

Predicting the Future Based on the Physiognomy of Genital Organs: Indian Influences and Developments in China

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ABSTRACT

Ancient Chinese engagement with the sexual organs is well attested, as evidenced by the detailed classificatory schemes of male and female genitalia preserved in Qin- and Han-period bamboo and silk manuscripts. The systematic integration of the reproductive system into physiognomic discourse, however, appears to have crystallized only during the Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties. Early genital physiognomy seems to have focused primarily on women, its principal function being to assist men in selecting suitable sexual partners. Over time, the practice broadened in both scope and intent: by the Dunhuang period, male genitalia too had become objects of physiognomic scrutiny, and the focus had shifted from its earlier bedchamber context toward evaluating prospective marriage partners and prognosticating offspring, wealth, social standing, and other secular concerns. In the Chinese tradition, genital physiognomy centered chiefly on features such as pubic hair, moles, coloration, and the morphology of the genital region. Through systematic collation and comparative analysis of Chinese medical treatises, physiognomic manuals, indigenous Indian texts, and Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures, this study contends that genital-based divination was not a native Chinese development but was profoundly shaped by Indic models, with Chinese Buddhist translations serving as a crucial conduit for its transmission.

KEYWORDS

Dunhuang manuscripts; Indian physiognomy; Chinese physiognomy; divination of the genitals; India-China cultural exchange

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INTRODUCTION

Comparative, cross-cultural research on Indian physiognomy has become a prominent topic within physiognomy studies. With respect to the relationships between ancient Indian physiognomic manuals and their Babylonian and Greek counterparts, scholars have already produced in-depth studies. For example, Barbara Böck's monograph *Die babylonisch-assyrische Morphoskopie* (2000) collates and translates the extant Babylonian physiognomic tablets and has become indispensable for the study of Babylonian materials; she also draws attention to affinities between the Babylonian corpus and Indian physiognomy. Kenneth G. Zysk, long engaged in the study of Indian cultural history, has systematically edited and analyzed Indian physiognomic sources; his monograph *The Indian System of Human Marks* (2015) and his articles 'Greek and Indian Physiognomy' (2018a) and 'Mesopotamian Physiognomic Omens in India' (2019) discuss connections and lines of transmission between Indian, Mesopotamian/Babylonian, and Greek traditions. Preliminary work has likewise been undertaken on the relationship between Indian and Chinese physiognomy. Ji Xianlin (1982: 385–391) was among the first to note that descriptions in Chinese histories of emperors whose hands extended below the knees were influenced by the Buddhist doctrine of the 'Thirty-Two Marks of a Great Man' (Skt. *dvātriṃśanmahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇāni*). More recently, Wang Jingbo (2003; 2004) and Yang Xiuqing (2022) examined convergences and divergences between Dunhuang physiognomy and Buddhist frameworks, arguing that Chinese physiognomy was in certain respects shaped by Indian models.

Building on existing scholarship, the influence of Indian physiognomy on Chinese physiognomy is decidedly multifaceted. At a macro-theoretical level, Indian accounts of the origins of physiognomic signs were transmitted to China through Buddhism. Early Chinese thought tended to uphold the doctrine of 'endowment by *qi* (vital energy)' (*bingqi* 稟氣), according to which individuals receive an allotment of prenatal *qi* and differences in bodily form, temperament, and fate arise from disparities in this primordial endowment—as Wang Chong's 王充 (27–c. 97 CE) *Lunheng* 論衡, Chapter Wuxing 無形 ('On the Immaterial'), states (*Lunheng jiaoshi*: 59): 'At birth, humans receive their vital *qi* from Heaven; each person's span of life—whether long or short—and the proportions of their body—whether tall or small—are both determined by this' (人稟元氣於天，各受壽夭之命，以立長短之形). By contrast, Indian physiognomy grounds differences in appearance and destiny in the doctrines of karma and rebirth. Varāhamihira (505–587), in the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* ('Great Compendium')—a work of great importance within the Indian divinatory sciences—states, in the chapter 'Puruṣalakṣaṇam' ('The System of Men's Marks'), that deeds performed in former lives manifest in the bodily features of the present life: 'A man's former birth should be ascertained from his face. Men whose faces resemble those of cows, bulls, tigers, lions, and Garuḍa-birds are lords of men, whose majesty is unimpaired and whose enemies are conquered' (Zysk 2015: 283).

Buddhism assimilated these Indian doctrines of karma and rebirth, likewise teaching that present bodily features are conditioned by karmic deeds from prior lives. As translated by An Shigao 安世高 in the Later Han, the *Foshuo fenbie shan'e suoqi jing* 佛說分別善惡所起經 ('Scripture on distinguishing the arising of good and evil') states:

‘The Buddha said: In this world, a person who habitually delights in anger, who is not harmonious, who becomes angry upon seeing the worthy and likewise upon seeing the foolish, who distinguishes neither good nor evil but only seeks to be angry—such a person incurs five evils, namely: first, he makes his own body burn with agitation; second, he throws his mind into disorder; third, he sleeps and rises without ease, and may even, in rage, take his own life; fourth, he enters the Great Mountain hell and endures poisonous torment and punishment for tens of millions of years; and fifth, when he emerges from the Great Mountain hell and is reborn as a human, his face is ever ugly and his complexion withered, dark, and sallow. Thus, when we now see people of ill complexion, this is all due to their habitual anger in former lives: their faces are ugly and their color poor, unlike those who are dignified and fair in appearance. This is perfectly clear; therefore, beware of anger!’

佛言人於世間常喜瞋恚不和調，見賢者亦恚，見愚者亦恚之，不別善惡，但欲瞋恚而已。從是得五惡。何等五？一者，為自燒身；二者，亦自亂意；三者，臥起不安隱，或憂恚自殺；四者，入太山地獄中，毒痛考治數千萬歲；五者，從太山地獄中出生為人，面日常惡，色萎黑黃熟。今見有惡色人，皆從故世宿命喜瞋恚所致，面醜惡色，不如端正好色。如是分明，慎莫瞋恚！¹

This Buddhist linkage between karmic retribution and bodily signs also shaped Chinese physiognomy. The *Taiqing shenjian* 太清神鑒 asserts that those who were practitioners in a former life will, in this life, display ‘a graceful and unadorned appearance; courteous comportment; a good disposition; even temper; and speech of the utmost reason. Even when serving at court, they retain a taste for mountains and forests—such a person has come from the path of cultivation’ (形貌清古、舉動恭謹、性善、氣平、言極至理，雖在朝廷常有山林之趣，此修行中來者).²

At the level of concrete diagnostic criteria, Chinese physiognomic materials likewise bear the imprint of Indian (Buddhist) models. Figures 1 and 2 reproduce the front- and back-view physiognomic diagrams of a nude male in Dunhuang manuscript P.3589V. The figure is drawn with strikingly elongated arms, slender fingers, and oversized, pendulous ears whose contours descend to roughly chin level. Following the analyses of Ji Xianlin and Yang Xiuqing, features widely noted in Chinese sources—such as hands extending below the knees and earlobes reaching the shoulders, as likewise exemplified in these figures—are best understood as reflections of the Buddhist doctrine of the ‘Thirty-Two Marks of a Great Man’.

As regards the intimate anatomy under consideration, the figure likewise exhibits characteristically Indian (Buddhist) features. In Figure 1, close inspection reveals that the penis is relatively small, with the glans apparently retracted within the prepuce. The adjacent caption reads: ‘The jade stalk (i.e., penis) is horse-sheathed and not visible’ (玉莖如馬陰藏而不見), a configuration traditionally said to augur intelligence and wealth. There is little doubt that this formulation derives from the Buddhist Thirty-Two Marks, specifically the ‘mark of a concealed penis’ (*yin-cang xiang* 陰藏相, Skt. *kośopagata-vasti-guhya*). The *Dīgha Nikāya* glosses this as ‘the penis is covered/enclosed’,³ and modern scholarship generally understands it to denote a glans retracted within the foreskin (Zysk 2015: 198). In Indian physiognomic discourse the trait is auspicious:

¹ CBETA 2024, T17, no. 729, 519a8–16.

² *Taiqing shenjian*, fascicle 1, included in the *Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書, ce 810: 767.

³ *Changbu jingdian* 長部經典; CBETA 2024.R1, N08, no. 4, p. 139a14.



Figure 1. Male physiognomic diagram (anterior view)
(P.3589V; source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France)

the *Brhatsaṃhitā*, ‘Puruṣalakṣaṇam’, states, ‘Men with penises hidden in a sheath of foreskin are kings; men with long penises that have broken out from the foreskin are paupers’ (Zysk 2015: 267). The influence of Indian physiognomy on Chinese physiognomy is both wide-ranging and substantial. With respect to divinatory readings of intimate anatomy, beyond the recurrent Dunhuang formulation 玉莖如馬陰藏而不見 (‘the jade stalk [penis] is horse-sheathed and not visible’), Chinese physiognomic treatises attest to Indian influence in numerous additional respects. Accordingly, this article takes Chinese physiognomic discourse on the genitalia as a case study to further delineate the contours of Indian influence on Chinese physiognomy.



Figure 2. Male physiognomic diagram (posterior view)
(P.3589V; source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France)

1. AN OVERVIEW OF PHYSIOGNOMIC READINGS OF THE GENITALS IN CHINESE SOURCES

1.1 Bed chamber Texts Predating the Tang Dynasty

In the Silk manuscripts (*boshu* 帛書) excavated from the Mawangdui Han tombs (Mawangdui Hanmu 馬王堆漢墓), early Chinese writers already displayed a relatively sophisticated understanding of male and female genital anatomy.⁴ The *Shiwen* 十問 (Ten Questions) records the terms *yuce* 玉策 and *yudou* 玉竇 for the penis and the vagina, respectively (Wei and Hu 1992: 99–100). The *He yinyang* 合陰陽 employs the expressions *lijin* 體津, *xuanmen* 玄門 and *jiaojin* 交筋 to refer to the breasts, the birthing gate, and the clitoris (Wei and Hu 1992: 130). The *Tianxia zhidao tan* 天下至道談 has an even more sophisticated taxonomy, dividing the female genital region into twelve distinct parts: *jiguang* 笄光, *fengji* 封紀, *lanhu* 調(調)瓠, *shufu* 鼠婦, *gushi* 穀實, *maichi* 麥齒, *yingnü* 嬰女, *fanqu* 反去, *heyu* 何寓, *chisou* 赤藪, *chizhu* 赤珠, and *shizao*

⁴ On early bedchamber texts, see van Gulik 1961; Harper 1987; Li and McMahon 1992. For a systematic compilation of the *fangzhongshu* manuscripts from the Mawangdui Han tombs, see Mawangdui Hanmu *boshu*: 145–167.

石礫. At present, these terms cannot be mapped precisely onto modern gynecological anatomy; only tentative identifications are possible. For example, *jiguang* likely denotes the clitoral prepuce and frenulum; *fengji* may correspond to the labia majora; *chisou* may indicate the vaginal fornix; and *chizhu* may refer to the vestibular bulbs (Wei and Hu 1992: 152–155).

While the Mawangdui bedchamber texts offer relatively detailed observations and a more systematic nomenclature of reproductive anatomy, they largely provide names without extended descriptions of coloration or morphology. Although the identification of an optimal sexual partner is a key concern of the bedchamber arts, the Mawangdui corpus, insofar as extant evidence indicates, does not employ bodily characteristics—including genital morphology—to predict whether a man and a woman are suitable partners for intercourse.

In the *fangzhongshu* 房中術 ('bedchamber manuals') transmitted after the Han dynasty, one can find passages that evaluate bodily features as criteria for determining whether a man and a woman were considered suited for sexual union. Since the *fangzhongshu* corpus in China suffered extensive losses, our present knowledge of such texts from the Mawangdui tombs derives entirely from modern archaeological discovery. A significant body of early medical literature—including *fangzhongshu*—from the Northern and Southern Dynasties through the Sui and Tang periods, or perhaps even slightly earlier, was preserved in Japan in the *Ishinpō* 醫心方, compiled by the physician Tamba Yasuyori 丹波康賴 (912–995) between 982 and 984.⁵ Apart from the Mawangdui silk manuscripts, the *Ishinpō* constitutes the earliest extant source through which *fangzhongshu* materials can be studied, with its twenty-eighth fascicle devoted exclusively to bedchamber practices. From Tamba's excerpts, portions of the *Yufang mijue* 玉房秘訣, a work recorded in the bibliographical section of the *Suishu* 隋書 (經籍志), can be reconstructed. Notably, in fascicle 28 of the *Ishinpō*, sections 22 ('Good Women') and 23 ('Bad Women') evaluate a woman's suitability for intercourse on the basis of bodily features, including those of the intimate regions. Both sections explicitly cite material from the *Yufang miju*, a text that was likely composed during the Six Dynasties period (222–589 CE).⁶

⁵ On this text, see Hsia and Geertsma 1986; see also Hsia, Geertsma and Veith 1986.

