

**In the Realm of the Dragon King: Sita and Hanuman meet
Cinderella and Sun Wukong**

**Fay Beauchamp, Ph.D.
Professor of English
Community College of Philadelphia**

Introduction

If faculty and students studying early world literature want to turn away from an Euro-centric emphasis on tragic male heroes on quests for glory, we can travel a border-crossing literary trajectory from Valmiki's c 500 BCE *Ramayana* to the c 850 Yexian original Asian version of Cinderella, to the 1592 *Journey to the West (JTTW)*, and with strands extending to Japan. Readers will discover Asian women who are transgressive, compassionate, loveable, suffering, royal and divine. As narratives moved from India through southeast China (near Vietnam), to the capital cities of China and beyond, the stories were of course transformed. Humor, irony, and imagination made the stories become more secular, but still immensely popular. Ten years ago I began connecting Sita, imprisoned by Ravana and saved after the Monkey King Hanuman alights on a tree over Sita's head, and Yexian, the Zhuang-minority step-daughter rescued by a strange being with wild hair who appears out of the sky. At that time, any trace of the *Ramayana* in China was questioned; a "fierce debate" (Dimock, 235) centered on what seemed an obvious influence of Hanuman's characterization on Sun Wukong, the Monkey King of *Journey to the West*. In the last two years, however, academia has accepted the two monkeys on the same family tree. Here I present new evidence to settle in Yexian, if not up in the branches, but at least hugging the same tree as she lies sleeping below.

Debate over the *Ramayana* in China and *Journey to the West*

While the *Ramayana's* transmission in Southeast Asia has led to Rama, Sita, and the Monkey King Hanuman being widely known in Thailand, Cambodia and Indonesia, that there was any knowledge of this Hindu religious text in China before 1600 has been vociferously contested. As my ASDP conference paper attested (March 2014), however, the impartial University of Chicago scholar Anthony Yu changed his position on the issue in his introduction to the 2012 edition of his four-volume *Journey to the West (JTTW)* translation. Professor Yu analyzed the scholarship on both sides in depth and accepted evidence that the *Ramayana* indeed crossed borders into China and clearly influenced the 1592 canonical version of *JTTW*. I had been referred to this new introduction by University of Pennsylvania Victor Mair, who has served as a mentor in this NEH/ASDP Bridging Cultures project. In an interview, Professor Mair described how, for the past forty years, he has challenged Glen Dudbridge's scholarship that concluded that evidence for *Ramayana's* influence in China was only "circumstantial" and "generalized" (Dudbridge, p.) Such an academic controversy is important to engage students in broad general education courses such as world literature or interdisciplinary humanities. The debate demonstrates to students that scholarship, including student work, is part of a living process forming hypotheses, and gathering, analyzing and presenting new evidence. And it matters whether we see chasms or bridges among world areas.

Professor Dudbridge sought to give due recognition to China's indigenous sources and to counter a hundred years of British propensity to see "Indo-European" mythology everywhere. Victor Mair, on the other hand, had read the *Ramayana* in English before

reading much East Asian literature, and learned Sanskrit at the same time as Chinese and Japanese. From his days as a graduate student he always saw analogs among Asian texts. In a 1970s book review, Mair challenged Dudbridge's conclusions made in the 1970 *The Hsi-yu Chi [JTTW]: A Study of Antecedents to the Sixteenth-Century Chinese Novel*. From Mair's point of view, to trace stories as they crossed borders was a matter of continuing documentation and analysis. He felt that there was no one breakthrough that led to a change of academic consensus as indicated by Anthony Yu's new stance; students and scholars from all over the world had contributed for decades.

Mair's and his followers' arguments primarily rest on close textual analysis of extended parallel passages. Mair not only wrote his own overview of the "Hanumat-Suen Wukung" controversy in 1989, but also edited and published in *Sino-Platonic Papers* the work of others such as Mair's student Hera Walker in 1998 and Ramnath Subbaraman in 2002. Walker and Subbaraman fully documented textual overlap, working in English and using Robert Goldman's translations of the *Ramayana* and Antony Yu's authoritative 1978-83 first edition of his four-volume translation of *JTTW*. It should be noted that once translations of both the *Ramayana* and *JTTW* started appearing where scholars were meticulous in making a close, literal translation, comparisons were possible that before weren't attempted. Hera Walker did not know Sanskrit and was just beginning to learn Chinese; so this is a possible reason why her work did not make the impact it might have. In 2002, Ramnath Subbaraman focused on *JTTW* Chapters 68-71, the episode of the Scarlett-Purple Kingdom where the narrative drive follows *Ramayana's* plot the closest. These chapters, incidentally, were not

included in Arthur Waley's translation *Monkey* frequently taught in U.S. college courses before Anthony Yu's 1978-83 translations. The noted Chinese philosopher and diplomat Hu Shih lamented these chapters' absence in his 1943 preface to Waley's *Monkey*. Not coincidentally, Hu Shih had made a case for *Ramayana* influence on *JTTW* in 1923 – he had read *JTTW* in the original Chinese, of course.

