the seal of rhetorical skill (*biancai yin* 辯才印, Skt. *pratibhā-mudrā*). This seal can be used with a spell, pomegranate branch, and willow branch to cast away evil spirits or horrible ghosts that possess or enchant human beings. And clean water should be prepared and sprinkled on the person before the ceremony. See *Qianshou qianyan Guanshiyin pusa mu tuoluoni shen jing*, T no.1058,20:101c22-24.
- 42 *Guanzizai pusa dawaduoli suixin zhou jing*, T no.1103b,20:469b6-8. This is the second version with more details of *Guanzizai pusa suixin zhou jing* 觀自在菩薩隨心呪經 [Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's Freely Fulfilling Wishes Dhāraṇī Sutra, T no. 1103a, vol. 20] translated by Zhitong in 653.
- 43 *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, T no.2154,55:8. 562b17-23.
- 44 As one can see in the picture, Guanyin is in the middle of the mandala, while four lamps point in four directions. And in the innermost layer of the mandala, the seats of the Four Heavenly Kings (*Sida tianwang* 四大天王, Skt. *Mahārājas*) are placed at the four corners. *Yangzhi* 楊枝 and water (*tang* 湯) are used in the ceremony. And the sutra also emphasizes that if there is no water pot, a copper basin can also be used. A willow branch should be placed in the water. See *Guanzizai pusa dawaduoli suixin zhou jing*, T no.1103b,20:469b18-29. For the image described in this sutra, see CBETA online, accessed on 17 March 2025. <https://dia.dila.edu.tw/uv3/index.html?id=Tv20p0470#c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=480&xywh=-995,-1,4133,3000>.
- 45 *Qing guanshiyin pusa xiaofu duhai tuoluoni zhou jing*, T no.1043,20:34b11-38a19.
- 46 *Qing Guanyin jing shu*, T no.1800,39:973a8-19.
- 47 *Qing guanshiyin pusa xiaofu duhai tuoluoni zhou jing*, T no.1043,20:37b28.
- 48 *Qing Guanyin jing shu*, T no.1800,39:970a7-27.
- 49 *Qing Guanyin jing shu*, T no.1800,39:973a19-23.
- 50 *Guoqing bailu*, T no.1934,46:795b16-796a3.
- 51 *Qing Guanshiyin pusa xiaofu duhai tuoluoni sanmei yi*, T no.1949.46:970b19-28.
- 52 For Zhiyuan's note on how to prepare *yangzhi jingshui*, see *Qing guanyin jing chanyi chao*, T no.1801,39:3.991c2-15.
- 53 *Gaoseng zhuan*, T no.2059,50:9.384b21-26 (T. Yang 2022, pp. 415–16).
- 54 *Gaoseng zhuan*, T no.2059,50:9.388b4-12. For another English version of this part, see T. Yang (2022, p. 437).
- 55 According to *Daishi guangyi ji xu* 戴氏廣異記序 [Preface to Dai [fu]'s Vast Collection of Miraculous Stories] by Gu Kuang 顧況 (?–820), Dai Fu passed the national exam and became *jinshi* 進士 in the second year of the Zhide Period 至德二年 (757) (Meng 2019, p. 350). Originally, there were 20 *juans* of *Guangyi ji* which contained more than 100 thousand words (*shiyuwan yan* 十餘萬言); for the preface, see Dong (1983, pp. 5368–5369). Now, 305 stories exist in six *juans*. There are 32 other debatable stories attributed to this book. The latest time for these stories would be the end of the Dali Period 大曆 (also known as the fourteenth year of Dali, 779) and the early Jianzhong Period 建中 (780–783). Gu Kuang's preface was written between the fifth and the ninth year of the Zhenyuan Period 貞元 (789–794). So, *Guangyi ji* should have been written before 789. See (Jianguo Li 2017, pp. 558–95).
- 56 This story was titled *Wei Canjun* 參軍; Wei is his family name, while *canjun* (Military Administrator) was his official position.
