

## THE SAINT EUPLUS MIRACLE IN CHINA: THE LOCAL VERSION OF A MOTIF COMPLEX

AGLAIA STAROSTINA  
 Senior Research Fellow  
 China Department  
 Institute of Oriental Studies  
 Russian Academy of Sciences  
 12 Rozhdestvenka Str.  
 Moscow 107031, Russian Federation  
 e-mail: abstarostina@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

A Eurasian motif complex built around the illusion of a flood was described by Artëm Koz'min in 2011 under the preliminary name of the Saint Euplus Miracle. Subsequently, this discovery proved to be productive in the understanding of the development of some Chinese plots including the image of a magic paintbrush. This article deals with a combination of the magic paintbrush image and the borrowed motif complex centred around water that appears miraculously, or the illusion of it, in Chinese tradition. The image of a magic brush has been widespread in the literature and folklore of China for centuries, although this combination, which underlies the famous tale Ma Liang and his Magic Brush, remains unnoticed. The aim of the article is to describe the Chinese version of the Saint Euplus Miracle and to point out its characteristic features.

In all the Chinese examples analysed, the role of the magic helper was prominent, while in the non-Chinese cases the helper was generally absent. Another feature specific to the Chinese cases was the helper giving the hero a magic object for use in drawing.

**KEYWORDS:** migration of plots • Chinese folklore • Tang literature • cross-cultural study • *Taiping Guangji*

### INTRODUCTION\*

In Chinese folk and literary traditions, the motif of a brush as a magic object capable of either providing its owner with exemplary writing skills or making pictures come to life is known from the early Middle Ages. Its reappearance through the ages and areas has been observed by a few scholars, however, the research dedicated particularly to its

\* The author thanks the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

emergence and development is nearly absent. Literary tales and verses about a magic brush bestowing literary talent have been subject to scholarly analysis (Ai and Liu 2011; Liu 2015). However, the whole set of medieval folk and literary plots and motifs including the image of the magic brush is largely still undescribed, and it seems that all we have is rich but scattered references concerning some mutual literary influences (Li 2007: 1011–1012; Liu 2015). As a result, a curious but rather persistent combination of the magic paintbrush with a borrowed motif complex centred around the illusion of water has been neglected by scholars.

This study of this peculiar combination was triggered by an observation by Artëm Koz'min (1976–2013). In his report for the Juri Lotman memorial conference at the end of 2011, Koz'min described an international motif complex (he calls it a plot; here I chose to use the term 'motif complex' as it seemed more often to play the role not of the whole plot but of an integral part) with the following kernel:

A person with supernatural powers [D1711 Magician]<sup>1</sup> is put in a closed room. People present see that water miraculously appears in the room [D2151.2.5 Stream Magically Appears]. Then the water abruptly disappears [D2151 Magic Control of Waters]. (Koz'min 2011; forthcoming)

Koz'min called this complex the Saint Euplus Miracle. Some months later, he wrote me an email asking about possible Chinese parallels, and it appeared to be relevant to a group of Chinese stories about the magic brush. The following study will deal with several medieval and two modern Chinese texts containing this motif complex. The aim is to reveal and describe the basic features of the Chinese version of the Saint Euplus Miracle and its connection to the image of the magic brush.

#### MORPHOLOGY AND SOURCES OF THE SAINT EUPLUS MIRACLE COMPLEX ACCORDING TO KOZ'MIN

In the written version of the conference report, Koz'min (forthcoming) points out the existence of the motif complex with this kernel all over the world. It can be traced in various traditions from 10th century Byzantium to the legends and short mythological narratives in the European part of Russia in the 19th and 20th centuries, to the description of Siberian shamanist practices and further to modern European fiction and poetry (15 examples were attached to the report, including one example of fiction and one of poetry). Koz'min reports that a reflection of this motif can be found in the K'iche' tales and traced to the time of the first settlers in America.

