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The Idea of the Anavatapta Lake in India and Its Adoption in East Asia

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Abstract: This article centers around the Anavatapta Lake. In East Asian pictorialization of worldview, Maps of Mt. Sumeru, which depict the mountain at the core of the world, are often paired with Maps of India, in which the Anavatapta Lake occupies a significant place. When the concept of the Anavatapta Lake was transmitted from India to China and Japan, it was understood through the lens of local cultures and ideologies, and the lake was envisioned as a site spatially connected to various places in China and Japan. As a result, the idea of the Indian lake located at the center of the human world helped China and Japan formulate their statuses and positions within the religious and geopolitical discourse of Buddhist cosmology. Through investigations of both pictorial and textual sources, this article explores the significance and place that the Anavatapta Lake occupied in East Asian religion and literature.

Keywords: Anavatapta Lake; munechi; Da Tang Xiyuji (Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions); Buddhist cosmology; Illustrated Life of Xuanzang (Genjō sanzō-e)

1. Introduction

In Buddhist cosmology, a large lake called the Anavatapta Lake (Ch. *anouda* 阿耨池, *anoudada* 阿耨達池; Jp. *munechi* 無熱池) lies at the center of the continent Jambudvīpa, the southern of the Four Continents surrounding Mt. Sumeru. This cosmology was transmitted from India to East Asia along with Buddhism. The Anavatapta Lake occupies an important place in this cosmology because it is the source of all water and therefore crucial to all life. The lake is the sacred abode of a water deity dragon, Nāga, and rivers run from the lake in all the cardinal directions—to China in the east, to India in the south, to nomadic lands in the north, and to the Middle East and Europe in the west—bringing water to everywhere in Jambudvīpa. The significance of the lake derives from this myth, that the water from the lake nourishes all creatures in the world.

In the process of dissemination of Buddhist cosmology, the concept of the Anavatapta Lake was understood through the lens of local cultures and ideologies, and the lake was envisioned as a site spatially connected to various places in China and Japan. Premodern people in East Asia had access to a vast amount of sources that mention the Anavatapta Lake. This article examines such sources—a travel journal, Buddhist sutras, narratives, and visual images that describe and pictorialize the lake—and discusses how the imaginary lake was perceived in China and Japan while blending with local cultures and ideologies.

2. The Anavatapta Lake in the *Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*: The Animals in the Four Cardinal Directions and Pictures of Mt. Sumeru

One of the most detailed accounts of the Anavatapta Lake is found in *Da Tang Xiyuji* 大唐西域記 (*Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*; hereafter *Xiyuji*). This twelve-fascicle travel account was written by the renowned Chinese scholar-monk Xuanzang 玄奘 (c. 602–664), who brought

a vast amount of Buddhist scriptures from India back to Tang China and translated them into Chinese. It provides vivid records of the geography and customs of localities in Western China, Central Asia, and India of the time. *Xiyuji* also served later generations who sought authentic Buddhist teachings in India as a guidebook. It expounds legends and folklores of various regions, legends of the Buddha, *jataka* tales, anecdotes, historical accounts, and the like.

In its first fascicle, *Xiyuji* starts the preface with Xuanzang's argument for the need to go to India for the Buddhist sutras. It then expounds the Buddhist cosmology and conception of space and time, and refer to three thousand great chiliocosms, Mt. Sumeru—a gigantic mountain that stands in the center of the universe—the sun and the moon, the Seven Mountains and Seven Seas, and the Four Continents, which lie in the cardinal directions in the ocean surrounding Mt. Sumeru. The southern of these four continents, Jambudvīpa, is the habitat of human beings.¹ The preface then lays out the geography of this continent:

In the center of the Jambu continent is the Anavatapta Lake, meaning “No Trouble of Heat”, which is south of the Fragrant Mountain and north of the Great Snow Mountains, with a circuit of eight hundred *li*. Its banks are adorned with gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and crystal. It is full of golden sand, and its water is as pure and clean as a mirror. A Bodhisattva of the eighth stage, having transformed himself into a Nāga king by the power of his resolute will, makes his abode at the bottom of the lake and supplies water for the Jambu continent. Thus from the mouth of the Silver Ox at the east side of the lake flows out the Ganges, which after going round the lake once enters the Southeast Sea; from the mouth of the Golden Elephant at the south side of the lake flows out the Indus, which after winding round the lake once enters the Southwest Sea; from the mouth of the Lapis Lazuli Horse at the west side of the lake flows the Oxus, which after meandering round the lake once enters the Northwest Sea; and from the mouth of the Crystal Lion at the north side of the lake flows out the Sītā, which after encircling the lake once enters the Northeast Sea, or it is said that it flows by a subterranean course to the Jishi Mountain, where the water reappears as a tributary of the Sītā and becomes the source of the Yellow River in China.²

The geography this account illustrates is clearly a fusion of the Buddhist worldview or cosmology and the real topography. The Anavatapta Lake occupies a particularly important place in this geography. The four sides of the lake are flanked by the four animals associated with the four cardinal directions. On each side of the lake, a river flows out of the mouth of the animal. The account also states that the Sītā River is the headstream of China's Yellow River. I will later expand on this supposed connection between the lake and the Yellow River. These descriptions show that the Anavatapta Lake was a geographical concept that connected the imaginary Buddhist cosmology to reality, and in the course of time, it became so prevalent that it often appeared in various works of literature.

3. The Anavatapta Lake in the *Picture of the Buddhist Cosmology* in the Harvard Art Museums

The Buddhist cosmology that Xuanzang's *Xiyuji* describes is represented in a handscroll called the *Picture of Buddhist Cosmology* (*Nihon[koku narabi ni] Shumi Shoten[koku] zu* 日本須弥諸天図) in the collection of the Harvard Art Museums (hereafter “the Harvard scroll”). Based on its colophon, this scroll can be dated to 1402 and attributed to Ryūyū 隆宥 (dates unknown) and Ryūi 隆意 (1338–1418), both of whom were Buddhist monks of the temple Daigoji in Kyoto, showing the production of the scroll at the temple.³ The handscroll contains a map of Japan in the style called “Gyōki map”

¹ The preface also covers the first-hand observation of the sites Xuanzang visited and the second-hand information he collected during his journey to Central Asia and India, and describes these places in relation to the Buddhist worldview. For previous scholarship on Mt. Sumeru, see (Komine 2011, pp. 45–55; Gao 2010, pp. 259–82; Gao 2012, pp. 263–84).

² (Li 1996, p. 18). For the Fragrant Mountain (*kōzan* 香山), see (Maeda 2014, pp. 237–80; Araki 2015, p. 58).

