

In Search of the Origin of the Enumeration of Hell-kings in an Early Medieval Chinese Buddhist Scripture: Why did King Bimbisāra become Yama after his Disastrous Defeat in Battle in the *Wen diyu jing* 問地獄經 (‘*Sūtra on Questions on Hells*’)?

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ABSTRACT

The idea of a purgatorial journey to the Ten Kings of the Ten Hells is a distinctive feature of funerals and ancestral worship in Chinese Buddhism and Chinese popular religions. In Indian Buddhism ideas emerged of chief deities presiding over others in a few of many heavens and of various hells with different tortures governed by Yama and his messengers, yet the idea that each hell was governed by a ‘king’ is not found in early Indian Buddhist sources. This article examines what is probably the earliest enumeration of hell-kings, in the *Sūtra on Questions on Hells*. This very early example derives from an extraordinary story about how King Bimbisāra and his eighteen ministers became Yama and kings of eighteen hells after a disastrous defeat in battle. My analysis will illustrate how this account was probably consciously formulated by an author familiar with two sources: (i) the story of the Buddha’s concern about the fate of his followers in the *Shenisha jing* (闍尼沙經; *Janavasabha Sutta*), and (ii) the popular Chinese belief in sacrificial cults of ‘defeated armies and dead generals’.

Keywords

King Bimbisāra, Yama, hells, enumeration of hell-kings

The introduction of Buddhist concepts of karma and the cycle of rebirths has significantly transformed Chinese perceptions of possible after-death destinies, and what leads to them, since the early medieval period. The rise, in the later medieval period, of the popular belief in the purgatory journey to the Ten Hells

where the upcoming fate of sentient beings will be judged and determined by the ten hell-kings has further elaborated the Chinese perception of a person's destiny in the afterlife; and this belief in a number of hell-kings met with on the purgatory journey, presented in funeral ritual and ancestral worship, has become a characteristic religious phenomenon not only of Chinese Buddhism but also of Chinese popular religions until today. In Indian Buddhism, a few of the many heavens are seen to have a presiding deity (e.g. Brahmā or Sakka) or deities (the Four Great Kings), but the various hells with their different tortures are envisaged as governed by Yama and his messengers; the notion that each hell has its own individual 'king' is not an idea found in early Indian Buddhist sources. Scholars such as Xiao Dengfu, Stephen Teiser and Harumi Ziegler have noticed possibly the earliest precedent for enumerations of multiple hell-kings, parallel to that of the Ten Kings, in two early medieval indigenous Chinese Buddhist scriptures, the *Jingdu sanmei jing* (淨度三昧經; 'Samādhī-Sūtra of Liberation through Purification'), and the *Wen diyu jing* (問地獄經; 'Sūtra on Questions on Hells').¹ Ziegler has further indicated that the *Wen diyu jing* also features a similar concept of the intermediate state between death and the next life – when evil-doers enter the city of Hell and wait for their final sentence of punishment – to the one included in the ninth/tenth century 'Scripture on the Ten Kings'.² Nonetheless, how this concept of multiple hell-kings was firstly formulated in early medieval China remains a matter of obscurity.

Though both these scriptures contain enumerations of hell-kings, the enumerations occur in different contexts. The thirty hell-kings in the *Jingdu sanmei jing* are mentioned by the Buddha in response to King Bimbisāra's questions about why his younger brother became ill, what causes people's illnesses, and what affects the length of their lives. The *sūtra* highlights the importance of observing the 'Days of the Eight Kings', a Buddhist appropriation of the Daoist idea of eight seasonal days when otherworld bureaucratic deities report people's deeds to the divine authority.³ The thirty hells, with their associated kings, are listed as destinations for evil-doers of various kinds whose reports record insufficient merit.⁴ However, there seems to be no direct causative link between the formulation of the thirty hell-kings and the idea of the 'Days of the Eight Kings'.