Analysing the morphology of the motif complex, he shows that a) the hero had to either to be a magician (D1711) or a witch (G200) or employ some kind of supernatural power (D2151 Magic Control of Waters); b) the place should be indoors; c) the central event varies, but in all cases contains the emergence of water (D2151.2.5 Stream Magically Appears), which can be a miracle, an illusion or an induced vision. In a small minority of cases involving escape from a closed space, water is missing and replaced by a vehicle. The Byzantine Miracle of Saint Euplus can be viewed as the "simplest case" (Koz'min forthcoming). Saint Euplus, preaching in Sicilia, was arrested and subsequently tortured by Calvisianus, ruler of the city of Catania. In prison after being

tortured Euplus was thirsty. He prayed for some time, and a spring appeared in his cell. Afterward, Calvisianus ordered soldiers to go to the cell, and they found that it was full of water. Euplus then stretched out his hands and the water disappeared. This episode was added to the original story of St Euplus' martyrdom in the 10th century by Symeon the Metaphrast (1864: 527–528). Here we deal not with an illusion but with miraculous appearance of real water, and the hero is not a magician but rather employs the higher power of God.

Studying the semantics of the motif complex, Koz'min suggested its close connection with the illusions presented to the mind in altered states of consciousness and, therefore, with the hypnotic tricks of shamans, on the one hand, and with mystic visions, on the other. While it seemed difficult in the first stages of research to trace the route of dissemination, Koz'min (forthcoming) saw its source in the "shaman folklore of northern Eurasia".

While the topic of water illusion made in jest (or as an entertainment) had already been preliminarily studied in *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm* by Johannes Bolte and Georg Polivka (1918: 203–206), the set of motifs depicted in Koz'min's article was unnoticed by them. On the whole, Bolte and Polivka concentrated on the motif later listed by Stith Thompson (1955–1958) as D2031.1 Magician Makes People Lift Garments to Avoid Wetting in an Imaginary River.

## TWO MODERN CHINESE EXAMPLES

Studying how the Saint Euplus Miracle travelled across the world, Koz'min wrote the abovementioned email. Searching for an answer, in the next few months I found some Chinese examples. Among the first was a famous modern children's tale called Ma Liang and his Magic Brush (Shen Bi Ma Liang).

The story of a peasant boy called Ma Liang and his magic brush is sometimes mistaken for a folk tale. However, it was written by children's writer Hong Xuntao (1928–2001) and first published in 1955 in the magazine *Xin Guancha* (Zhongguo wenxue 1991: 4600). The same year, a puppet animation film was made that received international acknowledgment (Sun 2022: 161–174).

A poor orphan Ma Liang, who is a talented artist, encounters an immortal in a dream and is presented with a magic paintbrush, which however turns out to be real and not illusory. Everything that he paints with his new brush comes to life. He uses his magic skills to provide his poor neighbours with cattle, ploughs, and other necessary items. Detained by an evil rich man, he escapes by drawing a ladder, which becomes real and later kills his pursuer with the bow and arrow, also obtained with the help of his magic brush. Upon hearing of Ma Liang's brush, the emperor orders him to be brought to the palace. Ma Liang refuses to demonstrate his skill, and the greedy emperor puts the young artist into the imperial prison. The emperor tries in vain to use the magic brush to get gold but must ask Ma Liang for help again. This time Ma Liang heeds his order and paints the money tree requested by the emperor. The tree, however, is situated on a small islet in the sea. Then he paints a ship for the emperor and his court, then when the ship is sailing he paints a big storm. The emperor and his court drown in the sea. (Hong 2015)

The story of Ma Liang, despite it being an author's work, is indeed deeply rooted in folklore. Hong (ibid.: 3–5) admitted that he was inspired by the many folk tales about wonderful brushes and painters that he had collected. It was also influenced by a folk tale slightly reworked by Mi Xingru (1899–1961) published in 1929: Wang Liang and His Immortal Brush (*Xian Bi Wang Liang*).