In 2012, Anthony Yu's introduction to his second edition of *JTTW* summed up thirty years of scholarship, but focused a paragraph on Subbaraman's monograph (specifically Subbaraman pp. 18-25). I quote Yu's paragraph here at length because of the particular details he describes:

When the novel and the epic are juxtaposed, *Journey* (chapters 68-71) and *Ramayana* contain astonishing and sustained parallels in plot construction and description of characters. The comparable features include the anguish caused by the abducted loss of a spouse (Rama's grief for Sita; the King of the Scarlet-Purple Kingdom for his queen consort); the misery of female prisoners as depicted in facial dejection, unkempt and dirty clothing, disheveled hairdo, absence of makeup, jewelry, and ornaments, and constant weeping . . .; and devising tokens of recognition (rings and bracelets) by the different monkey figures to establish the kidnapped female's identity. When the novel's Bodhisattava Guanyin providentially explains the separation and reunion of the royal couple, she discloses the human king's one past offence when hunting when his arrow accidentally wounded the Bodhisattva Great King Peacock. (Yu 2012, Vol. I-p. 15).

Dudbridge wrote his book which denied the connection between *Ramayana* and *JTTW* twenty or more years before Mair (1989), Walker (1998) and Subbaraman (2002) published their textual analyses. But Dudbridge's main objection rested on the question of intervening texts in China that demonstrated knowledge of the *Ramayana*. Because some manuscripts lay hidden in Dunhuang, etc., the question he raised was how an author of *JTTW* could have had access to these rare written documents. Very forcefully Dudbridge states: "Hu Shih and, in a more extreme degree, Lin P'ei-chih...effectively

started from their conclusions—identifying two figures from alien traditions – and simply assumed intervening stages not attested in any but the most circumstantial or generalized forms of evidence. Before the *Ramayana* theory can be of any substantial assistance there must be clear signs, not simply that some form of the story was current in a popular Chinese environment before, say, the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, but that the [*Ramayana*] monkey-hero as such . . . was known to Chinese audiences. The quantities of merely circumstantial evidence serve only, unless they supply this central link, to beg the question - why should no clear trace of the *Ramayana* monkey remain in Chinese sources?" (Dudbridge, 162).

While I have not found intervening Hanuman-figures swinging by their tails, I do have an intervening text to nominate. It is possible that the link between *Ramayana* Monkey King Hanuman and Sun Wukong, the Chinese Monkey King, has seemed so obvious when comparing the Valmiki and *JTTW* texts or seeing popular performances in India, Southeast Asia and China, that an emphasis on monkeys has rightly absorbed attention. Although the scene where Hanuman finds Sita and arranges for her rescue seems pivotal, my focus has been on the woman, Sita, rather than the monkey. In the Chapters 68-71 where Sun Wukong rescues a woman called Lady Golden Sage and reunites her with a king, the woman is not a main character, and described in such ludicrous sexually compromised terms vis-à-vis her captor as to make comparisons to Sita objectionable. (In sum she takes off all the clothes of the Ravana-like captor on the pretext of looking for lice, removes his "golden bells" i.e. testicles, and invites him to join her between silk sheets at which point he has to decline in embarrassment (*JTTW*,

Vol. 3, pp.304-305).) While one is left feeling that the *JTTW* author not only does not hold the Sita-figure in reverence, but scandalously ridicules her and diminishes her, the plot and other details (besides the lewd ones) definitely demonstrate direct influence. Therefore if the author knows of *Ramayana* as a narrative, it is not in any religious form or feeling.

The savagery of the humor could mean means that the *Ramayana* story, upon reaching the *JTTW* author, had already been secularized out of recognition. It is not simply that *JTTW* is a profoundly Buddhist text, with the main character the Buddhist monk Xuanzang traveling to India to secure Buddhist not Hindu sutras, but that the Hindu reverence for the divinity of kings and queens as avatars of gods, is a lost belief. The *JTTW* author is not challenging or mocking Hindu belief, but is unaware that the story conveys Hindu belief. Indian and Chinese stories do not represent “alien traditions” to use Dudbridge’s term, but rather demonstrate evolving, transforming, and proliferating traditions over space and time.