By contrast, the enumeration of eighteen hell-kings in the 'Sūtra on Questions on Hells' is based solely on one extraordinary story, also relating to King Bimbisāra (who in this context turns into Yama, the Lord of Hell, after a catastrophic defeat in battle). According to the extant fragments of the 'Sūtra on Questions on Hells', there are eighteen hells governed by eighteen hell-kings who were the eighteen ministers of King Bimbisāra in that fateful battle. The names of these kings include ones which are the same as or 'look-alike' abbreviations of a fourth-century Chinese official Qu Zun 屈遵,⁵ the Buddha's father King Śuddhodana,

1. Xiao Dengfu (1996, 43–45, 68–71); Teiser (1994, 82–83); Ziegler (2001, 136–158). *Jinglü yixiang* 經律異相. T 53. 2121. 259a9–b13.

2. Ziegler (2001, 157–158). *Jinglü yixiang*. T 53. 2121. 259b17–25.

3. Xiao Dengfu (1996, 58–68); Ziegler (2001); Chen Shih-Chung (2013, 55–78)

4. *Jingdu sanmei jing* (淨度三昧經). X 1. 15: 370a12–371c 2. Xiao Dengfu (1996, 68–71); Ziegler (2001, 139–152)

5. Qu Zun was the magistrate of Bolu 博陸 when Emperor Daowu 道武 of the Wei dynasty (r. 386–409 CE) was about to invade the region. While most local officials had fled, Qu Zun chosed

King Virūdhaka, King Śivi, the Buddha's rivalrous cousin Devadatta, one of the six sectarian teachers contemporary with the Buddha, Pakudha Kaccāyana, and other figures, either unidentifiable or named after Buddhist doctrines. The list of these kings is arranged disorderly and anachronistically and is not based on any historical fact. Some of them just happen to have the same names as various past well-known individuals. The story says that after his disastrous defeat in battle against a king called Weituoshi (維陀始王),⁶ Bimbisāra angrily vowed to become the Lord of Hell (and then presumably died). His eighteen ministers followed him to hell, along with his entire defeated army, in order to help him govern the evil-doers there. The ministers all became hell-kings, supervising different tortures in eighteen different hells, while the soldiers turned into ghostly wardens of the underworld.⁷ Although the complete *Wen diyu jing* is lost, this section has been passed down through later Buddhist encyclopaedias and the pivotal medieval Buddhist purgatory scripture, the *Lianghuang baocan* (梁皇寶懺; 'Jewelled Repentance Dharma of Emperor Liang', T 45. 1909). Nowadays there are even online games related to the story, such as Yanwang ling (閻王令; 'The Order of Yama') and Shenxian dao (神仙道; 'The way of Immortals').⁸ In her 1932 report on the Temple of the Eighteen Hells in Beijing, Anne Swann Goodrich also noticed this unusual tale (Goodrich 1981, 75).

According to many Indian and Chinese Buddhist sources, King Bimbisāra was imprisoned and tortured or starved to death by his son, King Ajātaśatru. Why is this Chinese account so different from the Indian sources and from other Chinese translations?⁹ How was a defeated warrior king able to become Yama? This article surveys the origins of the enumeration of hell-kings in the *Wen diyu jing* by addressing these two questions. I seek to demonstrate that this extraordinary story was probably consciously developed by an author from sources related to the early medieval Chinese popular belief in sacrificial cults of 'defeated armies and dead generals', and also to a passage in the *Shenisha jing* (闍尼沙經, *Janavasabha Sutta*) about the fate of the followers of the Buddha in the afterlife.

to stay and turned towards Emperor Daowu's side. He was later promoted as a Secretariat Director. *Weishu* (魏書). 33: 777–778. *Beishi* (北史). 27: 971–972.

6. The origin of King Weituoshi (維陀始王) or King Weituoshisheng (維陀始生王) is unknown in both Indian and Chinese sources. The name only appears in this account of the battle against King Bimbisāra in Chinese.
7. The idea of 'torturers' and 'wardens' of hell presented Buddhist interpreters with a problem. According to Buddhist principles, if they were real beings who continually tortured others, it would seem that this would generate such bad karma as to lead to ever repeated rebirths in hell realms. As life in no rebirth realm is seen as eternal, were such 'beings' to be understood as real or mere karmically generated phantoms of the prolonged nightmare of life in a hell? The Theravādins argued that the wardens are not unreal (*Kathāvatthu* XX.3). The Sarvāstivādin Vasubandhu, in his *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya* says that they are not real beings, though he cites the opinion of others that they are (III.59a-c).
8. Yanwang ling (閻王令). Disanpo zixun (第三波資訊), 2000, http://www.gamemad.com/intro_detail.asp?id=216&system_type=PC. Shen xian dao (神仙道). Xiamen qianwang keji (廈門前網科技), 2010–2011, <http://sxd.wan71.com/2011/0723/4132.html>.
9. A detailed analysis of scholarship on different Indian and Chinese versions of the death of the King Bimbisāra is given in Radich 2011.

