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GAN BAO'S «*IN SEARCH OF THE SUPERNATURAL: THE WRITTEN RECORD*» AS A KEY TO THE CHINESE MEDIEVAL WORLDVIEW

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The "Dark Ages" in the world history and in China. Human history is built on numerous paradoxes. The "Dark Ages" of the early Middle Ages were exactly the era that replaced antiquity. But in the history of the Eurasian continent, it was this new era, about which we know the least due to the lack of written records, that brought the greatest changes in human life. After all, we are talking about the period when the medieval Christian civilization, the civilization of the Far East, and later the civilization of Islam were born.

Our study is devoted to a new aspect of Chinese civilization at that time, namely, the medieval literature of the "Way of Spirits." The founding book, the literary canon of the Way of the Spirits, is *Notes on the Search for Spirits* by Gan Bao.

Gan Bao's «*In search of the supernatural: the written record*» reveals a cognitive picture of the world of China (and, in many aspects, of the Far Eastern civilization as a whole) in the early Middle Ages. Thus, by analyzing Gan Bao's manuscript, we are approaching an understanding of both the Chinese Middle Ages and the civilization of the Far East in general, and discovering another important fragment of the puzzle of the development of world civilizations.

The third century can be considered a key milestone in Chinese history. The Han Empire, which had been the center of the universe for its citizens (eventually, like the Roman Empire), collapsed and disappeared [5, p.97]. In the new, military conditions, intellectual authors of the third and fourth centuries (let us recall the Chinese poets and writers Cao Cao, Cao Pi, Cao Zhi, Tao Yuanming) were in the process of civilizational and cultural search for a new era of the early Dark Ages. This search was required by the new conditions of the new era of the third century. Chinese culture during this period radically changed the mainstream of its

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development because, in the new conditions of continuous battles and events, it was difficult to hear the dialogue between Confucius and his disciples. On the other hand, it was primarily possible to see Confucius's disciples, including historical characters and heroes of the famous novel *The Three Kingdoms*, Liu Bei, Zhang Fei, and Guan Yu, defending the Confucian values of longevity, wisdom, ethics, and humanity with swords in their hands. The mystical tendencies in Chinese early medieval prose were the factor that fundamentally distinguished the new intertextual search for the very essence of literature as a cultural phenomenon, gradually moving further and further away from the model of ancient Chinese philosophical prose on which the foundations of ancient Chinese civilization were built. The peaceful dialog between teacher and student, initiated in Confucius's "Lunyu", became less important in the eyes of the medieval reader.

The hypothetical imaginary medieval reader, unlike the hypothetical ancient reader, is no longer looking for answers to questions about the moral and ethical foundations of existence, but for answers to questions concerning the a priori dark, mysterious side of human existence, such as how to become immortal, how to obtain certain benefits of a vital or material nature, or how to escape the revenge of an angry spirit. Ultimately, ethical issues were resolved by the philosophical prose of Chinese antiquity.

Buddhist doctrine also plunged into a "whirlpool of change," and the ancient philosophy of early Buddhism was supplemented by new, purely esoteric trends of the

Early Middle Ages. The mystical search in Chinese Buddhism was reflected in the incantations called dharana and formed two almost opposite trends in Buddhism - the "Charya religion" (i.e., following rituals) and the "Yoga religion" (contemplation). Later, in the Tang dynasty, these two trends became the basis for mystical Buddhism, the first trend being represented by the translation of the fundamental canon of esoteric Buddhism, the Mahāvairochana Sutra, and the second trend being represented by the translation of the Diamond Peak Yoga Sutra, whereby practicing the latter sutra, the ascetic seems to gain unity with the "tathagatas" (literally, "self-existent") and becomes a Buddha himself [2]. Eventually, these teachings have come down to our days, almost in their original form. In the end, these teachings have survived to this day, almost in their original form. Thus, the "three teachings of the Celestial Empire" (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism) have undergone significant changes. Chinese culture demanded a radically new phenomenon, and this new cultural phenomenon was the "Way of the Spirits," whose actual founder was Gan Bao.

Biography of Gan Bao. The biographical information about Gan Bao's life that has survived to this day does not reveal much about the artist's life and work for the



modern reader; in other words, it is rather scarce. The only Chinese primary source that describes the life of Han Bao is a short section from the chronicle "Book of the Jin Dynasty," which is given in the modern Chinese reprint of the collection "In search of the supernatural: the written record" [8, p. 3–7].

Gan Bao lived in the late third and early fourth centuries; we do not know the exact dates of his life. The author of the collection was born in Henan Province, in Xinqai County. Gan Bao's grandfather, Gan Tong, served in the Wu state during the Three Kingdoms (a period in which China was divided into three states: Wu, Shu, and Wei), where he was awarded the title of "commander who was courageous in battle." Sima Zhao's son, Sima Yan founded the new Jin Empire. In 256, after Sima Zhao's death, Gan Bao's family joined the Jin Kingdom. Gan Bao's father was an official in the Jin Kingdom [8, p. 3–7].

