eISSN: 2774-1419 https://so08.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/artssu/index

The Netherworld, Reincarnation, and Karmic Retribution through the Events of Injustice and Revenge in *Sanguozhi Pinghua*

โลกหลังความตาย การเกิดใหม่ และการชดใช้กรรม ผ่านเหตุการณ์ความอยุติธรรมและการแก้แค้น ในวรรณกรรมเรื่อง ซานกว๋อจื้อผิงฮว่า

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Received 04-05-2022
Revised 31-05-2023
Accepted 02-06-2023

Abstract

Objectives: This article attempts to explore the influence of Buddhism in the literary work *Sanguozhi Pinghua* through the stories of injustice and revenge. During the span of approximately 2,000 years, Buddhism and Chinese culture have influenced each other in a complex manner; as a result, local Buddhist beliefs have emerged from this process. In addition to the Buddhist sutras, other forms of literature, such as tales, are also an important source for the laity to understand Buddhism. *Sanguozhi Pinghua* is a tale recounting the story of the Three Kingdoms period diffused with the local beliefs of Buddhism and other Chinese religions. This research aims to examine the Buddhist influence on *Sanguozhi Pinghua* in three themes: the netherworld, reincarnation, and retribution. We propose that *Sanguozhi Pinghua* reveals commoners' interpretation of Buddhist beliefs, which may not have been recorded in the Buddhist sutras, such as the concept of collective karma.

Methods: This research compared literary works and Buddhist scriptures.

Results: The results indicate that the concepts of the netherworld, reincarnation, and retribution in *Sanguozhi Pinghua* are a mixture of Buddhist influence and Chinese local beliefs, resulting in a significant deviation from the teachings in Buddhist scriptures.

Application of this study: This study hopes to offer a nuanced interaction between Buddhism and Chinese culture, which can be considered one of the models for studying religions in the society.

Keywords: Three Kingdoms, netherworld, hell, reincarnation, retribution, Buddhism, local Chinese beliefs

บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์: บทความนี้พยายามสำรวจอิทธิพลของพุทธศาสนาในวรรณกรรมเรื่อง ซานกว๋อจื้อผิงฮว่า ผ่านเรื่องราวของความอยุติธรรมและการแก้แค้น ในช่วงเวลาประมาณสองพันปี พุทธศาสนาและวัฒนธรรมจีนมีอิทธิพลต่อกันอย่างซับซ้อน ทำให้เกิดความเชื่อพุทธแบบชาวบ้าน ในการทำความเข้าใจพุทธศาสนาในบริบทคนทั่วไป นอกจากพระสูตรพุทธ วรรณกรรมรูปแบบอื่น เช่น เรื่องเล่า ก็มีความสำคัญเช่นกัน ซานกว๋อจื้อผิงฮว่า เป็นเรื่องเล่าที่กล่าวถึงยุคสามก๊กผสมผสานกับความเชื่อพุทธแบบชาวบ้านและศาสนาอื่น ๆ ของจีน งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อพิเคราะห์อิทธิพลพุทธศาสนาใน ซานกว๋อจื้อผิงฮว่า ผ่านสามประเด็น คือ โลกหลังความตาย การเกิดใหม่ และการชดใช้กรรม เราเสนอว่า ซานกว๋อจื้อผิงฮว่า แสดงให้เห็นถึงการตีความความเชื่อพุทธแบบชาวบ้าน สิ่งเหล่านี้อาจไม่มีการบันทึกไว้ในพระสูตรพุทธ เช่น แนวคิดเรื่องกรรมร่วม

วิธีการศึกษา: งานวิจัยนี้ใช้วิธีการเปรียบเทียบวรรณกรรมกับคัมภีร์พุทธศาสนา

ผลการศึกษา: ผลการวิจัยพบว่าแนวคิดเรื่องโลกหลังความตาย การเกิดใหม่ และการชดใช้กรรมใน ซานกว๋อจื้อผิงฮว่า เป็นการผสมผสานอิทธิพลพุทธศาสนาเข้ากับความเชื่อท้องถิ่นของจีน ทำให้เกิดความเชื่อที่เบี่ยงเบนจากคำสอนในคัมภีร์พุทธศาสนาอย่างมีนัยยะสำคัญ

การประยุกต์ใช้: งานชิ้นนี้หวังว่าจะช่วยนำเสนอภาพที่ซับซ้อนกลมกลืนของปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างพุทธศาสนากับวัฒนธรรมจีน ซึ่งสามารถใช้เป็นหนึ่งในแบบอย่างเพื่อการศึกษาศาสนาในสังคม

คำสำคัญ: สามก๊ก โลกหลังความตาย นรก การเกิดใหม่ การชดใช้กรรม พุทธศาสนา ศาสนาท้องถิ่นของจีน

Introduction

Why should the influence of Buddhism in *Sanguozhi Pinghua be studied*? For one, this tale is an important provenance for *Sanguo Yanyi*, one of the Chinese four great novels. *Sanguozhi Pinghua* delineates the origins of chaos during the era of the 'Three Kingdoms' by associating them with supernatural events such as the netherworld, reincarnation, and karmic retribution. The tale speaks of Liu Bang who ordered the unjust execution of Han Xin, a general who greatly contributed to the victory of the Han's army. Liu Bang's wrongdoing was judged in the netherworld, and he was to receive his karmic consequence by being reborn and bullied by the reborn Han Xin as an act of revenge. The Buddhist concepts in this tale are certainly twisted when contrasted against those in Buddhist scriptures. It is also worth mentioning that common people's Buddhism in China, during that time, varied from the teachings in Buddhist sutras. This belief system was likely a combination of Buddhism, Daoism, and other popular religions. Therefore, in order to grasp a better understanding of how common people practiced religion at the time, one cannot solely rely upon religious scriptures, but it is imperative to also investigate popular literature. According to Campany, there is an assumption that people closely practice religion according to the scriptures; yet this is not often the case. If we were to understand Buddhism as a religion and not just as a philosophy or a body of scriptural literature, it is critical to examine various texts from differing origins (Campany, 2017: xii).

Literature Review

There are some scholarly works concerning *Sanguozhi Pinghua.* Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West provide a complete English translation of this tale with rigorous annotations. Their work contributed tremendously to the field of Sinology. The *Sanguozhi Pinghua* quotes in this paper are taken from this translation. Their translation is based on the scanned version from the Digital Archives of the National Library of Japan (Idema & West, 2016).[1]

Another work that provides significant information on *Sanguozhi Pinghua* is Moss Roberts' translation of *Sanguo Yanyi*. His book's afterword explains the historical background of some underrated characters. He also compares the stories in *Sanguozhi Pinghua* and *Sanguo Yanyi* which inspired us to look more deeply into these tales. (Luo, 2015).

Yoo Min-hyung compares *Sanguozhi Pinghua* and *Hwayongdo*, a Korean musical storytelling version of *Sanguo Yanyi*. He claims that both tales share the same narrative structure. *Sanguozhi Pinghua* focuses on the side of Liu Bei and his kingdom is called Han rather than Shu. This signifies that Liu Bei is given legitimacy as the true inheritor of the Han. *Hwayongdo* also focuses on Liu Bei's side, but the story only begins when Liu Bei visits Zhuge Liang and ends when Guan Yu releases Cao Cao. However, *Hwayongdo*'s story is more similar to *Sanguo Yanyi's* than *Sanguozhi Pinghua's* (Yoo, 2017).

Zhang Zhenjun investigates the transformation of the concept called *bao* 報 (retribution) after the arrival of Buddhism based on a collection of stories called *You ming lu* 幽明錄 (Records of the Hidden and the Visible Worlds). According to Zhang, *bao* is a native concept in Chinese culture attested by pre-Buddhist texts such as *Laozi* 老子, *Mozi* 墨子, *Zuozhuan* 左傳. He classifies *bao* into Ethical (Human), Heavenly, and Demonic retributions. However, he focuses on demonic retribution; for example, the ghost comes back for revenge on his murderer. This is the main theme of *You*

[1] http://www.digital.archives.go.jp/

ming lu. There are some Buddhist concepts mingled in these stories such as rebirth and the Buddhist notion of retribution, which do not exist in pre-Buddhist texts (Zhang, 2013).

Suwanna Satha-Anand discusses karma as moral justice in Thai Buddhism. Her main sources are the books by Phra Sriwisuthimoli (the Venerable Dhamma-Pitaka) and the Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikku. These books propose interpretations based on the Thai version of the Buddhist Pali canon. In her analysis, there is no agent of moral justice in the karmic law, but "the law of karma operates in its course and time." The law of karma is very complicated and the consequences including their time of occurrence cannot be determined. One interesting concept in this paper is social or collective karma, which is "everyone is karmically responsible." According to Suwanna Satha-Anand, the collective dimension of karma is "novel" in Thai society. However, this interpretation still emphasizes individual responsibility. The consequences occur according to the principle of *Paticcasamuppada*, that is individual action is not the entire cause that determines the consequence (Satha-Anand, 2002).

