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Research on the Typical Writing Patterns at the End of Life in Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks

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Abstract

The writings about death in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* serve to showcase the monks' dissemination of teachings and their ascetic accomplishments. The deathbed writings are categorized into three distinct patterns based on the monks' perceptions of approaching death: foreknowledge, visions, and dreams. These categories are further divided into seven types, including predictive prophecies and signs from physical phenomena and celestial events. Each category of death-time writings is deeply rooted in Buddhist teachings as well as indigenous cultural traditions, reflecting the synthesis of Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist influences. This synthesis illustrates the prevalent trend of religious syncretism in end-of-life writings during the Sui and Tang dynasties.

Keywords: *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks; Deathbed Writings; Typical Patterns; Cultural Origins.*

1. CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION OF DEATHBED WRITINGS IN CONTINUED BIOGRAPHIES OF EMINENT MONKS

Life and death hold profound significance, marking the cessation of existence for all living beings. How individuals confront death reflects their core values and spiritual goals, clearly revealed in their final moments. Confucians concentrated on funeral and mourning rituals to honor life, while Daoists pursued the attainment of transcendent spiritual power, seeing it as a means to imbue life with eternal value.[1]In secular contexts, dying is merely the final stage before death for the common folk.

However, for practicing monks, this period from dying to achieving final nirvana represents the culmination of their karmic journey and a pivotal moment of rebirth. This article analyzes *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* to extract key elements that elucidate the concept of monks' dying and to understand the profound Buddhist implications of deathbed writings found in these biographies.

Let us analyze the final words and actions of Master Huibu 慧布 of Sheshan Qixia Monastery 攝山棲霞寺 (*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* 續高僧傳 pp. 239-240). Three key insights emerge from the text: He was aware of his impending death and had made preparations well in advance.

Choosing not to eat or take medicine, he sought to hasten his demise in the hope of being reborn in a borderland. During this time, attempts by fellow monks, disciples, and royals to persuade him to seek medical treatment were repeatedly rejected. This refusal suggests that, despite their good intentions, their interventions may have hindered Huibu's spiritual progress and preparations for his next life.

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Throughout this period, Huibu remained free from anxiety or fear, maintaining a calm and composed demeanor. He believed in neither desiring a prolonged life nor fearing death, reflecting his view that the extension of life was futile.

The *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* reveals that the period leading up to death varied considerably among monks, ranging from several years to mere days. This text underscores that the concept of dying is not limited by time. It highlights the period from terminal illness to ultimate nirvana, showcasing how the monks' actions and demeanor reflect their lifelong motivations and karmic results.

Through their unwavering devotion to Buddhist practices, service to the Buddha, and adherence to chanting scriptures related to rebirth, they often experienced visions of the Pure Land, in line with their beliefs in rebirth there. These deathbed writings primarily focus on the monks' determination for rebirth and serve to illustrate the intent-driven narrative of spreading Buddhism and the impact of their practices from life to death.

The writings uniquely depict how monks overcome traditional fears of death, characterized by a profound and urgent yearning for rebirth, and how peace and tranquility ultimately manifest in their physical presence upon fulfilling their virtuous deeds.

2. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF DEATHBED WRITINGS IN CONTINUED BIOGRAPHIES OF EMINENT MONKS

To analyze the characteristics of deathbed writings in these biographies, the author employs three specific criteria: the proportion of deathbed writings relative to the main text, the ratio of detailed to brief descriptions within these writings, and their distribution across the main and supplementary biographies.

A comprehensive statistical analysis reveals that *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* comprises a total of 398,460 characters, highlighting the extensive scope and detailed nature of Daoxuan's work. [2] The editions of *Biographies of Eminent Monks* 高僧傳 and *Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty* 宋高僧傳 used are similarly based on those published by the Zhonghua Book Company, ensuring uniformity across texts.

The analyses for *Biographies of Eminent Monks* and *Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty* apply the same criteria and are systematically detailed in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1: Deathbed to Main Text Ratio in Three Monastic Biographies

	Total Main Text Characters	Deathbed Writing Characters	Deathbed to Main Text Character Ratio
Biographies of Eminent Monks	151892	14943	9.8%
Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks	398460	56445	14.2%
Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty	180010	18596	10.3%

Table 2: Detailed to Deathbed Writing Ratio in Three Monastic Biographies

	Detailed Description Characters	Brief Record Characters	Detailed to Deathbed Writing Character Ratio
Biographies of Eminent Monks	5563	9380	37.2%
Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks	44685	11760	79.2%
Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty	10655	7910	57.3%

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Table 3: Deathbed Writing Distribution in Three Monastic Biographies

	Case Counts in Main Biographies	Case Counts in Supplementary Biographies	Main to Total Biographies Ratio	Supplementary to Total Biographies Ratio
Biographies of Eminent Monks	224	7	97.0%	3.0%
Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks	391	30	92.7%[3]	7.3%
Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty	319	20	94.0%	6.0%

The analysis of data across the three tables shows that *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* reaches a peak in the proportion of deathbed writings, the detail within those accounts, and their distribution between the main and supplementary biographies. This trend reflects a growing focus on existential themes from the Northern and Southern Dynasties through the Sui, Tang, and Song periods. Initially compiled during the turbulent Northern and Southern Dynasties—marked by frequent wars, rapid shifts in power, and widespread hardship—*Biographies of Eminent Monks* captures the era's instability and human struggles, as illustrated by Zhufahu 竺法護's flight westward during the chaotic reign of Jin Hui 290-306 AD. [4]

The *Book of Jin* 晉書 describes the Yongjia 永嘉 era's chaos, noting, "The world fell into disarray, leaving fewer than a hundred households in Chang'an 長安. Buildings crumbled, and weeds and thorns overgrew into forests. "[5]During the ravages of war, civilian survival was precarious; monks like Shi Daomeng 釋道猛 actively participated in medical charity[6], treating healthcare as a meritorious field. In the Sui Dynasty, Daoxuan's era coincided with a peak in Buddhism during the Sui and Tang periods, though its status faced periodic challenges. In the preface to *Extensive Collection to Broaden Illumination* 廣弘明集, Daoxuan reflects on the previous dynasty's conditions, stating, "Over six hundred years of tyrannical rule led to recurrent calamities and looming disasters.

Reflecting on past virtues shows that misfortunes had already taken shape. "[7] In the seventh year of the Wude era 武德 during the Tang Dynasty, Fu Yi 傅奕 labeled Buddhism as 'demonic speech' and 'barbarian writings,'[8] petitioning for its abolition. This hostile stance resulted in oppression and attacks on Daoxuan and other Buddhists by the government and rival religions, underscoring Daoxuan's persistent sense of crisis, even during times of peace.

