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THE MYSTERY OF AN "ANCIENT MIRROR": AN INTERPRETATION OF *GUJING JI* IN THE CONTEXT OF MEDIEVAL CHINESE CULTURAL HISTORY

Jue Chen 陳玨

Record of an Ancient Mirror (Gujing ji 古鏡記, hereafter referred to as *Gujing ji*) is generally regarded as one of the fictional narratives (*chuanqi* 傳奇) of the early Tang 唐 dynasty (AD 618–907).[1] The focus of the story is an "ancient" bronze mirror,[2] around which a series of episodic sub-stories develops.[3]

The mirror travels with the protagonists to many places in China at the end of the Sui 隋 dynasty (AD 581–618), and performs miraculous deeds wherever it goes. In the end of the story, the mirror foretells the fall of the Sui.

This mirror is also extraordinary in terms both of its appearance and function. The form of the mirror reveals that, typologically speaking, this is an object from nowhere: the history of Chinese bronze mirror casting proves that a mirror such as this never existed. At the same time, the functions of the mirror demonstrate that this is a mirror of somewhere: it is a reservoir of pre-Tang mirror lore.

Geremie R. Barmé, Duncan Campbell, Michael Loewe and Stephen Owen, who read earlier versions of this paper, have provided helpful comments for this revised text, for which I am grateful.

[1] In addition to ancient scholars such as Hong Mai (1123–1202) and Hu Yinglin (1551–1602), the mid- and late Tang-dynasty tales have been comprehen-/sively studied by scholars both in China and in the West (for instance, in China by Bian Xiaoxuan, Chen Yingque, Cheng Yizhong, Li Jianguo, Lu Xun, Wang Meng'ou, Wang Pijiang, and Zhou Shaoliang; and, in the West by Curtis Adkins, Glen Dudbridge, Karl S. Y. Kao, André Levy, Howard Levy, William Nienhauser, and Carrie Reed, among others) from different theoretical perspectives. Among /them, many scholars, though not all, believe that *chuanqi* is a major genre of the time and *Gujing ji* is representative of the early Tang-dynasty *chuanqi* genre.

[2] The description of *Gujing ji* makes it clear that the mirror is made of bronze rather than jade or iron, because of the use of the verb "to cast" (*zhu*) used when describing its creation. According to archaeologists and art historians, before the Warring States (475 BC to 221 BC) period, most Chinese mirrors were made of jade rather than bronze. From the Warring States onward, although a small number of ancient Chinese mirrors were made of iron, most were cast in bronze. The mirror in *Gujing ji* could not therefore be more "ancient" than the Warring States period.

[3] *Gujing ji* was one of the earliest works in the history of Chinese narrative that focused on a mirror. Similarly, *Gujing ji* was an early example of episodic fiction in Chinese history. The story consists of a dozen episodes surrounding the mysterious mirror. For a general discussion of the episodic nature of Chinese fictive narrative, see Andrew Plaks, "Conceptual models in Chinese narrative theory," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 4.2 (August 1977): 25–47.

Because of the above, the mirror seems to pose a mystery in its own right to art historians, as well as to cultural historians of Chinese civilization. This paper is an attempt to explore the nature of this mirror from the perspective of both Chinese medieval art history and cultural history.

Let us begin with art history.

I. Strange Design: an Unusual Mirror

As its title suggests, *Gujing ji* is a "record" of an ancient bronze mirror embellished with the following design:[4]

> The width of the mirror was eight *cun* [Chinese inches],[5] and the shape of its knob appeared to be a Chinese unicorn squatting on its heels.[6] Around the knob were a dragon, a phoenix, a tiger and a turtle, representing the four directions—East, South, West, and North. Around the four cardinal points were eight diagrams, and around these diagrams were twelve "double-hours,"[7] represented by twelve corresponding animal signs. Around these "double-hours" were twenty-four characters, bordering the mirror.[8] These characters resembled ancient *li* 隸-style calligraphy.[9] Although these characters were seemingly organized one stroke after another according to the rules, they could not be found in any dictionary.[10]

[4] English translations of *Gujing ji* and other quotes from primary sources in this paper are mine unless acknowledged otherwise.

[5] In order to understand the complex message hidden in the design of this mirror, it is necessary to examine the history of ancient and medieval Chinese bronze mirror casting. In this context, I found a number of curious elements. These, I believe, suggest that the author of *Gujing ji* was someone knowledgeable in bronze mirror design. In *Gujing ji* we read: "Once upon a time the Yellow Emperor cast fifteen mirrors. The diameter of the first mirror was fifteen *cun*, following the numerological characteristics of the full moon. The diameter of the second mirror was one *cun* less and that of the third was two *cun* less, and so on. This mirror here was in fact the eighth one." It is also noteworthy that the author of *Gujing ji* indicates that this mirror was the eighth of fifteen mirrors cast by the Yellow Emperor. Between this claim and the diameter of the mirror (both eight), there may exist hidden connections. Xue Hongji offers a symbolic interpretation indicating that this figure represents a sense of legitimacy: the Tang was the eighth united dynasty after the golden age of Three Dynasties. See Xue, *Chuanqi xiaoshuo shi* [A history of *Chuanqi* fiction] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Guji Chubanshe, 1998), p.44. Xue's theory is inspired, though simplistic. Ideological considerations aside, the eight *cun* bronze mirror is typologically real. Perhaps, the eight *cun* mirror was an accepted style of the period when *Gujing ji* was written; perhaps the number eight here carries a certain symbolic/numerological implication. In any case, the size of the mirror here warrants further exploration. There are two interesting issues related to the diameter of the mirror, and complex messages hidden therein indicate that the mirror was by no means "ancient." First, the diameter of the mirror is eight *cun* rather than nine *cun*, the typical size of a Taoist magic mirror, as specified in Ge Hong's (AD 284–364) *Baopu zi*. It may be taken as a deviation from the established size of an ancient mirror in the Six Dynasties. Second, the description of the diameter of the fifteenth mirror may well imply that it was a "mirror in the palm" (*zhangzhong jing*), a type rarely seen before the end of the early Tang. From the above-quoted account we can assume that the diameter of the smallest mirror in this series was one *cun*. Typologically speaking, this type of mirror would belong to the category of "mirrors in the palm."

[6] The shape of the knob here also may indicate that this mirror is not an ancient one. The knob of a Sui dynasty bronze mirror was usually circular or semicircular. Only starting from the Tang did the squatting animal knob (*fudi guaishou niu*) become visible in large numbers. There had existed a small number of squatting animal knobs in the Han and in the Sui, but it did not become a popular feature in mirror design until the Tang. See Shi Cuifeng, *Zhongguo lidai tongjing jianshang* [Appraisal and understanding of the Chinese bronze mirror in past ages] (Taipei: Taiwan Shingli Bowuguan, 1990), pp.12–14 and 145–66.

[7] The concept of "twelve double-hours" (*shi'er chen*) serves here as a major element in Han-dynasty cosmology, which was incorporated into bronze mirror design in both the Han and the Sui.

[8] The author's original phrasing in Chinese for "bordering the mirror" is *zhourao lunkuo*, which suggests a raised rim /(*lingji*) around the mirror. If this was the case, this is characteristic of the Sui mirror: the area inside the rim was the main area for graphic design, while the narrow band outside the rim was reserved for inscriptions (*mingwen dai*). This design was generally not seen in earlier mirrors in terms of design. In this sense, it also indicates that the mirror was contemporary rather than ancient.

[9] It is noteworthy that the Han mirror inscription was nearly always in the styles of *zhuan* or *li*; the Sui mirror inscription was usually in the style of *kai*; and Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties mirrors were somewhere in between. See Shi Cuifeng, *Zhongguo lidai tongjing jianshang*, pp.145–6.

[10] I suspect that the description of *Gujing ji* here may have been inspired by Yu Xin's "Rhapsody on the Mirror" (*Jing fu*), in which we read: "Engraving a coiling dragon in five colours, while inscribing the characters in a style of a thousand years old." See Yan Kejun, *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen* [Complete prose from high antiquity, the Three Dynasties, Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms and the Six Dynasties] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1958), 4:3926.