The origin of the ‘Sūtra on Questions on Hells’

The complete ‘Sūtra on Questions on Hells’ has been missing since the early medieval period. Fragmentary quotations from it were included in the chapters on hells in the forty-ninth and fiftieth *juans* of the sixth century Buddhist encyclopaedia, the *Jinglü yixiang* (經律異相; T 53. 2121. 258b–268c) and in the fifth section (on ‘the Lords who are in charge’ (典主)) of the seventh *juan* of the later seventh century Buddhist encyclopaedia, the *Fayuan zhulin* (法苑珠林; T 53. 2122. 327a14–b19). They appear also in the fourth *juan* of the *Cibei daochang chanfa* (慈悲道場懺法; ‘The Repentance Dharma of the Bodhimanda of Compassion’), otherwise known as the *Lianghuang baocan* (梁皇寶懺; ‘Jewelled Repentance Dharma of Emperor Liang’; T 45. 1909. 941a24–941b16), and in other later sources such as the *Fozu tongji* (佛祖統紀; ‘Chronological Record of the Buddha and Patriarchs’; T 49. 2035. 317b21–26).

The origin and date of the ‘Sūtra on Questions on Hells’ are unclear and its importance has long been overlooked. While the earliest quotations from it are found in the sixth century *Jinglü yixiang*, a contemporary catalogue, the *Chusan zang jiji* (出三藏記集; T 55. 2145), does not mention the *sūtra*. Ziegler points out that, in the *Gaoseng zhuan* (高僧傳; ‘The Biographies of Eminent Monks’), there is a similar title, the *Wen diyu shi jing* (問地獄事經 ‘Sūtra on Questions on Matters of Hells’), translated by Kang Ju (康巨; 187–199 CE).¹⁰ The two texts were thought to be the same by later Tang dynasty cataloguers, an assumption accepted by many modern scholars (Ziegler 2001, 153–154). However, apart from this arbitrary attribution, no direct reference indicates the relationship between the two.

There is an additional complication. The quotations attributed to the *Wen diyu jing* do not necessarily derive from a single text. They could be a compendium of quotations on the subject of hell from diverse sources. Certain inconsistencies suggest this. For example, one enumeration of hells attributed to the *Wen diyu jing* lists eighteen hells, while another (also attributed to it) lists sixty-four, and there are further differences. In the scheme of sixty-four hells, each hell does not have its own hell-king. Five kings who dedicated themselves to Buddhism and took the Mahāyāna vow to save other sentient beings are said to be there. Evil-doers who complete their entire course of punishment in all the hells will come before them and, depending on the karma from their past bad actions, may be allowed to leave their bodies in hell and enter an intermediate state, being reborn according to their karma.¹¹ In the scheme of eighteen hells, however, each hell is governed by an individual king, and they are closely associated with the story of King Bimbisāra who became Yama. This article therefore focuses on the eighteen-hell enumeration.

The story of King Bimbisāra in the ‘Sūtra on Questions on Hells’

The story of King Bimbisāra is narrated at the start of the forty-ninth *juan* of the *Jinglü yixiang*, the upper section of Hells, and is entitled ‘The reason why King Yama and his subjects became the bureaucrats of Hell in the past’ (閻羅王等為獄司往緣). It reads as follows:

10. *Gaoseng zhuan* (高僧傳). T 50. 2059. 324c10. Ziegler (2001, 153–154).

