

Buddhist View of Women Reflected in the Dragon Girl Image in the Chinese Translation of Buddhist Scriptures

XU Lei

漢訳仏典における龍女イメージから見る仏教女性観

徐 磊

Abstract

This paper discusses the origin of “Dragon” and examines the complex image of dragon girl in the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures to understand the Buddhist view of women as well as its unique historical and cultural connotations. In Buddhist stories, a dragon girl is sometimes a low and humble half-human and half-beast, sometimes a wise and noble Buddhist believer, and sometimes an alluring and seductive stunning beauty. This series of complex images of dragon girl reflects not only the influence of the Indian folk Nāga beliefs on Buddhism and the need to promote the dissemination of Buddhism, but also the completely different doctrines of Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana Buddhism as well as the male-centred cultural background shared by the two doctrines. It indicates that the complex images of dragon girl in the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures contain unique historical and cultural connotations and reflect the complex Buddhist view of women.

Keywords: Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures, dragon girl, view of women, Buddhism, Nāga beliefs

要 旨

本稿は、漢訳仏典における「龍」の由来を論じ、仏教龍女物語に関して、これまであまり論述されてこなかった複雑な龍女イメージを踏まえ、その底に潜んでいる仏教女性観と独特な歴史文化的意味を明らかにする試みである。龍女は卑しい畜生や英知敬虔な信者、艶めかしい美女等のイメージとして仏典物語に登場する。そういう龍女イメージから、インドのナーガ信仰の仏教に対する影響、大乘仏教と小乗仏教の思想の相違及び両者の共有する男性本位の文化的背景が読み取れる。漢訳仏典における複雑な龍女のイメージには独特な歴史文化的意味が潜んでおり、複雑な仏教女性観を十分に表していると言える。

キーワード: 漢訳仏典、龍女、女性観、仏教、ナーガ信仰

Introduction

Dragon worship has been found throughout Asia. The origin and development of the worship of dragon king and his daughter (dragon girl) in East Asia were prompted by the widespread introduction of Indian Buddhism, and the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures played a role in this process that cannot be ignored. Dragon worship, in which dragon is deemed a god, has been practiced in China since ancient times. However, the emergence of the worship of the personified dragon king and dragon girl among the Han Chinese people stemmed from the influence of the stories about the Buddhist dragon king and dragon girl, which, with the eastward introduction of the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures, exerted an important effect on folktales and folk beliefs in Korea and Japan.

To understand the East Asian dragon faith, it is necessary to investigate one of its origins, the dragon stories in the Buddhist scriptures of India and their inherent dragon faith. In Indian Buddhist scriptures, the most common dragon family members are dragon king and dragon girl. Based on the materials collected by the author of this paper, it appears that the academia has mostly emphasized dragon beliefs and rarely studied the image of dragon girl in the stories in the Buddhist sutra. Studies that address dragon girl's image focus on the following two aspects: the view of women reflected in the stories about dragon girl¹⁾ and the relationship between the stories of dragon girl in Buddhist sutra and those of the Chinese legendary dragon girl²⁾. These studies mostly focus on the story of dragon girl becoming a Buddha and do not conduct a comprehensive study of the image of dragon girl in Buddhist scriptures. Furthermore, their discussions of Buddhist feminism are mainly based on the question of "whether women can become a Buddha" and simply divide Buddhist feminism into the gender equality view of Mahayana Buddhism and the view discriminating against women of Hinayana Buddhism, overlooking the hidden women-discriminating elements in the so-called gender equality concept of Mahayana Buddhism. In fact, a series of complex images of dragon girl in Buddhist scriptures contains unique historical and

1) See Nima Namu (2004). On the Buddhist view of women achieving Buddhahood. *Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities*, 5, 192-194; Liu Weiwei (2006). An investigation of the female ethics of Chinese Buddhism. *Journal of Zhuzhou Institute of Technology*, 5, 103-105; Mamiya Keizin (2013). The origin of understanding of Nitiren "dragon girl becoming a Buddha": in the context of "instantly achieving Buddhahood". *Periodicals of the Indian studies of the religious society*, 40, 1-25; Jin Tianhe (2012). On dragon girl becoming a Buddha: an interpretation and comparison of the Tiantai Sect and the Huayan Sect of Buddhism. *Fahua cultural studies*, 38, 37-48.

2) See Ji Xianlin (1982). *Indian literature in China*. Collection on history of Sino-Indian cultural relations (p. 127). Beijing: Joint Publishing; Yan Yunxiang (1987). The effect of the Indian Nāga stories on the Chinese dragon girl stories. Yu Longyu (ed.). *The origin and development of Sino-Indian literary relations* (pp. 373-415). Changsha: Hunan Art Publishing House.

cultural connotations and reflects the complex Buddhist view of women. In the following section, the origin of “dragon” in the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures as well as the complex features of the images of dragon girl are analysed to further examine the complex Buddhist view of women and its unique historical and cultural connotations reflected in the images of dragon girl in the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures.