鏡橫徑八寸。鼻作麒麟蹲伏之象。遶鼻列四方。龜龍鳳虎。依方陳布。四方外又設八卦。卦外置十二辰位而具畜焉。辰畜之外。又置二十四字。周遶輪廓。文體似隸。點畫無缺。而非字書之所有也。[11]

From an art historian's point of view, this description of the mirror combines pre-Sui-dynasty typological elements with Sui and Tang elements. On the one hand, such a description creates a puzzle. On the other, it tells a tale.

The description creates a puzzle because it demonstrates that the author of *Gujing ji* had expert knowledge of the design of Chinese bronze mirrors,[12] and because this particular mirror is unlike any that is known to have existed it seems typologically to be a mirror of "nowhere."[13] The description of the mirror clearly indicates that it was typologically strange. Its strangeness is all the more curious due to the fact that the author was obviously knowledgeable about bronze mirrors. Before proposing an answer to this puzzle, first I will examine the ways in which this mirror appears to be typologically unreal. The following is a concise account of my efforts to locate the *Gujing ji* mirror in the context of the history of Chinese bronze mirror casting.[14]

II. Typological Contrast: the Cosmological Symbolism of the Han versus the Decorative Realism of the Tang

In the story the mirror is claimed to be an "ancient" one. But how ancient is it? According to an orally transmitted legend outlined in *Gujing ji*, the mirror's maker was the legendary Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黃帝).[15] Given the detail with which it is described, could such a mirror have actually existed in ancient China?

The mirror in *Gujing ji* has a strong cosmological dimension, one that accords with the characteristics of TLV mirrors (see below) during the Han 漢 dynasty (206 BC–AD 220).[16] TLV mirrors were revived under the Sui dynasty after a long period of disunity in the post-Han era. At first sight, the mirror in *Gujing ji* seems to be a variation of the Mirror of Four Spirits and Twelve Animal Signs (*sishen shi'er shengxiao jing* 四

[11] All original quotes of *Gujing ji* in this paper are taken from Wang Pijiang, *Tangren xiaoshuo* [Tang dynasty fiction] (Shanghai: Shenzhou Guoguangshe, 1932), pp.1–18. In the above volume, Wang Pijiang gathered a series of mid-Tang mirror stories and appended them to the text of *Gujing ji*. These stories are all important, but I have decided not to include them in the discussions /in this paper mainly because they are later products. I also regret that due to the limit of time and space I only provide the English translation for the relevant parts of the original text, instead of a complete translation of the whole piece. For a complete English translation, see Pauline Bentley Koffler, "The Story of the Magic Mirror (GUJINGJI): translated with an introduction and notes by /Pauline Bentley Koffler," in *Hommage à Kwong Hing Foon: Études d'Histoire Culturelle de la Chine*, ed. Jean-Pierre Dieny, (Paris: Collège de France, 1995), pp.165–214.

[12] See nn.5–10.

[13] I have checked through all the available catalogues and studies published by experts and scholars of Chinese bronze mirror art as well as the discoveries of modern archaeologists, and have not been able to locate a mirror like the one in *Gujing ji*.

[14] Because the description of the mirror carries an air of expert knowledge, *Gujing ji* was regarded, interestingly yet ironically, by Xu Naichang, one of the influential connoisseur-specialists of ancient Chinese mirrors in the first half of the twentieth century, as the earliest extant bronze mirror catalogue rather than a piece of fiction. In his "*Xiao Tanluanshi jingying* xu" [Collected Mirrors from the Small Studio of Lovely Bamboo Trees] we read: "The professional catalogue of ancient mirrors started with Wang Du's *Gujing ji* in the Sui dynasty. Unfortunately, most [of these ancient] catalogues are now lost so that we do not know much about their overall contents." See Xu Naichang, *Xiao Tanluanshi jingying* (Nanling: Xushi Danlu, 1930), p.1. The above suggests that even art historians and connoisseurs of bronze mirrors in the first half of the twentieth century would generally agree that the author of *Gujing ji* possessed expert knowledge regarding ancient Chinese mirrors, and that the description of the mirror bears signs of having been written by someone with such specialist knowledge.

[15] Apparently, modern scholars do not take this attribution seriously.

[16] For a concise and accurate description in English of the TLV mirror, together with its function and development during the Han dynasty, see Michael Loewe, *Ways to paradise: the Chinese quest for immortality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), pp.60–85. As for the relationship between the Han mirror and the other world, see K. E. Brashier, "Longevity like metal and stone: the role of the mirror in Han burials," *T'oung Pao* 81.4–5 (1995): 201–29.

神十二生肖鏡), a major, though later, sub-type of the TLV mirror that flourished mainly under the Sui (when the text of *Gujing ji* is supposed to have been written).[17] The basic components of this type of mirror, as its name suggests, were "four" plus "twelve": four directional "spirits"—the dragon, the phoenix, the tiger and the turtle—surrounded by twelve animal signs (rat, cow, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and pig) representing the twelve symbols of the Chinese zodiac.

Typologically speaking, the *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing*, as a subtype of a later period, stems from the Mirror of Four Spirits and Twelve Double-hours (*sishen shi'erchen jing* 四神十二辰鏡) of the Han dynasty, which is, in turn, one of the major variations of the TLV prototype, the Mirror of Four Spirits in a Square (*fangge sishen guiju jing* 方格四神規矩鏡). The prominent design characteristic of the *fangge sishen guiju jing* is that, centered on a square, the space of the mirror is divided and organized by the three dominant geometric figures: T, L and V. Modern art historians have thus coined the term TLV Mirror. This design is based on the aesthetic principle of symbolism that was in currency under the Han.[18] Furthermore, we should point out that, under the Han dynasty, the bronze mirror was used not only in everyday life but also posthumously to protect the dead in the afterlife. This situation explains why the design of the Han mirror contains an element of cosmic symbolism.[19]

Throughout the entire Six Dynasties 六朝 (AD 222–589) the TLV mirror was generally out of fashion, and was therefore very rarely cast. It was not until the Sui that the *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing*, a typological variation of the *sishen shi'erchen jing*, suddenly appeared in fairly large numbers. Art historians regard this revival as a continuation of the TLV tradition, although it lasted for only a short period—a few decades.[20] In the context of early Tang cultural development this revival was not accidental but reflected rather an intellectual trend of the time: a harking back to the Han dynasty in an attempt to imitate the "golden age" and continue the "great tradition."[21]

While they both share a strong cosmological flavor, the *sishen shi'erchen jing* of the Han is conspicuously different in design from the *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing* of the Sui. The concept of twelve "double-hours" (*shi'er chen* 十二辰) in the Han mirror is usually represented symbolically by the twelve Chinese characters—子丑寅卯辰巳午未申酉戌亥—designated to represent the twelve Earthly Branches (*dizhi* 地支), but the Sui mirrors bore instead twelve zodiac animal signs (*chenchu* 辰畜 or *shengxiao* 生肖). The former carried an air of the abstract, while the latter implied a flavor of the decorative, reflecting a subtle yet visible change in the aesthetic and philosophical currency between the two epochs.

It is also important to note that these elements were represented on different parts of the mirrors, and featured different graphic patterns. The twelve double-hours on a Han mirror were located on the inner rim of the mirror and were in the shape of a square, illustrating the shape of the cosmos wherein "heaven is round and earth is square" (*tianyuan*

[17] The author of *Gujing ji*, whose identity still remains a mystery, claimed that the text was written at the end of the Sui, the short-lived historical period during which the *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing* flourished. If this were the case, this mirror would surely have been called a "contemporary mirror," instead of an "ancient mirror." The task of this paper, however, is to demonstrate that the truth is much more complex and subtle.