In this tale, Wang Liang is a boy from an educated family. He also obtains the magic brush while sleeping. Then he is fated to experience various vicissitudes. In the end, he attracts the attention of a chancellor's beautiful daughter and is invited by the emperor to the palace. While demonstrating his skill, he paints sea waves and a ship on the palace wall and leaves the palace on this ship together with the chancellor's daughter. (Mi 1929) The story of Ma Liang seems to have been altered by the author to fit the prevailing propaganda trends of the 1950s (see the section "Back to the Story of Ma Liang" below). However, it is still obvious that both tales match the scheme suggested by Koz'min (2011; forthcoming). Both Wang Liang and Ma Liang employ supernatural power to perform "magic control of water" indoors, making water appear and then disappear.

#### EARLIEST CASES FOUND IN CHINESE WRITTEN TRADITION

The logical next step was to trace a genealogy of this miracle in Chinese tradition and to ascertain, if possible, its specific features. The three earliest examples that I have found have to do with drawing or painting. In the selection of texts attached to Koz'min's report (forthcoming) the process of drawing is mentioned four times, every time in connection with an escape from a prison (R211):

1) in a Moscow city legend about a deserter's prison escape from the memoirs of Pavel Ivanovich Bogatyryov (1849–1908) (Ashukin 1964: 103);

2) in Herman Hesse's *Kurzgefasster Lebenslauf* (1925) water is absent: the hero leaves the prison cell on a train he has painted on the wall. Everything else corresponds to the scheme (Hesse 1972: 43);

3) in a folk legend from the Samara region about the prison escape of Stenka Razin (Stepan Timofeyevich Razin, 1630–1671, the famous revolt leader to whom various magic abilities were ascribed) (Sadovnikov 1884: 341–342);

4) in a Guatemalan myth about the horned serpent where a malevolent witch steps into "the picture of a boat she had outlined with ashes on the floor of the cave" (Gordon 1915: 124) in which she was imprisoned.

Media in these four cases are respectively chalk, paint, not stated, and ashes. One can see that the element of drawing or painting is by no means unusual for this plot.

The three early Chinese examples were included in the *Extensive Records of the Taiping Era* (978), the vast collection of mythological narratives, novellas and plotless paradoxographical texts (Li 2006: 448–449, 1624, 1636). The three texts are fictional accounts; their authors did not strive to record accurately what they heard but went with their imaginations. However, the fiction of this period is heavily reliant on folklore, and the authors of fiction constantly recombine motifs and subplots from oral narratives.

The first story, Feng Shaozheng, is derived from the book written by Zheng Chuhui (d. 867) called *Miscellaneous Records about the Reign of [Emperor] Minghuang* (Zheng

2000). During a severe drought, emperor Xuanzong (685–762) orders the court artist Feng Shaozheng to paint four dragons on the walls of a newly built palace building. Here the miracle is combined with a widely known motif in China of the dragon as a rainmaker.

He did not finish even half of the work when wind and clouds began to emerge right under his brush. The emperor sent officials to the wall to see what would happen. The dragon's scales were covered with moisture. The artist had not completed painting yet when white steam billowed from under the roof and plunged into a nearby pond. The waves rose and heavy rain began. Several hundred people from the palace retinue saw a white dragon rising from the waves into the sky on the clouds. Soon the sky was covered with clouds and a storm broke out. (Li 2006: 1624; see also Zheng 2000: 962–963)

One could argue that the reason for the rain here was not the painter but rather the dragon itself; however, it is clear that only the magic skill of the artist made the image come to life (what amounts both to D2151 Magic Control of Waters and D2143.1 Rain Produced by Magic).

The next text, Student Lu (*Lu sheng*), was originally part of a book called *Records of the Origin of Transformations (Yuan Hua Ji)*, written roughly at the same time as *Miscellaneous Records about the Reign of [Emperor] Minghuang*, i.e., in the middle of the 9th century, and now lost. It is the story of a poor student called Lu who made acquaintance with an old Daoist magician of somewhat dubious moral principles.