Pi-ching Hsu examines the collection of short stories called *Three Words* (*Sanyan* 三言) written by Feng Menglong (1574-1646). Two stories are worth mentioning here. First, the one called "Disturbing the Underworld, Sima Mao Acts as Judge," which is an elaborated version of the prologue in *Sanguozhi Pinghua*. Sima Zhongxiang and Sima Mao are the same characters. While *Sanguozhi Pinghua* focuses on only one case, this story involves four cases from the event of Chu-Han contention. However, the main theme remains the same: the cause of the Three Kingdoms is the three generals who were unjustly killed by Liu Bang come back to take revenge in their next lives. Second, there is another story called "Poet Humu Di's Trip to Hell" in which Humu Di complains that Heaven is unjust regarding the event during the Song Dynasty, in which the Song Empire lost its territory to northern barbarians. He meets with King Yama and is explained that the seemingly unjust event is due to the Song royal family's karmic retribution because of their past wrongdoings (Hsu, 2006).

We can see that this theme of the head of the empire's action leading to the karmic retribution that affects the whole empire already occurred in *Sanguozhi Pinghua* and passed on to later literary works. Even though this Buddhist concept may not be found in Buddhist canonical texts, it was popular among common people. The scholarly works mentioned in this section provide some basis for studying the influence of Buddhism in *Sanguozhi Pinghua*, but there are still some research gaps left to be filled, which we will attempt to do in this paper.

Research Objective and Methodology

Our research objective is to fill a gap by exploring the influence of Buddhism in *Sanguozhi Pinghua* through the themes of the netherworld, reincarnation, and karmic retribution with the events of injustice and revenge as the thread that links these themes together. Our main argument is that Buddhism in this tale is mixed with Daoism and other Chinese native beliefs. Thus, the Buddhist concepts found in the story are twisted from the ones in Buddhist canonical texts.

We consult scholarly works related to our research topics and examine primary sources. In addition to the *Sanguozhi Pinghua*, our sources include the following:

1) Pali Canon:
    a. *Nibbedhikasutta (AN 6.63)*
    b. *Mahaparinibbanasutta* (DN 16)
    c. *Kakacupamasutta* (MN 31)
    d. *Mahatanhasankhayasutta* (MN 38)

e. *Acchariyaabbhutasutta* (MN 123)
f. *Devadutasutta* (MN 130)
g. *Tirokuttapetavatthu* (Pv 5)
h. *Sariputtattheramatupetivatthu* (Pv 14)
i. *Kokalikasutta* (Snp 3.10)
j. *Lohakumbhi-Jataka* (Ja 314)
k. *Bhaddasala-Jataka* (Ja 465)
l. *Samkicca-Jataka* (Ja 530)
m. *Nimi-Jataka* (Ja 541)
n. *Kathavatthu* (Kv 8.2)

2) Taisho Tripitaka (Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo) 大正新脩大藏經:[2]
   a. T. 13 (412) *Dizang pu sa ben yuan jing* 地藏菩薩本願經 [Sutra of the Fundamental Vows of the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha]
   b. T. 16 (685) *Yulanpen jing* 盂蘭盆經 (Ullambana Sutra)
   c. T. 21 (1331) *Guan ding jing* 灌頂經 [Consecration Sutra]
   d. T. 30 (1579) *Yu jia shi di lun* 瑜伽師地論 (Yogacarabhumi sastra)
   e. T. 44 (1581) *Da cheng yi zhang* 大乘義章 [Chapters on the Meaning of Mahayana]
3) Other Buddhist texts:
   a. *Milinda Panha*
      i. *Dhammasantatipanha* (Mil 3.2.1)
      ii. *Dvinnamlokuppannanamsamakabhavapanha* (Mil 3.7.5)
   b. *Mulian jiu mu* 目連救母 [Moggallana Rescues His Mother]

Our method is comparing the Buddhist concepts in Buddhist scriptures and *Sanguozhi Pinghua* along with interpreting the elements of Daoism and other Chinese native beliefs that affect the deviation of Buddhist concepts from the Buddhist texts.

Historical Background of the *Sanguozhi Pinghua*

Three Kingdoms is a period in Chinese history during 220-265 (Ebrey, 2010 : 86). The story of this period has been repeatedly told for a long time. In addition to the entertainment, the tales recounting this story also reflect philosophical and religious thoughts among the Chinese. The evidence of using Three Kingdoms in storytelling can be traced back as early as the period when Su Dongpo was alive (1036-1101) (Xiao, 2007 : 184). He recorded that: “a group of children from the alleys…hearing ancient Sanguo tales…knit their brows and weep if Liu Xuande is defeated, but shout with delight when Cao Cao is defeated.” (Luo, 2015 : 2264-2265).

In addition, there is a record of a play titled “Liu Pei Crosses the T’an River on his Mount” 劉備乘馬渡檀溪 that can be traced back to the Sui dynasty (581–618) (Plaks, 2015 : 368). However, the earliest extant texts of the whole tale are *Sanguozhi Pinghua* (三國志平話 *Records of the Three Kingdoms in plain language*) and *Sanfen shilue* (三分事略 *A Brief Account of the Tripartition*). The two are so similar that they could just be different editions of the same story. The publication date of *Sanfen shilue* is still debatable (Idema & West, 2016 : xxii-xxiii). The publisher was Yu Family of

[2] This collection is considered a Chinese Buddhist canon (Harvey 2012: 460).

Jian'an and the book was published during the Zhizhi era (1321-1323) of the Yuan dynasty, but there is no information about the author (Besio, 1997 : 67-68). Unfortunately, *Sanguozhi Pinghua* had been lost in China and was rediscovered in Japan in the 1920s (Riftin, 1999: 141).

Sanguozhi Pinghua tells a story of the Three Kingdoms period in the form of a mix between history and fantasy. The main story describes events during the years 184-280. [3] The prologue happens during the year 30 (the fifth year of Emperor Guangwu of Han's reign) (Idema & West, 2016 : 1) and the story ends during the collapse of the Western Jin (Idema & West, 2016 : 169). *Sanguozhi Pinghua* was believed to be used as a prompt book for storytellers during the Song dynasty (960-1279). However, this claim is still debatable (Idema & West, 2016 : xx).

It is also unclear who the author of *Sanguo Yanyi* (三國演義, usually translated as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) was; however, it is generally attributed to Luo Guanzhong. The full title of Luo Guanzhong's version is called *Sanguozhi Tongsu Yanyi* (三國志通俗演義 *Popular Exposition of the Records of the Three Kingdoms*). It is controversial when this book was written, but usually, it was believed to be written around 1350-1390. The earliest extant edition was published in 1522 and has a preface date of 1494 (Idema & West, 2016 : xvii; Luo, 2015: 2228). Mao Lun and Mao Zonggan modified the 1522 edition during the mid-1660s. Mao's version has become the standard edition of the novel until nowadays (Luo, 2015 : 2289).

Sanguozhi Pinghua's structure of sequential chapters might potentially have influenced the writing of *Sanguo Yanyi.* The stories in both fictions are similar to the extent that *Sanguozhi Pinghua* must have been a prototype for *Sanguo Yanyi*. Moss Roberts suggests that the states in *Sanguo Yanyi* are cycled around the theme of retribution, which is borrowed from *Sanguozhi Pinghua* (Luo, 2015: 2268-2269). However, the events in the prologue and epilogue of *Sanguozhi Pinghua* are not included in *Sanguo Yanyi* (Luo, 2015 : 2265-2266).

The prologue inspired at least two separate works, namely, *Nao yinsi Sima Mao duanyu* (鬧陰司司馬貌斷獄 *Disturbing the Underworld, Sima Mao Acts as Judge*) during the Ming dynasty (Hsu, 2006: 78) and *Sanguo yin* (三國因 *Causes of the Three Kingdoms*) during the Qing dynasty (Chen, 2017: 11). The two works contain the same main event, which Sima Mao (Sima Zhongxiang) was brought to the underworld to judge those who participated in the war of Chu-Han. As a reward for his judgment, he was reborn as Sima Yi who would then lay the foundation of the Jin dynasty. An example of the added details is that Xiang Yu was to be reborn as Guan Yu because of his bravery and righteousness (Hsu, 2006: 78).