[18] Edward Schafer points out: "Magic mirrors, cosmic mirrors, and astrological mirrors are a commonplace of the Chinese tradition. The best known of them belongs to the Han period. Among these the most studied have been the diagrammatic 'TLV mirrors,' which are thought to represent ideal views of the world, centered on some such universal pivot as the world-mountain K'un-lun, or perhaps its equivalent the 'Hall of Light' (ming t'ang), the astral adytum of the ancient Son of Heaven. Their purpose seems to have been to draw, by a kind of sympathetic magic, on cosmic forces for the physical and spiritual advantage of their owners." See Schafer, "A T'ang Taoist mirror," *Early China* 4 (1978–1979): 56–9. Schafer did not further explore the potentially intricate relationship between the *mingtang* and the TLV mirror. The complexity of this relationship is such that it remains a challenging issue. At the end of this paper I will make some tentative comments on the possible relations between the *mingtang* and the mirror in *Gujing ji*, which, I hope, will contribute to an alternative understanding of the possible hidden functions of the mirror in *Gujing ji*.

[19] For a cultural historian's general study of bronze mirrors under the Han dynasty, and the principal items of iconography, see Michael Loewe, *Ways to paradise*, pp.60–85. Cf. n.16.

[20] The *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing* was very popular during the transitional period between Wang Mang's New Dynasty and the early Eastern Han. See Wang Hongjun, "*Gujing ji* chuanqi tanwei" [Exploring the profound meanings in the *Chuanqi Gujing ji*] *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* (1985.1): 175.

[21] For a general discussion of the development of the bronze mirror between the Han and the Tang, see Kong Xiangxing and Liu Yiman, *Zhongguo gudai tongjing* [Ancient Chinese bronze mirrors] (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1984).

difang 天圓地方). In the Sui dynasty the twelve animal signs were removed to the outer rim of the mirror and placed in a circular arrangement.[22] Thus it is more likely that the mirror in *Gujing ji* was a product of the Sui dynasty.

From the end of the early Tang, under the reigns of Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (AD 650–83) and Empress Wu 武后 (AD 684–704), the popularity of the Sui dynasty *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing* gradually gave way to the Mirror of Auspicious Sea Monsters and Grapes (*haishou putao jing* 海獸葡萄鏡).[23] This bore a totally different graphic design, representing the Tang dynasty's colourful culture and innovative mindset.[24] In the context of early Tang and high Tang cultural development, the birth of this new type of bronze mirror design was again not coincidental. The Tang dynasty was a golden age that saw innovations in many areas of Chinese culture. Rather than imitation, the focus was firmly on creating unique cultural icons.

In this context, the reigns of Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu served as a demarcation line for many aspects of cultural development. In the history of bronze mirror casting alone, before their reigns, the *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing* generally led the tide of fashion, representing the trend known as "returning to antiquity" (*fugu* 復古). After their reigns, the *haishou putao jing* illustrated a new trend that could be termed "creating new styles" (*bianti* 變體) for the golden age of the Tang. While the earlier type of mirror had a symbolic significance, the latter was much more decorative and naturalistic in nature, carrying a flavor of realism.

The *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing* was thus a short-lived cultural creation. It was popular neither in the Han, nor in the Six Dynasties, nor in the high Tang but only in the transitional period between the Sui and the early Tang—no more than a few decades.[25]

To a person living under the Sui, the mirror in *Gujing ji*, seemingly a variation of the *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing*, would have been familiar and contemporary. However, to someone living at the end of the early Tang or after, the same mirror may have looked "ancient" and out of place. What confuses us in the first place is whether the author of *Gujing ji* and his intended audience were educated individuals of the Sui or from the end of the early Tang. The analysis made below suggests that they were most probably the latter.

III. Numerological Implications: the "Twenty-eight Lunar Lodgings" versus the "Twenty-four Pneumas"

Numerology and cosmology are essential components of the Sui and Tang intellectual environment, an appreciation of which is crucial in understanding the background of *Gujing ji*.

[22] See Shi Cuifeng, *Zhongguo lidaitongjing jianshang*, pp.145–6.

[23] For a study of Tang mirror casting and design in general and the period of Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu in particular, see Yan Juanying, "Tangdai tongjing wenshi zhi neirong yu fengge" [On the content and style of the decorations on Tang-dynasty bronze mirrors] *Academia Sinica Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology* 60.2 (1990): 289–366.

[24] The name of the mirror, *haishou putao jing*, itself suggests the growing influence of foreign culture under the reign of Emperor Gaozong. The *haishou*, literally translated as "sea monster," in fact refers to the lion, which was a product of India. The *putao*, the grape, is also a product of the Western Regions (*xiyu*). Although it was first imported into China under the Han, it became much more popular during the Tang.

[25] For detailed patterns of design, see Kong Xiangxing, *Zhongguo tongjing tudian* [An illustrated encyclopedia of Chinese mirrors] (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1992).

What adds to the puzzle is that, although the mirror in *Gujing ji* looks like a *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing*, it is in fact not quite right. Starting with the basic design, we find that the overall numerological structure of the mirror is based on the number "four" and its multiples, thereby forming a self-contained series. It is different from and much more sophisticated than the numerological series in the *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing*. In addition to the numbers "four" and "twelve," the basic structure of the mirror in *Gujing ji* also emphasizes "eight" and "twenty-four." These numbers represent their respective cosmological elements, and are organized to move gradually from the inner circle to the outer circle of the mirror as follows: four (for directional spirits), eight (4 x 2, for diagrams), twelve (4 x 3, for "double-hours"), and twenty-four (4 x 6, for pneumatic elements).

Archaeological findings in relation to Chinese bronze mirrors in the past few decades indicate that the design of the mirror in *Gujing ji* is unusual and strange because the numbers eight and twenty-four were not part of the regular design for the *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing* of the Sui, nor even for the *sishen shi'erchen jing* of the Han. While the numerological pattern of the mirror in *Gujing ji* describes a particular cosmological picture in the author's mind, it represents something divorced from reality.

In the Han and throughout the Sui the numerological figures incorporated in the bronze mirror design habitually contained specific philosophical implications, related to a series of core concepts of antiquity and the medieval Chinese worldview.[26] The number four generally referred to the concept of "four directions" (*xiang* 象),[27] while the number twelve typically referred to the concept of "twelve double-hours" (*chen* 辰).[28] The combination of these two symbolic numbers formed a cosmos with the fundamental dimensions of time and space—the so-called *yuzhou* 宇宙—and this concept found expression in the designs of both the Han and Sui mirrors.

However, in the history of Chinese bronze mirror casting the numbers four and twelve were seldom combined with the number eight, and almost never with the number twenty-four, which represented "pneumas" (*qi* 氣). Typologically speaking, the number eight (basically for the concept of "eight diagrams") played a central role in different minor species in post-Sui periods. The Mirror of Eight Diagrams (*bagua jing* 八卦鏡) flourished mainly in the late Tang and Song dynasties, with some earlier examples under the reigns of Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu. In various examples of *bagua jing* available to us, *either* the number four *or* the number twelve were occasionally incorporated into its design to form a Mirror of Four Spirits and Eight Diagrams (*sishen bagua jing* 四神八卦鏡) or a Mirror of Eight Diagrams and Twelve Double-hours (*bagua shi'erchen jing* 八卦十二辰鏡), but scarcely ever both numbers at the same time. In other words, a Mirror of Four Spirits, Eight Diagrams, and Twelve Double-hours (*sishen bagua shi'erchen*

[26] It is noteworthy that the numbers sixteen (4 x 4) and twenty (4 x 5) are missing from the typological design of the mirror in *Gujing ji*. This, I believe, is due to the fact that these two numbers were not important in the medieval Chinese world view.

[27] The system of "four spirits" mentioned above is one of the conventional manifestations of the concept of "four directions" in space.

