

## China

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**Wilt L. Idema and Allard M. Olof**  
*The Legend of Prince Golden Calf in China and Korea*

Amherst: Cambria Press, 2022. 308 pages. Paperback, \$49.99. ISBN: 9781638571261.

This co-authored book by Wilt L. Idema and Allard Olof, two leading scholars of early Chinese and Korean vernacular literature respectively, contains complete translations of seven variants of the legend of Prince Golden Calf from the two countries. The earliest source of this subject is the apocryphal Buddhist scripture *The Sutra on How a Filial and Obedient Son Achieved Buddhahood by Self-Cultivation, Pronounced by the Buddha* (*Fo shuo xiao shun zi xiu xing cheng fo jing*), which dates to around the sixth century. This text survived only in fragments among manuscripts found in the sealed library of the Dunhuang cave temple. Later, this legend became popular in both China and Korea, but the majority of written versions date to the comparatively later period (seventeenth-nineteenth centuries).

In this book, the authors attempt to trace the origins of this subject, which is a difficult task. Its earliest written version adopted the format of the jataka, a story of one of the

prior lives of the Buddha. However, this subject still has not been discovered among known jatakas and other texts in different versions of the Buddhist canon. Still, there are some signs that indicate the foreign provenance of this subject in China. At any rate, it was not completely a product of Chinese culture.

The second version of this story included in this volume comes from the *Record of the Ten Stages of Self-Cultivation of Tathagata Shakyamuni (Shijia Rulai shi di xiu xing ji)*, the Chinese work from around the fourteenth century that survived only as a Korean reprint. This work has dropped from circulation in China and at an unknown date was brought to Korea, where it enjoyed popularity; the earliest surviving edition of this collection was reprinted in Korea in 1660. In this text, the story also takes the jataka form, and the other nine narratives in this collection retell famous jatakas. Later Korean redactions of this story presumably were based on this source. One of them, *The Story of Golden Calf (Kŭm Songaji Chŏn)*, translated from the late-period transcription published in 1923, is also included in this volume. This narrative was very important in Korea, as it was considered to be one of Korea's earliest novels.

Thus, this work takes a transcultural comparative approach and is centered on interconnections between Chinese and Korean literature. This subject demonstrates the influence of Chinese vernacular literature in early modern Korea. The original version of *Golden Calf* transmitted to Korea was a prosimetric text (i.e., it includes a significant number of poems, which was typical of Chinese vernacular narratives). Such borrowings are less well-known than those in the field of classical literature. The traditional Korean perception of this tale as an indigenous one is especially noteworthy. Only recently has it been confirmed that its original version was composed in China. It is not a unique case; another example of a completely “naturalized” Chinese narrative with Buddhist meaning was the legend of Butcher Zhang that became well-known in Vietnam, and its Chinese origin also was forgotten (Nguyen 2022).

Another extended version of this narrative from China is *the Precious Scroll of Golden Calf*, an undated modern manuscript possessed by a performer from Gangkou in Zhangjiagang, Jiangsu. It is a performance-oriented text, which preserves the Buddhist connotations of this story. Its translation by Idema is supplemented by the translation of a prequel found in the lithographic edition of another recension of the precious scroll, printed by Youxin publishers in Hangzhou in 1924. Thus, a reader of this volume can observe the development and transformation of this story in China.

In a special research note, the editors have put *The Story of Golden Calf* into the context of oral literature studies. It represents the motif 707 of Aarne-Thompson-Uther's (ATU) system of classification of the folktale types (The Three Golden Sons). In folk literature, it is often combined with one or more other motifs, as we also see in the earliest Chinese version. In China, it is also represented by the famous tale “Crown Prince Replaced by a Cat” (later associated with the famous Judge Bao), and the authors have suggested historical connections between the two. The subject of the Golden Calf fits into a broad picture of connections between jatakas and folk literature. It is well-known that many folktales widespread across Eurasia can be traced back to ancient Indian transcriptions. In this regard one can ask the question of how typical is the story of the Golden Calf, first appearing as a Chinese jataka?

Another mode of adaptation of a Chinese Buddhist tale in Korea is represented by the tale of Prince Allakkuk that is based on the Chinese material but was greatly elaborated on in the vernacular Korean narrative, the earliest version of which is included in the

*Wŏlin Sŏkbo* (Moon Impressions and Sakya's Record) collection (1459). It is considered to be another earliest indigenous story in Korea, though also presented as a jataka story. The translation of its earliest recension also is included in this collection of translations.

Concerning the research part of the book, chapter 1 consists of an overview of Chinese literature concerning bovine (*niu*) subjects, demonstrating their important place in traditional Chinese culture. Though not directly connected with *The Story of Golden Calf*, it presents a background of the story's development in China, and thus may be especially useful for nonspecialist readers.

*The Legend of Prince Golden Calf in China and Korea* makes rare textual materials on folklore and popular literature more accessible, so the book can be highly recommended not only for specialists but also students of Chinese and Korean literature, as well as all those interested in world folklore, comparative literature, and the history of intercultural exchange and translation in East Asia. It is an impressive contribution to the field, combining high-quality translations of intriguing premodern narratives with a necessary introduction to their historical background and special features. Still, this volume does not contain an extended analysis of differences between early Chinese and Korean versions, which could be very useful. The authors did not provide information on the spread of this story's subject in the literature of other East and Central Asian countries. Tracing the history of transmission of this motif (ATU 707) throughout Eurasia also is a task awaiting further research. One can hope that these unanswered questions can attract potential researchers of this topic, when they read the book by Idema and Olof.

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#### REFERENCES

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