The arrival of Buddhism in China

Many accounts elaborate on the beginning of Buddhism in China. Some accounts claim that Buddhism arrived in China in 317 BCE; some accounts claim that Confucius was even aware of the existence of the Buddha.[4] There is one legend that has been repeatedly recorded in many accounts to the extent that it is often wrongly believed to be a historical fact. It is a legend involving Emperor Ming of Han's dream, which led to the arrival of Buddhism in China (Zürcher, 2007 : 22). According to Tansen Sen, even recent books such as *India and China: Twenty Centuries of Civilizational Interactions and Vibrations*, the authors claim the story as a historical fact despite it having been refuted due to its anachronisms, questionable narratives, inconsistencies, etc. (Ch'en, 1972 : 29-30; Sen, 2012 : 13).

Erik Zürcher remarks that the story related to the beginning of Buddhism in China in Buddhist traditional accounts were written and compiled with propagandistic agendas. The authors or compilers might have aimed to promote Buddhism

[3] The timeline of the story is broader than the Three Kingdoms period indicated in Ebrey, 2010: 86.

[4] For more details, see: Zürcher, 2007 : 19-22; Ch'en, 1972 : 27-28.

or claimed the successful longstanding of Buddhism in China. Thus, it is necessary to consult secular historical works as well (Zürcher, 2007 : 19). The earliest reference to a Buddhist community is recorded in an edict issued by Emperor Ming of Han. The edict mentions Prince Liu Ying as a worshipper of Huang Lao (The Yellow Emperor and Laozi) and Buddha. The event happened around the year 65, and the edict was preserved in the *Hou Han Shu* (後漢書 *History of the Latter Han*) compiled by Fan Ye (398–445 CE). This edict is evidence to support that Buddhism came to China before 65 as Prince Liu Ying had been involved in Buddhist activities before the time of the event recorded in the edict (Ch'en, 1972 : 33; Sen, 2012 : 14).

Another document that supports the awareness of Buddhism before 65 is *Weilüe* (魏略 *A Brief Account of the Wei Dynasty*) compiled by Yu Huan during 239-265. The original text has been lost, but it is quoted in the commentary of *Sanguozhi* (三國志 *Record of the Three Kingdoms*) by Pei Songzhi (372–451). The text records a conversation during the diplomatic mission between the Han Empire and Yuezhi Kingdom in the year 2 BCE which contains a reference to Buddhism. However, the location of this conversation is unknown; thus, it cannot be determined whether Buddhism arrived in China during this time (Ch'en, 1972 : 31-32). *Sanguozhi* also mentions the first recorded Buddhist temple built by a minor warlord named Zhai Rong in 193.[5]

The influence of Buddhism on the netherworld, reincarnation, and retribution in China

During the Han dynasty (202 BCE – 220), Buddhism was viewed as a branch of Daoism, even some Daoists held this view. Nirvana was considered the same as Daoist salvation. The arhat was the same as the *zhenren* (a pure man 真人). Two recorded events of Laozi and the Buddha being worshipped together are the ones by Prince Liu Ying and Emperor Huan of Han. Near the end of the Han dynasty, Buddhism was beginning to be recognized as a separate religion due to the Buddhist sutras being translated and foreign Buddhist monks coming to China (Ch'en, 1972 : 50-53; Teiser & Verellen, 2011 : 1).

In the span of roughly two thousand years, Buddhism has influenced many aspects of Chinese culture including literature, philosophy, art, etc. However, the interaction between Buddhism and each aspect of Chinese culture is complicated and requires rigorous research (Guang, 2013 : 305; Teiser & Verellen, 2011 : 2). For example, studying only the Buddhist sutras may not be enough to understand the Chinese commoners' beliefs regarding Buddhism, because they could perceive Buddhism differently from the written Buddhist scriptures. *Sanguozhi Pinghua* is a good example of Buddhism being incorporated into the Chinese common belief. The concepts of the netherworld, retribution, and reincarnation presented in the story were influenced by both Buddhism and Chinese local thinking.

The netherworld

The concept of the netherworld existed before the arrival of Buddhism; however, it was confusing and inconsistent. The integration of Buddhism and the native belief has made this concept clearer and more systematic. The evidence of the practice of ancestor worship, which infers the existence of the afterlife, can be traced back to the oracle bones during the Shang dynasty (c. 1600 BCE–c. 1046 BCE) (Keightley, 1978 : xiii-xvii; Schmid, 2011 : 245-246). The netherworld as a place called Huangquan (黃泉 the Yellow Springs) is first recorded in *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* (春秋左傳 *Zuo Commentary to the Springs and Autumns*) in the year 722 BCE. The event describes a conflict between Duke Zhuang of Zheng and

[5] The White Horse Temple in the legends of Emperor Ming of Han's dream as the first Buddhist temple has been deemed unreliable; for more details, see: Zürcher, 2007: 28-32.

his mother, which led to his vowing not to meet his mother until they reach the Yellow Springs (不及黃泉，無相見也). In other words, he would not wish to see his mother again. Taishan or the Tai Mountain was also referred to as the netherworld during the Warring States period (403-221 BCE). [6] During the Han dynasty, Fengdu became another location for the afterlife. The belief in the bureaucratic system in the netherworld can be traced back as early as the third century BCE as evidenced in tomb documents. These documents are even more common in Han tombs (Goldin, 2016 : 27; Schmid, 2011 : 247-248).

The Tai Mountain and Fengdu were neutral in terms of good or evil, but as a place for the afterlife without rewards or punishments. Through the influence of Buddhism, the netherworld was later divided into heavens and hells (Schmid, 2011 : 247). The concept of '*diyu'* (地獄 hell) as a bureaucratic system can be found in the *Foshuo shiwang jing* (佛說十王經 *Scripture of the Ten Kings*) written in 908 CE. The punishment received in each *xiaodiyu* (小地獄 subsection of hell) depended on the evil deeds committed when alive. The structure of hell is modeled after the bureaucratic system in the world of the living. There were cases of officials working double positions both in Hell and on Earth. One famous example is a fictional Bao Zheng (as opposed to the historical Bao Zheng) who was working as a judge on Earth during the day and in Hell during the night. The first fiction that narrates this story is *Xiu xiang Longtu gong'an* (繡像龍圖公案 *Illustrated Cases of the Longtu Studio*) written around 1594 or 1597 CE, during the Ming dynasty. During the late imperial China, Yanluo Wang (閻羅王 King Yama) was a fictional character with an official position, whose role appear to have changed in different settings. King Yama in early Chinese Buddhism oversaw the underworld without interfering with the karmic law (Ganany, 2015 : 41-49).

Naraka is a concept in Indian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. However, the origin of this concept cannot be determined with certainty. Naraka (Buddhist hells) is illustrated in the *Suttanipata*. (Zin, 2014 : 270). It is one of the oldest collections that mention Naraka. Some parts were composed during the third century BCE, some parts were composed not long after the Buddha attained Nirvana, and some parts were composed during the lifetime of the Buddha (Onozawa, 2002 : 11). *Kokalikasutta* (Snp 3.10), a chapter in *Suttanipata*, narrates various kinds of punishment such as a being beaten with iron hammers or being roasted in a copper pot.

In addition, Naraka is mentioned in many Jataka tales such as *Lohakumbhi-Jataka* (Ja 314), *Samkicca-Jataka* (Ja 530), and *Nimi-Jataka* (Ja 541) (Onozawa, 2002 : 13-14). The story in *Nimi-Jataka* is comparable to the prologue of *Sanguozhi Pinghua.* King Nimi is invited to Lord Sakra's place in Heaven with a deity called Matali as a charioteer. On the way, they see various kinds of punishment in Hell from above and King Nimi asks Matali "What sin has been committed by those mortals?" Matali then answers his question. This exchange goes on repeatedly for a while as the explanation for sins and their corresponding punishments (Cowell, 1907 : 53-68).

Naraka also appears in Chinese Buddhist texts such as *Moggallana Rescues His Mother* and *Sutra of the Fundamental Vows of the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha* (T. 412). The *Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha sutra* is included in the Chinese Buddhist canon according to the Taisho Tripitaka edition. This sutra is considered one of the Mahayana Sutras (Harvey, 2012 : 461). Its second chapter mentions the sins that will make one reborn in Avici Hell and the fifth chapter mentions 37 hells and their punishments. Within these 37 hells, there are also sub-hells. This sutra claims that it takes forever to explain all the details of suffering and torture in these hells (Pitt, 2005).

[6] The beginning date of the Warring States period is debatable, here we follow the date in Ebrey, 2010: 38.