Gan Bao's family was quite poor. Gan Bao had a natural aptitude for science and an innate desire for knowledge, and later became an official, which was quite prestigious in China at that time. Communication among officials clearly had a significant impact on the writer's work. Initially, Gan Bao took some part in the military events of 311-315, for which he took a certain position at the court of the Wang prince, then from 325 he governed the Shi'an county in Guangxi province, and from 335 he was a member of the imperial entourage. We also have information that Gan Bao held the position of court historian, worked on the history of the Jin Dynasty, compiled a commentary on the ancient Chinese Book of Changes, and worked on several dozen historical works. The only book written by Gan Bao is Notes on the Search for Spirits. Unfortunately, this is almost all the biographical information about the author that we know today

The "Way of Spirits". In fact, in the anthology "«In search of the supernatural: the written record», Gan Bao proposes a new type of worldview for China at the time, the "Way of Spirits." The "Way of Spirits" created by Gan Bao is a separate form of folk worldview, and possibly a separate folk religion. It should be emphasized that the author did not aim to develop a specific religious cult with a clear system of rituals; rather, the purpose of the collection was to make the reader believe in the existence of spirits. The deliberate primitivism and laconicism in Gan Bao's stories are intended to enhance the story's believability. The Way of the Spirits is not inherently Confucian, Buddhist, or Taoist, but can easily be combined with any of these philosophical movements. Subsequently, the "path of spirits" would form the basis of another religion new to the Far East, Shintoism, which uniquely reworked Japanese folklore and beliefs and systematized them in Japan into the Shinto religion (in the 7th and 8th centuries AD). The imperial world of China permeated Gan Bao's worldview to such an extent that even in the afterlife, there was a place for officials and for the leaders of underground labor groups. This

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anthropomorphized, bureaucratic character of the spirits made the reception of the stories in the collection quite easy for the average, more or less educated, Chinese reader of the time. In fact, while the primary layer of the collection, namely the motifs of encounters with the otherworldly, have their roots in the animistic beliefs of the Neolithic period, the layer added by the author is a purely

literary "framing" of the images of "spirits" in the story, in full accordance with the imperial culture of the medieval Middle Kingdom. After all, we can find a similar literary technique in British literature, in particular in the Gothic narrative of the Victorian era. Contact with the spirit in *The Notes* almost never passes without a trace for the human character; it almost always changes the fate of the play's protagonists, and often this contact is the culmination of the story. Gan Bao's spirits are not only the fantastic zoomorphic creatures described in *Mountains and Seas*, but also a highly organized society, and one that is much better organized than the human world. The author depicts a number of anthropomorphic images. The society of spirits is at the same time identical to the society of people, and at the same time is the "antithesis" of human society; it stands as if "above" human society, almost does not interfere in the current life of living people, and at the same time fully controls the fate of a person.

In many of Gan Bao's stories, we can see feminine gender motifs. For example, the motif of the "Heavenly Maiden" (wife-spirit), or the protagonist's contact with his deceased wife. This motif is connected with the gender dichotomy of the doctrine of the Ina and Yang, which I think is already well known to an educated European reader. As a rule, the protagonist's meeting with his spirit wife takes place in absolutely ordinary, everyday conditions or in a dream, so we also have onyric motifs in the collection.

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It should be noted that in many of the stories in the collection, Gan Bao has a meeting with a spirit master who lives either in the bowels of Mount Taishan or in the underworld or underwater world. This character is in charge of people's fates. Also, in many of Gan Bao's stories, relatives who have recently left this world come to him in a dream with a request to ease their fate in the afterlife, to transfer them to another position. In this case, it should be emphasized once again that the author of the collection was a state official by social background.

As a result of the study, we can identify the following **key characteristics of stories about the search for spirits**:

1.The "exploratory" nature of the collection - the author of the collection is not completely sure whether the events described really happened or not, and therefore tries to investigate the information he has heard as much as possible;

2.The "pseudo-historical" nature of the collection of stories, which follows from the first point of the study-the author tries to describe events in chronological sequence, the time and place of action of most Xiaosho stories are real, historical. The collection of short stories "Notes on the Search for Spirits" borrows the form from Sima Qian's "Historical Notes" in order to make most of the events described historical;

3.The laconicism of the Xiaosho story - the author of the story tries to concisely inform the reader or listener of the events described in literary language in accordance with the scientific and social requirements of his time;

4.Novelistic nature of the story - some Xiaosho stories have an unexpected ending for the reader or listener, and it is difficult for the reader to predict the plot development. The resolution of the plot of Gan Bao's stories can often shock a potential "imaginary" reader;

5. The moralizing nature of the collection of short stories - the plots of Xiaosho stories have the character of parables of the Chinese folk religion, the logic of which is very different from the logic of Taoist philosophy. This logic of the short story is closer to the logic of a folk tale than to philosophical thinking;

6.The complete nature of each short story. Each short story contains a specific plot and is not thematically connected to a number of subsequent stories;

7.The historical time period of each short story. Each short story in the collection is set in a specific historical era and in a specific real geographical location;

8.The "typicality" of the characters in the short story Xiaosho. The characters of the collection are typical, which allows us to create a clear classification of the literary heroes of the collection.

