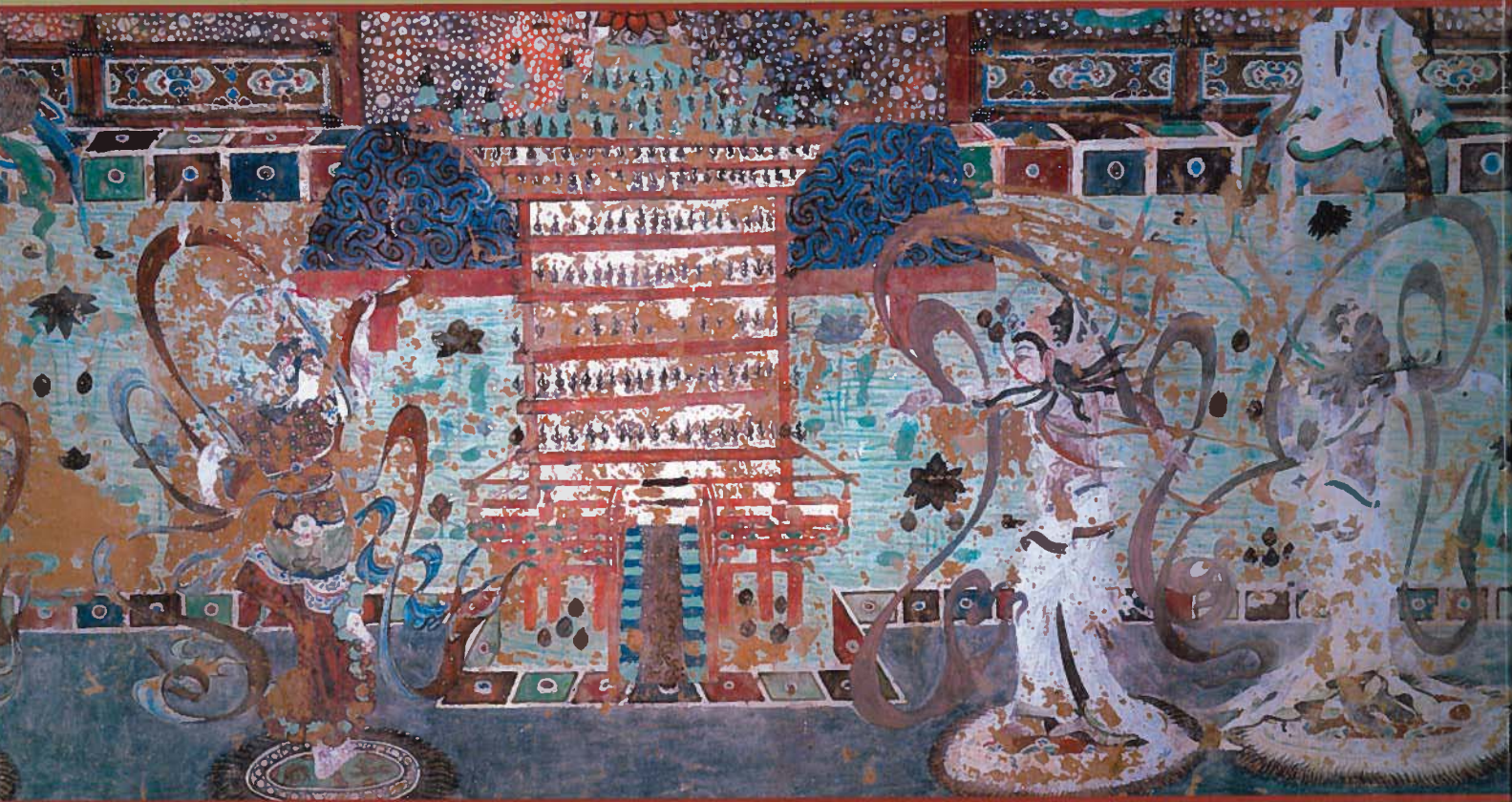


Ning Qiang

Art, Religion & Politics in Medieval China



The Dunhuang Cave of the Zhai Family

Art, Religion, and Politics
in Medieval China



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Photo on page ii: Sculpture of a Heavenly King, western niche
of Cave 45, Dunhuang, High Tang (705-780 c.e.)

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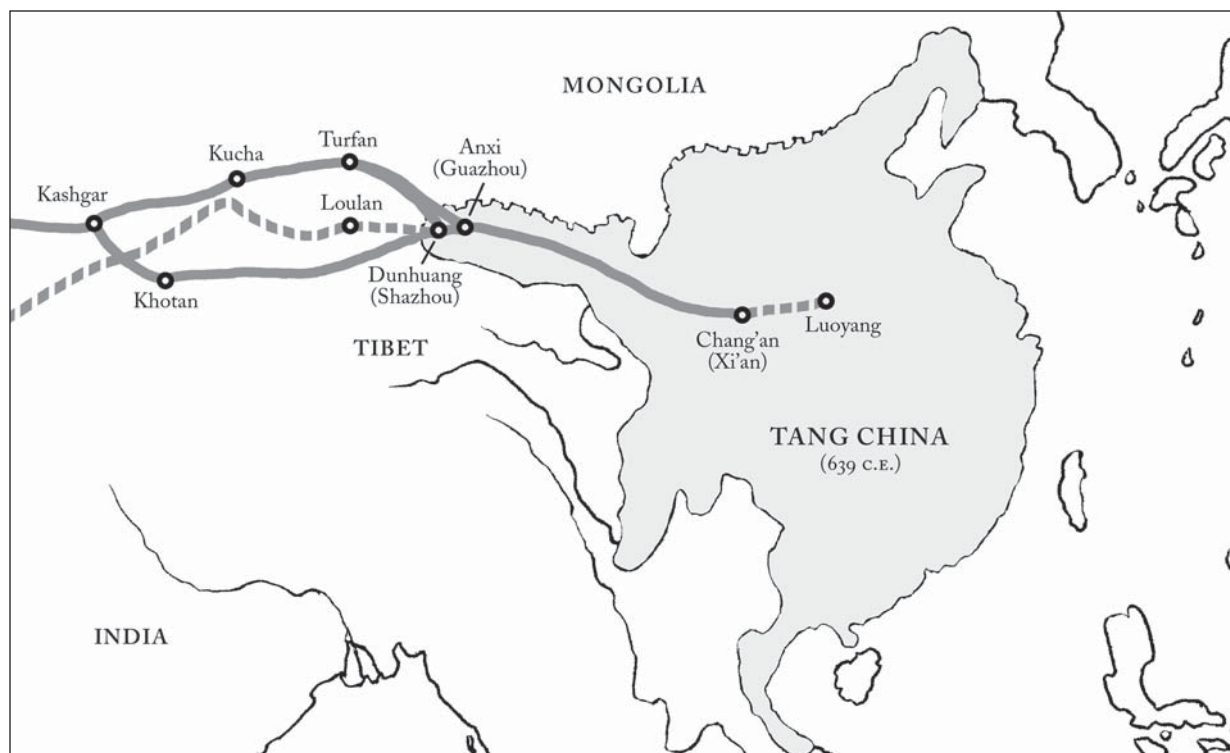
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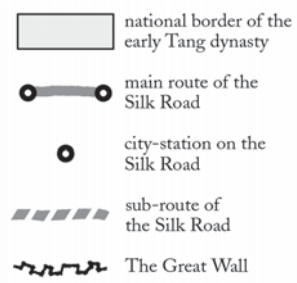
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Abbreviations

<i>Donors' Inscriptions</i>	<i>Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyangren tiji</i> 敦煌莫高窟供養人題記 (The donors' inscriptions in the Mogao caves at Dunhuang), ed. Dunhuang yanjiuyuan.
Tripitaka; T. (in the Notes)	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經, ed. Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe Kaigyoku.



Map of the Silk Road in the early Tang dynasty.



Chronology of the Mogao Caves

Period	Chinese Dynastic Year	Western Year (c.e.)
Sixteen States	Jianyuan 2nd–Yonghe 7th	366–439
Northern Wei	Taiyan 5th–Yongxi 3rd	439–534
Western Wei	Datong 1st–Gongdi 3rd	535–556
Northern Zhou	Yuwen Jue 1st–Daxiang 2nd	557–580
Sui	Kaihuang 1st–Yining 2nd	581–618
Tang	Wude 1st–Tianyou 3rd	618–906
Early Tang	Wude 1st–Changan 4th	618–704
High Tang	Shenlong 1st–Jianzhong 1st	705–780
Middle Tang	Jianzhong 2nd–Dazhong 1st	781–847
Late Tang	Dazhong 2nd–Tianyou 3rd	848–906
Five Dynasties	Kaiping 1st–Xiande 6th	907–959
Song	Jianlong 1st–Jinyou 2nd	960–1035
Western Xia	Daqing 1st–Baoyi 2nd	1036–1226
Yuan	Taizu 22nd–Zhizheng 28th	1227–1368

Note: The periodic divisions of the Mogao caves given here differ from the traditional dynastic divisions of Chinese history. The local historical periods of Dunhuang sometimes cannot be adapted into the national history. For example, Dunhuang was occupied by the Tibetans in 781–847, while central China was continually controlled by the Tang government. When the Western Xia conquered Dunhuang in 1035, the Song dynasty still occupied most territories of China. The Mongols replaced the Western Xia as the ruler of Dunhuang in 1226, five decades earlier than the fall of the Southern Song. Therefore the dynastic changes in central China simply cannot be used as the standards to phrase the local history of Dunhuang. The historical periods in this table were divided on the basis of local context.

Introduction

BUDDHISM AND BUDDHIST ART occupied an extremely important position in the culture and society of the Tang dynasty (618–907 C.E.), a period often referred to as the golden age of Chinese civilization. The vast number of Buddhist monuments surviving today provides us with the opportunity to understand the glorious and complex visual culture of this great period in Chinese history. The largest remaining site containing the most diverse examples of Chinese Buddhist art is the cave-temple complex Mogaoku (Mogao caves), more popularly known as the Dunhuang caves. Mogaoku is in the desert near the modern town of Dunhuang, Gansu Province, in northwestern China.

The Dunhuang caves consist of 492 grottoes carved in a gravel conglomerate cliff that are full of wall paintings and painted sculptures and an additional 230 caves at the northern end of the same cliff. The 45,000 square meters of paintings and 2,400 sculptures remaining in the caves span a period of a thousand years, from the early fifth to the fourteenth century C.E., and visually represent with vivid detail the culture and society of medieval China (Fig. 1). In addition to the wall paintings and painted sculptures, some 1,000 paintings on silk and paper and 50,000 texts written in Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit, and other central Asian languages were discovered in 1900 in a sealed cave, known as the “library cave,” at the Mogao site. These texts and paintings, now preserved in museums



Figure 1 | Overview of the Mogao caves in the 1900s. Photo by Charles Nouette, 1908.

throughout the world, were produced within the same sociohistorical context as the art found in the Buddhist caves. Examined together, they form an ideal case for interdisciplinary studies of art, religion, sociology, and politics.

The importance of the Dunhuang materials has been recognized by many scholars around the world. Currently, more than a thousand scholars worldwide are studying the artifacts and manuscripts from Dunhuang.¹ Why do materials from this remote site in China's northwestern desert deserve such large-scale scholarly attention? As Victor Mair points out:

Dunhuang and Turfan² Studies, though focusing on texts and artifacts associated with these two

particular sites, actually have broad ramifications for the history of East-West cultural and commercial relations in general. Another major reason is the unique quality of many materials discovered at Dunhuang and Turfan. Archaeological finds from these locations have enabled us, for the first time, to obtain an essentially first-hand look at China and some of its neighbors during the medieval period. That is to say, we can now learn, for example, about popular culture during Tang times without being forced to view it through a Confucian historiographical filter.³

In addition to Victor Mair, Stephen Teiser also sees the Dunhuang texts as a means to “avoid the limitation of traditional historiography” in his studies

of the ghost festival in medieval China.⁴ Indeed, for students of medieval Chinese society and culture, the firsthand visual and textual evidence preserved at Dunhuang is an ideal starting point.

The combination of visual works and written evidence makes the Dunhuang materials a perfect case study for those who want to examine works of art from the Mogao caves within their sociohistorical context. As an art historian, my first objective is to provide a “historical explanation of pictures,”⁵ that is, to explain the reasons for fashioning the works of art in the Dunhuang caves. My final goal, however, is to go one step further and use the artworks as reliable historical information to fill the gaps left by text-oriented historians. Methodologically speaking, this juxtaposition of the “historical explanation of pictures” and a “pictorial explanation of history” requires one to examine literally every piece of information, visual or textual, within a particular historical context. An interdisciplinary approach, therefore, is essential for this study.

To present a workable amount of research data that will additionally serve as a case study, I will focus on a well-preserved cave built in the early Tang dynasty. Numbered 220 by the Dunhuang Research Academy, this cave was originally built in 642 C.E. by the Zhai family, a prominent local clan at Dunhuang. It is a square cave, approximately 17 feet wide, 16 feet deep, and 10.5 feet high, with a truncated pyramidal ceiling and a rectangular niche in the west wall (Fig. 2). When it was completed in the early Tang, every inch of its walls and ceiling was covered with colorful paintings. These paintings, however, were entirely hidden by a new layer of paintings around the tenth century and remained concealed until the early 1940s. Once exposed, the original early Tang paintings, accordingly, appeared very

fresh and colorful in comparison with other Tang paintings at Dunhuang.

Crucial to our understanding of the original pictorial program is the well-preserved condition of the Zhai family cave, which provides a unique opportunity to investigate the visual details of the original paintings and sculptures in the cave. Furthermore, the remaining traces of reconstruction and redecoration indicate how this cave was maintained and used by the same Zhai clan during a period of more than three hundred years.

When this cave was built in the early Tang, the four walls of the cave were painted with varied themes that could be closely connected in terms of composition and function (Fig. 3). The paintings on the north and south walls are composed in the same scale and face each other. The north wall represents the Healing Ritual, an important Buddhist ritual for healing the wounded and the sick. The south wall depicts the Western Paradise, the main destination for Buddhist believers when they reach the end of their lives. The paintings on these two walls, therefore, seem to have been prepared for the wounded and sick (north wall) and dead (south wall) members of the patron family.

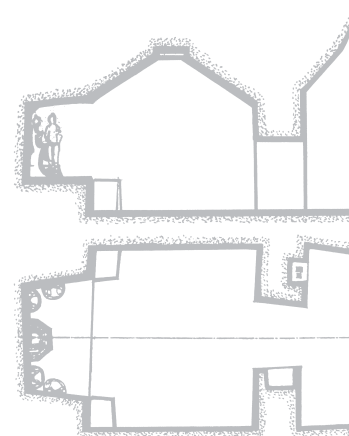


Figure 2 | Cross section and layout of Cave 220, Dunhuang, originally built in 642 C.E.

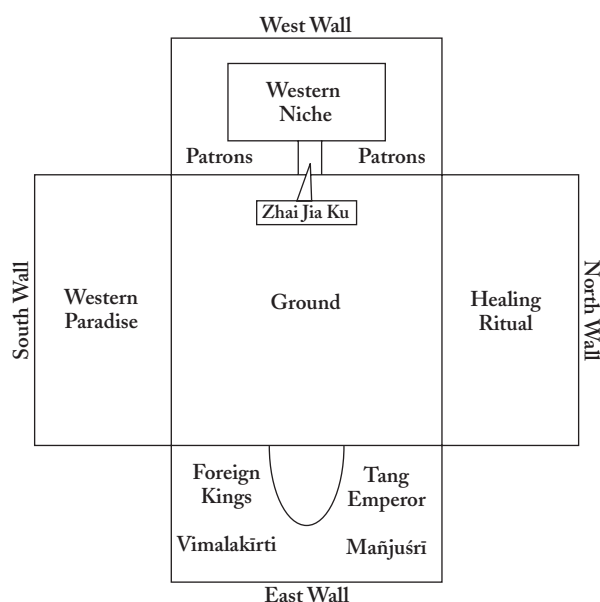


Figure 3 | Diagram of the thematic composition of Cave 220.

The paintings on either side of the entrance on the east wall are almost symmetrically designed to illustrate the famous debate between Sage Vimalakīrti and Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. Standing beside Mañjuśrī is Taizong, the imposing contemporary emperor of the Tang dynasty, shown with his ministers surrounding him. On the other side, non-Chinese kings and princes are depicted beside Vimalakīrti. The picture of the Tang emperor and his court officials might signify the patrons' unswerving loyalty toward the Tang central government in the capital Chang'an (present-day Xi'an). Apparently, the motifs on the east wall could help the living patrons gain political benefits from the Tang government. Together, the paintings on the north, south, and east walls are intended to serve the sociopolitical and religious needs of the wounded, dead, and living members of the patron family.

The west wall, in the lower section, features portraits of patrons from the Zhai family. The standing figures of patrons flank a rectangular panel at the lower center, in which three large characters, "Zhai Jia Ku" (Zhai family cave), are written. This clearly written information and the serial family portraits establish an unmistakable identity of the cave as a family shrine of the Zhai clan. The sculptures of the Buddha, two of his disciples, two bodhisattvas, and two heavenly guardians are located in the niche above the patron figures and were partially damaged or repainted over time. Eight additional disciples of the Buddha are painted on the wall behind the sculptures in the niche. Together with the two sculptures of disciples, they form a theme of the Ten Great Disciples of the Buddha. The painting on the niche's ceiling shows bodhisattvas coming to listen to the sermon of the Buddha. Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī is riding a lion and Bodhisattva Samantabhadra is riding on an elephant; they are depicted on the left and right sides of the niche. Generally speaking, the composition of the west wall appears to be more conventional than that of the north, south, and east walls except for the written emblem of the patron family shown at its lower center and the two great bodhisattvas painted on the left and right of the niche. Writing the family name appears to be a new phenomenon in the Dunhuang caves, which indicates the beginning of a local tradition of "family caves."

The significance of the Zhai family cave may be understood from the following perspectives. First, it is the first firmly dated and the best-preserved cave among the some 230 grottoes constructed at Dunhuang during the Tang dynasty. The vivid details of the wall paintings and the high quality of the sculptures exemplify the achievements and characteristics of Tang art. Most of the remaining Dunhuang caves were built by the Tang people, whose historical and

cultural legacy can still be seen not only in contemporary China but also, even more clearly, in China's neighboring countries such as Japan and Korea. Analyzing this reliably dated early Tang cave as a case study creates a solid foundation for the understanding of other Tang caves and thereby yields a potentially vast resource of visual materials available for the study of the art, religion, culture, and society of the Tang dynasty.

Second, this cave is the earliest identifiable cave built by a single family at Dunhuang. Local families played an extremely important role in constructing Buddhist cave-temples. Donors from a single family have been identified in some pre-Tang caves, for example, but they usually patronize an individual icon or a single picture within a larger pictorial program in a cave that is shared by several families or social groups.⁶

Cave 220, by contrast, was patronized by the Zhai family alone and maintained by the same clan for hundreds of years. The three large ink characters of "Zhai Jia Ku" written at the center of the west wall, just below the sculpture of the Buddha, face everyone who enters the cave from the gate on the east wall. These characters function as a clan emblem of the Zhai family and identify the cave as a privately owned family shrine. The portraits of patrons from the same Zhai family, placed to flank the clan emblem, further enhance the sense of family shrine. The combination of a Buddhist cave-temple and a traditional Chinese family shrine, on the one hand, suggests a further sinicization and secularization of Buddhism on Chinese soil during the Tang dynasty. On the other hand, it reflects the dominance of prominent clans in Buddhist activities as a local Buddhist practice at Dunhuang.⁷ Subsequent to completion of the Zhai family cave in the early Tang period, single-family sponsorship of cave construc-

tion became a popular pattern of patronage.⁸ Cave 220 was the start of a long tradition of family caves and provides the opportunity to examine the role of clans in the art and religion of medieval China.

Third, contextual evidence suggests that the design and pictorial programs of the Zhai family cave are closely associated with contemporary politics of the early Tang period. Dunhuang was not a stable territory of the newly established Tang empire. Local warlords repeatedly rebelled against Tang rule until the 630s and 640s when the Tang army initiated military actions in the Western Regions⁹ and used Dunhuang as its headquarters. The Zhai family cave was built two years after the military operation of the Tang troops to conquer Karakhoja (Gaochang), a small central Asian kingdom near Dunhuang.¹⁰ The wall paintings in the cave were created when the Tang army was still fighting in the Western Regions. Significantly, some members of the Zhai family served as officers of the imperial troops and probably joined the battles against the central Asians.¹¹ Scenes of the Healing Ritual and the Western Paradise, which are shown, respectively, on the north and south walls of the cave, were probably designed for the Zhai officers who were wounded or died in the war.

The artistic styles of these paintings suggest they were imported from the Tang capital Chang'an and not only reflect the Zhais' preference for the flair of the "capital style" but also demonstrate their political gesture toward the Tang court. By adapting this artistic style for their family cave, the Zhais declared their support of Tang rule in their hometown.

The Zhais' political attitude and ambition continue to be revealed in the paintings on the east wall of the cave, the direction from which the Tang army came. The contemporary ruler of the Tang dynasty, Emperor Taizong, is portrayed on an impressive

scale. He is accompanied by his ministers and court officials. Foreign kings and princes, central Asian in appearance, stand at the other side, paying tribute to the Tian Kehan, or the Highest Ruler under Heaven, also known as the King of Kings.¹² As military officers in an unstable new territory, the Zhais needed to demonstrate their absolute loyalty to the Tang court. By portraying the Tang emperor as a leading figure in their family cave, the Zhais not only proved their loyalty to the Tang government but also appealed to the commanders of the Tang army based in Dunhuang. These political motifs in a Buddhist cave are crucial for our understanding of the relationships among art, religion, and politics in medieval China.

Finally, Cave 220 was maintained and renovated by the Zhai clan generation after generation for more than three hundred years. The historical changes undertaken in the cave after its completion further illuminate the function of the cave as a private shrine and a political showcase of the patron family. Unfolding the historical layers of the cave can help in understanding how a Buddhist cave-temple was used by its owners to express their social and political concerns in different historical contexts.

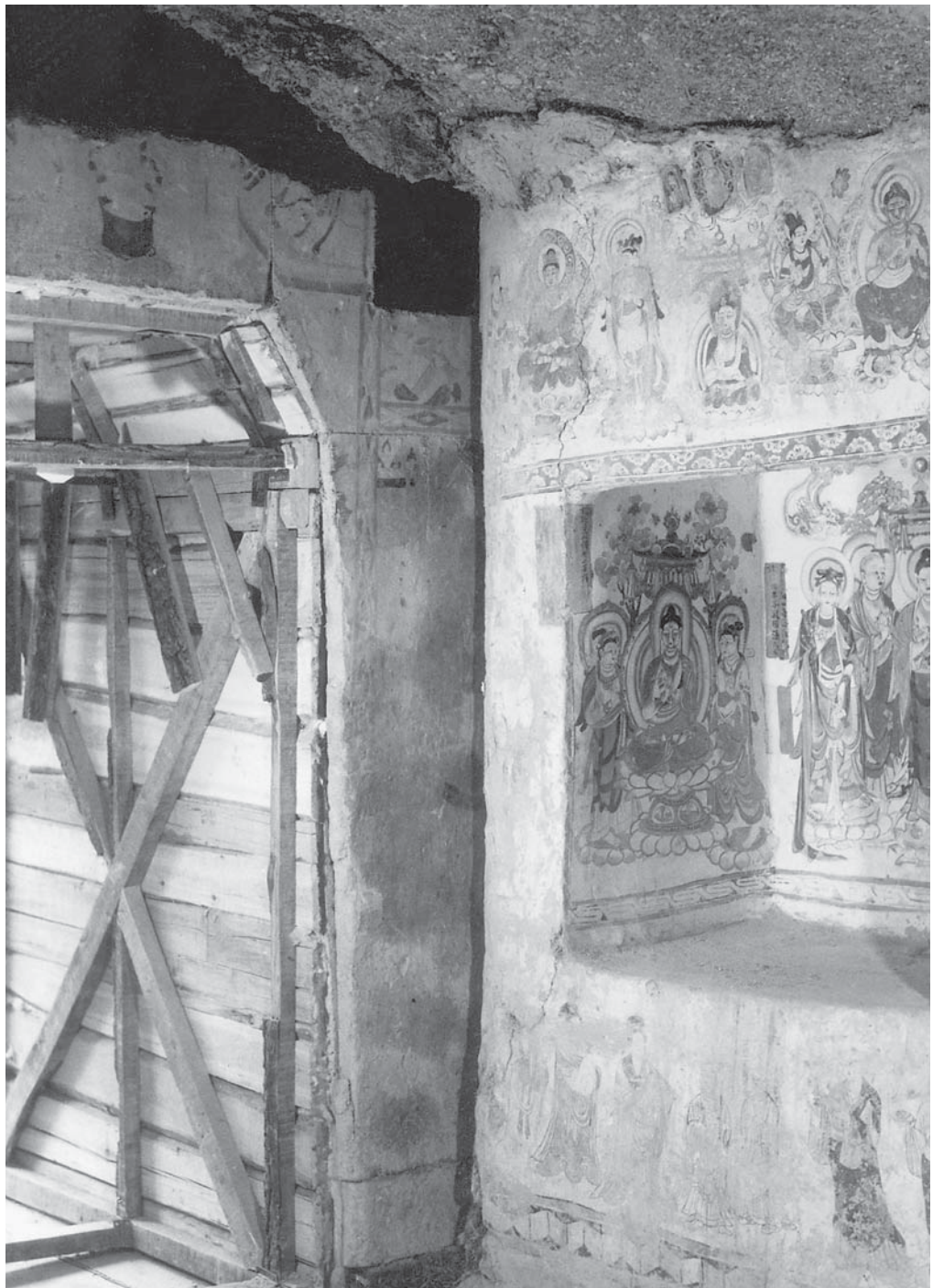
The studies of the Zhai family cave began when the French scholar Paul Pelliot and his photographer took a few pictures of the cave and recorded some crucial inscriptions in the cave in 1908. Pelliot published three black-and-white plates of the cave (south wall, west wall, and a detail of the pedestal of Buddha in the west niche) in 1914–1924, but his extensive notes and copies of inscriptions remained unpublished until the 1980s and 1990s.¹³ In the 1940s, after the removal of the tenth-century murals that had covered the four walls of the cave for a thousand years, the discovery of the original early Tang paintings began to attract the attention of scholars.

A Chinese archaeological project undertaken in 1975 excited increased interest in the cave when it revealed important paintings created in various historical periods on the sidewalls of the entrance tunnel of the cave (Fig. 4). The staff members of the Dunhuang Research Academy removed the outermost layer of the passageway of Cave 220 and exposed paintings of the Tibetan period (781–847 c.e.)¹⁴ on the south wall and Five Dynasties paintings on the north wall of the entrance tunnel. *Wenwu*, one of the most influential journals on Chinese archaeological discoveries, published the newly discovered paintings and inscriptions a few years later in 1978.¹⁵

Akiyama Terukazu published the first comprehensive introduction to the cave in 1969.¹⁶ Although Akiyama's study of Cave 220 is only a small section of his book on Chinese Buddhist art, he takes the cave "as an example of an early Tang cave" to illustrate the stylistic impact of metropolitan China upon frontier areas "as a result of the powerful expansion of Tang centralized rule."¹⁷ Even more important is his identification of the iconography of the paintings on the north, south, and east walls. Akiyama points out that the south wall represents the Pure Land of Amitābha, the north wall depicts the Paradise of Bhaiṣajya-guru, and the east wall illustrates the story of Vimalakīrti.¹⁸ Although many details in the three paintings were not clearly discussed by the author, this identification has served as the standard explanation of the iconography of Cave 220 since its publication decades ago.