King Yama in Hinduism

Within Naraka, there is the ruler of the Netherworld called King Yama. According to earlier Verdic texts, King Yama is the first human to die, while later Vedic texts describe him as the ruler of the netherworld. In Hindu epics, King Yama determines whether the dead will ascend to Heaven or descend to Hell (Ondracka, 2022 : 1799-1800). This is similar to his role in Chinese Buddhist stories such as *Moggallana Rescues His Mother*.

King Yama in the Pali Canon

King Yama appears in *Devadutasutta* (MN 130) as an inquirer who asks the sinners whether they see the five divine messengers (an infant, an elder, a sick person, a robber culprit, and a dead person). The sinners answer that they do not see the divine messengers. King Yama then tells the sinners that they committed their sins themselves, and that they have to face the consequences. This sutra also illustrates the realm of Hell such as the fire that will burn the sinners until the karma from their evil actions is completely exhausted. King Yama realizes the suffering of being in Samsara; thus, he wishes to be reborn as a human to meet the Buddha and learn Dharma to attain nirvana so that he will not have to face the risk of being reborn in hell ever again (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995 : 1029-1036).

We can see that King Yama functions as an inquirer, not a judge. King Yama emphasizes that the punishment is due to the sinners' evil actions. This is different from his role in *Sanguozhi Pinghua.* King Yama functioning as a judge contradicts the law of karma because each individual must face the consequences under the law of karma without anyone acting as a judge (Zin, 2014 : 273). It is unclear why King Yama is needed in Hell given that his role is just to ask questions. Perhaps, it is to warn the readers of this sutra not to make the same mistakes as the sinners.

King Yama in Chinese Buddhism

King Yama is mentioned in the eighth chapter of the *Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha sutra* (T. 412), but it is only a brief conversation between him and the Buddha in Heaven without explaining his role in Hell. However, in other texts, King Yama's role is similar to that of a judge such as in the story of *Moggallana Rescues His Mother*. This scripture was discovered in Dunhuang dated to the early ninth century, but the story was probably told orally a few centuries before (Teiser, 1988 : 44). King Yama acts as a judge and ruler of Hell. However, he does not judge Moggallana's mother (Lady Niladhi), because King Yama only judges people who performed half-good and half-evil actions. If the person did a lot of good or bad deeds, then the consequences will be according to the law of karma that is going to Heaven or Hell automatically. Lady Niladhi committed grave sins; thus, she does not meet King Yama. The structure of Hell is bureaucratic such as there is a bookkeeper who reviews good and bad karma. The story also illustrates the causes and their corresponding punishments (Mair, 1983 : 90-121).

Therefore, King Yama in Chinese Buddhism is similar to the Hindu version in that he acts as a karmic judge which seems redundant given that there is the law of karma. This is different from King Yama in the Pali Canon who only acts as an inquirer without intervening with the law of karma.

Reincarnation

The concept of reincarnation was not clearly discussed in Chinese ancient texts. According to Xing Guang, Confucius refused to talk about the afterlife (Guang, 2013 : 310). Xing Guang possibly refers to *Analects* 11.12: "You do not yet know life. How can you know death?" 「未知生，焉知死？」[7] Jasmyn Murrell argues that Confucianism does concern about the afterlife and influences other religions including Buddhism and Daoism despite not being directly

[7] For more discussion about the quote, see Goldin, 2015 : 69.

stated (Murrell, 2017 : 89). Being reborn as gods or ghosts may have already been familiar to the Chinese people for a long time before the introduction of Buddhism. However, being reborn as animals was quite novel as He Chengtian (370–447) expressed his disagreement that humans could not be reborn as insects (Guang, 2013: 310).

Rebirth or reincarnation was a new addition to the Chinese belief system. One of the differences between Chinese Buddhism and canonical Buddhism is the nature of souls. Chinese Buddhism believes in the permanent soul called *shen* 神, which is the opposite of *anatta* (nonself) in the Pali canon (Ch'en, 1972 : 46; Schmid, 2011 : 258). The doctrine of the permanent soul was formed during the Han dynasty. At the beginning of Chinese Buddhism, the idea of rebirth was difficult to understand for the locals. The concept of *shen* or *shen-ling* 神靈 (indestructible soul) was used as a link to connect each rebirth, which made it more comprehensible. The *Hou Han ji* (後漢紀 *Annals of the Later Han*), written by Yuan Hong (328-376), asserts that "the Buddhists also teach that when a person dies, his soul does not perish, but would become reborn and assume another form." (Ch'en, 1972 : 46). This statement reveals that Chinese Buddhists during the time believed in permanent souls, which is considered a misconception in the canonical Buddhism (Zürcher, 2007 : 10-11).

In the Pali Canon, the concept of *shen-ling* may be found in *Mahatanhasankhayasutta* (MN 38) as a misconception. There is a monk named Sati who misunderstood that "it is this same consciousness (*vinnana*) that runs and wanders through the round of rebirths, not another." (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995: 350). *Vinnana* in the Pali canon is usually translated as "consciousness" instead of "spirit" or "soul." The word "soul" implies that there is the essence of "self," which is contradictory to the notion of non-self (anatta) in Buddhism. The monk Sati's view is similar to that of Yuan Hong in the *Hou Han ji* mentioned above. The *Mahatanhasankhayasutta* explains the relations between consciousness (*vinnana*) and rebirth; however, it is stated that Sati is wrong to assume that the "same" *vinnana* transmigrates between rebirths.[8] The correct conception is that *vinnana* occurs according to the principle of "codependent arising" (*paticcasamuppada*)[9].

Theravada Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism also have different views regarding the concept of the "intermediate state" (Sanskrit: *Antara-bhava*; Chinese: *zhongyou* 中有). Theravada Buddhism rejects that there is an intermediate state between rebirth. The rebirth occurs immediately after death. *Antarabhavakatha* (Kv 8.2) in *Abhidhamma Pitaka* states that there is no intermediate state and the immediate rebirth is mentioned in *Milinda Panha* (Mil 3.7.5) (Wayman, 1984 : 252-253; Yu, 2003 : 29-31).

However, the intermediate state is accepted in Chinese Buddhism. According to *Da cheng yi zhang* (T. 1851), the departed who made great merits or committed grave sins will be reborn immediately while those who made moderate merits or committed moderate sins will be in the immediate state. The realm to be reborn of the departed in the immediate state is changeable depending on certain scenarios such as receiving merits from one's relatives. The notion of merit transferring will be discussed in detail in the section on retribution. The *Yogacarabhumi sastra* (T. 1579) explains that an intermediate state exists for no more than seven days. If one cannot be reborn in another realm within seven days, one will be reborn in the intermediate state again. In total, there can be seven times of intermediate state or 49 days. Eventually, one will definitely be reborn in another realm within 49 days (Xue, 2003 : 35-36). The *Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha sutra* (T. 412) mentions that if the departed relatives make merits on his or her behalf within 49 days, it will lessen the suffering of the departed from his or her bad karma (Pitt, 2005 : 66).

Ancient Chinese culture believes that if one died a violent death, one may become a vengeful ghost (Goldin, 2015 : 63). These ghosts function as judges who reward and punish people (Zhang, 2013 : 271). An example of a vengeful

[8] This is one of the six misconceptions in *Sabbasavasutta* (MN 2) (Nanamoli and Bodhi, 1995: 1232).

[9] "All phenomena depend on preceding causes. Each can only arise if the one before it is present" (Irons, 2008 : 390).

ghost is found in *Mozi* such as the story of King Xuan of Zhou who unjustly killed Du Bo, and he became a vengeful ghost and comes back to take revenge by killing King Xuan of Zhou.[10]

Retribution

According to Zhang, *bao* 報 can mean "to respond", "to reciprocate", "to repay", and "to revenge." *Bao* as the concept of retribution is already rooted in pre-Buddhist texts. After the arrival of Buddhism, the concept of *bao* was influenced by Buddhism and transformed into karmic retribution, which is different from the original *bao* in ancient Chinese culture. Karmic retribution is usually connected to rebirth, which is integrated into popular Chinese literature (Zhang, 2013 : 267-275).

***Chengfu* (inherited burden)**

Retribution, which is similar to the concept of karma in Buddhism, can be found in the *Yijing* (易經 *Book of Changes*). There is one statement in the *Yijing* that infers collective retribution: "The families that accumulate goodness will have good fortune, the families that accumulate bad things will have misfortune 積善之家，必有餘慶；積不善之家，必有餘殃."[11] Daoism developed this concept into the principle of *chengfu* (承負 "inherited burden") in *Taiping jing* (太平經 *Scripture of Great Peace*) during the Han dynasty (Guang, 2013 : 311; Schmid, 2011 : 249). However, it does not mention retribution in the next life (Tang, 1999 : 164).