[28] The system of "twelve animal signs" corresponds to the concept of "twelve double-hours."

jing 四神八卦十二辰鏡) was very rare. Furthermore, to my knowledge no art historian has been able to locate a single example in which the "twenty-four" pneumatic elements have been incorporated into the design of a bronze mirror, as is shown in the design of *Gujing ji*. I would therefore argue that a Mirror of Four Spirits, Eight Diagrams, Twelve Animal Signs, and Twenty-four Pneumatic Elements (*sishen bagua shi'ershengxiao ershisiqi jing* 四神八卦十二生肖二十四氣鏡) has never existed in the history of Chinese bronze mirror casting.[29]

So far, I have been able to locate very few exceptions that merit further discussion. These cases are closer to but still fundamentally different from the mirror in *Gujing ji*. The primary example is an ancient mirror discovered in Shangyu 上虞, Zhejiang 浙江 Province in 1973. Described by archaeologists as a product of the Tang,[30] this mirror contains the key numbers of four, eight and twelve. However, it does not incorporate the number twenty-four into its design. Instead, it notably features the number twenty-eight (4 x 7). In the Tang dynasty these last two numbers referred to two different, yet related, cosmological areas: while twenty-four referred to twenty-four pneumas (*ershisiqi* 二十四氣) in calendrical science (*lifa* 曆法), twenty-eight represented the lunar lodgings (*ershibaxiu* 二十八宿) in astrology (*xingzhan* 星占) and astronomy (*tianwen* 天文).[31]

I would propose here that this historical mirror, whose design falls out of the regular patterns, be termed a Mirror of Four Spirits, Eight Diagrams, Twelve Animal Signs and Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions (*sishen bagua shi'ershengxiao ershibaxiu jing* 四神八卦十二生肖二十八宿鏡). It overlaps in part with the design of the *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing*, and its numerological design is still based on the number four and its multiples. Edward Schafer suggests that this was no ordinary mirror to be used by ordinary people,[32] but was more likely a Taoist mirror of magic.[33] On the strength of finding a Picture of a High Purity Precious Mirror for Longevity (*Shangqing changsheng baojian tu* 上清長生寶鑒圖) from the Taoist canon (*daozang* 道藏),[34] in which a mirror of very similar design is pictured, Schafer strongly suspects that the Shangyu mirror might have been a magic tool of Tang dynasty Shangqing Taoism under the leadership of Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎 (AD 647?–735), at Tiantai 天台 Mountain, where he was active and influential during the reigns of Empress Wu and Emperor Ruizong 睿宗 (AD 710–12).[35] Although Schafer does not emphasize the numerological aspects of the designs, the similarities between the two mirrors are clear.

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[29] The reason for this has not yet been seriously explored by art historians or cultural historians. From the perspective of typology, I suspect that it is because both the *sishen shi'erchen jing* of the /Han and the *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing* of the Sui, as historical patterns, were already out of fashion when the *bagua jing* came into the picture in the mid and late Tang. This separation in /time prevents these two patterns from merging. From the perspective of philosophy, I would argue that this particular series of numbers (four, eight, twelve, and twenty-four) was typically found together only in certain time-specific cultural icons, such as the *mingtang*, a cosmological architecture especially important at the end of the early Tang.

[30] It is called, by Chinese archaeologists, *tianxiangjing* or "astronomical mirror." This is not a typological term. The fact that the archaeologists cannot find a proper typological term to define this mirror suggests that it is unique. For a brief report on this mirror, see Ren Shilong, "Zhejiang Shangyu xian faxian Tangdai tianxiang jing" [An astronomical mirror of the Tang dynasty found in Shangyu county, Zhejiang province] *Kaogu* 145 (1976): 277.

[31] Both are core areas for the pre-modern Chinese mindset, but represent different groups of ideas.

[32] Although no precise dates can be found for that mirror, it was probably a product of the transitional period from the end of the early Tang to the beginning of the high Tang, in which the *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing* might possibly have overlapped with the *bagua jing*.

[33] See Schafer, "A T'ang Taoist mirror," pp.56–9.

[34] See the photographic edition of *Daozang* (Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin: Wenwu Chubanshe, Shanghai Shudian, and Tianjin Guji Chubanshe, 1994), vol.6, pp.675–6.

[35] Schafer asserts: "[W]e may, with some confidence, assign HY 429 [the Taoist canon mirror] to the 'school' of Szu-ma Ch'eng-chen himself, that is, to the upper-class eremitical Taoism of the late seventh and early eighth centuries, and the Shang-yu artifact to a workshop engaged in producing standardized holy objects. It is particularly interesting that the bronze mirror was found on the south shore of Hangchow Bay, mid-way between Mao Shan, the recognized center of the cult, and T'ien-t'ai Shan, where the patriarch was active and influential during the reigns of Empress Wu and Jui Tsung." See Schafer, "A T'ang Taoist Mirror," p.58.

The function of the Shangyu mirror and the mirror in the Taoist canon, if Schafer's interpretation is accepted, was to ensure Taoist longevity and self-protection through drawing on "cosmic forces for the physical and spiritual advantage of their owners."[36] To achieve this, I would argue that both the design of the Shangyu mirror and the Taoist canon mirror drew on Han dynasty astrological and divination tools *shi* 式, which contained the numbers four, eight, twelve and twenty-eight.[37] While the combination in a mirror of directions (four), diagrams (eight), animal signs (twelve), and lunar lodgings (twenty-eight) was rarely seen,[38] the combination of the *Gujing ji* mirror—a *sishen bagua shi'ershengxiao ershisiqi jing*—is unique: it exists nowhere in the entire known history of Chinese bronze mirrors.[39] The key point here is that the system of twenty-four pneumatic elements was never a component of Chinese bronze mirror design and casting. Thus, it is this component that makes the mirror in *Gujing ji* typologically unique.

Why would the author of *Gujing ji* have invented such a mirror? This is especially curious given that, during the Sui and the early Tang, bronze mirrors were highly popular objects of artisanship, widely circulated and highly prized among members of polite society. Educated people at the time were generally sufficiently knowledgeable to evaluate and appreciate the worth of a bronze mirror if one were presented to them as a piece of art. In the prevailing intellectual environment it is difficult to believe that the author of *Gujing ji*, someone supposedly knowledgeable on the subject of Chinese mirror lore, would have deliberately created a mirror that did not actually exist out of nothing and for nothing. And yet *Gujing ji* revolves around such a mirror.

IV. A Hypothetical Relationship: the Mirror versus the Mingtang

Now, let us return to the key point that may help to explain this mystery. The concept of twenty-four pneumas, a typologically irregular component, was incorporated into the design of the *Gujing ji* mirror. Taking this as a point of departure, I have found that this entire scheme of numerological combination, though atypical in the history of bronze mirror casting, did exist in the design of another major cultural symbol and icon of the early Tang: the *mingtang* 明堂. The model for the mirror in *Gujing ji*, I would thus argue, is probably based on the multi-faceted, controversial and complex concept of *mingtang*, which was an ideological focal point during the reigns of Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu. *Mingtang* was the symbolic representation of a self-regulated cosmos of perfection and harmony, a microcosm of the perfect state of the human condition.[40] If the *mingtang* were out of order, the human world(s) would follow; if the human world(s) went wrong, so did its *mingtang*.

[36] See Schafer, "A T'ang Taoist mirror," p.56.

[37] It is the most important symbolic cultural icon I found that neatly combines the "directions," the "diagrams," the "double-hours" and the "lunar lodgings" to form its basic numerological structure for astrological and divination purposes.

[38] I further suspect that the design of the Sui dynasty *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing* was adopted and revised for special purposes by special groups of people, such as Taoists and Confucianistic diviners, with reference to other symbolic cultural icons, to create a physical (as in the case of Shangyu and the Taoist mirror) or an imaginative mirror (as in the case of *Gujing ji* mirror), during the reigns of Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu, when the regular type of *sishen shi'er shengxiao jing* was out of fashion.

[39] Such a design is not, to my knowledge, recorded in any Chinese bronze mirror catalogues.

[40] For a general study of *mingtang*, see Wang Shiren, "Mingtang xingzhi chutan" [A preliminary study of the shape and structure of mingtang], *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu jikan* 4 (1987): 1–43. For a specific study on the application of the concept of mingtang to the human body, see Li Jianmin, "Mingtang yu yinyang yi wushi'er bingfang jiuqi taiyin taiyang weili" [Mingtang and *yinyang*: moxibustion of Taiyin and Taiyang in the Fifty-two Prescriptions as an Example] *Academia Sinica Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology* 70.1 (1999): 49–118.