The Search for “Intervening Stories” between the *Ramayana* and *JTTW*: *Textual Parallels among Ramayana, Cinderella/Yexian, and JTTW*

Dudbridge does point to a puzzle – how *JTTW* could reflect *Ramayana* plot and descriptive detail without an evident trail of intervening texts being read in China between Valmiki writing in Sanskrit (c 500 BCE) and 1592. One needs to look for intervening stories that demonstrate the meaningful motifs that Yu lists as stemming from the *Ramayana* but combined in novel ways. One doesn’t have to say that Chinese audiences in general knew these texts *if one can show that the author knew the*

intervening text. Looking for Tang Dynasty (618-906 CE) texts is logical because even *Journey to the West* by its very title emphasizes that this period is one of heightened communication between China and India; this is also the time when knowledge of the *Ramayana* spread Hindu beliefs through Southeast Asia (see bibliography for many titles on this subject). My nomination here for one intervening text is a Cinderella story concerning a young girl called Yexian recorded in a miscellany *Youyang zazu* published by the Chinese Duan Chengshi in 850 CE.

In moving to the Asian original story of the world famous “Cinderella,” I am drawing upon research developed in classes, conference papers since 1998, culminating in a 2010 article, “Asian Origins of Cinderella: The Zhuang Storyteller of Guangxi” (*Oral Tradition* 2010). The goal in this research has been to situate the c. 850 CE story, not in relation to later European stories, but to see it in its own chronological and geographical Asian contexts. In the mid-ninth century, the story was told by a transnational minority (Zhuang) storyteller to a literate member of the dominant Han-Chinese elite who wrote and published the story in Chinese. Now maps and academia draw a firm border between Southeast Asia (where *the Ramayana* clearly spread in the 9th Century) and East Asia / China where scholars like Dudbridge could find no trace of the *Ramayana* being read. But in c. 850 when the Cinderella/Xexian story was recorded, Chinese literati and Zhuang lived on both sides of an extremely fluid border between China and Annam, what we now call Vietnam,

Seeing the Cinderella/Yexian story within the contexts of *the Ramayana* could or should be as natural as seeing European stories within a framework of Judeo-Christian

stories of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. The *Ramayana* is the *seminal* Asian narrative of a man and a woman, enduring love, political and sexual jealousy, exile and loss. The motifs that Anthony Yu summed up as markers of Sita's story retold many times in *JTTW* include: "the misery of female prisoners as depicted in facial dejection, unkempt and dirty clothing, disheveled hairdo, absence of makeup, jewelry, and ornaments, and constant weeping . . .; and devising tokens of recognition (rings and bracelets) by the different monkey figures to establish the kidnapped female's identity" (Yu, 2012, Vol. I:14-15).

Anthony Yu's list of motifs is useful in demonstrating that Yexian's story, too, fits this pattern. That the step-daughter is a literal prisoner becomes evident, not so much in the cruelty of her being ordered to "collect firewood from dangerous places and draw water from the deeps" (Reed, 2001: p. 111), but when the stepmother "went out and ordered the girl to keep watch over the fruit trees" while she and the stepdaughter go to the Zhuang festival. This "order" keeps Yexian from any hope of finding companionship and marriage. The motif of Yexian's "old clothes" is emphasized when the stepmother puts them on to trick Yexian's pet fish to come out of hiding; she kills and eats it. After this death, there is a fairy god-mother figure, "Suddenly out of the sky appeared a person with loose hair hanging down" (Reed 2001:112. Mair translates the "person with hair splayed across the shoulders," 2005:365). This 'person' resembles both Hanuman when he finds Sita weeping under a asoka tree and Sun Wukong. Anthony Yu lists "constant weeping" as one of his tell-tale motifs; each time Sun Wukong finds the Sita-like Lady Golden Sage in *JTTW*, she is "weeping" (Yu, Vol. 3, 296

and 301. After she discovers the fish has died, Yexian “wails with grief” (Reed, 2002: 112) a phrase Mair translates as “cried in the wilderness”(2005: 365) to convey the depth of her sorrow in complete isolation. The crying triggers “the person from the sky” to appear and console the girl with guidance that results and with the magical fine dress and with the talisman of all Cinderella – the precious shoe (here golden) that fits only her foot. Hanuman carries Rama’s unique ring to Sita and carries Sita’s golden anklet back; in *JTTW* the identifying object is a gold bracelet so that Lady Golden Sage knows Sun Wukong has come from her king (Yu, Vol. 3:293) 293).