These writings express concerns that transcend the secular concept of death, revealing a widespread awareness and caution about its nature. As the most devout Buddhists, monks reflect deeply on life’s end, considering karmic retribution and the possibility of ascension to the Pure Land. These reflections, hopes, and related karmic outcomes are central to their deathbed writings, adding depth to them. Consequently, the proselytizing intent in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* is more pronounced than in *Biographies of Eminent Monks*. Moreover, profound concerns about death and Daoxuan’s personal sense of crisis influenced the increased volume and depth of deathbed writings in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*. *Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty* was significantly influenced by this, directly adopting the deathbed writing style of *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*.

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3. THE STANDARD PATTERN OF DEATHBED WRITINGS IN CONTINUED BIOGRAPHIES OF EMINENT MONKS

The deathbed writings within *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* can be categorized into distinct types, each exhibiting common traits and following specific patterns. Based on how the monks perceive their approaching demise, these writings are divided into three modes—premonition, vision, and dream—each rooted in indigenous and religious cultural origins. In the premonition mode, monks receive indications of impending death through prophecies or particular signs. The visionary mode involves monks perceiving their approaching death by witnessing remarkable phenomena associated with ascension to the Pure Land. In the dream mode, monks receive signals of their impending demise through dreams. These three modes can be further detailed into seven categories. Following these criteria, the deathbed writings in *Biographies of Eminent Monks* and *Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty* are analyzed, with details for each type presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Data on Typical Patterns of Deathbed Writings in the Three Buddhist Biographies

Typical Modes		*Biographies of Eminent Monks*	*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*	*Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty*
Premonition Modes	Prophetic foreknowledge Phenological and astronomical omens	33 6	71 47	70 24
Visionary Modes	Divine and Buddhist Figures Visions Pure Land Visions	3 1	11 4	7 2
Dream Patterns	Self-verifying Dreams Corroborative Dreams Underworld journey dreams	1 2 1	11 5 4	1 3 4
Total and Corresponding Number		5151	157157	115115

In *Biographies of Eminent Monks*, the typical patterns of deathbed writings are used sparingly; their content is brief, and the techniques are underdeveloped. This suggests that the compilers were not yet deliberately employing these patterns. However, the nascent use of these patterns indicates they were gradually evolving into a trend. In contrast, *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* demonstrates a more deliberate and adept use of these patterns in deathbed writings, with enhanced details. Compared to *Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty*, *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* features richer texts with a higher density of typical patterns, including instances where a single monk utilizes two or more such patterns. The data presented above reinforces the value of using *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* as a case study to explore the unique characteristics and significance of deathbed writings.

3.1 Premonition Modes

Premonition mode consists of two types: prophecies and omens related to natural phenomena. These omens can arise from natural elements, animal behaviors, and celestial occurrences. Prophetic foreknowledge, on the other hand, involves personal predictions made by monks, which are primarily conveyed through spoken dialogue. Both physical and celestial omens serve as external signals closely linked to a monk's death or final nirvana and are frequently represented in various contexts.

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3.1.1 Prophetic Foreknowledge

The literature identifies 71 instances of prophetic foreknowledge, generally categorized into self-predictions and predictions made by others. Some monks can foresee their own demise without any signs or the need for hints from others or external objects. Before this, they often limited their travels and live reclusively, as exemplified by Shi Huichang 釋慧暢 (*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* p. 336). Shi Huichang recognized directly recognized that he would not be long for this world and prepared accordingly by leading a simple and reclusive life as he awaited his final moments. The ability of eminent monks to foresee death and sense fate is explained in Buddhist scriptures as the power to know one's destiny.

Some monks learned of their impending death through prophecies made by others, as illustrated by the case of Shi Huixuan 釋慧璿 (*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* p. 511). Following his lecture, Shi Huixuan was informed by a mountain spirit of his imminent passage to the Western Paradise, a prophecy that was ultimately fulfilled. Notably, April 8 marks the Buddha's birthday, and seventy-nine is the age at which the Buddha is said to have attained nirvana though some sources suggest eighty. [9] These significant time points indicate that the author intentionally linked Huixuan with the Buddha, thereby highlighting Huixuan's profound virtues and elevating him to the status of a Buddha incarnation. The mountain spirit is linked to local folk beliefs, as mountain worship in the pre-Qin period was seen as honoring these sites as abodes of deities or birthplaces of progenitors. [10] During the Han dynasty, mountain worship continued, with some mountains becoming deified and gaining supernatural powers, thus transitioning into mountain gods. Mount Tai 泰山, for instance, was believed to have the ability to know a person's lifespan; according to Ying Shao 應劭's *Fengsu Tongyi 風俗通義* during the Eastern Han 東漢, Mount Tai "possessed a golden casket and jade scepter, able to discern the length of human life." [11] By the Wei and Jin periods, the worship of mountain gods, including Mount Tai, "became part of Taoist culture, with mountain gods receiving talismans associated with Taoist practices." [12] Subsequently, folk belief in mountain gods continued and merged with Taoist culture. Traces of this merger are found in the *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, where mountain gods are depicted as deities foretelling the deaths of eminent monks.

Foreknowledge or predictions of impending death were not first mentioned in the *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*; they appeared earlier in the *Zuo Zhuan* and were often associated with divination. "Activities such as divination and dreaming can be considered forms of broader prophecy. "[13] Predictions about death in historical texts were frequently related directly to political matters. During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, divination "primarily aimed to combine macro and micro perspectives, focusing mainly on the macro. The macro aspect involved major national affairs and the nation's fate, while the micro aspect focused on individual fortunes and destinies."[14]Divinations concerned solely with predicting the time of death were rare. Monks' awareness of their own demise did not rely on divinatory tools; rather, it was more often linked to supernatural powers or phenomena. This emphasis reflects the compiler's intention to promote and illuminate the teachings while discouraging reliance on divination. [15] This contrasts with historical records. In Buddhist scriptures, the ability to foresee or prophesy without relying on any external objects is regarded as an aspect of the Buddha's vast supernatural powers and omniscience. The *Zengyi Ahan Sutra* 增一阿含經 states[16], the Buddha, with his understanding of all three times and his omniscience, naturally knows the lifespans of individuals. For example, Shi Huichang gained this ability

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through enlightenment obtained by studying Mahāyāna scriptures 大乘經典, such as the *Nirvana Sutra* 涅槃經: "After diligently studying for three years, he comprehended the 'Nirvana Sutra,' lamenting his late awakening," [17] thus acquiring the supernatural power of knowing his fate. The phenomena of foreknowledge in the deathbed writings of *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* reflect indigenous or pre-Qin shamanistic divination cultures and incorporate the concept of cosmic resonance, tracing back to the divine powers of Buddha in Buddhist scriptures. However, in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, the accounts of monks' deaths emphasize foreknowledge derived from recitation of scriptures and spiritual practice rather than divination. Such arrangements serve the overall missionary purpose of the text.