³ The Harvard scroll was first introduced by Komine in his co-edited book, (Komine and Shūhei 1991, pp. 2–25); also see (Komine 2011, pp. 49–52) in which Komine discusses the scroll in detail. Gao further investigated the scroll in comparison

(a style that is said to have been originated by the monk Gyōki), a “Map of India”, a “Diagram of the Anavatapta Lake”, a “Diagram of Mt. Sumeru”, and a “Map of Heaven”.

The Map of India in the scroll portrays the Anavatapta Lake in a similar manner to its description in *Xiyuji*, as if pictorializing it. India is represented as a continent in the shape of rounded trapezoid, surrounded by the neighboring countries such as China and Korea.⁴ The map does not depict Japan, even on the periphery. The Anavatapta Lake, which is enclosed by a double square, is drawn in the center of the northern part of India. Subsequent to the Map of India is the Diagram of the Anavatapta Lake, which shows the lake in close-up at its center (Figure 1).

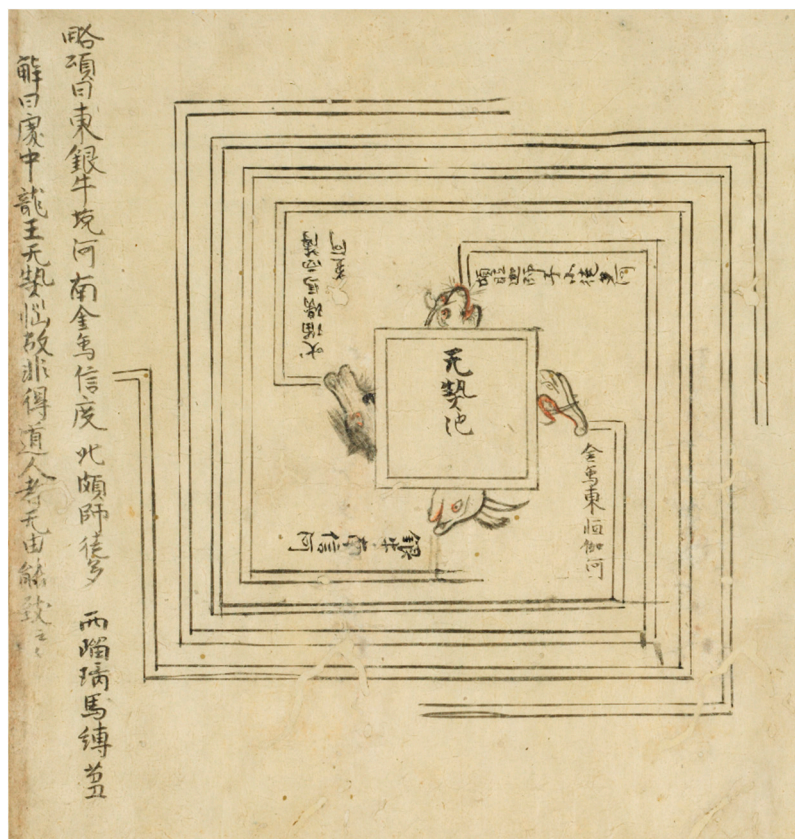


Figure 1. A diagram of the Anavatapta Lake from the Harvard scroll. Section from Buddhist Cosmology (*Nihon koku narabini Shumi shoten zu*) with text copied by Monk Ryūi; Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Gift of the Hofer Collection of the Printed and Graphic; ©President and Fellows of Harvard College; Accession Number: 1973.66; Image Numbers: DDC101828.

The heads of the Crystal Lion (north), the Golden Elephant (east), the Silver Ox (south), and the Lapis Lazuli Horse (west) are placed on the four sides of the lake, and a river flows out of the mouth of each animal, drawing a square spiral counter-clockwise. The placement of these animals in the Diagram of the Anavatapta Lake does not correspond exactly to their description in *Xiyuji*: the diagram and *Xiyuji* agree on the placement of the Horse (west) and the Lion (north), but the Elephant (east in the diagram) and the Ox (south) are swapped.

with a three-volume Ming publication entitled *Fajie anli tu* 法界安立图 (*Dharma Realm Diagrams*; printed in 1584) and *Sangai kuji no zu* 三界九地之图 (*Depiction of Three Realms and Nine Levels*; ninth or tenth century) that was discovered in Dunhuang. (Gao 2010, pp. 259–82; Gao 2012, pp. 263–84). For the discussion of Gyōki map in the Harvard scroll, see (Murai 2014, pp. 45–83).

⁴ For instance, the earliest extant Map of India (dated to 1364) in the collection of Hōryūji and the Edo-period map titled *Nansenbushū bankoku shōkanozu* (1710) show a similar map. For these maps, see (Yakushiji 2015, pp. 37–39).

The Diagram of Anavatapta Lake is followed by various passages. The first passage, seen in Figure 1, reads as follows:

The abridged verse says: the Silver Ox to the east, the Ganges; the Golden Elephant to the south, the Indus; the Crystal Lion to the north, the Sitā; and the Lapis Lazuli Horse to the west, the Oxus. The commentary says: since the Anavatapta Lake is the adobe of a Nāga king, no one who has not mastered the [Buddhist] way can reach it.⁵

This passage places the four animals in the same directions as in *Xiyuji*. The last part, “no one who has not mastered the dharma can reach it”, is seen in the fascicle 11 of *Jushelun* 俱舍論 (Jp. *Kusharon*). Other passages, which also mention the Anavatapta Lake and the four animals, cite various other Buddhist texts: (*Dachengbensheng*) *Xindiguan jing* (大乘本生心地觀經 (Jp. *Daijō honjō shinjikan gyō*), (*Foshuo*) *Xingqixing jing* (佛說興起行經 (Jp. *Bussetsukōkigyō kyō*),⁶ *Shizhu duanjie jing* 十住斷結經 (Jp. *Jūjū danketsu kyō*)⁷, *Dazhidulun* 大智度論 (Jp. *Daichidoron*), *Fahua wenju* 法華文句 (Jp. *Hokke mongu*), and *Jushelun* (Figure 2). They exhibit some variations regarding the geography surrounding the Anavatapta Lake, however.