An important factor in the perception of a work is the nature of the narrative. All of the xiaosho stories in Gan Bao's collection are characterized by an extradiegetic narrator (the narrator is outside the fictional world of the story, the story is told in the third person). The narrator's extradiegeticism emphasizes the historicism of the events and gives the story the effect of the "Voice of the Prophet." The reader or listener should not have even a shadow of doubt about the truthfulness, which adds to the effect of quasi-historicism (pseudo-historicity of each story). Pseudo-historicism is one of the guaranteed literary techniques that make the reader believe in the reality of the events that unfold in the story. The

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author tells each story like a prophet, and apparently, due to the lack of factual material, we will never be able to find out how much Gan Bao himself believed the materials in his own collection. Permanently, the collection had a significant impact on the development of Far Eastern literature, in fact becoming a "canon of the genre," as evidenced by the large number of collections of xiaosho stories that imitate Gan Bao (for example, "Soushen Houji", Buddhist xiaosho, "Shenxianzhuan", and many other collections) [9;10].

Character Typology and the Cognitive Worldview in «In search of the supernatural: the written record». The Chinese cognitive worldview of the early Middle Ages is extremely broadly represented in the works of Gan Bao. The first task of the study is to identify clear criteria that allow us to create a clear classification of the typology of characters in Gan Bao's works. The logical first criterion in the proposed classification is the presence of anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic (purely mythical-chthonic) characters in Xiaosho stories about the miraculous. It should be noted that some of the characters in Notes on the Search for Spirits are anthropomorphic, while others are not, which often determines the plot function of the character.

Accordingly, the second criterion of the proposed classification is the supernatural qualities attributed by the author or folk tradition (or, conversely, completely absent) to a character.

The third criterion of the proposed classification is gender.

The fourth criterion is the character's belonging to a certain group (social or religious inclusive).

Thus, we can distinguish two macro-categories of characters: anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic (this category also includes quasi-anthropomorphic characters, such as animal werewolves, who can take on human form).

Thus, the first large group of characters in Gan Bao's story that we have been able to identify are those associated with the dominant philosophical and religious (or rather, mystical) worldview of the third and fourth centuries, Taoism. Thus, the first group of anthropomorphic characters are realistic and pseudo-realistic characters associated with Taoism: 1. A person seeking immortality - a commoner man/woman; 2. A person seeking immortality - a prince, an official, an aristocrat; 3. A Taoist mentor who knows the secrets of immortality; 4. A traveling Taoist miracle worker, a Taoist magician; 5. A person who received a magic Taoist book; 6. A Taoist miracle worker who can change his appearance; 7. Immortal Taoist; 8. A court Taoist (usually an exorcist wizard); 9. A Taoist who can contact the dead; 10. Diviner - a Taoist or unidentified diviner; 11. A functionally related character is a shaman.



The second typological group of characters that we can identify in stories about the miraculous are those associated with shamanism. During the Three Kingdoms, as well as during the Han Dynasty, Chinese shamanism remained a "relic religion," because functionally shamanism was absorbed into the Taoist worldview (which, by the way, itself emerged from empiricism, which is close to shamanic thought). The plot function of the shamanic characters is quite close to the plot function of characters associated with Taoism. This function is the fight against dark, evil forces and exorcism. In Gan Bao's stories, we can occasionally meet both male and female shaman characters, but this group of characters is much less numerous and much less frequent in the stories than the first group.

The third group of non-anthropomorphic characters includes giant animals (i.e., animals characterized by emphasized gigantism) and giant monsters. These are: 1. The giant turtle; 2. The giant snake; 3. The giant monster that looks like an ox; 4. Monster "Kui"; 5. Monster "Wanliang / Wanxiang"; 6. The Shandu monster is a giant.

The fourth group includes chthonic characters. The concept of chthonic spirits of nature in Xiaoshu stories is based on the principle of polar identity of the concepts of harmony equals well-being, disharmony equals evil. The social disorders in the worldview of Notes on the Search for Spirits are also reflected in the birth of ugly creatures. Among the chthonic creatures in Gan Bao's stories we can find: plants with human appearance/plants that look like animals, animals with an excessive number of limbs, "Siamese twins" - people or animals with one body and two heads. In some stories, we can also see the phenomenon of interspecies transformation of animals (animals transforming from one species to another) and the phenomenon of gigantism described above, which we have separated into a separate group.

In the last, fifth group, we can distinguish non-anthropomorphic characters - mythical animals. These are four creatures that we meet on the pages of stories: a dragon, a dragon horse, a phoenix, and a Chinese unicorn.

Gan Bao's collection *«In search of the supernatural: the written record»* is a real encyclopedia of the folk worldview of the Far East in the early Middle Ages. The encyclopedic character and typicality of the characters in the collection allowed us to create a clear typological classification of the characters in the collection, to reveal the folk worldview. The proposed classification can be used as a basis for the study of other collections of short stories that imitated the work of Gan Bao. Also, the proposed typology can be used to analyze contemporary literary works of mystical nature in Chinese and Japanese literature.

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