⁶ In ancient India, the assessment of a woman's suitability for sexual intercourse on the basis of her bodily characteristics constituted a recognized element of cultural knowledge. The *Nāṭyaśāstra*—an important work of Sanskrit dramaturgy attributed to Bharatamuni, generally dated between the 5th century BCE and the 7th century CE, with its core structure likely crystallizing between the 2nd century BCE and the 2nd CE—contains the following passage: 'A woman should be recognised as having the character of a Piśāca-demon, whose hands have more or less than the normal number of fingers; who wanders at night in domestic gardens; whose behaviour terrorises young children; who is slanderous; whose speech is obscure; who acts badly during sex; whose limbs are hairy and nose is large; and who is fond of alcohol, meat, and oblations. [...] Men should know that women have different behaviours; they should consider the women's character during sex; they should approach them according to the knowledge of their character types and have sex with them' (Zysk 2018b: 243, 258). With the transmission of Buddhism, a wide spectrum of Indian intellectual traditions—including astronomy, medicine, and other branches of learning—was introduced into China. Whether this Indian practice of selecting sexual partners according to bodily criteria influenced the Chinese art of the bedchamber, which from the Han dynasty onward likewise employed somatic features to guide sexual choice, remains a significant and as yet unresolved question. Addressing this issue calls for a systematic comparative study of extant Chinese and Indian sources, with a view to elucidating potential channels of transmission and the processes of conceptual adaptation.

‘Good woman:

In choosing a woman for sexual union, one should select a young girl whose breasts have not yet developed, whose body is well-muscled, whose hair is fine as silk, whose eyes are small with clearly demarcated whites and blacks; whose face and body are soft and smooth, whose speech is harmonious and low-pitched; whose bones throughout the four limbs and at all joints are not prominently visible, so that the flesh predominates and the bones are not large; and whose genitals and armpits are without hair—or, if hair is present, it should be fine and smooth.

Bad woman:

[...] if the pubic hair is thick and hard, and grows in the wrong direction, and one has sexual intercourse with her, then this will harm oneself’

好女：

欲禦女，須取少年未生乳，多肌肉，絲髮小眼，眼精白黑分明者；面體濡滑，言語音聲和調而下者；其四肢百節之骨皆欲令沒，肉多而骨不大者；其陰及腋下不欲令有毛，有毛當令細滑也。

惡女：

.....陰毛大而且強，又多逆生，與之交會，皆賊損人。⁷

The extant portions of the *Yufang mijue* indicate that the text not only emphasizes the evaluation of manifest physical attributes—such as a woman’s hair, eyes, limbs, facial features, and voice—but also attaches significant importance to the inspection of less readily visible areas, including the armpits and genital region, as criteria for determining her suitability for sexual relations. Particular attention is given to the condition of pubic hair: fine and smooth hair is interpreted as an auspicious sign, whereas coarse, stiff, or upward-growing hair is regarded as inauspicious.

In addition to the *Yufang mijue*, the chapter on bedchamber practices in the *Ishinpō* also incorporates material from another text long lost in China, the *Daqingjing* 大清經, which similarly served to distinguish between ‘good women’ and ‘bad women’.

‘Good woman:

The vulvar orifice should be elevated (protruding outward), with no hair above the genitals [...] It is also said: As for the method of physiognomizing a noble and respected woman, she should have smooth flesh and delicate bones, dedicated and harmonious in nature, with hair like lacquer and face and eyes of beautiful countenance, with no hair above the genitals, and having a soft-spoken voice, and with a vulva orifice protruding outward. By having sexual intercourse with such a woman, one will never get tired during one’s life; one must strive to find such a woman, and one can nurture one’s nature and prolong one’s life.’

好女：

鑿孔欲高，陰上無毛.....又云：凡相貴人尊女之法，欲得滑肉弱骨，專心和性，髮澤如漆，面目悅美，陰上無毛，言語聲細，孔穴向前，與之交會，終日不勞，務求此女，可以養性延年矣。

⁷ *Yufang mijue*, ed. in Gao 2011: 592.

‘Bad woman:

The method of assessing a woman’s physiognomy lies in carefully examining her genitals and armpit areas. The hair [in these areas] should be smooth and moist; if they grow upwards in the wrong direction, and if there is hair on the arms and legs, and if it is coarse and lacking smoothness, this all will harm the man.’

惡女：

相女之法，當詳察其陰及腋下，毛當令順而濡澤；而反上逆，臂脛有毛，粗不滑澤者，此皆傷男。⁸

The *Daqing jing* is not recorded in the bibliographic treatises of traditional Chinese historiography. In his *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, van Gulik (1961: 125) transcribed the title as *Taiqing jing* and identified it with the physiognomic manual *Taiqing shenjian* 太清神鑑, a text composed during the Five Dynasties. Evidence preserved in the *Ishinpō*, however, complicates this identification. The passages it attributes to the *Daqing jing* encompass not only physiognomic classifications of ‘good women’ and ‘bad women’, but also a broader range of medical concerns, including prohibitions against administering treatment at certain times. This breadth of subject matter indicates that the text cannot be regarded merely as a physiognomy manual. Based on a comprehensive review of extant textual sources, the title *Taiqing jing* can be traced to fascicle 4 of the *Baopuzi neipian* 抱樸子內篇 (p.78). Since in early usage the characters *tai* 太 and *da* 大 were interchangeable, the *Daqing jing* cited in the *Ishinpō* may in fact correspond to the *Taiqing jing*. As the title first emerges in the *Baopuzi*, its composition is unlikely to have been far removed from the time of Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343) and may plausibly be placed in the Wei–Jin period. In addition, Gao Wenzhu (2011: 718) has suggested that the work might be identical with the *Taiqing zhudan jiyao* 太清諸丹集要, which is listed in the *Jingji zhi* 經籍志 (Bibliographic Treatise) section of the *Suishu* (ibid.). In comparison with the *Yufang mijue* 玉房秘訣, the *Daqing jing* likewise assesses a woman’s suitability for sexual intercourse through the observation of both manifest and concealed bodily features. With regard to the latter, it similarly treats the condition of pubic hair as a significant diagnostic criterion, construing softness, smoothness, and pliancy as auspicious signs. Distinctively, however, the *Daqing jing* introduces an additional site of attention—the vulvar orifice—which it describes as ideally outward-protruding, a physiognomic marker interpreted as indicative of women especially suited for sexual union.

Another part of the *Ishinpō*, fascicle 24, is wholly dedicated to the theme of procreation. It encompasses therapeutic regimens for infertility, techniques designed to ensure the conception of male offspring, and doctrines concerning the destinies of children conceived under specific heavenly stems (*tiangan* 天干) or during temporal configurations governed by particular constellations, along with a range of related medical and physiognomic discourses. Of particular note within this fascicle are two sections entitled ‘Methods for Physiognomizing the Auspicious and Inauspicious Features of Male Bodies’ (*xiang nanzi xingse jixiong fa* 相男子形色吉凶法) and ‘Methods for Physiognomizing the Auspicious and Inauspicious Features of Female Bodies’ (*xiang nüzi xingse jixiong fa* 相女子形色吉凶法). These sections employ bodily morphology as diagnostic criteria for evaluating male moral character and female marital suitability—parameters that, although not directly determining fertility, were nevertheless regarded as essential to ensuring family prosperity and the perpetuation of the lineage. The inclusion of such physiog-

⁸ *Daqing jing*, ed. in Gao 2011: 592–593.

nomie material in a fascicle devoted to procreation may thus be understood as a deliberate and conceptually coherent strategy intended to guide the selection of suitable marital partners. Both sections draw upon the *Chan jing* 產經, a text most likely compiled during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589 CE), with the latter section likewise focusing physiognomic observation on the female genital region.

‘A woman should not be married, if she has yellow hair, black teeth, foul breath, walking crookedly and sitting in a slanted way, large eyes and masculine voice, her face resembling a tiger and with eyes like a snake, excessive white in her eyes, will be promiscuous and cheat on her husband. If she has moles on the genitals, she will be promiscuous. If she has moles on the mouth, she will fall in love with the husbands of other women. Such women should not get married. If a woman has large buttocks and her vulva is small, her shoulders are protruding and her breasts tiny, her hands and feet are ugly, such women are bound to lead their families into poverty and [one] should not get married [to her].

[...]

Auspicious signs for women: A woman with a well-shaped buttock and a big vulva, with the vulvar orifice high as a cup turned around, long and smooth pubic hair growing in an orderly manner; if there is a mole on the genitals, she will be the wife of an official earning 2000 *dan*. A woman with big breasts and small mouth will be faithful to her husband, and moles on the upper, lower, left, and right sides of the breast, signifies wealth. A woman with a black mole on the palm and more than thirty-two teeth is regarded as possessing the most exalted physiognomy; and if she has the character forming ‘field’ (田) or ‘well’ (井) on the soles of her feet, she is destined to rule the world. Such women are deemed supremely auspicious, endowed with fortune and virtue, and one should by all means marry her, and be cautious not to reject her.’

女子不可娶者，黃髮黑齒，息其臭，曲行邪（斜）坐，目大雄聲，虎顏蛇眼，目多白少黑，淫邪欺夫。黑子在陰上，多淫；及口上，愛他人夫，勿娶。大股而陰水（小），甲夾（脚狹）而乳小，手足惡，必貧家，夫勿娶。

.....

女子吉相：夾股而陰大者，陰上高如覆杯，陰毛長而滑細順生者，陰有黑子，二千石之妻。乳大小口直夫⁹，乳上下左右黑痣，富相也。手中有黑痣，又齒卅二以上，最貴相也。又足下有田井字者，為天下主也。如此者，大吉祥，福德，必可娶之，慎勿放棄之。¹⁰

The precise dates of composition for the *Yufang mijue*, the *Daqing jing*, and the *Chan jing* remain uncertain. The *Daqing jing* is most plausibly identifiable with the *Taiqing jing* preserved in Ge Hong’s *Baopuzi*. Gao Wenzhu (2011: 722–723) situates the *Yufang mijue* within the Six Dynasties period, encompassing both the Eastern Wu (222–280) and Eastern Jin dynasties (317–420).

⁹ At present, the precise meaning of this sentence remains difficult to determine. Gao Wenzhu’s (2011: 496) annotation glosses *zhi* 直 as synonymous with *zhi* 值, while *fu* 夫 is identified as a traditional unit of measurement in Chinese medicine, equivalent to the breadth of four fingers. On this basis, the phrase may be interpreted as referring to the distance between the two breasts. A comparable expression occurs in the Dunhuang physiognomic manuscript P.2572(A), which reads: ‘If the breasts are separated by one *chi* and two *cun*, it is an omen of great nobility’ (妳（奶）相去一尺二寸大貴).

¹⁰ *Chan jing*, ed. in Gao 2011: 496.

Since the *Chan jing* cites Ge Hong's *Geshi fang* 葛氏方, a work datable to the Eastern Jin, its compilation must necessarily postdate Ge Hong and is therefore likely later than both the *Yufang mijue* and the *Daqing jing*. This chronology, however, remains tentative and calls for further investigation. From a content perspective, the *Chan jing* exhibits—alongside its attention to manifest features such as hair, teeth, and eyes—a more sustained and systematic engagement with the physiognomic observation of the female genital region than either the *Yufang mijue* or the *Daqing jing*. In addition to the features already noted in these earlier texts, such as pubic hair and the vulvar orifice, it also considers the relative size of the vulva. Particularly striking is its introduction of a further physiognomic marker: moles. The *Chan jing* asserts that a dark mole located in a woman's genital area either signifies sexual promiscuity or portends that she will become the wife of a high-ranking official, whereas a mole on the breast is interpreted as a sign of wealth and elevated social status. Notably, the *Chan jing* places a dark mole on a woman's genitalia in two opposing classificatory categories—both as a marker of ineligibility for marriage and as an auspicious sign. This apparent inconsistency may indicate that the inclusion of moles in genital physiognomy was a relatively recent development and that divergent interpretive traditions had not yet been fully reconciled or systematized. In this respect, the *Chan jing* appears to represent a more integrated—and plausibly later—stage in the evolution of genital physiognomy, extending its observational repertoire beyond what is attested in the *Yufang mijue* and the *Daqing jing*. Equally significant is its textual framing: determinations of male and female fortune based on genital physiognomy are incorporated into the chapter on procreation rather than relegated to the section on bedchamber arts. Moreover, the scope of prognostication is markedly broadened. No longer restricted to concerns about sexual harm (*shang nan* 傷男) or the preservation of vitality through sexual techniques (*yangxing yannian* 養性延年), it now encompasses guidance for the selection of marriage partners, with particular emphasis on predicting female chastity, and further extends to explicitly secular concerns such as the acquisition of wealth and the attainment of social rank. Taken together, these features suggest that by the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589 CE), physiognomic discourse concerning the intimate regions was undergoing a process of conceptual expansion—progressively transcending its earlier confinement to the domain of sexual cultivation and opening onto a broader horizon of social fortune, moral destiny, and human flourishing.