1. From “snake” to “dragon”

In studies related to the origin of the Chinese stories about dragon king and dragon girl, researchers have generally believed that, despite China’s long history of dragon worship, stories about dragon king and dragon girl in literature only emerged in the late Northern and Southern Dynasties, introduced by the classic Buddhist scriptures and influenced by the Indian Nāga stories. With the widespread introduction of Indian faiths into China, characteristics of the Indian Nāga were transferred to the Chinese dragon, which led to the birth of the Chinese dragon family such as dragon king, dragon girl, etc.³⁾

Regarding the “dragon” in the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures, Ji Xianlin (1982) traced its origin to the translation from Sanskrit into Chinese and described the relationship between the dragon in the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures and the image of the dragon in the Chinese dragon king and dragon girl stories. He argued that “the character of ‘龍’ (dragon) in the Chinese translation of Buddhist scripts is actually the translation of the Sanskrit word ‘Nāga’, which means ‘snake’. So, we can say that after the introduction of Buddhism, the meaning of ‘dragon’ changed. In Buddhist scriptures as well as romances of the Tang Dynasty ‘龍王’ (dragon king) is actually the translation of the Sanskrit word of ‘Nāgarja’, ‘Nāgaraj’ or ‘Nāgarajan’. This thing did not originate in China but was imported from India” (p. 127).

As mentioned above, in previous studies researchers have generally believed that the stories of dragon king and dragon girl were generated under the direct influence of the Indian Nāga stories. Here, it is worth noting that the early stories about dragon king and dragon girl analysed by the above-mentioned scholars were from the records of Han Chinese literature. In fact, prior to the introduction of Buddhism into China, stories about dragon king and dragon girl appeared in the time of primitive Tibetan society. According to the records of the primitive Tibetan Bon classic “The classic about one hundred thousand Dragons”, in the concept of primitive Tibetan Bonism, the universe is divided into three realms: the upper realm, the middle realm, and the lower realm. In the upper realm resides the Nian god, in the middle realm the landlord, and in the sea of the lower realm are the 500 dragon palaces, where the dragon king and dragon girls dwell and the

3) Yan Yunxiang has collated previous studies of the origin of Chinese stories about the dragon king and dragon girls. See details in Yan Yunxiang (1987). The effect of the Indian Nāga stories on the Chinese dragon girl stories. Yu Longyu (ed.). The origin and development of Sino-Indian literary relations (pp. 373-415). Changsha: Hunan Art Publishing House.

dragon king leads a life similar to us earthlings. According to primitive Tibetan beliefs, dragon is not only a god but also human, and a dragon girl can marry a descendant of god and beget human ancestors. Zanus before the Latuotuorinian Zanpu all married a goddess or a dragon girl, and each of the twenty-nine generations of Zanus thereafter also took a dragon girl as a wife⁴⁾.

The Tibetan epic of “King Gesar” tells of King Gesar who married a dragon girl and other stories in which humans interact with the dragon family. The legend of King Gesar emerged sometime in the historical period when the ancient Tibetan clan society began to unravel and the power structure of the slavery state gradually formed, i.e., from 300 BC to 600 BC. Around the 11th century, with the revival of Buddhism in Tibetan areas, Tibetan monks began to be involved in the compilation, collection and dissemination of the epic of “King Gesar”. The basic frame of the epic of “King Gesar” began to form, and the earliest handwritten copies appeared (Peng Zhaorong et al., 2004). The long heroic epic of “King Gesar” was generated, disseminated and gradually completed in the social environment of primitive Bon culture, thus deeply influenced by Bon ideas and culture. Although the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet had a significant impact on the “King Gesar” epic, the marriage between a dragon girl and a mortal, the dragon palace belief, and the worship of the personified dragon king and dragon girl, which are all present in “King Gesar”, had long existed in the primitive Bon religion and can be said to reflect indigenous Tibetan dragon culture before the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet.

As mentioned in the discussion above and based on the current literature and materials, Chinese stories about the dragon king and dragon girl were first seen in the period of primitive Tibetan society. Of course, on the national scale, the Han Chinese stories about dragon girl had the most profound influence on the Chinese stories about dragon girl. Although primitive Tibetan society already had stories about dragon girl before being influenced by Buddhism, the Tibetan dragon girl stories were not widely disseminated in other parts of China due to Tibet’s geological remoteness and relative inaccessibility. The most widely circulated Han Chinese dragon girl stories indeed emerged after the introduction of Buddhism and were influenced by the stories of Nāga King and Nāga girl in Buddhist sutras, which were converted to stories about dragon king and dragon girl in the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures and further spread eastward to Korea and Japan, where the stories exerted an important influence on folktales and folk beliefs. As an important part of the stories about the dragon family, the stories about dragon girl in the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures are diverse and colourful, with varied and complex images of dragon girl, fully reflecting the complex Buddhist view of women and their unique historical and cultural background. In the following section, the image of dragon girl in the Buddhist scriptures is analysed and discussed.

4) For the content of the story, see Gele (1988). On the origin and formation of Tibetan culture and its relationship with surrounding ethnicities. Guangzhou: Zhongshan University Press.