3.1.2 Phenological and astronomical omens

In addition to foreknowledge and prophecy, various signs indicated a monk's impending death, including natural and astronomical omens. There are 47 documented instances of such occurrences. These texts record abnormal phenomena in the environment surrounding the monks—both in the natural world and among living beings—before their deaths. Such phenomena can be interpreted as signs of a monk's imminent death. For example, as Shi Tanxun 釋曇詢 experienced (*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* pp.598-599), this text employs a flashback technique to describe various strange phenomena that occurred prior to his death, following the narration of his demise. The phenomena include divine lights, unusual fragrances, landslides, and collapsing mountains, alongside abnormal animal behavior. The arrangement of these miraculous and bizarre signs becomes denser and intensifies from Shi Tanxun's final moments to his deathbed phase, emphasizing their strange and exaggerated characteristics. The descriptions are detailed and poignant, portraying animals with human emotions, including instances of them weeping tears of blood in their grief.

During the pre-Qin period, documents recorded signs of impending death, exemplified by the account of Bo You 伯有's death in *Zuo Zhuan*, which combines omens with astronomical predictions. Belief in omens has deep historical roots in local cultures, employing a cognitive approach similar to that of divination. "Omens represent one of the earliest cognitive activities of humans regarding the interconnections of events. Early beliefs in omens treated them as direct causes, resulting in reliance, reverence, or dread of these omens." [18]Ancestors connected natural anomalies with worldly changes through causal reasoning, believing that variations in the natural environment foretold corresponding fortunes or misfortunes. They interpreted these signs to seek benefits and avoid harms.

During the pre-Qin era, many texts predominantly featured omens that predicted natural disasters, with fewer omens related to human affairs and rarely directly associating omens with an individual's imminent death. [19]This reflects a dependency on the natural environment, suggesting that human affairs were dictated by the heavens rather than by human effort. However, in the *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, omens of natural and celestial phenomena directly indicate a monk's death, without serving to predict other events. In addition to the gradual advancement of ancient understanding, it is evident that the function of omens as a cultural phenomenon has become more specific and targeted over time due to changes in historical context. In Buddhist scriptures, similar phenomena are noted to have occurred before the Buddha entered Nirvana, as described in the *Parinirvana Sutra* 般泥洹經（*Parinirvana Sutra, Upper Volume, in Taisho Tripitaka, Volume 1*）[20].

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Just before the Buddha was to enter Nirvana, the earth trembled, and divine light illuminated the surroundings. The Buddha explained to Ananda that the earthquake had many causes. One cause was that, upon his renunciation of life, the celestial realms perceive his unfettered divine powers, which leads to the quaking of the earth. The variations in the natural environment resulted from his immeasurable and freely exercised supernatural powers. Additionally, in the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* 大般涅槃經, the Buddha recounts how, during his final visit to Vaisali 毗耶離城, it rained despite the clear skies (In *Taisho Tripitaka*, Volume 1. p. 193).

The heavens expressed emotions unique to humans, grieving profoundly as the Buddha prepared to enter Nirvana. The rain was not merely rain; it was the tears of the heavens, falling in response to this grief. Initially, the Buddha decided to enter Nirvana, which was followed by earthquakes and heavenly rains. These events indicated a response from all worldly beings to the Buddha's actions. Everything was governed by the Buddha's supernatural powers and wisdom, allowing him to understand the hearts and minds of all beings. In *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, this legend is also adapted to describe the passing of Shi Tanqian 釋曇遷. [21]

3.2 Visionary Modes

The achievements of a monk's lifelong cultivation manifest in various ways at the end of life, one of which is the vision of apparitions. The ability to see such apparitions serves as a measure of a monk's level of spiritual attainment. The special forms perceived by some monks at the time of death are non-physical; they are visible only to a select few highly accomplished monks and remain invisible to others. In *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, there are 15 instances of monks witnessing apparitions at the moment of death. These visions can be categorized into two types: primarily deities and Buddhas, with fewer representations of Pure Land worlds. Upon witnessing these visions, monks typically pass away, which strongly indicates their rebirth in the Pure Land. The transition from the impure world to the blissful realm, being born within a lotus in the Pure Land, is referred to as rebirth. This process represents the ultimate ideal and belief of all Buddhists.

3.2.1 Divine and Buddhist Figures Visions[22]

Monks devoted to the Buddha, who maintain their vows, recite scriptures, and perform significant meritorious deeds, can see visions of divine Buddhas as they approach death. The author includes this to encourage the public to embrace Buddhism. These visions primarily depict the Buddha himself or his disciples and attendants, as illustrated in the case of Shi Hueijue 釋慧覺 (*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* p. 405). While traveling to the capital, Shi Hueijue 釋慧覺 fell ill. Despite his condition, he maintained a calm demeanor and a pleasant complexion, continuing to engage in normal conversations with those around him. Those accompanying him witnessed the great Vajra deity encircling him. Initially, Zhi Jue sensed his name being inscribed in *the Golden Record*, [23] acknowledging Hueijue's great virtue and immeasurable status. Furthermore, the entire biography traces Hueijue's journey from childhood, highlighting his extraordinary spiritual insight. It notes that "from childhood, he was marked by a unique aura and an unusual temperament. By the age of eight, he had entered monastic life and was deeply studying the Dharma. "[24]Throughout his life, he dedicated himself to defending the Dharma, ultimately receiving affirmation and support from Emperor Yang of Sui 隋煬帝. [25] Thus, when he passed away, the Vajra deity came to welcome him, an event witnessed by all those present.

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Another instance involves a monk witnessing the Buddha personally coming to greet him, as in the case of Shi Shanzhu 釋善胄 (*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p. 418). Faith, aspiration, and practice are the three essentials for rebirth: one must have firm faith in the true Buddha and the Pure Land, aspire to be reborn there, and continuously recite the name of Amitābha Buddha. Despite being seriously ill, Shi Shanzhou remained confident in his lifelong devotion to the Buddha, certain of his rebirth in the Pure Land. The text depicts a dramatic scene where Shi Shanzhou, at the brink of death, suddenly sat up, clasped his hands in prayer, made confessions, and repented before the Buddha. He passed away immediately after speaking, and his visions were later confirmed. This aligns with the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sutra* 般舟三昧經, which states: "Contemplate the Buddha of that land; adhere to the precepts with single-minded recitation—be it for a day and a night or seven days and nights—after seven days, Amitābha Buddha will appear, not seen while awake, but in dreams." [26] Indeed, sincere chanting of the Buddha's name will certainly lead to a vision of Amitābha Buddha. Their devotion and level of spiritual practice surpass those of others.