Akiyama's introduction was followed by a more systematic iconographic study by Deng Jianwu (Higashiyama Kengo) in 1980.¹⁹ Although Deng merely claims to provide readers with basic information on the cave, he takes two vigorous approaches in identifying the contents of the paintings in the cave.

Figure 4 |
Entrance to
Cave 220 after
the removal of
the outer layer
of the passage-
way in 1978.



First, his article examines the motifs against the relevant records in Buddhist sutras and explains the content of the motifs in detail. Second, he compares the paintings in this cave with the relevant paintings in other caves at Dunhuang and tries to explain how the paintings in Cave 220 evolved from previous paintings. This research explains and describes the form and content of the paintings and sculptures in detail and thus seems to offer a good foundation for further studies of the cave. Two major problems with this analysis, however, may lead to questionable conclusions: (1) quotations of records from various Buddhist scriptures lack a careful investigation of the relationships among them; and (2) the relationships among the individual paintings and sculptures in the cave remain unclear.

The studies of Chinese scholars of Cave 220 were collectively published as the explanations of plates printed in the third volume of the five-volume series on the Mogao caves, entitled *Zhongguo shiku—Dunhuang Mogaoku* (Chinese cave temples—the Mogao caves at Dunhuang).²⁰ Accompanied by fourteen high-quality color plates, the explanatory notes introduce the inscriptions remaining in the cave, discuss the iconographic details of the paintings, and relate the individual motifs to the Tang poems and popular literature in the Dunhuang region. These notes are short but quite informative. They explain in detail what is actually represented in the paintings. The main problem with these short notes on Cave 220, however, is the use of incorrect Buddhist scriptures as the textual basis for their interpretation of the motifs. The painting on the north wall, for example, is explained as an illustration of the *Yaoshi liuliguang qifo benyuan gongde jing* (Sutra on the merit of the fundamental vows of the seven masters of healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Buddhas), a sutra that was translated in 707 C.E.,

more than half a century later than the date of the painting. The use of the *Amituo jing* (*Amitābha sūtra*) as the textual basis of the painting on the south wall is also problematic. A more appropriate text would be the *Guan Wuliangshou jing*, or *Sutra on Visualizing the Buddha of Measureless Life* (popularly known as the *Visualization Sutra*).²¹

A major study in English of Cave 220 was published by Roderick Whitfield as one of the forty Mogao caves discussed in his luxuriously illustrated book, *Dunhuang: Caves of the Singing Sands*, in 1995. Whitfield continues the identifications provided by the Japanese and Chinese scholars and gracefully describes the stylistic features of the paintings in Cave 220. In this publication, Whitfield makes a few significant contributions. First, he translates the important inscription with dating information remaining on the north wall and thus makes it available to Western readers. Second, he also identifies the north wall painting as the illustration of the Eastern Paradise of Bhaiṣajya-guru but recognizes that some details in the painting are related to “the worship of the Buddha” instead of his paradise. Whitfield also points out the correspondence between the colorful banners in the north wall painting and the actual banners from Dunhuang now in the Stein collection at the British Museum. It is regrettable that he does not move on to explain why these non-paradise elements are shown in the painting and how they may relate to the function of the painting in the context of a family shrine. Third, he describes the imperial image on the east wall in detail and suggests that the “portrayal of the emperor in full ceremonial attire, listening to the debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, was an important means of showing imperial support for Buddhism.”²² In addition to this obvious meaning, however, I would argue that the portrait of the contemporary Tang emperor reveals

the patrons' intention to show their loyalty to the Tang court.²³

Another important contribution was made by Fujieda Akira, who notes that Cave 220 was renovated several times after its completion and that Zhai Fengda supervised a major reconstruction in 925 C.E.²⁴ It also indicates the relationship between the tenth-century *ruixiangtu*, or "picture of auspicious images," in Cave 220 and the Khotan kingdom.²⁵ These interesting ideas inspired me to systematically investigate the social and political changes as reflected in the history of the Zhai family cave and to examine how this family shrine was used by the offspring of the clan in these different socio-political contexts.

In addition to the above five important publications on the Zhai family cave, many scholars have written about a specific painting or sculpture in the cave or discussed the general value of the cave. Generally speaking, these studies can be divided into two types: (1) the inclusion of this cave in a broader discussion of the overall condition of Tang dynasty art at Dunhuang,²⁶ and (2) the use of one or other mural of the cave in the comprehensive study of the paintings of the same subject matter in the Dunhuang caves.²⁷ The first type of scholarship places the cave in a larger context of Tang dynastic arts in the Dunhuang region and emphasizes the significance of the cave in the studies of Tang caves at Mogao. This limited type of study, however, provides only an oversimplified sketch of the cave and lacks deeper intellectual inquiry. The second type of scholarship focuses on an individual painting in the cave and allows for a more detailed introduction to the iconography of the mural. The latter study, however, separates the wall from its original context and creates artificial barriers for our understanding of the entire pictorial program.

Why were the paintings and sculptures put together in this family cave? Why did the Zhai family create such a cave in this historical moment? How did this prominent local clan maintain and use its family cave? How could these paintings and sculptures, moreover, help in understanding the characteristics of Tang culture and society? These and other questions have not been answered by existing scholarship and invite a deeper inquiry into this unexpectedly well-preserved monument of early Tang Chinese Buddhist art.

My research into various aspects of the Zhai family cave rests on four presuppositions. First, this study gives priority to textual evidence in explaining the artworks in the Dunhuang caves instead of relying on formal analysis. It uses the original inscriptions remaining on the walls of the caves, the documents discovered from the "library cave" at Dunhuang, and other local historical records to interpret the Buddhist motifs appearing in the Zhai family cave and to unfold the historical layers of the family shrine. In my opinion, any changes in the visual form must be understood within their historical context, and in the case of Dunhuang art studies, reliance on textual evidence to explain artistic phenomena is essential because ancient local texts and artworks were produced in the same historical circumstances and therefore should be examined concurrently as evidence.

Second, this study draws attention to the political dimensions of Chinese Buddhist art. It examines the political intentions of the original pictorial program and the redecorations of the Zhai family cave and reveals how the Zhai clan used their family cave as a political showcase to respond to various political circumstances in different historical periods. This approach is mainly inspired by the publications of Martin Powers and Wu Hung, whose books on the

political expression and ideology shown in the funeral art of the Han dynasty paved the way for future scholars to reconsider approaches to the study of Chinese art history.²⁸ Although their works focus on Han funeral art, their methodology is also valid for the study of Chinese Buddhist art.²⁹

Third, this study analyzes Dunhuang caves in their religious ritual context. It connects the Healing Ritual to the north wall and the visualization practice to the south wall of the Zhai family cave and explains the importance of ritual practice in understanding Dunhuang Buddhist art. In 1990, Stanley Abe published his study on the function of Dunhuang Cave 254 within a ritual context of Northern Wei Buddhist practices.³⁰ Wu Hung's article on the paintings of the Western Paradise in the Tang-dynasty Dunhuang caves also discusses the paradise images in their religious and ritual context.³¹ In the field of Buddhist studies, Stephen Teiser demonstrates the significance of Buddhist rituals in medieval Chinese social life.³² My great interest in the studies of the religious and ritual contexts of the Dunhuang caves coincides with the interests of these scholars, although my own study concentrates on the Zhai family cave.

Fourth, this study establishes close connections between the Dunhuang caves and the local history of the region. Most publications on the relationship between the Dunhuang caves and the local history were done in China by scholars at the Dunhuang Research Academy—in particular, the late Shi Weixiang and the late Sun Xiushen, former director of the academy Duan Wenjie, and Ma De. My study of

the Zhai family cave is indebted to their studies, as readers can see throughout the book. Slightly differing from their approach, however, my study attempts to make the links between the local historical circumstances and the visual forms of the paintings and sculptures more specific and concrete rather than offering brief introductions to the local history and cave art, respectively.

My study of the Zhai family cave focuses on the meaning and function of the original pictorial program and the political implications of the reconstruction history of the cave-temple. The overall design of the book comprises three main sections. The first section identifies the contents of the paintings and sculptures and explains why these motifs were chosen by the patrons for their family cave shrine. The second section traces the renovation history of the Zhai family cave and interprets the political implications of the later additions to the cave. The third section analyzes the historical and cultural values of the Zhai family cave in understanding medieval Chinese society.

In addition to using historical texts to interpret the meanings of the paintings and sculptures in Cave 220, this study will also use the pictorial information in the cave to explain interesting phenomena in the social, political, and religious histories of medieval China. It is my intent that this juxtaposition of the “historical explanation of pictures” and the “pictorial explanation of history” will make our studies of art more historically grounded and our studies of history more deeply oriented in material culture.

Iconography of the Original Early Tang Paintings: A Reexamination

IN THE EARLY YEARS of the Tang dynasty, Dunhuang, Tang China's westernmost territory, was politically unstable. Local warlords rebelled several times and challenged Tang authority. At the time of the fall of the Sui (581–618 C.E.) and the rise of the Tang dynasty, the small kingdom of Liang in the Hexi corridor (the western part of present-day Gansu Province) was destroyed. As a result Dunhuang, which had been a part of the Liang kingdom, became a part of the Tang empire in 619, the second year of the reign of the first Tang emperor, Gaozu. Dunhuang came under the control of Li Shimin, the future Tang emperor Taizong.

In the same year, the Dunhuang governor Heba Xingwei arrested General Da Xigao and declared the independence of Dunhuang. It remained independent for two years, until 621, when a local landlord, Wang Gan, killed Heba Xingwei and returned Dunhuang to the Tang. In the next year, the Tang governor of Dunhuang, Heruo Huaiguang, was killed by two Dunhuang natives, Zhang Hu and Li Tong. The new lord of Dunhuang, Dou Fuming, however, surrendered to the Tang in the ninth moon of the same year.¹ Dunhuang remained politically unstable until the Tang army undertook an expedition into central Asia and expanded Tang power into the Western Regions in the 630s.

The Tang dynasty had a great interest in the oasis kingdoms in central Asia because of the trade routes that passed through them. It was

along this network of trade routes that merchants from central Asia, Persia, and the eastern Roman Empire traveled to China; control of the route was thus an important objective for Tang imperial policy.²

The first large oasis to fall to the Tang was the warm and fertile country of Karakhoja (Gaochang), located near modern-day Turfan in Xinjiang. In 630 the king of Karakhoja, Ju Wentai, visited the Tang court with his queen and was lavishly entertained. However, some years after returning to his kingdom, Ju Wentai began to block the trade routes from China. Emperor Taizong summoned Ju Wentai to appear personally at the Tang court as an imperial vassal in 638, but the Karakhoja king ignored the order. The Tang emperor then appointed Hou Junji as commander of an expeditionary force to enter Karakhoja in the last month of the same year. When Ju Wentai heard that the Chinese troops were close at hand, he is said to have died of fright. In the eighth month of 640 the new Karakhoja king, Ju Wentai's son, surrendered his country to Hou Junji, and Karakhoja became a part of China.³

The Tang army continued its expedition in central Asia and established Chinese protectorates in one small oasis kingdom after another. By the 660s, Chinese power was firmly established in the Tarim Basin, in Zungharia, and in the Ili valley (in present-day Xinjiang).⁴

Dunhuang was situated between China proper and the Western Regions. The Tang military campaign in central Asia brought strong Tang cultural influence from the capital Chang'an to Dunhuang. Furthermore, it became much easier for the people of Dunhuang to receive information from the newly conquered oasis regional cultures in central Asia after the fall of Karakhoja. It was an exciting moment in the history of Dunhuang for adopting cultural and religious elements from the east and the

west. The outside cultural and religious influences from Chang'an in the east and Karakhoja in the west are evident in the Zhai family cave, the construction of which was completed in 642, two years after the conquest of Karakhoja by Tang troops.

Recent studies have suggested that when the Zhai family cave was built, there were fewer caves on the cliff of Mogao than there are today. This cave was constructed in a completely new part of the cliff face, a full 140 meters away from the nearest earlier cave.⁵ The choice of such a new location on the cliff suggests the possibility that a new tradition of cave construction was started here in Dunhuang. In fact, the original early Tang pictorial program of the Zhai family cave demonstrates many new characteristics.

First, it had a written label on the western wall to identify the ownership of the family cave, a feature that was not seen in previous caves.⁶ This clan emblem indicates the beginning of a new tradition of "family caves" at Dunhuang.

Second, the compositions of the paintings on the north, south, and east walls differ from the inner decorations in previous caves. Each of the three walls is painted with a single theme illustrating an individual Buddhist sutra, including the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*, the *Visualization Sutra*, and the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*. Using the entire surface of a wall to illustrate a single sutra was an innovation that first appeared in the Zhai family cave and was later copied in many other caves of the Tang period.

Third, the painting on the south wall of the cave is the first clearly identifiable and dated picture of the Western Paradise in Chinese art history, which marks the beginning of the great popularity of Pure Land paintings in Chinese Buddhist art during the Tang dynasty. Hundreds of paintings of the Western Pure Land were produced in the Dunhuang caves alone, and records indicate that more, similar paint-

ings were made throughout China in the Tang and Song periods.⁷

Fourth, the north wall of the cave mainly depicts the Healing Ritual dedicated to Bhaiṣajya-guru, but it also includes motifs showing the Eastern Paradise of the Healing Buddha. The painting thus marks the transition from the representation of the Healing Ritual to the representation of the Eastern Paradise in the history of the illustrations of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*.

Fifth, the east wall of the cave begins to represent the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* on a large scale, including the Chinese emperor and his ministers, as well as non-Chinese kings and princes. It thus adds a strong political implication to this traditional theme in Chinese Buddhist art.

All these new features emerging in the Zhai family cave had strong influences on the later Dunhuang caves, particularly on the Tang caves. The Zhai family cave, therefore, provides an excellent foundation to analyze the Buddhist cave-temples of the Tang dynasty and may shed light on knowledge about medieval Chinese Buddhist art and culture in general.

In order to have a full understanding of the Zhai family cave, a thorough identification of the contents of its paintings and sculptures is required. From the *Complete Catalogue of the Contents of the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang*, edited by the Dunhuang Research Academy and published by Wenwu Press in 1982,⁸ the reader learns the basic contents of the pictorial program of the cave. However, the identifications provided by the catalogue are very brief and without specific references to the textual basis of the paintings. Additional studies by Chinese and Japanese scholars have identified most paintings and sculptures in the cave. Their identifications, however, need to be reexamined, because many of the discus-

sions of them are cursory and the descriptions are sometimes misleading. This book, therefore, begins with a careful iconographic study of all paintings and sculptures in the cave to form a solid foundation for further interpretations. Because the pictorial program is designed according to the shape of the cave, I will examine, step by step, the paintings on the west, north, south, and east walls, as well as the painted sculptures in the western niche.

West Wall: Sculptures and Paintings

The west wall of Cave 220 is dominated by a large niche in the middle section, directly opposite the entrance. The painted clay statues of the Buddha, his disciples, and bodhisattvas are located in the niche (Plate 1). The ceiling of the niche is painted with figures of bodhisattvas riding on colorful clouds. They appear to be arriving for the sermon of the Buddha (Fig. 1.1). On the left and right sides of the niche are two panels, each with a group of figures. The left group focuses on the Bodhisattva Puxian (Samantabhadra) (Fig. 1.2), and the right group concentrates on the Bodhisattva Wenshu (Mañjuśrī) (Fig. 1.3). These two bodhisattvas became very popular in China during the early Tang dynasty, and continued to attract believers' attention in later periods. Seven images of the early Tang patrons are depicted below the niche. The three striking ink characters "Zhai Jia Ku" (Zhai family cave) are written at the lower center (Fig. 1.4).

Theoretically, the sculptures in the western niche should be viewed as the main deities for religious devotion. Believers are expected to worship the statue of the Buddha sitting on the lotus pedestal at the center of the niche. Although some of the early Tang sculptures have been lost in history or repainted in the Qing dynasty (1662–1911 C.E.), we still

Figure 1.1 |
Painting on the
ceiling of the
western niche,
Cave 220,
Dunhuang,
642 C.E.





Figure 1.2 | Bodhisattva Samantabhadra and his followers, detail of the western wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 c.e. Photo of a copy made by the Dunhuang Research Academy in the 1980s.



Figure 1.3 | Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī and his followers, detail of the western wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 c.e. Photo of a copy made by the Dunhuang Research Academy in the 1980s.

Figure 1.4 |
Inscription
of “Zhai Jia
Ku,” detail
of the west-
ern wall,
Cave 220,
Dunhuang,
642 C.E.



have enough evidence to reconstruct the appearance of the original early Tang niche. We can also rely on other early Tang sculptures such as the painted statues in Dunhuang Caves 322 and 328 to infer the composition and style of the statues in Cave 220.

According to the archaeological remains inside the western niche and the two clay platforms at the left and the right outside the niche, there must have been nine sculptures in the original design. The visual focus of the western niche is certainly the seated Buddha at the center (Plate 2). He is flanked by his two renowned disciples, Ānanda and Kāśyapa (Fig. 1.5). The other eight of the Ten Great Disciples are painted on the wall behind the statues. Two

bodhisattvas stand next to Ānanda and Kāśyapa. In addition to these surviving sculptures, four more statues should have been erected inside the niche next to the bodhisattvas and on the platforms outside the niche. The two missing figures inside the niche might have been two standing Heavenly Kings similar to the two Heavenly King sculptures in the western niche of Cave 322. Some members of the patron family served in the Tang army as officers. So it is therefore reasonable to assume that the patrons would prefer to have had the Heavenly Kings, the guardians of Buddhism often shaped like the generals of the Tang army, placed in the niche of their family cave (Fig. 1.6). If the two missing figures inside the niche were Heavenly Kings, the two missing figures outside the niche, originally located on the two platforms, might have been two warriors who are also guardians of Buddhist believers.⁹ The well-preserved western niche in Cave 194 exemplifies this type of composition of sculptures (Fig. 1.7). These missing figures might have also been attendant bodhisattvas, as seen in Cave 373.

The sculptures remaining in the western niche of Cave 220 demonstrate a strong stylistic influence from central China, especially from the Tang capital Chang'an.¹⁰ Although the surface of the sculptures was repainted probably in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911 C.E.), the original shape of the statues is well preserved. As Marilyn M. Rhie has correctly pointed out: “The Cave 220 sculptures, except for the monk images, have not received the attention they deserve, compared to the famous wall paintings in this cave. Despite the hindrance of the Ch'ing [Qing] period paint and repair of the heads on the Buddha and Bodhisattva, they are extraordinary remains that show the full and confident portrayal of the fully developed, yet still fresh, early Tang body and drapery style.”¹¹ The obvious Tang capital style

Figure 1.5 |
Kāśyapa, disciple of
the Buddha, in the
western niche of
Cave 220, Dun-
huang, 642 C.E.

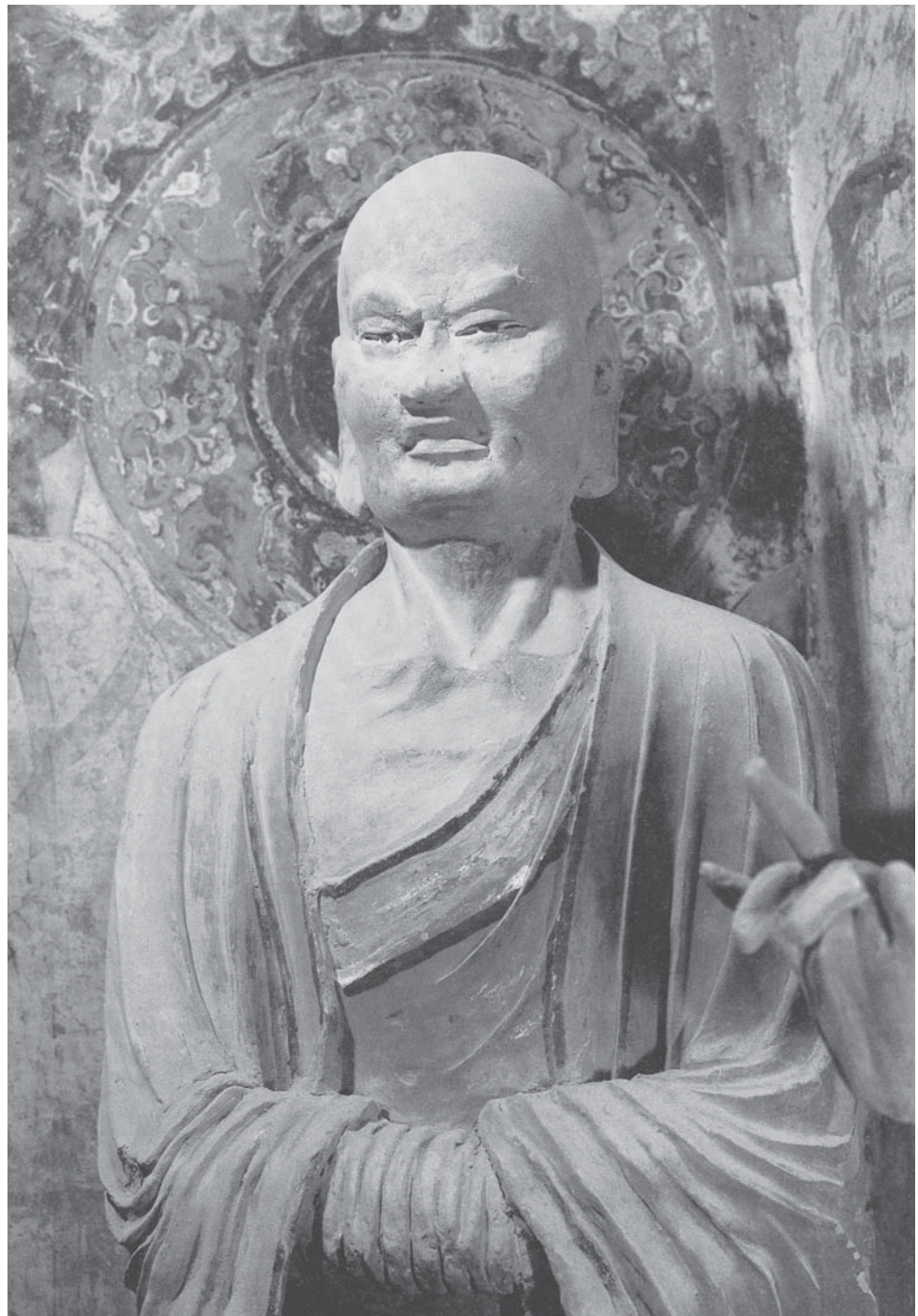


Figure 1.6 | Sculpture
of a Heavenly King,
western niche of Cave 45,
Dunhuang, High Tang
(705–780 C.E.).



Figure 1.7 | West wall of Cave 194,
Dunhuang, High Tang (705–780 C.E.).

of sculptures echoes the Tang capital styles of the wall paintings. Together they demonstrate the patrons' ideology and serve to introduce and promote the Tang cultural and political influence in their hometown.

The statues of the two disciples emerged in the Dunhuang caves in the Northern Zhou period and became popular during the Sui and the early Tang. The pattern of representing two disciples, one young and another old, formed in the Sui and continued throughout the Tang. It has been widely agreed that the young monk is the image of Ānanda and the old monk is the image of Kāśyapa. In legend, Śākyamuni had three thousand disciples; ten of them were called the Ten Great Disciples (*shida dizi*), with Ānanda and Kāśyapa being among them. Why were Ānanda and Kāśyapa chosen to be represented in sculptural form while the other eight disciples were shown in two-dimensional form in Cave 220 and in other Sui-Tang caves?

Ānanda is famous for his excellent memory of what he heard from the Buddha and was entitled the Most Knowledgeable One (*duowen diyi*). Kāśyapa was converted to Buddhism after practicing non-Buddhist religious traditions for many years. He was one of the oldest disciples of the Buddha and gained the title of the Best in the *Dhūta* Practices (*toutuo diyi*). The other eight Great Disciples were also



famous for their wisdom and accomplishment. Why did the young and the old become a visual focus in Buddhist cave-temples of medieval China? It is possible that the images of Ānanda and Kāśyapa represent the young and the old generations of Buddhist practitioners; therefore, all Buddhist monks, including the young and the old, could identify with the images. The statues of the old and the young disciples not only set up models for all Buddhist practitioners but also symbolize the hierarchy of the

monastic community. The symbolic function of the two disciple images connects them with Chinese Buddhist monks and explains their great popularity in Chinese Buddhist art.

The two pictures depicted on the left and right of the niche represent the bodhisattvas Puxian and Wenshu and their followers. Numerous bodhisattvas have been introduced into China from India, yet only four of them—Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara), Dizang (Kṣitigarbha), Wenshu, and Puxian—became well known in China. Guanyin saves people from suffering, while Dizang rescues people's souls from hell. Wenshu has a great reputation for his unlimited wisdom (*dazhi Wenshu*) and is recognized by the blue lion (*qingshi*) he rides all the time. Puxian is famous for his theoretical understanding of Buddhist philosophy (*li*) and his great morality (*de*). It has been suggested that the bodhisattvas Puxian and Wenshu were favorites among the intellectual-official circles, whereas Guanyin and Dizang were more favored by the ordinary people.¹² The patron family of Cave 220 was an educated official clan and had a reason to favor Bodhisattvas Puxian and Wenshu. The two pictures of Puxian and Wenshu on the west wall of Cave 220, in fact, are the earliest examples of these two bodhisattvas in the Dunhuang caves. They might signify the increasing importance of bodhisattvas in early Tang Chinese Buddhist communities.

North Wall: The Healing Ritual and Its Visual Representations

The painting on the north wall of Cave 220 represents mainly the Healing Ritual devoted to Bhaiṣajya-guru, or the Healing Master (Plate 3). Symmetrically composed, this painting depicts seven sculpturelike images of the Buddha in the middle section. The central placement and impressive scale of these

Buddha images indicate that they are the visual focus of the whole painting. Ten bodhisattvas are shown in a smaller size among the Buddha images. Above the Buddha images are auspicious clouds and flying *apsarasas*, or heavenly musicians. Long, colorful banners fly from short spars atop three tall flagstaffs. Below the Buddha images, a large magnificent scene of lamp lighting and dance and music performance is shown. On the left and right sides of the Buddha images, the generals or guardians of the Bhaiṣajya-guru cult known as Yakṣa are represented. Together, these motifs create a sacred environment of religious ritual and an exciting scene of entertainment.

Previous scholarship has vaguely identified the north wall painting as *Yaoshijing bian* (Illustration of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*). Most scholars believe that this painting depicts the Paradise of the Healing Master.¹³ My study of the iconography of this painting, however, argues that this painting mainly represents the Healing Ritual of Bhaiṣajya-guru rather than his paradise. My argument for the identification of the north wall is based on four observations concerning the painting: scriptural basis, textual references, pictorial prototypes, and religious/social function.

Scriptural Basis

In the Chinese Buddhist texts preserved in the Tripitaka, we find four different versions of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*: *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Abhiṣeka [Initiation] of Clearing Off the Sins of the Past and the Birth and Death to Reach the Pure Land* (*Fo shuo guanding bachu guozui shengsi dedu jing*);¹⁴ *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Fundamental Vows of the Master of Healing Tathāgata* (*Fo shuo Yaoshi rulai benyuan jing*);¹⁵ *Sutra on the Merits of the Fundamental Vows of the Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata* (*Yaoshi liuliguang rulai benyuan gongde*

jing);¹⁶ and *Sutra on the Merit of the Fundamental Vows of the Seven Masters of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Buddhas* (*Yaoshi liuliguang qifo benyuan gongde jing*).¹⁷ The first two of the four Tripitaka versions of the sutra were translated before 642 C.E., the time of the construction of the Zhai family cave. Another local version of the sutra, also translated before 642 C.E., was discovered in the “library cave” at Dunhuang.¹⁸ These three versions of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* were available at Dunhuang when Cave 220 was built and might have been used as the scriptural basis of the painting. The last two Tripitaka versions, known respectively as the Xuanzang version (650 C.E.) and the Yijing version (707 C.E.), were translated after the construction of Cave 220 and could not be used as the scriptural basis for the north wall painting.