1.2 Dunhuang Genital Physiognomy Texts

The specialized physiognomic treatises of pre-Tang China have suffered extensive loss, such that our understanding of early Chinese physiognomy must be reconstructed from fragmentary references embedded in medical and other classical texts.¹¹ The earliest extant works devoted ex-

¹¹ Physiognomy is deeply embedded in the fabric of Chinese intellectual and cultural history, with anecdotal accounts traceable as far back as the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, dating to the mid-fourth century BCE. In the pre-Qin 先秦 period (prior to 221 BCE), however, references to physiognomy were scattered across diverse texts rather than presented in dedicated monographs. From the Qin and Han dynasties onward, specialized treatises began to appear, such as the 24-fascicle *Xiangren* 相人 recorded in the *Hanshu* 漢書. All such pre-Tang works are now lost. Nevertheless, several early writings preserve chapters explicitly devoted to physiognomy—for example, the 'Fei Xiang 非相' chapter of the *Xunzi* 荀子, which systematically explores the theoretical foundations of physiognomy and reflects on contemporary attitudes toward the practice, citing the bodily features of historical figures

clusively to physiognomy are those preserved among the Dunhuang manuscripts, transcribed during the late Tang and Five Dynasties period but based on sources that predate this era. In comparison with the *Ishinpō*, the Dunhuang physiognomic texts contain several new elements concerning the physiognomization of intimate bodily regions.

Within the corpus of Dunhuang physiognomic manuscripts, P.3589V, S.5969+P.2797, S.t.511 (CH.87), and P.2572 preserve closely related material and appear to represent different copies of the same underlying text. The scroll S.t.511 (CH.87) is headed *Xiangshu yi bu* 相書一部, followed by the statement ‘compiled by Xu Fu and others, thirteen persons in total’ (漢朝許負等一十三人集). On this basis, the present study refers to these four manuscripts collectively as Xu Fu-type physiognomy texts.¹² In all four manuscripts, the twenty-third section is devoted specifically to the physiognomy of the genital region. Because the wording of this section exhibits minor yet noteworthy variation among the witnesses, a synoptic transcription and comparison of the twenty-third section is provided below. The texts of P.3589V, S.5969+P.2797, and P.2572 are established on the basis of the facsimiles released by the International Dunhuang Programme (IDP), whereas for S.t.511 (CH.87), in the absence of publicly available images, the transcription by Zheng Binglin and Wang Jingbo (2004) is provisionally adopted.

for illustration. Another chapter devoted specifically to physiognomic issues is the ‘Mingxiang 命相’ of the *Liuzi* 劉子, preserved in the *Daozang* 道藏 and attributed to Liu Zhou 劉晝 of the Southern and Northern Dynasties, with commentary by Yuan Xiaozheng 袁孝政 added in the Tang. This text enumerates the distinctive corporeal traits of legendary and historical figures: ‘Fuxi had a central protrusion on his forehead shaped like the sun (伏羲日角); the Yellow Emperor bore prominently ridged brows resembling those of a dragon (黃帝龍顏); Emperor Ku displayed fleshy protuberances on the head rising like opposing halberds (帝嚳戴肩 [干]); Zhuanxu’s ribs were joined as though a single continuous bone (顓頊駢髀); Yao’s eyebrows showed eight distinct colors (堯眉八采); Shun had double pupils (舜目重瞳); Yu possessed three perforations in each ear (禹耳三漏); Tang had two elbows on each arm (湯臂二肘); King Wen had four nipples (文王四乳); King Wu’s teeth were perfectly aligned (武王並齒); Confucius’s skull was vaulted, with the crown depressed and the edges raised (孔子返宇); Yan Hui also had double pupils (顏回重瞳); and Gao Yao’s mouth was shaped like a bird’s beak (皋陶鳥喙). All such characteristics were extraordinary marks bestowed by Heaven upon sages and worthies at birth. [...] Even among commoners, physiognomic diagnosis was possible: Gu Zi’s full, rounded chin (穀子豐下) led Shu Xing to predict that he would have descendants; Wei Qing’s broad, square forehead (衛青方額) presaged wealth and honor despite his servile origins; [Zhou] Yafu’s nasolabial folds descended straight to the mouth corners (亞夫縱理), prompting Xu Fu to foresee his death by starvation; and Yang Fu’s jackal-like voice (羊斟聲豺) enabled Shu Ji to predict the annihilation of his lineage’ (*Liuzi in Daozang*, ce 21: 752–753). The features cited encompass the head, forehead, cranial protuberances, shoulders, ribs, eyebrows, eyes, ears, arms, nipples, and teeth, along with wrinkles, voice quality, and other physical traits. Yet, insofar as the extant evidence permits, the physiognomic materials dispersed across non-medical secular sources prior to the Tang dynasty—authored within the elite literati milieu—offer no attested discussion of the intimate regions of either the male or the female body.

¹² Xu Fu 許負, a female physiognomist from the Han dynasty, was originally from Wen, Henei (modern-day Wen County, Henan Province). According to the *Shiji*, in the ‘Biography of Zhou Bo 周勃’, it is recorded that when Zhou Yafu 周亞夫 (the son of Zhou Bo) was governor of Henei, Xu Fu assessed his physiognomy. She remarked that ‘in three years, you will become a marquis, and eight years after that, you will serve as a general and minister, holding state power’ (Chen 1991: 620). She also observed vertical lines running from the sides of his nose to the corners of his mouth, a sign indicating that he would die of starvation. In the ‘Houses of the External Relatives’ (外戚世家) section of the *Shiji*, Xu Fu is also noted for predicting that Empress Dowager Bo would give birth to an emperor. Emperor Gaozu of Han conferred upon Xu Fu the title of Mingci Tinghou 鳴雌亭侯 (ibid.). Xu Fu’s renowned skill in physiognomy led to many later works on the subject being attributed to her. As a result, many physiognomy books from Dunhuang bear Xu Fu’s name. Notably, these books often include the names of other historical figures alongside Xu Fu’s. Therefore, such texts can be referred to as ‘Xu Fu-type physiognomy texts’ (許負系統相書).

P.3589V	玉大起第廿三 ¹³	凡人玉莖如鳥（馬）陰藏而不見，生毛迺囊如爛樁，多智、富。玉莖頭上有黑子，貴。傍有廐子妨子孫。大起處毛迺，多衣食。婦人玉泉毛迺孔，宜子孫。
S.5969 +P.2797	玉大起第廿三	凡人玉莖如鳥（馬）陰而不見，□毛迺囊如爛樁色，多智，富。玉莖頭上有黑子貴。傍有黑子妨子孫。大起處□□□。大起處毛多迺，多衣食。婦人玉泉毛迺孔，宜子孫。
S.t.51 (CH.87)	玉莖大起第廿三	凡人玉莖如馬陰藏而不見，生毛廐 ¹⁴ 囊如爛樁色，多智、富。玉莖頭上有黑子，貴。傍有廐子妨子孫。大起處方，貴。大起處方毛廐，多衣食。婦人玉泉毛廐孔，宜子孫。 ¹⁵
P.2572	相玉莖袋器第廿三	凡人玉莖如馬而不見，生毛迺囊如爛樁色，多智、富。玉莖頭有黑子者貴。傍有廐（廐）子妨子孫。玉門上有廐（廐）子起夫。

As shown in the comparative table, the section titles in P.3589V, S.5969+P.2797, and S.t.51 are most likely identical, although in the first two manuscripts the graph *jing* 莖 appears to have been lost in transmission. P.2572, by contrast, presents a more substantial divergence: in addition to the insertion of the verb *xiang* 相 (‘to physiognomize’), the phrase *da qi* 大起 (‘great rising’) is replaced with *daiqi* 袋器 (‘sack organ’). A survey of all four extant physiognomic scrolls shows that section titles consistently employ the name of the bodily part under examination as their rubric. In this light, the twenty-third section of P.3589V and its parallels—bearing the compound heading *yujing* 玉莖 (‘jade stalk’, i.e., penis) + *daqi* 大起 (‘great rising’)—appears stylistically anomalous within the compilation. We therefore propose emending *daqi* 大起 (MC: *dajH-khix*) to *daiqi* 袋器 (MC: *dojH-khijH*), as the two expressions were phonetically close in Middle Chinese. The term *daiqi* 袋器 most plausibly denotes what modern anatomical terminology would identify as the scrotum. Since the only externally visible components of the male genitalia are the penis (including the glans) and the scrotum, the use of *yujing* 玉莖 and *daiqi* 袋器 as section headings is fully consistent with the nomenclatural conventions observed in Dunhuang physiognomic texts of the Xu Fu 許負 type.

A further noteworthy distinction between P.3589V, S.5969+P.2797, and S.t.51, and P.2572 lies in the wording of their final line. The first three manuscripts refer to *yuquan* 玉泉 (‘jade spring’), whereas P.2572 employs *yumen* 玉門 (‘jade gate’). These two terms are functionally synonymous, both serving as refined euphemisms for the female vulva and vaginal orifice. As R. H. van Gulik (2004: 231) notes, ‘more elegant terms referring to vulva and vagina are *yü-men* 玉門 “the jade gate” (corresponding to *yü-ching* for the penis), *ch’iung-men* 瓊門 or *-hu* 戶 “corral gate”, *tan-hsüeh* 丹穴 “cinnabar crevice”, *tan-t’ien* 丹田 “cinnabar field”, *shen-t’ien* 神田 “sacred field”, *yin-kou* 陰溝 “hidden gully”, *kun-hu* 坤戶 “female door”; also the old medical term *chung-chi* 中極

¹³ The Dunhuang manuscript P.3589V opens with the title *Xiangshu yi juan* 相書一卷 (‘Physiognomy, One fascicle’). Most of the twenty-third section, *Yu daqi* 玉大起, is placed beneath the frontal depiction of a male figure (see Figure 1), while its final sentence follows the twenty-second section. Six intervening sections separate the two, leaving this section in a state of textual disarray.

¹⁴ The other three manuscripts read 迺 for 廐; as the facsimile reproductions of S.t.51 are unavailable, its original form cannot be verified. 迺 is an orthographic variant of 廐.

¹⁵ Zheng and Wang 2004: 30–31.

“central point”, explained as “the aperture 4 inches below the navel”. This observation indicates that *zhongji* 中極, originally denoting an acupuncture point in traditional Chinese medicine, was likewise employed to refer to the female genitalia and vaginal orifice. Since *zhongji* was also known as *yuquan* 玉泉 (Gao 2011: 55–56), it follows that *yumen*, *zhongji*, and *yuquan* can all be regarded as elegant circumlocutions for the female genital region. Even if *yumen* and *yuquan* are taken as synonymous, there remains a substantive difference between the final line of P.3589V, S.5969+P.2797, and S.t.51 and that preserved in P.2572.

The first three manuscripts focus on the presence of pubic hair around the female vulva and vaginal region, asserting that the encirclement of the vulvar orifice by pubic hair is auspicious for fertility and progeny. P.2572, by contrast, addresses the presence of moles, stating simply that a woman with a mole on the vulva or at the vaginal opening will *qi fu* 起夫 (‘raise the husband > make the husband prosper’). Zheng Binglin and Wang Jingbo (2004: 82) emends 起夫 to *fang fu* 妨夫 (‘hinder the husband’), interpreting it as portending harm to the husband. Yet, as noted above in our discussion of the *Chan jing*, the presence of a dark mole on the female vulva or vaginal region is alternatively said to signify either sexual promiscuity or that she will become the wife of a high-ranking official. Consequently, such a mole might equally be construed as auguring that the woman’s husband will attain high status, allowing 起夫 to be read positively as ‘make the husband prosper’ (旺夫). Since the graph 起 is clearly legible in P.2572, the present study retains the manuscript reading rather than adopting Zheng and Wang’s emendation to 妨. The divergences between P.3589V, S.5969+P.2797, and S.t.51 and those of P.2572 may indicate two distinct stemmatic branches deriving from the same underlying Xu Fu-type physiognomic tradition.

It is likewise noteworthy that P.3589V and related manuscripts record the phrase *sheng mao za nang* 生毛迺囊 (‘hair growing so as to encroach upon the nang’). Here, *nang* 囊 should be understood not as the scrotum in modern anatomical terms but as a reference to the testes. As van Gulik (2004: 231) notes in the appendix ‘Chinese Terminology of Sex’ to *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period*, vol. 1, ‘The testes are indicated by the term *nang* 囊 “sack,” also *yin-nang* 陰囊 “hidden sack,” or *shen-nang* 腎囊 “sack of the testes.” The phrase *sheng mao za nang* may thus denote pubic hair growing to the point of covering the region where the testes are located. In *Figure 1*, the testes are shown symmetrically on either side of the penile shaft, with hair descending along the shaft. When this hair extends toward the testes, it would seem to correspond to what P.3589V and related texts describe as *sheng mao za nang*. The parallel manuscript S.5969+P.2797 reads [*sheng*] *mao sui nang* [生]毛遂囊, where *sui* 遂 conveys ‘reaching’ or ‘coming up to’, which carries the same referential force as the expression *sheng nang za mao* 生囊匝毛.

