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THE TURNING POINT

A MODEL OF BECOMING IN EARLY MEDIEVAL CHINESE AUTOBIOGRAPHIC WRITINGS

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Early Chinese autobiographical writings tend to paint a still portrait of who the author is: his temperament, personality, and achievements. They operate on a model of being and, at best, of a continuous, lifelong self-cultivation and a gradual process of self-actualization.

In the fourth century, we see an emphasis on transformation in an author's life writing. A moment that sheds light on the past and points to the future is singled out as a turning point, and this turning point creates a new possibility for autographical writings. Instead of a depiction of what is, we see a narrative of change, and this talk proposes that the narrative of change owes a profound debt to Buddhist stories of conversion and enlightenment.