The structure of a *mingtang* contained the numerological combination of directions (four), diagrams (eight), animal signs (twelve), and pneumatic elements (twenty-four), serving as a power center of united cosmological forces regulating the cosmos.[41] In being modelled on the structure of a *mingtang*, the mirror of *Gujing ji* gains the magic power of regulating the cosmos and even foretelling the destiny of a dynasty, which many scholars believe was its main function.

If this is the case, it connects this typologically non-existent mirror to an important corner of the intellectual environment of the time. In this special corner the cosmos was organized according to the numbers four, eight, twelve and twenty-four. This prevailed for a short historical period during the late seventh century under the reigns of Emperor Gaozong and, more particularly, Empress Wu, when *Gujing ji* was supposedly written. Through incorporating all these into the design of the mirror, the author connected the micro-world of the mirror/*mingtang* to the macro-world of human society at a given historical moment. The story of the mirror thus serves as a symbolic, allegorical, or even "*roman-à-clef*" account of the lives of the author and his contemporaries.[42]

The history of bronze mirrors from the Han dynasty to the Tang is preserved not only in museums and the works done by mirror specialists but also in various literary, philosophical, religious, sociological and political texts. Just as a textual landscape can be different from a physical landscape, so textualized mirror lore here differs from the physical history of real mirrors. The study of mirror lore is, apparently, to a certain degree independent of the study of mirror casting history. While the mirror in *Gujing ji* is typologically a mirror of "nowhere," it is ideologically a mirror of "somewhere," as can be seen in the following section.

[41] For a detailed study of *Mingtang* and its ideological impact on the intellectual environment of the early Tang, see Antonino Forte, *Mingtang and Buddhist Utopias in the history of the astronomical clock: the tower, statue and armillary sphere constructed by Empress Wu* (Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1988; and Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988).

[42] For general discussions of the *roman-à-clef* mode in Chinese narrative, see Jue Chen, "'Shooting sand at people's shadow': Yingshe as a mode of representation in medieval Chinese Literature," *Monumenta Serica* 47 (1999): 169–207.

V. The Pre-Tang Taoist Mirror Lore: a Mirror of Somewhere

The exploration of pre-Tang Chinese mirror lore as preserved in *Gujing ji*, though seemingly technical, is in fact essential to our understanding of the mirror lore of medieval China in general, and of the cultural context of *Gujing ji* in particular.[43] This section is an attempt to review some preliminary observations on this topic.

As a precious item with magic power, how did the mirror function in medieval Chinese culture in general, and in the story of *Gujing ji* in particular? From the perspective of popular religion, the mirror in *Gujing ji*, as a reservoir of pre-Tang Chinese mirror lore, incorporates at least five ideological mirror types into its story of adventure. All these types of mirror existed in the minds of medieval Chinese during the period of the Six Dynasties. They are the "Mirror that Discloses the True Identity of a Demon" (*zhaoyao jing* 照妖鏡), the "Mirror that Reflects

[43] For an excellent discussion of medieval Chinese mirror lore, see Fukunaga Mitsuji, "Dōkyō ni okeru kagami to ken" [The Taoist mirror and sword], *Tōhō Gakuhō* 45 (1973): 59–120. A Chinese version, "Daojiao de jing yu jian" [The Taoist mirror and sword], translated by Xu Yangzhu, can be found in *Riben xuezhe yanjiu Zhongguoshi lunzhu xuanyi* [Translation of selected papers on Chinese history by Japanese scholars], ed. Liu Junwen (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1993), pp.386–445. Much of my discussion here is based on it.

Human Entrails" (*zhaogu jing* 照骨鏡), the "Mirror that Cures Diseases" (*wuji jing* 無疾鏡), the "Mirror that Knows Future Things" (*zhishi jing* 知事鏡), and the "Mirror that Sees the Gods or Immortals" (*jianshen jing* 見神鏡).

All five mirror-types have a strong Taoist flavour. The functions of these mirrors include keeping evil forces at bay, reading the human organs (in the manner of X-rays today), seeing things people could not see, curing diseases, and telling fortunes. These functions are well documented in the texts of the Six Dynasties, prior to the composition of *Gujing ji*.

Gujing ji also serves as a source of metaphorical mirror lore that was important to the official ideology of Confucianism from the Han to the Tang. In the Sui and the early Tang, the Confucian metaphorical usage of the mirror, so-called "taking the history as a mirror for the present" (*yi shi wei jian* 以史為鑒), occupied an important position in the minds of the emperors and their subjects. These Confucian and Taoist orientations are different from, yet complementary to, each other.

I will try to review the textual and cultural origins of these functions of the mirror, as well as to observe further how they work in the story of *Gujing ji* in a synthesized way.

Let us start with the Taoist mirror. The first type, in terms of function, is the Mirror that Discloses the True Identity of a Demon.[44] In the context of medieval Chinese mirror lore, the Mirror that Discloses the True Identity of a Demon functions powerfully in *Gujing ji*: in an inn located in a place right outside of the capital, Wang Du 王度, the protagonist, meets Parrot 鸚鵡, a beautiful maid from nowhere. Confronted by Wang Du's magic mirror, she is immediately transformed into a fox, her original and true form. In *Gujing ji* we read:

> In the sixth month of that year, Wang Du was heading back to Chang'an [the capital]. After arriving at Changle Slope, he lodged at Cheng Xiong's inn. Cheng Xiong recently hired a maid named Parrot who was left by another guest. She was very pretty. After settling down, Wang Du wanted to dress himself carefully, so he checked his attire in the mirror. "I dare not live here any longer," said Parrot who began kowtowing and bleeding as soon as she saw the mirror at a distance … .Wang Du suspected that she was a demon or an evil spirit, so he approached her holding up the mirror … . The maid fell on her knees again and told her story: "I am an old fox—one thousand years old—living under the tall pine tree in front of the Mountain God temple of the Mount Hua … . Then, unexpectedly, I encountered the heavenly mirror and now I can hide my true identity no longer."… When she had finished, she prostrated herself again, turned back into an old fox, and died.
> 至其年六月，度歸長安，至長樂坡，宿於主人程雄家。雄新受寄

[44] According to Li Jianguo, the term *zhaoyao jing* was first used by Li Shangyin (AD 813?–58?) in a line of one of his poems, where he says "*wowen zhaoyao jing*" (I have heard about the Mirror that Discloses the True Identity of a Demon). See Li Jianguo, *Tang Wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* [Annotated bibliographical studies on *Zhiguai* and *Chuanqi* in the Tang and the Five Dynasties] (Tianjin: Nankai Daxue Chubanshe, 1993), p.118. Li Jianguo's statement regarding the earliest use of the term may be correct, but, in terms of function, this type of mirror did appear in pre-Tang texts.

一婢，頗甚端麗，名曰鸚鵡。度既稅駕，將整冠履，引鏡自照。鸚鵡遙見，即便叩首流血，云：「不敢住。」……度疑精魅，引鏡逼之。……婢再拜自陳云：「某是華山府君廟前長松下千年老狸，……不意遭逢天鏡，隱形無路。」……歌訖，再拜，化為老狸而死。

This Mirror that Discloses the True Identity of a Demon was not created by Tang writers, but was rather a confabulation of the Six Dynasties. One of the earliest appearances of this type of mirror was in the "Dengshe" 登涉 chapter of Ge Hong's 葛洪 *Baopu zi* 抱朴子.