Apart from the differences noted above, the four manuscripts also exhibit a number of minor lexical variations. For instance, S.5969+P.2797 reads 婦婦人玉泉毛迺孔, where it is beyond doubt that one of the two occurrences of 婦 is a dittography introduced during transmission. Similarly, the graph 鳥 in P.3589V is best taken as a scribal error for 馬, and 厭 in P.2572 should be emended to 廐. In the present collation, these and comparable cases have been emended directly in the transcriptions.

P.3589V, S.5969+P.2797, and S.t.511 display a high degree of textual consistency, with S.t.511 being the most complete; P.2572, by contrast, exhibits certain divergences. On the basis of the foregoing analysis, S.t.511 and P.2572 are here taken as representative witnesses of the Dunhuang Xu Fu-type physiognomic tradition, and their contents are translated as follows:

S.t.511 玉莖大起（袋器）第廿三 (*Yujing daqi* [*dai qi*], Penis and Scrotum)

‘If a man’s *yujing* 玉莖 (“jade stalk”, i.e., penis) is sheathed like that of a stallion and thus not visible, and if the hair on the penile shaft grows so as to cover the region of the testes and the shaft is of the color of ripe mulberries, he will be intelligent and wealthy. If there is a black mole on the glans, he will be honored. If there is a dark mole nearby, it will obstruct his posterity. If the *daiqi* 袋器 (“scrotum”) is square in shape, he will be honored. If hair encircles the scrotum, he will enjoy abundant food and clothing. If a woman’s *yuquan* 玉泉 (“jade spring”) is surrounded by pubic hair at the vulvar orifice, she will bear many sons.’

P.2572 相玉莖袋器第廿三 (*Xiang yu jing dai qi*, Physiognomizing the Penis and Scrotum)

‘If a man’s *yujing* 玉莖 is concealed like that of a stallion and not externally visible, and if hair grows so as to encroach upon the *nang* 囊 (“testes”) and the penis is of the color of ripe mulberries, he will be intelligent and wealthy. A black mole on the glans portends honor, whereas a dark mole nearby will obstruct his posterity. If there is a dark mole on the *yumen* 玉門 (“jade gate”, i.e., female vulvar orifice), it will *qi fu* 起夫 (i.e., make the husband prosper, 旺夫).’

Our analysis of the Dunhuang physiognomic texts of the so-called Xu Fu-type reveals a striking expansion of the scope of physiognomic inquiry when compared with earlier bedchamber manuals and medical treatises—most notably in their explicit and systematic incorporation of the male genitals into the domain of physiognomic assessment. As Li Zhende (2005: 104) has observed with reference to the *Ishinpō*, the section entitled *Xiang nan zi xing se jixiong fa* 相男子形色吉凶法 (‘Methods for Physiognomizing the Auspicious and Inauspicious Features of Male Bodies’) in the *Chan jing* considers only such characteristics as bodily stature and build, facial appearance, vocal qualities, and comportment. These traits fall squarely within the domain of conventional ‘observation and listening’ (*wangwen* 望聞), require no disrobing, involve no inspection of the genitals, and bear no direct relation to reproductive capacity.

By contrast, the physiognomy of women in these sources is oriented not only toward the evaluation of reproductive potential but also toward the prevention of deception or harm to the husband. Our current investigation has not yet been able to determine with certainty the underlying causes of this pronounced gendered asymmetry. A plausible explanation, however, may be sought in the divergent aims of the two genres.

Bedchamber texts focus primarily on fertility and the regulation of sexual relations; their central purpose is to identify suitable sexual and marital partners—sometimes through the observation of intimate bodily features—so as to secure reproductive success and conjugal harmony. Within the patriarchal order of premodern China, men occupied a dominant position in sexual and familial relations, whereas women were typically construed as objects of selection. Responsibility for fertility and blame for conjugal disharmony were disproportionately assigned to them. It is in this context that the *Ishinpō* prescribes a notably more detailed and comprehensive examination of the female body, extending even to meticulous inspection of the external genitalia. Professional physiognomic treatises, by contrast, articulate a considerably broader prognostic horizon, transcending the narrowly procreative and therapeutic concerns of bedchamber literature. The incorporation of the male genitals into a holistic assessment of the body is presented as a means to achieve a more systematic and, at least ostensibly, more authoritative prediction of male destiny.

With respect to diagnostic criteria, the Dunhuang physiognomic texts follow the trajectory of bedchamber and medical writings in the case of women, focusing on such indicators as pubic hair and moles. In the case of men, however, they move decisively beyond these limited markers to encompass the overall morphology of the penis, asserting that the most auspicious configuration is one ‘like that of a horse, concealed and not visible’ (如馬陰藏而不見)—a feature identified in our introduction as one of the Thirty-Two Major Marks of a Great Man in the Buddhist tradition. Equally significant is the fact that the Dunhuang Xu Fu-type texts introduce a diagnostic parameter unattested in earlier physiognomic sources—color—explicitly affirming that a penis of ‘ripe-mulberry color’ (爛椹色) constitutes an especially propitious sign. In terms of prognostic content, our analysis indicates that the Dunhuang Xu Fu-type corpus not only perpetuates but also amplifies the concerns of earlier bedchamber texts.

Whether describing the physiognomy of male or female intimate regions, one of its principal aims is the prediction of offspring, for the flourishing of descendants and the perpetuation of the ancestral line were central imperatives of the patrilineal kinship system. This focus represents a logical continuation of the *Chan jing*’s project of using physiognomic observation—including, where necessary, the intimate regions—to select suitable marriage partners. Moreover, the *Chan jing* had already articulated a correlation between certain female genital features and the acquisition of wealth and social status—a linkage that the Dunhuang texts preserve and further elaborate. What is especially striking, however, is that this expanded framework of prognostication is applied even more extensively to the male body. The Dunhuang corpus repeatedly associates specific features of the male genitals with predictions of intelligence (*zhi* 智), wealth (*fu* 富), and social eminence (*gui* 貴)—three attributes traditionally regarded as constitutive of the ideal male in traditional Chinese thought.

Since the Northern and Southern Dynasties, moles (*zhi* 痣) have assumed a prominent role in Chinese physiognomic discourse.¹⁶ Both the *Chan jing* and the Dunhuang physiognomic treatises of the Xu Fu-type treat moles as central objects of observation and divinatory interpretation. Within the Dunhuang corpus, there are even specialized manuals devoted exclusively to mole physiognomy, systematically charting the entire body to prognosticate fortune or misfortune. A representative example is manuscript P.3492V, which is entirely concerned with the physiognomy of bodily moles. The presence of captions such as *fu ren tu* 伏人圖 (‘Diagram of a Supine Figure’) and *ce ren tu* 側人圖 (‘Lateral View of a Human Figure’) indicates that the work was originally accompanied by illustrations, although these were omitted—perhaps deliberately—by the scribe of the extant copy. One section of the text is devoted specifically to the interpretation of moles located in the genital regions of both men and women.

‘A black mole on the penis head (glans) indicates [being] a “teacher of the country,” while one on the middle of the penis signifies a 2000 *dan* official (i.e., a high-ranking official). If there is a black mole at the “root” (i.e., the lower part) of the penis, then the man will get hold of a virtuous wife, and the wife will get hold of a virtuous husband. If a woman has a mole adhering to the area around the genitals, she shall become the wife of a duke or a king. There is a saying that if there is a mole on the vaginal orifice, it indicates nobility and an abundance of sexual desire (*duoyin* 多淫). If a woman’s womb has a mole, this indicates nobility. If there is a mole in the area of the pubic hair, it indicates an abundance of sexual desire.’

¹⁶ For a comprehensive treatment of mole divination in China, see Yang Gang, *forthcoming*.

正當陰頭有黑子者，國師¹⁷。陰莖中腰黑子，二千石。陰莖本中有黑子，男得貞婦，婦得貞夫。女人黑子著陰左右，應作公王妻。一說云：黑子生陰頭，貴而多淫。女人產孔有黑子，貴。陰毛中生黑子，多淫。(IDP; P.3492V)

Manuscript P.3492V is mainly concerned with the occurrence of moles on the glans and shaft of the penis in men, and in the vicinity of the vaginal orifice in women. The prognostications it preserves focus primarily on indicators of social rank, material prosperity, and—most notably in the case of women—sexual chastity. In terms of content, these divinatory pronouncements do not differ markedly from those examined above. What is striking, however, is that the *Chan jing* assigns the presence of a black mole on a woman's genitals to two mutually exclusive categories: on the one hand, as a stigma rendering the woman unmarriedable (because of excessive sexual desire, *duoyin* 多淫), and on the other, as an auspicious sign foretelling that she will become the consort of an official of *erqian dan* (二千石) rank. P.3492V similarly acknowledges that a mole on the female genitals can bear divergent prognostic valences, but it explicitly juxtaposes these alternatives with the phrase *yi shuo* 一說 ('another view holds'), thereby revealing a deliberate editorial strategy to collect and harmonize competing interpretive traditions. Equally noteworthy is that all the texts considered thus far confine themselves to references to 'black marks' (*heizi* 黑子), 'black moles' (*heizhi* 黑痣), and 'dark moles' (*yanzi* 黥子), with no mention of the chromatic diversity of moles, spots, and blemishes systematically catalogued in later physiognomic treatises. This limitation would appear to mark these materials as belonging to an early, relatively unelaborated phase in the conceptual and classificatory history of mole physiognomy.

According to the research of Wang Jingbo and Zheng Binglin (2004), CH.00209 and S.5976 constitute two complementary scrolls of mole-divination charts. When conjoined, CH.00209 and S.5976 yield a set of six illustrations: frontal views of the male and female faces, as well as full-length anterior and posterior views of each sex. The diagrams indicate mole positions by means of black dots, each accompanied by a specific divinatory inscription explicating the auspicious or inauspicious import of that location. Figure 3 reproduces from CH.00209 the female anterior view together with the male and female posterior views; the portion absent from this folio corresponds precisely to Figure 4, preserved in S.5976. Once the two manuscripts are joined, the female anterior view is rendered complete. Zheng Binglin and Wang Jingbo have produced reconstructed line drawings of the composite CH.00209 + S.5976 corpus, assigning a unique numerical identifier to every mole. The mole situated in the female genital region is designated as No. 203 (Figure 5), with the accompanying prognostic formula reading:

'[If the black moles on a woman's genitals] are abundant, then this signifies wealth, the birth of noble offspring, and success in riding bovines and horses. However, it [also indicates] harm to the husband.'

多，大富貴，生貴子，乘牛馬，妨夫。(Zheng and Wang 2004: 174)

¹⁷ In the *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典, the term *guoshi* 國師 (lit. 'master of the country') has multiple meanings. Originally, it could refer to a country's military forces ('army of the country'), a governmental position established by Wang Mang 王莽 in the 1st century BCE; at the same time, the term was applied as alternative for the official title *taishi* 太師 ('great teacher'); later, it could also refer to an honorary title bestowed by emperors upon monks, sometimes also posthumously (see Luo 1989: 639). In our context, *guoshi* most probably refers to the position of *taishi*, a high-ranking official.



Figure 3. Front View of Female Figure and Back Views of Male and Female Figures (IDP; CH.00209)

We also attempted a digital reconstruction by joining CH.00209 and S.5976 (Figure 6). The alignment of the phrase 多子 in the red-marked section with adjacent lines and inscriptions supports the reliability of our reconstruction. However, the conjoining is not entirely seamless, and minor gaps appear to remain between the two fragments, unlike the smooth composite in Zheng and Wang's line drawings. For the mole located on the female anterior genital region, the reconstructed text reads as follows: 多, 大富貴, 生口貴子, 乘牛馬, 妨夫。 Compared with Zheng and Wang's transcription, the reconstructed manuscript page suggests that one character is missing before 貴子. Its exact form cannot be determined, though it was likely a numeral, as Dunhuang physiognomy manuscripts frequently specify the number of sons (e.g., P.2797: 名龍角文, 男二千石, 生五子。), and similar expressions also occur in traditional literature (e.g.: 當生三貴子。; *Soushen milan* 搜神秘覽, p. 602). In any case, this discrepancy does not significantly affect the overall meaning of the prognostic statement.

In this illustration, the presence of black moles in the female genital region is likewise correlated with indicators of wealth, fertility, and the question of whether they prove auspicious or det-

rimonial to the husband—displaying only minimal divergence from the cases discussed above. What is particularly noteworthy, however, is the iconographic treatment in CH.00209 + S.5976: unlike the physiognomic charts (*zhan xiangtu* 占相圖) of P.3589V cited in the introduction, CH.00209 + S.5976 refrains from depicting the male and female genital regions in full exposure, choosing instead to render them discreetly covered with *kun* 裊 (traditional undergarments). In addition, the arms of both figures are drawn terminating at the level of the outer thighs rather than extending below the knees. Considered together, these iconographic conventions may suggest a divergence in aesthetic traditions.