From their early years of practice, monks study numerous Buddhist scriptures that depict the Pure Land world and inspire a longing among the faithful. This image becomes deeply ingrained in the monks' inner worlds, forming the realm they pursue throughout their lives. Kumarajiva 鳩摩羅什's translation of the *Lotus Sutra* 妙法蓮華經 provides vivid descriptions of the deities and Buddhas of the peaceful world (*the Lotus Sutra*, Volume 6, in *Taisho Tripitaka*, Volume 9, p.54). Leaving behind the world of suffering, one enters the realm of peace, no longer hindered by greed, anger, ignorance, or mundane impurities. This purification of vision enables the individual to behold Amitābha Buddha and the bodhisattvas, who are born upon captivating lotus thrones. In the *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, descriptions of divine Buddha apparitions at the time of death, such as Shi Xuanhui 釋玄會 "seeing the Buddha come to welcome him, and subsequently breathing his last," [27]illustrate the manifest presence of divine Buddhas. Monks in this text, by sowing good causes throughout their lives, are later able to witness images of Buddhas—visions that undoubtedly reaffirm the beliefs of those aspiring to be reborn in the Pure Land. These divine apparitions, often seen in the moments before death, reflect the deep connection between spiritual cultivation and the karmic conditions that arise at the end of life. The ability of monks to perceive divine Buddha forms is also intricately linked to the subconscious. As monks approach death, their physical functions weaken, their consciousness fades, and their subconscious becomes dominant. At this stage, "mature karmic fruits are manifested as symbolic psychological images." [28]These visions of divine Buddhas or auspicious celestial signs align with the attributes of the Pure Land, which are discussed further in the text.

3.2.2 Pure Land Visions

The Pure Land is a sacred realm inhabited by saints, free from the pollution of the five defilements. At the moment of death, some monks witness apparitions of the Pure Land, primarily depicted through vivid scenery and dramatic portrayals. For instance, when Shi Lingqian 釋靈乾 was gravely ill, he experienced visions of the Trayastrimsa Heaven Palace 兜率天宮, as described in one text (*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p. 414). The document explains that Shi Lingqian's visions of rebirth were closely connected to his chanting and devotion to the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Despite being severely ill, Lingqian continuously gazed into the sky, as if perceiving something beyond the ordinary, without interacting with others. The text outlines a detailed account of Shi Lingqian's rebirth into the heavenly palace through a dialogue between master and disciple. Initially, a messenger in blue, a celestial youth,

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appeared to lead him to the outskirts of the Trayastrimsa Heaven Palace. This palace belongs to the realm of desire, with the inner court being Maitreya's 彌勒 Pure Land and the outer court a place of joy for many gods. The attendant caring for Lingqian also witnessed this vision and expressed a desire to be reborn in the Pure Land. He asserted that only by being reborn in the world of the Lotus Treasury 蓮華藏, where the true body of the Tathāgata resides, can one escape the suffering of samsara. Shi Lingqian's rebirth in the Pure Land aligns with what the *Sutra of the Beginning of the World* 起世經 states: "Upon the disintegration of the body and the end of life, one is reborn in the Sun Heaven Palace according to one's wishes. There, one immediately receives swift karmic retribution; hence, it is called the path of all good deeds."[29]Moreover, Shi Lingqian's early practices of supporting the Buddha through the three practices significantly influenced his experiences. [30]

There are accounts of other monks who witnessed various apparitions at the moment of death, described from the perspective of observers with less spiritual insight. Furthermore, the *Biography of Shi Daohong* 釋道洪 notes that only Daohong was able to see the apparitions he experienced during his death (*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p. 543). Initially, Daohong showed no discomfort from his illness. Subsequently, attendants observed him moving his hands through the air as if directing something, prompting inquiries about his actions. He responded that monks in neat attire were coming to worship, and he waved to them in greeting. He subsequently described seeing vibrant flowers and a green pond that was pleasing to the eye. Shortly thereafter, he joined his hands as if in prayer, announcing that he was bidding farewell to the great Rahu. He passed away immediately thereafter, and a strange fragrance filled the courtyard. This unusual fragrance signals the monk's transition to the Pure Land, as described in the *Sutra of Immeasurable Pure Equal Enlightenment* 佛說無量清淨平等覺經: "The bathing pools of the Immeasurable Pure Buddha 無量清淨佛 and various bodhisattvas and arhats 阿羅漢 contain water that is pure and fragrant, filled with fragrant flowers. These flowers emit a fragrance beyond comparison, indescribable. Their scent is not of earthly flowers but surpasses even those of heaven." [31] The unique fragrance belongs to the heavenly realm, not found in the ordinary world, and only those monks who have transcended worldly impurities can perceive it. This indicates that at the time of his death, Daohong not only beheld the Pure Land but also witnessed a gathering of monks and Rahu, a disciple of the Buddha, coming to welcome him. This aligns with the descriptions of the Pure Land in the Buddhist scriptures, allowing us to better understand how the monks truly perceive the Pure Land.

Now, let us examine the appearance of the Pure Land as described in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (*The Avatamsaka Sutra*, Volume 8, in the Taisho Tripitaka, Volume 9, p. 40). The Pure Land is splendidly adorned, with seas filled with perfumed waters and replete with various treasures, so clear that the bottom is visible, and the light from each treasure dazzles the eye. Lotus flowers bloom across the surface of these tranquil waters. The sound of the Buddha's teaching, regarded as a divine voice, purifies the minds and perceptions of the listeners. Bodhisattvas demonstrate their miraculous powers, thereby accumulating boundless merit. The shores are lined with brilliant treasures, numerous jeweled towers, and staircases of ten jewels, alongside forests of sala trees. The pervasive fragrance and melodious sounds delight the ears, creating an atmosphere of boundless light. In the Lotus Treasury World, countless seas of fragrant waters abound, with lotuses thriving within them. Each lotus contains multilayered, infinite worlds stacked upon one another, where all goodness and beauty are manifested, captivating all who behold them. The appearance and structure are illustrated in Figure 1.

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Figure 1: the Lotus Treasury World Diagram[32]

The documentation is elaborately detailed, presenting a sequence of unique and valuable treasures that collectively create an image of a tranquil and splendid ideal land. In a previous life, Shakyamuni Buddha 釋迦牟尼佛 offered five lotus stems to the ancient Buddha Dipankara 燃燈古佛 [33], an act that ultimately led to his enlightenment. This offering symbolizes auspicious cleanliness and utter immaculateness. The Lotus Treasury World, as envisioned by Shi Lingqian, is part of the Mind-Only Pure Land, a favored interpretation of Pure Land belief among scholarly Chinese monks. [34] This represents one category within the diverse traditions of Pure Land.