11. T 53. 2121. 267a15–268b8.

King Yama was once upon a time King Bimbisāra. It is due to his battle against King Weituoshi (?) that his troops were beaten. He therefore took a vow that he wished to become Lord of Hell. Eighteen of his vassals led a mass of a million soldiers whose heads had either horns or ears. They were all full of anger and hatred and they all vowed, 'From now on, we shall present ourselves to help govern these evil-doers'. King Bimbisāra is now Yama. The eighteen vassals are the minor kings and the million soldiers are the ox-headed torturers. They are subject to the Northern Celestial King, Vaiśravaṇa.¹²

The story reads as if King Bimbisāra, his eighteen ministers, and a million soldiers had all died in the battle and then been reborn as Yama, hell-kings, and wardens in the other world. Another passage in the *Jinglü yixiang*, which is a comment within a list of enumeration of hells from a different text, states that 'the *Sūtra on Questions on Hells* says: Hells are on the earth'. Ziegler notices that this simple statement of location of hells on the earth is quite dissimilar to those descriptions in the Buddhist scriptures translated from India, which are usually more 'fictional'.¹³

The eighteen hells and the names of the lord of each hell

The forty-ninth *juan* of the *Jinglü yixiang*, the chapter on hells, also reports the enumeration of eighteen hells, with the names of their rulers, from the *Wen diyu jing*.¹⁴ A better edition of this appears in the *Cibe daochang canfa*. It reads:

The names of the Eighteen Hells and their lords.

The eighteen minor kings are as follows: The first is Kaccāyana (迦延), who governs the hell of niraya. The second is Qu Zun, who governs the hell of blade mountains. The third is Feishou, who governs the hell of the boiling sands. The fourth is Feichü, who governs the hell of boiling excrement. The fifth is Jiashi (Ajātaśatru?), who governs the hell of black-thread (Kālasūtra). The sixth is Kaisuo, who governs the hell of the fire-chariot. The seventh is Tangwei (Tiwei? Trapusa?), who governs the hell of the boiling cauldron. The eighth is Tiejian (?), who governs the hell of the iron bed. The ninth is King Virūḍhaka (of the same name as Prasenajit's son), who governs the hell of the Mountain of (?). The tenth is Groaning, who governs the hell of cold ice. The eleventh is Bijia (Śivi (Shibijia) 尸毘伽? This sounds like a shortened form of the name of one of Śākyamuni's former incarnations), who governs the hell of skin-peeling. The twelfth is Yaoto (or Jingto?), who governs the hell of animals. The thirteenth is Devadatta, who governs the hell of knives and weapons of war. The fourteenth is Yida, who governs the hell of iron grinding. The fifteenth is King Śuddhodana, who governs the hell of ice. The sixteenth is Penetration of Bone, who governs the hell of iron bars (?). The seventeenth is Mingshen (Name-and-form), who governs the hell of maggots. The eighteenth is

12. 閻羅王者。昔為毘沙國王。緣與維陀始王共戰。兵力不敵。因立誓願。願為地獄主。臣佐十八人領百萬之眾頭有角耳皆悉忿懣。同立誓曰。後當奉助治此罪人。毘沙王者今閻羅是。十八人者諸小王是。百萬之眾諸阿傍是。隸北方毘沙門天王。T 53. 2121. 258c6-12.

13. 地獄者地上有也。T 53. 2121. 260b26 (21). It is not certain whether this passage is placed with the story of King Bimbisāra and his eighteen ministers in the same context of the 'Sūtra on Questions on Hells'. However, this remark seems to suggest that the idea of 'Hells are on the earth' is highlighted in this *sutra* (Ziegler 2001, 154).

14. T 53. 2121. 259a9-17.

Guanshen (Contemplation of the body), who governs the hell of boiling copper.¹⁵

As Ziegler notes, the eighteen hell-kings seem randomly named. Many of the names sound like shortened forms of Sanskrit names, either translated or transliterated (Ziegler 2001, 155–156).

The names of the hell-kings can be categorized according to their origins. First, there are names that are also the names of figures recorded in Indian Buddhist accounts, such as King Virūḍhaka (惡生) and Devadatta (提薄). Secondly, there are Sanskrit-like names, such as Tangwei (Tiwei? Trapusa) and Kaccāyana (迦延), which seem to be slightly shortened or distorted names from Indian Buddhist texts. Thirdly, in a category of its own, is the name of a late fourth-century Chinese official, Qu Zun, a real historical figure. There are also names, such as Yida, whose origins remain obscure, and names borrowed from meditation, such as Mingshen (Name-and-form, Skt *Nāmarūpa*) and Guanshen (Contemplation of the body).