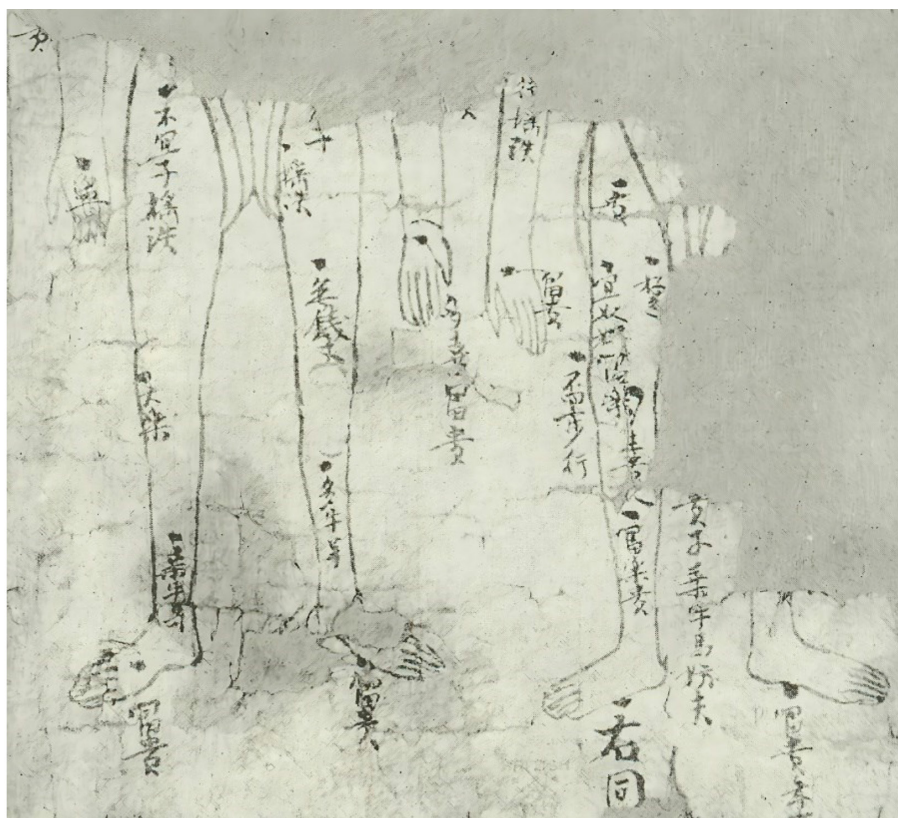


Figure 4. The missing portion of CH.00209: the lower section of the female front and back views (based on S.5976).¹⁸

¹⁸ Unfortunately, the authors have not been able to obtain a high-resolution digital image of manuscript S.5976 from the holding institution. The manuscript was previously published under the title *Xiangshu renti heizhi tu* 相书人体黑痣图 in Volume 44 (p.634) of the *Dunhuang baozang* 敦煌宝藏. However, the quality of the reproduced image is extremely poor. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Zheng Binglin and Wang Jingbo, authors of *Dunhuang xieben xiangshu jiaolu yanjiu*, for generously providing a comparatively clearer image of S.5976.

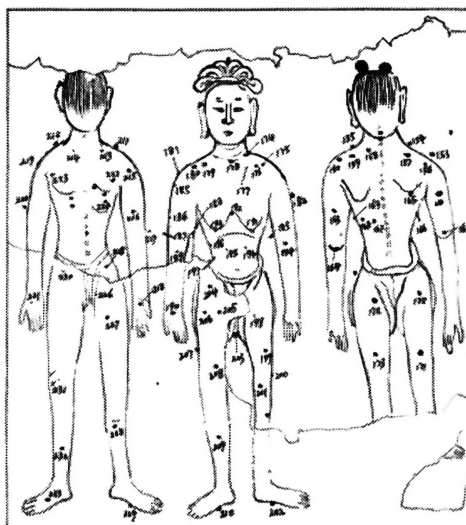


Figure 5. Line drawing depicting the female front view and the male and female back views (CH.00209 and S.5976 conjoined; based on Zheng and Wang 2004: 166).



Figure 6. CH.00209 and S.5976, digitally conjoined by the authors.

1.3 Genital physiognomy in post-Tang dynasty texts

Excluding the physiognomic treatises preserved in the Dunhuang manuscript corpus, the earliest extant work of this genre is arguably the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* 玉管照神局. Traditionally attributed to Song Qiqiu 宋齊丘 of the Five Dynasties period, this text offers a systematic investigation into the correlations between the morphological features of various bodily parts and the destinies they are thought to presage:

‘The skull should be elevated, the forehead should be prominent, eyes should be elongated, eyebrows should be elegant, hair should then be black, ears should consequently be firm, the nose should be prominent, mouth should then be square, and the vertical lines stretching from the lower part of the nostrils to the corners of the mouth (*faling* 法令) should be long, the vertical groove from the middle of the upper lip stretching to the middle of the nostril (*renzhong* 人中, lit. “middle of the person”) should be extended, the area of the hairline on the sides of the head (*bianting* 邊庭) should be prominent, the left side of the tip of the nose (*lantai* 蘭臺) should be deep, the nostrils (*jingzao* 井灶) should be clear, the area between the tip of the nose to the middle of the eyes (*shangen* 山根, lit. “mountain root”) should be thick, the area of the “storage” (*cangku* 倉庫)¹⁹ should be full, the area to the left and right above the two eyebrows (*yima* 驛馬) should be fat; the “well” (*jing* 井) area, situated on the sides of the connection between the middle of the lips and the nose, should be wide, then the voice should be deep, the teeth should be white, the breathing (*qi* 氣) should be regular (lit. “broad”); the chest should be wide, the mind should be calm, the waist consequently should be strong, the body should be upright, the skin should be smooth, the navel should be deep, the abdomen should be sagging, the hands should be long, the feet should be short, the complexion should be bright; when sitting, it should be [steadfast like] a mountain, and the spirit should then be clear; one’s walking should be like (i.e., as harmonious as) water. Urination should be dispersed yet swift, defecation should be square in form and fine in texture; the water gate (i.e., the urethral orifice) should be tight and constricted, and the fire gate (i.e., the anal orifice) should be vertical and deep. Those who possess these bodily characteristics are not merely noble but also destined for wealth.’

頭骨欲起，額骨欲峻，眼則欲長，眉乃欲秀，髮則欲黑，耳乃欲硬，鼻乃欲隆，口乃欲方，法令欲長，人中欲長，邊庭欲豐，蘭臺欲深，井灶欲明，山根欲厚，倉庫欲滿，驛馬欲肥，井則欲寬，聲則欲宏，齒則欲白，氣則欲寬，胸乃欲闊，心乃欲平，腰乃欲厚，體乃欲正，皮則欲滑，臍則欲深，腹則欲垂，手則欲長，腳則欲短，色則欲明，坐欲如山，神乃欲清，行欲如水。小便欲散而疾，大便欲方而細，水戶欲急而滯，火戶欲垂而深，入於此相者不貴而富也。²⁰

¹⁹ This usually includes two areas, each situated to the right and left of the eyes (天倉), and the other one an area of the chin below the sides of the mouth (地庫).

²⁰ See *Yuguan zhaoshen ju*, fascicle 1, included in the *Yingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書, ce 810: 724. The above facial terms have been translated descriptively, drawing on later physiognomic illustrations such as the Thirty Key Parts Diagram (*shisan buwei zong yao zhi tu* 十三部位總要之圖) found in the Complete Compilation of Physiognomy (*Shenxiang quanbian* 神相全編; fascicle 1, in *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成, vol. 473: 5).

The above passage primarily focuses on facial features, encompassing the eyes, eyebrows, ears, nose, mouth, and chin, and further delineates the face into distinct regions. Beyond the face, it also addresses the chest, heart, waist, skin, navel, abdomen, hands, feet, voice, complexion, breath, spirit, and comportment. The concluding sentence of the passage turns to the intimate regions of the human body, but does so in a manner entirely distinct from the approaches found in earlier medical treatises and the Dunhuang physiognomic manuscripts previously discussed. The *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* examines the private parts through the lens of excretory organs and their products. It identifies auspicious urine as being dispersed rather than concentrated and passed swiftly; auspicious feces as fine and square in shape; an auspicious urethral orifice as tightly constricted; and an auspicious anus as deeply pendent. Such physiognomic assessment—grounded in the morphology of the excretory organs and the qualities of their excreta—has no precedent in extant physiognomic texts, and its textual genealogy remains obscure. Nevertheless, when set against the treatment of the genitals in medical sources and the Dunhuang materials cited above, this mode of physiognomic reasoning appears to suggest an altogether distinct line of transmission or conceptual origin.

In subsequent physiognomic literature, these two divergent approaches to the physiognomizing of the genital region were not only preserved but also brought into a process of synthesis. The *Shenxian quanbian* 神相全編 (Complete Compendium of Divine Physiognomy), fascicle 4, ‘Xiangxia 相下’ chapter (‘Physiognomy of the Private Parts’)—a work traditionally attributed to the Song-dynasty recluse Chen Tuan 陳搏 but in fact compiled by an anonymous Ming-period author—records the following observations:

‘If the anus (*gudao* 穀道) is narrow and square, it portends wealth and high status; if the urethral orifice (*shuidao* 水道, *meatus urinarius*) is wide and round, it portends lowness and servility. Excrement that is thin and square likewise signifies nobility, while urine that is dispersed like water-droplets indicates auspiciousness. A black mole appearing on the genitals is a sign of eminence. A protruding penis portends lowly status, whereas a retracted glans indicates prosperity. If the pubic hair grows in an inverted direction, it foretells disharmony between husband and wife.’

穀道急而方者貴；水道寬而圓者賤；²¹大便細而方者貴；小便如撒珠²²者貴；陰生黑子者貴；陰莖聳出者賤；陰頭縮者貴；毛逆生者夫婦不相和睦也。²³

²¹ In the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju*, the terms *shuihu* 水戶 (‘water gate’) and *huohu* 火戶 (‘fire gate’) are employed. Considered in isolation, the text of the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* does not permit a definitive identification of the anatomical locations designated by these expressions. Drawing on parallel passages in the *Shenxian quanbian*, however, it is possible to correlate *shuidao* 水道 with *shuihu* 水戶 (‘water gate’) and *gudao* 穀道 with *huohu* 火戶 (‘fire gate’). The *Ishinpō*, in the prescription ‘For Treating Sores of the Gudao’ (治穀道生瘡), quotes the *Bingyuan lun* 病源論: ‘穀道肛門，大腸之候。大腸虛熱，其氣熱結肛門，故令生瘡’ (Gao 2011: 174). This passage confirms that *gudao* and ‘anus’ are synonymous. We therefore take *gudao* to denote the outlet of defecation (i.e., the anus) and *shuidao* to designate the outlet of urination (i.e., the urethral orifice, colloquially referred to as the ‘horse’s eye’), with *huohu* and *shuihu* referring to these same respective anatomical sites. Moreover, both the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* and the *Shenxian quanbian* use the adjective *ji* 急 in this context, which is best interpreted as ‘tight’ or ‘constricted’, rather than ‘rapid’.

²² *Sazhu* 撒珠, literally ‘scattering like water-droplets’, refers to urine that drips or disperses in the form of separate drops. In modern medical terms, this phenomenon may be attributable to urological conditions such as urethral meatal stenosis, prostatic hyperplasia, or adhesion and inflammation of the urethral orifice, all of which can cause the urinary stream to bifurcate or to present as water-droplet-like.

²³ See *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成, Vol. 473: 20.

This passage engages not only with the features foregrounded in medical treatises and Dunhuang physiognomic texts—such as pubic hair, moles, and the morphological characteristics of the genital organs—but also incorporates the aspects emphasized in the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju*, including the anus, the urethral orifice, and the qualities of urine and feces. Taken together, these elements underscore the passage's distinctly integrative and synthetic character.

A diachronic textual analysis demonstrates that physiognomic discourse concerning the private parts in ancient China underwent a continuous process of elaboration and refinement. The bedchamber manuals excavated from the Mawangdui Han tombs already divide the female reproductive system into twelve distinct regions, indicating that the sexual organs were a focus of attention at a very early stage. The medical manuscripts from Mawangdui, however, do not yet establish any correlation between the private parts and prognostication about an individual's future. In contrast, the citations from the *Yufang mijue*, *Daqing jing*, and *Chan jing* preserved in the *Ishinpō* suggest that by the Eastern Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties, the physiognomizing of the private parts was no longer an unfamiliar topic. In the *Yufang mijue*, the examination of the genital region focuses primarily on the state of the pubic hair and serves the pragmatic purpose of selecting an appropriate sexual partner. The *Daqing jing*, although likewise situated within the context of bedchamber practice, expands the scope of observation to include the position of the vulvar orifice. The *Chan jing* further incorporates the observation of moles and shifts the function of such inspection from the selection of sexual partners in bedchamber arts to the broader context of choosing a marriage partner, extending its relevance to secular concerns such as wealth, social status, and fortune. By the time of the Dunhuang physiognomy texts, the physiognomy of the private parts had achieved a comparatively mature and systematic form.

