

# *Research in the Intertextuality between Social and Humanities of “The Great Sage Prince Nazha Chased and Killed Dragon King Vasuki”—From the Viewpoint of International Exchanges between Liao and India*

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**Keywords:** Artworks, Humanities, Sign, Society, “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”

**Abstract:** This article starts from “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”, and connects the Indian snake mythology system. From the perspective of signs, we analyze signifier (image), signified (meaning), signification (connection), and symbol (composition). On the one hand, observe different myths whether they have similar cultural signs. On the other hand, observe these signs. When there are similar or identical data or elements, do they have different qualities and different numerical values? In the third aspect, if there are partial similarities between signs in different places, then what kind of differences exist (including symbolism, spirit, will, psychology, etc.). By exploring the performance of artworks, we hope to read the meaning produced by signs from the context of intertextuality.

## **1. Introduction**

“The Story of Prince Nazha on the stone case” unearthed from the Chaoyang North Tower was created around the time of Liao Xingzong (r. 1031-1055), when was the key point of Liao's transition from prosperity to decline. There had been important changes in the humanistic and natural environment. The four sides of the stone case were engraved picture series with “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki” (see Fig. 1); the cover of the case was engraved with “The Heart of Prajna Paramita Sutra”, and the four sides of the cover were engraved with apsaras holding lotus. Buddhist relic stone case contains symbols of Buddha, Dharmakaya and Nirvana. The structure of thesis is as follows Figure 2 (see Fig. 2):



Figure 1: Prince Nazha [1]

**“The Great Sage Prince Nazha Chased and Killed Dragon King Vasuki”  
on the “The Story of Prince Nazha on the stone case”**

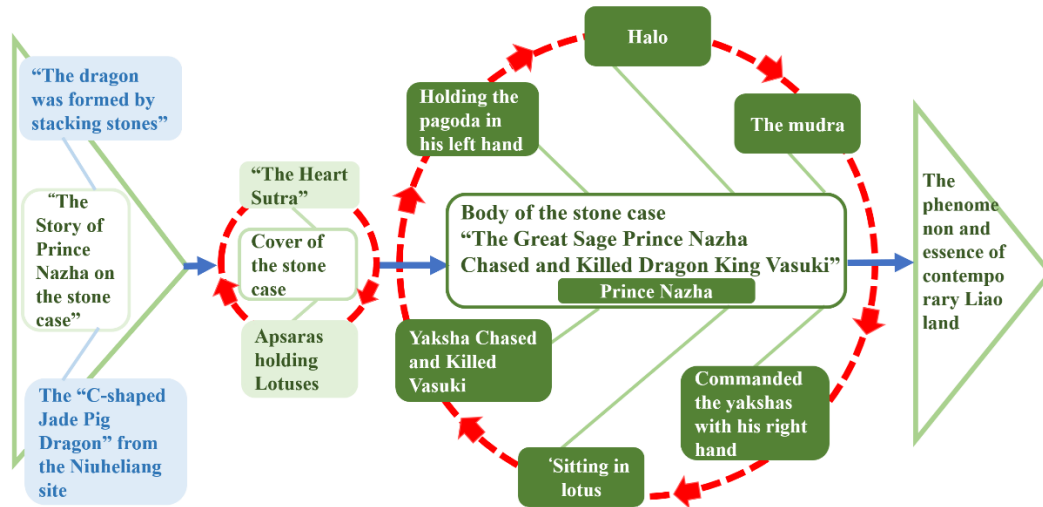


Figure 2: The structure of Nazha on the stone case

## 2. Liao's humanities and natural environment

### 2.1. Liao's humanities environment

The first was in the humanistic environment: In the past time, there were historical memories of Yelu Abaoji's glorious founding of the country: “He ascent to the throne of emperor” [2]; more recently, there were traumatic memories of Liao Xingzong leading an army of 100,000 to conquer Western Xia in 1044A.D., but being lured by the enemy into defeat and escaping. Buddhism was prevalent during the Liao Dynasty, combining religion with royal power. “The Story of Prince Nazha on the stone case” was enshrined and worshiped at this time, which symbolized Buddhism. And it also referred to stabilizing the country and heading for victory. In “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”, Prince Nazha was fully armored and commanding forward; his image was as if the Liao armed general.