2. Low and humble beasts

In Buddhist scriptures, there are demi-gods and semi-devils, among which dragon is listed as the second of the eight Dharmapala races. As a Dharmapala, the dragon king is a kind god, sacred, charitable and saving the world. However, for the dragon family, as beasts of a lower caste class than humans, it is always difficult to completely discard their humble identity. Furthermore, as previously described and as mentioned by Ji Xianlin, the character of “龍” in the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures is actually the translation of the Sanskrit word of “Nāga”, which originally means ‘snake’. Therefore, the “dragon king and dragon girl” in the stories in the Chinese translation of the Buddhist scriptures are not who we currently understand them to be; translated accurately, it should be “snake king and snake girl”, and translated literally and phonically, it should be “Nāga king and Nāga girl”. Like the blue-blooded Chinese dragon girl, as a member of the beast dragon family, the dragon girl in the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures is also a beast with a low and humble origin. In the Buddhist scripture of “Jin Lu Yi Xiang”, there is a story about a merchant and a dragon girl, in which a cattle-dealing businessman rescues an estranged dragon girl and is later invited by the dragon girl to the dragon palace as a guest and presented with eight cake-shaped gold nuggets to thank him for his life-saving deed. It reads:

龍性卒暴，曠恚無常……龍法有五事苦，何等五？生時龍，眠時龍，淫時龍，曠時龍，一日之半，三過皮肉落地，熱沙搏身。

(Translation: Dragons are short-fused in temperament, having unpredictable tantrums of rage... as to the nature of dragon, there are five sufferings. Which five sufferings? They are sufferings when giving birth, sleeping, copulating, raging and dying. In merely half a day, the skin and flesh fall to the ground three times, while being scorched by steamy hot sands.)⁵⁾ (Bao Chang et al., 1988, pp. 228-229)

The “dragon girl” referred to above is actually the “Nāga girl”, i.e., “snake girl”. The Nāga in Indian myths and folk beliefs is not an ordinary snake but the cobra that was and is still deemed a god in most parts of India under the name of Nāga. In Indian beliefs, the cobra is a magical animal that can metamorphose into human form. However, its metamorphosis is restricted, and it has to assume the original animal form of its birth when giving birth, sleeping, copulating, raging, and dying. During half the day, it must endure that “the skin and flesh fall to the ground and it is scorched by steamy hot sands”. Essentially, the cobra god is still an animal of a caste lower than human. Therefore, the hope of the Indian “dragon girl” in the story is that she can incarnate into a human by practicing the Buddhist austerity rituals of “accepting the posadha doctrine”.

In addition to the influence of the above-mentioned Indian Nāga belief, in which Nāga was

5) The text in quotation was translated by the author, as was the remainder of the excerpts.

regarded as an animal, the “five-obstacle doctrine” of Hinayana Buddhism is also one of the important factors underlying the low status of dragon girl in Buddhist scriptures. In the Buddhist scripture of “Da Ai Dao Bi Qiu Ni Jing”, the Buddha says:

女人有五處，不得作沙門。何等為五處：女人不得作如來至真等正覺；女人不得作轉輪聖王；女人不得作第七梵天王；女人不得作飛行皇帝；女人不得作魔天王。
(Translation: There are five Buddhist obstacles for women. Which five obstacles? They are the truest enlightenment Tathagata, the wheel-turning sage king, the Seventh Brahma Heavenly King, the Shakra, and the devil king.) (Taisho Tripitaka Publication Association, 1998, p. 949b)

Buddha believes that because women face five obstacles in that they cannot become a Buddha, a wheel-turning king, a Brahma, a Shakra, or a devil king, they cannot live in a temple. The “Five-obstacle doctrine” fully reflects the “clean men-soiled women” view of Hinayana Buddhism whereby women are soiled and not sufficiently pure to become a Buddha. Under this doctrine, as a female, dragon girl naturally belongs to those who are low-caste and unclean. Being both an animal and a female deemed by Hinayana Buddhism as impure and soiled, the image of dragon girl in Buddhist scriptures is often of a low-life and humble animal. In the above-mentioned story about a merchant and a dragon girl, after falling captive to humans, dragon girl was even “led by the nose on a leash”. The low and humble animal image of dragon girl is also seen in the “Great Tang Records on the Western Regions”, dictated by Xuanzang, the master monk of the Tang Dynasty, to Bian Ji, one of the master’s disciples. The book relayed a series of stories about Indian Nāga girls, among which, in Volume 3, the “Legend of the dragon pond of Mt. Lanboluo and the King of the Wuzhangna State”, a love story in which Shizhong, a distressed son from the Shakya clan, comes across a dragon girl and falls in love with her and marries her. The dragon girl was uneasy, thinking of being in a different caste than her lover, but Shizhong, who fell in love with dragon girl at first sight, helped the dragon girl to metamorphose into a human body and went to the dragon palace, where Shizhong and the dragon girl married. After the marriage, helped by the dragon king, Shizhong was crowned king of the Wuzhangna State. The story thus far seems to have a happy ending, but the actual ending is not ideal, as seen below:

龍女宿業未盡，余報猶在，每至譏私，首出九龍之頭。積種畏惡，莫知因計。伺其寐也，利刃斷之。龍女惊寤曰：“斯非後嗣之利，非徒我命有少損傷，而汝子孫當苦頭痛。”故此国族常有斯患，雖不連綿，時一發動。

(Translation: The dragon girl still had to pay her karmic debt and retributions, so whenever they had an intimate encounter, the dragon girl grew the heads of nine dragons on her head. Shizhong was scared and disgusted by this and did not know what to do.