Recently, Michael Radich has published a thorough survey of accounts of Ajātaśatru, son of King Bimbisāra, in both Indian and East Asian Buddhist sources. According to his research, the episodes of Devadatta's plot to persuade Ajātaśatru to kill his father and Ajātaśatru's repentance before the Buddha for his patricide have both already appeared as early as in the Pāli canon (Vin II 190, D I 85). In many later sources which evolved from these episodes, it is said that King Bimbisāra was imprisoned and then tortured or starved to death by his son (Radich 2011, 6–32). Accordingly, the account of the death of King Bimbisāra in the *Wen diyu jing* apparently differs from that found in all other Indian and Chinese sources. Why did a defeated king become Yama and how did his ministers and soldiers become kings and guards in hells? Why is King Bimbisāra, as Yama, subject to the Northern Celestial King, Vaiśravaṇa? I think these questions are clues to understanding how this extraordinary story may first have been formulated.

Why did a defeated king and his ministers become Yama and the hell-kings?

The story of King Bimbisāra recalls the popular sacrificial cult of 'defeated armies and dead generals' in early medieval China. For example, Jiang Ziwen (蔣子文), a general of the third century who died in battle, was believed to have become the 'God of Earth'.¹⁶ Cults also attached to the famous King Chu, Xiang Yu (項羽) of the third century BCE (who was defeated by Liu Bang (劉邦), the founder of the Han dynasty, and then committed suicide; Li Bo 2008, 214–217), and to the notorious rebellious general of the fourth century CE, Su Jun (蘇峻, who was beheaded after being captured by the government army),¹⁷ amongst others. Dead generals and armies of soldiers who died in battle were believed to become ghost kings and demonic soldiers in the unseen world (on earth). They would spread disease

15. 十八地獄及獄主名字 十八小王者。一曰迦延。典泥犁獄。二號屈尊。典刀山獄。三名沸壽。典沸沙獄。四名沸曲。典沸尿獄。五名迦世。典黑耳(繩)獄。六名[嶮-我+皿]倥。典火車獄。七名湯謂。典鑊湯獄。八名鐵迦然。典鐵床獄。九名惡生。典[嶮-我+皿]山獄。十名呻吟。典寒冰獄。十一毘迦。典剝皮獄。十二遙(or 逕)頭。典畜生獄。十三提薄。典刀兵獄。十四夷大。典鐵磨獄。十五悅頭。典寒冰獄。十六名穿骨。典鐵[筵-二+舟]獄。十七名身。典蛆虫獄。十八觀身。典烱銅獄。T 45. 1909. 941b6–15; T 53. 2121. 259a9–17.

16. Lin Fu-shih (1998, 357–375); Chen Shengyu (2007, 165–169).

17. Li Hongyan (2005, 112–120); Quan Jiayu (2010, 39–44).

among humans if they did not receive proper sacrifice.

This religious idea has attracted the attention of many scholars, such as Nathan Sivin (1999, 406–410), Rolf Stein (1979, 53–82), Lee Fong-mao (1994, 373–422), Lin Fu-shi (1998: 357–375), Stephen Bokenkamp (2007, 108–111), Paul R. Katz, (2008, 54–83), Richard von Glahn (2004, 63–64), Mark Meulenbeld (2007, 11–12, 122), and others, as the cults were recorded in some early medieval Daoist scriptures, such as in the *Daomen kelüe* (道門科略; ‘Abridged Codes for the Daoist Community’; CT 1127) by Lu Xiuqing (陸修靜; 406–477 CE), and the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* (太上洞淵神咒經; ‘Scripture of Divine Incantations of the Abyssal Caverns’; CT 335), an apocalyptic and exorcistic text whose earliest sections can be dated to the fifth century. In the ‘Abridged Codes for the Daoist Community’, Lu Xiuqing described the cults as follows:

The stale vapors of the Six Heavens took on official titles and appellations and brought together the hundred sprites and the demons of the five kinds of wounding, dead generals of defeated armies, and dead troops of scattered armies. The men called themselves ‘General’ and the women called themselves ‘Lady’. They led demon troops, marching as armies and camping as legions, roving over heaven and earth. They arrogated to themselves authority and the power to dispense blessings. They took over the people’s temples and sought their sacrificial offerings, thus upsetting the people, who killed the three kinds of sacrificial animals [ox, sheep, and pig], used up all their prospects, cast away all their goods, and exhausted their produce. They were not blessed with good fortune, but rather received disaster. Those who died unjustly or early and violently could not be counted.¹⁸

In the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing*, deceased historical generals who either won or lost wars, officials with unrecognizable names, and unidentified kings of the Warring States period are said to have become ghostly kings in the unseen world, leading millions of ghost soldiers and causing epidemics. By threatening to kill these ghostly kings, Daoist priests would be able to deter them from harming humans. For example, *juan* 6 of the above text says:

Dao (the Way) says: ‘In the year of Jiayu, there are demonic kings of the five kingdoms. The demonic soldiers are the dead soldiers of the states of Song, Zhou, Yan, Wei, and Lu. Each king leads thirty-six thousand demons. They paraded in the land of Shuhan to capture girls, little boys and old men, carrying forty-six kinds of illness to kill people. From now on, I have known your names. The demonic king, Huainan zi (淮南子),¹⁹ return! [Also] Duke of Bai (白公),²⁰ Han She, Song Xi, Wang Shan and others, from now on, I will mobilize you, those underground ghosts. Hence, with regard to those who come to kill people and do not leave, your head will be broken into seventy-eight pieces’.²¹

18. Quotation from the translation by von Glahn (2004, 64).

19. A book title of the second century BCE Chinese philosophical classic edited by King Huainan (淮南王), Liu An (劉安; 179–122 BCE). Liu An committed suicide after an accusation of plotting a rebellion. *Han Shu* (漢書). 44: 2145–2152.

20. Baigong Sheng (白公勝; ? –479 BCE) was the grandson of the King Ping of Chu (楚平王). He carried out a rebellion and kidnapped his uncle, King Hui of Chu (楚惠王). He committed suicide after the rebellion failed. *Shiji* 史記. 36: 1583; 40: 1718.

21. 道言：甲戌之旬年，有鬼王共五國，鬼兵宋、趙、燕、魏、魯之死將。國王各領三萬六千鬼，遊行國土蜀漢，取天下女子、小兒、老公，行四十六種病殺人。自今以去，已知汝名字，鬼王淮南子

Juan 7 of the text then says:

Dao says: 'These are those who all used to be generals and officials in the past. After they died, each of them had shrines [to them] erected by people. They are worshipped incessantly. It is said that now hundreds of ghosts attach themselves to them and form a big crowd. They frequently wait to take advantage of people. They kill and harm common people. They make people suffer by drowning in water and burning in fire, and by quarrels. Involvement in lawsuits is nothing but misfortune. When bad fortune comes, it kills people completely. Most of the population dies. It is never just one individual. Now I dispatch the great guards of Red and Black, who are ten thousands *zhang* in height. There are eight hundred thousand of them and each leads a crowd of three-thousand billion. Come down to arrest these kinds of ghost kings. On arrest, they should be beheaded without forgiveness'.

Dao said; 'Today in those places where the priest of three caverns has saved people by turning the scriptures, nine-thousand billion divine soldiers should be ordered to protect all family members of the living, including old and young. If they have problems of illness, lawsuits, or imprisonment, they should be released and be able to get through all these troubles and recover from illness without any harm.

On the day when they are without any harm, the ghost kings will be promoted. If they do not recover, the heads of those who put them at risk and cause them trouble, such as the great demonic king Emperor Mao and others, should be broken into ninety pieces'.²²

Daoist scholars, particularly Lee Fong-mao, have demonstrated and suggested that these Daoist accounts may be important in reflecting how the cults of defeated armies and dead generals were later absorbed and institutionalized into Daoist religion.²³ It seems to me that there is considerable similarity between the narration of the cult of defeated armies and dead generals in historical and Daoist sources and the extraordinary account in the *Wen diyu jin* of King Bimbisāra, his eighteen ministers, and millions of soldiers becoming Yama, hell-kings, and underworld wardens after defeat in battle. Might the story of King Bimbisāra be a case of Buddhist reflection on these sacrificial cults?