The magician offered to teach him the arts of immortality and in return asked only for a woman as a present. Lu tried to kidnap a girl for him by creating illusions with the aid of a magic staff. However, he failed to follow the orders of his new teacher accurately and picked a young lady from a rich and noble family. Her relatives were able to summon a virtuous court Daoist priest to help. Consequently, Lu was quickly exposed and arrested by guards. He confessed and was brought in fetters to the mountain abode where he previously met his teacher; however, the hut was gone and there was no trace of the magician. When Lu called out to him, he appeared before them leaning on a staff. When the guards tried to capture the old man, he had sketched something on the earth with his staff, and suddenly a water barrier appeared between him and his putative captors. Lu asked the old magician to help. He agreed, took a sip of water, and spat it out. A black mist covered the surroundings. When the air had cleared, both Lu and the old man were gone; only the fetters remained on the ground. (Li 2006: 448–449)

The third tale, Lian Guang, initially belonged to the lost collection known as *Records of Marvellous Events of the Great Tang (Da Tang Qi Shi Ji)*. This book was created slightly later than *Miscellaneous Records about the Reign of [Emperor] Minghuang* and *Records of the Origin of Transformations*, at the end of the 9th or perhaps beginning of the 10th century. This story obviously contains a blending of some elements of the previous two.

Lian Guang was picking medicinal herbs on the slopes of Mount Tai when he was approached by a mountain spirit in the guise of a hermit who presented him with a magic five-coloured painting brush. As he soon found out, everything that he painted with it came to life. First at the request of a county prefect and his assistant he painted ghost warriors who started to fight one another. Frightened owners destroyed the picture, and Lian Guang also panicked and fled to another county. There, the prefect

asked him to draw a dragon. Lian Guang reluctantly set to work. As soon as he put a finishing touch, the clouds began to swirl and fog emerged. A whirlwind rose, and the dragon rose on the clouds into the sky. Rain poured down; it did not stop for several days. In anger the prefect put the artist into the county prison. Lian Guang cried and complained; then he fell asleep and dreamed of the mountain spirit, who advised him to paint a big bird. Rising with the dawn, Lian Guang painted a magnificent bird, mounted it, and escaped. Later, however, the mountain spirit came to him and took the brush back noting that he shouldn't have told people about the magical gift. After that, Lian Guang lost his ability to paint. (Li 2006: 1636)

In all three early stories, the protagonist employs supernatural power (in two cases, it is the exaggerated power of art). In the first and the third stories, an illusion (or a miracle) starts indoors. The example from *Records of the Origin of Transformations* does not fit in the sense that the action takes place outdoors, although such exceptions are sometimes possible. In all cases, we have the emergence of water (rain or river) in an important place of a tale. Therefore, one can confidently confirm the presence of the Saint Euplus Miracle in all three tales.

#### MAGIC HELPERS AND MAGIC OBJECTS IN EARLY CHINESE TALES CONTAINING THE SAINT EUPLUS MIRACLE

In the second and third stories, the crucial part is the presence of a magic object and a magic helper. This is also obviously characteristic of the 20th-century stories about Wang Liang and Ma Liang with their magic brushes. In all the examples in the selection of texts attached to Koz'min's article (forthcoming), magic objects are totally absent (the chalk, paints, and ashes do not have their own power, they only serve the person who possesses magic abilities); magic helper is explicitly present only in two Irish tales, *Magic Powers from a Red-haired Boy*, and *Magic Got from the Fairies* (Ó hEochaidh et al. 1977: 126–137). In both cases, the protagonists encounter a magic helper or helpers who teach them how to create various illusions.<sup>2</sup> The species to which this red-haired boy belongs is not given, but all in all his behaviour is typical for a fairy. The ability to create the illusion of water in both Irish stories is but one of the many, and not a vital element of the plot.

Nonetheless, in the tales from *Records of the Origin of Transformations* and *Records of Marvellous Events of the Great Tang*, there is a curious parallel with the first story in Koz'min's collection, namely, the Miracle of Saint Euplus by Symeon. The thing is that Saint Euplus himself did not possess any magical abilities. After seven days in prison, he prayed, and the last words of his prayer were: "Lord Jesus Christ, now command the spring of freshwater to spring up in this prison to quench my thirst and to let everyone know that there is no other god before you" (Symeon 1864: 527). As in the two Chinese stories from the 9th and 10th centuries, Symeon, who was born around 900, describes a person arrested and in need of help calling to a higher power (N817.0.1 God as Helper).