Additionally, secular literature contains accounts of fantasies about another world at the time of death or during serious illness. For example, Zhao Jianzi 趙簡子 describes his dream to others after his illness, as recorded in the *Records of the Grand Historian*.[35] After recovering from his severe illness, Zhao Jianzi shared with those around him that he had dreamed of visiting the divine realm, where he joined gods in heavenly revelry, accompanied by music and dance that stirred the soul. The deity foretold the forthcoming decline of the Jin state and the rise of Qin. The text carries a strong political tone, using imaginative descriptions to predict military outcomes. Notably, the portrayal of the heavenly realm resembles the Buddhist concept of the Pure Land, especially in its inclusion of gods, music, dance, and the characteristics described in Buddhist sutras 佛經. In contrast to the superficial representations of heavenly realms in secular texts, which often lack depth, Buddhist scriptures provide a multi-dimensional depiction of the Pure Land. They illustrate a beautiful setting free of suffering, where enlightenment is accessible to all, embodying the Buddhist aspiration for paradise. Moreover, the construction of afterlife worlds in Buddhist scriptures is systematic, with many texts significantly influencing local cultures.

3.3. Dream Patterns

Substantial scholarly work has focused on the terminal dreams described in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*,[36] However, studies that specifically examine the functions of these dreams in monk biographies remain relatively scarce. This paper categorizes the dream

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narratives in the terminal texts of *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* based on the dreamer and the specific functions of the dreams. The collection includes 16 texts about terminal dreams and 4 concerning journeys to the underworld. Since the metaphysical outcomes pursued by monks in their practices are not directly verifiable, devout authors should include rebirth testimonies to guide readers toward Buddhism sincerely. Exaggeration and unattainability are inappropriate. Regarding textual presentation, the structuring of terminal dreams serves as an artistic technique. While physical demise is inevitable, how monks confront it in extraordinary ways can serve as a model for all, providing valuable lessons and examples to follow. This is a significant emphasis by the author. From the perspectives of verification and purpose, self-evident dreams, corroborative dreams, and underworld journey dreams strongly support the successful rebirths of monks. Among these, underworld journey dreams represent a unique type of terminal dream.

3.3.1 Self-verifying dreams

Self-verifying dreams are those in which the biographical subject perceives signs related to their impending death. In these cases, the subject is the dreamer, and their transition often occurs shortly after awakening from such dreams. The content of these dreams resembles previously mentioned omens, such as witnessing a pole fall, a lamp extinguishing[37], or banners and flowers welcoming them.[38] However, these signs do not occur in real life but are embedded within the dreams experienced at the end of life. In contrast to the fragmentary signs seen in reality, these dreams that include omens of death present more cohesive narratives. The focus is now on selecting terminal dreams that emphasize the subject's identity and life experiences. Correlating terminal dreams with the subject's experiences offers a clearer understanding of the author's rationale for such an arrangement.

Monks have documented dreams in which divine beings call them to heaven to teach the scriptures, as exemplified in *The Biography of Shi Zhi Tuo* 釋智脫 (*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p.325). The text employs a retrospective narrative technique. Zhi Tuo experienced the same dream both before his death and on his dying day. In this dream, a child holding a lotus informed him that the lord of the Trayastrimsha heaven 忉利天, Heavenly Emperor Śakra, had invited him to ascend to heaven to teach. Following this vision, Zhi Tuo sat in meditation, chanting the Buddha's name, and soon encountered the impermanence of life. The portrayal of Heavenly Emperor Śakra's invitation to preach affirms Zhi Tuo's lifelong accomplishments in teaching the Dharma. His virtuous teachings are highlighted in the text with phrases such as, "He perpetually turned the wheel of Dharma, adorning the assembly with splendor," and, "The emperor invited him to enlighten, swiftly moving the divine mechanism."[39] Zhi Tuo became renowned for his teachings, earning him an audience with the emperor, who invited him to deliver sermons within the palace. Thus, the structure of his terminal dreams reflects his personal qualities and life achievements.

Secular literature also includes accounts of dreams that foreshadow impending death, such as the narrative in which Confucius dreams of sitting between two pillars (*Records of the Grand Historian*, p.1944). Confucius was severely ill and mourned deeply for the world's departure from the proper path. He recalled a dream from the previous night in which he sat between two pillars in a hall designated for the coffins of the Yin people, indicating his impending death as he belonged to the Yin dynasty. This dream materialized seven days later. His dream, signifying his impending death, resembles the self-verifying dreams in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, both of which feature personal premonitions of the end. However, secular self-verifying dreams typically relate closely to the subject's health condition.

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Before his dream, Confucius had experienced a severe psychological blow and was critically ill, overwhelmed with grief and uncertain of his survival. In contrast, the terminal self-verifying dreams in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* do not necessarily correlate with physical health; the subjects often remain calm and indifferent. Monks, upon contracting illnesses, perceive life and death differently from laypeople, demonstrating contrasting attitudes and behaviors. In a monk's life, illness does not signify the end but indicates the completion of their karmic mission, allowing them to transcend concerns about life and death.[40] Furthermore, some terminal self-verifying dreams in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* also foretell ascension to celestial realms, a feature rich with religious implications and distinct from secular texts.

3.3.2 Corroborative dreams

In addition to the protagonist dreaming of various signals foretelling his death, there are corroborative dreams in which others also dream that he is about to die, featuring symbols predicting his imminent passing. For instance, before his death, Shi Shensu 釋神素 bid farewell to his fellow monk Zhi Kuan 志寬 in a dream (*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p.465). This text shifts the focus of the dream to the protagonist's friend. It introduces a narrative in which the friend dreams of saying farewell to Shi Shensu after his passing, with the dream aligning perfectly with the actual time of death. Before Shi Shensu's death, his friend Master Zhi Kuan, sensing a premonition and feeling suffocated, dreamed of Shi Shensu visiting him. In this dream, Shi Shensu sat on Zhi Kuan's bed and bid farewell with deep emotion and heartfelt words. In his farewell, he expressed his inspiration from the Buddha's immense compassion in liberating beings and his pursuit of the Dharma to ensure such virtues endure. Acknowledging his own shortcomings and unfulfilled duties, he regretted the sudden approach of impermanence and came to bid farewell, urging Zhi Kuan to continue his spiritual practices diligently and uphold goodness. As Zhi Kuan watched Shi Shensu depart in the dream, he suddenly became aware of something significant. It was only the next day, when he asked others, that he learned Shi Shensu had died the previous night, coinciding exactly with the time of the farewell dream. The biography of Zhi Kuan provides an additional description of this farewell dream: "On the night of the 25th, a divine spirit gathered; we shared a bed, talked throughout the night, and only parted at dawn. "[41] This dream not only confirms Shi Shensu's passing but also highlights the profound bond and deep affection between the two, evoking strong emotions. In *Biographies of Eminent Monks*, there are two instances of corroborative dreams in which the protagonist's disciples dream of divine beings coming to welcome them, described in a straightforward and concise manner. In contrast, the corroborative dreams in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* are more splendidly written, featuring vivid embellishments and richer literary quality. For instance, in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, Masters Hui Ming 慧命 and Fa Yin 法音 both fall ill simultaneously, prompting dreams in which celestial beings descend to earth, with a scene that is bright and clear, accompanied by music and exotic fragrances.[42] Subsequently, both masters pass away simultaneously, culminating in a celebrated tale of kindred spirits. The character portrayals in these dream sequences are more developed, which stands out in contrast to those in *Biographies of Eminent Monks*.