These texts not only address features of the female genitals—such as pubic hair and moles—but also include the male genitals within the scope of physiognomic observation, focusing on their morphology, hair, and moles, and introducing a novel concern with color. This comprehensive, bilateral approach to the private parts rendered the physiognomy of the genitals more complete and internally coherent. Outside the Dunhuang corpus, the earliest extant transmitted physiognomic manual appears to be the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju*. Its particular importance lies in its documentation of a distinct tradition of genital physiognomy, one that incorporates the conditions of feces and urine, as well as the anus and urethral orifice, into physiognomic judgment—an approach not attested in the Dunhuang texts. The genealogy of this tradition remains uncertain. Nevertheless, the two modes of physiognomic practice—those represented in the Dunhuang manuscripts and those preserved in the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju*—were subsequently synthesized in later physiognomic treatises, together forming the principal corpus of genital physiognomy within the broader tradition of Chinese physiognomic thought.

2. THE CONTENT OF 'PRIVATE PARTS' IN INDIAN PHYSIOGNOMY TEXTS AND CHINESE TRANSLATIONS OF BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES

As noted in the preceding section, the medical manuscripts excavated from the Mawangdui Han tombs attest to an early Chinese interest in the sexual organs. The systematic incorporation of the genitalia into the framework of physiognomy, however, appears to have taken shape only during the Eastern Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties—a period that coincided with the rapid dissemination of Buddhism in China. The recurrent appearance in the Dunhuang physiognomic

texts of expressions such as ‘the jade stalk concealed like a horse’s penis’ (玉莖如馬陰藏而不見) can be traced to the Buddhist notion of the ‘concealed penis’ (陰藏相, Skt. *kośopagata-vas-ti-guhya*). The adoption of the concept of *yincang xiang* into Chinese physiognomic discourse on the genitals invites broader reflection on the relationship between Chinese and Indian traditions of physiognomy in this domain: from what sources, ultimately, does the content of genital physiognomy in Chinese texts derive, and to what extent was it shaped or mediated by Indian/Buddhist cultural influences? The following section surveys relevant materials on genital physiognomy preserved in indigenous Indian sources as well as in Chinese translations of Buddhist texts, thereby establishing a textual foundation for the comparative analysis to be undertaken in the subsequent discussion.

2.1. The Description of Male and Female Private Parts in Indian Physiognomy Texts

The first systematic and independently circulating physiognomy text in India was the *Sāmudrikatīlaka*, compiled by Durlabharāja and his son Jagaddeva around the 12th century (Zysk 2015: 1). However, ancient Indian astrological texts (*Jyotiḥ śāstra*), historical texts (*Purāṇa*), epic accounts (*Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*), the *Kāma sūtra*, and the *Kāma śāstra* already contain rich and sexually explicit descriptions of sexual intercourse and sexual organs. Occasionally, these descriptions are embedded into a physiognomic context, such as in the *Brhatsaṃhitā*:²⁴

‘In the case of a small penis, a man is wealthy but issueless; in the case of a large penis, he is devoid of wealth; in the case of a penis that bends to the left, he is devoid of sons and wealth; in the case of a penis that is crooked in a different manner (i.e., that bends to the right, etc.), he fathers sons. In the case of a penis that is bent downward, there is poverty. In the case of a penis covered with vessels, he is a man with few sons; in the case of a penis covered with large knots, he is happy; and a soft penis causes death by means of urinary disorders, etc.

Men with penises hidden in a sheath of foreskin are kings; men with long penises that have broken out from the foreskin are paupers; men who have penises that are straight and round and men who have penises that are slightly covered with vessels are wealthy. A man who has one testicle dies in water; a man with testicles that are not uniform are desirous of women; a man who has uniform testicles is a king; a man who has testicles that remain high has a short life-time; and a man who has testicles that hang down lives a hundred years.

²⁴ Ancient Indian tradition emphasized oral recitation over the written transmission of texts. As a result, the surviving textual forms of Indian documents often emerged later and show significant variation across different versions. The Indian physiognomy texts discussed in the following sections may originate from original manuscripts or English translations. For instance, Varāhamihira’s *Brhatsaṃhitā*, translated and annotated by Panditabhushana V. Subrahmanya Sastri and Vidwan M. Ramakrishna Bhat, serves as an important resource. Alternatively, Zysk’s scholarly compilation provides a more comprehensive and systematic review of Indian physiognomy literature, improving both readability and accuracy. Thus, physiognomic content from ancient Indian texts such as the *Brhatsaṃhitā*, *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*, and *Skandapurāṇa* cited here is primarily based on Zysk’s edited and annotated versions.

Men with red glans penises are wealthy; men with pale and dirt-coloured glans penises are poor; men whose urination is noisy are happy; and men whose stream of urine is silent are poor.

Men with two, three or four streams of urine that twist in a clockwise direction should be known as kings; and men whose urine is dispersed should be known as paupers.

Just a single stream of urine that twists clockwise engenders splendid bodily form but does not bestow sons. Men whose glans penises have an oily sheen and are upraised and uniform are enjoyers of wealth, women and jewels.

Men with glans penises sunken in the middle will be fathers to daughters and thus paupers; men with glans penises elevated in the middle possess many domestic animals; and men with very thick glans penises are not wealthy.

Men with withered bladder-bags (i.e., lower bellies) are to be recognised as paupers and have a miserable lot in life. Men whose semen smells like flowers are to be recognised as kings.

In the case of honey-scented semen, there is abundant wealth; in the case of fish-scented semen, there are many offspring. A man who has semen that is thin is the father of daughters; a man who has semen that is flesh-scented has great enjoyment.

In the case of liquor-scented semen, a man a sacrificer; in the case of alkali-scented semen, he is a pauper. A man who has quick sexual intercourse is long-lived; a man who has sexual intercourse in a different manner from this is short-lived.' (Zysk 2015: 265–267)

In the foregoing passage, we have cited sections 7–16 of the chapter 'The System of Men's Marks' in Zysk's edition of the *Brhatsaṃhitā*. This portion is primarily concerned with the relationship between male genital morphology and the prognostication of future destiny. Although the *Brhatsaṃhitā* was redacted in the 6th century CE, the traditions it preserves clearly reach back to earlier layers of Indian culture. The treatise offers a remarkably comprehensive account of the male genitalia. As the cited passages indicate, the text begins by examining the size of the penis, the direction of its curvature, the presence of salient structures along the shaft (including blood vessels and nodules), its relative softness or firmness, and whether or not it is covered by the foreskin. It then turns to the testicles, evaluating the prognostic significance of their number, relative height, and bilateral symmetry. This is followed by a discussion of the glans penis, with particular emphasis on its coloration as an important diagnostic indicator of auspicious or inauspicious fate. In the subsequent sections, attention shifts to urination, with detailed observations on the sound and intensity of the urinary stream, its number, and the direction or rotational pattern of its flow. The text then returns to the glans, focusing on the concavity or convexity of the urethral meatus, its coloration, and its thickness as further indicators of fortune or misfortune. Thereafter, it considers the olfactory qualities of semen as a criterion of divination, and finally treats the duration of sexual intercourse as an additional index for predicting future outcomes.

With regard to the correlation between female bodily features and the prognostication of future fortune or misfortune, the *Brhatsaṃhitā* devotes a separate chapter to this topic under the title *Strīlakṣaṇam*. Section 15 of the *Strīlakṣaṇam* states: 'The auspicious set of women's marks has been explained. There is an opposite set of marks. It is considered the inauspicious set. I shall now communicate concisely those (marks) that have particularly undesired results' (Zysk 2015: 289). This passage makes clear that the chapter systematically distinguishes between auspicious

and inauspicious marks. The following citations therefore reproduce, in two parts, those portions of the *Strīlakṣaṇam* that specifically concern the characteristics of the female genital region, presenting them separately under the categories of auspicious and inauspicious features.

‘(Auspicious): A woman whose thighs are thick like elephants’ trunks and hairless, whose vagina is wide and shaped like the leaf from the Sacred Fig tree, whose pudendum is broad and elevated like a tortoise’s shell, and whose jewel-like clitoris is concealed provides abundant prosperity.

(Inauspicious): Miserable women have calves with muscular bundles compact at their top and that are covered with vessels, emaciated, hairy or very fleshy; a vagina whose hairs twist counter-clockwise and which is sunken and small; and a stomach shaped like a water jug.’ (Zysk 2015: 287–289)

Based on the Sanskrit text provided by Zysk, the *Brhatsaṃhitā* describes the auspicious woman as follows: ‘ūrū ghanau karikarapratimāv aromāv aśvatthapatrasaḍṛṣaṃ vipulāṃ ca guhyam śroṇīlalāṭam uru kūrmāsamunnataṃ ca gūḍho maṇiś ca vipulāṃ śrīyam ādadhātīm’ (Zysk 2015: 286), whereas the inauspicious woman is described as ‘udbaddhābhyām piṇḍikābhyām śīrāle śuṣke jaṅghe lomaśe cātīmāṃse vāmāvartaṃ nimnam alpaṃ ca guhyam kumbhākāraṃ codaraṃ duḥkhitānām’ (Zysk 2015: 288). Accordingly, in Zysk’s translation, vagina corresponds to the Sanskrit term *guhyam*, while pudendum corresponds to *śroṇīlalāṭam*. The term *guhyam* literally denotes ‘that which is hidden’ and functions as a euphemism for the genitals or private parts. By contrast, *śroṇīlalāṭam* means ‘the anterior portion of the pelvis’, referring specifically to the mons pubis (i.e., the raised pubic mound). Thus, the *Brhatsaṃhitā*’s physiognomic attention to female sexuality encompasses the *guhyam* (vagina, or more accurately the vulvar region), the mons pubis, and the clitoris.

The *Purāṇas* may be regarded as encyclopedic repositories of India’s cultural memory, encompassing mythic narrative, dynastic history, ritual prescription, cosmology, and normative discourse. Their composition was characteristically protracted and stratified, making the precise dating of any individual *Purāṇa* exceedingly difficult. The earliest strata of both the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* and the *Skandapurāṇa* likely crystallized during the first centuries CE. Of particular significance is the fact that both texts preserve passages linking the morphology of the female genitalia to prognostications of future fortune or misfortune—a motif that may reflect an even earlier, shared cultural or textual substratum.

Compared with the *Brhatsaṃhitā*, the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* offers a more varied and detailed set of descriptions concerning the female genitalia.

‘A women’s pudendum that has small hairs that twist clockwise and that is uniform, lovely and broad is adored as the cause of sexual enjoyment. A woman whose vagina is hairless, uniform, very tight and compact becomes a queen even though she is born of a low family. A women’s most adored vagina that increases sexual pleasure resembles a Sacred Fig’s leaf; it is elevated like a tortoise’s shell, resembles the moon’s disk and is shaped like a water-pot. If one vagina resembles a sesamum blossom and (another) a hoof at the top, both lead to servitude and poverty. The group of women with vaginas that resemble a wooden mortar encounters pain; the group with open-mouthed vaginas encounters death; the group with deformed, putrid and fleshless vaginas; and the group with vaginas whose hairs resemble those of elephants encounter depravity, an unfortunate lot in life and poverty.’ (Zysk 2015: 377)

In the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa*, the corresponding Sanskrit reads: *savyāvartaṃ samaṃ cāru sūkṣma-romānvitaṃ pṛṭhu jaghanaṃ śasyate strīṇāṃ ratisaukhyakaraṃ dvija aromako bhago yasyāḥ samaḥ suśliṣṭasaṃhata api nīcakulotpannā rājapatnī bhavaty asau āsvatthapatrasadṛśaḥ kūrmaprṣṭhonnatas tathā śaśibimbanibhaś cāpi tathaiva kalaśākṛtiḥ [...]* (Zysk 2015: 376). In Zysk's translation, pudendum corresponds to *jaghanam*, a term designating the lower abdomen and pelvic region, including the mons pubis and the pubic area, whereas vagina corresponds to *bhagaḥ*, which can denote the vulva.

In the *Skandapurāṇa*, the following is mentioned:

'A freckle or a mole on the chest is the cause of a fortunate lot in life. A woman who has both a red freckle and mole on the right breast gives birth to four daughters and three sons. Expect a woman whose left breast has a red freckle or mole to give birth first to a son and then to become a widow. If there is a freckle on the right side of a woman's pudendum, then expect her to be a king's queen or to give birth to a son who will be king.' (Zysk 2015: 445)

The Sanskrit passage reads: [...] *ekaṃ putraṃ prasūyādaḥ tataḥ sāvīdhavā bhavati guhyasya dakṣiṇe bhāge tilakaṃ yadi yoṣitaḥ tadā kṣitipateḥ patnī sūte vā kṣitipaṃ sutam nāsāgre maśakaḥ śoṇo mahiṣyā eva jāyate* (Zysk 2015: 444). In this passage, pudendum corresponds to *guhyasya*, a term signifying 'of the concealed part' or 'of the private region', which here can be taken to refer specifically to the female vulva.