As mentioned before, Symeon inserted the episode with miraculous water into an earlier story of martyrdom that initially lacked supernatural elements (see, for example, Musurillo 1972: 312–319). Given the temporal proximity of the Byzantine and Chinese stories, we can hypothesise that in both cases, this set of motifs, in addition to the origi-

nal scheme including both the image of a magic helper and an important detail of the protagonists' arrest, was introduced to both places through the same folklore tradition. Considering the cultural and economic contacts of Byzantium and China at the time, it is possible to suggest as a carrier a people engaged in international trade, possibly Sogdians, Persians or Syrians.

The story of Lian Guang is not an obvious variant of the Saint Euplus Miracle as its structure seems somewhat warped. We have the magic rain (D2143.1) first, and only during the second night does the hero ask for help and leaves the prison on the back of the bird he has painted (R211 Escape from Prison). The story of Saint Euplus does not fully match the pattern of Lian Guang or Student Lu: it does not include the miraculous flight of the hero, important in those two tales. Saint Euplus is a voluntary martyr who prays for water only to quench his thirst. However, it is more than possible to hypothesise a proto-tale considering that five examples from Koz'min's collection have as the crucial episode a flight with the help of an illusion. Accordingly, the outline of this medieval modification of the Saint Euplus Miracle can be made: (a) a person is detained or arrested; (b) he seeks help from a higher power and obtains it; (c) as a result, other people present observe the magic water in the prison cell (or sometimes outdoors); (d) then the water abruptly disappears, as does the hero. Here it is important to add that episode (b) is characteristic only of early Chinese tales (plus Symeon's tale and its hypothesised Persian/Syrian/Sogdian origin). Judging from existing materials, the magic helper as such is not typical of the later non-Chinese examples of the Saint Euplus Miracle (except for the Irish tales mentioned above). In China, though, the magic helper persists and shows in folk tales including the Saint Euplus Miracle even in the 20th century.

Magic objects, absent in the other tales including the Saint Euplus Miracle, are found in the fragments from *Records of the Origin of Transformations* and *Records of Marvellous Events of the Great Tang*. They are brushes. In the fragment from *Miscellaneous Records about the Reign of [Emperor] Minghuang*, though the brush itself is not magical, the supernatural ability of the artist is tied to his skill. As we saw earlier, some variations of the Saint Euplus Miracle in several traditions do include the element of drawing and painting, although not with the aid of the magic object. Neither Koz'min's collection nor the text mentioned by Bolte and Polivka (1918) have a single mention of a magic object. For now, it seems specific only to the Chinese tales.

The Chinese scholars who commented on the story from *Records of Marvellous Events of the Great Tang* had already noticed that Lian Guang's five-coloured brush was somehow connected with the earlier small group of legends concerning writing brushes (see, for example, Li 2007: 1011–1012). This connection and its sense in a broader context of the development of stories about magic brushes will be discussed below.

#### CHINESE LEGENDS OF MAGIC BRUSHES AND MAGIC PAINTINGS: FROM THE 6TH TO THE 10TH CENTURY

The first legends about magic brushes in China had nothing to do with painting. Neither were they connected with the topic of water or illusions in the broad sense of the word. Those legends emerged among the literati and seemed to have a vivid metaphor

as a core. The brush itself symbolised the ability to write. This ability was crucial for the civil career, and for the opportunity to express one's literary talent, the value of which was increasingly realised by early medieval Chinese scholar-officials.

One of the earliest tales about a magic brush explained the decline of the literary talent of poet Jiang Yan (444–505). Jiang Yan once dreamed that famous writer Guo Pu (276–324) came to him and asked to return his five-coloured brush. After that, Jiang was unable to write good poetry. (For the original story of Jiang Yan's brush see Williams 2014: 172–174.)