The principle of retribution has been greatly changed due to the influence of Buddhism. The Buddhist karmic theory indicates that one should be individually responsible for one's actions while the Daoist *chengfu* suggests that consequences of the ancestors' actions are to be collectively shouldered by the descendants. The Chinese then accepted the Buddhist idea and believed in the combination of both (Guang, 2013 : 312). There were scholars such as Xi Chao (336-377) who understood the difference between the Buddhist karmic theory and the idea of *chengfu*. He explained in the *Fengfayao* (奉法要 *Essentials of the Dharma*) that: "if the father performs some evil deed, the son does not suffer the consequences for him; if the son performs some evil deed, the father does not suffer the consequences for him. A good deed naturally brings about its blessings, an evil deed its calamity." (Ch'en, 1972 : 70). However, expert opinions such as Xi Chao's might be different from commoners' popular beliefs as evidenced in the *Sanguozhi Pinghua,* which reflects the mixture of Buddhist and Daoist retribution principles.

The Scope of karmic retribution and Merit Transference

Generally, the karmic law is regarded as a matter of one's own in canonical Buddhism; however, Egerton Baptist argues otherwise by citing stories in the Pali canon (Baptist, 1972 : 32-33 as cited in Mc Dermott, 1976 : 72). One of the stories tells an event that King Vidudabha and his army massacred the Sakiya clan. King Vidudabha was humiliated by the Sakiya clan when he was a child. After ascending the throne, he wreaked vengeance by leading a troop to kill them. The Buddha explained the cause of the Sakiya clan being slaughtered: "In a previous state of existence they conspired together and threw poison into the river." (Mc Dermott, 1976 : 79) (Ja 465). However, Mc Dermott does not think that this is a convincing example of collective karma. It could be interpreted that each person who participated in poisoning the river would receive the karmic consequence individually.

[10] See the full story in Goldin, 2015 : 83.

[11] The translation in Guang, 2013 : 311.

The transfer of merit appears in both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism (Xue, 2003 : 29). This concept is related to whether the karmic consequences are individual responsibility or whether one can benefit from others' actions. The Pali Canon mentions merit transference in several stories of *Petavatthu* such as Sariputta performing the transfer of merit through the sangha for his mother from his past life to save her from the realm of *peta* (hungry ghosts) (Pv 14). Another story is about King Bimbisara offering alms to the sangha for his relatives who are hungry ghosts (Pv 5). *Mahaparinibbanasutta* also mentions offering merits to the local devas (DN 16).[12] Harvey provides examples of the realms that can benefit from merit transference, which are the realm of hungry ghosts and the realm of devas (Harvey, 2012: 45-46). Gombrich also discusses these two realms. He refers to a Sinhalese monk who explains that only the realm of hungry ghosts can benefit from merit transference, the higher realms do not need it, and the lower realms cannot receive it (Gombrich, 1971 : 207-209). Appleton also remarks that the realm of hungry ghosts is a unique realm different from the realm of animals and the realm of hell-beings. Beings in these two realms have to exhaust their karma while those in the realm of hungry ghosts can benefit from merit transference (Appleton, 2014 : 58). Buddhism emphasizes the principle that individuals can only face consequences or receive benefits from their actions. Thus, the idea of merit transference may seem inconsistent with that principle. Some Buddhist thinkers interpret that benefits from making merits cannot be transferred. When someone offers alms to the sangha for the departed one, the departed one makes merit himself or herself by rejoicing with the one offering alms (Harvey, 2012 : 46; Brekke, 1998 : 297).

There is a story in Chinese Buddhism called *Yulanpen* sutra, which is similar to the story of Sariputta mentioned above, but Sariputta is changed to Moggallana. The Buddha suggests that Moggallana can save his mother from the realm of hungry ghosts by performing the transfer of merit through the sangha (T. 685).[13] Merit transference in Chinese Buddhism is related to the intermediate state. The *Consecration sutra* (T. 1331) describes both merit transference and the intermediate state. Lord of Heaven will pardon the departed ones who are residing in the intermediate state and King Yama will respect them if their relatives give alms to the sangha (Xue, 2003 : 44). *Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva sutra* (T. 412) recounts that the Buddha of Flower of Meditation and Enlightenment can rescue those in the *Avici* hell and leads them to Heaven. Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva in his previous life also took a vow that "I shall exercise my best to relieve people of their suffering forever in my future lives of kalpas (eon) to come" (Pitt, 2005 : 17-18). This sutra also mentions that if one makes merits for the departed one, the departed one will receive one-seventh of the merits while the one making merits will receive six-sevenths of the merits (Pitt, 2005 : 65).

After the arrival of Buddhism, the ideas of the netherworld, reincarnation, and retribution in Buddhism and native religions became entwined with each other as can be seen in *Sanguozhi Pinghua,* which will be discussed in later sections.

The influence of Buddhism on popular beliefs in *Sanguozhi Pinghua*

At the expert level, Buddhism and Daoism might seem very different; however, the two systems might have been merged into an undistinguished belief that the commoners practice in their daily life (Zürcher, 1980 : 146). It should not be assumed that the way lay people practice Buddhism would be identical to the Buddhist sutras. To understand the

[12] The translation in Walshe, 1995 : 238.

[13] The translation in Karashima, 2013.

popular belief of Buddhism, it is necessary to examine a variety of evidence such as visual arts, folktales, fiction, etc. (Campany, 2017 : xii).

This section focuses on the Buddhist influence on *Sanguozhi Pinghua*, mainly, the netherworld, reincarnation, and retribution. Though the *Sanguozhi Pinghua* was published during the Yuan dynasty, some plots were dated to earlier periods. It is possible that certain ideas and beliefs in the story existed before the Yuan dynasty. In addition to the Buddhist sutras and other religious texts, this tale is good evidence that can provide more insights into the understanding of Chinese Buddhism believed by commoners around the time.

The prologue of *Sanguozhi Pinghua* explains that Liu Bang, the founder of the Han dynasty, betrayed his three generals who contributed greatly to his successful campaign to reunify China. The three generals were to be reborn in the Three Kingdoms period and split the Han Empire into three parts as their revenge. The story begins with Sima Zhongxiang cursing Heaven for giving Qin Shi Huang (the First Emperor) the mandate to rule China, which brought suffering to people. When he continued to talk about Liu Bang, suddenly fifty men dressed like officials appeared and brought him to the netherworld. He was to judge the case of Liu Bang and reversed the injustice bestowed upon his three generals. Heaven would grant him the status of an emperor in the next life for his good judgment. The three generals, namely, Han Xin, Ying Bu, and Peng Yue complained about Liu Bang's wrongdoings. Sima Zhongxiang then summoned Liu Bang to the Hall of Avenging Wrongs. Liu Bang refused the responsibility and blamed his wife, Empress Lü. Empress Lü was then summoned to the Hall. She admitted that she orchestrated the murder of the three generals, but it was to follow Liu Bang's wish. Sima Zhongxiang submitted his decisions to the Lord of Heaven. The Lord of Heaven agreed to his judgment and sent him to be reborn as Sima Yi who would reunify and rule the empire. Liu Bang would be reborn as Emperor Xian of Han. Empress Lü would be reborn as his wife, Empress Fu. Han Xin would be reborn as Cao Cao who would torment the couple as his revenge and rule the Kingdom of Wei. Peng Yue would be reborn as Liu Bei and rule the Kingdom of Shu (Han). Ying Bu would be reborn Sun Quan and rule the Kingdom of Wu. The three warlords would divide the Han Empire into the Three Kingdoms before Sima Yi's reunification (Idema & West, 2016 : 1-8).

The epilogue continues the story after the death of Zhuge Liang, Sima Yi's nemesis. Sima Yi seized the power of the Wei court, established himself as Prince of Jin, and deposed the Wei emperor. When Emperor Xian of Han heard this story, he laughed until he died. Sima Yi then reunified China and ruled the Empire. Liu Yuan, Liu Bei's great-grandson, escaped after the fall of Shu Han to the north. He later came back and conquered the empire of Jin. Therefore, the Han was restored under the leadership of Liu Yuan (Idema & West, 2016 : 167-169).