If we consider non-Chinese versions of the sutra, we find one Sanskrit, two Tibetan, one Sogdian, one Khotanese, and two Mongolian versions.¹⁹ All of the non-Chinese versions except the Sanskrit version were clearly made after the creation of Cave 220 and therefore cannot be considered as a scriptural basis of the painting. The Sanskrit version was discovered in a stupa near Gilgit in northern Pakistan in 1931, where archaeologists found one complete text and several fragments of the Sanskrit version. According to Nalinaksha Dutt, these texts probably belong to the sixth or seventh century.²⁰ His study also shows that these Sanskrit texts were very close to the Chinese version of the sutra translated by Monk Xuanzang in 650 C.E., and it is possible that Xuanzang’s translation is based on the Gilgit Sanskrit version. It is also possible that the Gilgit Sanskrit version is a translation of Xuanzang’s Chinese text.²¹ The date of the Sanskrit version seems uncertain. However, striking similarities between the Sanskrit version and Xuanzang’s version suggest that they were circulated

around the same time and probably were unavailable when Cave 220 was constructed. Furthermore, most Dunhuang murals used Chinese sutras as their textual references, and non-Chinese scriptures were rarely consulted.²² It is reasonable, therefore, to exclude this uncertain Sanskrit version from our discussion on the scriptural basis for the north wall painting of the Zhai family cave.

Local records found at Dunhuang prove that the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* was a very popular Buddhist scripture in that region.²³ Two hundred eighty-seven copies of the sutra have been discovered among the Dunhuang texts from the library cave. Of these texts, 118 are the so-called Dunhuang-Huijian version (the local version of Dunhuang plus the misidentified Śrimitra version),²⁴ 5 are the Dharmagupta version, 143 are the Xuanzang version, and 1 is the Yijing version. The remaining 20 texts of the sutra from the library cave are in fragments and cannot be firmly identified.²⁵ This inventory shows that Xuanzang’s translation was the most popular version of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* in ancient Dunhuang. When Cave 220 was built in 642 C.E., however, Xuanzang was traveling in India and had not yet brought his famous collection of the Sanskrit sutras back to China. Yijing’s translation was done in 707 C.E., a few decades later than Xuanzang’s translation. Apparently, the only two versions of the sutra available at Dunhuang around the year 642 were the Dunhuang-Huijian (457 C.E.) and the Dharmagupta (617 C.E.) versions.

Comparing the Dunhuang-Huijian version and the Dharmagupta version, we find a striking difference in the description of the ritual ceremony. The former version only mentions that “[one] should make the image of the Healing Buddha,”²⁶ but the latter version emphasizes that “[one] should make seven images of the Healing Buddha and put seven

lamps in front of each image.”²⁷ In the painting on the north wall of Cave 220, seven impressive sculpturelike images of the Healing Buddha are shown, with countless lamps displayed on the “lamp trees” (*dengshu*) and a “lamp tower” (*denglou*) in front of them. The large scale and central placement of the seven Buddha images clearly indicate that the main scriptural basis of the painting is the Dharmagupta version of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*.

Textual References

If we take the Dharmagupta version of the sutra as the main textual reference for the motifs shown in the painting, the mural’s visual details may be identified by comparing them with the related records in the sutra. According to the Dharmagupta version of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*:

If you desire to rescue a sick person from the dangerous disease, for the sake of the person you should accept and hold to the eightfold vows for seven days and seven nights. You should collect together food, drink, and other property and, in accordance with your means, offer them to monks. You should worship the Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata six times during the day and at night. Read and recite this sutra forty-nine times. Light forty-nine lamps and make seven images of the Tathāgata. In front of each image arrange seven lamps. Make each lamp as large as a cartwheel, and for forty-nine days let their shining light ceaselessly burn.²⁸

This textual description of the Healing Ritual matches the visual details in the painting on the north wall of Cave 220 as follows.

THE SEVEN IMAGES OF THE BUDDHA

The sutra requires one to “make seven images of the Tathāgata.”²⁹ In the painting, we can see seven large images of the Tathāgata, or the Healing Buddha,

which are shown in frontal, standing poses and in a concave-convex style to resemble three-dimensional sculptures. This kind of frontal, standing, sculpturelike image seems fitting in the context of religious ritual performance.

It has been suggested that the seven images of the Buddha represent *Yaoshi qifo*, or the seven brothers of the Healing Master, who live in the Eastern Paradise of Bhaiṣajya-guru.³⁰ The seven brothers of the Healing Master are recorded only in the Yijing version of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* which was not available when the north wall painting of Cave 220 was made.³¹ According to the Dharmagupta version of the sutra, the Healing Buddha is the only master of his own paradise. The seven images of the Buddha, which are needed for the performance of the Healing Ritual, therefore, indicate that this painting mainly represents the ritual devoted to the Healing Master instead of representing his paradise.

THE FIVE-COLORED BANNERS

Making banners is an important part of the Healing Ritual. According to the sutra, one should “make five-colored banner(s) of forty-nine feet long” in the ritual.³² In the painting, three long and colorful banners hang on short sticks atop three tall poles, two of which stand at either side of the seven Buddha images while the third one stands between the fifth and sixth Buddha images (Fig. 1.8). The presence of the “five-colored banners” further proves that this painting represents the Healing Ritual.³³

LIGHTING THE LAMPS

A crucial component of the Healing Ritual is to light lamps in front of the images of the Healing Buddha. Two large “lamp trees” (*dengshu*) and a miniature “lamp tower” (*denglou*) are shown in front of the seven Buddha images in the painting. The “lamp



Figure 1.8 | Five-colored banner, detail of the north wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

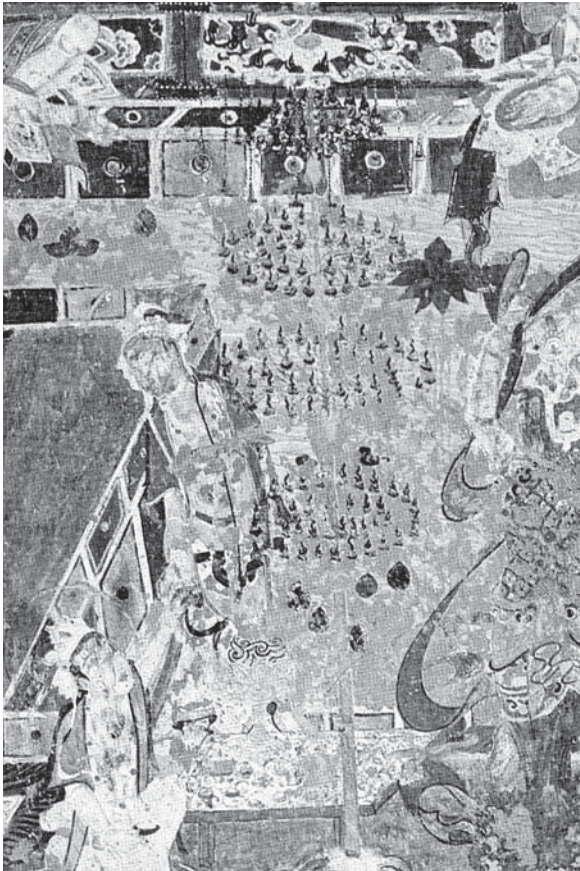


Figure 1.9 | Lamp wheels, detail of the north wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

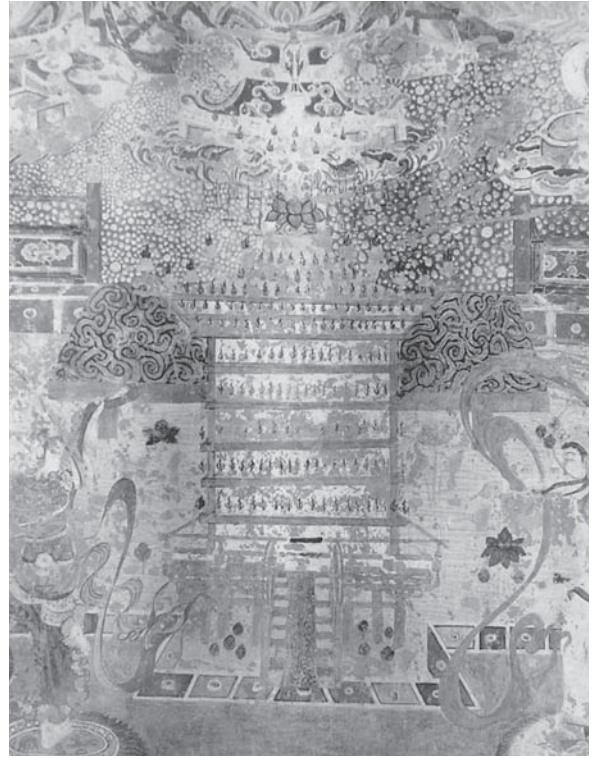


Figure 1.10 | Lamp tower, detail of the north wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

trees” contain several tiers of the “lamp wheels” (*denglun*), on which numerous oil lamps shine (Fig. 1.9). The ten floors of the “lamp tower” are also filled with shining oil lamps (Fig. 1.10). These countless shining lamps embody the significance of the sentence “lighting forty-nine lamps and letting their shining light ceaselessly burn for forty-nine days”³⁴ and confirm that the major theme of the painting is the Healing Ritual rather than the paradise of the Healing Master.

MUSIC AND DANCE

The lower section of the painting depicts a wide stage, which can be divided into three parts. The left



Figure 1.11 | Dance and music performance, detail of the north wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

and right parts of the stage are filled with lively musicians and singers. Four whirling and jumping dancers are shown at the middle part (Fig. 1.11). These musicians, singers, and dancers occupy a large space in the painting, yet they are represented only by a short sentence in the sutra: “*guyue gezan*,” or “playing music and singing praise,”³⁵ which is also a part of the Healing Ritual.

THE YAKṢA GENERALS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS

When the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* was spoken by the Buddha, twelve Great Yakṣa Generals were attending the meeting and each of them had seven thousand dependents or troops. At the end of the Buddha’s teaching, these generals vowed to protect all believers of the Healing Buddha:

O, Lord, we now, having received the Buddha’s awesome force, have been granted the hearing of the name of the Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata. Never again will we have the fear of sinking into an awesome path. Together, we all have the same thought: we will take utmost refuge in the Buddha, the Teachings,

and the Order. We aspire to bear responsibility to do acts of righteous benefit, enrichment, peace, and joy for all sentient beings, no matter in what village, town, capital, or forest grove of retirement they dwell. As to those who circulate this sutra or who further accept and hold to the name of the Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, and revere and worship him, we will cause them to be freed from all suffering and difficulties. All the desires of these persons will be caused to be fulfilled.³⁶

The Buddha praised all the Great Yakṣa Generals saying:

Excellent, excellent, Great Yakṣa Generals! When you think of repaying the merciful blessing of the Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, you should ever serve all sentient beings in the way you have described, bringing to them blessing and benefits.³⁷

In the painting, the twelve Yakṣas are shown in two groups, six in each group, standing at both sides of the seven Buddha images with dependents placed

among them (Plate 4). Their bodies are protected by armor, their hands grasp weapons, as though they are great generals of the Tang army, and their heads are adorned by helmets decorated with animal symbols (Fig. 1.12).³⁸

THE EIGHT OR TEN BODHISATTVAS

Ten bodhisattvas are depicted among the seven Buddha images. The two bodhisattvas who flank the central Buddha differ slightly from the other eight bodhisattvas in terms of location and posture. They may be considered to be the two chief assistants to the Healing Master (Plate 5). According to the sutra, their names are Sunlight and Moonlight. The other eight bodhisattvas are described as having the responsibility of guiding the deceased believers of the Bhaiṣajya-guru cult to the Western Paradise of Amitābha. According to the Dharmagupta version of the sutra:

If one wants to be reborn into the Western Paradise of Amitābha, for the cause of hearing the name of the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, there would be eight bodhisattvas flying in the sky to show him the correct path when the person is dying. This person, therefore, would be naturally reborn in the lotus flower with varied colors in that world.³⁹

The function of the eight bodhisattvas is to guide the souls of the believers of Bhaiṣajya-guru to the Western Paradise of Amitābha instead of to the Eastern Paradise of the Healing Buddha. From this point of view, the eight bodhisattvas bridge the Bhaiṣajya-guru cult and the Amitābha cult. The link between the Bhaiṣajya-guru cult and the Amitābha cult is visible in the pictorial composition of Cave 220, whose north and south walls represent, respectively, the Healing Ritual and the Western Paradise.



Figure 1.12 | A Yakṣa general (with a dragon decoration on the head), detail of the north wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 c.E.

On the whole, the visual details of the north wall painting do not match the scriptural descriptions of the Eastern Paradise of Bhaiṣajya-guru. Instead, they can be better connected with the Healing Ritual described in the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*. Creating seven images of the Healing Buddha, making the five-colored banners, lighting the lamps, performing music and singing praise—all are included in the process of the Healing Ritual. Thus this splendid

large painting seems to represent mainly the Healing Ritual rather than the paradise of the Healing Master.

Although we find close links between the Healing Ritual and the motifs depicted in the painting, it is too simplistic to conclude that this painting is a visual representation of a real ritual. In fact, this painting represents the Healing Ritual as described in the scripture. The seven images of the Buddha, the colorful banners, the shining lamps, and the musicians are clearly recorded in the sutra and shown in the painting, but some key elements of the ritual, including the religious practitioners and the patrons, are absent from the painting. No persons reading or reciting the sutra are visible. In other words, the actual participants in the ritual are missing from the painting. The absence of the patrons and monks or nuns suggests that this painting may have been used as a visual aid for actual ritual participants.⁴⁰

Given spatial limitation, the monks and patrons could not erect tall lamp trees or make large images of the Buddha in the cave. In addition, it would be impossible to have large-scale performances of music and dance within this limited space. Obviously, this splendid painting should be a visual substitution for the major part of the real ritual. With the painting as a visual aid, the participants of the ritual, including the monks and patrons, could simply read the sutra, light a few lamps, and chant eulogies to complete the ritual performance.

Visual Representations of the Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra

The earliest visual representations of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* are found in four Sui-dynasty (581–618 C.E.) caves at Dunhuang. These four paintings, shown on the ceilings of Caves 417, 433, and 436 and on the eastern wall (above the door) of Cave 394, represent the Healing Ritual in varied ways. Given that the

murals were made before the Dharmagupta translation, their scriptural basis must have been the Dunhuang-Huijian version of the sutra, the only version available by the end of the Sui. This version of the sutra repeatedly emphasizes that one should “create the image of the Buddha,” “make the five-colored banners,” “light lamps,” and “offer incense and flowers” to the Buddha when holding the ritual.⁴¹ These descriptions on the Healing Ritual match the motifs shown in the Sui paintings.

The ceiling of Cave 417, dated to the Sui dynasty, depicts the Healing Buddha at the center and flanked by eight bodhisattvas (four on each side). A tower or tree of lamp wheels is placed in front of the Buddha. The twelve Yakṣa generals kneel at both sides of the lamp wheels. The impressive “wheels of lamps” indicate that this painting represents the Healing Ritual (Fig. 1.13).

The painting on the ceiling of Cave 433 represents the Healing Ritual with more details in comparison with the painting in Cave 417. Bhaiṣajya-guru sits at the center and is flanked by his two chief assistants, Sunlight and Moonlight. Nine lamp wheels hang on each of the two poles erected at both sides of the Buddha and bodhisattvas. The five-colored banners hanging on the tops of the two poles fly in the wind. The twelve Yakṣa generals kneel in two rows on the left and right of the holy icons. In addition to the motifs recorded in the sutra, flying *apsaras* are added to enhance the sacred environment of the ritual (Fig. 1.14).

The painting on the ceiling of Cave 436 is similar to the painting in Cave 433 in terms of content and composition. The painting on the eastern wall of Cave 395, the only Sui illustration of the sutra that is not shown on the ceiling of a cave, is severely damaged. What we can see is a detail depicting a few Yakṣa generals. It may be surmised that this painting,



Figure 1.13 | Illustration of the *Bhaisajya-guru Sūtra*, Cave 417, Dunhuang, Sui dynasty (581–618 c.e.).

like the other three illustrations of the sutra made in the Sui dynasty, also represents the Healing Ritual.

Three of the four illustrations of the *Bhaisajya-guru Sūtra* in the Sui caves are depicted on the slopes of the vaulted ceilings facing the pictures of the Tushita Heaven of Maitreya. This obvious visual link between Maitreya's Celestial Palace and the Bhaisajya-guru cult is also described in the Dunhuang-Huijian version of the *Bhaisajya-guru Sūtra*: "Those who want to be reborn in the Tushita Celestial Palace [of Maitreya] should also worship the Buddha of Lapis Lazuli Radiance."⁴² The connection between Bhaisajya-guru and Maitreya, however, can be found only in the Dunhuang-Huijian version of the sutra; later versions do not mention it. This is paralleled by a compositional change in the Tang caves, for Tang

illustrations of the sutra no longer face pictures of the Tushita Heaven. Instead, they face the Western Paradise of Amitābha, as depicted in Cave 220, which is the earliest known illustrated case of the Bhaisajya-guru–Amitābha connection at Dunhuang.⁴³

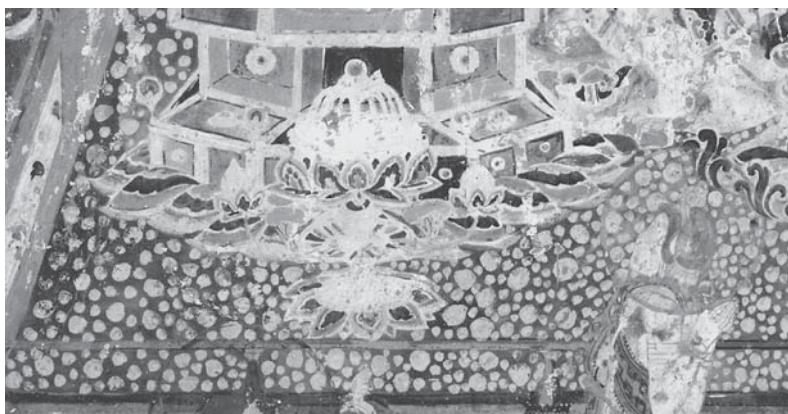
Comparing the north wall of Cave 220 with the previous Sui illustrations of the *Bhaisajya-guru Sūtra*, we find two new motifs. One is a crystal-like platform on which the seven images of the Buddha are placed, and the other is a lotus pond in front of the Buddha images.

The crystal-like platform is depicted with numerous colorful dots (Fig. 1.15). According to the scriptural records, the Eastern Pure Land of Bhaisajya-guru is made of "silver and lapis lazuli" (Dunhuang-Huijian version)⁴⁴ or just "lapis lazuli"

Figure 1.14 | Illustration of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*, Cave 433, Dunhuang, Sui dynasty (581–618 c.e.).



Figure 1.15 | Lapis lazuli ground, detail of the north wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 c.e.



(Dharmagupta version).⁴⁵ It is possible that the artist intended to place the seven images of Bhaiṣajya-guru on a platform that is close to the land of his own paradise. A poem composed by Emperor Yang of the Sui dynasty (r. 604–617 c.e.) about the New Year celebration, which I believe is related to the development of the Healing Ritual, gives us clues to understanding the motif.⁴⁶ The emperor wrote:

Wheel of Dharma [Law] turns up in the sky,
Indian music comes up to the sky.

Trees of lamps shine with one thousand beams,
Flames of flowers open on the seven branches.
Moon image freezes in flowing water,
Spring breeze embraces nighttime plums.
Banners fly above the golden ground,
Bells come out from the terrace of lapis lazuli.⁴⁷

The emperor's description of the event is very close to the scriptural record of the Healing Ritual in the Dharmagupta version of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*, which was translated toward the end of the Sui dynasty. It also matches the motifs depicted on the north wall of Cave 220. In particular, the last sentence of the poem mentions the "terrace of lapis lazuli" (*liulitai*), which exactly echoes the crystal-like terrace or platform in the painting. It is possible that in the common imagination of the late Sui and early Tang period, a "terrace" (*lan*) or "platform" (*tai*) made of lapis lazuli would appear in the Healing Ritual or similar events.

The lotus pond appearing in this painting is not recorded either in the Dunhuang-Huijian or in the Dharmagupta versions (Fig. 1.16). We cannot even find it in the slightly later Xuanzang version. Why did the artist add a lotus pond in the painting?

The concept of a lotus pond (*lianchi*) is mainly associated with the Western Pure Land in Buddhist scriptures. Most sutras on the Western Pure Land, including the *Wuliangshou jing* (Sutra of the Buddha of infinite life), *Amituo jing* (*Amitābha sutra*), and *Guan Wuliangshou jing* (Visualization sutra), describe in detail the beauty and splendor of the lotus ponds in the Western Paradise.⁴⁸ Some other sutras occasion-

ally mention a lotus pond but do not describe it in detail. For example, the *Lotus Sutra* (*Miaofa lianhua jing*) talks about "rebirth through the lotus flower" but does not provide any details of the lotus pond. Exclusively on the basis of textual investigation, one



Figure 1.16 | Lotus pond, detail of the north wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

may conclude that the lotus pond eventually comes to symbolize the Western Pure Land in Buddhist scriptures.

We find, however, a much wider use of the lotus pond motif in early Chinese Buddhist art. The earliest surviving examples of this type are two paintings, dated to 420 c.e., from Cave 169 at Binglingsi, another Buddhist cave site in Gansu. One of the paintings shows the Buddha sitting on a lotus pedestal, flanked by two bodhisattvas. Below the pedestal is a water pond (Fig. 1.17). An inscription, still legible, next to the Buddha image reads: “Wuliangshou Fo” (Buddha Amitāyus). This inscription suggests that the lotus pond in the painting is a symbolic representation of the Western Pure Land.

More examples can be seen in the early Dunhuang caves, where the lotus pond motif is used in varied contexts. The west wall of Mogao Cave 272, dated to the Northern Liang period (420–439 c.e.), depicts more than twenty bodhisattvas in different poses sitting on lotus flowers whose stalks emerge from a pond (Fig. 1.18). The statue of the Buddha in the western niche of this cave has been identified as Maitreya rather than Amitābha or Amitāyus, in which case the water pond should symbolize not the Western Pure Land but the holy site of Maitreya preaching the Law. The motif of a lotus pond in association with a Buddha preaching the Law can also

be found in several Northern Wei (439–534 c.e.) and Western Wei (535–556 c.e.) caves at Dunhuang, including Caves 257, 251 (Fig. 1.19), and 249. However, there is no evidence, such as an inscription, to indicate that they are visual representations of the Western Pure Land.

Lotus ponds appearing in the square patterns painted on the ceilings of the early Dunhuang caves have been termed *zaojing* (decorative well) or *fangjing* (square well) in Chinese texts.⁴⁹ During the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), a *zaojing* or *fangjing* painted on the ceiling of a wooden building represented the idea of suppressing fire.⁵⁰ In the decora-



Figure 1.17 | Buddha preaching the Law (in lotus pond), Cave 169, Binglingsi, Gansu, 420 c.e. After *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua bian* 17, p. 3.

Figure 1.18 |
Bodhisattvas
in lotus pond,
west wall of
Cave 272,
Dunhuang,
Northern
Liang (420–
439 C.E.).



tive wells painted on the ceilings of the Dunhuang caves, there are naked people swimming in the water (Fig. 1.20), who are probably the newly reborn in the Western Pure Land. These motifs of lotus ponds may be perhaps identified as preliminary images of the Western Paradise.

Several illustrations of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* in the Sui-dynasty Dunhuang caves depict two lotus ponds filled with flowers and aquatic birds in the courtyard of Vimalakīrti's home, where a famous debate between Vimalakīrti and Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī took place (Plate 6). These lotus ponds do not symbolize the Western Paradise. Rather, they represent a beautiful garden of a wealthy Chinese family.

On the whole, motifs of lotus ponds in early Chinese Buddhist art do not exclusively represent the Western Paradise and instead imply different meanings in varied visual contexts. However, they all denote a beautiful and pure place. In the examples mentioned above, it is not clear which "pure land" the lotus pond is a symbol of, and this ambiguity in its identity suggests that it could be used to symbolize the "pure land" of any Buddha. It is possible that the painter of the north wall of Cave 220 tried to use this motif to indicate the Eastern Paradise of the Healing Buddha or at least a holy platform on which the images of the Healing Master should be placed.

If the lotus pond on the north wall painting of

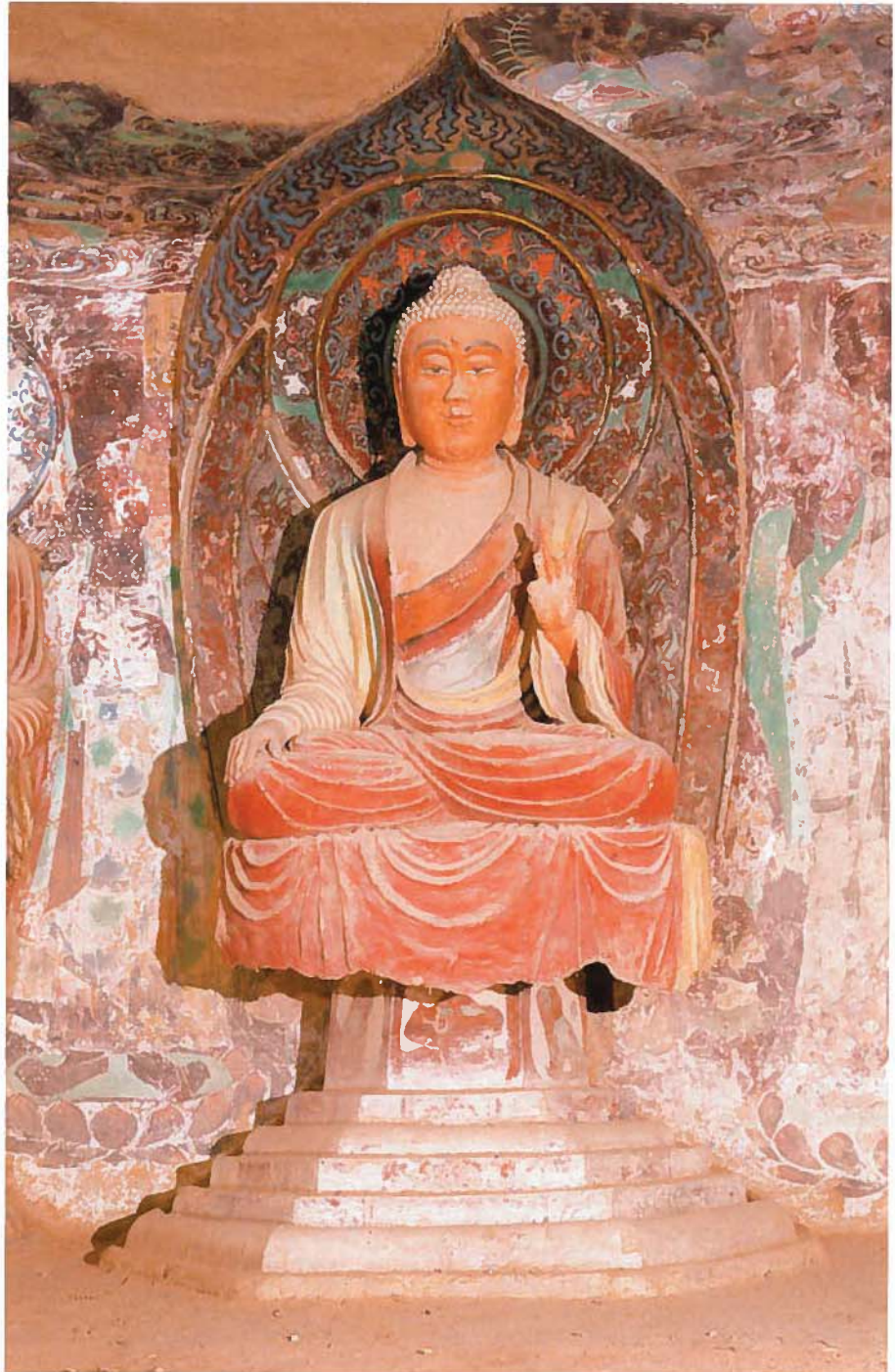


Figure 1.19 | Buddha preaching the Law (in lotus pond), Cave 251, Dunhuang, Northern Wei (439–534 C.E.).