Historical and inscriptional textual sources seem to provide clues to the Buddhist attempt to convert these sacrificial cults and integrate these gods in their pantheon during this period. According to the biography of Li Anmin (李安民; 429–486 CE) in the official historical record of Southern Qi (南齊書), the belief in the warrior god, Xiang Yu, was so popular in Wuxing (吳興) that even the local governor (太守), had to leave the main official hall to Xiang Yu and make a sac-

返，白公、韓涉(?)、宋銑(?)、王善(?)等。自今以去，動汝下鬼，故來殺人不去者，汝頭破作七十八分矣。 *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* 太上洞淵神咒經, *juan 6*.

22. 道言：此等之人，皆悉是往時大將、任事之人，死亡之後，各有人立祠，祀之不止。今傳有百鬼附之，唯成大眾，仍何人形便，殺害百姓。令人水火口舌，官事萬凶。凶來奄殺，人口多死，從來非一。今遣赤盧大禁兵，身長萬丈，八十萬人，各領三億萬眾，來下收捕此等之鬼王，得便斬殺之，不恕矣。

道言：今些三洞法師轉經救人之處，當令神兵九萬億人，護此生人之家大小口數。若有疾病、官事、刑獄之者，一一令解了得出，病愈無他。無他之日，鬼王上遷。若不遷，令危厄者，大魔王毛帝等，頭破作九十分矣。 *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing, juan 7*.

23. Lee Fong-mao (1994); Stein (1979); Katz (2008); Bokenkamp (2007); von Glahn (2004); Meulenbeld (2007).

rifice of the ox of their cart to the deity. When Li Anmin became the governor of Wuxing, as a devout Buddhist he abolished the sacrifice of an ox to Xiang Yu by performing the Buddhist Eight-Precept Abstinence instead in the main official hall (*Nanqi shu*. 27: 508). Li Bo, in his study on ‘The Stele inscription on the Divine Temple of the King Chu (Xiang Yu)’ (吳興楚王神廟碑) by the Emperor Jianwen of the Liang dynasty (梁簡文帝; r. 549–551CE), points out that the content of this inscription verifies the account of the abolishment of the sacrifice of an ox to Xiang Yu by Li Anmin and that it even further mentions that the deity had converted to promote Buddhism (Li Bo 2008, 216). In another well-known pro-vegetarian declaration on ‘Abstinence from meats and alcohol’ (斷酒肉文) by the Buddhist Emperor Wu of Liang, he claimed that even the warrior god, Jiang Ziwen, had also followed the path of the bodhisattva (菩薩道) and had abandoned animal sacrifice. As a result, only ‘vegetarian monks’ could be invited to participate in the feast held in the shrine of Jiang Ziwen, as the presence of ‘non-vegetarian monks’ would irritate the deity for their blasphemy of Buddhist Dharma.²⁴ These accounts signify a Buddhist attempt to convert the deities of popular sacrificial cults such as Xiang Yu and Jiang Ziwen and include them in the Buddhist pantheon. They imply that this attempt could also have been crystallized in items such as the story of King Bimbisāra in the ‘Sūtra on Questions on Hells’.

Why was King Bimbisāra, who became Yama, subject to the northern celestial king, Vaiśravaṇa?

Another unusual line in the story in the *Wen diyu jing* is that King Bimbisāra as Yama, Lord of Hell, is subject to the Northern Celestial King Vaiśravaṇa. Although there seems to be no evidence of a direct connection between Yama and King Vaiśravaṇa in early Buddhist sources, Bimbisāra is associated with Vaiśravaṇa in the *Dīgha-nikāya Janavasabha Sutta* (D.18), the *Shenisha jing* (闍尼沙經) in the Chinese *Dīrgha-āgama* (T 1. 1: 34b4–36b23). In this story, Ānanda inquires of the Buddha about the postmortem fate of his disciples from Magadha. While the Buddha meditates upon their final destination, he hears the voice of the late King Bimbisāra, in the form of a *yakkha* named Janavasabha, who then appears in a splendid form and reports to the Buddha that by virtue of his faith in the Buddha’s teaching, he has been reborn into the entourage of the Lord Vessavaṇa (Vaiśravaṇa) and become a king of non-human beings among the *devas* (D II 206). This conversation between the Buddha and Janavasabha is recorded as follows:

I am Bimbisāra, O Exalted One! I am Bimbisāra, O Welcome One! ’Tis now the seventh time, lord, that I am reborn into the communion of the great King Vessavaṇa. Deceased as a human king, I am in heaven become a non-human king.