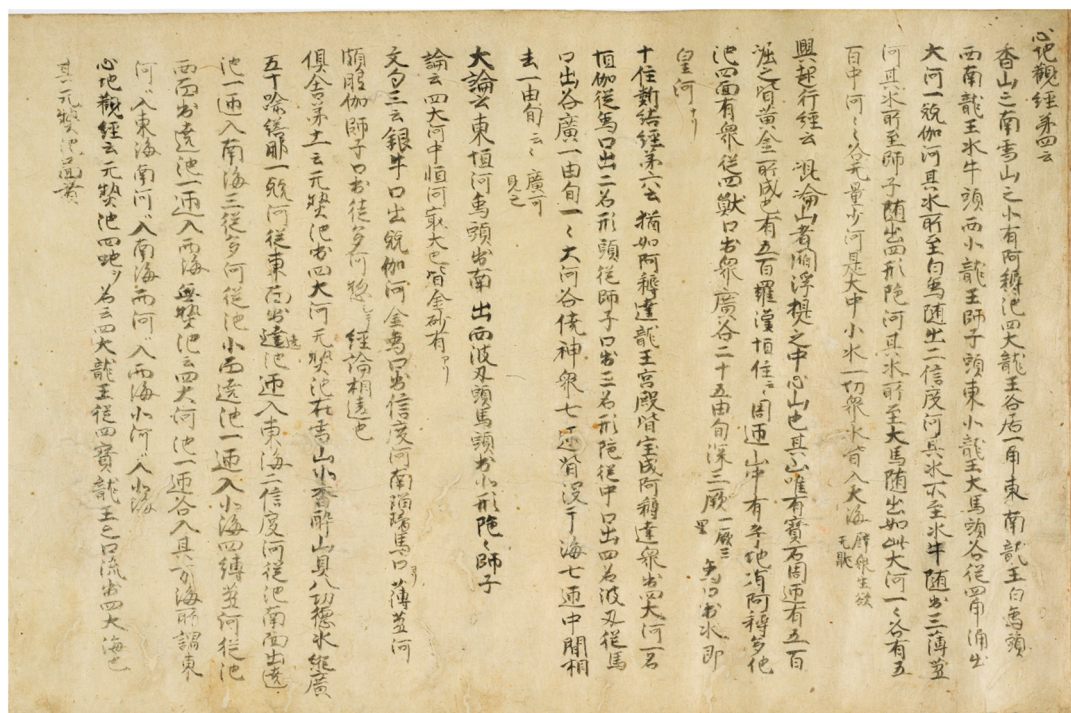


Figure 2. Passages on the Anavatapta Lake in the Harvard scroll. Section from a Buddhist Cosmology (*Nihon koku narabini Shumi shoten zu*) with text copied by Monk Ryūi; Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Gift of the Hofer Collection of the Printed and Graphic; ©President and Fellows of Harvard College; Accession Number: 1973.66; Image Numbers: DDC101827.

For instance, the excerpt from *Xindiguan jing* states that four Nāga (dragon or mythical serpent) kings reside in the Anavatapta Lake; that the Ganges flows from the mouth of the Nāga king on the southeast of the lake, who has the head of the White Elephant; that the Indus flows from the mouth of the Nāga king on the southwest with the head of the Water Buffalo; that the Sitā flows from the mouth

⁵ It is not clear what is the source of this abridged verse and the commentary. It is likely, however, that they are derived from a commentary of the *Treasury of Abhidharma*.

⁶ (*Foshuo*) *Xingqixing jing* (佛說興起行經, T197, vol. 4, p. 163, c. 13.18.

⁷ *Shizhu duanjie jing* is also known as *Zuisheng wen pusa shizhu chugou duanjie jing* 最勝問菩薩十住除垢斷結經, T309, vol. 10, p. 1011, a, 8.20.

of the Nāga king on the northwest with the head of the Lion; and that the Oxus flows from the mouth of the Nāga king on the northeast with the head of the Horse. It is distinctive of this description that the Nāga kings are placed in the intercardinal directions. It is worth noting that *Xindiguan jing* contains several lines that use the Anavatapta Lake as a metaphor of the superiority of “bodhisattva monks” to the laity, by comparing the laity’s limitless desire to the ocean that is never satisfied with the water flowing out from the Anavatapta Lake.⁸ The excerpt summarizes these lines with a note that “It is like a sentient being’s desire having no satisfaction.”

On the other hand, the passage based on (*Foshuo*) *Xingqixing jing* identifies Mt. Anavatapta, which is at the center of Jambudvīpa, with Mt. Kunlun 崑崙山 of China, and states that the river flowing from the mouth of the Elephant on the Anavatapta Lake is the Yellow River.⁹ (*Foshuo*) *Xingqixing jing* was translated by a Buddhist scholar of Sogdian descent, Kang Mengxiang 康孟詳 (in the late second century), in Luoyang, the capital city of the Eastern Han near the Yellow River. The identification of Mt. Anavatapta with Mt. Kunlun is particularly noteworthy in the localization of the concept of the Anavatapta Lake in China.

As we have just observed, different passages show significant discrepancy with respect the geography surrounding the Anavatapta Lake, for instance regarding the directions of the four animals and the four rivers. Indeed, one of the passages states that “sutras disagree” regarding the animals and rivers.

Among the Buddhist texts cited in the Harvard scroll, *Dazhidulun* describes the Anavatapta Lake in the closest manner to the depiction in the Diagram of the Anavatapta Lake in the Harvard scroll, as these two sources assign the same directions to the four animals.¹⁰ (The short passage in the scroll based on *Dazhidulun* lacks the mention of the Ox on the south, however.) Since the accounts of the geography of the lake vary significantly across Buddhist texts, the Diagram of the Anavatapta Lake pictorializes only a part of the accounts, and this pictorialization is relativized by the passages citing different accounts. In addition, as we have seen, the Harvard scroll gives additional accounts, such as that only the bodhisattva monks can reach the Anavatapta Lake or that the water from the Elephant is the source of the Yellow River in China, the latter of which illustrates a way in which the imaginary geography of the Anavatapta Lake was connected to the real geography.

Although the Harvard scroll was produced by Japanese monks in Japan, the Buddhist texts and visual representations of the Anavatapta Lake in the scroll were probably influenced more by Chinese culture than by the Japanese one—for the scroll quotes passages from Buddhist sutras and commentaries that were either translated from Sanskrit and/or Pali into Chinese or written by Chinese scholars and commentators. In this sense, Japanese monks perceived the idea of the Anavatapta Lake through the mediation of the Chinese interpretation.

In this section, I have reviewed the images of and commentaries on the Anavatapta Lake in the Harvard Scroll. The next section will examine the way in which the Anavatapta Lake appears in Buddhist sutras, Japanese literature, and visual cultures.

4. Discussions on the Anavatapta Lake in Buddhist Sutras

Due to the imaginary geography of the Anavatapta Lake, it has several aspects that attracted discussions. These discussions mostly appear in Buddhist texts, as summarized below.

⁸ An explanatory note to the final passage reads “is comparable to not to disgust against sentient being’s desire.” The description of the Anavatapta Lake in *Xindiguan jing* can be found in T159, vol. 3, p. 307, c. l.5.