The Netherworld in *Sanguozhi Pinghua*

The netherworld in *Sanguozhi Pinghua* is depicted as a fusion of Buddhism and the Chinese native system. Sima Zhongxiang was granted the role of a judge in place of the Lord of the Underworld, which can be implied that he temporarily took the role of King Yama. Thus, the story of King Yama as a position instead of a deity in *Sanguozhi Pinghua* predates the story in *Longtu Gong'an* discussed previously. Here, Sima Zhongxiang intervened in the karmic law and decided the fates of certain individuals before submitting the case to the supervisor (Lord of Heaven) for approval. The officials in the netherworld are described as similar to officials during the Tang and Song dynasties as one of them wore a fish-shaped tally on his belt (Idema & West, 2016 : 3n7). The netherworld in the prologue is obviously influenced by Buddhism and possibly Daoism. In addition to karmic retribution, an officer in the netherworld mentioned the Buddha in the dialogue: "Your Majesty, is it not said that those who follow the Buddha are reborn above into paradise, but those who do not are reborn below into hell?" (Idema & West, 2016 : 4). This is to assure Sima Zhongxiang that the past events he mentioned were justified according to Buddhist principles. The officer further explained that good people deserved to

be born in the time of good rulers while bad people deserved to be born in the time of bad rulers. It seems that King Yama's decisions must be approved by the Lord of Heaven, which implies that he is a subordinate of the Lord of Heaven. According to Keith Stevens, the Lord of Heaven, alias the Jade Emperor, is considered a Daoist deity; however, Jade Emperor also refers to Indra in the Buddhist sutras. Lay people of both Buddhism and Daoism worshipped the Jade Emperor for a soul's pardon in the netherworld (Stevens, 1989 : 18-20).

In summary, the netherworld narrated in the prologue of *Sanguozhi Pinghua* is in the form of a judicial court in the Chinese bureaucratic system. Hell's court officers dress like real-world Chinese officials. King Yama functions as a judge who determines *vipaka* (maturation of karma) and decides which realm to be reborn in. In general, this is very similar to the image of hell described in *Moggallana Rescues His Mother*, which is a Chinese Buddhist text.

Nevertheless, *Sanguozhi Pinghua* does not copy everything from the above-mentioned scripture. The ruler of Heaven is named the Jade Emperor (玉皇) who is a Daoist deity instead of Sakra or Indra (帝釋), a Buddhist deity. These are just different names of the ruler of Heaven. Sakra or Indra is the ruler of Heaven in *Moggallana Rescues His Mother* and other Chinese Buddhist scriptures. In addition, King Yama in *Moggallana Rescues His Mother* is the ruler of Hell while King Yama in *Sanguozhi Pinghua* is a position that the Jade Emperor can appoint a human to work as King Yama who is a judge in the netherworld and he can be punished if he makes mistakes. This is a manifestation of complex interactions between Buddhism and Daoism.

Reincarnation in *Sanguozhi Pinghua*

A Daoist element added to the story is that a person can be reborn in the Daoist netherworld. The officer in the netherworld informed Sima Zhongxiang that "If you can pass sentence on these underworld cases without any partiality, he will make you the Son of Heaven in the world of light, but if you judge them wrongly, you will be banished to the backside of the Mountain of Darkness and never again see the human form." (Idema & West, 2016 : 5). It is hinted that Sima Zhongxiang made a just decision as he was to be reborn as an emperor. However, if he made an unfair decision, he would be punished in the Yinshan (陰山 Mountain of Darkness), and could not be reborn as a human for eternity. The idea of eternity seems to contradict the concept of impermanence in the principle of Three Marks (impermanence, sorrow, and no-self), which was the main preaching in the Buddha's first sermons along with the Four Noble Truths (Gómez, 2005 : 1104). The Mountain of Darkness is probably the same place as the Beiyinshan (北陰山 Northern Mountain of Darkness) in the Daoist text called *Taishang Laojun shuo chang qingjing zhu* (太上老君說常清靜經註 *Heart Sutra of Clarity and Calmness Spoken by the Most High Lord Lao*) (Eskildsen, 2015 : 204). The Mountain of Darkness in this text is a place for torturing souls similar to Buddhist hells. Thus, reincarnation in *Sanguozhi Pinghua* is the amalgamation of Buddhism and Daoism.

The prologue narrates the appearances of Han Xin, Ying Bu, and Peng Yue as the souls of those who were executed. They wear bloody armor, which is their appearance before their death. Han Xin shouts "injustice" and that he has been wronged. They seem to be vengeful ghosts in native Chinese beliefs; however, they cannot avenge their death like the ghost stories in ancient Chinese texts.[14] They have to rely on the karmic judge that is King Yama who is part of popular Chinese Buddhism. Han Xin and others possibly are in an intermediate state waiting for rebirth according to the principle in Chinese Buddhism.[15]

The idea of a vengeful ghost can be considered a variant of *shen-ling* (indestructible soul) that is an individual has the essence of oneself called a soul. Explaining the principle of anatta (non-self) and rebirth together is rather difficult.

[14] For ancient Chinese ghost stories, see Goldin 2015.

[15] See the explanation of the intermediate state in section 4.2.

Some might ask "If there is no self, then who will face karmic retribution or be reborn in another realm?" The answer may be the idea of *paticcasamuppada* found in *Mahatanhasankhayasutta* as words of the Buddha. There is also a metaphorical example in *Milinda Panha* (Mil 3.2.1). King Milinda asks venerable Nagasena that "He who is born, Nagasena, does he remain the same or become another?" His answer is "Neither the same nor another," then he explains the concept of rebirth according to the anatta principle that it is like milk becoming butter. He concludes that "Just so, O king, is the continuity of a person or thing maintained. One comes into being, another passes away; and the rebirth is, as it were, simultaneous. Thus neither as the same nor as another does a man go on to the last phase of his self-consciousness" (Davids, trans, 1890 : 63-65). We cannot say that butter is the same as milk, but we also cannot say that butter does not come from milk. Theravada Buddhism believes that each rebirth is the continuity of cause and consequence just like milk becoming butter, but there is no essence of self in both milk and butter.

This framework is quite difficult for common people, and the easier concept of *shen-ling* was used instead to explain rebirth during early Chinese Buddhism (Ch'en, 1972 : 46). Each rebirth has one soul as a link, this soul changes bodies and stores karma. Obviously, this is a misconception in the Pali Canon, but the concept of *shen-ling* is easier to illustrate in storytelling than *paticcasamuppada*. The setting in the prologue of *Sanguozhi Pinghua* could be considered wrong both in Chinese Buddhism and the belief concerning ghosts in ancient China. There is no rebirth in ancient Chinese beliefs; thus, Han Xin's vengeful ghost being reincarnated as Cao Cao is different from the concept of ghosts in ancient China. According to Chinese Buddhism, an intermediate state can exist for no more than 49 days, then all individuals have to be reborn in another realm (T. 1579) (Xue, 2003 : 35-36), but the time between Han Xin's execution and his karmic judgment in the netherworld is 205 years according to the story (Idema & West, 2016 : 5), which is more than 49 days. Thus, this scene reflects a mixture of the concept of rebirth in Chinese Buddhism and the concept of ghosts in Chinese popular beliefs.

Rebirth in *Sanguozhi Pinghua* is vastly different from rebirth in the Pali Canon. The most obvious point is the judging by King Yama and Jade Emperor instead of automatic rebirth according to the law of karma. Ch'en remarks that *vipaka* (maturation of karma) in the Pali Canon is considered an automatic process without supernatural agents (Ch'en, 1972 : 4-5).

Retribution in *Sanguozhi Pinghua*

The concept of *bao* in *Sanguozhi Pinghua* is certainly influenced by Buddhism; thus, it can be called karmic retribution. The original Chinese concept of retribution does not concern the next life, because rebirth does not exist in ancient Chinese minds. Han Xin was unjustly executed and the netherworld decides to let him be reborn as Cao Cao to take revenge in the next life as karmic retribution. The borrowed Buddhist concept is the cycle of rebirth, not revenge. Obviously, Buddhism never encourages revenge but supports compassion.[16]

Karmic retribution is narrated as the cause of the Han Empire being divided into three kingdoms. This paper classifies the theme of karmic retribution in the story into three categories:

1. Individual responsibility: the consequence of karma that one has to face is due to one's actions. This is similar to the teaching in the Pali Canon. According to Harvey, the Pali Canon believes that all intentional actions, whether they are good or evil, will have consequences. Nevertheless, the reverse is not necessarily true, that not all that happens to us comes from our actions. For example, the cause of an illness may be

[16] See a story of compassion in *Kakacupamasutta* (MN 31), translation in Nanamoli and Bodhi, 1995: 301-306.

the change of seasons. Furthermore, the detailed process of the law of karma that determines a specific case is *acinteyya* (unthinkable) for everyone, except the Buddha (Harvey, 2012 : 41-42).