Hence seven, thence seven, in all fourteen rebirths – So much I know of lives I’ve lived in the long past.

Long, lord, have I, who am destined not to be reborn in states of woe, been conscious of that destiny, and now is there desire in me to become a Once returner.²⁵

24. See Liang Wudi (梁武帝), ‘Duan jiurou wen’ (斷酒肉文), in Shi Daoxuan (釋道宣) ed., *Guang Hongming ji* (廣弘明集). T 52. 2103: 297b23–c3. Lin Fu-shih (1998, 370–371).

25. D II 206, transl. Rhys Davids 1910, 240.

The Buddha rejoices over the king's recognition of his splendid destination and the late King Bimbisāra declares that his achievement of this is all due to his faith in the Buddha's teaching. Thereafter, the late King Bimbisāra continues to describe the regular assemblies of *devas* in the *deva* realm on *uposatha* days, when Saṃkumāra Brahmā delivered the teaching on the development of the bases of psychic power, the three opportunities for spiritual development, the four applications of mindfulness, and the seven (path-factors as) accessories of concentration to *devas* (D II 210–17).

In the Chinese version, Shenisha (Janavasabha) tells the Buddha that he has been reborn as the crown prince of Vaiśravaṇa (Vessavaṇa) and attained the state of Stream-enterer through his dedication to the Buddhist Dharma during his lifetime.²⁶

The statement in the *Wen diyu jing* that King Bimbisāra and his subordinates are subject to the Northern Celestial King Vaiśravaṇa corresponds to the claim of the late King Bimbisāra in the *Janavasabha Sutta* that after having passed away as a king of humans, he had been reborn into the entourage of the Lord Vessavaṇa and become a king of non-human beings among the *devas*.

Conclusion

This article seeks the origin of the early enumeration of the hell-kings in the early Chinese Buddhist scripture by examining the textual formation of the extraordinary story of King Bimbisāra in the *Wen diyu jing*, which is associated with one of the earliest examples of the enumeration in Chinese Buddhist scripture. It considers two questions: why King Bimbisāra, a defeated king, became Yama, and why King Bimbisāra as Yama is subject to the Northern Celestial King, Vaiśravaṇa. My examination on these questions tentatively suggests that the story was probably consciously formulated by an author familiar with two sources: (i) the story of the Buddha's concern about the fate of his followers in the *Shenisha jing* (闍尼沙經; *Janavasabha Sutta*) in the *Chang ahan jing* (長阿含經), and (ii) the popular Chinese belief in sacrificial cults of 'defeated armies and dead generals'.

Nonetheless, I do not intend to suggest any direct link between this early example and the later formation of the 'Scripture of the Ten Kings'. For the moment, I simply present this extraordinary story of King Bimbisāra as a separate case which may offer insights of some value for research on the later development of the enumeration of hell-kings in Chinese Buddhist scriptures.

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26. *Chang ahan jing* (長阿含經). T 1.1. 34c3–35a10.

Abbreviations

- CT Schipper, Kristofer, ed. 1975. *Concordance du Tao-tsang. Titres des ouvrages*. Paris: EFEO (Publications de l'EFEO, 102).
- D *Dīgha-nikāya*.
- T *Taishō* edition of the Chinese Canon.
- Vin (Theravādin) *Vinaya*,
- X Xuzangjing, *The Shinsan Dainihon zoku zōkyō*, Tokyo: Kokusho Kankokai. 《卍新纂大日本續藏經》(卍新纂續藏)。東京：國書刊行會。

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- Fayuan zhulin* (法苑珠林). T 53. 2122.
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