Plate 1 | West wall of Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 c.e.

Plate 2 | Statue of the
Buddha, western niche
of Cave 220, Dunhuang,
642 C.E.



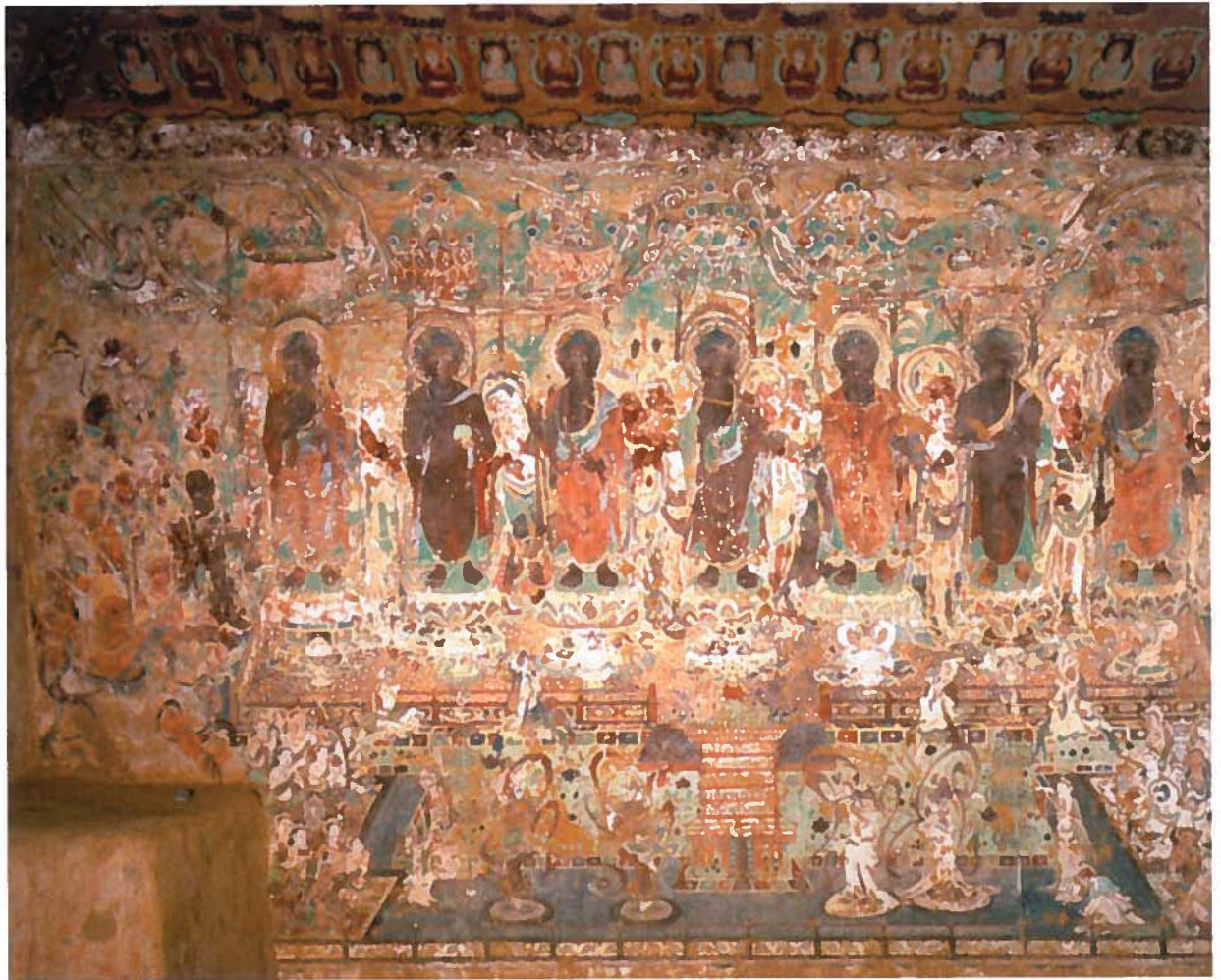


Plate 3 | North wall of Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

Plate 4 |
Yakṣa generals,
detail of the
north wall,
Cave 220,
Dunhuang,
642 C.E.





Plate 5 | The Healing Buddha and his two assistant bodhisattvas, detail of the north wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.



Plate 6 | Lotus pond, detail of the illustration of
Vimalakirti-nirdeśa, west wall of Cave 420, Dunhuang,
Sui dynasty (581–618 c.e.).



Plate 7 | Western Paradise, south wall of Cave 220,
Dunhuang, 642 c.e.

Plate 8 | Treasury
trees, detail of the
Western Paradise,
south wall of Cave
220, Dunhuang,
642 C.E.





Plate 9 | Building in
the Western Paradise,
detail of the south wall,
Cave 220, Dunhuang,
642 C.E.

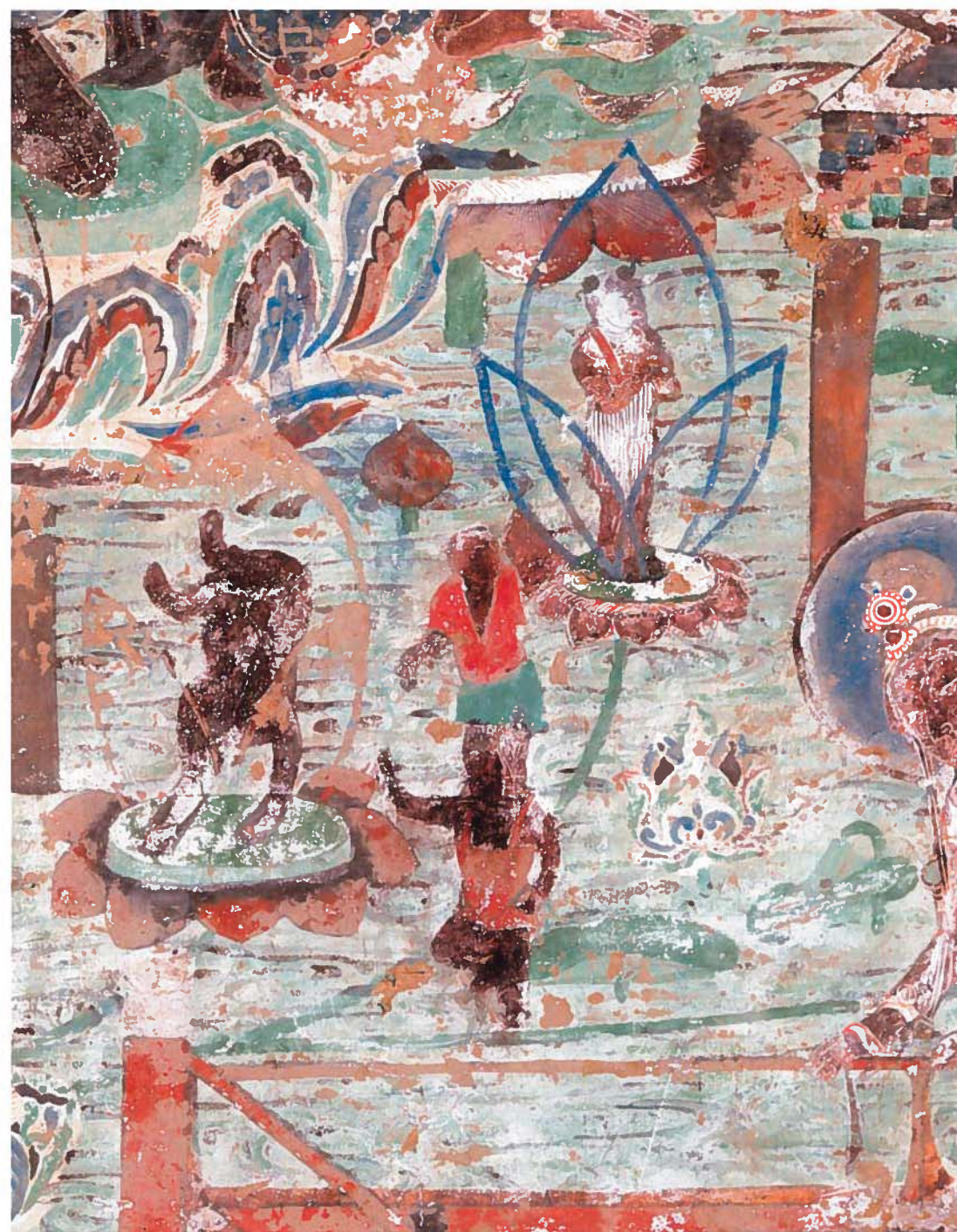


Plate 11 | Tang emperor and his court officials, detail of the east wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 c.e.

Plate 10 | (*opposite*) Reborn children playing in the water, detail of the Western Paradise, south wall of Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 c.e.



Plate 12 | New type of Mañjuśrī picture, north wall of the passageway of Cave 220, Dunhuang, 925 C.E.



Plate 13 | Male patrons from the Cheng family (part),
Cave 62, Dunhuang, Sui dynasty (581-618 c.E.).



Plate 14 | Female patrons from the Cheng family (part),
Cave 62, Dunhuang, Sui dynasty (581-618 C.E.).

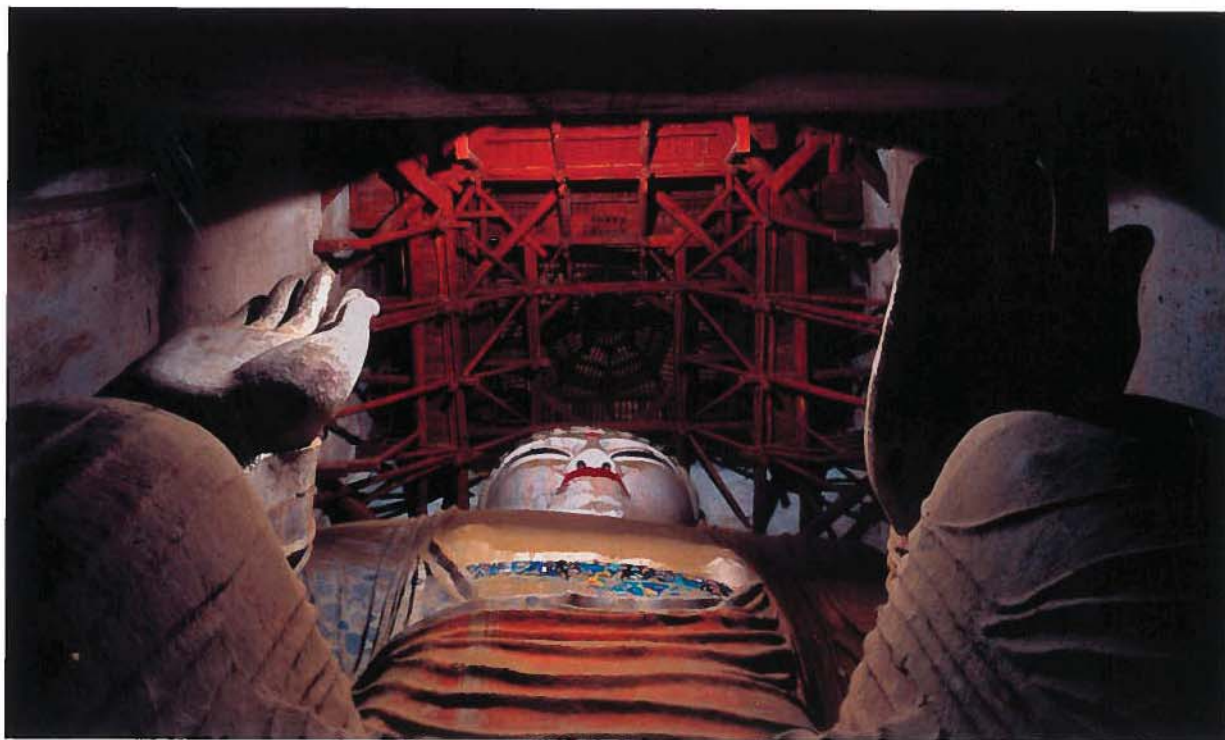
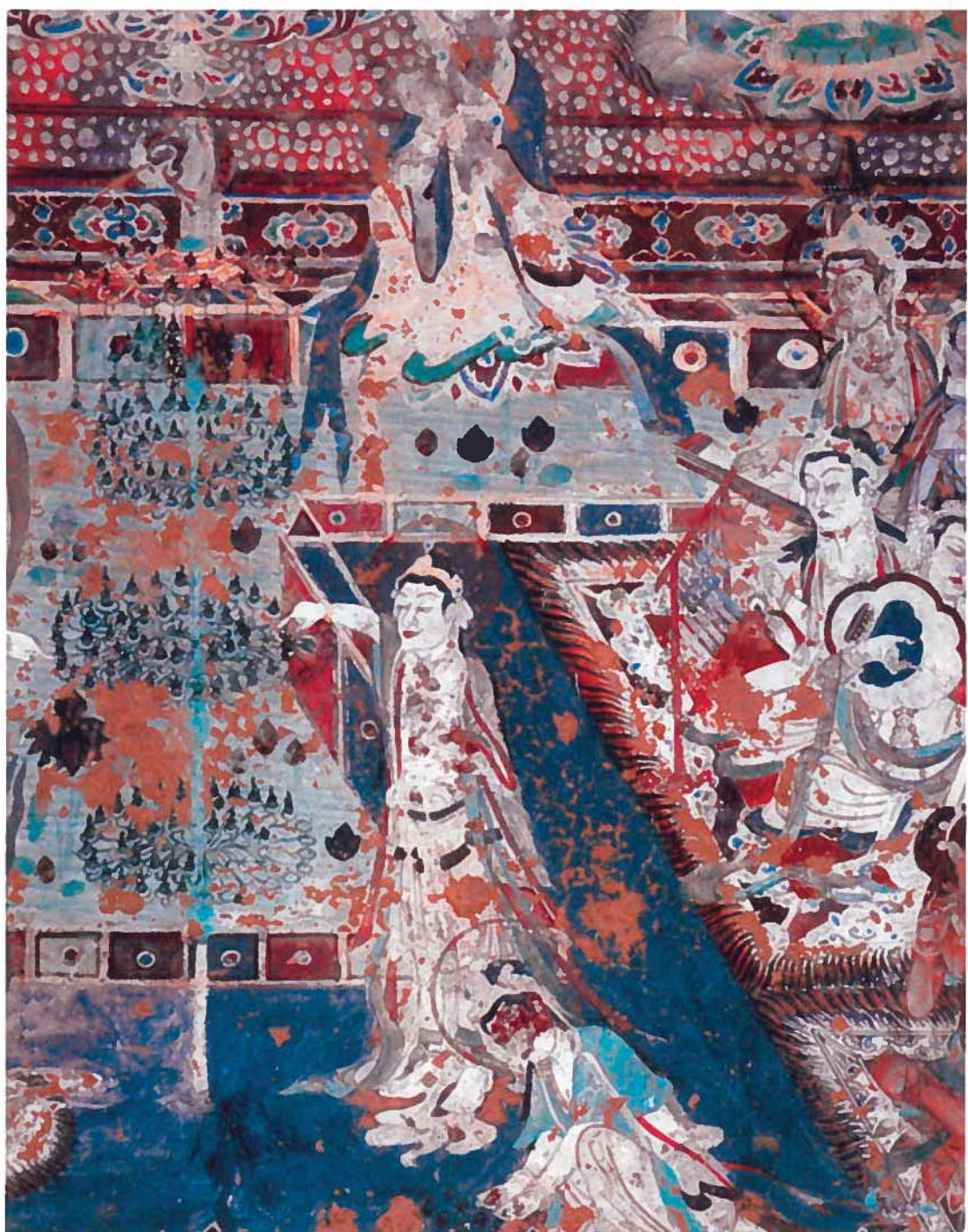


Plate 15 | Colossal statue of Buddha Maitreya, Cave 96,
Dunhuang, 695 c.e.

Plate 16 | *(following
page)* Lamp wheels,
detail of the north wall,
Cave 220, Dunhuang,
642 c.e.



Cave 220 is intended to represent the Eastern Pure Land of Bhaiṣajya-guru, we find a sign of transition from the representation of the Healing Ritual to the representation of the Eastern Paradise. Before Cave 220, all illustrations of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* depict the Healing Ritual with various visual details. Yet after Cave 220, all illustrations of the same sutra focus on the Paradise of the Healing Buddha instead of the ritual devoted to him.

The *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* was not illustrated in the Dunhuang caves for 134 years after the creation of the north wall painting of Cave 220. Upon the construction of Cave 148, the Li family cave, in 776 C.E., the north side of the east wall of this cave was used to depict this sutra by clearly focusing on the Eastern Paradise of the Healing Buddha rather than on the Healing Ritual. A large compound of palatial buildings is displayed as the main background. Bhaiṣajya-guru and his followers, including the bodhisattvas and the Yakṣa generals and their relatives, sit on the platforms floating on a huge water pond in which a few newly reborn infants are visible (Fig. 1.21). In addition, the twelve great vows (*shier dayuan*) of the Healing Master and the nine untimely deaths (*jiu hengsi*) are shown in two side panels on the left and right sides of the Eastern Paradise.⁵¹ This paradise composition



Figure 1.20 | Swimmers in the lotus pond, ceiling of Cave 257, Dunhuang, Northern Wei (439-534 C.E.).

corresponds exactly to the composition of the Western Paradise depicted on the opposite wall of the same cave.

Fifty-five illustrations of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* have been identified in the Tang-dynasty Dunhuang caves. Most of these paintings delineate the sutra by focusing on the Eastern Paradise of the Healing Buddha with the same composition as the



Figure 1.21 | Eastern Paradise of Bhaiṣajya-guru, north side of the east wall, Cave 148, Dunhuang, 776 c.e.

east wall of Cave 148 discussed above. The only exception to this group is the earliest of these caves, Cave 220, whose north wall is decorated mainly with the Healing Ritual. The prevalence of the Eastern Paradise scene leads us to conclude that the Healing Ritual no longer occupied the dominant position in the visual representations of this sutra during the Tang dynasty.

Religious and Social Functions of the Healing Ritual

To understand why the Zhai clan chose to represent the Healing Ritual in their family cave in this his-

torical moment, we need to examine the function of the Healing Ritual and to discuss the painting of the ritual in its early Tang local historical context. The main religious purpose of the Healing Ritual is to cure severe illness and especially to save people from untimely death, as the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* explains. The early practice of this ritual in China, however, appears to have been mixed with Chinese traditional concepts such as longevity and filial piety.

The earliest surviving evidence on the Bhaiṣajya-guru cult is an inscription, dated to 285 c.e., which was recorded in an ancient text.⁵² In this inscription, a patron by the name of Zhang Yangci, after the birth

of his son, prays to the Healing Buddha and wishes his deceased parents, living relatives, and all living beings to meet the Buddha and to hear the dharma in all their circles of rebirth. He wishes them to have a strong faith in Buddhism and to finally reach enlightenment. The prayer of the patron seems like a common wish of a Buddhist believer in that time. No special wishes related to healing are shown in the inscription. It is possible that at the very beginning Chinese believers simply took Bhaiṣajya-guru as one of the many buddhas introduced into China from India without a clear understanding of his specific power as a healer.

An inscription remaining in the Guyang cave at Longmen,⁵³ dated to the seventeenth day of the seventh moon of 525 C.E., is evidence of the beginning of a focus on the specific power of Bhaiṣajya-guru to extend people's lives.⁵⁴ This interesting change apparently reflects the influence of the Huijian version of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*, which intentionally added a "method of life extension" (*xumingfa*) into the sutra.⁵⁵

The earliest extant record on the Healing Ritual is found in the eighty-fourth chapter of the *Beishi* (The history of the north).⁵⁶ It is the story of Zhang Yuan, a sixteen-year-old boy who lived in the Northern Zhou period (557–580 C.E.). Zhang Yuan's grandfather had been blind for three years, and the boy could not help but cry and read Buddhist sutras day and night to pray for his grandfather's eyesight to return. When he read the sentence "the blind can regain their sight" in the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*, he decided to have the Healing Ritual performed and invited seven monks, lit seven lamps, and read the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* for seven days and nights. The miracle did not happen immediately. The boy then said to himself: "We have been performing the ritual every day. Isn't this a burden for my masters? As a

grandson I have not been filial, so that my grandfather became blind. I am now donating the light to all living beings. If my grandfather could recover from his blindness, would that I might lose my own sight in his place!" The ritual was again diligently performed for seven days. Zhang Yuan dreamed on the seventh night that an old man was healing his grandfather's eyes with a golden comb. The old man told him that he should not be sad and that his grandfather's eyes would recover three days later. He was overjoyed and woke up and told his dream to everybody in his home. Three days later, his grandfather indeed recovered.⁵⁷ Zhang Yuan's story reveals the mixture of Buddhist ritual and traditional values in Chinese society at this time. Although the Healing Ritual was performed for the purpose of healing the grandfather's eyes, what the boy tried to prove by holding the ritual was his filial piety.

Another account concerning the Healing Ritual is from a eulogy attributed to Emperor Wen of the Chen dynasty (r. 560–567 C.E.). Patronized by the court, this large ritual event involved a thousand monks and lasted a thousand days. In the eulogy, the emperor explained the great protective power of the Healing Master and his ability to fulfill people's varied wishes. In particular, he emphasized that Bhaiṣajya-guru could rescue people from the dangers caused by nature and by human beings, including "flood, fire, bandits, thieves, diseases, pestilence, hunger, accusers, creditors, imperial laws and county officials."⁵⁸ These dangers were, in fact, social problems of that time. It appears that the emperor tried to use the Healing Ritual to solve his own problems as a secular ruler. Zhang Yuan's story and Emperor Wen's eulogy suggest that the Healing Ritual not only was used for personal healing but was also intended to solve social problems in the mid-sixth century.

When the Zhai family cave was created in 642 C.E., the Tang dynasty was still in the process of recovering from the mass killings that resulted in the overthrow of the preceding Sui dynasty and the power struggles that occurred within the Tang imperial Li family. Emperor Taizong, who reigned during the time the Zhai family cave was created, did three noteworthy things in the first month of his reign. First, he ordered the virtuous monks of the capital to come to the palace and hold services for seven days. Second, he ordered the ordination of three thousand clergy with standards to be enforced by the officials. And third, he ordered the conversion of one of the imperial Li family palaces into a Buddhist temple.⁵⁹ In addition, he donated his own clothing to the Buddhist temple and ordered the monks to be fed vegetarian feasts and to hold Buddhist rituals. Specifically, he stated in his edict that the purpose of performing the rituals was to comfort the angry spirits of the one thousand men who were killed by him during the course of his dynastic campaign.⁶⁰ In 629 and 630 C.E., he ordered the establishment of Buddhist temples and reliquaries with appropriate inscriptions commemorating those who died in the various battles prior to his reign, with the income from certain “merit fields” (*futian*) for their upkeep.⁶¹ On the whole, the purpose of Taizong’s official actions relating to Buddhism, as Arthur Wright has rightly pointed out, was “to please many, alarm no one, and heal the many social and political wounds of the period of civil war and his own rise to power.”⁶²

The Zhai clan’s purpose for depicting the Healing Ritual in their family cave in 642 C.E. may be understood in a local historical context. As was mentioned earlier, this cave was constructed two years after the decisive military operation of the Tang army to conquer Gaochang (Karakhoja), a small but important kingdom that controlled the Silk Road

trade. As the headquarters of the Tang troops, Dunhuang suffered human losses by supplying resources. Some members of the Zhai family apparently served in the Tang army as officers, as is indicated by the inscription on the east wall, which records their military titles Zhaowu Xiaowei (Zhaowu commandant) and Bobao Zhenjiang (Bobao garrison defense commander).⁶³ It is possible that some family members died or were wounded or remained in danger on battlefields in the Western Regions when this cave was built, because the expedition of the Tang army continued westward after the conquest of the Gaochang kingdom.⁶⁴ In such a historical context, the Zhai family’s choice to present the Healing Ritual in their family cave becomes understandable. By depicting the Healing Ritual, the patrons from the Zhai family expressed their wishes to heal the wounded members of the family and, in cases of death, to help the deceased to be reborn into the Western Paradise accompanied by the eight great bodhisattvas associated with *Bhaiṣajya-guru*. The personal wishes of the patron family seem to correspond with the imperial desire to heal the whole of society.

After a careful investigation in Cave 220, I found some traces of burned oil remaining in the western niche. This discovery suggests there might have been some kind of ritual performance, involving the lighting of lamps, that took place in the cave.⁶⁵ The day-to-day bookkeeping records of the Buddhist temples near the Mogao caves, found in the “library cave,” also indicate the use of oil in the caves.⁶⁶ On the basis of the archaeological and textual evidence, we can deduce that the Zhai family might have performed some parts of the Healing Ritual such as lighting the lamps and reading the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* in the cave. Because the image-making part of the ritual had been done on the wall,

the patrons did not have to do additional things except lighting lamps and chanting the names of the Healing Master to complete the ritual. The combination of the personal participation of patrons in the ritual and the visual representation of the ritual helps to understand how this kind of ritual imagery was used in its original settings.