Initially my intent analyzing the Yexian story was not to “prove” that it reflects the *Ramayana* pivotal scene, but to recognize that this earliest version of “Cinderella” was recorded at a particular moment in the Tang Dynasty and place it in its South Asian (Hindu), Southeast Asian (Hindu-Buddhist), and East Asian (Buddhist) contexts, because it was told in an intersection of the three world areas (Zhuang territory overlapping the China-Vietnam border). It was told by people (the Zhuang) who secularized the story because they were animist and not Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian or even Daoist.

The Yexian story, with its *Ramayana-JTTW* motifs, should be recognized as an intervening story that Dudbridge said didn’t exist. The following analysis of the shared themes, plot turns, and motifs could establish this status. [There is a chart at the end of this paper that sums up similarities and key differences.]

A River Dragon King and Textual Evidence Linking Yexian/Cinderella Story and *JTTW* but not *Ramayana*

One part of the story recorded in c. 850 by Duan Chengshi, is neither part of the Western versions that began appearing in Europe in the late 16th Century nor in the *Ramayana*. Integrated into the Yexian story is a sub-plot important to the Zhuang near Vietnam in the 9th Century. This story-line is about a small red fish that grows into a huge creature that becomes of benefactor to the little girl, Yexian. Yexian, sent to draw water from the deeps” catches a fish “about two inches long with red fins and golden eyes” (Reed, 2001:111) Yexian saves it in a basin of water; while hiding and feeding it, she moves it carefully from bowl to bowl to pond while it grows. By the time it is killed by the wicked stepmother, the fish is “more than ten feet long” (Reed, 2001:111). Yexian’s sorrow over its death precipitates the strange person from the sky appearing, and telling the girl to pray to the bones of the fish. The resulting new finery, including a golden shoe lost at a festival, eventually leads to her marriage with a king.

The first Westerner who drew world attention to this story written in Chinese was R. D. Jameson in a 1932 journal article. In finding parallels in the Han Chinese tradition, Jameson (1932:91) refers to a famous incident in the 1592 *Journey to the West* where a young man rescues a small golden carp. This man, Guangrui, is the father of the monk who will make the journey to the West. Guangrui buys a golden carp “for a string of coins. He was about to have it cooked for his mother when he saw that the carp was blinking its eyes vigorously. In astonishment, Guangrui said, “I have heard that when a fish or a snake blinks its eyes in the manner, that it’s a sure sign it’s not an ordinary creature! . . . Accordingly, Guangrui sent the live fish back to the river” (Yue, 2012, Vol. 1:219). His mother commends him, “It’s a good deed to release living creatures from

captivity . . . I am very pleased” (219). The girl acts spontaneously in saving a living creature and with no prior indication that the fish is supernatural. By the time of the later story, both Guangrui and his mother know that they are acting within a morally-sanctioned established tradition. His act of saving the fish marks a man worthy of giving birth to a remarkable son who will travel to India and bring back Buddhist sutras.

In *Journey to the West*, Guangrui is soon murdered with his body thrown into a river. Luckily there is a Dragon Palace down below and the body is brought to the Dragon King. Recognizing his “benefactor,” the River Dragon King exclaims: “As the common saying goes, ‘Kindness should be repaid by kindness.’ I must save his life today so that I may repay the kindness of yesterday The golden carp that you released was myself and you are my benefactor” (Yu 2012: Vol. 1:220-221). The Dragon King later is very happy to bring Guangrui back to life and the golden-fish story is repeated (228-229). Between the 9th Century and the 16th saving a small fish for merit and good fortune had become a Buddhist practice. [This tradition continues in China where “mercy release” is part of a surge in religious devotion with Buddhist women digging up “miniscule aquatic crustaceans” in order to liberate them, (New York Times, July 26, 2014, A4).] In both “Yexian” and *JTTW*, it is the little carp with golden eyes that grows spectacularly and becomes a benefactor. In effect there are two fairy grandmothers the Yexian story, one baby fish-Dragon King and the second a strange being with splayed hair that comes out of the sky. In *JTTW* the second strange being later is Sun Wukong backed up by the female Guanyin Bodhisattva. Both guard Guangui’s son, the monk Xuanzang, on his journey to India.