By comparing Zysk's English renderings of female genital terminology with the underlying Sanskrit, it becomes clear that, in Zysk's translational framework, when vagina and pudendum occur together, vagina tends to refer to the vulva, whereas pudendum designates the mons pubis and adjacent areas; when pudendum appears alone, however, it may encompass the entire vulvar region. Indian physiognomic texts describe women's private parts in remarkable detail, including the shape, size, hair distribution, and moles of the genitalia, and even the clitoris. According to Zysk's analysis, an auspicious woman is characterized by a mons pubis that is broad and prominently elevated, covered with fine hair arranged in a clockwise pattern and evenly distributed; her vulva should be broad like the leaf of the sacred fig,²⁵ convex like a tortoise shell, and likewise adorned with soft, clockwise-growing hair. The opposite features are considered inauspicious.

2.2 The Description of Male and Female Private Parts in Translated Buddhist Scriptures

Indian Buddhist texts were inevitably influenced by Indian ideas concerning physiognomy. According to Buddhist beliefs, the thirty-two physical characteristics of a great person are unique to a Buddha as an enlightened being. The concept of the thirty-two marks was not originally introduced by Buddhism but was absorbed and adapted based on ancient Indian ideas concerning physiognomy. In the traditional Indian concept, the physiognomy of great men has thirty-two (alternatively, thirty-three or thirty-one) special physical features. These thirty-two marks can

²⁵ Traditional Chinese beliefs do not consider a large vulva in women as ideal. The *Qianjin fang* 千金方 (in *Beiji qianjin yaofang jiaoshi* 備急千金要方校釋: 66) contains the following prescription: 'To cure a wide vulva, make it narrow' (治陰寬大令窄小方). By contrast, in the *Ishinpō*, fascicle 24, 'Judging the Fortune and Misfortune of Women's Appearance', it is also believed that auspicious women have large vulva, which seems to be closer to the Indian tradition.

be divided into five fine, five long, seven red, six raised, three broad, three small and three deep or seven red, six raised, five fine, five long, three broad, three short and three deep and so on.²⁶

Buddhists, influenced by Indian ideas on physiognomy, incorporated descriptions of the private parts of men and women into their scriptures. For example, the Northern Wei monk Gautama Prajñāruci (瞿曇般若流支), who arrived in China in 516 and carried out translation work from 538 to 543, describes the beauty of a heavenly queen in his translation of the *Vyāsapariṣṭhā* (毗耶娑問經):

‘The Buddha said, “Great Immortals! The first heavenly queen of the thirty-third heaven of Śāka/Brahma is named Shezhi. With hundreds of thousands of celestial maidens she resides in the Joyous Forest, with various flowers illuminating on her body, and the cheek being like lotus flower [...] She wanders thus in the Joyous Forest, with wide and generous cheek, she walks on marvelous flowers scattered on the ground. Below the navel and above her private parts, there are fine hair and skin patterns,²⁷ precious clothes are draped over her, and while walking, a sound emerges. Her eyes are blueish and stand wide apart, charming when opened, and her hair is long and black, each hair spirals (curls), and the nose is high and straight.”

佛言：‘大仙！三十三天帝釋天王第一天后名曰舍支。百千天女住歡喜林。有種種花開發光明集在其身，頗如蓮花.....歡喜林中如是遊行，頗分寬博，妙花散地，在上而行。臍下陰上，有細毛文，妙寶跨衣，行則聲出。目青而寬，開而有媚，髮青長黑，一一毛旋，鼻隆而直。’²⁸

In this passage, the Buddha enumerates the auspicious marks adorning the celestial queen, observing, for example, that ‘below the navel and above her private parts there are fine hair and skin patterns.’ This description is consistent with the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa*, which records that the presence of small, soft hairs on the mons pubis and in the pubic region is considered auspicious, whereas coarse, bristle-like hairs resembling those of an elephant are regarded as inauspicious. The *Vyāsapariṣṭhā* likewise reinforces this view, further attesting that the presence of fine hair in the genital region has traditionally been associated with auspicious women in Indian physiognomy.

Similarly, in the 26th fascicle of the *Mūla-sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhaṅga* (*Genben shuoyiqie youbu pinaiye* 根本說一切有部毗奈耶) translated by Yijing 義淨 (635–713), there is a record of a disciple of the Buddha divining a person’s physiognomy. It includes a description of a woman’s genitalia:

‘At that time, the Buddha resided at Anātha-piṇḍa-dasyārāmaḥ. The venerable Udāyin, who was proficient in physiognomy, at sunrise took her robe and bowl and went to the city of Vārāṇasī to beg for food. She arrived at the home of a Brahmin and saw a young woman. She asked her, “How is your mother-in-law?” [The young woman] replied, “She is anxious, in panic like a rabbit hit by an arrow.” The venerable Udāyin answered, “What problem does your mother-in-law have? It is because she has inauspicious signs between

²⁶ See ‘Fixed Number of Marks or Body Parts’ in Zysk 2015: 190–194.

²⁷ This probably refers to certain types of ‘wrinkles’ and lines in this area.

²⁸ *Piyasuo wenjing* 毗耶娑問經 (Skt. *Vyāsapariṣṭhā*), CBETA 2023. T12, no. 354, p. 232c8–18.

her two breasts and on her private parts, such as black spots, red spots, and curly hair, this is her fault [causing her anxiety].”

爾時佛在室羅伐城迦多林給孤獨園。時具壽鄒陀夷善解身相，於日初分時執持衣鉢入室羅伐城次行乞食，至婆羅門居士舍，見有少婦問曰：“汝姑何如？”彼便答曰：“我姑暴急如兔中箭。”鄒陀夷報曰：“汝姑何過？由彼兩乳中間及隱密處有暴惡相，謂黑靨赤靨及以旋毛，是此之過。”²⁹

The venerable Udāyin assessed a woman's moral character by examining the spots and hair on her genitalia, with particular attention to the presence of whorled pubic hair (*xuanmao* 旋毛), which he regarded as an inauspicious sign. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* does not specify the orientation of such hair whorls—whether counterclockwise or clockwise. In the Indian tradition, however, the rotational direction of hair growth constitutes an established criterion of divinatory assessment. Thus, the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* explicitly observes that counterclockwise (leftward) whorls of pubic hair in women are inauspicious, whereas the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* conversely emphasizes that clockwise (rightward) whorls are propitious.

In principle, Buddhism opposes the practice of divination.³⁰ However, in the course of its historical development, Buddhism's attitude towards divination also seems to have undergone changes. With the advent of Mahāyāna Buddhism and Esoteric Buddhism, Buddhism's attitude towards divination seemingly became more tolerant. There appeared a number of scriptures that incorporated topics of divination, including the mentioning of male and female private parts, often with rather detailed descriptions. Compared with the *Vyāsapariṣcchā* and the *Mūla-sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhaṅga*, such scriptures contain more complete and systematic records on this topic.

In the translation of the *Mātāṅga sūtra* (*Modengqie jing* 摩鄧伽經),³¹ the moles on the women's body were related to the prediction of their future:

‘I (i.e., Buddha) will now expound the features of the moles; on a woman's neck, if there is a purple [mole], her husband will certainly become a king; if [the mole] is black, and there will be a similar [mole] between her breasts, her husband will become a general; if there is black [mole] between the eyebrows, and a similar [mole] on the neck, she will successively have five husbands without lacking food and clothing; if there is black [mole] on the cheeks and a similar [mole] on the back, she will be alone during a number of years and it will be difficult to find a husband; if there is black [mole] on the ears and a similar [mole] on the waist, she will have a strong memory and an extensive knowledge; if there is a black [mole] on the upper lip and a similar [mole] on the hand, she will be deceived by others; if there is a black [mole] on the lower lip and similar [mole] below [at her private parts], she will be licentious and will not lack drink or food; if there is black [mole] on the upper chin and a similar [mole] below [at her private parts], there will naturally be no lack of delicacies.’

²⁹ *Genben shuo yiqie youbu binaiye* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶 (Skt. *Mūla-sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhaṅga*), CBETA 2023.Q4, T23, no. 1442, p. 770b24–c1.

³⁰ For the specific attitude of Buddhism towards divination, see Yang and Anderl 2020; see also Yang 2023.

³¹ The translation of this text is ascribed to Zhu Lüyan 竺律炎 and Zhi Qian 支謙 of the Wu 吳 dynasty. However, the actual date of translation is debated and was probably later than traditionally assumed.

我今復說黑子之相，婦人項上，有靨紫色，夫必為王；其色若黑，乳間有報，夫為將軍。眉間有黑，報靨在頸，經歷五夫，衣食不乏。頰上有黑，報靨在背，孤寡歷年，夫難可得。耳上黑者，報靨在腰，強記博識。上脣有黑，報靨在手，為人欺誑。下脣有黑，報靨在下，性多姪洩，不乏飲食。頤上黑者，在下有報，自然銷饑，無所乏少。³²

Furthermore, in the translation of the *Ratnaketu-parivarta* 寶幢分, included in the **Mahāsaṃnipāta* 大方等大集經, translated by the Indian Tripiṭaka master Dharmakṣema 曇無讖 (385–433) during the Northern Liang Dynasty, the matter of genitals is also addressed:

‘For those born under the constellation Zhang, they will live to be eighty years old, be skilled in music, their hair on the head will be sparse, and experience decline at the age of twenty-seven and thirty-three. [...] They will have a sore on the head and will only have children after the age of thirty-five. There will be a black mole on their genitalia and a yellow mole on their thigh. Gautama! Thus, those born under the constellation Zhang will exhibit such bodily features.’

屬張星者，壽命八十，善於音樂，首髮稀少，衰二十七及三十三……頂有瘡癰，過三十五乃有子息，陰有黑子，脾有黃子。瞿曇！屬張星者，有如是相。³³

A similar content appears in the translation of the [*Mahāsaṃnipāta*] *ratnaketu dhāraṇī* (寶星陀羅尼經) by Prabhākaramitra during the Zhenguan 貞觀 period (626–649) of the Tang Dynasty, fascicle 4:

‘For those born under the constellation Citrā (in the language of the Tang it is called Jiaoxiu), there will be a mole on the genitals of both men and women. Their nature is pure and direct, and they will be full of sexual desires, furthermore, they will be fond of singing and dancing. For those born under the constellation Svāti (in the language of the Tang it is called Kangxiu), there may be a yellow mole either on the head of the male penis or underneath them. The character they received will be full of craving, troubling people, and lack of any wisdom.’³⁴

質多羅（唐言角宿）星生者，男女陰上當有靨子，為性純直而多愛欲復好歌舞。薩婆底（唐言亢宿）星生者，或男根頭或在根下有黃靨生，受性多貪，瞋惱大眾而無智慧。

It can be deduced that the absorption of Indian physiognomy content related to male and female genitals in Buddhist scriptures is multifaceted, including the discussion of the features of hair, certain patterns of the private parts, moles, etc. Special attention is paid to the moles, including their color, shape, and location.

³² *Modengqie jing* 摩登伽經 (Skt. *Mātanga sūtra*); CBETA 2023.Q4, T21, no. 1300, p. 409c12–19.

³³ *Baochuang fen* 寶幢分 (Skt. *Ratnaketu-parivarta*), included in the *Dafangdeng daji jing* 大方等大集經 (Skt. **Mahāsaṃnipāta*); CBETA 2023.Q4, T13, no. 397, p. 139b7–12.

³⁴ *Baoxing tuoluoni jing* 寶星陀羅尼經 (Skt. [*Mahāsaṃnipāta*] *ratnaketu dhāraṇī*); CBETA 2023.T13, no. 402, p. 556a6–9.

3. CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER INQUIRY

By examining the treatment of human private parts in Indian physiognomic texts, translated Buddhist scriptures in Chinese, medieval Chinese medical treatises, the physiognomic manuals from Dunhuang, and later transmitted physiognomic works, it becomes evident that there exists a close correlation between the descriptions of the physiognomy of the genitals in Chinese and Indian sources. The discussions of private parts in early Chinese bed chamber manuals and related medical literature, as well as in Chinese physiognomy, were very likely shaped by conceptual frameworks derived from Indian culture, with translated Buddhist scriptures serving as the principal conduit for this transmission.³⁵

From the perspective of genital morphology, the Dunhuang physiognomy texts indicate that auspicious male sexual organs should be ‘hidden like a horse’s sheath’, a formulation that directly evokes the Buddhist notion of the ‘horse’s sheath’. Although the criteria for physiognomizing bodily features evolved across different periods of Indian physiognomy, the general principle that the male genitals should be small, unobtrusive, not externally prominent, and retracted within the foreskin was consistently regarded as auspicious—an ideal that remained largely unchanged in the Indian physiognomic tradition. Indian physiognomy texts, Buddhist scriptures, and the Dunhuang physiognomy manuscripts all stress the concealment of the male genitals, which may be interpreted as a continuation of a shared tradition.³⁶ Furthermore, Indian physiognomy texts characterize auspicious female vulvae as ‘high’ and ‘protruding’, likening them to the shell of a tortoise, whereas inauspicious vulvae are described as concave, comparable to a ‘wooden mortar’. The *Chan jing* likewise asserts that the female vulva should be ‘as high as an inverted cup’, underscoring the close affinity between the two traditions.