South Wall: Pictorialization of the Western Paradise

It has been suggested that the painting of the Western Paradise on the south wall of Cave 220 is based upon the textual description of the Buddha Amitābha's paradise recorded in the *Amitābha Sūtra*, translated into Chinese by the famous monk Kumārajīva (344–413 C.E.) in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.⁶⁷ Scholars believe that the paintings of the Western Paradise should be divided into two types, according to their composition and content: one type is supposed to represent the *Amitābha Sūtra*, and the other is supposed to depict the *Sūtra on Visualizing the Buddha of Measureless Life (Amitāyus)*, or the *Visualization Sūtra*. Most local scholars at Dunhuang agree that the murals, which depict the Western Paradise at the middle with two vertical panels showing the Ajātaśatru story and the sixteen visions of Queen Vaidehī on the left and right sides, are based on the *Visualization Sūtra*. At the same time, the murals showing the Western Paradise alone must be based on the *Amitābha Sūtra*. Accordingly, these paintings of the Western Paradise should be identified, respectively, as *Guan Wuliangshou jingbian* (Illustrations of the *Visualization Sūtra*) and *Amituo jingbian* (Illustrations of the *Amitābha Sūtra*).⁶⁸ The south wall of Cave 220, therefore, must be an illustration of the *Amitābha Sūtra*, because it portrays the Western Paradise without the two series of marginal

illustrations on the left and right.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, my study of the paradise image on the south wall of Cave 220 suggests that the main scriptural basis of the painting is the *Visualization Sūtra* rather than the *Amitābha Sūtra*.⁷⁰

Iconography of the Painting

The visual focus of the south wall painting of Cave 220 is a large water pond in which the Buddha sits on a lotus pedestal at the center (Plate 7). He is flanked by two standing assistant bodhisattvas. Two seated bodhisattvas, relatively large in scale, and other minor holy beings are also shown in the pond. In particular, nine lotus buds enclosing infants are depicted along with small children playing in the water in front of the holy icons in the pond, indicating that this is a place where the believers of Amitābha could be reborn. Dancers and musicians play on a terrace in the front section, with Buddhas and bodhisattvas watching from their left and right. Three multistory buildings, in which minor heavenly beings stand in relaxation, are shown on the left, right, and back of the water pond. The whole painting, no doubt, represents the Western Paradise.⁷¹

The Western Paradise is recorded in a set of five Buddhist scriptures, commonly known as the Pure Land sutras: *Amitābha Sūtra* (or *Shorter Sūtra*) of Kumārajīva, *Sūtra on the Buddha of Measureless Life* (or *Longer Sūtra*) of Kang Sengkai (Saṅghavarman), *Sūtra on Visualizing the Buddha of Measureless Life* (or *Visualization Sūtra*) of Kālayāśas (Jiangliangyeshe), *Sūtra on the Vows of Samantabhadra*, and a short segment from the *Śūramgama Sūtra*.⁷² In addition to these five Pure Land sutras, some other translations of the Pure Land, such as the *Amituo jing (Amitābha sūtra)*; translated by Zhiqian, 222–280 C.E.) and the *Wuliang qingjing pingdeng jue jing* (Sūtra on the enlightenment of measureless equanimity and equality;

translated by Zhu Fahu of the Western Jin period, 266–317 C.E.), also contributed to the popularity of the Western Paradise. All of these Pure Land sutras were translated or composed before the construction of Cave 220 and may have been used as the scriptural basis for the Western Paradise on the south wall.

Among the Pure Land sutras mentioned above, the descriptions of the Western Paradise in Kumara-jīva's version (the *Amitābha Sūtra*) and in Kālayāśas's version (the *Visualization Sutra*) are the closest to the motifs shown on the south wall of Cave 220. According to Kumara-jīva's *Amitābha Sūtra*:

The Buddha spoke to the Venerable Shariputra [Śāriputra]: "West of here, a hundred billion buddha-fields away, there is a world system called 'Supreme Bliss.' In that field there is a buddha named Amita. At this very moment he dwells in that faraway land, preaching the Dharma. Shariputra, why is that field called 'Supreme Bliss'? Because the living beings in that realm are free from all forms of suffering and they only experience all forms of happiness. Therefore, it is called 'Supreme Bliss.'

"Furthermore, Shariputra, all around this Land of Supreme Bliss, there are seven tiers of railings, seven rows of netting, and seven rows of trees. They are all made of the four precious substances. All around, they encircle the perimeter of this land. Therefore, that land is called 'Supreme Bliss.' Furthermore, Shariputra, in the Land of Supreme Bliss, there are bathing pools made of the seven precious substances. They are filled with the best water, endowed with eight good qualities: their water is always limpid, cool, sweet-tasting, light, soft, placid, healthy, and thirst-quenching. The bottom of these pools is completely covered with golden sand. In each of their four sides, they have steps made of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and crystal. Above, there are towered pavilions, adorned with gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, coral, red pearls, and agate. On the

surface of the pools, there are lotus blossoms as large as cart wheels. These are blue colored, with a blue sheen; yellow colored, with a yellow sheen; red colored, with a red sheen; white colored, with a white sheen; they are delicate and fragrant. Shariputra, in the Land of Supreme Bliss, good qualities and ornaments like these are brought to perfection.

"Furthermore, Shariputra, in this buddha-field celestial music is constantly heard. And the ground is made of gold. Four times a day, exactly on the hour, day and night, mandara flowers rain down from heaven. Early every morning, each living being in this land picks some of those exquisite flowers, places them in the hem of his robe, and travels to worship with these flowers a hundred billion buddhas in other worlds in other regions of the universe. Immediately thereafter, each of these persons returns, in time for his forenoon meal, to this, his own world, and takes his meal and afternoon stroll. Shariputra, in the Land of Supreme Bliss, good qualities and ornaments like these are brought to perfection.

"Moreover, Shariputra, in that land you will always see many flocks of rare and exquisite birds of many colors—white egrets, peacocks, parrots, shari, and kalavinka birds, and those birds called 'Living-Together.' Doves of these birds gather to sing with soothing exquisite voices four times a day, exactly on the hour, day and night. Their voices proclaim the tenets of the Buddha's teaching—for instance, they sing of the five spiritual faculties, of the five spiritual powers, of the seven aspects of awakening, of the Eightfold Path that is followed by those of spiritual nobility, and of many other aspects of the Buddha's Dharma. When the living beings in that buddha-field hear such song, they all immediately enjoy thoughts of the Buddha, of his Dharma, and of his Order, and keep these three in mind incessantly. Shariputra, you should not say that these birds are actually born here as a result of their past evil deeds. Why not? Because the three undesirable courses of rebirth are not

found in this buddha-field. Moreover, Shariputra, in this buddha-land even the names of the three undesirable paths of rebirth are not to be found. How then could they exist in fact? The birds that sing in this buddha-field have all been created by the Buddha Amita himself, by means of his miraculous power, because he wanted to have them broadcast the sound of the Dharma.

“Shariputra, in that buddha-land, a subtle breeze blows, swaying the rows of jeweled trees and the jeweled nets, so that they emit an exquisite sound, like that of hundreds of thousands of diverse kinds of musical instruments playing together at the same time. All those who hear this sound enjoy spontaneously and immediately thoughts of the Buddha, of his Dharma, and of his Order, and keep these three in mind incessantly, bringing to mind the Buddha, bringing to mind his Dharma, bringing to mind his Order. Shariputra, in that buddha-land, good qualities and ornaments like these are brought to perfection.”⁷³

This lengthy and graphic description of the Western Paradise reveals a wonderland full of beautiful things and a luxurious lifestyle. Almost all the treasured objects mentioned in the sutra, including the railing, nets, trees, pools, water, towered pavilions, and lotus blossoms are shown in the south wall painting of Cave 220. The heavenly music and colorful birds are particularly emphasized in the sutra. It is not surprising that we find diverse kinds of birds and a sophisticated scene of music and dance performance in this painting of the Western Paradise (Fig. 1.22).

The impressive depiction of the musicians and dancers creates a feeling of celebration, indicating the happiness of those who have just entered the Western Paradise. The newly reborn figures in paradise are not clearly described in the sutra, but they are shown in the painting.

The entire painting is almost symmetrically designed except for the nine lotus buds enclosing infants in the water pond. We find five lotus buds on the left and four lotus buds on the right (Fig. 1.23). This unusual design breaks the balance of the whole composition. It also provides us with a crucial clue to understanding the scriptural basis of the painting.

As previously discussed, the Western Paradise is recorded in various Pure Land sutras, but none of them except the *Visualization Sutra* mentions the “nine ranks of rebirth,” a hierarchical system on the conditions in which a believer could be reborn into the Western Paradise. The *Visualization Sutra* has been considered a *weijing*, or apocryphal scripture, which “was composed in China in the style of Indian sutras and with a tacit claim to canonical authority.”⁷⁴ It has no Sanskrit, Tibetan, or variant Chinese recension. Consequently, modern scholars contest the date and location of its compilation.⁷⁵ This uncanonical sutra, however, “served as a model for meditational practices connected with Pure Land belief [in China].”⁷⁶ It “seems to carry more authority among Chinese commentators than the two *Sukhāvativyūha* sutras.”⁷⁷ For our present study of the south wall of the Zhai family cave, this sutra is certainly more important than the other Pure Land sutras, because its textual descriptions on the Western Paradise match the motifs in the painting very well.

According to the *Visualization Sutra*, believers who want to be reborn in the Western Paradise are divided into nine ranks, including “the upper birth of the upper rank” (*Shangpin shangsheng*), “the middle birth of the upper rank” (*Shangpin zhongsheng*), “the lower birth of the upper rank” (*Shangpin xiasheng*), “the upper birth of the middle rank” (*Zhongpin shangsheng*), “the middle birth of the middle rank” (*Zhongpin zhongsheng*), “the lower birth of the middle

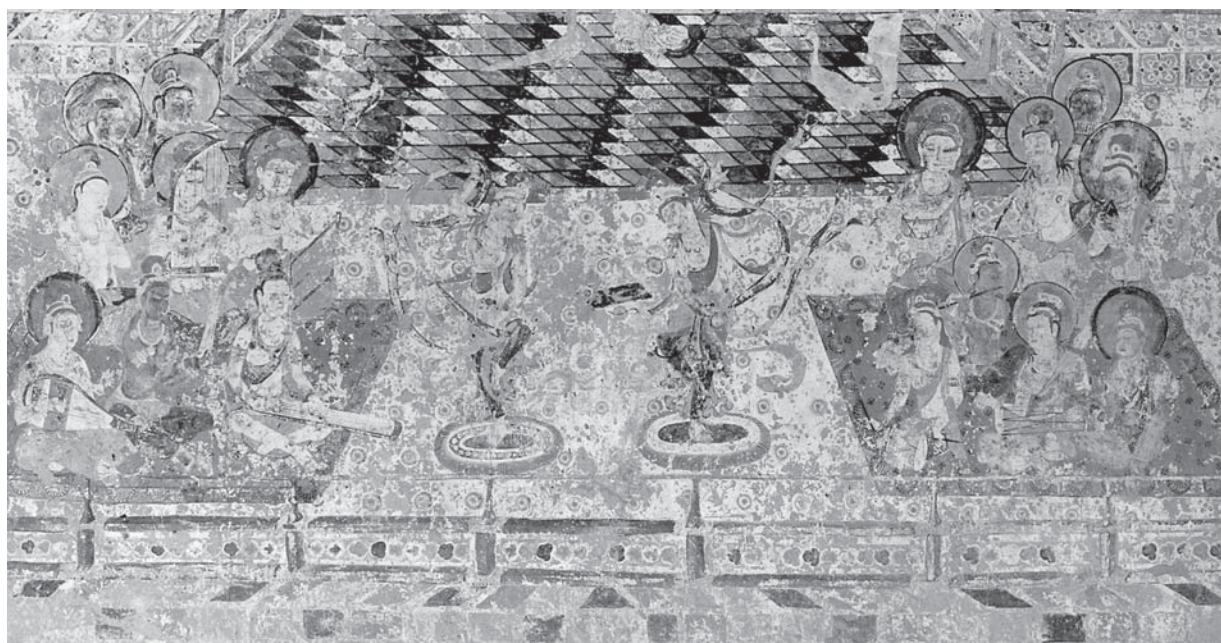


Figure 1.22 | Dance and music performance, detail of the south wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

rank” (*Zhongpin xiasheng*), “the upper birth of the lower rank” (*Xiapin shangsheng*), “the middle birth of the lower rank” (*Xiapin zhongsheng*), and “the lower birth of the lower rank” (*Xiapin xiasheng*). In total they are called the “nine ranks of rebirth” (*Jiupin wangsheng*).⁷⁸ This unique system of rebirth is not described in other Pure Land sutras.

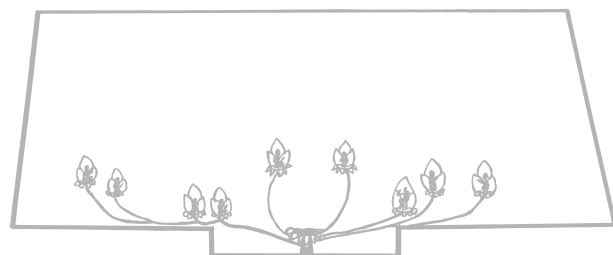


Figure 1.23 | “Nine ranks of rebirth,” detail of the Western Paradise, south wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E. Drawing by Ning Qiang, based on the original painting.

The Western Paradise on the south wall of Cave 220 depicts the “nine ranks of rebirth” in the significant location of the front section of the lotus pond. No doubt, every believer of Amitābha wants to be reborn in the Western Paradise. Accordingly, the most attractive motif in the painting to an ordinary believer must be the reborn figures (Fig. 1.24). The nine lotus buds containing reborn infants, which symbolize the “nine ranks of rebirth,” not only inspire viewers’ imagination of a place in paradise but also suggest that this painting of the Western Paradise is mainly based on the *Visualization Sutra*, though it does not exclude influence from the *Amitābha Sūtra*.

In addition to the “nine ranks of rebirth,” other motifs in the painting can also be closely connected with the *Visualization Sutra*. The focus of the *Visualization Sutra* is a special religious practice, which requires a practitioner to visualize Amitāyus and his

Pure Land. The icon of Amitāyus and the vivid details of his Western Paradise, needed for the visualization practice, are fully illustrated on the south wall of Cave 220. The visualization practice combines meditation and image viewing. Practitioners are supposed to meditate on the holy icons and the wonders in the Western Paradise. With visual aids, the practitioners would be able to visualize the Western Paradise in their mind and to encounter the Amitābha Buddha in their imagination.

In the *Visualization Sutra*, the method of visualizing the wonders of the Western Pure Land is introduced with a *yinyuan*, or a cause-and-effect story, which starts with the arrest of the old king Bimbisāra by his wicked son, Ajātaśatru. The prince locks his father inside a city gate guarded by armed soldiers and hopes that the old king will starve to death. Queen Vaidehī, Ajātaśatru's mother, manages to convey food and drink to the king, but her act is discovered by the prince. In a rage, Ajātaśatru is about to kill his mother when a wise minister stops him, and instead he imprisons her inside the palace, where she appeals to Śākyamuni for help. The Buddha then instructs her in the method to visualize the Western Pure Land of Amitāyus, which is called *shiliuguan*, or the “sixteen visions.”

The first or “primary” vision, according to the sutra, is to medi-

tate on the “setting sun in the west.” Meditating on the “water in the west” is the second vision. These two visions, in fact, are not represented in the painting of the Western Paradise of Cave 220. They must have been considered preparation for visualizing the Western Paradise.

The third vision is to meditate on the land of the Western Paradise (Fig. 1.25), which is also called *chujian jileguo di*, or the “primary vision of the land of the Country of Supreme Bliss (Western Paradise).”



Figure 1.24 | A reborn child, detail of the Western Paradise, south wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

Beginning with this vision, all the remaining fourteen visions are shown in the painting of paradise.

The fourth vision concentrates on the treasury trees (Plate 8), and the fifth vision focuses on the water in the pond of the Western Paradise. These two visions may be somehow related to the trees and ponds of the earthly world, which would make them easier for a beginner to visualize.

The sixth vision is called the “comprehensive vision” (*zongguan*), which includes buildings (Plate 9), heavenly musicians, and self-sounding musical instruments. It is also called “the first vision of the treasury trees, the treasury land, and the treasury pond in the Country of Supreme Bliss.” Clearly, the sixth vision is a review of the previous three visions. It combines the three earlier visions and creates a new comprehensive vision of the Western Paradise.

After Śākyamuni teaches Queen Vaidehī the sixth vision, or the comprehensive vision, Amitāyus Buddha suddenly appears in the sky, with two great bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin) and Mahāsthāmaprāpta (Da Shizhi), accompanying him. Greatly moved by the visionary miracle and worried about all living beings of the future (who might not

have the chance to personally see this wonder), Queen Vaidehī asks Śākyamuni to instruct her in the method of visualizing Amitāyus and the two bodhisattvas.

Śākyamuni thus continues to describe the seventh vision as the “meditation of the lotus pedestal” (Fig. 1.26). The eighth vision meditates on the “images” (i.e., portraits) of Amitāyus and the two great bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta. The ninth vision concentrates on Amitāyus himself (the real body) (Fig. 1.27), while Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta are the focus of the tenth and eleventh visions, respectively. The artist could have chosen to make a distinction between the images of the deities and their real bodies in this painting. Instead, he chose to combine the images and the real bodies of the deities in his painting and let the visualizer differentiate between them in the practice.

The twelfth vision is to visualize the process of rebirth in the Western Paradise. According to the sutra, one should imagine oneself becoming a newborn child, sitting in a lotus bud in paradise, meeting the Three Holy Ones of the West (*xifang sansheng*)—

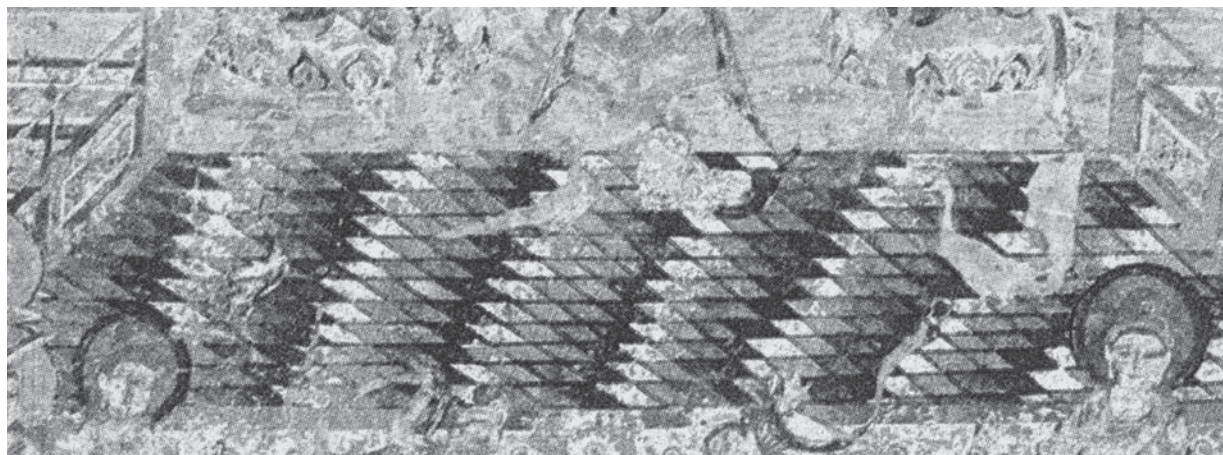


Figure 1.25 | Land of the Western Paradise, detail of the south wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.



Figure 1.26 | Lotus pedestal, detail of the Western Paradise, south wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

Amitāyus, Avalokiteśvara, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta—and enjoying the beauty of the new world (Fig. 1.28).

The thirteenth vision starts with the meditation on the large image of Amitāyus and ends with the Three Holy Ones of the West and is called *zaxiang guan*, or “divergent vision.” Once again, the sutra requires the practitioner to visualize the holy figures in paradise. The importance of holy icons in the visualization practice explains why the figures of deities are much larger and more striking than other insignificant figures in this painting of the Western Paradise.

The last three visions focus on the three *bei*, or generations of rebirth.⁷⁹ The sutra explains the qualifications for and the processes of different ranks of rebirth. The visualizer is expected to experience all the steps in his imagination.

Almost all of the “sixteen visions” except the first two, the preparatory visions of the “setting sun in the west” and the “water in the west,” are depicted on the south wall of Cave 220. This painting of the Western

Paradise, therefore, could have been used as an object for the visualization practice. Although the textual descriptions of the Western Paradise in both the *Amitābha Sūtra* and the *Visualization Sutra* match the motifs shown in the painting, some pictorial details in the painting, such as the “nine ranks of rebirth” and the Three Holy Ones of the West, indicate that the main scriptural basis of the painting is the *Visualization Sutra*.

If this painting were actually used by Buddhist monks in their visualization practice, then who were these monks? Why were

they allowed to use the family cave for their religious routine? Interestingly, I have found that some members of the Zhai family were Buddhist monks. Their portraits, with inscriptions identifying them, can still be seen on the murals inside the Zhai family cave (Fig. 1.29), and they are placed among the members of the patron family.

One inscription records the monastic name of a monk and indicates his secular family name, Zhai.⁸⁰ A typical inscription identifies only a monk’s monastic name without giving any indication of his secular name, yet in Cave 220 the inscriber particularly mentions the secular name of the monk to emphasize his family origin. In fact, all the monks represented in the cave were likely to have been from the Zhai family. It would have been natural for them to use their family cave as a place for religious practice. In this way, these Zhai family monks, who would ordinarily have left the family when they became monks, were united symbolically with their relatives in their family

Figure 1.27 |
Buddha Amitāyus,
detail of the
Western Paradise,
south wall, Cave
220, Dunhuang,
642 C.E.





Figure 1.28 | The Three Holy Ones of the West, detail of the Western Paradise, south wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 c.e.

cave. The southern wall of Cave 220 thus functions as a private paradise for meditation that was created specifically for the use of the Zhai monks and for their family.

The Privatization of Paradise

The nine lotus buds enclosing infants in the water pond not only provide a critical clue to understanding the main scriptural basis of the painting but also reveal a strong personal wish of the patron family: their deceased brothers could be reborn in the Western Paradise as a family. The southern wall painting of Cave 220 depicts the “nine ranks of rebirth” in a unique way: the nine lotus buds are connected by

nine branches that share the same root. This strong lotus root probably symbolizes the unity of the patron family.

According to the inscriptions remaining on the east wall, some members of the Zhai family served in the Tang army and probably died or were wounded in the battles before or around the year 642, when this cave was built. In addition to the Healing Ritual for the wounded, shown on the north wall of the same cave, the patron family also prepared a private paradise for their dead relatives. In this family paradise, the dead brothers could share the same root, a symbol of the Zhai clan, when they were reborn in the lotus buds.



Figure 1.29 | Patrons at the right side of the lower section of the west wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E. Photo of a copy made by the Dunhuang Research Academy in the 1980s.

The family was highly valued in ancient Chinese society. When a male family member died, his body would be returned to his hometown and buried with other deceased members of the same family.⁸¹ As a family cave, Dunhuang Cave 220 is comparable to the family shrine of the Eastern Han both in conception and structure. The size of the family unit during the Qin and the Western Han was small and included only a married couple and any unmarried children. The corresponding burial form for such a small family was the single-pit tomb. Larger house-

holds began to appear in the Eastern Han. After they married, brothers lived together with their parents in an extended family. Corresponding to this change, the size of a family burial was enlarged, and more chambers were built inside a grave. This type of burial—the multichambered tomb for an extended family—became typical during the Eastern Han.⁸² Even though tombs increased in size, only a single offering shrine stood in front of a family tomb (Fig. 1.30). The deceased family members shared the same shrine to receive offerings from living members of the family. An offering shrine built in front of a multichambered family tomb, though first dedicated to a certain individual, would eventually become a family or a lineage shrine in ritual practices. There descendants made sacrifices to the originally enshrined individual as

well as to other deceased family members buried in the multichambered tomb behind the shrine.⁸³ The use of the shrine increased with time as newly deceased members were buried in the family tomb.

Cave 220 of Dunhuang was constructed for both the deceased and the living members of the Zhai clan. The family label, “Zhai Jia Ku” (Zhai family cave), was placed at the exact center of the west wall, just below the statue of the Buddha, which is seen immediately upon entering the cave. For the deceased, the construction of the cave enabled them

to be reborn in paradise. For the living, it reserved a future position for them in paradise. Textual and archaeological evidence shows that this cave was often renovated and continually used by descendants of the Zhai family for the sake of their deceased ancestors and for themselves.⁸⁴ It was also the locus of some important socioreligious activities such as the lamp-lighting ceremony on the Buddha's birthday, the eighth day of the fourth month of the Chinese lunar calendar. Although the functions of the cave differ from the Eastern Han tomb-shrine, they share some significant features: to allow people to perform ritual practices for members of a family, to be renewed or used by descendants of the same clan, and to be considered a center for social activities.

Because of its remote location, Dunhuang fortunately escaped the wars and disasters during the Six Dynasties period, a destructive period of disunity and warfare that succeeded the fall of the Han dynasty. The traditions of the Eastern Han were perpetuated and evolved at Dunhuang. The Han burial customs, including the family shrine tradition, continued to exist for many centuries in the Dunhuang region.⁸⁵ The parallels between the family cave and the family shrine suggest a link between the two and could be explained by the local history of Dunhuang.

Most residents of Dunhuang were emigrants from central China. In order to keep their identities and to strengthen the relationships among family members, most large families compiled their own *shipu*, or *zupu* (genealogy), and during the Sui-Tang periods the tradition of writing a genealogy became popular. The bibliographical chapters of the *Sui shu* (History of the Sui dynasty) and the two Tang histories list a very large number of genealogical works from pre-Tang times, which range from genealogies of single lineages, the precursors of modern *jiapu* and *zongpu*, to works dealing with all the prominent

lineages of a specific region and to mammoth compilations made on a national scale.⁸⁶ According to Denis Twitchett: "All of these works listed in the Sui and Tang histories were lost long ago, many of them before the eighth century. Apart from some fragmentary quotations the only surviving pre-T'ang and T'ang works representative of this genre are manuscripts from Tunhuang [Dunhuang], an area whose inhabitants had a strong tradition of local historical writing. They also seem to have had a genealogical tradition."⁸⁷

Some genealogies of prominent families at Dunhuang, including the Zhang and Fan families, have been discovered, but a separate volume of the genealogy of the Zhai family has not been discovered yet. The Zhai family, however, is recorded in a genealogical text of the Dunhuang region.⁸⁸ Also, the history of the Zhai family was written on the eastern wall of Cave 220, the Zhai family cave, and inscribed on a stela entitled Zhai Jia Bei (Zhai family stela).⁸⁹

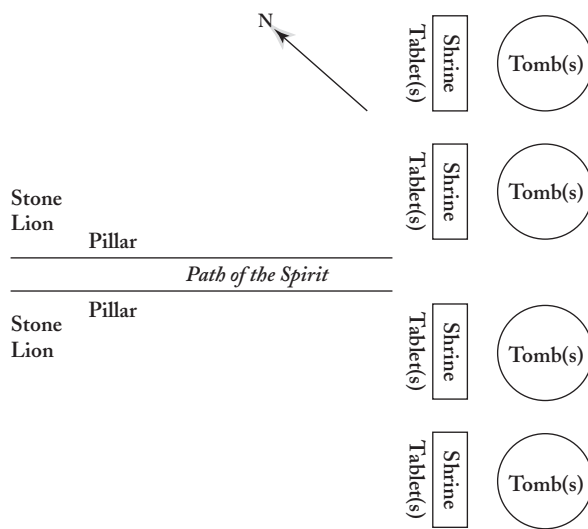


Figure 1.30 | Sketch of "shrine-tomb" structure of the Eastern Han (25-220 C.E.). After Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, p. 36.

The family cave and family stela reveal the Zhai family's strong interest in documenting their genealogy and strengthening their family connections.

To reiterate, Cave 220 is a family cave, constructed and reconstructed by the same Zhai clan for several centuries. The nine lotus buds of rebirth depicted on the southern wall, designed to suggest the unity of the deceased family members, also reveal a strong personal desire of the patron to identify the ownership of the cave and to strengthen family ties. The genealogical interest of the Zhai clan, the private nature of the cave, and the special design of the motifs clearly show the sociopolitical ideology and the cultural attitude of the members of the patron family.

The nine infants enclosed in the lotus buds are not the only children found in this painting of the Western Paradise. Other children playing in the water are also depicted (Plate 10). If the nine lotus buds symbolize the "nine ranks of rebirth," why did the artist add extra children in the water pond who appear older than the infants in the lotus buds?