### 2.2. Liao's natural environment

The second was in the natural environment: The natural disasters recorded in the “History of Liao” including floods, droughts, locust plagues, frosts, earthquakes, etc. Especially for the emperors Liao Xingzong before and after, when Shengzong (39 times) and Daozong (100 times) were even more frequent. It had a great impact on people, including politics, geography, and ecology; it was crucial to the rise and fall of dynasties, people's migration, and the survival of races. “History of Liao, Geography” recorded: “Jianzhou... The state was located on the south of Linghe River and had been frequently damaged by floods”.

In 1007, Emperor Shengzong of the Liao Dynasty moved the central capital to ‘Dading Prefecture’ (now Ningcheng county of Chifeng, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.), and near the Chahai Site Settlement Center in Fuxin, Liaoning(c.6200B.C.-5400B.C.). The Chahai Culture was also known as ‘Jade-Dragon Culture’ (‘Jade Culture’ and ‘Dragon Culture’). In other words, “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”, unearthed from the North Tower of Chaoyang, Liaoning, had an intertextual connection with the local dragon culture, and has great origins in both humanities and geography.

### 3. International exchanges between Liao and India

The artworks and cultural relics unearthed in Chaoyang North Tower bear witness to the international exchanges of Liao Dynasty along the Grassland Silk Road. “The Story of Prince Nazha on the stone case” created based on Indian Buddhist scriptures. The Body of the stone case “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed Dragon King Vasuki” is closely related to the Indian Buddhist scriptures. Prince Nazha's body language presented several common ‘signs’ in Buddhism.

#### 3.1. Vasuki

In “Mahabharata”, “Ramayana”, “Vishnu Purana”, “Bhagavan Purana”, recorded about ‘The Ark and The Flood’ and ‘The Churning of the Ocean of Milk’ of Indian mythology. The great snake Vasuki was a key character in leading India to rebirth. With the rise of Buddhism in India from c.5, 6thB.C., those Naga legends originating from ancient Indian mythology and ancient Hinduism were absorbed and reinterpreted. Vasuki was absorbed as one of the protectors of ‘The Eight Legions’ (Aṣṭasenā). He was the patron saint of the Buddha. Vasuki was also the Dragon King in the Liao Dynasty “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”.

#### 3.2. ‘Halo’

In “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”, Nazha's head was upright and shining with a circle of light. It was connected with many intertextuality. The first was the intertextuality connected to ancient Persia, including Adzar (the god of fire), the Aureola around the saint's head, Farr in the image of Zoroastrian, etc.; such as “Persepolis Faravahar” (see Fig. 3). The second was the intertextuality connected to India, including the Buddha statues of Gandhāra, Mathura and Gupta, with round light Halo on their heads; such as “Standing Buddha with a halo” (see Fig. 4). The third was the intertextuality connected to Christian art, including aura on saint's head ; such as “Emperor Justinian and his retinue” (see Fig. 5).

“The Story of Prince Nazha on the stone case” was a stone case containing Buddhist sacred objects; the sacred halo with a flaming appeared on Prince Nazha's head, which referred to the Buddhist halo. It was worth noting that wheel treasures and flames were used as backlighting in the Buddha sculpture art, which mostly referred to patron saints. In brief, the image (signifier) of Prince Nazha pointed to the patron saint of Buddhism.



Figure 3: “Persepolis Faravahar” [3].



Figure 4: “Standing Buddha with a halo” [4].



Figure 5: “Emperor Justinian and his retinue” [5].