⁹ There is a variation between the excerpt and the original text: while the inscription in the Harvard scroll says that the Sita River measures three *li*, the original text says it measures seven *li*. See (*Foshuo*) *Xingqixing jing*, T197, vol. 4, p. 163, c. l3.18.

¹⁰ *Dazhidulun*, T1509, vol. 25, p. 114, a, 15.25.

(1) Regarding the Nāga king in the Anavatapta Lake:

The Nāga king is a provisionally manifested form of a Buddhist deity—but there are several accounts as to what deity it is: for instance, it is the Bodhisattva of the seventh stage 七地菩薩 in the *Avataṃsaka Sutra* 大方廣佛華嚴經 (Jp. *Daihō kōbutsu kegon kyō*);¹¹ it is the Bodhisattva of the tenth stage 十地菩薩 in *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 (Jp. *Busso tōki*).¹²

(2) Regarding lotus flowers in the Anavatapta Lake:

The lotus flowers in the Anavatapta Lake are in four colors. These flowers were born from the Nāga king's vow to save sentient beings.¹³ There are many *setsuwa* (tales and anecdotes) involving the lotus flowers in the Anavatapta Lake. These anecdotes usually center around the episode of King Ruri's (Virūdhaka) massacre of the Shaka (Śākya) people. To take an example, Shaka women who had been killed by King Ruri attained salvation when Mahākāśyapa, one of Shakyamuni's major disciples, poured water contained in lotus of the Anavatapta Lake on them.¹⁴

(3) Regarding the number of the Anavatapta Lake(s):

While the majority of the sources say that there is one lake and that four rivers flow from that lake,¹⁵ one source says that there are four lakes and that sixteen rivers flow from them.¹⁶

(4) Regarding water in the Anavatapta Lake:

One question concerns why river water is saline even though it flows from the Anavatapta Lake. *Shisongru* 十誦律 (Jp. *Jūjuritsu*) explains that the water becomes saline because it flows through five hundred hells underground.¹⁷

The Anavatapta Lake originated not as a real geographic concept, but as a religio-cultural concept. The Anavatapta Lake continued to be a Buddhist idea, and has become a backdrop for many religious events. Therefore, as will be seen below, the lake embodies various metaphors in Buddhist sutras.

(1) The Anavatapta Lake is regarded as a sacred site worthy of holy beings:

It is closely associated with holy beings such as the aforementioned Nāga kings and bodhisattvas. No ordinary people can reach the lake. It is also said that the five hundred arhats often listened to the Buddha's lecture at the lake.¹⁸ Moreover, there is a story in which Sakyamuni went to the lake to give a lecture and a daughter of the Nāga king offered a jewel to him.¹⁹

(2) Water of the Anavatapta Lake is compared to wisdom in dharma:

- (a) In the same way water flowing from the Anavatapta Lake nurtures the four-continent world (*shitenge* 四天下) endlessly, water provided by the bodhisattva's vows to save all sentient beings nourishes them.²⁰
- (b) Good dharma comes from Mahayana, in the same way water comes from the Anavatapta Lake.²¹

¹¹ *Dafang guangfo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經, T279, vol. 10, p. 208, c, 12.16.

¹² *Fozutongji* 佛祖統紀, fascicle 32, T2035, vol. 49, p. 314, a, 2.8.

¹³ *Da Piluzhena chengfo jing shu* 大毘盧遮那成佛經疏, fascicle 15, T1796, vol. 39, p. 734, a, 22.25.

¹⁴ For instance, see the preface to *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經, T1718, vol. 34, p. 24, c, 18.20.

¹⁵ *Foshuo chang ahan jing* 佛說長阿含經, T1, vol. 1, p. 116, c, 05.18.

¹⁶ For instance, see *Shengman baoku* 勝鬘寶窟, fascicle middle, T1744, vol. 37, p. 43, a, 27.29.

¹⁷ *Shisonglu* 十誦律, fascicle 2, T1435, vol. 23, p. 346, a, 9.28.

¹⁸ (Wang et al. 1984, p. 146).

¹⁹ *Ruyi baozhu zhuanlun mimi xianshen chengfo jinlun zhouwang jing* 如意寶珠轉輪秘密現身成佛金輪呪王經, fascicle 1, T961, vol. 19, p. 331, c, 6.8.

²⁰ *Dafang guangfo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經, fascicle 27, T279, vol. 10, p. 222, b, 16.29; *Shizhu jing* 十住經, T286, vol. 10, p. 531, b, 26.28.

²¹ *Dabaoji jing* 大宝積經, fascicle 119, T310, vol. 11, p. 575, a, 8.10.

- (c) In the same way water from the Anavatapta Lake, where a dragon lives, benefits Buddhist practice, the Four Great Rivers of Dharma flow from bodhisattvas.²²
- (d) In the same way water from the Anavatapta Lake benefits sentient beings, bodhisattvas benefit sentient beings in the Sea of Wisdom.²³
- (3) The eradication of afflictions brings about many benefits, in just the same way the ablution in the Anavatapta Lake eradicates sins.²⁴
- (4) Breathing disorder will be cured if one visualizes the Anavatapta Lake.²⁵
- (5) Shakyamuni's fearless mind at his defeat of Māra is likened to the calmness of the full water of the Anavatapta Lake and to the immovability of Mt. Sumeru.²⁶

These examples show the ways in which the sacred Anavatapta Lake was used as a metaphor of dharma and enlightenment.

5. Transmission and Reception of the Anavatapta Lake in China

In the process of dissemination of Buddhism, the Anavatapta Lake was perceived through the lens of local cultures. In China, the idea that China was the center of geography began to merge with the Buddhist concept of the Anavatapta Lake around the time when numerous Buddhist texts were translated into Chinese. It is not difficult to imagine that, during the process of localization of foreign culture, a new fusion of ideas was gradually formed through a repeated series of clash and transformation of ideas. In this new fusion, Mt. Anavatapta was identified with Mt. Kunlun, and the Anavatapta Lake with the Kunlun Lake 崑崙池. Although Lü Jianfu has argued that this merge began in the periods of the Three Kingdoms (220–280) and the Jin dynasty (265–420),²⁷ it seems to have started a little earlier, as we have seen in Kang Mengxiang's translated sutra, (*Foshuo*) *Xingqixing jing*, where Mt. Anavatapta is identified with Mt. Kunlun, although the Anavatapta Lake is not explicitly identified with the Kunlun Lake. One of the earliest examples that reflects these identifications of both the mountains and the lakes is Zhi Qian's 支謙 (active 223–253) translation of *Fanmoyu jing* 梵摩渝經 (Jp. *Bonmayugyō*), as Lü has noted.²⁸ Later, the account that identifies Mt. Anavatapta with Mt. Kunlun and the Anavatapta Lake with the Kunlun Lake was confirmed in *Shuijingzhu* 水經注 (Jp. *Suikichū*), the oldest commentary of waterways in China, by the geographer Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (d. 527) in the Northern Wei period (386–534). Li wrote this commentary through scrutiny of textual and geographical evidence, and it was widely accepted as an established account by both the clergy and the laity in subsequent periods.²⁹