The *Visualization Sutra* regroups the nine ranks into three *bei* instead of *pin* when they become the objects of meditation, which are called *shangbei shengxiang* (meditation on the upper generation of rebirth), *zhongbei shengxiang* (meditation on the middle generation of rebirth), and *xiabei shengxiang* (meditation on the lower generation of rebirth).⁹⁰ The *Foshuo Wuliangshou jing*, traditionally attributed to Kang Sengkai, also mentions *sanbei*, or "three generations" of rebirth: *shangbei*, *zhongbei*, and *xiabei*.⁹¹ Both sutras use the same term "*bei*" rather than "*pin*" to group the ranks of rebirth. The Chinese term "*bei*" clearly means "generation" in family lineage.

In the context of a family cave like Cave 220, the differentiation of *bei* (generation upon generation) is certainly acceptable and appropriate. Because this

painting was designed also for religious practices, the requirement of visualizing the three *bei* of rebirth demands their representation. How then did the painter represent the three generations of rebirth?

Three groups of small figures in the pond are easily recognized (Fig. 1.31). The first group consists of the nine infants in the nine lotus buds. The older children playing in the water belong to the second group; these children have just been released from the buds, and they enjoy their freedom and happiness in paradise. The third group shows two small bodhisattvas kneeling on two lotus pedestals in front of the two great bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta. An incense burner is beside each of the two small bodhisattvas who have just emerged from the water and have become official members of the Western Paradise (Fig. 1.32). Their new bodhisattva dress and the incense burners indicate the ceremony of the transformation from a newborn child to a formal member of paradise.

Instead of stressing the hierarchy of the three *bei* of rebirth, the painter represents the three groups of tiny figures in sequence: being present in the lotus bud is the first stage, playing in the water is the second stage, and becoming a bodhisattva is the third stage. Thus, the three groups of rebirth have double meanings. On the one hand, they symbolize the three *bei* as required by the visualization practice. On the other hand, the sequential mode visually suggests a process of transformation, from lower stage to higher stage, which means that all who are reborn can pass through the three stages and finally become official members (i.e., bodhisattvas) of paradise. Once again, the artist catered to the need of his patron by providing an equal chance in paradise for all deceased members of the family.

The Western Paradise represented on the south wall of Cave 220 is not purely a visual transformation



Figure 1.31 | “Three generations of rebirth,” detail of the Western Paradise, south wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

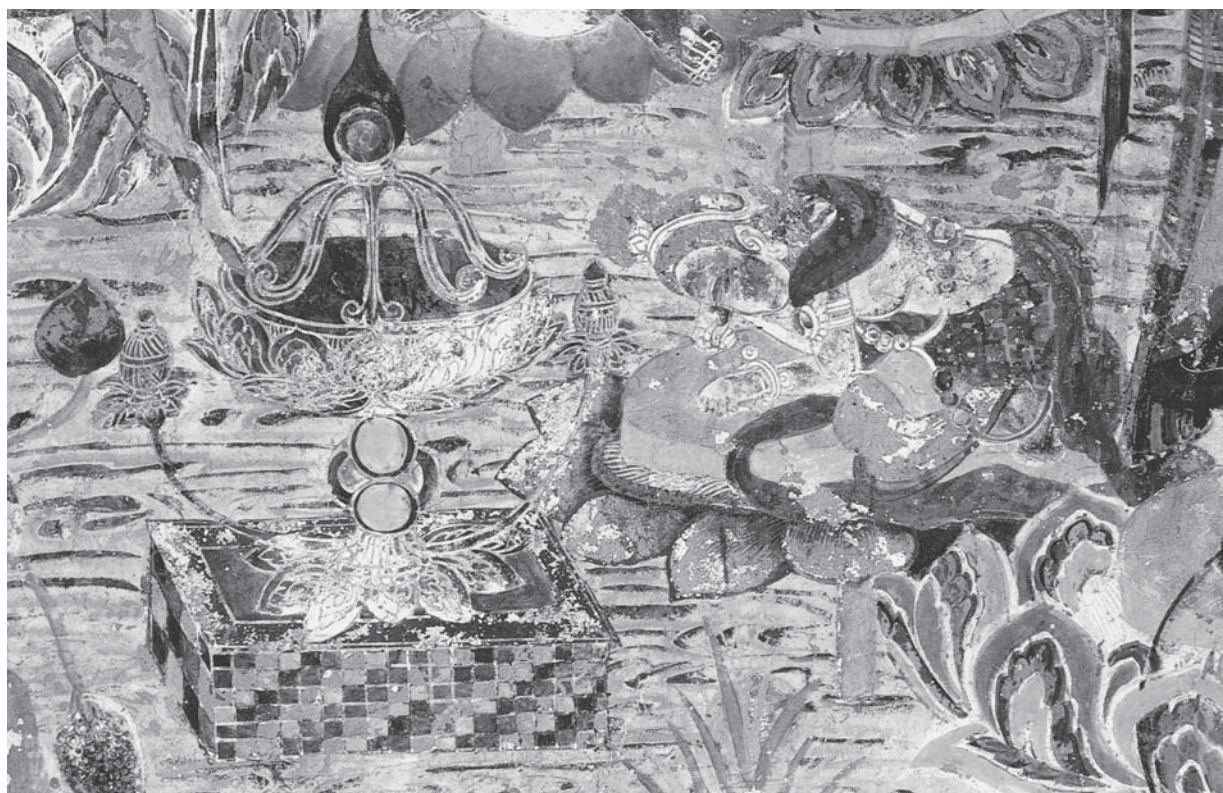


Figure 1.32 | A new bodhisattva, detail of the Western Paradise, south wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 c.e.

of the Buddhist scripture. In addition to its religious function for visualization practice, it was also designed as a private paradise dedicated to the deceased members of the Zhai family. The privatization of paradise in the painting not only reveals the personal wishes of the patrons but also changes the meaning and function of the cave. It transforms the Buddhist cave into a family shrine.

East Wall: New Motifs in the Illustration of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*

The east wall of Cave 220 illustrates the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* (*Weimojie jing*), one of the most popular

Buddhist sutras in medieval China. This sutra was first translated into Chinese from Sanskrit in the second century c.e., and since then, it was retranslated several times and became a favorite subject in Chinese Buddhist art. As one of the earliest Buddhist sutras translated into Chinese, the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* has been interpreted and commented on for centuries. This sutra, however, seems not to have attracted artistic attention in India and central Asia. No visual representation of the sutra has been found in those areas.⁹² The imagery of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, therefore, might be considered a Chinese creation that embodies Chinese religious understanding and visual imagination of the Buddhist sutra.

The east wall of Cave 220, however, is far from being the first visual representation of this famous Buddhist scripture. Several dozens of pre-Tang images illustrating the sutra have been found in central China as well as in the Sui-dynasty Dunhuang caves.⁹³ To understand the iconography of the east wall painting of Cave 220, it is necessary to examine the previous works of art to determine what the new and significant elements are in this painting. A brief historical investigation of the sutra and its circulation at Dunhuang could also help in comprehending the meaning and function of the motifs shown in the painting.

The Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa and Dunhuang

The oldest extant Chinese version of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, entitled *Fo shuo Weimojie jing* (The *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* told by the Buddha), was translated by Zhiqian in the Wu Kingdom in south China between 222 and 229 C.E.⁹⁴ The second extant translation, by Kumarajīva in 406 C.E. and entitled *Weimojie suo shuo jing* (The sutra spoken by Vimalakīrti), became the most popular version of the sutra. The third extant version was translated by Xuanzang after his famous journey to India and postdates the construction of Cave 220. Therefore, my discussion of the sutra is based mainly upon the two versions translated before the construction of Cave 220, that is, the Zhiqian and Kumarajīva translations.

More than 770 copies of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* and 30 kinds of commentaries, transformation tableaux (*bianwen*), and poems of the sutra have been found in the “library cave” at Dunhuang.⁹⁵ Most of the copies of the sutra and its commentaries were made in the eighth and ninth centuries, with only a few of them belonging to the pre-Tang period (220–618 C.E.).

The earliest dated copy of the sutra surviving

today was made by Wang Xianggao on the ninth day of the sixth moon of the fifth year of the Linjia era (393 C.E.). It is a copy of Zhiqian’s translation and is now preserved in the Shanghai Museum. Another copy of the sutra was created by three unknown people in 467 C.E., and it is now preserved at the Dunhuang Research Academy (ms. no. 113). Still another copy was made by a professional “copy student” (*jingsheng*) in 518 C.E., who even recorded how many sheets of paper that he had used in his work, in order to collect payment because he was remunerated on a per sheet basis.⁹⁶

Some important commentaries were also copied and circulated at Dunhuang in the pre-Tang period. The *Weimojie jing zhu* (Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*), written by Sengzhao, a disciple of Kumarajīva (also one of the translators of the sutra); the *Weimo yi ji* (Notes on the meaning of the *Vimalakīrti [Sūtra]*), author unknown; and the *Weimo jing yi ji* (Notes on the meaning of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*) were copied repeatedly. The great number of the copies of the sutra and its commentaries discovered in the “library cave” at Dunhuang suggests that the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* was popular in local communities between the fourth and seventh centuries, long before the construction of Cave 220 in 642 C.E.

The *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* teaches Buddhist philosophy by describing and elaborating the conversations and debates between the Buddha and his disciples, between the Buddha and the great bodhisattvas, between Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī and Sage Vimalakīrti, and between Śākyamuni’s disciple Śāriputra and Vimalakīrti’s servant maiden, who is commonly known as *tiannü*, or the Daughter of Heaven.

The debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, which has been used as the central motif in most visual representations of the sutra, focuses on the

emptiness, bitterness, and illusory nature of human life. Taking himself as an example, Vimalakīrti pretends to be ill and uses his illness as a metaphor to help his audience understand his philosophy on the bitterness and unreality of human life. Interestingly, the abstract philosophical ideas are often illuminated by Vimalakīrti's unusual actions and magical powers as demonstrated in the sutra.

*The Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa and Its
Representations in Early Chinese
Buddhist Art*

The first visual representation of the sutra was said to have been created by China's most famous fourth-century painter, Gu Kaizhi, who painted it for a public audience and won great success.⁹⁷ Gu's success in winning public support for his work encouraged others to represent the sutra. In addition to Gu Kaizhi, three other famous artists active in the southeast—Zhang Mo, Lu Tanwei, and Zhang Sengyao—are also said to have portrayed Vimalakīrti in the fifth to the sixth centuries. Trying to create a new composition of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, Yuan Qian is recorded to have depicted more than one hundred episodes of the sutra on a piece of silk.⁹⁸

More than seventy works of the Six Dynasties period depicting the sutra have been discovered so far.⁹⁹ Most of them are carved in the cave-temples at Yungang near Datong in Shanxi Province and Longmen near Luoyang in Henan Province. Some forty-four well-preserved illustrations of the sutra are also seen in the Sui and Tang caves at Dunhuang.¹⁰⁰ Emma C. Bunker, who has studied the stelae collected in Western museums and the works carved in the cave-temples at Yungang and Longmen, has made an inventory of these works.¹⁰¹ Various pictorial formulas have been created to illustrate the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, and most of them were made for

a public audience and thus may shed light on the relationship between religious art and the public in medieval China.

Jin Weinuo has also surveyed the origin and development of the imagery of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* in early Chinese art. According to Jin, the earliest surviving works are the scenes of the debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī carved in Caves 7, 1, and 2 at Yungang, from the fifth century C.E. They represent the fifth chapter of the sutra and should be considered the "earliest form [of the visual representation of the sutra]."¹⁰² Jin's discussion, however, focuses on the paintings of the subject that remain in the Dunhuang caves, which were created during the Sui and Tang dynasties.

He Shizhe, a senior research fellow of the Dunhuang Research Academy, published a more detailed study of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* paintings in the Dunhuang caves in 1983 after his long-term study in situ. He counted sixty-eight illustrations of the sutra in the Dunhuang caves and declared that thirteen chapters of the sutra are depicted in the caves rather than nine chapters, as suggested by the Japanese scholar Matsumoto Eiichi in the 1930s. He also challenged the theory, proposed by Liu Hongshi, that the earliest representation of the sutra is the stone carving made at Kongwangshan near Lianyungang in Shandong Province during the reigns of Huandi and Lingdi of the Eastern Han (147–188 C.E.) (Fig. 1.33). He raised a number of questions concerning some details of the Kongwangshan carving, which do not match the textual records, and suggested that the earliest surviving work is the painting representing "Mañjuśrī's visit to the ill Vimalakīrti" in Cave 169 at Binglingsi, dated to 420 C.E.¹⁰³

The Binglingsi painting depicts an old man, dressed in bodhisattva costume with a halo behind his head and shoulders, reclining on a what may be



Figure 1.33 | Drawing of the Kongwangshan stone carving, Shandong, second century C.E. After Lianyungang bowuguan, “Lianyungang shi Kongwangshan moya zaoxiang diaocha baogao,” Fig. 9.

a bed, and with a smaller figure standing beside the bed (Fig. 1.34). One inscription next to the reclining figure reads: “*Weimojie zhi xiang*” (Vimalakīrti’s portrait). Another inscription next to the small standing figure reads: “*Shizhe zhi xiang*” (the attendant’s portrait).¹⁰⁴ Clearly, the larger bodhisattva-dressed figure reclining on the bed is the sick Vimalakīrti, and the smaller standing figure his attendant. Mañjuśrī is not visible in the mural. This painting, therefore, does not represent Mañjuśrī’s visit to Vimalakīrti, as He Shizhe suggested, because it shows only Vimalakīrti and his (female) attendant. This earliest surviving image of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* seems to match the Vimalakīrti portrait created by Gu Kaizhi some sixty years earlier. Both works focus on Vimalakīrti alone

rather than on the famous debate between the sage and the bodhisattva.

The earliest image of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* appeared in the Dunhuang caves as late as the Sui dynasty.¹⁰⁵ There are eleven works on this theme that remain in the Mogao caves and are dated to this time,¹⁰⁶ and all of them focus on the two main figures of Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī. They are usually depicted on either side of the western niches, facing each other. The Buddha image, located at the center



Figure 1.34 | Illustration of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, Cave 169, Binglingsi, Gansu, 420 C.E. After *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua bian* 17, p. 7.

of the niche, appears like a judge for the debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī (Fig. 1.35).

This two-part composition is not new. Many similar pictures can be seen in earlier works in central China. For instance, the middle section of the south wall of Cave 6 at Yungang, dated to the Northern Wei period (386–534 C.E.), represents Vimalakīrti at one side and Mañjuśrī at the other side, talking to each other. The Buddha sits in the middle between the two debaters (Fig. 1.36). A Northern Wei stela, sponsored by Zhao Jianxi and others in 533 C.E., also depicts the Buddha in the middle between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī.¹⁰⁷

The compositions of the paintings in the Sui-dynasty Dunhuang caves basically continued the

same pattern of composition established by previous artworks from central China. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the pictures of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* in the Dunhuang Sui caves were made with a strong influence from the central land of China as a result of the Sui reunification of the Chinese empire.

Like the stone carvings of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* created in central China, most of the Sui paintings at Dunhuang are small in size and similar in composition. For example, in Cave 420, the two debaters are depicted sitting in two small houses surrounded by water ponds in which some aquatic plants are floating (Fig. 1.37). These Sui paintings of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* are very small and less detailed in relation to



Figure 1.35 |
West wall of
Cave 420,
Dunhuang,
Sui dynasty
(581–618 C.E.).

Figure 1.36 | Representation of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, south wall of Cave 6, Yungang, Northern Wei (386–534 C.E.). After Mizuno Seiichi and Nagahiro Toshio, *Yūnkang*, vol. 3, plate 31.



the painting on the east wall of Cave 220. But we see a major change in Cave 276, where Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī are represented in a standing pose and talking to each other. They are placed on either side of the western niche (Fig. 1.38). Not only are the figures represented alone, with no audience, but they are also full-length standing figures close to life size; in the background behind each of them is a tree, rather than the usual building. This formula for the composition, however, was not repeated.

New Motifs on the East Wall of Cave 220

The east wall of Cave 220 illustrates the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* on a very large scale, in two panels each

measuring about 2 meters (about 6 feet) wide and 3.42 meters (about 10 feet) high. It is painted on the left (north) and right (south) sides of the entrance in the middle of the east wall (Fig. 1.39).¹⁰⁸ Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī are shown on the south and the north, respectively, facing each other. On the north side, a large image of the Chinese emperor, whose costume identifies him as the reigning Tang emperor Taizong,¹⁰⁹ and his court officials are depicted below Mañjuśrī. Śāriputra and the Daughter of Heaven are also prominently displayed on each side of the entrance. Some magical episodes selected from the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* are depicted around Vimalakīrti, who sits on a *huchuang*, or barbarian bed or stool.

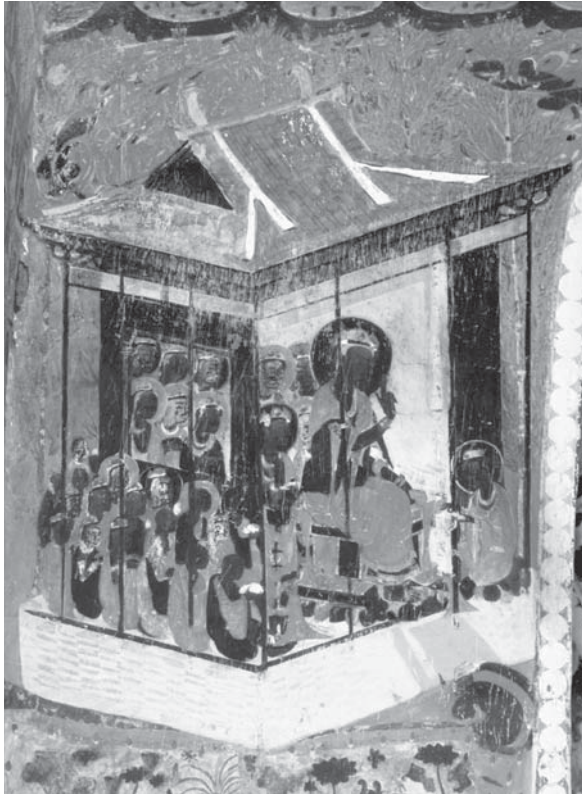


Figure 1.37 | Mañjuśrī, west wall of Cave 420, Dunhuang, Sui dynasty (581–618 c.e.).

Following the conventional composition, this painting focuses on the two main figures in debate, Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī. Other figures are divided into two groups, standing on either side of the two main figures (Figs. 1.40 and 1.41). The new elements appearing in this painting include the Chinese emperor and his court officials, the foreign kings and princes, and three scenes of miraculous, magical demonstration.

The picture of the Chinese emperor occupies a large space and is outstanding among the figures standing at the Mañjuśrī side. He is surrounded by his court officials and attendants (Plate 11). Opposite



Figure 1.38 | Vimalakīrti, west wall of Cave 276, Dunhuang, Sui dynasty (581–618 c.e.).

the Chinese emperor and his court officials are non-Han kings and princes, most of whom look like central Asians (Fig. 1.42).¹¹⁰ Apparently this scene indicates the political landscape of the early Tang period when the Tang dynasty was trying to expand its territories into central Asia. Geographically, Dunhuang was very close to the central Asian kingdoms ruled by non-Chinese kings and princes. It seems that it was quite necessary for the local people of Dunhuang to maintain friendly relationships with the central Asians. The prominent presence of the central Asian kings and princes in the Zhai family cave, along with the Chinese emperor and his court officials, reveals the Zhai family's wish to maintain good relations with the Tang court in the east and with the central Asian kingdoms in the west.

According to the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, no emperors or kings attended the great debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī. The Chinese emperor

and his officials, therefore, should not have been represented in this debate. In addition, previous illustrations of the sutra, including the Sui-dynasty paintings at Dunhuang, did not show the emperor and his court officials. Clearly, these figures were intentionally added in the scene of debating between the two sages. What does this addition mean in terms of understanding the painting and early Tang politics and religions?

The illustration of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* on the east wall of Cave 220 is often used by scholars to exemplify the stylistic influence of central China on the art of the northwestern frontier.¹¹¹ The large image of the Chinese emperor is considered merely a part of the whole composition, representing the kings who visit the sick Vimalakīrti.¹¹² According to the sutra, however, only some bodhisattvas, Śākya-muni's disciples, and heavenly beings went to the famous debate with Mañjuśrī. Vimalakīrti used his



Figure 1.39 |
East wall of
Cave 220,
Dunhuang,
642 C.E.

magical powers to empty his house and left only a bed (or stool) for himself. The laypeople, including the Chinese emperor, his officials, and the foreign kings and princes should not appear at this moment. Why did the artist add these figures to the painting?

The significance and danger of the emperor's involvement in Buddhist activities were discussed by Han Yü (768–824 C.E.), a famous Confucian scholar-official, who wrote a memorial to express his deep concern:

For how could the wisdom of Your Majesty stoop to participation in such ridiculous beliefs? Still the people are slow of perception and easily beguiled; and should they behold Your Majesty thus earnestly worshipping at the feet of Buddha they would cry out, "See! The Son of Heaven, the All-Wise, is a fervent believer; who are we, his people, that we should spare our bodies?" Then would ensue a scorching of head and burning of fingers; crowds would collect together, and tearing off their clothes and scattering their money, would spend their time from morn to eve in imitation of Your Majesty's example. The result would be that by and by young and old, seized with the same enthusiasm, would totally neglect the business of their lives; and should Your Majesty not prohibit it, they would be found flocking to the temples, ready to cut off an



Figure 1.40 | Vimalakirti and listeners of the debate, south side of the east wall of Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.



Figure 1.41 | Mañjuśrī and listeners of the debate, north side of the east wall of Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

Figure 1.42 |
Non-Chinese
kings and
princes, detail
of the east
wall, Cave 220,
Dunhuang,
642 c.E.



arm or slice their bodies as an offering to God. Thus would our traditions and customs be seriously injured, and ourselves become a laughing stock on the face of the earth;—truly, no small matter!¹¹³

Han Yü's memorial suggests the very significance of the emperor's involvement in Buddhist ceremonies in Tang society.¹¹⁴ In the early years of the Tang dynasty, followers of Buddhism experienced a period of frustration because of the emperors' favor of Daoism. The impressive image of the emperor, associated with the "bodhisattva of wisdom," Mañjuśrī, may suggest the support of the emperor to Buddhism. Or at least it reveals the strong desire of local Buddhists to win imperial support.

The investigation of the local context of the construction of Cave 220 further suggests that the images of the Chinese emperor and his officials actually encode a specific political meaning. It marks Tang dominance of the northwestern region in the mid-seventh century.

As discussed, the patron family of Cave 220 was a local elite clan famous for its political careers. Originating in central China, the Zhai clan emigrated to Dunhuang for a governmental position in 579 c.E. and then stayed and established itself there.¹¹⁵ According to the inscription remaining on the east wall of Cave 220, the members of the Zhai family held at least two military positions around 642 when the cave was built.¹¹⁶ Two years before the construction of the cave, General Hou Junji, who was

one of the twenty-four “meritorious officials” of Emperor Taizong’s, led the imperial troops to the northwestern regions to conquer the Karakhoja (Gaochang) kingdom near Dunhuang and continued his expedition into central Asia after his overwhelming victory.¹¹⁷ As the westernmost town of the Tang empire, Dunhuang served as the base fort and headquarters for these military operations, and the local people were obliged to take on the burden of supplying human and material resources demanded by the state.¹¹⁸

As officers in the Tang army, some members of the Zhai family must have joined the Tang military expansion into the Western Regions.¹¹⁹ Observed in this political context, the large image of the Tang emperor in Cave 220, which was totally new for the local people of Dunhuang and the peoples living in the Western Regions, should be viewed as a political symbol. It conveyed a strong message to this area: the emperor of the Tang dynasty was the ruler!

The Zhai clan identified the cave as its family cave. As indicated earlier, three large ink characters, “Zhai Jia Ku” (Zhai family cave), were written at the exact center under the western niche, just below the Buddha statue. By portraying the Tang emperor in their own family cave, the Zhais declared their loyalty to the Tang court.

Significantly, not only the Tang emperor but



Figure 1.43 | The prime minister, detail of the east wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

also his high officials were represented. The one who wears a marten tail on his hat has been identified as the prime minister (Fig. 1.43).¹²⁰ According to historical texts, twenty-four meritorious officials, including General Hou Junji, the chief commander of the military operations in the Western Regions, were chosen by Tang emperor Taizong to be portrayed by Yan Liben in the Lingyan Pavilion.¹²¹ To be portrayed there was considered the highest honor. The high officials of the Tang court represented in Cave 220, therefore, reflect the respect for and support of the Zhai family to the Tang court. They also reveal a

personal desire of the Zhai clan to please court officials and to strengthen the clan's political ties to the central government.

Opposite the Tang emperor and his ministers are figures of non-Chinese kings and princes, most of whom were from kingdoms in central Asia. During his reign from 626 to 648 C.E., Emperor Taizong was persuaded to declare himself Tian Kehan (king of kings).¹²² During his long reign, this king of kings encouraged many talented military and civil persons with foreign origins to join his army and government. Many non-Chinese individuals achieved very high positions in the Tang army and government.

In 642 C.E., the same year as the construction of the Zhai family cave, some small kingdoms in the Western Regions, threatened by the invasion of the Arabs (Dashi), sent envoys to seek protection from the Tang.¹²³ Emperor Taizong ordered Yan Liben, the most famous court artist of the early Tang, to portray the foreign kings and chiefs who paid offerings to him. Yan's portrayal of these foreign kings may have been a visual reference for the east wall of Cave 220, and the motif of the emperor was perhaps also based upon Yan Liben's portrait of Emperor Taizong.¹²⁴

In general, the Tang emperor, the court officials, and the non-Chinese kings and princes represented on the east wall of Cave 220 vividly reflect the early Tang political landscape. The image of the emperor, in particular, not only declares the authority of the Tang court in the newly conquered Western Regions but also reveals the political gesture of the Zhai family toward the Tang court.

In addition to the political themes, three scenes of miracles performed by Vimalakīrti are also depicted in the mural. The first is the miracle of the thirty-two thousand "lion thrones." It was said that when Śāriputra saw no seats in the house of

Vimalakīrti after they arrived there, he wondered where the bodhisattvas and chief disciples would sit. Vimalakīrti knew what he was thinking and asked him: "Virtuous One, do you come here for a seat or for the Dharma?" Śāriputra replied: "I come here for the Dharma and not for a seat." After explaining his philosophy, Vimalakīrti demonstrated his supernatural powers:

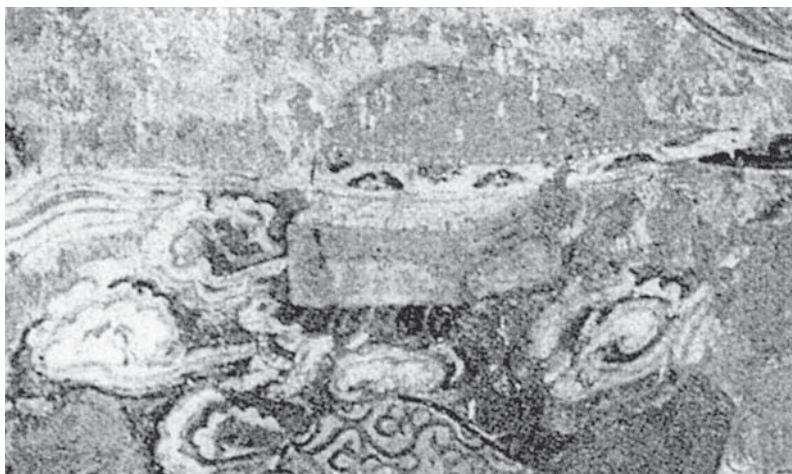
The rich man Vimalakīrti then exercised his transcendental powers and at once that Buddha dispatched thirty-two thousand lion seats, tall, broad, adorned, and pure, and had them brought into Vimalakīrti's room, where the bodhisattvas, major disciples, Indras, Brahmas, Four Heavenly Kings and the others saw something they had never seen before. For the room was broad and spacious enough to hold all these thirty-two thousand lion seats without the slightest crowding or hindrance. The city of Vaishali and Jambudvīpa and the other of the four continents too seemed in no way cramped or inconvenienced, but all appeared just as usual.¹²⁵

This miracle is symbolically represented by the "lion seats," covered by clouds, depicted near the top of the canopy of Vimalakīrti's bed (Fig. 1.44).