While Jameson noted the resemblance from the Yexian story forward to *JTTW*, Dudbridge did not, however, refer back to the Yexian story as one source for *JTTW*. This lack of acknowledgment is perhaps because his focus was on the Monkey King and not on fish nor small agile girls. The small fish-giant fish savior is not from *Ramayana* but it is a variant from the Hindu “Manu and the Fish” (see Beauchamp, 2010).

Guarding Fruit Trees

Going beyond unusual little red fish that turn into river dragons, there are other parallels between the Yexian story and *JTTW*. Yexian herself resembles Sun Wukong in a completely different episode: when her stepmother forbids her to go to the festival, but instead “ordered the girl to keep watch over the fruit trees in the garden.” It is her rush to get back to the fruit trees before her stepmother comes home that causes Yexian to lose her slipper; when the “stepmother returned home, she only saw the girl fast asleep in the garden, arms wrapped around a tree, so she didn’t worry any more about it” (Reed 2001:112). This passage reminds one of the very famous passages concerning Sun Wu-kong who “was asked to take care of the Garden of Immortal Peaches.” But Sun Wukong complains, “Recently the Queen Mother gave the Grand Festival of Immortal Peaches, but she did not invite me.” (Yu 2012: Vol. 1:167). Of course he goes anyway. At one point he is discovered asleep on a peach branch (Yu, Vol. 1: 163), as Yexian is found asleep with her arms “embracing” a tree. The uninvited guest at the festival has rushed home exhausted. Jameson, discussing the Yexian text, says “this is a strange position for sleep, and not the position assumed by girls left alone in the house when their parents go to festivals” (Jameson in Dundes, p. 78). Jameson

presents Yexian's story as an old "abraded" story that has wandered in time's mists and not original in Asia. But the Chinese author of *JTTW* seems to be interpreting and filling in details to explain what is a bizarre posture in the Yexian story. In this interpretation, Sun Wukong does not appear in a hairy fairy stepmother(!) role, but as Yexian-Cinderella herself. On his branch, Sun is a monkey with a tail but has changed his size. The rebellious monkey who can change his shape beyond recognition has taken on the role of the unfilial step-daughter who defies her cruel stepmother to go to a festival. Monkey or girl then are found "innocently" at home sleeping in or under a tree where they should have been all along.

In noticing these resemblances between Yexian's story and episodes in *JTTW*, I began to wonder whether I was seeing monkeys in all texts, as I indeed I was surrounded by monkey kings in Guangxi Province when I went to look for evidence of Cinderella-Yexian in 2007 [A pause here for a pictorial interlude – if this were a regular conference, there would be PowerPoint, but a virtual conference can also be illustrated with a pause for relevant and interesting photos.]



I went to find Cinderella/Yexian but instead I got claimed by a band of monkey-kings complete with staffs earning a living for their owner near Guilin in Guangxi Province where the Cinderella/Yexian story was told in 850 CE.

To find Yexian hugging a tree, I had to resort asking our Chinese guide to hug one in front of a fish pond where carp have been raised since the 9th Century when domestication began among the Zhuang of Guangxi:



Koi can be seen now all over the world, in hotel lobbies for example. Here only dark carp are raised for food.



The Zhuang saved little beautiful small red fish everywhere, even on under the eaves of their wooden hilltop homes. The view down from the small pond where this fish swam showed terraces where carp are raised in the wet months. Such domestication of carp that began in Guangxi in the 9th Century saved Zhuang lives when Han Chinese pushed them away from river beds. There are also many caves with underground rivers and lakes for dragon kings.



Among a lot of goldfish and carp – on kites, tee shirts, -- I wondered how can one link any one story with another? And then six months ago, I was reading Anthony Yu's new 2012 introduction where he was discussing the authorship of the 100-chapter 1592 version of *JTTW* that he has given his lifetime to translate. And I found a clear connection not between the Tang Dynasty Yexian story and *Ramayana*, nor between *JTTW* and *the Ramayana* but between *Journey to the West* and the Yexian story.

Direct evidence that the author of *JTTW* read the Yexian Story.

When five years ago I was trying to put the Yexian story into the context of Asian literature, It didn't occur to me that there might be a record that the writer of *JTTW* might simply have read the story first published some 600 years before. Yet a reading of Anthony Yu's 2012 introduction to *JTTW* seems to give that evidence.