Liu Aihua (Liu 2015) in his overview of the medieval accounts of dreams about magic brushes notes that such dreams could predict increasing writing skills. 9th century author Wei Xu tells the story of how poet and calligrapher Yu Shinan (558–638) once dreamed that he swallowed a brush; after that, he became sure of his skill and made great progress in calligraphy. Then, Liu demonstrates that the magic brush in a dream could also symbolise future success in the career of civil servant, as in the case of Ma Yinsun (d. 953) who dreamed of a spirit presenting him with two brushes; when he was subsequently appointed to two important posts simultaneously, he took it as the fulfilment of the omen. Some tales about such dreams are enumerated in Chen Shiyuan's (1516–1597) treatise on dreams (Strassberg 2008: 158). Later, there were even stories in which rather than the scholar or poet himself, his mother had dreamed of a multi-coloured brush while pregnant (Liu 2015: 96).

From this group of legends, the image of a magic (often five-coloured) brush was transferred to the mythological beliefs concerning painting. From the 3rd century approximately, society in different states located in the territory of modern China saw the development in prestige of the individual artist. Along with this process, stories about magic pictures, although not yet brushes, began to emerge. The picture of a great artist could influence reality using imitative magic: Liu Yiqing (403–444) in his *Records of the Hidden and the Visible (You Ming Lu)* mentions that when famous artist and calligrapher Gu Kaizhi (348–409) pinned the portrait of his beloved to the wall, the pin pierced the place where the heart should be, and at the same moment the girl, who was then far away, felt a sharp pain in her heart (Liu 2018: 55).

During the Tang era (618–907), the belief according to which a picture could come to life arose (motif D435.2.1 Picture Comes to Life) independently or as a borrowing from another culture. In a short story from the work by Duan Chengshi (d. 863), *Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang (Youyang Zazu)*, painted dancers descend from the ancient screen to scare the drunken protagonist (Duan 2001: 47).

A tale written a little later and included in the now lost anonymous collection *Records of Strange Tales (Wen Qi Lu)* is built around the image of a fairy called Zhenzhen trapped in a painting using the artist's magic (Li 2006: 2283). This plot seems to be related to an Indian tale from Chapter 19 of *The Abridgment of the Great Story (Brhatkathāślokaśamgraha)* by Budhasvamin (time unclear, probably somewhere between the 8th and 10th centuries), where a prince falls in love with the painted image of a beautiful demoness *yakshi* (Budhasvamin 2005: 151–155). However, we do not find any mention of the artist in the tale of the painted *yakshi*.

The *Famous Paintings through History (Lidai Ming Hua Ji)* collection by Zhang Yanyuan (815–875) contains a famous fragment about Zhang Sengyou (6th century), court painter to Emperor Wu of Liang (464–549). According to this, when working on



the frescoes in a Buddhist monastery Zhang Sengyou did not wish to mark pupils in the eyes of four dragons because he thought that could then fly away. When sceptics asked him to prove it, he marked the pupils in the eyes of two dragons, and they immediately left the wall and rose into the sky amidst thunder and lightning (Li 2006: 1614–1615). This legend is close to the tale of Feng Shaozheng, which is roughly contemporary to it (see the “Earliest Cases Found in Chinese Written Tradition” section above), but it lacks the vital detail of steam and water appearing because of an artist’s magical skill.

Keeping in mind these stories of magic brushes and magic paintings, one unquestionably finds that two of the three abovementioned early tales (about Feng Shaozheng and about Lian Guang) bear traces of a merging of the Saint Euplus Miracle with existing stories about magic paintings. In the case of Feng Shaozheng, the Saint Euplus Miracle serves as a binder for two motifs: that of the skilful painter (F674) and that of magic rainmaking (D2143.1). As for the tale about Lian Guang, one can see there the combination of Chinese legends about writing brushes, legends about paintings, and the Saint Euplus Miracle.

However, though the tale from *Records of the Origin of Transformations* (about a student called Lu and his Daoist teacher) includes drawing lines with a magic staff, it seems to have little or no connection with the sublime sphere of skilful painting. It is possible to suggest that this tale reflects a somewhat earlier stage of assimilation of the motif complex in China.