The second magical story is about the illusory bodhisattva who was created by Vimalakīrti to bring food for the participants of the great debate.

At that time Śāriputra thought to himself, "It is almost noon. What are all these bodhisattvas going to eat?" Then Vimalakīrti, knowing what was on his mind, said, "The Buddha preached the eight emancipations. You, sir, should undertake to practice them. Why be distracted by thoughts of eating when you are listening to the Law? If you want something to eat, wait a moment. I will see that you get the sort of food you have never had before."¹²⁶

Figure 1.44 | “Lion seats,” detail of the illustration of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, east wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.



After saying that, Vimalakīrti entered the state of Samādhi and used his transcendental powers to show to the assembly a country called Fragrant Land (Xiangjiguo). He then created an illusory bodhisattva and sent him to that country to ask for a bowl of fragrant rice. The illusory bodhisattva came back with the bowl of rice and nine million bodhisattvas from the Fragrant Land who wanted to see this world. The single bowl of fragrant rice satisfied all the participants. This miraculous story is represented in the painting by two scenes: the illusory bodhisattva flying in clouds (Fig. 1.45) and the same bodhisattva kneeling in front of Vimalakīrti holding a bowl of rice in his hands.



Figure 1.45 | “Illusory bodhisattva,” detail of the illustration of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, east wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.



Figure 1.46 | “World of Profound Joy,” detail of the illustration of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, east wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

The third miracle is painted above Vimalakīrti's bed in the mural. A small standing image of Vimalakīrti is depicted at the corner. His right hand is "lifting out" (*duanqu*) the World of Profound Joy (*miaoxi shijie*) surrounded by clouds (Fig. 1.46). According to the sutra, after his debate with Mañjuśrī, Vimalakīrti carried all the participants of the meeting with his right hand from his own house to the Buddha's residence. Śākyamuni then introduced a paradise called the World of Profound Joy. Because all of the listeners wanted to see the paradise, the Buddha asked Vimalakīrti to move it to this world.

Having had this thought, he [Vimalakīrti] entered samadhi and, manifesting his transcendental powers, lifted the Wonderful Joy world out of its place with his right hand and set it down on the ground [in this world]. The host of bodhisattvas and voice-hearers and the various heavenly and human beings in that world who had acquired transcendental knowledge all cried out together, saying, "Look, World-Honored One! Someone is making off with us! Save and protect us, we beg you!" But the Buddha

Immovable said, "This is not my doing. This is the work of Vimalakīrti's supernatural powers." And the rest of the beings in that world who had not yet acquired transcendental knowledge did not even realize or know where they had gotten to. But although the Wonderful Joy world had been placed on the ground in this world, it had not increased or decreased in size, and this world likewise had in no way become cramped or narrowed, but was no different from what it had always been.¹²⁷

The supernatural power of Vimalakīrti amazed all the participants of the gathering and even terrified the bodhisattvas in the World of Profound Joy who had to ask for the protection of their own Buddha.

These magical demonstrations made by Vimalakīrti are merely short stories inserted in the philosophic discussions in the sutra but were chosen to be prominently shown in the painting. It seems likely that the emphasis on Vimalakīrti's magical demonstrations in the painting is connected with the Daoist practice and probably reflects the conflict between Buddhism and Daoism in the early Tang.¹²⁸

CHAPTER TWO

Reconstruction: Historical Layers of the Zhai Family Cave

IN THE PRECEDING CHAPTER, I focused on the iconographies of the original early Tang paintings and carefully examined the motifs depicted on the north, south, east, and west walls of the Zhai family cave. These paintings, I believe, express the political ideology and religious feeling of the early Tang patrons. However, this cave was repeatedly redecorated and expanded by later generations of the same clan according to new sociopolitical circumstances and for shaping the public image of this prominent clan.

That the Zhai family cave has been redecorated several times is well known. However, Fujieda Akira is the only scholar who paid great attention to the reconstruction history of the cave. He points out, "Cave 220 was initially built in 642. During the two or three hundred years after its completion, several redecorations must have taken place (in the cave)."¹ Fujieda believes that the three walls on the left, right, and front sides of the main chamber were covered by a new layer of plaster and painted with new pictures in the first half of the tenth century, and this comprehensive reconstruction project was perhaps supervised by Zhai Fengda, who belonged to the ninth generation of the original patron of the cave.² Fujieda's study on the redecoration history of Cave 220, which appeared in a short article prepared for the first international conference on Dunhuang studies at the Mogao caves in 1987, was informative but fragmen-

tary and incomplete. His discussion of the redecoration is not set within a historical framework, nor does he use the history of reconstruction of the cave to reveal the nature of the cave as a political showcase for the Zhai clan.

This study takes a more systematic approach to the cave's renovation history. In addition to making a comprehensive examination of the historical changes that happened in the Zhai family cave, this research focuses on the new niche added during the Tibetan period to the south side of the passageway of the cave and the comprehensive tenth-century redecoration of the main chamber and the north side of the passageway, as a context for discussion of the social and political implications of the reconstruction projects.

Cave 220 has been redecorated and expanded at least four times since its completion in 642 C.E. The first expansion was done during the Tibetan occupation (781–847 C.E.), the second repainting was carried out in the late Tang period (848–906 C.E.), the third renovation was made in the Five Dynasties period (907–959 C.E.), and the fourth one in the Western Xia period (1036–1226 C.E.). Most of these reconstructions were undertaken by later generations of the Zhai family. Although carried out by the same clan, the reconstructions of different periods may imply different meanings.

Political Motifs Made during the Tibetan Occupation

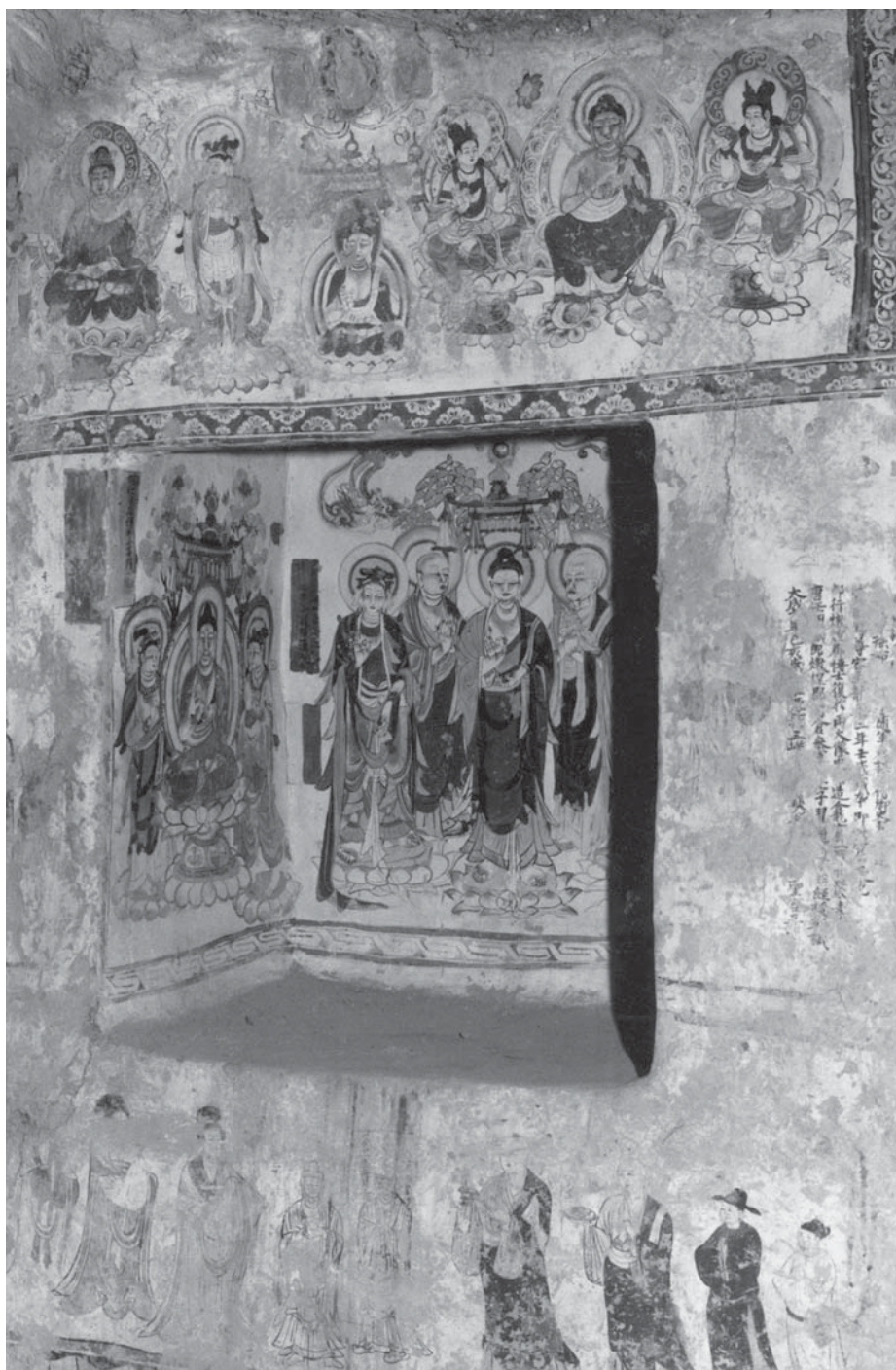
The first reconstruction took place in the middle Tang period (781–847 C.E.), when Dunhuang was occupied by the Tibetans. It seems that the physical condition of the cave was still very good when the project of renewal was being considered. The planner thus decided to build a small niche on the south

wall of the entrance tunnel (Fig. 2.1). This choice had the advantages of avoiding possible damage to the inner space of the cave and also of drawing attention to the new feature. Upon approaching the cave, the new niche was the first part that a viewer would encounter. Therefore, the choice of such a location indicates that the Zhai family may have used the niche as their new “political showcase.”

As previously discussed, the east wall of Cave 220 depicts a large image of the Tang emperor, demonstrating the loyalty of the Zhai family to the Tang court. When the Tibetans finally conquered Dunhuang by force in 780 C.E., the image of the Tang emperor was in conflict with the local political situation. Although the image could survive under the guise of religion (it could be explained as depicting one of the kings who visited Vimalakirti and the Buddha after the debate), the Zhai family still needed to do something in order to show their political deference to the new ruler of Dunhuang. Understood in such a sociopolitical context, we find that the construction of the niche on the south side of the passageway of Cave 220 implied multiple sociopolitical meanings: first, it reflected the submission of the Zhai family to the Tibetan authorities; second, it pleased the Tibetan king and was an attempt by the Zhai family to escape possible dangers and gain political benefits from the Tibetan rulership; third, it continued the function of uniting family members in a new historical period; and finally, it helped to keep the Tang emperor image safe in the cave and prepared a seed to regain the trust of the Tang court in the future when Dunhuang would be recovered from the Tibetans.

The rear (south) wall of the small niche centers on the icons of Bhaiṣajya-guru and his assistants (Fig. 2.2). During the High Tang period (705–780 C.E.), only three illustrations of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru*

Figure 2.1 | South wall of the passageway of Cave 220, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 C.E.).



Sūtra were made in the Dunhuang caves. However, more than thirty paintings of the same *sūtra* have been discovered in the Dunhuang caves from the period of Tibetan rule, suggesting the Healing Buddha's great popularity at Dunhuang during that time.³

An inscription written on the right side of the painting contains important information for our understanding of the political intention of the patrons (Fig. 2.3). According to the record published by the Dunhuang Research Academy, this inscription reads:

Nan wu yao shi liu li guang fo guan zi zhai pu
Sa [juan shu?] sheng □ □ pu er wei xian wang
fu mu

Praise to the Healing Master, the Buddha of
 the Radiance of Lapis Lazuli, Avalokite-
 śvara Bodhisattva [and their relatives?].
 The Holy . . . Puer [Pu II] for [my]
 deceased parents.⁴

The first thirteen Chinese characters of the inscription indicate the identities of the icons, simply and clearly. The meaning of the remaining characters, however, appears ambiguous because of the two missing characters. According to the editors of *Donors' Inscriptions*, the patron of the painting, Puer—as recorded in the inscription and translated above as Pu II—made the painting for his deceased parents.⁵ This interpretation of the inscription may be challenged on three points.

First, if Puer is considered to be the name of the donor, the character “Pu” would have to be a monastic name like Pude, Puhui, or Puji, because there was no recorded family name “Pu” at Dunhuang. The “er” is similar to the names or nicknames of secular commoners who receive their names or nicknames from older brothers and sisters, such as Zhang Er or Wang



Figure 2.2 | Rear wall of the niche on the south wall of the passageway of Cave 220, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 C.E.).

Er. Therefore, the combination of “Pu” and “er” seems unnatural as a formal monastic name.

Second, if “Puer” is considered to be the name of a person, the following words, “*wei xian wang fu mu*” (for [my] deceased parents), do not fit the formula common in donors’ inscriptions at Dunhuang, which is “*fengwei*” or “*yangwei xianwang fumu*” (for, with respect, my deceased parents). Because the object is “deceased parents,” there must be a “*feng*” or “*yang*” (with respect) before the character “*wei*.”



Figure 2.3 | Inscription on the rear wall of the small niche on the south wall of the passageway of Cave 220, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 C.E.).

Third, it is very hard to explain the phrase “*pu sa [juan shu] sheng* □ □” (bodhisattvas and relatives holy . . .). The identities of the icons should stop after “*pu sa*,” or “*pusa*” (bodhisattva). Another inscription remaining on the same wall clearly stops after the “*pusa*” and continues to indicate the donor’s identity rather than that of the *pusa*.

On the whole, the record and explanation of this inscription in *Donors’ Inscriptions* seem to be contradictory and opaque. In the summer of 1994, I returned to Dunhuang and carefully investigated this inscription in its original context. I found that the fourteenth and fifteenth characters in this inscription were “*feng wei*” (for, with respect) instead of “*juan shu*” (relatives). The fifteenth character “*wei*” is exactly the same as the twenty-first character “*wei*.” The whole inscription, therefore, should read as follows:

Nan wu yao shi liu li guan fo guan zi zhai pu
Sa feng wei sheng □ □ *pu er wei xian wang fu mu*⁶

Praise to the Healing Master, the Buddha of the Radiance of Lapis Lazuli and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. First for, with respect, the Holy □ □ Pu; second for [my] deceased parents.

Many inscriptions using the same formula have been found at Dunhuang. For example, an inscription written on a silk painting from the “library cave,”⁷ dated to 910 C.E., reads:

Nan wu da ci da bei jiu ku guan shi yin pu sa yong
chong gong yang
Feng wei guo jian qing ping fa lun chang zhuan er
wei ajie shi
Wei wang kao bi shen sheng jing tu jing zhao da
sheng yi xin gong yang

Praise to the great merciful, great compassionate saver from hardship Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, in perpetual offering. *First for, with respect*, the peace of the empire and the ceaseless turn of the Wheel of the Law. *Second for* [my] Master Elder Sister and for my deceased parents. [I wish] them to be reborn in the Pure Land. I reverently made this Great Holy One and with whole heart dedicated it.⁸

The combination of “*feng wei*” and “*er wei*” matches exactly the inscription on the south wall of the small niche on the south side of the entrance corridor of Cave 220.

Another example is an inscription at the northeastern corner of Cave 335, dated to 686. The female patron had a painting made of Amitābha, two bodhisattvas, and two disciples. Her wishes were as follows: “*First for, with respect*, [my] deceased husband and living man and woman relatives; and *second widely for* all living beings.”⁹

One more example is a donor’s inscription written on the south wall of Cave 196, built in the late Tang period. It reads:

Di zi song wen jun jing hua pu sa si qu
Yi wei yi wang ci mu er wei ji xi yi wang suo shi
niang zi

[The Buddha’s] disciple Song Wenjun respect-

fully painted four bodhisattvas, *first for* [my] deceased kind mother and *second for* myself and [my wife], the late Lady Suo.¹⁰

In Cave 220, we find a similar inscription. It was written by Zhai Fengda, a ninth-generation descendant of the original sponsor of the family cave. He wrote the inscription after completing the reconstruction project on the north side of the entrance tunnel. In this inscription he mentioned: “*First for, with respect*, the soul of the initiator of the cave . . . and *second for* my deceased kind father and elder brother.”¹¹ This formality matches the inscription on the opposite wall in the small niche.

Based upon this evidence, it may be surmised that the combination of “*fengwei*” and “*erwei*” or “*ciwei*” is a common formula of the donors’ inscriptions at Dunhuang during the Tang and Five Dynasties periods. The second half of the inscription on the south wall of the small niche on the south side of the entrance tunnel of Cave 220, therefore, should be read:

Fei wei sheng □ □ *pu*; *er wei xian wang fu mu*.
First for, with respect, the holy . . . *pu*; second for [my] deceased parents.¹²

Who, then, is the *sheng* □ □ *pu* mentioned ahead of the deceased parents? In many cases, the objects of honor introduced before the deceased parents were the empire or the emperor. In the Confucian ethical order, the *jun* (emperor) is always above *fu* (father). In a local context, during the middle Tang period the Tibetan king was equal to the Chinese emperor. Therefore, “*sheng* □ □ *pu*” may refer to the Tibetan king.

The Tibetan king was called Shengshen Zanpu (holy divine king) at Dunhuang. For example, the Tibetan inscription discovered in Cave 365, built in

the middle Tang period, calls the contemporary Tibetan king Qisulizan (Khri-gtsug-ide-btsan or Kelikezu; r. 815–836 C.E.) “Shengshen Zanpu.”¹³ A Chinese document, written by a former Tang official who surrendered to the Tibetans and served in the local Tibetan government, also calls the Tibetan king “Shengshen Zanpu.”¹⁴ Obviously, the two characters missing between the “*sheng*” and “*pu*” must be “*shen*” and “*zan*.” The whole inscription, therefore, should be restored as follows:

Nan wu yao shi liu li guan fo guan zi zhao pu
sa feng wei sheng [shen zan] pu er wei xian wang
*fu mu*¹⁵

Praise to the Healing Master, the Buddha of the Radiance of Lapis Lazuli and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. First for, with respect, the Holy Divine Tibetan King; second for [my] deceased parents.

The reconstructed inscription is clear and logical, and its composition is in accordance with the common form of inscriptions from that period. The reason for the blurring of the two important characters may be that the Zhai family after Dunhuang was recovered by the Chinese intentionally obscured the identity of the Tibetan king in their family cave in order to avoid criticism.

This interesting inscription declares that the painting was made for the Tibetan king; the intention to please the local authorities is apparent. The political attitude of the Zhai family toward the Tibetans is closely related to the severe political situation of Dunhuang under Tibetan rule.

In 755, when An Lushan and Shi Siming, two powerful Tang generals who rose up against the Tang court, the Tang troops in the Hexi region were recalled to central China to put down the rebellion, leaving a military no-man’s-land.¹⁶ Taking advantage

of the decline of Tang power, the Tibetan army stormed the cities along the Hexi corridor and rapidly occupied the entire region. At Dunhuang, however, the Tibetan army met with fierce resistance, and the Tibetan king had to move his military base to the South Mountain nearby and personally supervise attacks on Dunhuang, which was the final stronghold of Chinese resistance in the Hexi region.

The people of Dunhuang struggled against Tibetan attacks for eleven years, until they ran out of ammunition and food in 780 C.E. With a predisposition to “not being moved to other regions,” the people of Dunhuang surrendered to the Tibetans.¹⁷

In the early years of Tibetan rule, the local Chinese rebelled several times, killing Tibetan officials. Tibetan authorities had to use the prominent local clans of Dunhuang to help sustain their rule. Some of the powerful families, therefore, cooperated with Tibetan officials and started to share political power with them. Some families, particularly the Yin and Suo households, became even more powerful than they had been under the rule of the Tang government. Those who did not cooperate with the Tibetans were severely punished. As a result, some families flourished and a few perished.¹⁸

In such a sociopolitical context, it becomes understandable that the Zhai family constructed a new niche in its family cave to worship Bhaiṣajyaguru and to please the Tibetan authorities by dedicating the painting to the Tibetan king, the “Holy Divine Zanpu.” In doing so, the Zhai family could increase its chances of not being eliminated and could win favor with the Tibetan rulers.

Another inscription written on the same wall reads:

Da bei jiu ku guan shi yin pu sa □(jing) □(guo)
*Qing xin fo di zi jing guo qing yi xin gong yang*¹⁹
 The great compassionate savior from hardship

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva [Jing Guo].
 The pure and faithful disciple of the
 Buddha, Jing Guoqing, with whole heart
 dedicated [to him].

The two characters at the end of the first line, “*jing guo*” are very light and blurred, possibly washed off with water after writing with ink, and they look like a slip of the pen. It is possible that the inscriber forgot to write the identity of the donor as a “pure and faithful disciple of the Buddha” before his name. Therefore, he erased the two characters and started again at the second line. The two blurred characters, though still recognizable, should be excluded from the inscription.

Although he did not bear the name “Zhai,” the donor Jing Guoqing must have been a close relative of the Zhais, very possibly a son-in-law. Because the Zhai family remained a prominent clan at Dunhuang during Tibetan rule, it is inconceivable that the Zhais allowed anyone else to build a niche in their family cave.

The west wall of the small niche represents the Buddha Maitreya and his two assistant bodhisattvas (Fig. 2.4). The inscription near the icons reads:

*Tu mi le fo bing er pu sa yi qu*²⁰
 A group of [images of] the Buddha Maitreya
 and two bodhisattvas was painted.

The first character “*tu*” (disciple) should be translated as “*tu*” (paint). The interchange of words with the same pronunciation was a common practice in medieval China, particularly in the Dunhuang region. The three icons were painted as a group. The painting is simple, but the donors’ portraits and the nearby inscription are extremely interesting.

Three donors are depicted at the lower center of the painting: a woman dressed in traditional Chinese

costume and two men dressed in Tibetan costume (Fig. 2.5). The inscription written between the woman and the two men reads:

Xian wang ci mu □(*qing*) *xin*
nü yi xin gong yang

[Our] deceased kind mother, a
pure faithful woman, wor-
ships [the Buddha] with a
single heart.²¹

Obviously, this painting was made by two brothers for the sake of their deceased mother. The mother was Chinese and probably died before the Tibetan occupation; therefore, she was shown dressed in a Chinese costume. The two brothers were apparently alive and had to wear Tibetan costumes.

Various historical texts mention the forced Chinese adaptations of Tibetan national costume and hairstyle in Tibetan-occupied areas. For instance, the Tibetan section of the *New History of the Tang Dynasty* records: “The people of Dunhuang had to obey Tibetan rule and dress in Tibetan costume. They dressed in Chinese costume once a year in order to worship their ancestors. After the ritual, they cried and hid the Chinese dress.”²²

The documents discovered in the “library cave” at Dunhuang also mention the changes under Tibetan rule, including the adaptation of national costumes and hairstyles. One Dunhuang document gives the following description: “The swaddling



Figure 2.4 | West wall of the small niche on the south side of the passage-way of Cave 220, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 C.E.).

clothes of the beloved sons had to be opened for printing a [slave] mark on their bodies. Husbands and wives had to loosen their hair buns and rebind their hair in pigtails of [Tibetan style].”²³ Another document, entitled *Zhai Jia Bei* (Zhai family stela), also notes: “The hairstyle followed the pigtail [of the Tibetans] and the body was decorated with a ‘beauty mark’ (i.e., the slave mark). The body was covered by the left-opening clothes (i.e., the Tibetan costume).

Figure 2.5 | Patrons on the west wall of the small niche on the south side of the passageway of Cave 220, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 C.E.).



[The people of Dunhuang] drooped their arms kneeling [i.e., the Tibetan way to show respect].”²⁴

These records reflect the forced changes of national costume, hairstyle, and rituals of the local Chinese under Tibetan rule and also help to explain why the deceased mother was dressed in a Chinese costume while her sons were dressed in a Tibetan costume.

The east wall of the small niche has a representation of a Buddha and two bodhisattvas (Fig. 2.6). The inscription on the wall reads:

*Shi jia mu ni fo bing er pu sa*²⁵

The Buddha Śākyamuni and two bodhisattvas.

Neither donors’ portraits nor inscriptions can be seen on this wall.

The outer surface of the small niche, originally the south wall of the entrance tunnel, was covered

with religious and secular images. The upper section depicts three seated Buddhas and four bodhisattvas (Fig. 2.7). The Buddha image with a crown on his head can be clearly identified as the Buddha Vairocana (Lu she na Fo), a deity particularly favored by the Tibetans.²⁶ A similar image is depicted in Cave 25 at Yulin, a cave-temple site about 70 kilometers away from Mogao, which was also made during the Tibetan occupation (Fig. 2.8).²⁷

The middle section of the outer surface of the small niche was occupied by secular images. Two male donors, dressed in Tibetan costume, are displayed at the east side, and a woman, dressed in a Chinese costume, is shown at the west side. This composition is the same as the form of the donors at the lower center of the west wall inside the niche. The two men in Tibetan costume might be the same two brothers who express their wish inside the niche.

Figure 2.6 | East wall of the small niche on the south wall of the passageway of Cave 220, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 c.e.).

The woman at the other side might be their deceased mother. The donors' portraits in the middle section of the outer surface of the niche are large and striking, identifying the ownership of the entire niche. A very small version of the donors' portraits is seen inside the niche just below the icon of the Maitreya Buddha, expressing their personal wishes with the inscription. The two sets of donors' images thus function in different ways: one identifies the ownership of the niche, and another expresses the private desire of the patrons.

The lower section of the outer surface of the niche was repainted in the late Tang period, thereby covering the middle Tang painting. The late Tang painting is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

On the whole, the first reconstruction of Cave 220 did not take place in the main hall of the cave. The new small niche was built on the south wall of



Figure 2.7 | Upper section of the south wall of the passageway of Cave 220, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 c.e.).



Figure 2.8 |
Image of
Vairocana on
the rear wall
of Cave 25,
Yulin, middle
Tang (781–847
c.e.).



the entrance tunnel. This location avoided any damage to the four walls of the main hall and kept the integrity of the inner space of the family cave, showing respect to the ancestors of the family. The choice of representing these new motifs in the niche, the costume of the donors, and the written inscriptions, however, disclose the sociopolitical realities of life under Tibetan rule.

Maintenance of the Family Cave: The Second and Third Reconstructions

The second reconstruction of the Zhai family cave took place in the late Tang period (848–906 C.E.), after the Chinese recovery of Dunhuang from the Tibetans. This time, only the lower section of the south wall of the entrance tunnel was repainted. It is possible that some inscriptions or images, made during the Tibetan occupation, had become improper or dangerous in the new political context of late Tang, and so the Zhai family decided to repaint this section and cover it with new images.