The common attribution of authorship of *JTTW* is to Wu Cheng'en (1500-1582), with a case made by Hu Shih in 1923. One of the few writings by Wu that survives with his name is a statement about his favorite reading. As quoted by Anthony Yu, Wu wrote "I

was very fond of strange stories when I was a child. In my village-school days, I used to buy stealthily popular novels and historical recitals . . . I carefully hid them in secret places where I could enjoy them unmolested . . . When I was in my thirties, my memory was full of these stories accumulated through years of eager seeking. I have always admired such writers of the Tang Dynasty as Tuan Ch'eng-shih [Duan Chengshi, author of the *Youyang zazu*] . . . I often had the ambition to write a book [of stories] which might be compared to theirs . . . Although my book is called a book of monsters . . . it is not devoted to provide illumination for ghosts; it also records the strange things of the human world and sometimes conveys a little bit of moral lesson. (Yu, 2012:25. The interpolation "Duan Chengshi, author of *Youyang zazu*" is Anthony Yu's).

At the time of reading this 2012 introduction, I was jolted to see the name Duan Chengshi, the writer of the c. 850 miscellany that contains the Yexian story. How had I missed this reference to him five years ago when I was writing my *Oral Tradition* article? The similar passage is in Yu's 1978 introduction, but Yu only gives the Wade-Giles spelling Tuan Ch'eng-shih with the book called *Yu-yang tsa tsu*, and I somehow didn't recognize this as the pinyin title *Youyang zazu*, used by Carrie Reed in the title of her second book on Duan Chengshi (2003) and by Mair (2005:263). However that may be, to find a direct link where one is looking to make a connection and the author *says he read* the earlier book was more than I had hoped for. Why hasn't this been given as proof that Wu Cheng'an (the putative author of *JTTW*) was certainly the author? Yu quoted Edward H. Shafer who talked about *Youyang zazu* and concludes almost the opposite:

“Shafer’s meticulous description of the Tang anthology [Youyang zazu] ironically casts further doubt on Wu’s authorship of XYJ, for not many of the elements mentioned, or even allusions to or verbal echoes have turned up in XYJ. The novel itself does not bear up Wu’s professed fondness for Duan’s title.” (Yu, Vol. 1: 26. The book Anthony Yu labels XYJ is an early prototype of *JTTW* and listed as written by Wu Cheng’en.)

To me, the 100 Chapter *JTTW* published in 1592 does more than allude or echo the Yexian story in the c. 850 miscellany that Wu Cheng’en delighted to read as a child and which inspired him to write a comparable book of “monsters.” What I seem to have found confirmed that *Journey to the West* was written by Wu Cheng’en in the 16th Century; because the 9th Century story of Yexian was part of a re-published printed miscellany that Wu Cheng’en loved as a child and remembered.

Since 2007, I have thought the connection of the little red fish saved by Yexien that grows into gigantic fish to resemble the River Dragon King of *JTTW*, and thought that Sun Wukong among the peach trees resembled the girl Yexian. My return to this material in 2013 as part of the NEH ASDP Cultural Bridges grant led me to the new Anthony Yu introduction and Subbarman’s article that Yu cites and which was then available on-line. **What I found astonishing was that the 16th Century Wu Cheng’en said explicitly that he was inspired by the 9th Century book that contains the Yexian story.**

Conclusion: Why the *Ramayana-Yexian-Journey to the West* Trajectory is important.

Let me end by reinforcing why I think this “journey to the east” of a narrative travelling from India through Vietnam to China is so interesting to generalist faculty members teaching undergraduate general education courses. We at ASDP have an impact on thousands of students yearly who might have very little other introduction to Asian studies – for example, the students in my large urban community college and students who other ASDP faculty teach throughout the United States.

Why teach the c.850 Yexian story?

These are the highlights of my 2010 *Oral Tradition* article which I hope will reach a wider audience: American teachers should teach the “Cinderella” story in its original Asian contexts. These include

- 1) American students should learn about a particular time period, the Tang Dynasty, when women were held momentarily in high esteem, and the female Guanyin Bodhisattva began to be worshipped. Compassion then was a key Buddhist virtue. Yexian appeared in the context.
 - 2) The story was told by a minority group, the Zhuang, protesting its marginalized status. The diversity within China should be recognized. It is not accurate that it is a “Chinese” story although the man who heard and recorded it, Duan Chengshi, in his miscellany was Han-Chinese.
 - 3) The girl -- in saving a red/golden fish, moving it from bowl to pond, and letting it grow - seems to have begun the practice of domesticating carp. I suggest it also led to the raising of goldfish and koi which bring pleasure, but domesticated carp have saved millions from starvation. The story is about a “cultural hero” who is a woman.
 - 4) Hindu India, Buddhist China and Japan, and Christian west do not represent “alien traditions”. The role of narratives in forming cultural bridges should be acknowledged.
 - 5) Perhaps my largest goal has been to persuade the American public that their favorite fairy tale, Cinderella, did not incidentally appear in c. 850 in China in an obscure printed book, buried in a cave like Dunhuang, merely one of many thousands of early recorded versions of a story now considered “universal.” The Yexian story should be taught in its Asian contexts – Hindu, Buddhist, Zhuang, Chinese and even Japanese in that chronological and geographical order of transmission.
- 5) Many scholars have traced the route of “Cinderella” from China to the west via a slow overland route. It undoubtedly has variants along those routes. But it was known