One time when the dragon girl was asleep, Shizhong cut the heads with a very sharp knife. The dragon girl was awakened from her sleep and frightened, and she said “this is not good for the wellbeing of our offspring. It does not hurt me, but our descendants will suffer from headaches”. Hence, the nation is plagued with this medical condition that bothers people from time to time, although not all the time.) (Xuanzang, Bianji, 2000, p. 291)

Although the dragon girl in the story obtained help from Shizhong and metamorphosed into a human body, she still could not completely discard the form of an animal. In this Indian story that was collected by the Chinese in the Tang Dynasty, the image of the dragon girl fully reflects the traditional Indian belief that regards Nāga as an animal of low caste.

In the above story from the Indian Buddhist scripture, although the dragon girl has the magic power of metamorphosis, she usually assumes her original form in the earthly world and often has to do so even in the dragon palace. She is of a lower caste than humans, and her godhood is half-human and half-beast in nature. Certainly, dragon girls in Buddhist scriptures are not all magical half-human half-beast animals. In the Fahua Festival Party, a dragon girl sent beads as her tribute to the Buddha and thus achieved Buddhahood, exhibiting a superb wisdom, having an image completely different from the low and humble one of the dragon girls in the story described above. In addition, in Buddhist scriptures there are many descriptions of young monks who could not resist the temptation of a dragon girl’s beauty, in which the dragon girls was endowed with carnal and attractive characteristics. Overall, dragon girls in the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures can be a magical half-human half-beast animal, a devout believer that is exemplary to other woman devotees, or an alluring object that hampers the Buddhist practice of male practitioners.

3. Wise and devout believers

The story of a dragon girl becoming a Buddha was told in the “Lotus sutra”, an iconic tale signifying the doctrinal transition from Hinayana Buddhism to Mahayana Buddhism. According to Buddhist scriptures, the Wisdom Bodhisattva asked the Manjusri Bodhisattva whether all sentinel beings could swiftly become a Buddha if they were diligent in practicing the “Lotus sutra”, and the Manjusri Bodhisattva answered:

有娑竭羅龍王女。年始八歲。智慧利根善知眾生諸根行業。得陀羅尼。諸佛所說甚深秘藏悉能受持。深入禪定了達諸法。于剎那頃發菩提心。得不退轉辯才無碍。慈念眾生猶如赤子。功德具足心念口演。微妙廣大慈悲仁讓。志意和雅能至菩提。

(Translation: There is the daughter of the dragon king Sagara, who just turned eight. Her wisdom has strong roots, and she has a keen understanding of the root activities and

of living beings. She has mastered the dharanis, has been able to accept and embrace the full storehouse of profound secrets preached by the Buddhas, has entered deep into meditation, thoroughly grasping the doctrines and, in the space of an instant, conceived the desire for bodhi and reached the level of no regression. Her eloquence knows no hindrance, and she thinks of living beings with compassion, as though they were her own children. She is fully endowed with blessings, and in regard to conceiving in mind and expounding by mouth, she is subtle, wonderful, comprehensive and great. Kind, compassionate, benevolent, yielding, she is gentle and refined in will, capable of attaining bodhi.) (Taisho Tripitaka Publication Association, 1998, p. 35c)

Upon hearing this, Sariputta, one of Buddha's disciples, did not believe it and asked the dragon girl, citing the five obstacles of woman:

汝謂不久得無上道，是事難信。所以者何？女身垢穢，非是法器，雲何能得無上菩提？佛道懸曠，經無量劫，勤苦積行，具修諸度，然後乃成。又女人身猶有五障：一者不得作梵天王；二者帝釋；三者魔王；四者轉輪聖王；五者佛身。雲何女身速得成佛？

(Translation: You suppose that in this short time you have been able to attain the unsurpassed way. However, this is difficult to believe. Why? Because a woman's body is soiled and defiled, not a vessel for the Law. How could you attain the unsurpassed bodhi? The road to Buddhahood is long and far-reaching. Only after one has spent immeasurable kalpas pursuing austerities, accumulating deeds, practicing all types of paramitas, can one finally achieve success. Moreover, a woman is subject to the five obstacles. First, she cannot become a Brahma heavenly king. Second, she cannot become the king Shakra. Third, she cannot become a devil king. Fourth, she cannot become a wheel-turning sage king. Fifth, she cannot become a Buddha. How then could a woman like you be able to attain Buddhahood so quickly?) (Taisho Tripitaka Publication Association, 1998, p. 35c)

After listening to the words of Sariputta, the dragon girl presented a precious jewel worth as much as the thousand-million-fold world to the Buddha, and the Buddha accepted it. Then the dragon girl immediately became a man, sitting on a lotus throne, and suddenly became a Buddha.