- 57 The word *humei* 狐媚 (fox charm) is frequently used to metaphorically characterize a seductive and beguiling lady, and foxes are frequently viewed as emblems of enchantment and cunning in Chinese folklore. Stories about fox spirits and fox devils were common throughout the Tang Dynasty, which was the first rich era of fox culture. In books from the Tang Dynasty, foxes were significant characters. They might take on human characteristics or even become deities like Buddhas, Laozi, and Bodhisattvas. Sexual seduction, sexual harassment, and sexual assault were the most frequent ways that foxes hurt people, and sexual considerations were always the most crucial components of fox mischief. The Tang Dynasty was no exception. The Tang Dynasty saw the development of stories about female foxes that were on par with those about male foxes. Meanwhile, benevolent foxes also emerged at this time. See (Jianguo Li 2002, pp. 78–126). In stories of the Tang Dynasty, fox spirits can be read as a metaphor of foreigners (*huren* 胡人). Since at least the early Tang, fox spirits were simultaneously exorcised as demons [*humei* 狐媚] and venerated as deities (*hushen* 胡神) in popular culture. In many facets of Tang literati society, foxes represented marginal outsiders, representing the transcendent self of the literati men, their adored courtesans, and most importantly, the “barbarians” who coexisted with the Chinese. See (Ren 2013, pp. 35–67; Kang 1999, pp. 35–67).

- 58 (Jianguo Li 2019, p. 45); For another English translation of this story, see (Gan 1999, p. 19).
- 59 *Foshuo qijuzhi fomu xin da zhunti tuoluoni jing*, see T no.1077,20:185a9–186b3.
- 60 *Foshuo qijuzhi fomu xin da zhunti tuoluoni jing*, T no.1077,20:185b21–22.
- 61 *Foshuo qijuzhi fomu xin da zhunti tuoluoni jing*, T no.1077,20:185b23–25.
- 62 *Foshuo qijuzhi fomu zhunti daming tuoluoni jing* 佛說七俱胝佛母准提大明陀羅尼經 [Dhāraṇī of the Great Bright Cundī, Seven Koṭīs of Buddha Mothers] translated by Vajrabodhi (Jingangzhi 金剛智, 671–741); see T no.1075,20:174a1–5.
- 63 *Qijuzhi fomu suoshuo zhunti tuoluoni jing* 七俱胝佛母所說准提陀羅尼經 [Dhāraṇī of the Goddess Cundī Spoken by Seven Koṭīs of Buddha-Mothers] translated by Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空, 705–774); see T no.1076,20:179b19–20.
- 64 *Qijuzhi fomu suoshuo zhunti tuoluoni jing*, T no.1076,20:179c2–6.
- 65 He was rewarded with this title for his support of the restoration of Tang Zhongzong 唐中宗 against Wu Zetian 武則天 to the throne. In the first year of the Shenlong Period 神龍元年 (705), Huan Yanfan, together with other officials, launched the “Shenlong Coup” (Shenlong Zhengbian 神龍政變) which forced Empress Wu Zetian to abdicate, restoring the Tang Dynasty. For his biography, see (Xu Liu 1975, pp. 2927–32; Xiu Ouyang 1975, pp. 4309–13).
- 66 For the introduction of this book, see (Jianguo Li 2017, pp. 847–64).
- 67 *Foshuo Hailongwang jing* 佛說海龍王經 [Skt. *Sāgaranāgarāja-paripṛcchā Sūtra*; The Sūtra of the Ocean Dragon King] in 4 *juans* which was translated by Dharmarakṣa (Zhufahu 竺法護, 233–316) on the 10th day of the 7th month of the 6th year of T'ai K'ang 太康六年, Western Jin Dynasty (西晉) (August 27th, 285). See *Chusanrang ji ji*, T no.2145,55:2.7b24.
- 68 Li, *Dongting yinyuan zhuan*, (H. Chen 2019, pp. 85–94, especially 89–92); cf. (Jianguo Li 2015, pp. 643–74); (F. Li 1961, pp. 3410–17); (Shiren Li 2014, pp. 716–24). Liu Yi's story has a strong Buddhist cultural background; see (Cao 2009, pp. 5–9; Q. Wang 2011, p. 147). For an English translation and discussion of this story, see (Nienhauser 2016, pp. 1–70).
- 69 In a later story titled as *Xiangfei Shenhui* 湘妃神會 [Mysterious Encounter with the Lady of the Xiang River], someone encounters the Goddess of the Xiang River and was invited to her banquet. Among the deities present at the banquet was the Dragon Princess of Dongting (Dongting Longnü 洞庭龍女). See Jianguo Li (2015, p. 3198).