2. Familial responsibility: the consequence of karma that one has to face is due to a family member's actions, particularly, one's ancestors. This is similar to the concept of *chengfu* (inherited burden), which exists in ancient Chinese thoughts. This category can be viewed as a sub-category of collective responsibility, but its scope is one's family.
3. Collective responsibility: the consequence of karma that one has to face is due to a group member's actions. It is debatable whether this category exists in canonical Buddhism. Gombrich states that in principle, the moral responsibility of the individual is a basic teaching in the Pali Canon (Gombrich, 1971 : 203). Moreover, the Pali Canon also indicates that: "It is volition, bhikkhus, that I call kamma. For having willed, one acts by body, speech, or mind" (AN 6.63).[17] Therefore, if one has no mutual intention with other group members in acting, then one should not face karmic retribution. However, Mc Dermott discusses other scholars' ideas related to collective karma such as family karma, racial karma, national karma, and group karma. For example, when the ruler makes merits, people in the nation will also benefit from the ruler's karma. Mc Dermott himself may not agree with these ideas though (Mc Dermott, 1976 : 69). Suwanna Satha-Anand also discusses the Venerable Dhamma-pitaka's works concerning social karma and moral justice (Satha-Anand, 2002 : 81). The Venerable Dhamma-Pitaka explains that when members of the society endorse their leader, and then the leader performs some actions, "all are karmically responsible, to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the extent of their personal involvement and acquiescence." (Payutto, 1993 : 76).

As we can see, the theory of collective karma varies depending on the author. One common feature is that one must be karmically responsible for actions one did not perform directly such as the people have to face consequences from the ruler's karma. Another common feature is that karmic retribution can be explained in terms of the summation of members' karma. The concept of collective karma in *Sanguozhi Pinghua* is also different from those proposed by Buddhist scholars because bad karma in the ruler's previous life affects the whole empire and its people. Han people suffer due to Liu Bang's evil actions a few centuries ago.

Retribution in the *Sanguozhi Pinghua* does not only imply the idea of *chengfu* and Buddhist karmic law but also collective karma. This section analyzes three themes of karmic retribution in the story.

First, the case of Emperor Xian of Han suffering from Cao Cao's actions is to bring justice to Han Xin who was wrongfully punished despite his great contribution to the founding of the Han Empire. The karmic consequence here can be considered an individual matter because Emperor Xian has to receive karmic retribution due to his own actions in his previous life. Whether karma is individual or collective in Theravada Buddhism is arguable.[18] However, the general opinion such as the *Encyclopedia of Religion* refers to the quote in the Pali canon: "One's karman is one's own; whether good or bad, it is like a treasure not shared with others, which no thief can steal," (Hirota, 2005 : 5099) which implies that it is individual.

Second, the case of Cao Cao killing the crown prince of Han, is the implied cause that led to the downfall of the Wei dynasty. Cao Cao was informed that the crown prince plotted against him. Before the crown prince could act, Cao Cao framed him for trying to murder the Emperor. The crown prince was arrested and tortured until he confessed. Then,

[17] See the translation of the *Nibbedhikasutta* in Bodhi, 2012: 963.

[18] For more discussion on group karma, see Mc Dermott, 1976: 67-80.

he was publicly executed by Cao Cao's order (Idema & West, 2016 : 140-141). The poem in the story implies the karmic consequence of Cao Cao's evil actions:

> Wrongfully killing the Crown prince, he ended the line of the Han;
> At this fine terrace the Wei ancestor will enthrone their rival lord.
> In total five emperors would be the compensation from the netherworld;
> But when the Simas schemed for kingship, they would kill their own share!
> (Idema & West, 2016 : 145)

This case conveys the idea of *chengfu*, in which the descendants must inherit the ancestor's burden and it can also be considered a case of collective karma, which will be discussed in the third theme. Later in the story, the fourth Wei emperor, Cao Cao's descendant, conspired against Sima Yi and was killed before the plan could be successfully executed in the same manner as the crown prince of Han. Sima Yi then usurped the throne from the last Wei emperor (Idema & West, 2016 : 167), which effectively ended the Wei dynasty. We can see that Cao Cao himself did not have to suffer a consequence of his evil acts, but the ones suffering were his descendants.

Third, there are events that could be interpreted as related to collective karma in *Sanguozhi Pinghua*. The definition of this concept differs from author to author as already discussed in the topic of collective responsibility. Here, we will discuss two sub-themes of collective karma, which are the theme of the ruler's action affecting the whole empire and the theme of the summation of members' karma.

1. The ruler's action affects the fate of the empire.

The prologue narrates the events that Liu Bang committed grave sins and one of his punishments is that the Han Empire is to be divided into Three Kingdoms. The theme of the ruler's action affecting the state can be found in *Sanguozhi Pinghua*.

a) Jin Empire: The cause of Jin's collapse is explained by referring to the Emperor's incompetence and the Empress' evil actions. Emperor Hui of Jin is retarded while Empress Jia is licentious. When she sees handsome young men, they will be forced to disguise themselves as women and brought into the palace to have sex with the Empress. After that, they will be killed. It is stated that: "Because of this, the country descended into chaos" (Idema & West, 2016 : 169). This event does not concern karmic retribution, but it is an example of the ruling family's actions leading to the destruction of the empire.

b) Wei Empire: The fall of Wei could be considered the most obvious example of karmic retribution that does not only occur to the one who committed sins. As already explained in the idea of *chengfu*, descendants inherit the sins of their ancestors. Cao Cao killed the crown prince of the Han and ended the line of the Han's ruling family. This is a grave sin because not having an heir to continue the family line is considered a dreadful situation (Hsu, 2006 : 79). Thus, Wei must end within 5 generations as Heaven's punishment on Cao Cao, but his descendants are the ones who suffer from this karmic retribution. It is related in the story that "What is gained through evil will be done in by evil. The Cao family wished to inherit a thousand-year enterprise, But the Simas inherited the throne in just the same way" (Idema & West, 2016 : 144-145). Even though Cao Cao (who was Han Xin in his previous life) was destined to take revenge on Emperor Xian of Han (who was Liu Bang in his previous life), ending the line of Han may be considered too evil. His empire then was stolen by the Simas in the same way he has done to the Han.

c) Han Empire: as can be seen in the two previous examples, *Sanguozhi Pinghua* has a theme that the fate of the empire depends on the ruler's virtues. These virtues do not coincide with Buddhist principles, because this is a story of warfare and many virtuous characters kill soldiers on the battlefields.

According to the Pali Canon, karma requires *cetana* (intention). A state or nation does not have its own intentions, and the ruler's karma is not equal to the state's karma. However, the idea of the fate of the state depending on the ruler's virtues had existed in ancient China. One example relates to *Shang Shu*, where it is stated that the ruler of Xia was a tyrant with no virtues; therefore, Heaven brought calamities to Xia. Another example is from *Shiji*, which records that: "Mars moves to the position of Song, which will bring disaster". In this context, a minister suggested that he could move this disaster to other people. Duke Jing of Song rejected this immoral suggestion by moving the advent and pretext of war out of Song due to his noble virtues (Zhang, 2013 : 270-271).

These examples indicate that there is the idea that the ruler and the state are linked in ancient Chinese thoughts. However, sometimes the state can exist despite its immoral ruler. The Han Empire did not collapse within Liu Bang's lifetime despite the fact that he unjustly executed his generals. Instead, the Han Empire survived for hundreds of years. In order to give moral justice to this event, *Sanguozhi Pinghua* cooperates with Buddhist concepts such as rebirth and karma. Thus, the prologue links Liu Bang's sins to the collapse of the Han Empire. It should be noted that the story does not indicate that Emperor Xian of Han, the last ruler of Han, has done anything wrong but it is due to the karma in his previous life (as Liu Bang) that the Empire under his rule has to be divided. This is different from the above stories in *Shang Shu* and *Shiji*, because it considers also the previous life of the ruler not just the current life.

Because of the chaos at the end of the Han Empire, Han people have to suffer from ongoing civil wars as mentioned in the conversation between Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang: "'Ever since Emperor Heng and Emperor Ling lost control of the government,' replied Zhuge, 'the common people have found it hard to survive'" (Idema & West, 2016 : 77). Therefore, it can be interpreted that Liu Bang's sins cause the entity called the Han Empire to collapse, the fall of Han in turn causes Han people to suffer. In conclusion, this is an example of collective karma because people are in distress due to the karmic sins of their ruler in previous life, even though those people did not commit the sins themselves.