The "Lotus Sutra" was purported to promote Mahayana Buddhism, in which the story of a dragon girl becoming a Buddha means that, as a female, the dragon girl is also one of the objects to be delivered from torment. The "Five-obstacle doctrine" in the story is actually meant to indicate the view of women in Hinayana Buddhism through the words of His Highness Sariputta, which is the target of critique of Mahayana Buddhism. There is still another story in Buddhist scriptures

about a wise girl who becomes a Buddha, which manifests the gender equality view of Mahayana Buddhism more clearly. One time, a wise girl was debating the Shangdu bhikkhu, and after several rounds of questions by the wise girl, the Shangdu bhikkhu ultimately admitted that men and women are equal to enlightenment and essentially not different from each other. Buddha was very pleased with the wise girl, and ultimately, the wise girl turned into a man to become a Buddha⁶⁾. This story was also about a woman's metamorphosis into a man to become a Buddha, and through the words of the wise girl, it clearly and categorically refuted the view of Hinayana Buddhism that "woman's body is soiled and leads to five obstacles" from the perspective of Mahayana Buddhism, advocating the proposition of Mahayana Buddhism that women can also become a Buddha.

In his book titled "The Buddhist view of women", Yongming (1990) conducted an in-depth examination of the Buddhist view of women and argued that the plot of "woman turning into man" was not meant to negate women's personality or human nature but precisely to embody the view of gender equality advocated by Mahayana Buddhism. According to Buddhism, the object of desire of men is the flesh of women, so women become the largest obstacle to men practicing Buddhism, which is also the basis of various regulations on gender issues in Mahayana Buddhism. For example, the "Lotus Sutra", the representative canon of Mahayana Buddhism, stipulates that the devotees of Mahayana Buddhism are prohibited from getting close to women, to avoid obstacles to the practice and thus to stay on the right track towards Buddhahood. In Buddhist scriptures, the story of dragon girl turning into a man and then becoming a Buddha is not deemed prejudice against women but rather a symbol of the idea of gender equality, precisely meaning that after turning into a man, the woman is no longer the object of desire in men's eyes, indicating that women are freed from their strong subordination to men. In this sense, it is a product of the transition from the "women-discriminating view" of Hinayana Buddhism to the "gender equality view" of Mahayana Buddhism.

In addition, dragon girl does not necessarily need to be transformed into a man to become a Buddha. In the "Lotus Sutra" there are also records of a dragon girl achieving Buddhahood in a woman's body. In the "King of sea dragon sutra", Baojin, a daughter of the king of sea dragon, debated whether women could achieve the Buddhahood in a woman's body with Mahakasyapa, who had always looked down on women, and Baojin offered the following rebuttal:

心志本淨，行菩薩者得佛不難，彼發道心，成佛如觀手掌，適以能發諸通慧心，則使攝取一切佛法。……又如所雲，不可以女身得成佛道，男子之身亦不可得。所以者何？其道心者無男無女。如佛所言，計于目者無男無女，耳鼻口身心亦復如是無男無女。

(Translation: If one has a pure mind and devotion, then achieving Buddhahood by

6) The content of the story is referenced in Taisho Tripitaka Publication Association (1998). Taisho newly compiled Chinese Buddhist canons. Vol. 15. Taipei: New Wenfeng Publishing Company.

practicing Buddhism is not difficult, and if one keeps Buddha in mind, then becoming a Buddha is like looking at your palm, and once it reaches one's mind, it can absorb all the Dharma... If it is as you said, that women cannot achieve Buddhahood with a woman's body, then men cannot either. Why? The Buddhist mind makes no distinction between men and women. As the Buddha said, in your eyes is only sunyata, neither men nor women, so are true in your ears, nose, mouth, body and mind, neither men nor women.) (Taisho Tripitaka Publication Association, 1998, p. 149b)

Eventually, Mahakasyapa had to admit that women could become a Buddha. Buddha was very pleased with Baojin and allowed her to become a Buddha in a woman's body. The views of the two debaters in the story, Mahakasyapa and dragon girl, represented the different views of women in Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana Buddhism, respectively. What the dragon girl, of humble origin but becoming a Buddha in a woman's body, argued was precisely the concept of gender equality advocated by Mahayana Buddhism. After a round of debate, Baojin succeeded in achieving Buddhahood in a woman's body, symbolizing the completion of the transition of the Buddhist view of women from the "women-discriminating view" of Hinayana Buddhism to the "gender equality view" of Mahayana Buddhism.