3.3.3 Underworld journey dreams

Underworld journey dreams in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* represent a unique type of terminal dream, in which monks are summoned by the underworld to preach

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and undertake journeys through hell, later returning to the living world to inform others. This is essentially a near-death experience for monks; though not technically dead, it resembles a deathbed experience. At this point, the monk's body is inert, resembling death; hence the saying, "Entering the underworld is somewhat similar to dreaming."[43] In essence, entering the underworld can be described as a form of "soul-departing dream entry." Thus, journeys to the underworld are also examined as a type of dream experience. Due to their unique role, monks in the underworld engage in spreading the Dharma and guiding sentient beings rather than undergoing punishment. They assist those suffering in hell to escape its torments, highlighting the Buddhist role in the salvation of beings. Consequently, the text focuses on monks preaching the Dharma instead of primarily emphasizing the intimidating aspects of hell. Furthermore, upon waking from such journeys, the monks share their experiences, facilitating communication between the underworld and the living realm. For example, Master Hui Leng 慧稜 (*Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p. 498). This text is exceptionally captivating, featuring two dream sequences that are rich in content and plot, strung together like pearls and utilizing contrasting perspectives effectively. The reading experience evokes a sense of wonder and fascination. The first underworld journey dream does not feature the protagonist Hui Leng directly; instead, it revolves around him. His companion, Master Chang, serves as a conduit. In his dream, King Yama invites Hui Leng to the underworld to lecture on the Three Treatises, while Zhi Ba 智拔 expounds on the *Lotus Sutra*.[44]The dream narrative extends beyond merely seeing King Yama or an underworld messenger; underworld figures emerge, even approaching the protagonist's circle of life, infusing the reading with a sense of divine mystery.

Consideration of the afterlife has long been a part of indigenous thought. However, before the introduction of the Buddhist concept of hell, the ancient understanding of the underworld was not yet systematic. It primarily involved a division between yin 陰 and yang 陽, lacking a clear concept of an underworld. During the pre-Qin period, texts like "Zuo Zhuan" refer to "Huangquan" 黃泉 [45]below, while *Chuci* 楚辭 mentions "Youdu" 幽都, both of which were managed by mythical figures such as Shentu 神荼 and Yulei 鬱壘 [46]. This reflects a strong mythological influence. During the Han dynasty, concepts such as "Mount Tai's Lord 泰山府君," "Liang Fu 梁父," and "Hao Li 蒿裡" were all associated with the imagination of the underworld. These notions emerged from the dualism of soul and spirit that was prevalent at the time.[47] By the late Western Han to early Eastern Han period, the concept of "Mount Tai governing the ghosts" emerged, indicating that after death, an individual's registration would be managed by the Lord of Mount Tai in the underworld. This concept signifies the maturation of indigenous concepts regarding the afterlife.[48]

Following the advent of Buddhism, beliefs regarding the underworld shifted to emphasize Ksitigarbha 地藏王 and the governance of the "Ten Kings of Hell" under King Yama, with the Lord of Mount Tai designated as the seventh king.[49] This transformation reflects the deeper integration of Buddhism with native Chinese culture. By the Wei and Jin dynasties, traditional Chinese views on ghosts, spirits, and the governance of the underworld by Mount Tai had evolved through the incorporation of Buddhist concepts of hell.[50] In the *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, accounts of journeys through the underworld frequently reference the belief in the two kings of hell. Rather than concentrating on the depiction of the underworld or hell itself, these texts emphasize the journeys of monks and devotees through the underworld. "Monks can alleviate the sufferings of those in hell through their recitations and petitions, thereby highlighting the practical role of Buddhism and its monks in redeeming the masses."

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Monks, as Buddhist emissaries, traverse hell to preach sutras and aid tormented souls. They promote the accumulation of merit for rebirth in the Pure Land and encourage reciting scriptures to earn spiritual rewards. This emphasis gives these narratives a strong religious advocacy and didactic purpose.

4. CONCLUSION

In summary, the three types and seven categories of deathbed writings in the *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* can each be traced back to their respective Buddhist and indigenous cultural origins. From a comparative literature perspective, these writings draw from both Buddhist cultural roots and indigenous elements. While local narratives also depict deathbed scenes, the significant emphasis on these moments arises from Buddhist beliefs in the afterlife. The stylistic approach of the deathbed writings in the "Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks" effectively utilizes the strengths of local biographical and supernatural writing traditions. Throughout the biographical narratives, the text emphasizes the exemplary character and conduct of the monks. However, upon death, the narrative takes on a surreal quality, crystallizing the fusion between Buddhist and indigenous cultures. This style merges biographical and fantastical forms, transcending the previous dichotomy between these genres. The text reflects the coexistence of Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist cultural syntheses, epitomizing the confluence of the three teachings during the Sui and Tang dynasties.

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Notes and References

1) Chen Lixiang 陳力祥,"Interconnection of Life and Death in Pre-Qin Confucianism and Daoism - A Study from a Comparative Perspective", *Lanzhou Academic Journal*, 2006, Issue 1, P. 6.
2) Based on the Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局 edition of *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, annotated by Guo Shaolin, prefaces, tables of contents, titles, punctuation, and textual corrections are not included. Both *Biographies of Eminent Monks* and *Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty* primarily rely on the Zhonghua Book Company edition.
3) In *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, deathbed writings initially focused in the main biographies, shift towards the supplementary texts, indicating a broader dissemination of end-of-life concerns. Conversely, *Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty* returns to a primary concentration of these writings in the main biographies, where awareness of end-of-life issues remains more confined.
4) Hui Jiao 慧皎, *Biographies of Eminent Monks*, annotated and collated by Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, Zhonghua Book Company in 1992, p. 24.
5) *Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p. 296.
6) Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, *Book of Jin*, published by Zhonghua Book Company in 1974, p. 132.

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7) Daoxuan, *Extensive Collection to Broaden Illumination*, Volume 1, in Taisho Tripitaka 大正藏, Volume 52, published by Xin Wenfeng Publishing Company 新文豐出版公司, 1983, p. 97.

8) Liu Xu 劉昫 et al., *Old Book of Tang* 舊唐書, Zhonghua Book Company, 1975, p. 2715.