- 70 *Ganzhuan* 乾饌 (dry cuisine) refers to the practice of arranging dried fruits, snacks, and similar items on a plate to entertain guests, without the need for cooking pots or starting a fire. Parts of the preface of Wen Tingyun's book were cited in sources in later dynasties. According to the records of the *Yiwen zhi* 藝文志 (The Records of Arts and Literature) in *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 [The New Book of the Tang Dynasty], this book of *Ganzhuanzi* was attributed to Wen Tingyun in three *juans*. However, the exact number of chapters contained in the complete collection remains unknown. Chao Gongwu 晁公武 (1105–1180) quoted its preface in his *Junzhai dushuzhi* 郡齋讀書志 [*Prefectural Study's Records of Reading*]: “Telling strange stories to entertain guests is no different from the suitability of the taste of food, so this collection is named after ‘dry cuisine’. 語怪以悅賓，無異饌味之適，遂以乾饌命篇”。 See Chao, *Junzhai dushu zhi*, 568. Chen Zhensun 陳振孫 (1179–1262) quoted the preface of Wen Tingyun's book in his *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解題 [Commented library catalogue of the Zhizhai Studio]: “Without cups or goblets, not boiled or grilled, it can delight the hearts of all and satisfy the tastes of many. This is perhaps the meaning of dry cuisine. 不爵不觥，非炮非炙，能悅諸心，聊甘眾口，庶乎乾饌之義”。 (Chao 2011, p. 320). And *Tang caizi zhuan* 唐才子傳 [Biographies of Outstanding Poets of Tang Dynasty] compiled by Xin Wenfang 辛文房 (d.u.) in 1304 claims that *Ganzhuan zi* was in one *juan*. See (Fu 1995, p. 416).
- 71 Also known as *Chongxian fang* 崇賢坊, this place is located to the east and west of Baisha Village 白沙, southwest of today's Xi'an, near Xidian University 西安電子科技大學. For more information, see (Song Xu 2019, p. 28).
- 72 The character *fen* 粉 means the rice powder which people use as face powder. There was even a river titled as *Fenshui* 粉水 in Jiangzhou 江州 in Bajun 巴郡 (in present Chongqing). If the water from this place is used to make powder, the powder will be bright and shiny, as well as fresh and fragrant, so it has contributed to the capital. Therefore, it is named powder water. See (D. Li 2007, pp. 773–74). Here, *Fenshui* 粉水 might be the water after washing off the facial powder.
- 73 Also known as *Luzi yishi* 盧子逸史, *Lushi yishi* 盧氏逸史, *Tang yishi* 唐逸史, and *Yishi* 遺史. For the biography and discussion on the content of this book, see (Jianguo Li 2017, pp. 866–95).
- 74 For a brief list of works that include this story, see (Jianguo Li 2017, p. 887).
- 75 The name *Lingying tai* indicates that this place can answer people's prayers and grand wishes miraculously. In another story, quoted from *Bianyi zhi* 辯疑志 [Discernment of Doubts] by Lu Changyuan 陸長源 (?–799), *Taiping guangji* states that *Lingying tai* is actually a platform on the peak of the mountain. And an iron Guanyin statue was built there, forty *li* south of Chang'an City lies *Lingmu Valley* 靈母谷, also known as *Tan Valley* 炭谷. Five *li* into the valley stands a temple called *Huiju Temple* 惠炬寺. By crossing the deep ravine to the southwest of the temple, where waters splash against cloud-clad cliffs, and proceeding for another eighteen *li*, one arrives at the peak. This peak is called *Lingying Terrace* 靈應臺, upon which a tower has been constructed, housing an iron statue of Guanyin Bodhisattva. This iron statue was cast by An Taiqing 安太清 (a member of An Lushan's 安祿山 [703–757] rebel army). Legends say that the Bodhisattva once appeared here in her true form, and that the iron statue often emits a Buddhist light. As a result, some vulgar folk in Chang'an City rushed to pay homage, each carrying supplies such as oil, grain,

soy sauce, and vinegar. At the foot of the terrace, more than forty temples have been built in a row, ensuring that the monks and lay workers have no worries about food and clothing. See (F. Li 1961, p. 2299).

- 76 One fang outside Chang'an city, in the place of Northwest University 西北大學 in the southwest of present Xi'an. For more information, see (Song Xu 2019, p. 247).
- 77 For more information, see (Yü 2001, pp. 295–353).
- 78 Wu Youji was a grandson of Wu Shirang 武士讓 (d.u.), the uncle of Empress Wu Zetian. He was also the second husband of Princess Taiping 太平公主 (665?–713), the favorite daughter of Empress Wu Zetian. For Wu Youji's biography, see (Xu Liu 1975, pp. 4737–38; Xiu Ouyang 1975, p. 5843).