4. Carnal and seductive beauty

As mentioned above, regarding the issue of "whether women can become a Buddha", Mahayana Buddhism is more inclined to the idea of gender equality than Hinayana Buddhism, but we should bear in mind that to a certain degree, Mahayana Buddhism is not free of discrimination and prejudice against women and does not achieve true equality between men and women. As mentioned above, Buddhists believe that men's object of desire is a woman's body, so women are the biggest obstacle to men's Buddhist practice. Dragon girl becoming a Buddha by turning into a man means that the body is no longer the object of desire of men and that women are freed from their strong subordination to men. In this sense, it is indeed an embodiment of the idea of gender equality in Mahayana Buddhism. However, from a deep ideological perspective, the premise of this so-called "gender equality" is that "all women, including the dragon girl, are men's object of desire as well as the greatest obstacle to men's Buddhist practice". This premise attributes men's failure to become a Buddha to their sexual desire and to the presence of women; moreover, it completely rules out the desire of women for men, i.e., the issue of "whether men are women's object of desire" is not taken into account. Although, as indicated in stories such as the dragon girl and Baojin, Mahayana Buddhism recognizes women's eligibility to become a Buddha in a woman's body, the women-discriminating mindset that "women are the obstacle to men's Buddhist practice" remains deep-rooted.

The view of women in Mahayana Buddhism is extremely complex. Compared with the

blatant disdain for women in Hinayana Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism is more respectful towards women and tends more towards gender equality. However, as a product of a male-centred culture, it reveals the same sex discrimination and prejudice against women in its teachings as Hinayana Buddhism. Although in Buddhist scriptures the dragon girl shows sacred and Buddhist aspects, she still cannot escape her fate of being discriminated against as a woman. As mentioned above, the dragon girl, an exemplary case of becoming a Buddha as a woman, achieved Buddhahood both in a man's body, in the case of the eight-year-old dragon girl of Suojieluo, and in a woman's body, as in the case of Baojin, a daughter of the sea dragon king. Regardless of how she became a Buddha, these types of stories about dragon girl becoming a Buddha aim to emphasize the Buddha nature and the root of wisdom, while actually, in Buddhist stories, there is not only the wise and pious dragon girl but also the carnal and seductive dragon girl, which are opposite images to the Buddhist believer. For example, in "Fayuanzhulin" (Daoshi, 2003, p. 1067), a young monk sees a "beautiful and alluring" dragon girl and is immediately attracted to her, wanting to turn into a dragon. "Jing Lu Yi Xiang" records the story "A monk fell in love with a dragon girl and ended up having a dragon son", in which a romance between a monk and a dragon girl is told. A dragon girl was in love with a young monk, who was practicing Buddhism following his master in the mountains, and despite various discouraging efforts, the master could not stop the romance. The story is as follows:

師乃覺之，呼出言語：“此非采女，是畜生耳。汝為沙彌，雖未得道，必生忉利天上，勝彼百倍。勿以污意。”沙彌言：“此龍居處，世間少有。”師曰：“彼有三苦，一者雖百味飯，入口即化成蝦蟆；二者采女端正無比，欲為夫婦，兩蛇相交；三者龍背有逆鱗，砂石生其中，痛乃達心胸。此為大苦，汝何因从之？汝未得道，不可令見鬼道及國王內事也。”沙彌不応，晝夜思想，憶彼不食，得病而死，魂神生為龍作子。

(Translation: The master eventually discovered the romance and summoned the young monk and said "this girl is not an ordinary girl but a beast. You are a monk, and although still not enlightened, you are destined to achieve Buddhahood, which is a hundred times better than her. Please don't pollute yourself". The young monk said "this is a residence place of dragon and rare in the world". The master said "she has three sufferings: first, whatever she eats becomes a frog once in her mouth; second, although she is beautiful, once you two are married, you actually turn into two snakes when copulating; third, there are scales reversely growing on the back of a dragon with stones and sands, causing debilitating pains that reach the heart, which is the greatest suffering of all. Why do you want to indulge in this? You are not enlightened yet and should not see events associated with affairs of the ghost cult and the king". The young monk would not listen and was submerged in the affair day and night and so lovesick that he could not eat and

eventually died, incarnating into a dragon and ultimately having a dragon son.) (Bao Chang et al., 1988, p. 121)

The young monk was so lovesick that he was thinking of the dragon girl day and night and eventually died of lovesickness, falling into the caste of beast and becoming a member of the dragon family. In the story, after metamorphosing into human form, the dragon girl was a pretty and attractive woman, so strongly attractive to men that it was difficult for a monk to resist the temptation.

In fact, the dragon girl is only one example of the many seductive beauties in the stories of Buddhist scriptures, in which there are not only lascivious village women and dragon girls that seduce ordinary monks but also charming maids, witches and dancers that flirt with the Buddha. Faced with a variety of debauched pretty women, the Buddha was unmoved and influenced them with his boundless Dharma and made them convert to Buddhism. However, ordinary monks often could not resist the temptation of beautiful women, and as long as the monks and women who committed the sin repented sincerely, they were still able to be enlightened and relieved. Regarding sensual woman luring men in Buddhist scriptures, Puhui (2009) conducted detailed research, and it is noteworthy that the repentant monks and debauched women were all forgiven in Buddhist scriptures, which reflects the gender equality perspective of Mahayana Buddhism that both men and women can achieve Buddhahood. The outcome that both men and women can achieve Buddhahood appears to show gender equality, but as previously mentioned, the premise of this so-called “gender equality” is that “women are men’s object of desire and the greatest obstacle to men’s Buddhist practice as well”, which precisely hides the women-disparaging idea of “regarding women as men’s greatest obstacle to Buddhist practice”. While men crave women’s body, they also view it as a fatal and evil temptation, blaming men’s indulgence in women’s body on the existence of women. The alluring and seductive image of dragon girls in Buddhist scriptures reflects the sexist discrimination and prejudice against women by men in a male-centred culture.