All three tales demonstrate that the Saint Euplus Miracle can easily be embedded in various plots as was done in Byzantium by Symeon the Metaphrast.

#### A 17TH CENTURY CHINESE EXAMPLE OF THE SAINT EUPLUS MIRACLE

It is difficult to find any traces of the peculiar combination of the magic brush and the Saint Euplus Miracle in Chinese literary tradition over the next ten centuries. The Miracle of Saint Euplus itself, however, can be found in three episodes from Feng Menglong’s (d. 1646) epic fantasy novel *The [New] Suppression of the Sorcerers’ Revolt* (*[Xin] Ping Yao Zhuan*) (Feng and Luo 2008). This book was closely based on *The Suppression of the Sorcerers’ Revolt* (*Ping Yao Zhuan*), another earlier multichapter vernacular novel ascribed to Luo Guanzhong (14th century) (Luo 1994). Though a work of fiction, the book written by Feng, as well as its precursor, drew inspiration from the material of storytellers and is richly saturated with folk motifs. Three sorcerers, quite fascinating heroes of the novel, among other supernatural abilities possess the power to summon magic water. They make it both with help of a wonderful “gourd of water and fire” (Feng and Luo 2008: 941, 1275), and, which is more demonstrative, by using an ordinary bowl of water (end of the 17th chapter):

As the magistrate escorted them to the front hall, Bonze Dan called out for a bowl of water, which was immediately brought by a page. Bonze Dan picked it up and began chanting, then filled his mouth with water and spat it out with a splash before them; it changed into a broad river with heaving, rolling waves and swells, reflecting the silvery moon. (Feng and Luo 2008: 660, translated by Nathan Sturman)

Then the heroes leave in a gourd transformed into a boat. The reader should note that here the magic is performed not indoors but outdoors, as in the tale from *Records of the Origin of Transformations* mentioned above. In this episode, as in the other two, water magic is needed when the sorcerers have to leave the scene quickly. This detail of the water often being an obstacle for pursuers used for the protagonists' safe departure is typical of the Saint Euplus Miracle (D672 Obstacle Flight).

Thus, here one can see a different variant of the Saint Euplus Miracle: not necessarily involving the magic object (and when it is present it has nothing to do with drawing or painting) and definitely not including the magic helper: Bonze Dan is a magician (D1711) in his own right. It does not include the detail of detaining or imprisoning either. Further findings are of course necessary before it will be possible to determine the level of popularity of this version of the Saint Euplus Miracle or even the time of its introduction to Chinese folklore.

#### BACK TO THE STORY OF MA LIANG

Despite the lack of written proof of a version of the Saint Euplus Miracle combined with the motif of the magic paintbrush during the following centuries, it is probably safe to assume its continuous survival in some regions of China. The reason for this is primarily the existence of the tale recorded by Ma Xingru and then the testimony by Hong Xuntao about various folk tales about magic brushes (see the "Two Examples from the Modern Chinese Tradition" section above), both including motif D435.2.1 Picture Comes to Life.

The story by Ma Xingru about Wang Liang and his brush loosely fits into the pattern described above: A person is detained or arrested. He seeks help from a higher power and obtains it. As a result, other people present observe the magic water in the prison cell (or sometimes outdoors). Then the water abruptly disappears, as does the hero.

The discrepancies are as follows: the hero is not arrested by the emperor and merely arrives at court after being ordered to do so; true, the magic brush is given to him by a magic helper, but the episode of seeking help is absent. The disappearance of water does not happen, for the water only becomes real for the few moments when the hero and the beauty enter the ship. The ship does disappear into the depths of the painting, and the waves remain painted as they were before. Nevertheless, the direct connection of this tale with our pattern is obvious.

With Ma Liang, the connection is rather trickier. This story underwent rather heavy editing by Hong Xuntao and is no longer a folktale. Du Chuankun (2020) rightly notes that the story by Ma Xingru "does not have the rich political colouring as the well-known tale *Ma Liang and his Magic Brush*": this political colouring, as well as many picturesque details of the tale, are seemingly due solely to the author's imagination. The frame of the tale, however, is still the same: Ma Liang obtains a brush from a magic helper, is imprisoned (even twice) and both times is saved with the help of his brush: when taken by a rich man, he paints a ladder, when captured by the emperor, he paints the sea. The ancient episode with the call for help is absent too.