### 3.3. Lotus Pose (Padmasana) (or another ‘Half Lotus Pose’)

Lotus Pose (Padmasana) (or another ‘Half Lotus Pose’) originated from Gandhara in northwest India in 2th-3thAD. In “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”, that presented a rare sitting image of ‘Nezha’ statues in the Central Plains. It was shown as sitting cross-legged with the right foot crossed, and his left foot hanging down was covered by clouds; which is an auspicious half lotus (if the left foot was placed on the right thigh, which was a half-lotus for subduing demons).

In the Central Plains, Lotus Pose (Padmasana) (or another ‘Half Lotus Pose’) was current during the Southern and Northern Dynasties, and was popular in Dunhuang, Luoyang, Chang-an and other regions during the Tang Dynasty. It was commonly found in statues of Buddha, Guanyin, Maitreya etc., and was sometimes combined with thought image.

Intertextually, ‘Comfortable Sitting Posture’ in Indian Buddha statues, that the right foot was bent at the knee, the left foot was hanging on the ground, the right hand was placed on the right knee, and the left hand is hanging behind the left knee.

It was first discovered in “Naga King (Dragon King) and his Consort” on the left wall outside of Cave 19 of Ajanta Caves in India during the late 5thA.D. period (see Fig. 6); belonging to the late Caitya caves. The theme was based on Nagaraja (King of Naga), the local deity of Wakula Gorge. Sitting next to him was the dragon concubine, and a female fly whisk bearer stood in the corner. The Naga King had 7 hooded serpents standing on his head to protect him. The 7 serpents rose from the king's back in the shape of a fan, which was a sacred symbol, just as if the sacred halo commonly seen on Indian Buddha statues.

In comparison, the 13thA.D. Lakshminarayana temple stone carvings in Karnataka, India “Sculpture of Lord Krishna dancing On Kaliya Snake” (see Fig. 7). This was Krishna's classic victory gesture, standing in a ‘Half Lotus Pose’; however, it was suppressing the seven-headed Serpent Kaliya standing up in a fan shape under his feet.

On the other hand, the ‘Comfortable Sitting Posture’ originated from the Indian “Naga King (Dragon King) and his Consort”, had become 11th -13th A.D. Song (960-1279), Liao (916- 1125), Jin (1115-1234) important examples of Buddhist statues. It was expressed in the ‘Comfortable Guanyin Buddha’, especially the ‘Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara in the Water-Moon Manifestation’ in China. The best was “Seated Guanyin Bodhisattva” of the Liao Dynasty (see Fig. 8). This statue was known as ‘the most spectacular existing statue in China’: in form, the face showed the golden section of Greek sculpture (The length from the chin to the tip of the nose, the hairline to eyebrow line, and ears; the distances are the same, were one-third of the face length); the material was wood carving, the texture was smooth, and the clothes were flowing. In terms of content, it was elegant and full, and the spirit was quiet.



Figure 6: “Naga King and his Consort” [6].



Figure 7: “Sculpture of Lord Krishna dancing On Kaliya Snake” [7].



Figure 8: “Seated Guanyin Bodhisattva” [8].

### 3.4. Made the abhaya mudra (Abhayamudrā)

Prince Nazha commanded all the Yakshas and made the abhaya mudra sign with his right hand. That was, if the Buddha statue rose its right hand, rose its right palm, and stretched its five fingers, the demonic image could be subdued, that was a mudra given by the Buddha to relieve all sorrow and fear. It was a common mudra for Buddhist statues in India and Gandhara.

### 3.5. Holding the pagoda in his left hand

Prince Nazha held the pagoda in his left hand, which was in line with the records in the Chinese Buddhist scriptures: “He sent his third son Nezhe to hold the pagoda and not leave his side” [9]. “Order the third son Nezhe to hold the pagoda and follow the heaven king” [10]. The artistic expression of Heavenly King Vaisravana could be found in the stone sculpture of "Heavenly King, Fengxian Temple, Longmen Grottoes" (c. 672-675A.D.) (see Fig. 9) , in which the Heavenly King held the pagoda in his right hand; intertextually, Prince Nazha holds the pagoda in his left hand. The four heavenly kings of Buddhism were not only protectors, but also had the wish for favorable weather.