9) The age of the Buddha at seventy-nine is noted in the translation of the *Beihua Sutra* 悲華經, Volume 5, by Tan Wuchen 曇無讖 from Northern Liang 北涼, which is found in the *Taisho Tripitaka*, Volume 3, page 197.

10) Zhang Haixia 張海霞, "A Preliminary Exploration of Mountain Worship in the Pre-Qin Period," Master's thesis, Xiangtan University, 2007, p. 27.

11) Ying Shao, with annotations by Wang Liqi 王利器, *Annotations to the Comprehensive Meaning of Customs* 風俗通義校注, Zhonghua Book Company in 1981, p. 64.

12) Liu Zhi 劉志, "Mountain Worship and Taoist Culture During the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties," *Journal of Sichuan Normal University*, Social Sciences Edition, 2010, Issue 4.

13) Lü Donghui 呂東輝, "Discussing the Prophecies in *Zuo Zhuan* 左傳, " *Journal of Inner Mongolia University for Nationalities*, Social Sciences Edition, 2007, Issue 1.

14) Qin Nannan 秦楠楠, "Research on Prophecies in Records of *the Grand Historian* 史記, " Master's thesis, Xinyang Normal University, 2021.

15) The *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* includes a case where divination predicted an early death that did not materialize due to faith in Buddhism, as noted on pages 447-448: "Shi Tanzang 釋曇藏, at fifteen, was predicted to live a short life; yet he prayed to Guanyin 觀音 and reached the age of sixty-nine." Daoxuan not only opposed divination but also believed it was often performed for profit, contributing to his negative stance: "The five evils… the fifth is to forcefully divine good and ill fortune for personal gain." For further reference, see Daoxuan, as authored by Yuanzhao 元照: *Vinaya in Four Parts with Annotations, Comprehensive Records of Monastic Practices* 四分律含注戒本疏行宗記, in *Newly Compiled Continued Tripitaka* 新纂卍續藏, Volume 39, Kokusho Kankokai 株式會社國書刊行會, 1989, p. 735.

16) Translated by Sengqie Tibo 僧伽提婆: *Zengyi Ahan Sutra*, Volume 44, Taisho Tripitaka, Volume 2, published by Xin Wenfeng Publishing Company in 1983, bottom of page 787.

17) *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p. 366.

18) Liao Qun 廖群, "The Primitive Belief in Omens in *the Classic of Mountains and Seas* 山海經 and Its Value in Folkloristics," Journal of Folklore Studies 民俗研究, 2006, Issue 2.

19) In *the Classic of Mountains and Seas*, there are 32 omens of natural disasters and 16 omens of human calamities, with the former being twice as numerous as the latter. The majority of omens associated with human disasters relate to conscription and similar actions by rulers, and they are not linked to omens of death. In contrast, *the Book of*

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Songs primarily predicts natural disasters and determines auspicious wedding dates based on natural phenomena, atmospheric conditions, and favorable signs, with virtually no direct references to omens of death. For further details, refer to Zhong Mengzhuo 種夢卓's "Research on Prognostic Phenomena in *the Book of Songs*," Master's Thesis, Liaoning Normal University, 2018.

20) Eastern Jin, Translator unknown, *Parinirvana Sutra*, Upper Volume, in *Taisho Tripitaka*, Volume 1. Xin Wenfeng Publishing Company, 1983, pp. 180-181.

21) From *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, page 278: "'After I pass away, give my body to the animals and burn what remains according to ritual, without preserving any bones'... After the rites and cremation, although the sky was clear and free of clouds, a light rain fell, similar to the situation with Dipankara 闍毗 Buddha."

22) The deathbed writings of three Buddhist biographies exclusively feature male divine and Buddha figures, with no female figures recorded. However, in *the Biographies of Buddhist Nuns* 比丘尼傳, authored by Shi Baochang 釋寶唱 during the Liang dynasty, there is a notable account of a rare female divine figure appearing at the time of death. The appearance of female divine figures is closely related to the gender dynamics of the time. For further details, see Zhang Le 張樂's thesis: "Study on the Psychological Conversion of Buddhist Nuns During the Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties," Master's thesis, Northwest University, 2013, pp. 14-18.

23) *The Golden Record*, was originally a Taoist scripture. Its content primarily addresses the *Three Cavern Scriptures* 三洞經書 and the transmission rituals of Laozi 老子's Five Thousand Characters 五千文. Additionally, from Tang dynasty Falin 法琳: *Debates* 辯證論, Volume 2, Taisho Tripitaka Volume 52, page 497, published by Xin Wenfeng Publishing Company in 1983: "According to the scriptures, there are three records and seven classes... This commentary reflects the monks' perception of the importance and function of the Golden Record." Furthermore, in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p.405, the Biography of Shi Hueijue states: "His profound discourses and the dissemination of significant meanings were characterized by powerful, clear arguments that flowed like clouds and springs—truly as if capturing the sun and the moon, filling the room with gusts of wind. Despite his limited ambitions and stagnant emotions, he swiftly transcended pettiness. His transformative impact, akin to that of orchids, and his persuasive efforts, comparable to shaping clay, expanded day by day—truly profound. This section praises Hueijue's captivating presence while he preached. Therefore, the reference to the Golden Record acknowledges Master Hueijue's contributions to the dissemination and teaching of the Dharma.

24) *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p. 404.

25) *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p. 405.

26) Translated by Zhiloujiachen 支婁迦讖 during the Later Han dynasty, the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sutra*, Volume I, is found in *Taisho Tripitaka*, Volume 13, published by Xin Wenfeng Publishing Company in 1983, p. 905.

27) *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p. 526.

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28) Shi Rushi 釋如石,"Types and Religious Psychological Functions of Auspicious Signs at Death Part I — Primarily Focusing on *the Record of Pure Land Sages* 淨土聖賢錄" in Fa Guang, 2008, Issue 229.

29) Translated by Jñanagupta 闍那崛多 et al. during the Sui Dynasty: *Sutra of the Beginning of the World*, Volume 10, in *Taisho Tripitaka*, Volume 1, published by Xin Wenfeng Publishing Company, 1983, p. 359.

30) Translated by Zhiloujiachen: *Sutra of Immeasurable Pure Equal Enlightenment*, Volume 1, in *Taisho Tripitaka*, Volume 12, p. 284.

31) Translated by Zhiloujiachen during the Later Han: *Sutra of Immeasurable Pure Equal Enlightenment*, Volume 1, in *Taisho Tripitaka*, Volume 12, p.284.

32) Daotong of the Song Dynasty wrote in *The Avatamsaka Sutra Swallowing the Ocean Collection*, Volume 1, published in the New Edition of the Complete Buddhist Canon, Vol. 12, Taipei: Xinwenfeng Publishing Co., 1995, p. 759.