and read in China in the late 16th Century, when Wu Cheng'en read it and when Europeans, like Matteo Ricci (1550-1610) started turning up in China. Ricci died in China but many returning missionaries could have spread the story in Europe before "fairy tales" like it began to suddenly spread. Works like Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) should be read in the context of these "fairy tales" (see Beauchamp 2001). Tragedies are not the only genre uniting world literature.

6) This story is seen as part of American ideology of "rags-to-riches" and the success of a compassionate, enterprising girl. Many do not like the fact she was rewarded by marriage to a Prince, and they'd believe that her success was due to passive wishful thinking, not because she demonstrated kindness. It is remarkable how often Walt Disney is blamed for making the story have a moral lesson, as if the "Grimm" story – grim and grim—was somehow original and more "true." Cinderella's saving of mice seems to go on and on, but story extolling kindness and the freeing of prisoners is humane!

I am not suggesting the Yexian story is an intentional retelling of *The Ramayana*. On the contrary, the Zhuang deny Buddhist interpretations let alone Hindu ones. In their view the story originates with the Zhuang (Beauchamp, 2010). But if teachers are interested in how female figures are treated in Asia and in literature, they should juxtapose the Sita Chapters of the *Ramayana*, then Yexian, then *Journey to the West*, with an alternate route via *the* poems of Bai Juyi which are the topic of another paper), and then following Bai Juyi to Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*.

Why teach "Yexian/Cinderella in the Context of *Ramayana* and *Journey to the West*?"

1) **Literary contexts:** Asian context is not just a matter of geography, time period and ethnic identity of author. Yexian is not just an Independent fairy-tale that washed up on a shore – it developed out of other Asian literary stories and influenced those afterward.

1) **Genre:** We look for long texts such as *JTTW* because of an ethnocentric view that 'epics' are great literature. Short texts can be just as powerful culturally. We need to rethink what genres we teach.

2) **Political Change over time and space:** *The Ramayana* was connected to divine hereditary kingship justified by divinity. Yexian supports this idea because she was displaced from succession by a jealous mother-in-law as Sita was. By the time of *JTTW*, *China* did not have any respect for hereditary kingship as shown in *JTTW*. *China* becomes different than Japan at this point; Japan continued to revere an emperor.

3) **Religious context and the use of narrative to teach morality:** The little fish in *JTTW* who grows up to the great River Dragon King saves the father of the monk Xuanzang who goes to India to get scriptures. That fish and the one that saves the girl, in my

opinion, are remembered as goldfish that are never eaten, and as koi. These fish, because of their gold and red colors are never eaten – who would eat a pet goldfish? Who would eat a koi? The fish stand for human babies that miraculously grow, the stories cry out as protest against murder and cannibalism, and by extension all human atrocity.

Final Conclusion: Compassion can be taught. The Monk who travels to India in *JTTW* Xuangzang's has a family that knows it's a "good thing to release living creatures from captivity" (Yu Vol 1:219). This is a Buddhist ideal that applies to young girls in the 9th Century and might well be better remembered in the world today.

The End -- but there is a postscript of more photos illustrating our heroine as she is **(perhaps)*** currently portrayed in Japan. Bibliography and chart of motifs also follow.



The above picture was taken in Suma, Japan in 2013. It apparently shows a new statue of the “Fish-Basket Guanyin” a Bodhisattva that cradles a bowl holding one fish with an open eye. She stands on a giant carp in the sea. In the setting along the Suma shore, the statue was apparently erected to protect fishermen at sea or it can read protecting “fisheries.” Yet it also seems to portray the Yexien Cinderella who saved one small fish by carrying it in a bowl to a larger pond. The fish then grew to be a giant size and its bones gave her wishes. In the Tang Dynasty Guilin, the domestication of carp, carried from pond to pond in bowls or baskets, saved the Zhuang from starvation when they were pushed up into the hills by the invading Han-Chinese. The figure is clearly a Buddhist Bodhisattva standing on a lotus pedestal.