> Long ago, Chang Kai-t'a and Ou Kao-ch'eng were both giving earnest thought to the divine process in a cave on Mount Yün-t'ai in Shu [Szechuan], when a man approached them wearing a single [an unlined] garment of coarse yellow silk and a kerchief of Kudzu. "Rest yourselves, Taoist hermits," he said, "for you are suffering from your life as hermits." When the two of them looked into their mirrors, they saw that it was a deer. Immediately they greeted it with: "You are an old tiger [deer] belonging to this mountain. How dare you pretend to be a human being!" Before they had finished speaking, the man changed into a tiger [deer] and left.[45]
> 昔張蓋躋及偶高成二人，并精思於蜀雲臺山石室中。忽有一人，著黃練單衣葛巾，往到其前曰：勞乎道士，乃辛苦幽隱！於是二人顧視鏡中，乃是鹿也。因問之曰：汝是山中老鹿。何敢詐為人形。言未絕，而來人即成鹿而走去。

This reflects an age-old Chinese belief that a demon (*yao* 妖) could transform itself into a human being in order to fool, play with, or seduce and harm people. However, a Taoist mirror had the magic power to expose the true identity of the demon, even if it had taken human form. Once its true identity was revealed in the mirror, the demon would flee and could no longer cause harm.[46]

Therefore, according to Ge Hong, it was essential for a Taoist who travelled in the mountains to carry a mirror with him to protect himself from demons and spirits.

> The spirits in old objects are capable of assuming human shape for the purpose of confusing human vision and constantly putting human beings to a test. It is only when reflected in a mirror that they are unable to alter their true forms. Therefore, in the old days, all Taoists entering the mountains suspended on their backs a mirror measuring nine inches [*cun*] or more in diameter, so that aged demons would not dare approach them. If any did come to test them, they were to turn and look at them in the mirror. If they were genii or good mountain gods, they would look like human beings when viewed in the mirror. If they were birds, animals, or evil demons, their true forms would appear in the mirror.[47]

[45] See Wang Ming, *Baopu zi neipian jiaoshi* [A collation and annotation of the inner chapters of *Baopu zi*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980), p.274. This English translation and those in nn.46–47 (with minor moderations) are from James Ware, *Alchemy, medicine, religion in the China of A.D. 320: the nei p'ien of Ko Hung (Pao-p'u tzu)* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966), p.281.

[46] The mirror had the power, according to Ge Hong, not only of driving out demons but also of keeping ghosts away. In *Baopu zi* we read: "At the foot of Mount Lin-lü there was a shelter inhabited by ghosts. Whenever someone spent the night there he either died or fell ill. Every night several dozen individuals were there clad in yellow, white, or black—some of them men and others women. [Hsi] Po-I once spent a night there. Lighting a lamp or torch [candle], he was sitting, intoning a Classic, when at midnight about a dozen characters, entering and sitting down opposite him, proceeded to play dice and back-gammon with one another. Po-I secretly looked at them in his mirror, and they proved to be a pack of dogs. He then seized his torch [candle] and stood up as though he were going to extinguish it, but as it singed the clothing of one of the visitors there was an odor of scorched hair. Then when he stabbed another one of them with the dagger that had been concealed in his breast, there was at first a human cry, but upon dying the creature became a dog. Thereupon, all the other dogs left. With that, the haunting of the shelter ended. Such is the power of a mirror." See Wang Ming, *Baopu zi neipian jiaoshi*, p.274, and James Ware, *Alchemy, medicine, religion in the China of A.D. 320*, pp.281–2.

[47] See Wang Ming, p.274; Ware, p.281. If one compares the above passage with the corresponding description in *Gujingji*, the similarities are obvious.

> 又萬物之老者，其精悉能假託人形，以眩惑人目而常試人。唯不能於鏡中易其真形耳。是以古之入山道士，皆以明鏡徑九寸以上，懸於背後。則老魅不敢近人。或有來試人者，則當顧視鏡中，其是仙人及山中好神者，顧鏡中故如人形。若是鳥獸邪魅，則其形貌皆見鏡中矣。

Similar examples can be found in other texts of the same period, such as Ge Hong's *Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital* (Xijing zaji 西京雜記)[48] and *A Record of the Han Emperor Wu's Penetration in the Dark Mysteries* (Han Wu dongming ji 漢武洞冥記, author uncertain),[49] among others.

The major difference between *Gujing ji* and stories in the Six Dynasties texts quoted above seems only to be the geographical locations in which the demons lived: in the Six Dynasties' texts, demons disguised as humans mainly lived in the countryside or mountains, but under the Tang they also lived in or near towns in order to intermingle with humans (just as in modern science fiction aliens intermingle with humans in big cities). This made a Mirror that Discloses the True Identity of a Demon essential for the Tang people in their everyday lives, even if they lived in big cities.

The second type of mirror in *Gujing ji* is the Mirror that Reflects Human Entrails. One day, a foreign monk came to Wang Du's house and told his brother about the magic power of the mirror:

> "Unfortunately," sighed the monk, "we do not have a certain essential substance; otherwise we could make the mirror see people's entrails."
> 僧又歎息曰：「……更作法試，應照見腑臟，所恨卒無藥耳。」

One of the earliest examples of this type of mirror appeared in Ge Hong's *Xijing zaji*, which is described as follows:

> Emperor Gaozu of Han entered the Palace of Xianyang ... , and there was a square mirror whose diameter was four *chi* [Chinese foot] and the length of which was five *chi* and nine *cun*.[50] Both sides of it were luminous. If one faces it, one will see one's reflection in it upside down. If one puts a hand on the heart, one will see the intestines, stomach, heart, liver, spleen, lungs and kidneys. If a sick person faces the mirror and holds their hand, they will know where their sickness is. If a woman has sexual or vicious desires, the mirror will show that her gallbladder is open and her heart is moving. The First Emperor of the Qin often used it to examine his palace ladies.
> 漢高祖入咸陽宮……有方鏡。廣四尺，高五尺九寸。表裡有明，照之影則倒見。以手掩心而來，則見腸胃五臟……。人有疾病在內，掩手而照之，則知病之所在。又女子有邪心，則膽張心動。秦始皇常以照宮人。[51]

The same type of mirror, according to semi-historical sources, was displayed in front of the Renshou Hall in the Wu Palace 吳宮仁壽殿

[48] In *Xijing zaji* there is an account that claims that Emperor Xuan of the Han always carried a Mirror That Discloses the True Identity of a Demon with him, which helped him out of difficulties. When he passed away, the mirror also disappeared (in a similar manner to the disappearance of the mirror at the end of *Gujing ji*). For the original text, see Fukui Shigemasa's collated version *Xijing zaji, duduan* [Miscellaneous records of the Western Capital and Independent Judgment] (Tokyo: Tōhō Shoten, 2000), p.28.

[49] See Wang Guoliang, *Han Wu dongmingji yanjiu* (Taipei: Wenshizhe Chubanshe, 1989), p.48.

[50] This type of mirror and its variations could be either huge or small, measured by *chi* or by *cun*. The same is true for certain other types of mirrors studied here.

[51] See Fukui Shigemasa, *Xijing zaji, duduan*, pp.90–1.

during the Three Kingdoms 三國 period (AD 220–280). It was therefore also called the mirror of *renshou* 仁壽鏡.[52] Doubtless the mirror in *Gujing ji* could also be potentially regarded as a Mirror that Reflects Human Entrails as long as "a certain essential substance" (*yao* 藥) was available.[53]

Related to this X-ray type of mirror, an earlier example of the third type of mirror—the Mirror that Cures Diseases—can be found in Ren Fang's 任昉 (AD 460–508) *Account of Strange Things* (Shuyi ji 述異記):

> In the state of Rilin, there are several thousand different kinds of divine medicine. In the south-west area of the state, there is a stone mirror. It is huge, several hundred square *li* in size, luminous and crystal-clear. It shows a person's internal organs such as the heart, liver, gallbladder and stomach.[54] The mirror is also called the "mirror of immortals." If people were sick, they would go to the mirror and see their reflections there, and thereby learn which organ is the origin of the sickness and take the appropriate proper divine medicine for it. All people would be cured.
> 日林國有神藥數千種。其西南有石鏡。方數百里，光明瑩徹，可鑒五臟六腑。亦名仙人鏡。國中人若有疾，輒照其形，遂知病起何臟腑，即採神藥餌之。無不愈。[55]