- 79 *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T no.2061,50:18.822b19-23.
- 80 For the worship and the image of Sizhou Sengqie, see (H. Yang 2024, pp. 76–83; Zhang and Yang 2023, pp. 88–97; Niu 2016, pp. 102–16; R. Xu 2014, pp. 67–68+89–100; You 2010, pp. 112–32+414–15).
- 81 (G. Wang 2017, p. 283). *Qingxu zazhu sanbian* 清虛雜俎三編 [Three Novels of Wang Gong] includes three books on historical tales written by Wang Gong 王鞏 (1048–1117), which are *Wenjian Jinlu* 聞見近錄 [The Record of Resent Hearsay] in one *juan*, *Jiashen Zaji* 甲申雜記 [The Miscellaneous Record in the Year of Jiashen 甲申 (1104)] in one *juan*, and *Suishou Zalu* 隨手雜錄 [Random Records at Hand] in one *juan*. This story was collected in *Jiashen zalu*.
- 82 *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*, T no.2060,50:18.572a47;19.585b16-22. For a translation and short discussion of the two stories, see W. Li (2023).
- 83 The miraculous healing records of Guanyin from the Eastern Jin and Southern Dynasties bear testimony to the emergence and initial form of this belief. Furthermore, with the introduction of Esoteric Buddhist scriptures related to Guanyin's healing abilities, this belief became prevalent throughout the country during the Tang and Five Dynasties periods (T. Ma 2021, pp. 209–14).
- 84 The introduction, written by Liu Yannian in 1104, states that Liu followed his father to Changting 長汀 in Fujian, where he studied under Sun Sheng during the Shaosheng Period 紹聖 (1094–1097) of Emperor Zhezong 宋哲宗 (1077–1100, r. 1085–1100) of the Song Dynasty. He collected Sun Sheng's conversations into a book after recording them. See Sun and Liu 2012, pp. 89–91. This book's primary focus is on the political events of Emperor Zhezong's Yuanyou Period of the Song Dynasty, as well as the statements and actions of Yuanyou party members that Sun Sheng personally witnessed. *Pu* 圃 refers to a garden that is cultivated with melons, fruits, and vegetables. This book's title suggests that it is a compilation of stories and tales, as is the case with earlier works like *Shuoyuan* 說苑 [The Garden of Tales], *Xiaolin* 笑林 [The Forest of Jokes], and *Fayuan Zhulin* 法苑珠林 [Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Dharma].
- 85 Here, Puguang refers to Sengqie as Puguang 普光, which used to be Puzhaowang Temple 普照王寺 built by Sengqie at the location of Xiangji Temple 香積寺 in the Qi Dynasty (479–502). Then, it was changed to Puguang Wang Temple 普光王寺 in the second year of Jinglong 景龍二年 (708). See T no.2061,50,18.822a9-21.
- 86 The stories of “cutting flesh to serve one's parents” have deep Buddhist roots and are classic Confucian stories that highlight filial piety. In Buddhist Jataka stories, Buddhas and Bodhisattva exhibit compassion and charity by performing heroic acts such as self-immolation or self-harm, which involves giving up a portion of one's flesh to rescue others. Buddhists undertake self-immolation by performing acts like cutting off flesh, burning fingers, and amputating arms. For general studies on self-immolation and the practice related to the cutting of the thigh, see (Benn 2007, pp. 29, 30, 82, 93, 105, 107, 138, 196, 213, 247, 268n.46).
- 87 This book was written in the first year of the Chunxi Period 淳熙元年 (1174). Originally named *Sanyin Jiyi Bingyuan Lun Cui* 三因極一病源論粹 [Essential Treatise on Three Categories of Pathogenic Factors], it is abbreviated as *Sanyin Fang* 三因方 [Prescription on Three Factors]. The book consists of 18 *juans*, divided into 180 chapters, containing more than 1050 prescriptions. The book first discusses pulse diagnosis, steps of learning medicine, and the three causes of disease: *neiyin* 內因 (internal factor), *waiyin* 外因 (external factor), and *bunewai yin* 不內外因 (pathogenic factors neither endogenous nor exogenous). It then lists the prescriptions and treatments for various clinical diseases based on the three causes.
- 88 This term was used by Lu Xun 魯迅 to describe novels that promote and support Buddhism in the Six Dynasties (Lu 1973, p. 194).

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