In terms of the criteria assessing the private parts, Chinese and Indian physiognomy texts also show certain similarities. The *Mātaraṅga sūtra* mentions, that ‘if there is a black [mole] on the lower lip and similar [mole] below [at her private parts], she will be licentious and does not lack drink or food; if there is black [mole] on the upper chin and a similar [mole] below [at her private parts], there will naturally be no lack of delicacies’. This means, if there is a mole on the genitals of a woman, she will be full of sexual desire, and in her life there will be sufficient riches.

³⁵ The entry of Indian physiognomy into China relied on diverse methods and mediums. For example, the ‘Catalogue of Classics’ in the *Suishu* (p. 1019) includes several Indian classics such as *Brahmana śāstra* 婆羅門書, *Brahmana Astronomy Sūtra* 婆羅門天文經, and *Brahmana Jie Ga’s Celestial Astronomy Discourse* 婆羅門竭伽仙人天文說. These are non-Buddhist texts, and the identity of their translators is also difficult to determine. Indian physiognomy may have entered China through such Indian texts. However, from the literature currently available, it appears that Buddhism played a crucial role in the process of Indian physiognomy entering China.

³⁶ Why does Indian physiognomy consider small, hidden male genitalia auspicious? This may be related to the Indian society’s emphasis on asceticism and yoga practice. In ancient India, practitioners of asceticism and yoga often kept their male genitalia in a low-hanging state by controlling sexual desire (Goyal 2020: 45). Therefore, small, hidden, low-hanging genitalia may be seen as a sign of practicing asceticism and yoga, and thus considered auspicious. However, the Japanese medical compendium *Ishinpō*, which anthologizes earlier Chinese medical writings, devotes fascicle 28 to *fangzhongshu*, the regulation and cultivation of sexual relations. Entry 27, ‘Yujing xiao 玉莖小’ (‘Small Jade Stalk’), preserves three prescriptions from earlier Chinese sources that address penile shortness: ‘Formula to make a man’s penis long and large’ (治男子陰長大方), ‘Formula to make a man’s penis large’ (欲令男子陰大方), and ‘Formula for a long penis’ (長陰方). Taken together, these materials suggest that, within classical Chinese bedchamber discourse, a short penis was regarded as an impediment to conjugal harmony and therefore undesirable. In this respect, compared with relevant Indian texts, Chinese views appear to express a stronger preference for a longer and larger phallus.

P.3492V states, ‘If a woman has a mole adhering to the area around the genitals, she shall become the wife of a duke or a king. There is a saying that if there is a mole on the vaginal orifice, it indicates nobility and an abundance of sexual desire (*duoyin* 多淫). If a woman’s womb has a mole, this indicates nobility. If there is a mole in the area of the pubic hair, it indicates an abundance of sexual desire.’ It can be deduced that the Dunhuang physiognomy texts also assume that moles on a woman’s genitals indicate on the one hand promiscuity and an abundance of sexual desire, on the other hand a carefree and wealthy life among the nobility. Similar ideas can be found in the *Chan jing* which mentions ‘If she has moles on the genitals, she will be promiscuous’ and ‘if there is a mole on the genitals, she will be the wife of an official earning 2000 *dan*’. Furthermore, the *Vyāsaparipṛcchā* considers ‘fine hair’ on the genitals as auspicious signs for women; in addition, the *Mūla-sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhaṅga* states that the female genitals featuring pubic hair curling into the reverse (i.e., left) direction are regarded as inauspicious signs. The *Yufang mijue* mentions that ‘the genitals and armpits should not have any hair, and if there is hair, it should be fine and smooth’, and ‘if there is thick and strong pubic hair and curling counterclockwise, and one has sexual intercourse with her, then this will be all harmful to people’. This shows that thin hair is regarded as a sign of a ‘good’ woman, while hair curling in counterclockwise direction characterizes an ‘evil’ woman.

Moreover, there are potential connections between Indian and Chinese physiognomic traditions. For instance, the ancient Indian text *Brhatsaṃhitā* categorizes women as either ‘auspicious’ or ‘inauspicious’, while Chinese texts such as *Yufang mijue* and *Da qing jing* similarly classify women as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, reflecting a shared approach to categorization. In addition, physiognomic texts of ancient India also take into account the sound and characteristics of urination when predicting a person’s fortune, assuming that a loud noise indicates happiness, whereas a ‘silent’ flow of urine points to misery. Men with two, three, or four streams of urine twisting in a clockwise direction are said to become kings; by contrast, men whose urine is irregularly dispersed will end up as beggars. A single stream of urine twisting clockwise is believed to bestow a splendid bodily form but does not grant male offspring. In Chinese materials, however, a dispersed stream of urine is regarded as an auspicious sign. Thus, there are notable differences between Indian and Chinese sources in their interpretation of urinary patterns and their significance for prognostication. Nevertheless, both traditions accord special importance to the observation and interpretation of the nature and flow of urine. We have also previously noted that the inclusion of urine within the scope of physiognomic assessment is not attested in the Dunhuang physiognomy texts and may derive from an alternative source. Although the precise origin of this mode of divination remains uncertain, its remarkable similarity to Indian physiognomic practice is striking and warrants further scholarly investigation.

On the basis of the foregoing close examination and comparative analysis of materials concerning the physiognomic assessment of male and female genitalia in Indian physiognomy, Buddhist scriptures, medieval Chinese medical texts, and Dunhuang physiognomic manuscripts, it becomes evident that there are striking similarities and lines of continuity between the Chinese and Indian traditions in this domain. It may thus be plausibly concluded that the treatment of the genital organs in the Dunhuang physiognomic corpus and in medieval Chinese medical literature was profoundly shaped by Indian cultural paradigms, with Buddhism—particularly through the vehicle of translated scriptures—functioning as the primary medium of transmission.

The influence of Indian physiognomy on the development of its Chinese counterpart has been both profound and far-reaching. As discussed in the introduction, early Chinese theories of

physiognomy maintained that physical appearance was determined by the endowment of vital *qi* at birth (稟氣). Over time, however, this view was gradually supplemented—if not partially replaced—by the doctrine that one's present appearance constitutes the karmic outcome of actions performed in previous lives, a conceptual shift that unmistakably reflects Indian cultural influence. The introduction also reviews earlier scholarship that has traced the Indian provenance of specific diagnostic criteria employed in Chinese physiognomy. The core of this article takes as its case study the physiognomy of the genital organs. Through meticulous textual comparison and analysis, it demonstrates that the Chinese practice of 'physiognomizing the genitals' can be traced to Indian antecedents. Beyond this specific discussion, the study further seeks to acknowledge that the broader impact of Indian culture on Chinese physiognomy remains a fertile area of inquiry that continues to call for systematic and comprehensive scholarly investigation.

One illustrative example concerns the influence of Indian mole divination (moleomancy) on Chinese physiognomic thought, a topic that the present author examines in detail in a separate forthcoming study. Another telling case is preserved in the Dunhuang physiognomic manual P.2572 (B), which states: 'In all physiognomic methods, observe a person's conduct. Even if one possesses favorable marks, virtuous behavior is still required; if one's conduct is unvirtuous, those marks will be damaged or destroyed' (凡相之法，看其所作，雖有好相，由（猶）須好行，行若不善，損相毀傷也) (Zheng and Wang 2004: 206). This assertion—that human behavior can alter one's physical appearance—stands in marked tension with the theoretical foundations of traditional Chinese physiognomy. Classical Chinese thought grounds physiognomy in the concept of *qi*-endowment and emphasizes that, once a person has received their allotment of *qi* and their bodily form has taken shape, that form is fundamentally immutable.

The Eastern Han philosopher Wang Chong, one of the most penetrating thinkers of early China, argued unequivocally that once the endowment of *qi* is fixed, neither fate nor physical form can be changed:

'If one's destiny is to die young, even virtuous conduct will not bring longevity; if one's destiny is to be poor and lowly, even a virtuous disposition will not bring fulfillment.' (*Lunheng*, 'Mingyi 命義')

命當天折雖稟異行終不得長，祿當貧賤雖有善性終不得遂。(*Lunheng jiaoshi*: 46)

'Human beings receive their original *qi* from Heaven: each is allotted a destiny of long or short life and given a corresponding bodily form—just as the potter shapes jars and vases from clay, or the metalworker fashions basins and cups from bronze. Once the vessel's shape is fixed, it cannot be made larger or smaller; once the human body is formed, it cannot be diminished or augmented. *Qi* constitutes one's nature; once that nature is complete, destiny is determined. The bodily *qi* and the physical frame are interdependent, and life and death correspond to the appointed term. The form cannot be transformed, and the lifespan cannot be increased or diminished.' (*Lunheng*, 'Wuxing 無形')

人稟元氣於天，各受壽夭之命，以立長短之形，猶陶者用埴為簋廡（甗），冶者用銅為枰杆（盤盂）矣。器形已成，不可小大；人體已定，不可減增。用氣為性，性成命定。體氣與形骸相抱，生死與期節相須。形不可變化，命不可減加。(*Lunheng jiaoshi*: 59)

In the *Lunheng*, Wang Chong employs the metaphor of crafted vessels to illustrate his view of the human body, arguing that once a vessel has been shaped its size can no longer be altered; likewise, once the human body has been formed, its appearance cannot be changed. The idea that human conduct can transform one's physical appearance and bodily features thus stands in direct opposition to Wang Chong's position. The presence of this notion in the Dunhuang physiognomic texts therefore raises important questions and may well point to the influence of Indian cultural and religious thought on Chinese physiognomy.

Indeed, the earliest story we can identify in Chinese literature that links moral conduct to a change in appearance—and thereby to a transformation of destiny—concerns a Buddhist practitioner. The *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (*Further Biographies of Eminent Monks*) records the case of Fachong 法寵. In this account, Fachong was foretold to die at the age of forty; however, through sustained penitential practice, his physical features underwent an actual transformation—hard bones developed within his ears—and his fated death at forty was thus averted (兩耳乃是生骨，斯實懺蕩之基，功不虛也).³⁷ Within the framework of Chinese physiognomic doctrine, 'soft and boneless ears signify short life' (耳軟無骨，短命) (Zheng and Wang 2004: 29), whereas 'ears with bone signify longevity and eminence' (耳如骨者，長命，貴) (Zheng and Wang 2004: 29). Consequently, the growth of ear bones was interpreted as an auspicious sign predicting extended life and elevated fortune. Accounts of the transformation of physical appearance through Buddhist devotion can be traced to even earlier Buddhist scriptures. For instance, the *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經 (*Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish*), translated by Huijue 慧覺 and others during the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534 CE), recounts the story of King Prasena-jit's daughter, whose coarse and unsightly features were miraculously transformed into a radiant, almost divine appearance through her sincere and wholehearted supplication to the Buddha.³⁸

Beyond Buddhist literature, the notion that inauspicious bodily marks could be ritually removed can be traced to still earlier Indian sources. The *Atharvaveda* contains a hymn specifically intended for the removal of unlucky physical signs:

1. 'Out we drive (*nir-sū*) the pallid sign, out the niggard; then, whatever things are excellent (*bhadrá*), those we lead together (?) for our progeny.
2. Savitar has driven out the trouble (? *āraṇi*) in her feet; out have Varuṇa, Mitra, Aryaman [driven][that] in her hands; out hath Anumati, bestowing (*rā*) upon us; the gods have driven this woman forward unto good fortune
3. Whatever in thy self, in thy body, is frightful, or what in hair or in mien—all that do we smite away with [our] words; let god Savitar advance (*sūd*) thee.
4. The antelope-footed, the bull-toothed, the kine-repelling, the out-blowing, the licked-out, the pallid—these we make disappear from us.'³⁹

From the Vedic corpus to Buddhist scriptures, it is evident that the notion of transforming bodily features is not a uniquely Buddhist innovation but is deeply rooted in the broader cultural matrix of ancient India. This observation, however, gives rise to several important lines of inquiry that merit sustained and detailed investigation: How were these Indian conceptions of bodily trans-

³⁷ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*; CBETA 2024, vol. 50, no. 2060, p. 461b12–13.

³⁸ *Xianyu jing*, CBETA 2024, vol. 4, no. 202, p. 357c13–27.

³⁹ Whitney 1905, Book I: 19. The passage omits the author's comments and only cites his translations.

formation appropriated and reinterpreted within the doctrinal framework of Buddhism? In what ways did Buddhist thinkers negotiate the apparent tension between such ideas and the fundamental principle that karma is immutable and non-transferable? And through what mechanisms were these concepts transmitted to China, where they were eventually assimilated into the theory and practice of Chinese physiognomy? While the present study has focused on the single case of genital physiognomy as a point of entry, it aspires to serve as a stepping stone toward a broader research agenda. By accumulating and synthesizing multiple case studies, future scholarship may gradually reconstruct a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of the complex and multifaceted influence that Indian culture exerted on the development and theoretical underpinnings of Chinese physiognomic traditions.

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