Figure 9: “Heavenly King, Fengxian. Temple, Longmen Grottoes” [11].



### 3.6. Commanded the yakshas with his right hand

On the one hand, the image of Prince Nazha commanding all the yakshas was consistent with what the Chinese Buddhist scriptures called ‘Nalakuvara’: who was a “Yaksha general” [12]. On the other hand, it was also consistent with the ‘Nalakuvara’ recorded in the Tantra, who was a ‘Great Yakṣa General’ (“Great Peacock-Queen Spell”).

### 3.7. Wearing Liao armor

Prince Nazha was fully armored, with intricate and delicate decorations, smooth lines, and snake-like folds on his clothes, which were characteristics of the Liao Dynasty. The image of Prince Nazha corresponded the realistic characteristics of Liao Dynasty paintings and sculptures.

## 4. Similarities and differences in signs

Research for similarities and differences in signs through visual analysis of pictures:

### 4.1. Similarities: Similarities: Buddhist Signs and Snake-Slaying Myths

For one thing, the Liao Dynasty's “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki” used a lot of data from Buddhist art. Secondly, India had also had snake-slaying myths such as Indra and Krishna since ancient times. However, could those be used to prove that the art of “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki” was a direct inheritance or a copy from Indian art?

### 4.2. Differences: “Form” and “Content”

From an art point of view, the “form” of the picture applies a lot of data from Buddhist art, that was used to express the “content” of the picture, depicting Nazha chased and killed Vasuki.

One was about mythological characters: Nazha from Liao Dynasty and Nalakuvera from India, both had similar transliterations in terms of etymology. In the Indian epics “Mahabharata” and “Ramayana”, the image of Nalakuvera was described as a Yaksha prince. And the scene in “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki” was also depicted as a general commanding all the yakshas, who was exactly consistent with the identity of yakshas. However, the image of Nazha was different from the ugly Yaksha, but a mighty general with a dignified appearance.

The second was about mythical creatures: the Dragon King Vasuki was originally a powerful protector in Indian Buddhism. But in the Liao Dynasty's “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”, he appeared as a dragon king who made trouble and was hunted down; which was different from that the character of ‘The Eight Legions’ (Aṣṭasenā) in Buddhism.

### 4.3. Cultural exchange activities in the Liao Dynasty

It was obvious that the mythical characters and mythical creatures represented by the picture signs, whether it was India or Liao, these two different regions, although there were similarities in data, however they were so different with different meanings and different references. Chaoyang North Tower's “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”, it unearthed from Chaoyang of Liaoning. Furtherly we searched for dragon culture and traced the environmental origins of Liao Dynasty. Judging from Chaoyang, Liaoning, where the artwork was unearthed, Liaoning was located in the Liaohe River Basin. Searching for cultural relics in this area, it was discovered that a large number of dragon cultural relics were unearthed since the Neolithic Age. First,

one of them was the earth dragon sacrifice theory of “The dragon was formed by stacking stones” from the Chahai Site Settlement Center in Fuxin, Liaoning (c.6200B.C.-5400B.C.)(see Fig. 10), which belonged to the Chahai-Xinglongwa culture of the early Neolithic Age. It was known as “the first dragon in Liaohe River”. The Chahai Culture was also known as ‘Jade-Dragon Culture’ (‘Jade Culture’ and ‘Dragon Culture’). The second was, Chaoyang also had the splendid Niuheliang site (c.3500 B.C. ~ c.3000 B.C.), which belonged to the late Hongshan Culture (4700 B.C. ~ 2900 B.C.) of the Neolithic Age. The Chahai-Xinglongwa Culture was an important source before the Hongshan Culture. The “C-shaped Jade Jue” (see Fig. 11) unearthed from the Chahai site was traced to the same origin as the “C-shaped Jade Pig Dragon” (c.3000 B.C.) from the Niuheliang site (see Fig. 12). The third was, The “C-shaped Jade Dragon” was unearthed from Wengniute Banner in Inner Mongolia, it belonged to the Hongshan Culture of the Neolithic Age (see Fig. 13). The fourth was, it was connected to the “C-shaped Jade Jue” (see Fig. 14) and “Jade Sitting Dragon” (see Fig. 15) unearthed in Chaoyang North Tower. Those verified the inheritance of culture. Coincidentally, “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki” was also unearthed in the North Tower of Chaoyang, Liaoning. It illustrated the long-standing dragon culture in Liaoning, and witnesses the brilliant civilization of the western Liao River area. The dragon image of Vasuki expressed the sharp and measured characteristics of Liao Dragon.