One detail especially is highly likely to be changed by the author. At the end of the tale, Ma Liang does not escape on a ship (as did Wang Liang and some heroes from Koz'min's collection). He commits an act that is unique in this context: he lures the

emperor and his court into the ship and then drowns them in cold blood. This manifestation of the class struggle goes completely against the gist of the tale, i.e. that the illusion allows the protagonist to escape, and not to annihilate his enemies.

Overall, on the rather modest base of Chinese and foreign material that we have for now, perhaps it would still be constructive to identify two kinds of the Saint Euplus Miracle. The shorter, 'basic' one, contains the appearance and subsequent disappearance of water. Here the protagonist is a magician or at least an illusionist. Here belong the cited fragment from *The New Suppression of the Sorcerers' Revolt*, most of the texts from the analysis of Bolte and Polivka, and seven examples from Koz'min's collection. In this case, sometimes the hero leaves simultaneously with the disappearing water. The second, longer version is discussed above. After modification, it looks like this: (a) a person is detained or arrested; (b) sometimes he has a magic helper, under whose intervention, direct or indirect, (c) or without it, the person can produce in the prison cell (or sometimes outdoors) the illusion of water or a miraculous vision of water, observed by other people present; (d) then the water abruptly disappears, as does the hero. The water may sometimes be replaced by a painted ship or another magic vehicle. To this scheme correspond most of the cited Chinese tales (apart from *The New Suppression of the Sorcerers' Revolt*), five examples from Koz'min's collection, and the Saint Euplus Miracle from Byzantine hagiography. In this last instance, every link is present bar the flight of the hero; the whole chain is reinterpreted as a manifestation of the power of God rather than a means of escape.

Apart from this common scheme, the two Chinese 20th-century tales available to us demonstrate the combination of the Saint Euplus Miracle and the image of the magic brush initially derived from the cluster of legends about skilled writers and with the motif of pictures coming to life. It is noteworthy that most elements of this combination are inherited from the Middle Ages almost without change. The uncommonly high place occupied in Chinese culture by literati (symbolised by a person with a brush) possibly led to the perception of their skills as magical. The painter, as a specialist often belonging to literati, or at least close to them, gained the same reputation by proxy.

## CONCLUSION

Therefore, the Saint Euplus Miracle international motif complex found and named by Koz'min is present in Chinese folklore and literature in two forms. The shorter form contains only the episode with the illusion or miraculous appearance of water and its instant vanishing (motifs D2151.2.5 Stream Magically Appears and D2151 Magic Control of Waters). The longer form involves the escape of a hero, often from a prison (R211). In both cases the setting is generally a closed space. In the earliest Chinese cases, the influence of Persian/Syrian/Sogdian traditions may be suggested.

Entering the Chinese cultural sphere at a time when tales of paintings coming to life (D435.2.1 Picture Comes to Life) were very popular, the longer form of the Saint Euplus Miracle merged with them, simultaneously absorbing the motif of the magic brush, which in its turn had been transferred from the group of legends about talented writers. In the analysed Chinese tales corresponding to the longer form of the Saint Euplus

Miracle, both medieval and modern, the magic helper plays an important role. In the non-Chinese examples of the Saint Euplus Miracle, the opposite is true.

The role of the helper in the Chinese tales is to present the protagonist with the magic object. The object in one medieval case is a staff, and in one medieval and two modern cases it is a brush; in all cases it is used for drawing or painting. Though the water or illusion of water in some non-Chinese tales is produced through drawing or painting, the presence of magic objects in this context seems specific to Chinese tales.

## NOTES

1 Here and hereafter the type names are given according to Thompson 1955–1958.

2 Here I won't linger on the mysterious affinity of some Irish and Scottish fabulates concerning fairies with a few Chinese medieval plots, but it certainly exists and will be subject to subsequent study.

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