A Philological Account of a Silk Road tale: The Painter and the Mechanical Maiden

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Versions

- 2 Sanskrit: Vinaya of the Mulasarvāstivādin and Kathināvadāna
- 1 Tibetan: Kanjur (9th c.)
- 2 Chinese: Taishō 1448 (cca. 700); Tripiṭaka (5th c.), without a major frame
- 1 Tocharian: part of the Tocharian Puṇyavanta Jātaka (cca. 800)

Clusters of motifs

- A contest between two artisans: power of illusion, magic (Skt. rddhi) over knowledge, wisdom (Skt. prajña)
- Creating an imitation of a woman/man
- Believing the artificial woman/man is real + falling in love with the mechanical maiden
- Painter’s passion is blind, close to madness, leading to (an imitation of) a suicide
- Art vs. life: both artisans succeed in creating a human imitation on pair with life

Alterations in form

- Only Tocharian version: versified, dramatized
- Genres: chu-kung-tiao 諸宮調 “all keys and modes”; pien-wen “transformation texts” 變文

The pre-verse formula in pien-wen, according to Mair (6, 27-28, also in Pinault ‘Une version’ 210), goes as follows: “(Please look for a moment at the) place [where] X [occurs]. How [should I] present [it]? Or: How does it go?” This formula is also found in the Tocharian tale. For example: “She, that with his [the mechanic’s] reverence held in her hand, as it were, beauty and reverence, attended to him. But how so? || in the S.-tune:|| Like one ashamed casting her glance to the ground a little, she looked lovely” (A4 b1-b3). “He painted himself opposite(?) the door. But how so? || in the $\text{-tune:}||$ The head tilted a little – the eyes set [continues to describe the hanged body]” (Malzahn A7 a4-a5).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Versions</th>
<th>Painter and mechanic are Buddha’s disciples</th>
<th>Mention of the land</th>
<th>Mention of policy of the land: royal witness</th>
<th>Suggestion to cut the rope is given by ...</th>
<th>Detailed descriptions of the mechanical maiden’s beauty</th>
<th>Detailed descriptions of the painter’s hanged body</th>
<th>The ending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sanskrit VM</td>
<td>✓ (revealed only at the end)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>King’s officials</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>overtly Buddhist moral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanskrit K</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>the crowd</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>overtly Buddhist moral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibetan</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>King’s officials</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>Buddhist moral abrupt; no moral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger Chinese</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ (revealed only at the end)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>King’s officials</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>Buddhist moral appeal for joining Buddhism (i.e. Buddhism) doesn’t mention Buddhism, concludes with a (Buddhist) moral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older Chinese</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>the mechanic (no one else present)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tocharian</td>
<td></td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>the mechanic (2×) (neighbors present)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Notes