This third type of mirror can not only determine the origin of a person's illness by seeing through his or her body, but it could also provide the right prescription for a cure. It is obvious that the mirror in *Gujing ji* had a similar function, as revealed in the episode involving Zhang Longju:

> Pestilence was especially common between the Pu and the Shan. Zhang Longju of Hebei was a minor subordinate of Wang Du. Several dozen members of Zhang's family were simultaneously infected by these diseases. Wang Du showed compassion to Zhang: he brought the mirror into Zhang's household and let Zhang use it in the evenings to light up the place. All the infected family members were astonished and got up when they saw the mirror, saying: "We saw that Longju brought a moon to light up the house. The light was as cold as ice wherever it touched the body, the coolness went deep inside us." The fever was immediately gone, and they all recovered the next evening.
> 蒲陝之間，癘疫尤盛。有河北人張龍駒，為度下小吏，其家良賤數十口，一時遇疾。度憫之。齎此入其家，使龍駒持鏡夜照。諸病者見鏡，皆驚起，云：「見龍駒持一月來相照，光陰所及，如冰著體，冷徹腑臟。」即時熱定，至晚並愈。

The main difference between the regular Mirror that Cures Diseases and the mirror in *Gujing ji* seems to be that the former still required the prescription of medicine to affect a cure while the latter could cure disease by the inner power of the mirror itself.

[52] It is said that this magic mirror was huge and square. See Yu Shinan, *Beitang shuchao* [Excerpts from books in the northern hall] (Taipei: Hongguang Shuju, 1974), p.627. Because this type of mirror was first found in the palace of the First Emperor of the Qin, it is also called the "mirror of the [First] Emperor of the Qin" (*Qinhuang jing*). Popular faith in the magic Mirror that Reflects Human Entrails was particularly common under the Sui and throughout the Tang. For instance, in *Youyang zazu*, we read that there was a square mirror besides a stone cave at the Dancing Spring of Wulao County, in which one could see through people's skin and clearly discern their organs. People believed that this mirror was the one owned by the First Emperor of the Qin. See Duan Chengshi, *Youyang zazu* [Assorted notes from Youyang] (Taipei: Hanjing Wenhua Gongsi, 1983), p.93.

[53] The description of polishing the mirror here, I believe, reflects a medieval, especially Tang-dynasty, practice. It appears to be very similar to the method given in Bai Juyi's (AD 772–846) famous poem "Bailian jing": "Polishing the mirror with the cream of gold and the powder of pearl." See *Quan Tang shi* [Complete poetry of the Tang] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 13:427:4700.

[54] In the theory of Chinese medicine, there are five *zang* organs and six *fu* organs in the human body. For the sake of conciseness, I have not translated all the names of all of the organs here.

[55] See Nakajima Osafumi's collated version in *Ren Fang Shu yi ji jiaoben* [Collated edition of Ren Fang's account of strange things], *Tōbō Gakuhō* 73 (2001): 443.

Both suggest that a magic mirror had the power to penetrate the human body. Along the same lines, types four and five discussed below—the Mirror that Knows Future Things (*zhishi jing* 知事鏡) and the Mirror that Sees the Gods or Immortals (*jianshen jing* 見神鏡)—as extensively recorded in Six Dynasties' texts, had the power to penetrate "other worlds." I would argue that the mirror in *Gujing ji* combined both functions. Also in the Zhang Longju episode, it is recorded that:

> Zhang Longju came and told Wang Du: "Yesterday, I encountered a person in my dreams. He had a dragon's head and a snake's body, and he was wearing a red cap and purple robe. He told me: 'I am the spirit of the mirror, and my name is Purple Treasure. I have helped your family, so now I am asking a favor of you. Please tell Lord Wang that the people here did something wrong, so Heaven punished them with diseases. Why let me, against the will of Heaven, save their lives? This disease will last for only two months. After that, these people will gradually recover by themselves. Please don't put me in a difficult position'." Wang Du was moved by the concern of the mirror and therefore recorded this incident. Two months later, all the sick people recovered just as Zhang Longju had been told in his dream.
> 龍駒來謂度曰：「龍駒昨忽夢一人，龍頭蛇身，朱冠紫服，謂龍駒：我即鏡精也，名曰紫珍。常有德於君家，故來相託。為我謝王公，百姓有罪，天與之疾，奈何使我反天救物？且病至後月，當漸愈，無為我苦。」度感其靈怪，因此誌之。至後月，病果漸愈，如其言也。

Obviously this mirror allowed humans to see the gods (*jianshen* 見神), and at the same time it could see into the future (*zhishi* 知事). These two functions are intermingled in *Gujing ji*.

All five types of mirrors described here carry an otherworldly flavor, which implies that such a mirror has the power to connect this world with others.

VI. Beyond Taoism: Buddhist Mirrors and Confucian Mirrors

In addition to the "Taoist" mirror functions discussed in the above, certain types of Buddhist mirror were also popular during the period.[56] While not playing a direct role in *Gujing ji*, they are, to some degree, intellectually intertwined with the concept and function of the mirror. For instance, the Mirror of Karma (*yejing* 業鏡), which reflects a person's good and bad deeds in their previous lives, shares some similarities to certain aspects of the mirror in *Gujing ji*. The Mirror of Wisdom (*huijing* 慧鏡), which suggests that Buddha's mind is reflected in the human mind, can also be potentially connected to the function of the mirror in

[56] For a discussion of the Buddhist concept of the metaphorical mirror, see Paul Demiéville, "The Mirror of the Mind [translated by Neal Donner]," in *Sudden and gradual: approaches to enlightenment in Chinese thought*, ed. Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987), pp.13–40.

Gujing ji. In contrast to the Taoist mirror that emphasizes mystic elements, the Buddhist mirror focuses on the power of divine intelligence that will help humans broaden the boundaries of their understanding, to see the present through the past and perceive the future in the present.

In the medieval Confucian mind, the basic ideological function of a mirror was also to link the past with the present in order to broaden the limits of human intelligence and comprehension, and to allow the individual to make correct political decisions. But, compared with its Buddhist counterpart, the Confucian concept of the mirror is much more metaphorically oriented. In other words, through looking into the past, people are able to understand the present and the future better, showing a trust in the power of human logic through metaphorical reasoning.

The metaphorical usage of the mirror is often seen in the texts of the early medieval period of Han and the Three Kingdoms, stretching into the Six Dynasties. Shortly after the Six Dynasties, this Confucian concept was conspicuously incorporated into the Sui-dynasty Buddhist text *Record of The Three Jewels in Past Dynasties* [Lidai sanbao ji 歷代三寶記] by Fei Changfang 費長房. In terms of the specific function for understanding the present through the past (*jiangu zhijin* 鑒古知今) this testifies to the close relationship between Buddhist and Confucian concepts of the mirror. As Fei says:

> I am now making a general chronology to piece together the past and the present, while using the dynasties and reigns to divide eras. This design will allow the reader to view the rise and fall of rulers in the past as if things are reflected in a mirror in front of them, and to observe the changing of dynasties as if the reader has a mirror in the palm.[57] After that they will be able to comment on the achievements of different emperors to see how they apply their royal favors to the world and how the Buddha's teaching nourishes everything in the world whenever it gets an opportunity.[58]
>
> 今先上編甲子紘絡古今，下纘帝年綱紀時代，庶禪讓霸主若鏡目前，遷革市朝如鑒掌內，然後考諸君王澤被撫運，適時佛法化流應機濟物。

This earlier representation of the metaphorical mirror in medieval China was further developed and greatly promoted under Emperor Taizong's 太宗 reign (AD 627–49) during the early Tang dynasty as part of the new dynasty's mainstream ideology.[59] This is vividly illustrated in

[57] Again, I would emphasize here that the concept of "a mirror in the palm" was popular both typologically and ideologically under the Sui and the Tang. Ideologically, it was especially popular under /the early Tang, when Emperor Taizong was in power. More than a century later, Bai Juyi wrote: "Emperor Taizong often uses [certain] people as his mirror, and they [metaphorically] reflect the past and /the present instead of reflecting the appearance of humans. [By so doing,] the safety and well-being of the country are thus put into the emperor's palm, while the political achievements and mistakes of the previous kings are held within the emperor's mind." See *Quan Tang shi*, 13:427:4700.