The discourse in which Mt. Anavatapta with Mt. Kunlun and the Anavatapta Lake were identified with the Kunlun Lake merits further discussion. Mt. Kunlun is a mythical mountain that was believed to lie in the western region of China. It symbolically functioned as a marker of the western border that separated China from the otherworld. Its summit was considered to be a dwelling of the goddess Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母), who controlled the secret of immortality. Moreover, in some texts, such as the aforementioned commentary *Shuijingzhu*, Mt. Kunlun is regarded as the source of the Yellow River. These mythical characteristics of Mt. Kunlun probably accommodated the identification of Mt. Kunlun and Kunlun Lake with Mt. Anavatapta and the Anavatapta Lake. The visual representation of the Anavatapta Lake at the center of the Map of India in the Harvard

²² *Foshuo huashou jing* 佛說華手經, fascicle 7, T657, vol. 16, p. 182, c, 29.a05.

²³ *Foshuo zhufa yongwang jing* 佛說諸法勇王經, T822, vol. 17, p. 848, b, 22.28.

²⁴ *Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經, fascicle 23, T375, vol. 12, p. 755, c, 9.12.

²⁵ *Zhichan bingmi yaozhu* 治禪病祕要法, fascicle 1, T620, vol. 15, p. 335, b, 3.18.

²⁶ *Dasheng baoyun jing* 大乘寶雲經, fascicle 1, T659, vol. 16, p. 241, c, 10.11.

²⁷ (Lü 2005, pp. 75–82; also see Lü 2015, p. 267).

²⁸ (Lü 2005, p. 77; 2015, p. 267). As we have seen, a similar interpretation is also stated in the Harvard scroll.

²⁹ In the Qing period (1644–1912), firsthand surveys of the river systems of the Yellow River led to the identification of Mt. Anavatapta (or Mt. Kunlun) with Mt. Kailash 岡底斯山, an actual mountain in Tibet. (Lü 2005, p. 77; 2015, pp. 268–70).

scroll, for instance, can be superimposed onto the Chinese geography, where the mythical mountain Mt. Kunlun lies in the west and the Yellow River flows from there. The lake being the source of the Yellow River had a particular significance in Chinese ideologies, since for the Chinese people the Yellow River was not just a source of water that enriched their life, but it also constituted the center of their civilization. Through “the complete integration of the Buddhist ideas of the geographical center, and the Chinese idea of the geographical center”, the Buddhist worldview was transplanted in China.³⁰ This enforced the Sinocentric ideology that the Chinese mythical mountain was one and the same as the mountain at the center of Jambudvīpa. This would have a great significance in supporting China’s cultural superiority.

How then did the idea of the Anavatapta Lake spread in Chinese culture? Although we do not have many references to the Anavatapta Lake in Chinese literature, it is probable that preaching practices such as *bianwen* 變文 (transformation texts) played an important role in disseminating the idea of the Anavatapta Lake in China. For example, the Anavatapta Lake appears in *Dong Yong bianwen* 董永變文 (transformation text of Dong Yong), a story of filial piety in *Dunhuang bianwen* 敦煌變文, the collection of narrative stories discovered in a cave library in Dunhuang.³¹ This is a famous story that is also compiled in *Soushen ji* 搜神記 (Record in Search for the Supernatural) by the historian Gan Bao 干宝 (d. 336). As the story goes, the main character Dong Yong indentured himself to a rich man so that he could conduct a proper burial and memorial service for his deceased father. Moved by Yong’s filial piety, the Emperor of Heaven sent a weaving maid to marry Yong and to pay the debt on his behalf by weaving cloth. When the debt was paid off, the maid returned to heaven. While *Soushen ji* ends the story here, *Dong Yong bianwen* continues as follows: A child was born between Yong and the maid. When he grew up, he saw a fortune teller in search of his mother, and he successfully found her by following the fortune teller’s instruction to take away a purple robe when three celestial maidens were bathing in the Anavatapta Lake. This story is a typical legend of celestial feather robe, but *Dong Yong bianwen* is the only version to mention the Anavatapta Lake. In this story, the Anavatapta Lake is a liminal space between the sacred and the secular where ordinary people make contact with celestial beings. This is in contrast to Buddhist sutras, in which the Anavatapta Lake is the abode of bodhisattvas, Nāga kings, or the five hundred arhats, and a place where ordinary people cannot reach. This contrast suggests that, by the time of the creation of *Dong Yong bianwen*, people had come to perceive the Anavatapta Lake as a site closer in time and space to them.

6. Reception and Recreation of the Anavatapta Lake in Japan

In Japan, due to the lack of direct contact with India in premodern times, the idea of the Anavatapta Lake was disseminated through Chinese translations of Buddhist texts. One of the most important backbones in Japanese people’s understanding of the Anavatapta Lake was the worldview or three countries (*sangokukan* 三国觀). It regarded the world as comprising India, China (including Korea), and Japan, and was prevalent in Japan until Europeans brought new world atlases and geography there in the sixteenth century. This worldview or model of the world was based on Buddhism in the sense that the combination of the three countries derived from the dissemination route of Buddhism from India to Japan via China. In Buddhist cosmology, however, Japan held a marginal place in several hierarchies. In terms of location and size, India was a vast continent positioned at the center of the world, and China neighbored it on the northeast, but Japan was a tiny land on the far periphery at best, and often absent, as in the Map of India in the Harvard scroll. Furthermore, the widely-held thought of “the end of dharma” (*mappō* 末法)—that after the demise of the historical Buddha Buddhist doctrines would decline progressively in three stages—meant that Buddhism had entered Japan in the final, most degenerate stage. This negative status of Japan as a marginal country in the final age of

³⁰ (Lü 2005, p. 78; 2015, p. 39).

³¹ (Wang et al. 1984, p. 112).

dharma (*masse hendo* 末世辺土) was, however, transformed after Japan repelled the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century, when the idea of the land of kami (*shinkoku* 神国)—that Japan was protected by Japanese native kami—emerged. This *shinkoku* discourse was fundamentally linked to the account of *honji-suijaku* 本地垂迹 in medieval Japan, according to which kami were considered identical to, or manifestations (*suijaku*) of, Buddhist deities (*honji*: origin). This discourse, in a manner similar to the Chinese case, helped Japan identify itself as a sacred country, and the identification of Buddhist and Japanese native deities probably emerged in tandem with the connecting of Japan's local sites to Indian mythological ones, and to the Anavatapta Lake among others.