Figure 10: “The dragon was formed by stacking stones” [13].



Figure 11: The “C-shaped Jade Jue” from the Chahai site [14].



Figure 12: The “C-shaped Jade Pig Dragon” from the Niuheliang site [15].



Figure 13: “C-shaped Jade Dragon” from Wengniute Banner in Inner Mongolia [16].

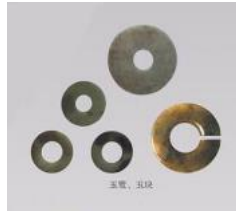


Figure 14: “C-shaped Jade Jue” from Chaoyang North Tower [17].



Figure 15: “Jade Sitting Dragon” from Chaoyang North Tower [18].

#### 4.4. Judging from the form and content of painting

In brief, the creation of “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”, in terms of form, it presented a variety of data from foreign cultures, showing the exchange activities between the Liao Dynasty and the international community. In terms of content, it inherited the statement of earth dragon sacrifice of “The dragon was formed by stacking stones” in the Chahai Culture. It expressed the natural and humanistic environment of present life in the Liao Dynasty, and presented as the wish for good weather and good harvests.

### 5. Sign Analysis

#### 5.1. ‘semiotic theory’

From the perspective of ‘semiotic theory’, in terms of ‘signifier’, Prince Nazha had the image of a Buddhist patron saint. In the “signified”, Nazha chased and killed Vasuki that had the meaning of quelling the floods. In terms of ‘signification’, the connection between Buddhism and politics was presented. Accordingly, it was exactly the ruler's responsibility to protect people's lives and pray for favorable weather.

#### 5.2. ‘Philosophy of Language’

From the perspective of ‘philosophy of language’, in terms of ‘sense’, Prince Nazha appeared as someone who controlled floods (water disasters). In terms of ‘reference’, it was based on the earth dragon sacrifices since the local Chahai culture to pray for rain (drought); it not only linked to the climate of the Yanbei region where the Khitans were mainly active at that time, but also related to the water, drought, and environment that were the basis of people's lives. In terms of ‘terms’ (meaning = reference + sense), it was further expressed through Buddhism and politics as the rulers of the Liao Dynasty, facing the strange changes in the natural and human environment, calling for the prosperous age of the Western Liao River Basin created by the Liao Dynasty.



### 5.3. 'Logical empiricism'

From the perspective of 'logical empiricism', the literature research on "The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki". First, there was intertextuality with "History of Liao" recorded droughts and floods. Secondly, there was intertextuality with the imperial myth and the dragon-shooting myth of Abaoji in the "History of Liao". In other words, the data in the subsets had similarities and could be converted into qualitative clustering models. The mythical imagination of Nazha and Abaoji, precisely provided a cultural imagination of revival, during the period of Liao Xingzong (r. 1031-1055), when the natural environment was experiencing increasing climate change and the humanistic environment was becoming increasingly displaced.

## 6. Conclusions

Buddhism reached its peak in the Liao Dynasty. One was to eliminate evil and quell chaos through the Buddhist patron saint; the other was to demonstrated the Liao rulers' elimination of flood and disasters, and summoned the glory of the Liao Dynasty. What it conveyed was the phenomenon and essence of contemporary Liao land; correspondingly, it revealed the different social systems of Liao and India.

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