Close-up of the Bodhisattva cradling the fish. Her hands resting above and below the basket or bowl resemble those of a woman protecting her unborn child. In my opinion this aspect demonstrates that she is not selling the fish but protecting it so it grows up to be the creature that supports her (literally and figuratively).



The above small demure “Fishbasket Guanyin” was found on a shelf with other ornaments in a bedroom at the Buddhist Daien Temple on Mt. Koya where couples can stay overnight in retreat. In this setting far from the sea, the statue is evidently not placed to protect fishermen or fisheries. The looped handle over woman’s womb seems clearly sexual, as is the fish with a perky tail in the basket. The figure is still Bodhisattva with the headdress, robe and bare feet of religious figures stemming from Greek portrayals of the divine. That couples might come to this room to conceive in an auspicious location seems quite fitting. It also fits the intent of the Cinderella story which always ends in matrimony and implied childbirth where the little fish grows up in such an extraordinary way. Chun-Fang Yu, who traces the story of the fishbasket Guanyin to 9th Century China, does not trace the image to the Yexian story (see Chun-Fang Yu, pp. 419-438).

The word koi in Japanese I was recently told is the word for carp, not just for ornamental fish which began to be bred only in 1820’s. As a pun or homophone, Koi also means a loved one, a romantic female partner. The kanji is different with kokoro (heart) part of the character.

The photograph was taken by NEH/ASDP Community College of Philadelphia participant Michael Stern in Mt. Koya in June 2014. He and Paula Behrens, also CCP faculty were in Mt. Koya as part of a Japan Studies Association faculty group. Paula as well as Michael had seen my January JSA presentation on the Fishbasket Bodhisattva, and Paula pointed out the statue to Michael who took the photo.

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COMPARATIVE CHART SITA EPISODE -- YEXIAN – JTTW

Motif	<i>Ramayana</i> India c. 500 BCE Valmiki text moves in 9 th Century through S.E. Asia	Yexian c. 850 CE Told by Zhuang in SE China near Vietnam to Duan Chengshi (Chinese)	<i>Journey to the West</i> 1592 CE China Written by Wu Cheng'en
Royal Status	Sita is wife of Rama and rightfully should be queen.	Marries a king at end and becomes first wife	Chapters 68-71 Vol. 3 about a King and his wife Lady Golden Sage
Imprisonment	Queen Sita kidnapped and imprisoned by Ravana	Yexian can be interpreted as “enslaved” by stepmother	Lady Golden Sage kidnapped and imprisoned. Chapters 68-71 Vol. 3
Tears	In tears under Asoka tree	Crying in the wilderness	Eyes frequently drenched with tears.
Rough clothing	‘bark clothing’	Old clothes	No ornaments when found
Signs of rebellion	Disobeys Rama and steps outside circle	Goes to Festival despite order to guard the peach orchard.	None by the Lady; Sun Wukong goes to Festival and eats peaches
Rescuer	Hanuman, Monkey King	Person with wild hair appears out of sky	Sun Wukong, Monkey King
Token for recognition	Ring from Rama; hairclasp from Sita	Golden slipper fits only one foot	Gold Bracelet provided by King to Sun Wukong
Moral Virtue	Born with exemplary divine qualities	Compassion as shown by rescuing and be-friending golden carp	Monk Xuanzang’s father rescues Golden fish. Reciprocal Benevolence. Lewd, laughable behavior by Lady.
Motif of fish that becomes a Dragon King	Not in <i>Ramayana</i> but comes from the Hindu <i>Manu and the Fish</i>	Strong motif integrated into story; fish bones grant wishes	Dragon King was the small red fish rescued by Xuanzang’s father.
Evidence of connection	<i>Original story</i>	Proof of connection to <i>Ramayana</i> only through shared motifs and female heroine.	Author Wu Cheng'en writes he has read the book containing the Yexian story;

			connection to <i>Ramayana</i> through shared motifs
Religious Context	<i>Ramayana</i> is a deeply revered Hindu text	Not explicitly a religious text; Yexian revealed as a divine being, could be interpreted as a Buddhist Bodhisattva	Main story about a monk going to get Buddhist sutras in India. Guanyin Bodhisattva a primary character. Many references to Confucianism and Daoism.
Values re Gender	Sita is pure of heart yet secondary to Rama; Valmiki's ending has her return to "earth"	Female Yexian is the heroine, Tang Dynasty China and/or Zhuang give women high value.	Queen satirized; female Guanyin moral standard; Male monkey the central hero;