Indeed, the Anavatapta Lake appears quite often in Japanese *setsuwa* literature, and more often than it does in Chinese literature. For convenience' sake, I will divide examples into several groups: (1) *setsuwa* in which the lake serves as a landscape backdrop for Indian myths; (2) ones that connect Indian myths and Japan; (3) historical accounts that reflect the worldview of the three countries; and (4) *setsuwa* that constitute metaphors. Let us review representatives of these four categories.

- (1) The first category includes *setsuwa* in the early-twelfth-century anthology *Konjaku monogatari shū* 今昔物語集 (*Collection of Tales of Times Now Past*) and in the fourteenth-century warrior tale *Taiheiki* 太平記 (*Chronicle of Great Peace*). The following episode from *Konjaku monogatari shū* relates that Nāga's offspring escaped the danger of the Golden Winged Bird (Garuḍa: *konjichō* 金翅鳥) only when they were in the Anavatapta Lake:³²

Long ago in India, various dragon kings lived at the bottom of a great sea. They were always menaced by the attack of the Golden Winged Bird. The dragon kings also had a pond called Muncchi [the Anavatapta Lake] where there was no danger from the bird. The Golden Winged Bird fanned the surface of the great sea with its wings until the water had dried, took the children of the dragon kings and ate them (India Section 3: 9).³³

The next example, found in the thirty-eighth scroll of *Taiheiki*, is an episode taken from a well-known *Kitano tsuya monogatari* 北野通夜物語 (All-night Story-telling Vigil at Kitano Shrine), in which protagonists tell stories, mostly Chinese and Indian ones.³⁴ Among them is a story on King Ruri's massacre of the Shaka people, where Shakyamuni explains how and why it took place as follows: In the previous lives of the Shaka people, they were fishermen and killed a sea monster, Makara, in the Anavatapta Lake—the monster was reborn as King Ruri, and he revenged himself on the Shaka people. Although *Konjaku monogatari shū* contains a similar story, it says that King Ruri was a fish and lived in a pond in a fishing village in Raetsu (Rājagṛha).³⁵ Since Makara often appears as an indicator of the other world in *setsuwa* literature and illustrated scrolls, we can assume that the *Kitano* story mentions the monster to emphasize the otherworldliness of the Anavatapta Lake.

In this way, similar to the worldview of Mt. Sumeru, the Anavatapta Lake is portrayed as a substantive manifestation of the Indian world, and thereby provides a backdrop for Buddhist-related *setsuwa*. In the same vein, the preface to *Jinnō shōtōki* 神皇正統記 (*Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns*) refers to the Anavatapta Lake as part of the Indian cosmology:

According to the Buddhist scriptures, there is a mountain called Sumeru, which is surrounded by seven other concentric, golden mountains. Between these golden mountains flows the

³² The same episode is compiled in a collection of didactic tales *Chūkōsen* 注好選 in the twelfth century. *Sanpō-e, Chūkōsen* 1997, p. 367.

³³ (Dykstra 2014, p. 149); also see *Konjaku monogatari shū* 1999, p. 221.

³⁴ In *Kitano tsuya monogatari*, the Buddhist monk Raii of Hino visits Kitano Shrine, and listens to a dialogue between a hermit, a courtier, and a Buddhist monk all night long. These dialogists narrate Indian, Chinese, and Japanese tales, with which they castigate the sovereign's rulership in Japan in the middle of the civil war between the Northern and Southern Courts.

³⁵ *Konjaku monogatari shū* 1999, p. 170; see also (Dykstra 2014, pp. 115–20).

Sea of Fragrant Waters, and outside them are four great oceans. Within the oceans are four great continents, each of which consists of two lesser parts. The southern continent is called Jambu (or Jambudvīpa, a different form of the same name), and is named after the *jambu* tree. At the center of the southern continent is a mountain called Anavatapta, and on its summit is a lake. (Anavatapta is also called Bunetsu. It is none other than the mountain known in non-Buddhist sources as K'un-lun.)³⁶

After discussing the origin of Japan's name ("Nippon"), *Jinnō shōtōki* expounds the Buddhist cosmology and resituates China and Japan in the India-centric worldview. It emphasizes that China and Japan are remote and small lands on the periphery of Jambudvīpa, where India is situated in the center, and the Anavatapta Lake is placed within this worldview.

- (2) Preaching texts in the collection of the Kanagawa Prefectural Kanazawa-Bunko Museum include a good example of *setsuwa* that connects Indian myths and Japan through the Anavatapta Lake—namely, the text called *Gumonji kuketsu* 求聞持口訣.³⁷ According to the text, the Nāga king Zennyō 善如龍王 (Zennyō ryūō) dwells in a pond at the Buddhist temple Murōji on Mt. Murō, and this pond is linked by subterranean streams to the Anavatapta Lake in India, enabling Zennyō to visit the lake frequently. The connection is probably meant to glorify the sanctity of Mt. Murō.³⁸ One noteworthy feature of this episode is that it refers to the dragon in the Anavatapta Lake as the Nāga king Zennyō, whereas Buddhist texts refer to him as a manifestation of various deities such as bodhisattvas of the seventh, eighth, and tenth stages.³⁹ The same is the case with the famous episode contained in *Konjaku monogatari shū* and *Taiheiki* in which, during a rainmaking ritual, Kūkai 空海 (774–835)—the founder of Japanese Shingon Buddhism—invited the Nāga king Zennyō from the Anavatapta Lake to a pond of the imperial garden Shinsen'en.⁴⁰ The Anavatapta Lake was believed to be connected, through subterranean streams, to various sacred water sources in Japan.
- (3) The third category is *setsuwa* in which the Anavatapta Lake appears as a historical precedent against the backdrop of the worldview of the three countries, which saw the entire world as consisting of India, China, and Japan. Our first example in this category is “the Battle at Hiuchi” in Chapter Seven of *Heike monogatari* 平家物語 (*Tale of the Heike*):

[The Hiuchi stronghold] was a formidable position, surrounded by towering rocks and peaks, with mountains in front and behind; there were also two rivers, the Nōmigawa and the Shindōgawa, in front. At the confluence of the rivers, the defenders had built in an elaborate dam by felling and dragging in mighty trees for branch barricades, so that water lapped at the base of the mountains to the east and the west, just as though the stronghold were facing the lake. “Its surface steeped the southern mountain: blue and vast. Its waves engulfed the westering sun: red and patterned.” On the bottom of the Heatless Lake [Anavatapta Lake], there is silver and golden sand; by the shore at

³⁶ (Varley 1980, p. 54).