33) When the Bodhisattva saw the Buddha, he scattered five flower stems that remained suspended in the air above the Buddha, as though they had roots, with none falling to the ground. He later scattered two additional flowers, which clung to the Buddha's shoulders. Recognizing the Bodhisattva's profound intent, the Buddha commended him, saying: "You have pursued purity through countless kalpas, subdued your heart and life, renounced desires, and upheld emptiness, with neither arising nor ceasing. With boundless compassion, you have accumulated merit and fulfilled your vows, and now you have attained your goal." Consequently, it was prophesied: "From now on, in ninety-one eons, during an eon called 'Virtuous,' you shall become a Buddha named Shakyamuni." This is referenced in the translation by Upasaka Zhi Qian 優婆塞支謙 from Wu: *Sutra on the Former Deeds and Divine Responses of the Crown Prince* 佛說太子瑞應本起經, Upper Volume, *Taisho Tripitaka*, Volume 3, p. 473.

34) In Buddhist scriptures, Pure Lands are categorized into two major types. The first type consists of those created through the vows and accumulated merits of Buddhas when they were Bodhisattvas facing numerous adversities over many eons. This category includes the Pure Lands of Akshobhya Buddha 阿閦佛淨土, Maitreya Buddha 彌勒淨土, Manjushri Bodhisattva 文殊菩薩淨土, Medicine Buddha 藥師佛淨土, and Amitābha Buddha 阿彌陀佛淨土. The second type considers Pure Lands to be manifestations of the mind alone, existing within the minds of all beings, such as the Mount Wutai Pure Land 阿彌陀佛淨土 and the Lotus Treasury World Pure Land 蓮華藏世界淨土. Further information can be found in Chen Yangjiong 陳揚炯's *A Comprehensive History of the Pure Land School in China* 中國淨土宗通史, published by Phoenix Publishing, Nanjing, 2008, pp. 18-40.

35) Han dynasty Sima Qian, edited by the Editorial Department of Zhonghua Book Company, Records of *the Grand Historian*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1982, p. 1787.

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36) Research on terminal dreams includes Liang Liling 梁麗玲's work, "The Writing and Characteristics of 'Demonstration of Serenity Dreams' in Monastic Biographies Through the Ages," published in the National Chengchi University Journal of Chinese Studies, 2019, Issue 32, pp. 167-199. This article categorizes dreams related to pre-death visions into five types: foretelling the time of death, holy assembly's welcome, Pure Land visions, signs of destruction, and farewell dreams. Additionally, research on the narrative aspects of terminal dreams is exemplified by Ding Liangyan's article, "Observing the Self-Therapeutic Function of Pure Land Practices through the Narratives of Jin and Tang Monk Biographies, Focused on Biographies of Eminent Monks and Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks," published in Wutai Shan Research, 2019, Issue 2, pp. 19-24. Studies in dream culture include Chai Gen 柴根's master's thesis, "A Study on the Depictions of Monks' Deaths in Early Monastic Biographies," completed at Northwest University in 2021, among others.

37) "Within a year, I dreamed that a long pole fell on its own in a clear reflection, and the light of a lamp extinguished by itself," as recorded in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p. 286.

38) He told his disciples, "I dreamed that the four assemblies, with banners and flowers arrayed in the sky, welcomed me to ride the clouds, signifying that my karmic rewards are complete," as found in *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p. 186.

39) *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, pp. 325-326.

40) Liu Yuanru 劉苑如 and others, "A Digital Study of the Descriptions of Illnesses in the Biographies of Monks Through the Ages—Starting from the Consideration of Monks' Lifespans," published in the 2020 edition of Chinese Literature and Philosophy Research Communication, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 25-26.

41) *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p. 544.

42) As seen in *the Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, p. 612: "He predicted the day of his death and, with his sound hand, went to the pine forest. At the same time, he fell ill. The group then had a dream in which celestial beings descended to earth, their banners shining like the sun. They also heard the sound of a room chanting ‘Good!’ accompanied by strange fragrances and unusual music. Both sages were thirty-eight years old."

43) *Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty*, compiled by Zan Ning 贊寧 and annotated by Fan Xiangyong 范祥雍, published by Zhonghua Book Company in 1987, p. 555.

44) Zhi Ba's passing occurred before that of Hui Leng, and they shared a friendship, as referenced on page 500 of *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*: "Zhi Ba informed Master Leng, 'Zhi Ba has completed his responses, and soon difficulties will arise, all of a spiritual nature. Today, I bid farewell to the esteemed patrons from our locality and beyond.'"

45) Huangquan lacked a structured notion of an underworld society, deriving solely from funeral customs intended to ensure the deceased's peaceful rest. However, the evolution of the concept of Huangquan indicates significant developments in ancient perspectives on the soul and the underworld.

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46) In Wang Chong 王充's *Lun Heng* 論衡, he references the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, stating, "In the Cang Sea lies Mount Duoshuo 度朔, atop which stands a vast peach tree spanning three thousand miles. Among its branches to the northeast lies the Ghost Gate, the portal for myriad ghosts. Atop, two divine figures, Shentu and Yulei, supervise the multitude of ghosts. " For further insights, refer to *the Classic of Mountains and Seas* 山海經箋疏, published by Qilu Book Society, Jinan, 2010, p. 5128.

47) Around the 2nd century BC, the dualistic concept of the soul was established in China. The soul is associated with yang, characterized as active and celestial, while the spirit relates to yin, characterized as passive and earthly. After death, these components separate from the body. Due to the soul's lighter nature compared to the heavier spirit, rituals to summon the soul emerged. For more information, refer to Yu Yingshi 余英時's *Views on Life and Death in the Eastern Han Dynasty* 東漢生死觀, published by Shanghai Ancient Books in 2005, pp. 134-138.

48) Wei Fengjuan 韋鳳娟 discusses the transformation of underworld concepts in her article, titled "From 'Underworld' to 'Hell'—On the Evolution of Concepts of the Underworld in the Ghost Stories of the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties," published in Literary Heritage, 2007, issue 1, pp. 16-25.

49) After death, individuals journey through the realms of the underworld, encountering the judgments of the ten kings at distinct intervals, as noted in Tang Zangchuan 藏川's "*Buddha Speaks of Preparing for Life by the Ten Kings Sutra* 佛說預修十王生七經," Volume 1, found in *Newly Compiled Swastika Continuation Collection*, Volume 1, p. 409.

50) Wang Zhipeng 王志鵬, "The Origins and Expression of Hellish Thought in Dunhuang Manuscripts," published in *Silk Road Cultural Studies*, 2022, inaugural issue, p.100.

51) Han Hong, "Research on Buddhist Beliefs and Underworld Entry Stories during the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties," PhD Dissertation, Lanzhou University, 2019, pp. 44-46.