5. The image of dragon girl and the Buddhist view of women

As described above, the images of dragon girls in Buddhist scriptures are extremely complex, sometimes portrayed as low and humble half-human half-beast, a caste lower than humans and condemned to the sufferings designated for animals, sometimes as wise and noble Buddhist devotees becoming a Buddha at once, and sometimes as alluring and seductive stunning beauties, causing monks to falter in their belief and fall to the status of beast. This series of complex images of dragon girl reflects not only the influence of Indian folk Nāga belief on Buddhism and the needs of Buddhism in promoting its teachings but also the completely different doctrines of Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana Buddhism as well as the male-centred cultural background shared by the two.

In previous studies related to the Buddhist view of women, based on the doctrinal difference between Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana Buddhism, researchers divided the Buddhist view of women into the gender equality view of Mahayana Buddhism and the women-discriminating view of Hinayana Buddhism, mostly using the criterion of “whether women can become a Buddha”⁷⁾. The Hinayana Buddhists worship Sakyamuni as god and the only Buddha; through religious morality practice, devotees can discard the worries of the Three Realms and transcend reincarnation but are unable to become a Buddha. In contrast, Mahayana Buddhists believe that there simultaneously exist countless Buddhas in the Three Realms and ten directions, that Sakyamuni is only one of them, and that through practice, believers can also become a Buddha. As noted in the book “History of Buddhism” (Du Jiwen, 1991, p. 214), Hinayana Buddhism requires strict observance of the disciplines by the monks, and only through rigid practice is it possible for believers to “be free of” life and death, while Mahayana Buddhism advocates compassion, not only expanding the scope of becoming a Buddha and advocating salvation for all sentient beings but also believing that the thoughts and motives of adherents are more important than strictly observing the disciplines, and thus, as long as they are faithful to the Mahayana in thoughts and motives, they should not be restricted.

With the above-mentioned distinctive difference between the two teachings, the views of women in Hinayana Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism differ significantly. Hinayana Buddhism believes that “women’s body has five obstacles”, so women cannot become a Buddha. In contrast, Mahayana Buddhism aims for the salvation of all sentient beings and leads all faithful practitioners to become a Buddha and to cast off misery, so that the Buddhist Pure Land can be established; therefore, it advocates that men and women are equally qualified in learning and practicing the Dharma, with the same subjectivity of the ultimate realm of achieving Buddhahood through Buddhist practice. Those who achieve salvation in Mahayana Buddhism include ordinary women who are adamantly rejected by Hinayana Buddhism, even prostitutes who have always been despised. In stories of dragon girl becoming a Buddha, the dragon girl either metamorphosed into a man before becoming a Buddha or became a Buddha directly in a woman’s body. Regardless of the path to achieving Buddhahood, the common aspect is that, like men, women have the same qualification to become a Buddha. Because of this, in previous studies related to the image of the dragon girl and the Buddhist view of women, researchers generally believed that the story of the dragon girl becoming a Buddha fully reflects the core idea of Mahayana Buddhism being different from Hinayana Buddhism in the “view of gender equality”.

Through the analysis of the stories about the dragon girl becoming a Buddha, previous studies examined Mahayana Buddhism’s criticism of the women-discriminating teachings of Hinayana

7) For views of the previous related studies, see Yang Xiaorong (2003). On the Buddhist view of women and its co-evolutionary changes with society and history. *Explorations*, 6, 194; Nima Namu (2004). On the Buddhist view of women achieving Buddhahood. *Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities*, 5, 192-194.

Buddhism, which is very insightful. Mahayana Buddhism expands the scope of achieving the Buddhahood to the general public, including women who have long been scorned and excluded, which is clearly a negation of the women-discriminating doctrine of Hinayana Buddhism. Zhang Yong (2008) argued that this shift in thinking exposed Buddhism to a wider audience, and coupled with the secularization, simplification and explicitness of the methods of practice, Mahayana Buddhism indeed played an important role in prompting a change in the traditional view of women.

However, it should also be noted that the so-called view of gender equality in Mahayana Buddhism does not represent full and complete gender equality but incorporates hidden women-discriminating elements. As mentioned above, although Mahayana Buddhism advocates that both men and women can become a Buddha, it still regards women as an obstacle to men's practice. From this perspective, Mahayana Buddhism still retains a women-discriminating doctrine similar to that of Hinayana Buddhism. Also because of this, the dragon girls in the stories of Buddhist scriptures are sometimes dignified and graceful, sometimes flamboyant, sometimes pious, and sometimes vulgar, manifesting complex and varied images, even seemingly in contradiction with each other.