³⁷ Originally the collection was housed in the archives in the complex of the Buddhist temple Shōmyōji in Yokohama. For *Gumonji kuketsu*, see (Takahashi 1994, p. 275).

³⁸ *Gumonji kuketsu* goes on to say that the monk Huiguo 惠果 (746–806), who transmitted esoteric Buddhist tradition to Kūkai at Qinglong Monastery in Chang'an in 805, has moved to Mt. Murō, and that whenever a Shingon master visits Mt. Murō, Huiguo welcomes him, whereas if an inexperienced practitioner visits there, he will be slaughtered by poisonous snakes and other creatures. (Takahashi 1994, p. 275).

³⁹ Although the Dragon King Zennyō appears in *Baoxidi chengfo tuoluo ni jing* 宝悉地成佛陀羅尼經 translated by Amoghavajra (705–774), it appears more frequently in Japanese sources more frequently. We can assume that the name Zennyō was more familiar to Japanese people through a wide reception of the *setsuwa* literature.

⁴⁰ See “Matter of the Garden of Divine Waters”, in (McCullough 2004, p. 374); *Taiheiki* 1960, pp. 420–24. Also see *Konjaku monogatari shū* 1993, p. 359; “How Master Kōbō Practiced the Cult of Shōkyō and Caused a Downpour”, in (Dykstra 1998, pp. 248–49).

Kunming Lake, there were virtuous-government boats. At this artificial lake near the Hiuchi stronghold, there was a dam with roiling water for the purpose of deception.⁴¹

In this battle scene, Minamoto no Yoshinaka's 源義仲 (1154–1184) army entrenched itself in the Hiuchi stronghold in Echizen Province, but it was defeated due to a traitor who had secretly communicated with the antagonists, the Taira. The tale says that the artificial lake in Hiuchi was not comparable to the Anavatapta Lake in India and the Kunming Lake 昆明池 in China. Here the Anavatapta Lake is represented as one of the world's famous sites embellished with gold and silver sand, rather than as a sacred site. It is also paired with the Kunming Lake, where "virtuous-government boats" float. The Kunming Lake is an artificial lake that was originally constructed by Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (141–87 BCE) for navy exercise.⁴² It is interesting that this comparison to the Kunming Lake presages the outbreak of the war.

Another example in the third category, and one in which a pond in Japan is compared to India's Anavatapta Lake and China's Kunming Lake, is found in *Taiheiki*, in the episode of fire that started in Okazaki in Kyoto and destroyed the pagoda in the temple Hosshōji:

The octagonal nine-story pagoda [. . .] was a pagoda that excelled any other in the three countries (*sangoku musō no gantō nari* 三国無双ノ雁塔也). When it was first built, its image was reflected onto the surfaces of India's Anavatapta Lake, China's Kunming Lake, and Japan's Naniwa Bay, truly a miraculous event. The fact that an imperial-vow site with such a miraculous power was destroyed by fire in an instant must mean something far more significant than the devastation of this temple alone.⁴³

The pagoda, which once stood in a pond, would resemble Mt. Sumeru. Based on the three-country model, the passage stresses the splendor of the pagoda, which it says "excelled any other in the three countries", by referring to the Anavatapta Lake in India, the Kunming Lake in China, and the Naniwa Bay in Japan reflecting its image. It expands the idea of excellence in the three countries to the famous ponds in the three countries (although the Naniwa Bay is not a pond). The passage takes the loss of the pagoda as a portent to the fall of the Buddhist and Sovereign Laws and the decline of the country.

- (4) In the fourth category, the Anavatapta Lake constitutes a metaphor. An example is in the writings of the prominent monk Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282). While in exile on Sado Island, Nichiren wrote letters to his disciples and lay followers who were shaken by the persecution of Nichiren. Below is a passage from one of the letters:

An arrogant person will always be overcome with fear when meeting a strong enemy, as was the haughty *asura* who shrank in size and hid himself in a lotus blossom in Heat-Free Lake when reproached by Shakra.⁴⁴

The letter refers to the battle between Shakra (Indra) and *asura* as an admonition for the proud. This is also a famous story, and can be found in *Konjaku monogatari shū* as well, in which *asura* "retreated and confined himself in a cell of lotuses",⁴⁵ but while Nichiren connects the image of lotuses to the Anavatapta Lake, *Konjaku monogatari shū* does not specify where the lotuses were planted.⁴⁶ Nichiren

⁴¹ (McCullough 1988, p. 227); also see *Heike monogatari* 1994, pp. 25–28.

⁴² The image of the Kunming Lake seems to have permeated among Japanese people. For instance, in the *Illustrated Scroll of the Story of the Courtier Ban* (*Ban dainagon ekotoba*), the lake is depicted on a free-standing panel behind a courtier in formal attire in the scene where the chancellor Fujiwara no Yoshifusa (804–872) makes a direct appeal to Emperor Seiwa (850–881; r. 858–876) that the minister of the left, Minamoto no Makoto, is innocent of having set fire to the Ōten-mon gate. *Ban dainagon ekotoba* (Komatsu 1975, pp. 28–29).

⁴³ *Taiheiki* 1960, pp. 144–146.

⁴⁴ (Gasho Translation Committee 1999, p. 302).

⁴⁵ (Dykstra 2014, pp. 67–68).

⁴⁶ (Gao 2017, pp. 21–36).

also wrote several treatises while in Sado, and one of them, entitled *Kaimokushō* 開目抄 (*Liberation from Blindness*), has the following passage, which resonates with the aforementioned Indian myth in *Konjaku monogatari shū*:

In China, F'ei-kung fought with Hsiang-yü (Kō-u) for eight years. In Japan, Yoritomo fought with Munemori for seven years. *Asuras* fought with Śakra. *Garuḍas* fought with dragons at the Anavatapta Pond. But these fights were not so severe [as the controversies between the advocates of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* and the slanders of it].⁴⁷

These various examples of *setsuwa* of the Anavatapta Lake in Japanese literature—in some, the lake is a stage setting for the world of Indian myths, or connected to Japan as in the ponds of Murōji and Shinsen'en, while in others the lake constitutes a precedent in the three-country model—show how widely the lake was perceived and understood as part of the East Asian worldview.

7. The Anavatapta Lake in the Garden in the *Illustrated Biography of Xuanzang*

Lastly, I examine a fourteenth-century Japanese picture scroll called the *Illustrated Biography of Xuanzang* (*Genjō sanzō-e* 玄奘三蔵絵), which is closely related to Xuanzang's *Xiyuji*.⁴⁸ Somewhat surprisingly, the Anavatapta Lake appears in a depiction of a garden in this scroll.