2. Summation of individual karma as collective karma

In the case of Liu Yuan restoring the Han, this event might be considered to contradict the prologue. The prologue begins with Liu Bang's betrayal of his three generals, which caused the Empire to be disintegrated into three kingdoms as karmic retribution. However, the cause that merits the restoration of the Han is not mentioned explicitly. Emperor Xian (Liu Bang's reincarnation) does not seem to have made any good deed that warrants this outcome and is also considered weak and incompetent (Idema & West, 2016 : 34). By the end of the story, Liu Bang was even worshipped by Liu Yuan (Idema & West, 2016 : 169).

Thus, we propose that the rationale behind this seemingly illogical plot is based on the idea of collective karma or social karma. The summation of positive and negative accumulated karma of individuals affects the community. Although the Han Empire collapsed due to Liu Bang's wrongdoing and Emperor Xian did not do any good deeds to improve the balance of karma, other Han members such as Liu Bei, Zhao Yun, Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, Zhuge Liang, Pang Tong, and its people collectively generated positive karma bringing the empire toward restoration.

Several points in the story hint that the characters in the state of (Shu) Han are praiseworthy. The three sworn brothers (Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei) are frequently applauded for their morality and talent. One example is: "Because dragon and tigers are filled with love and righteousness, evil sons and slanderous ministers are startled from their sleep." (Idema & West, 2016 : 16). Here, "dragon" refers to Liu Bei and "tigers" refers to Guan Yu and Zhang Fei.

The purpose of this quote is to introduce the three protagonists to the readers at the Peach Garden where they swore an oath to live and die together.

Zhao Yun (Zilong) is highly acclaimed despite not being included in the sworn brothers. He is usually lauded for his bravery and loyalty. The last line of a long poem dedicated to praising him reads: "A thousand generations from this point on, who will not look up to these high moral actions?" (Idema & West, 2016 : 83). This poem is inserted in the scene where Zhao Yun alone went through Cao Cao's army to rescue Liu Bei's heir. This act made him the exemplar of loyalty as he was ready to sacrifice his life for his lord.

The most celebrated character is probably Zhuge Liang. He is most well-known as Liu Bei's advisor. A song reads: "Thrice visited in the thatched cottage: a man of such great integrity is rare indeed! Like a cock pecking at its food; like a fish finding its stream: such nobility that the crowd will never reach." (Idema & West, 2016 : 157). This song describes the event when Liu Bei tried to recruit Zhuge Liang by visiting his cottage three times. On the one hand, it shows that Liu Bei was a man of determination who appreciated Zhuge Liang's talent. On the other hand, the song praises not only Zhuge Liang's talent that Liu Bei desperately needed like a fish needs its water but also his integrity which is unparalleled. Moreover, when Zhuge Liang died, the people felt as if they lost their own father because they admired his virtues. It is told that "When the common people heard about it, it was as if they had lost their own parents. In administering the people, the Martial Marquis (Zhuge Liang) was sparing with mutilations and fines and imposed only light taxes and corvées" (Idema & West, 2016 : 166). Only Zhuge Liang and Pang Tong went to Heaven in the story, which implies that they have made great merits.

The story does not explicitly mention the virtues of the people under Liu Bei's rule. However, they endorse virtuous leaders such as Liu Bei and his loyal ministers. This may be considered positive karma by itself, which helps increase the overall good karma. In other words, the act of endorsing good leaders generates good karma collectively. In addition, the story also mentions that each kingdom has its advantage. Cao Cao occupies Heaven's timing, Sun Quan occupies favorable geography, and Liu Bei occupies the support of the people (Idema & West, 2016 : 8, 77). This is evidence that Liu Bei is endorsed by his people.

As these characters are portrayed as virtuous characters and the people endorse them, it is justified to have the restoration of Han as the ending as a result of positive collective karma. Though they died failing to restore the Han themselves, the fact that their descendants were able to succeed in re-establishing the empire could be considered a happy ending[19] and more pleasing to the readers. Although the story never explicitly explains the rationale behind this contradicting plot, the idea of collective karma could certainly be a befitting solution. The protagonists collectively accumulated good karma to the entity called Han, then the Han Empire was reunited as a result. Thus, the epilogue is not in conflict with the prologue as it may seem at first glance. At the same time, it reveals that the concept of collective karma existed at least before the printing of this tale during the Yuan dynasty.

The karmic retribution that the characters receive may be different from the teachings and virtues in Buddhist sutras. It may represent the authors' definition of moral justice. *Sanguozhi Pinghua* was originally an oral tale; thus, we can assume that it was popular to the extent that the common people accepted this kind of moral justice and continually retold it until it later became a printed book. Especially, the moral justice in the prologue is elaborated in two later versions.[20] Whether this moral justice is correct depends on each person to interpret. Even the notion of merit transference

[19] Moss Roberts considers this ending ominous because the historical Liu Yuan was viewed as a barbarian, not an heir to the Han throne; however, the fictional Liu Yuan in *Sanguozhi Pinghua* was a great-grandson of Liu Bei. Within the scope of the tale, we think it should be a happy ending. For Moss Roberts' discussion of Liu Yuan and the ending, see: Luo, 2015 : 2270-2274.

[20] For the two later versions, see Hsu, 2006: 78; Chen, 2017 : 11.

could be viewed as an anomaly in the Pali Canon by some Buddhist orthodox thinkers as already discussed in section 4.3.2. The idea that the descendants have to face karmic retribution due to the ancestors' karma and the idea that people must face disasters due to the immoral ruler seem unjustified; however, it might be justified enough for Chinese people at that time as the story has been passed on to other versions until today.

Table 1 The summary of concepts separated by categories

The elements that appear in the story (most events are combinations of beliefs)	
Chinese Buddhism	1. Believing in the Buddha: "Your Majesty, is it not said that those who follow the Buddha are reborn above into paradise, but those who do not are reborn below into hell?" (W. L. Idema & S. H. West, trans, 2016: 4). 2. King Yama acts as a judge to decide the fate of certain individuals. 3. *Shen-ling* (indestructible soul): it made the concept of rebirth easier to understand for the Han people. The concept was invented at the arrival of Buddhism in China.
Daoism	1. The ruler of Heaven is called Jade Emperor instead of Sakra or Indra. 2. The notion of *chengfu* (inherited burden). 3. Mountain of Darkness: if Sima Zhongxiang makes mistakes in karmic judgment, he will be banished into this place forever.
Chinese popular beliefs	1. The officials in the netherworld are described as similar to Chinese officials during the Tang and Song dynasties as one of them wore a fish-shaped tally on his belt. 2. Jade Emperor acts as a final approver for the judgment of King Yama and somehow functions as a law of karma. 3. People who died violently may become vengeful ghosts. 4. People may face the consequences of the ruler's karma.

Conclusion

Sanguozhi Pinghua serves as a prototype for *Sanguo Yanyi* for both themes and structures. The story of the Three Kingdoms had been retold and passed on in many forms such as songs, poems, and plays before it became a complete written tale in *Sanguozhi Pinghua*. The prologue and epilogue clearly demonstrate the influence of Buddhism. Buddhism was transmitted to China around the time of the Han dynasty. It gradually mixed with other native religions and assimilated into the Chinese culture. By the time of the Yuan dynasty when *Sanguozhi Pinghua* was printed, Buddhism had already become a part of popular belief. *Sanguozhi Pinghua* provides evidence of Buddhist influence on commoners' beliefs, which is complementary to Buddhist sutras in studying Buddhism during the Yuan dynasty.

This paper analyzes three concepts: the netherworld, reincarnation, and karmic retribution. The event of tale begins with the injustice bestowed upon the main characters in the previous life and the revenge they were to seek in the next life. *Sanguozhi Pinghua* explains this as the cause of the Han Empire's disintegration in terms of karmic retribution. The netherworld is narrated as a combination of Buddhist hells, Daoist deities, and the Chinese bureaucratic system. The reincarnation of the main characters retains the concept of the indestructible soul (*shen-ling*) in Chinese Buddhism, which was the Chinese native element that Buddhism had incorporated into its system. However, this is completely opposite from the concept of anatta (nonself) in the Buddhist Pali canon. Moreover, the concept of vengeful ghosts and the intermediate state also feature in the story.

There are three themes of karmic retribution in the story. First, one is individually responsible for one's actions. Second, descendants are responsible for ancestors' actions. Third, karma can be collectively generated and karmic retribution can be collectively responsible. We argue that not only the first two themes, but the third also existed in the Chinese karmic belief system as early as the Yuan dynasty. Therefore, the study of Buddhism in fiction such as *Sanguozhi Pinghua* provides insights into the understanding of the complicated interactions between Buddhism and Chinese culture during the time.

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T. 16 (685)	*Yulanpen jing* 盂蘭盆經 (Ullambana Sutra)	Karashima, 2013
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