Conclusion

With the spread of Buddhism, the stories about the Nāga king and Nāga girl in the Buddhist scriptures were translated into stories about the dragon king and dragon girls in the Chinese translation of the Buddhist scriptures and were introduced into China and subsequently passed on eastward to Korea and Japan, exerting an important influence on the folklores and folk beliefs of the three countries. As an important part of the Chinese translation of the stories about the dragon family in Buddhist scriptures, the stories about dragon girl in the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures are diverse and colourful, and the images of dragon girl complex and varied.

In analysing the images of dragon girl in Buddhist scriptures, it was found that in the scriptures, as the representative of women, dragon girl fully reflects the complicated views of women in Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana Buddhism. On the one hand, influenced by the Indian folk Nāga belief, it was believed in Buddhism that the dragon family belongs to the caste of animal, thus lower than humans; on the other hand, as required for the promotion of the Dharma, they were regarded as good gods and devout Buddhist disciples. Due to the influence of the traditional Indian folk Nāga beliefs and the women-discriminating view of Hinayana Buddhism represented by the "Women's five-obstacle doctrine", it is difficult for dragon girls to discard the humble half-human half-beast image; under the influence of the teaching of Mahayana Buddhism that "men and women are equal and all sentient beings can become a Buddha", the dragon girls were portrayed as wise, devout and completely personified images of Buddhist believers. Dominated by the male-centred culture common to both Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana

Buddhism, the dragon girls were also depicted with glamorous and seductive characteristics.

It can be said that a unique historical and cultural background gave birth to the complex feminist view of Mahayana Buddhism and Hinayana Buddhism, which formed the complex and diverse images of dragon girl. The dragon girl is one of the few female Buddhist believers depicted in Buddhist scriptures, and analysis of the dragon girl image is of great significance to the understanding of the formation and development of the Buddhist view of women as well as the related Buddhist teachings, history and culture, and folk beliefs.

References

- Nima Namu (2004). On the Buddhist view of women achieving Buddhahood. *Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities*, 5, 192-194.
- Liu Weiwei (2006). An investigation of the female ethics of Chinese Buddhism. *Journal of Zhuzhou Institute of Technology*, 5, 103-105.
- Mamiya Keizin (2013). The origin of understanding of Nitiren "dragon girl becoming a Buddha": in the context of "instantly achieving Buddhahood". *Periodicals of the Indian studies of the religious society*, 40, 1-25.
- Jin Tianhe (2012). On dragon girl becoming a Buddha: an interpretation and comparison of the Tiantai Sect and the Huayan Sect of Buddhism. *Fahua cultural studies*, 38, 37-48.
- Ji Xianlin (1982). *Indian literature in China*. Collection on History of Sino-Indian cultural relations (p. 127). Beijing: Joint Publishing.
- Yan Yunxiang (1987). The effect of the Indian Nāga stories on the Chinese dragon girl stories. Yu Longyu (ed.). *The origin and development of Sino-Indian literary relations* (pp. 373-415). Changsha: Hunan Art Publishing House.
- Gele (1988). *On the origin and formation of Tibetan culture and its relationship with surrounding ethnicities*. Guangzhou: Zhongshan University Press.
- Peng Zhaorong et al. (2004). Oral account/ Written account: historical narration and narrative history. *Study of Ethnicity in Guangxi*, 1, 16.
- Bao Chang et al. (1988). *Jing Lu Yi Xiang*. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House.
- Taisho Tripitaka Publication Association (1998). *Taisho newly compiled Chinese Buddhist canons*. Vol. 25. Taipei: New Wenfeng Publishing Company.
- Xuanzang, Bianji (2000). *Buddhist Records*. Ji Xianlin et al. (annotated). Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.
- Taisho Tripitaka Publication Association (1998). *Taisho newly compiled Chinese Buddhist canons*. Vol. 9. Taipei: New Wenfeng Publishing Company.
- Taisho Tripitaka Publication Association (1998). *Taisho newly compiled Chinese Buddhist canons*. Vol. 15. Taipei: New Wenfeng Publishing Company.
- Yongming (1990). *The Buddhist feminism*. Kaohsiung: Buddha Press.
- Daoshi (2003). *Annotation of Fa Yuan Zhu Lin*. Vol. 5. Zhou Shujia, Su Jingren (Annotation). Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.
- Puhui (2009). Buddhist view of women from the perspective of the literary works of Buddhist scriptures. *Journal of Shaanxi Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences edition)*, 1, 71-77.
- Yang Xiaorong (2003). On the Buddhist view of women and its co-evolutionary changes with society and

history. *Explorations*, 6, 194.

Du Jiwen (1991). *The history of Buddhism*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Publishing House.

Zhang Yong (2008). Influence of Mahayana Buddhism of the Northern and Southern Dynasties on women's spiritual outlook. *Journal of Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*, 1, 62-67.

*本論文は、中国教育部人文社会研究青年基金項目「敦煌変文对日本物語影响之研究（日本語訳：敦煌変文の日本物語に対する影響の研究）」（16YJC751033）による研究成果の一部である。

(Received July 4, 2017)