The style of gardening in East Asia has been influenced by the worldview of Mt. Sumeru. For instance, in ancient Japan, in the seventh century, emperors had stone monuments in the shape of Mt. Sumeru constructed in their courtyards⁴⁹. Indeed, one of these stone monuments was unearthed in Asuka, and scholars believe that it was originally a stone fountain set up at the center of a garden pond.⁵⁰ Though the relationship between this pond and the Anavatapta Lake is uncertain, evidence suggests that there were gardens in which lakes or ponds imitated the Anavatapta Lake.

In China, *Xu Gaozeng zhuan* 續高僧伝 (*The Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*), which was compiled by Dao Xuan 道宣 (596–667) during the Tang dynasty, includes a short biography of Chāde 叉德 (d. 638), a monk from Mt. Liang 梁山 in Yong Province 雍州. It recounts that Chāde constructed a lake imitating the Anavatapta Lake to the south of Mt. Jiuzong 九峻山, and made a stone basin beside the lake, for the benefit of sentient beings. There were probably more cases of this kind, although there has been no pictorial source found in China that shows the Anavatapta Lake in gardens; neither has archaeological evidence been investigated on the construction of imitated Anavatapta Lakes.

By contrast, in Japan, there is a depiction of a garden placing an imitated Anavatapta Lake—namely, in the *Illustrated Life of Xuanzang*. This picture scroll was produced by the prominent court painter Takashina no Takakane 高階隆兼 (active in the early fourteenth century). In the second section of the sixth fascicle of the scroll, there is a scene where Xuanzang receives offerings from King Bālāditya at Nālandā Monastery in India and stays in the living quarters of Dharmapāla Bodhisattva. In front of the living quarters a fountain in a pond is depicted—although it has not been pointed out, this pond is clearly modeled on the Anavatapta Lake (Figure 3).⁵¹

A text accompanying the illustration of this scene explains the origin of the name of the monastery. The direct source of this text is *Da Tang Da Cī'ensi Sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三蔵法師伝 (*Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master of the Great Cī'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty*), which relates the monastery to a pond as follows:

Nālandā Monastery means the monastery of Insatiability in Almsgiving. It was said by old tradition that to the south of the monastery there had been a pond in a mango grove in which lived a dragon named Nālanda. As the monastery was built beside the pond, it was named

⁴⁷ *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* is a Sanskrit name of the *Lotus Sutra*. Translation is from (Murano 2000, p. 81).

⁴⁸ For the *Illustrated Biography of Xuanzang*, see (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2011, p. 91).

⁴⁹ *Nihon shoki* 1965, pp. 198, 330, 336, 343.

⁵⁰ It is now preserved in the Asuka Historical Museum, along with a reconstructed model.

⁵¹ (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2011, p. 91).

so. It was also said that when the Tathāgata was practicing the Bodhisattva path in one of his former lives, he was a great king and founded his capital at this place. As he had pity on the poor and the lonely, he often gave alms to them; and in memory of his beneficence the people called the place Insatiability in Almsgiving.⁵²

Though this passage does not mention the Anavatapta Lake, it refers to a pond where a dragon lived. Perhaps because of the dragon inhabiting in the pond, the *Illustrated Life of Xuanzang* associates the pond with the Anavatapta Lake and portrays the pond with a fountain of the four animals in the four cardinal directions.



Figure 3. A garden fountain modeled on the Anavatapta Lake, from the *Illustrated Life of Xuanzang*. (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2011), p. 91.

The *Illustrated Life of Xuanzang* also depicts a strangely shaped rock in the center of the pond. The rock is partially covered with moss, and windmill palm trees grow around its top. Around half-way up to the top, three animal heads are attached: an elephant on the front, a water buffalo on the right, and a lion on the left. Water is flowing out of the mouth of each animal. The opposite side, although invisible, must have a horse's head. This representation of the four animals and water flowing from their mouth is exactly the same as that in the descriptions of the Anavatapta Lake in the *Xiyuji* and the Harvard scroll. Although the directions of the animals vary across different texts, the majority of texts have an elephant on the south; it is therefore likely that the *Illustrated Life of Xuanzang* depicts this scene from the south.

To the best of my knowledge, however, there are no other pictorial sources that show the Anavatapta Lake in a garden. Nevertheless, the absence of a fountain in a garden in the accompanied text in the *Illustrated Life of Xuanzang* suggests that the artist used a preceding pictorial source as a model for his depiction of the pond. Since gardens with the imitated Anavatapta Lake were actually built as attested in the aforementioned *Xu Gaozeng zhuan*, it is possible that there are remains of such gardens—this demands more of both pictorial and archaeological research.

⁵² (Li 1995, p. 93). The scroll text that accompanies the illustration in the *Illustrated Life of Xuanzang* is almost identical. In addition, a similar account is recorded in “the Country of Magadha” of the ninth fascicle of Xuanzang's *Record of the Western Regions*. (Li 1996, p. 281).

8. Conclusions

This article's search for the Anavatapta Lake started with Xuanzang's *Xiyuji* and ended with the *Illustrated Life of Xuanzang*. We have examined various references to the lake from *Xiyuji* to the Harvard scroll, to Buddhist sutras, to works of medieval literature such as *Konjaku monogatari shū* and *Taiheiki*, and to the *Illustrated Life of Xuanzang*. All of these sources have made it clearer how significant a place the lake occupied in the cosmology of Indian origin. It was a landmark deeply connected to the world of Mt. Sumeru, which was located at the center of the Asian worldview. While Mt. Sumeru provided a more imaginary and massive worldview, the Anavatapta Lake constituted a space at which imaginary and real geographies intersected with each other, as the lake was thought to, for instance, connect to the Yellow River in China.

In the process of transmission of Buddhism from India to East Asian countries, the idea of the Anavatapta Lake carried layers of meanings beyond its initial role as a sacred water source located in India. Buddhist cosmology placed India at the center of the world and at the top of the hierarchy of sacredness. The adoption of this cosmology in China or in Japan therefore caused tensions with their ideologies that placed China at the center of the world or that regarded Japan as a divinely protected sacred country. Against the backdrop of these tensions, the Anavatapta Lake played a crucial role in adapting and adopting Buddhist cosmology in China and Japan. In the localization of the concept of the lake, the sacred source of all water in the world became intricately associated, and sometimes believed to even be spatially connected, with places of cultural, religious, and ideological significance in China and Japan, such as China's Yellow River or Japan's Shinsen'en pond. These conceptual and spatial connections helped the reconciliation of the India-centered cosmology and the local ideologies in China and Japan, and reformulated political and cultural visions in East Asia.

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Abbreviation

T SAT Daizōkyō Text Database (SAT大正新脩大藏經テキストデータベース). 2018 version.
Tokyo: University of Tokyo. <http://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/>.

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