[58] See Fei Changfang, *Lidai sanbao ji*, in *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* (Tokyo: Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–32), 49:15:22–3.

[59] The metaphorical use of the mirror became an accepted convention among later emperors of the Tang. For example, Emperor Gaozong's well-known metaphorical statement regarding a memorial from Xue Zhen as being like a mirror reflecting the sunlight that enables people to see all things: "after reading your memorial, [I had the following feeling:] it was as if a dark room had been lit by sunlight, or how a person sees all things reflected in a clear mirror." See Yang Jiong, *Zhongshuling Fenyingong Xue Zhen xingzhuang* [An unofficial biography of Xue Zhen, Secretary of the State and Duke of Fenyin], in Xu Mingxia, ed., *Lu Zhaolin ji Yang Jiong ji* [Collected works of Lu Zhaolin and collected works of Yang Jiong] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980), p.162. Even until the reigns of Emperor Xuanzong, people still tended to use the mirror as a metaphor in book titles, for instance, Xiao Song's *Kaiyuan liyi jing* [A mirror on the rites and justice in the Kaiyuan reign]. The rationale behind the Tang dynasty's metaphorical usage of the mirror is largely based on an age-old allusion, *Yinjian buyuan*, in which the rulers of the Zhou dynasty held the fall of the Yin [Shang] dynasty up as a mirror in front of them to remind them how to do things correctly. This type of mind-set occupied an important position in the mind of Tang emperors. See *Jiu Tangshu* [Old history of the Tang dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975), 8:71:2550–1. The "mirror of Yin" here is in fact none other than the mirror of Sui, which is not far away at all from the Tang dynasty. This practice was called "taking the Sui as a mirror" (*yi Sui wei jian*), and became a popular motto for the early Tang emperors as well as the ministers in the court. See *Jiu Tangshu*, 8:71:2554.

the following anecdote, in which the minister Wei Zheng 魏徵 (AD 580–643) functioned, metaphorically, as a Confucian mirror to the throne.[60] Wei Zheng, Emperor Taizong's chief adviser, was, in his early years, reportedly exposed to the teachings of the great Sui dynasty master of Confucianism Wang Tong 王通 (AD 584?–617), whose life story is, in turn, one of the keys to our understanding of the text of *Gujing ji*.[61]

> "If one uses the bronze [mirror] as a mirror," said Emperor Taizong to his subjects around him, "one will be able to adjust one's dress and hat properly. If one uses the past as a mirror, one will be able to learn the principles of the rise and fall of a dynasty. If one uses a person as a mirror, one will be able to discern one's own achievements and mistakes. I always have these three mirrors at hand to avoid making mistakes. Now that Wei Zheng has passed away, I have lost one of my mirrors."
> 太宗後嘗謂侍臣曰：「夫以銅為鏡，可以正衣冠；以古為鏡，可以知興替；以人為鏡，可以明得失。朕常保此三鏡，以防己過，今魏徵殂逝，遂亡一鏡矣。」[62]

This metaphorical concept—the idea that history could act as a mirror to show the current emperor how to rule his land and people well—was developed so strongly under the early Tang that it not only became a major idea in the early Tang and high Tang court, but remained popular long after that. After the completion and wide circulation of Sima Guang's 司馬光 (1019–86) monumental historical chronicle, *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* (Zizhi tongjian 資治通鑑), in the Song dynasty, this concept became one of the most influential commonplaces in Chinese thought.

An important component of the Confucian mirror that relates to the above point of view is found in Han dynasty books of divination (*weishu* 緯書), whose spirit is incorporated into early Tang-dynasty mainstream ideology. Whether an emperor retained or lost his magic mirror was a definitive sign of whether or not he would continue to rule the land and people legitimately. Therefore, to gain or lose a mirror meant a great deal to both the emperor and his country. Obviously, the mirror here serves as a symbol of the legitimacy (or otherwise) and destiny of a dynasty: if a disqualified ruler came to power, the mirror would be lost. When a legitimate ruler appeared, the mirror would go to him automatically. An appreciation of belief helps us understand in part the mystery of the mirror in *Gujing ji* and illustrates its main function.

In short, in *Gujing ji* the mirror functions variously as a Mirror that Discloses the True Identity of a Demon, a Mirror that Reflects Human Entrails, a Mirror that Cures Diseases, a Mirror that Tells Fortune, and a Mirror that Sees Gods and Immortals. The same mirror at the end of the story also functions as the Confucian metaphorical mirror reflecting the rise and fall of a dynasty, focusing on its legitimacy.

[60] This Tang concept is discussed in detail in Howard Wechsler's *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the court of T'ang T'ai-tsung* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974).

[61] This is discussed in detail in my "History and fiction in the Gujingi (Record of an ancient mirror)," *Monumenta Serica* 52 (2004): 161–97.

[62] See Wu Jing, *Zhenguan zhengyao* [Main points of the politics of the Zhengguan reign] (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1978), p.33.

Taking the end of the story as our point of departure, the primary function of the mirror in *Gujing ji*, on the surface at least, seems to be to foretell the fall of the Sui dynasty a few months later, in 617:

> Su Bin, a recluse of Lu Mountain, was a scholar of great enlightenment knowing the principles of the *Book of Changes*, and who was capable of telling fortunes both in the past and the future. Su Bin told [Wang] Ji: "All the marvelous things of this universe will not stay in this world too long. Today's universe is chaotic, and one should not stay in places other than one's homeland. Right now, the mirror is still with you and sufficient to protect you. But you should go home as soon as possible."…
> On the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the thirteenth year of the Daye reign, a baleful cry issued from the mirror-case. The sound was at first but a thread, slight and distant. Then, it became louder and louder, resembling the howling of a dragon and a tiger. After a while, the cry disappeared, and when the case was opened, the mirror was gone.
> 廬山處士蘇賓，奇識之士也，洞明《易》道，藏往知來，謂勣曰：「天下神物，必不久居人間。今宇宙喪亂，他鄉未必可止，吾子此鏡尚在，足下衛，幸速歸家鄉也。」……
> 大業十三年七月十五日，匣中悲鳴，其聲纖遠，俄而漸大，若龍虎咆吼，良久乃定。開匣視之，即失鏡矣。

On a more detailed level I would speculate that it is possible that the primary function of the mirror in *Gujing ji* was also to foretell the temporary fall of the Tang house at the end of the seventh century, when Empress Wu established the short-lived Zhou 周 dynasty. I would argue that this "foretelling" carries a strong sense of a Tang loyalist's lamentation, itself the sophisticated application of the analogical imagination from a writer of a *roman-à-clef*.

* * *

From this brief discussion it is clear that the mirror in *Gujing ji* is a mirror of "somewhere." Its functions can be traced through different sources in the Han and Six Dynasties up to the early Tang. An educated general reader of the early Tang would have felt very familiar with the cultural functions of the mirror as described here, although the mirror's typological design may give rise to a sense of alienation. Therefore, the overall perception of this reader is that the mirror is a mirror of fact as well as a mirror of fiction: something remote yet proximate.

Based on this, I strongly suspect that the author of *Gujing ji* was a person who lived during the reigns of Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu, and that the central symbolic meaning of the mirror in *Gujing ji* was

[63] See note 42.

to insinuate the usurpation of the throne by Empress Wu, using the adventures of the mirror at the fall of the Sui dynasty as a "shadow" story to "shoot" at some otherwise hidden reality. In the tradition of Chinese fictive narrative, *yingshe* 影射[63] is a popular method of composition. The literal translation of *yingshe* is to "shoot the shadow," while the real meaning of the term is to create a *roman-à-clef* story to parallel a situation in reality. In the case of *Gujing ji*, in order to do this, a variety of elements from the cultural reservoir of previous dynasties were assimilated to create a fictional mirror.

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