Three women are depicted at the eastern side of the lower section. Two monks and two men are shown at the other side (Fig. 2.9). They are all dressed in Chinese costumes of the late Tang period. Between the women and men is a white square area filled with Chinese characters. Some of the characters are still identifiable:

Zhao ku yi suo bing lu na □□fo

Bing wang mu

*Da zhong shi yi nian liu yue san ri xin shi nan li
yi xin gong yang²⁸*

A niche has been built and the Vairocana Buddha [painted], and [my] deceased mother [portrayed]. The third day of the sixth moon of the eleventh year of the Dazhong era [857 C.E.]. The faithful man Nanli worships [the Buddha] with the single heart.

This inscription is not very clear but is still understandable. It seems that the donor has reidentified the small niche as his own, because there is no additional niche nearby. He also declares that he has



Figure 2.9 | Lower section of the south wall of the passageway of Cave 220, Dunhuang, late Tang (848–906 C.E.).

made a portrait of his deceased mother. Because the other short inscriptions nearby, which probably identify the individual images of the donors, are severely blurred, we cannot recognize which one is his deceased mother. We cannot even identify the chief patron's portrait. Their dress, however, definitely identifies them as people of the late Tang period. The style of their dress is in accordance with the dating shown in the inscription.

The two figures in the drawing, a Buddha and a monk, are smaller than the donors' portraits. They are drawn over the main inscription at the central square area, and some parts of the inscription therefore cannot be seen clearly. Compared with the fully colored donors, these two figures look like a sketch. Given that they are exactly the same as the Healing Buddha (Bhaiṣajya-guru) and the disciple depicted on the front wall inside the niche, though without colors, I believe that the two figures in the drawing were made by a later painter who simply copied the Buddha and the disciple inside the niche as an exercise. They have nothing to do with the inscription over which they are painted, nor with the donors painted on the two sides.

The third reconstruction was carried out by the ninth generation of the Zhai family in 925 C.E. The chief sponsor was Zhai Fengda, the most famous local calendar editor and geographer in the mid-tenth century at Dunhuang. A few documents from the "library cave" and some inscriptions related to this local scholar have been discovered. These records provide us with a brief biography.

Born in 883 C.E., Zhai Fengda received his education at Dunhuang prefectural school (*zhouxue*) in the last years of the Tang dynasty. After the fall of the Tang, he became a civil official and military adviser in the local government. He edited almost all of the almanacs used at Dunhuang between 926 and 959 C.E.

He also produced a gazetteer of Shouchang County and presented it to the magistrate of the county in 945 C.E. His final position was *jingxue boshi* (erudite in the classics) in the prefectural school at Dunhuang.²⁹ Some dated documents discovered in the "library cave" and inscriptions remaining in the caves at Dunhuang help in reconstructing his personal history and his official career in the local government.

- 902 C.E. twenty years old, student at the local prefectural school.
- 908 C.E. twenty-six years old, a commoner (*buyi*) at Dunhuang.
- 924 C.E. forty-two years old, editor of the annual calendar.³⁰
- 925 C.E. forty-three years old, military adviser and official in charge of the state ritual. He sponsored the reconstruction project on the north wall of the entrance corridor of the Zhai family cave (Cave 220).³¹
- 926 C.E. forty-four years old, military adviser and official in charge of the state ritual. He edited the annual calendar and signed his name at the end of the manuscript: "Edited by Zhai Fengda, Military Adviser."³²
- 928 C.E. forty-six years old, military adviser. He edited the annual calendar and signed his name with the same title.³³
- 945 C.E. sixty-three years old, erudite in the prefectural school (*zhouxue boshi*). He composed a gazetteer of Shouchang County and presented it to the magistrate. He also edited the annual calendar.
- 956 C.E. seventy-four years old, erudite in the prefectural school. He edited the annual calendar and his student Zhai Wenjin copied it.³⁴
- 958 C.E. seventy-six years old, acting vice director of the Ministry of Public Works in the Department of State Affairs.³⁵ He made copies of Buddhist sutras for the sake of his deceased wife (or mother), Mrs. Ma.

959 C.E. seventy-seven years old, erudite in the classics in the prefectural school. He edited the annual calendar.³⁶

In addition to this dated information, a few Buddhist sutras and secular texts have been identified as copies made by Zhai Fengda. On the whole, Zhai Fengda was a very active and productive scholar-official. His father, Zhai Xin, and his younger brother Zhai Wenzheng also served in the local government as military and civil officials.³⁷

One daughter of the Zhai family married the governor of Dunhuang and sponsored several projects of construction and reconstruction at the Mogao site. The Zhai family, therefore, became one of the ruling clans in the local communities during the periods of the Five Dynasties (907–959 C.E.) and Song (960–1035 C.E.).

In 925 C.E., Zhai Fengda chose to represent a new type (*xinyang*) of Mañjuśrī picture (*Wenshubian*) on the north wall of the entrance tunnel of Cave 220, his family cave, when he was a civil official in the local government and a military adviser in the army. This new type of Mañjuśrī picture depicts the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī from a frontal perspective, directly facing the viewer, just like a formal icon of the Buddha. It also includes the images of Sudhāna (*Shancai tongzi*) and the king of Khotan (*Yutian wang*) (Plate 12).

Some scholars at Dunhuang have correctly pointed out that the so-called new type of Mañjuśrī picture entails two things: first, Mañjuśrī becomes the center of the painting; and second, the king of Khotan replaces the black “slave of Kunlun” (*Kunlun nu*)³⁸ to guide the lion of Mañjuśrī.³⁹

Mañjuśrī’s image appeared as the Buddha’s assistant in the early Tang caves. During the Tang dynasty, Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra were repre-

sented as a pair, one at the left and the other at the right of the Buddha. They were shown in polite postures toward the Buddha, and only two-thirds of their faces can be seen. For example, the west wall of Cave 220 depicts the two bodhisattvas at the upper left and upper right corners, flanking the statue of the Buddha in the central niche (see Figs. 1.2 and 1.3). In the late Tang period, however, this pair of bodhisattvas was shown together with other smaller attendant bodhisattvas. Their images are relatively large and striking among the bodhisattvas, but their locations and postures still suggest their positions as the Buddha’s assistants (Fig. 2.10).

The painting of Mañjuśrī on the north wall of the passageway of Cave 220, patronized by Zhai Fengda in 925 C.E., is the first depiction of the well-known bodhisattva alone. The frontality of the image and its separation from Samantabhadra change the status of Mañjuśrī from the Buddha’s assistant to an independent icon. The independent Mañjuśrī icon, in turn, marks a significant change in Chinese Buddhism and Buddhist art: it conveys the further sinicization and localization of Buddhism in China and the great popularity of local icons after the fall of the Tang dynasty. The issue of local icons is discussed in the next section.

In addition to the new type of Mañjuśrī picture located in the central rectangle on the wall of the entrance to Cave 220, two standing bodhisattvas are also shown at its left and right sides. The one depicted at the left is Avalokiteśvara, who holds a bottle of pure water in his right hand and a lotus flower in his left hand. This image was made by Zhai Fengda’s uncle Zhai Shende, whose portrait can be seen among the donors’ portraits below the painting. The bodhisattva shown at the right side is again an image of Mañjuśrī. He holds a bottle of pure water in his left hand and a willow branch in his right hand.

The portraits of the patrons, depicted below the Mañjuśrī icon, can be divided into two groups. The first group includes the deceased father of Zhai Fengda, his two brothers, and Zhai Fengda himself. The second group includes his uncle and the deceased son and grandson. A red line clearly separates the two groups (Fig. 2.11).

The Zhai brothers and their father are shown in official attire, with their official titles written in front of their portraits. The order is from the oldest to the youngest. Zhai Fengda is positioned behind his father and elder brother but before his younger brother. The father stands on a square carpet while his sons share a long, rectangular carpet.

The uncle of Zhai Fengda heads the second group. The three people, one alive and two dead, are shown in casual clothing. The inscriptions written in front of their portraits indicate their names and their relationships with Zhai Fengda. The inscription beside Zhai Fengda's uncle also identifies him as a *le zhuchi xingzhe*, a monk's assistant-in-residence who performs the duties of a disciple.

It seems that the members of the Zhai clan came to visit their family cave frequently. Some years after the completion of the new type of Mañjuśrī picture in 925 c.e., Zhai Fengda was promoted to a higher position in the local government. He then came to his family cave and added his

new title on the mural. This addition can still be seen just above his portrait on the north wall of the passageway. He also traced his family history, praised the ancestor who created this family cave, and personally wrote the essay on the mural.⁴⁰

It is significant that Zhai Fengda traced the history of the Zhai family at Dunhuang back to the first year of the Dacheng era of the Northern Zhou (579 c.e.), but he counted the generations from Zhai Tong—whose style-name was Siyuan, the initiator of the family cave-temple—and considered himself the “great-grandson of the ninth generation” (*jiudai zengsun*) of Zhai Tong.⁴¹ The recognition of the creator of the family cave as the first ancestor, to whom later generations of the clan could have offered sacrifices annually, suggests the nature of the family cave-temple as an ancestral shrine.



Figure 2.10 | Samantabhadra and his followers, Cave 196, late Tang (848–906 c.e.).

Figure 2.11 |
Patrons from
the Zhai family,
north wall of
the passageway
of Cave 220,
Dunhuang,
925 C.E.



Fujieda Akira has suggested that the repainting of the south wall of Cave 220 was sponsored by Zhai Fengda when he was working on the repainting of the north wall of the passageway in 925 C.E.⁴² This suggestion corresponds with the motifs depicted on the south wall, which concentrate on local icons (see the next section). Very possibly, the paintings on the south, north, and west walls and the ceiling, and the painting on the second layer of the east wall (just below the painting of the Western Xia period, 1036–1226 C.E.), were made during the Five Dynasties with the patronage of Zhai Fengda.

Scholars at the Dunhuang Research Academy have suggested that the paintings on the second layer of the four walls and the ceiling in the main hall and the new entrance, which changed the shape of the passageway from rectangular to trapezoid, were made

in the Western Xia period.⁴³ This dating does not correspond with the motifs represented on the south wall—the *ruixiang*, or auspicious images—which are absent from the Western Xia paintings. In fact, Dunhuang scholars mainly base their dating of the four walls and the ceiling upon the Thousand Buddhas depicted on the east wall (partially damaged but still visible in the 1970s) and the decorations in the entrance passage, which were probably made much later than the paintings on the south, north, and west walls.

The fourth reconstruction of the cave includes the change of the gate and the repainting of the east wall in the Western Xia, when such reconstruction was popular at the Mogao caves. This time, the small niche built in the middle Tang, the late Tang paintings on the south wall of the passageway, and Zhai

Fengda's new type of Mañjuśrī picture on the north wall of the passageway were covered by the alterations to the entrance. The painting of the Five Dynasties on the east wall of the main hall, sponsored by Zhai Fengda, was also covered by new motifs of the Thousand Buddhas. Therefore, the outermost painting on the east wall and the new gate belong to the same period of the Western Xia.

After the Western Xia modifications, the condition of the cave remained unchanged until the early

1940s, when the outer layer of the four walls of the main hall was completely removed. In 1975 the Western Xia additions to the entrance were removed by the Dunhuang Research Institute, unveiling the middle Tang niche on the south wall and the Five Dynasties picture of Mañjuśrī on the north wall of the passageway.

Fortunately, Paul Pelliot's photographer Charles Nouette took a picture of the whole of the south wall (Fig. 2.12) and of the whole west wall, including a



Figure 2.12 | South wall of Cave 220 (second layer) painted in the Five Dynasties (907–959 C.E.). Photo by Charles Nouette in 1908.

Figure 2.13 |
West wall of
Cave 220
(second layer)
painted in the
Five Dynasties
(907–959 c.e.).
Photo by
Charles Nouette
in 1908.



small part of the north wall (Fig. 2.13), in 1908. These photographs were taken a few decades before the complete removal of the north, south, and east walls in the early 1940s. Pelliot recorded some inscriptions remaining on the south wall painting.⁴⁴ James Lo photographed the south wall again in 1943, just before the removal of the outer layer. His photo shows the half-damaged condition of the wall (Fig. 2.14). These visual and literary records enable a brief study of the paintings that are no longer visible.

The history of reconstruction of the Zhai family cave shows that the changes were often made under new sociopolitical circumstances. When the Zhai family realized the impropriety of the pictures in their family cave under the contemporary social conditions, they did some reconstruction to remedy the situation. The changing pictures in the family cave of the Zhai clan provide excellent examples for exam-

ining the relationships between family and society and between art and politics.

Local Icons and Local Histories

The appearance of the Zhai family cave in the Five Dynasties was completely different from its original condition in the early Tang. In 925 c.e. the four walls of the cave were completely covered by a new layer of clay plaster and painted over with contemporary images, including the foreign and domestic Buddhist icons called *ruixiang*, or auspicious images, and various legendary and historical stories of Buddhism, reflecting the great popularity of the localized icons at Dunhuang after the decline of Tang power.

Most of the Buddhist icons depicted on the south wall are the divine guardians of the Khotan kingdom, a close ally of the local government at

Figure 2.14 |
Half-damaged
condition of
the south wall
(second layer)
of Cave 220 in
the early
1940s. Photo
by James Lo;
Lo Archive
no. 220-7.



Dunhuang. The founding history of the Khotan kingdom occupies the largest space in the painting, with the king of Khotan represented on the north wall of the passageway. These motifs must have pleased the official envoys from Khotan who visited the Mogao caves in the spring of 925 C.E. Zhai Fengda, the cultural representative of the Dunhuang government and the patron of the painting, obviously used these motifs as a tool of diplomatic propaganda for his government.

The term “*ruixiang*” has been translated as “miraculous images”⁴⁵ or “miraculous statues”⁴⁶ or “famous images.”⁴⁷ These translations are correct to a certain degree, but all differ slightly from the original Chinese meaning. A direct and precise translation of “*ruixiang*” should be “auspicious images,” which is closely associated with the ancient tradition of *xiangrui* (auspicious omens) popular in China since the Han dynasty. Because the auspicious images are often associated with Buddhist historical

figures and places, some scholars also refer to such images as “paintings of the stories and relics in Buddhist history.”⁴⁸

Generally speaking, the auspicious images include Buddhist icons, created in India and in other regions, that are closely associated with a specific place and a story or stories. The locations and the legends surrounding such icons establish individual identities for them. Most of these auspicious images were created and used by local Buddhist communities in various regions and thus represent the ideas and tastes of local peoples. Therefore, they often imply strong contemporary sociopolitical meanings in the regional/historical contexts.

Auspicious images emerged in the Dunhuang caves in the early Tang period and developed in the middle Tang period under Tibetan rule. The standard composition of these auspicious images in the middle Tang caves is a band of rectangles surrounding the ceiling of the western niche of a cave. Usually, a

single image is depicted in each rectangle, and one by one, the images are connected to form a band. More than thirty images are regularly chosen to decorate a single niche, as in Caves 231 and 237.

The auspicious images were often depicted on the ceilings of the passageways in the late Tang period. Seven paintings of the auspicious images and Buddhist historical stories have been identified in the late Tang caves, including Caves 9, 39, 45, 85, 126, 236, and 340.⁴⁹

The representations of the auspicious images reached their zenith during the Five Dynasties. More icons were selected from the local Buddhist histories as the subject matter of the Dunhuang murals. In addition to the paintings on the ceilings of the western niches and on the ceilings of the passageways, they were also shown on the walls of the main halls, just like the illustrations of the main sutras. The prominent locations and large scales of these paintings reflect their significance in the art of the Five Dynasties.

One of the largest paintings of the auspicious images and Buddhist historical stories covered the entire south wall of Cave 220 (i.e., the second layer made in the Five Dynasties). Unfortunately, this layer no longer exists; it was completely removed in the early 1940s. However, a black-and-white photograph of the painting, published by Paul Pelliot in the 1920s, can still serve as a major reference for our understanding of the historical appearance of the Zhai family cave during the Five Dynasties period.

Thirty-three auspicious images are shown in this painting, but only one of them, the “double-bodied Buddha,” has been correctly identified.⁵⁰ This limited identification has served the scholarly community for decades. No real progress has been made in studying this painting since the 1930s.⁵¹

In the hope of gaining a better understanding of

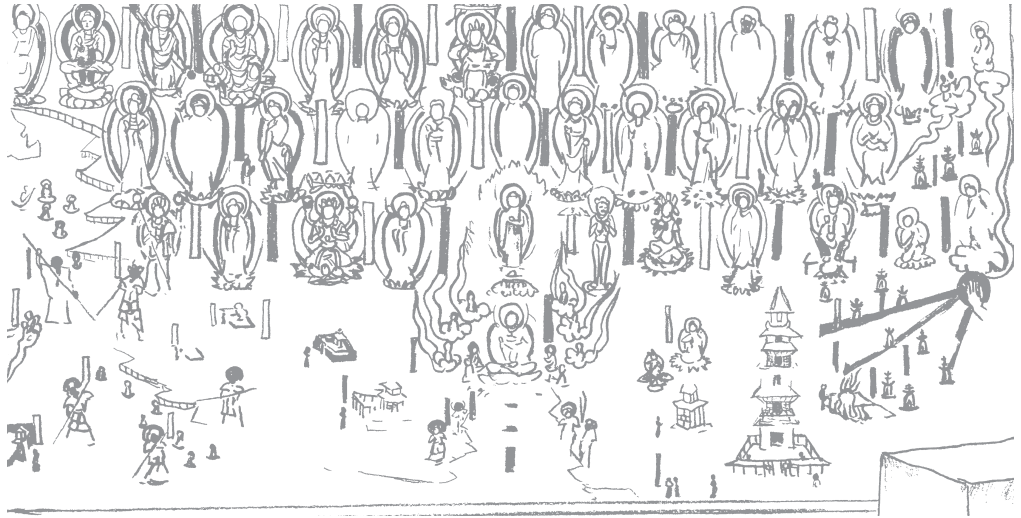
the tenth-century appearance of the Zhai family cave, I have made a drawing of the south wall painting from Pelliot’s plate (Fig. 2.15) and have identified eight of the thirty-three auspicious images and five of the Buddhist historical and legendary stories depicted in the painting. These newly identified images could help us understand the historical meaning of the Zhai family cave and serve as a basis for further studies on the significance of the local icons in tenth-century Dunhuang. The following is a brief discussion of the newly identified pictures.

The individual icons in this painting are aligned along three horizontal rows in the upper and middle sections. The narrative scenes are located at both sides of the icons and in the lower section. The top row includes thirteen icons; the second row, eleven icons; and the third row, nine icons.

The “double-bodied Buddha,” identified by Matsumoto Eiichi in 1937, is the tenth icon in the second row (from the left [east] to the right [west], the same direction hereafter). A few similar icons with clear inscriptions indicating their identities have been discovered in other Dunhuang caves (Fig. 2.16). These finds confirm Matsumoto’s identification of the image. Similar icons have also been found in Turfan and Halaheshuo (Khara Khoto) and have also been discussed by Matsumoto. A particularly fine sculpture of this image was discovered by Kozlov and is in the collection of the State Hermitage, St. Petersburg.⁵² In addition, I have found two sculptures representing the same theme in the Southern Niches at Bazhong in northern Sichuan, one made in the late Tang and another in the Song dynasty.⁵³

The second icon in the first (top) row is the statue of the Buddha in the Deer Park. The seated Buddha is shown sitting on a lotus pedestal, with his legs interlocked. The most striking mark of this icon is a large round lotus depicted in front of the statue,

Figure 2.15 | Drawing of the south wall (second layer) of Cave 220, Dunhuang, which was originally painted in the Five Dynasties (907–959 c.e.). Drawing by Ning Qiang.



on which two footprints of the Buddha can be seen. A similar image can be found on the eastern slope of the ceiling of the western niche of Cave 231 (Fig. 2.17) built in the middle Tang period. The inscription beside the image reads:

*Zhong tian zhu bo luo nai guo lu ye yuan rui
xiang*⁵⁴

The auspicious image in the Deer Park at
Vārāṇasī kingdom in central India.

Śākyamuni's first sermon in the Deer Park is a well-known episode in the Buddha's life, and it is associated with a specific place (the Deer Park in Benares). Sun Xiushen has identified the round lotus as the Wheel of Dharma, by citing literary references from the *Huayan jing*, *Puyao jing*, and *Zhidu lun*.⁵⁵ According to Sun's explanation, when Śākyamuni was preaching, the Wheel of Dharma flew to the Deer Park and landed in front of the Buddha. The Buddha then touched the wheel with his hand and stopped the wheel from spinning. The marks on the lotus in this picture, however, appear like footprints instead of handprints.⁵⁶

The third Buddha icon in the first row can be identified as the picture of the "auspicious image of the Buddha pointing to the sun and moon" (*zhi ri yue ruixiang*). This icon is shown repeatedly in the middle Tang caves, including Caves 231, 236, and 237 (Fig. 2.18). I have found a three-dimensional version of the icon, a stone sculpture, in a late Tang cave at Bazhong County in Sichuan.⁵⁷ It has been suggested that this image is the portrait of Luo Yun (Rāhula), Śākyamuni's son who later became a buddha. The sun and moon represent the situation when he was born and symbolize his name.⁵⁸ However, there is not sufficient evidence to prove that Luo Yun pointed to the sun and moon. What he did was to cover (*zhang*) them with his hands. Therefore, this

Figure 2.16 | (*opposite, left*) "Double-bodied Buddha," ceiling of the western niche, Cave 231, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 c.e.).

Figure 2.17 | (*opposite, right*) Statue of the Buddha in the Deer Park, ceiling of the western niche, Cave 231, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 c.e.).



identification made by Sun Xiushen still seems questionable. Another possible identification was made by Alexander Soper, who suggested that this image represented a precise moment in Śākyamuni's life:

When Sakyamuni [Śākyamuni] won his sudden increase in supernatural powers after the defeat of Mara [Māra], he sat cross-legged in the air as if on the ground, or soared through the sky like some bird. The sun and moon are mighty powers, yet he raised his hands and stroked their faces.⁵⁹

Soper also mentions a similar stone carving of the same subject, attributed to the Tang dynasty (Fig. 2.19).⁶⁰ The inscription on the stone carving reads:

*Shi jia mu ni xiang fu wai dao shi*⁶¹

The moment when the Buddha Śākyamuni subjugated the demons.

The inscription identifies the Buddha image as Śākyamuni. This identification agrees with Soper's suggestion. Nevertheless, this stone carving seems to be an isolated case, and its dating and authenticity are still uncertain.⁶² No firm identification can be reached at this moment because of a lack of evidence. However, the title of the picture can be identified by comparing it with other similar images with clear inscriptions remaining in the Dunhuang caves.

The fourth image on the top row is a seated Buddha dressed in a white robe. His legs are separated, naturally dropping down to the lotus flower pedestal on the ground. His right hand is in front of his chest, as if in the mudra (hand gesture) of giving a sermon. His left hand rests on his left thigh. This is a very popular posture of Maitreya in the Dunhuang caves. A very similar image on the eastern

slope of the western niche of Cave 237 is also visible (Fig. 2.20). The inscription written beside the image reads:

*Tian zhu guo bai yin mi le rui xiang*⁶³

The auspicious image of the white silver Maitreya in India.



Figure 2.18 | “Buddha pointing to the sun and moon,” ceiling of the western niche, Cave 231, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 C.E.).

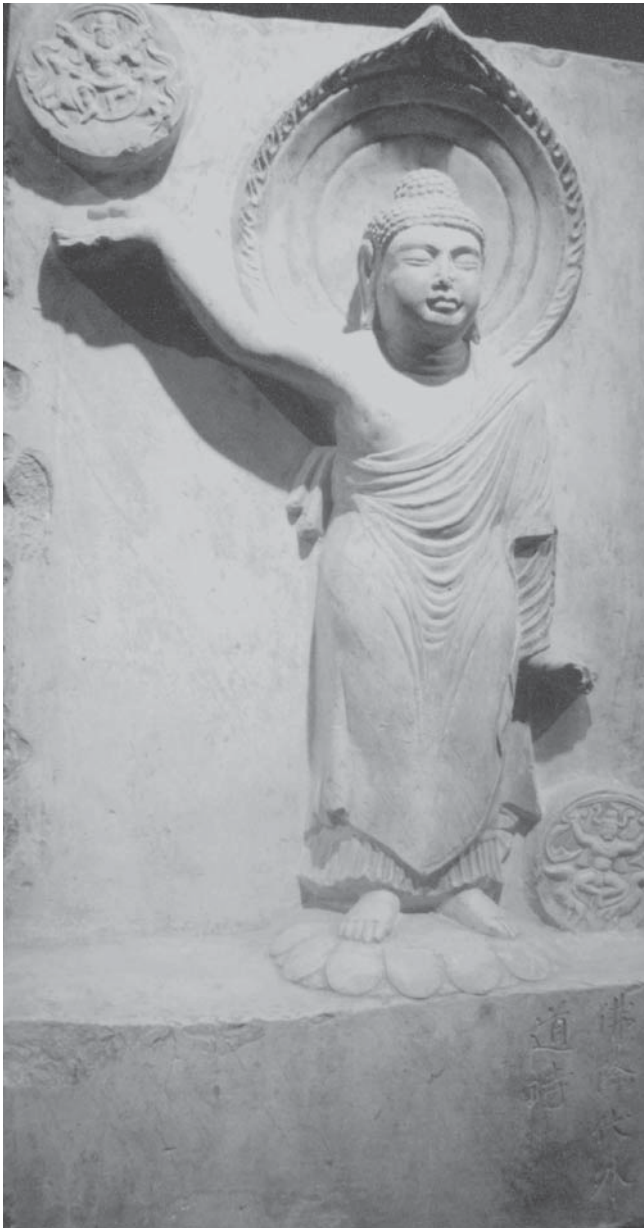


Figure 2.19 | “Buddha pointing to the sun and moon,” stone carving found in Xi’an, Tang dynasty (618–906 c.e.). Photo by Li Song, 2001.



Figure 2.20 | Silver image of Maitreya, ceiling of the western niche, Cave 237, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 c.e.).

This inscription indicates the name and original location of the Maitreya image. The white robe of the icon probably suggests that this is an image made of silver.

The third image in the second row stands in an oblique pose. The figure bends slightly forward to give something with his right hand to a very small figure standing in front of him. Obviously, this image represents the story of a thief who tries to steal the jewel on the forehead of a Buddha statue in central India. According to the story, when the Buddha realizes the intent of the thief, he bends over to offer the jewel to the thief as a present. The textual description of the story, found in Xuanzang's *Da Tang Xiyu ji* (Records on the Western Regions of the great Tang), perfectly matches the painting.⁶⁴

Several similar images have been found in other Dunhuang caves. One painting on silk, discovered by Sir Aurel Stein in the "library cave" and now divided into two halves and collected respectively by the British Museum in London and the National Museum in New Delhi, represents this icon as one of the auspicious images.⁶⁵ In particular, an inscription written beside a similar image on the west slope of the western niche in Cave 72 (Fig. 2.21), built in the Five Dynasties, retells the story in detail:

*Zhong yin du jing fo tou shang bao zhu shi you pin
shi ji jian bao zhu nai sheng pen [dao] xin
xiang bian qu ji gong shou zhu yu zei*⁶⁶

In central India, there was a Buddha image whose forehead was inlaid with a precious pearl. When a poor man saw the pearl, he made up his mind to steal [the pearl]. The Buddha image thus bent over to give the pearl to the thief.

In Xuanzang's records, this story took place in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), but the content of the story in

Xuanzang's version is otherwise exactly the same as the inscription.

The first image in the third row is a standing bodhisattva, half naked, with a canopy above his head. He has four arms. Two arms are raised up, holding the sun and the moon, and of his other pair of hands, the right is raised to chest level and the left hangs down, holding a bottle of pure water. This image is the same as that depicted on the eastern slope of the western niche of Cave 237 (Fig. 2.22). Another similar image is seen on the eastern slope of the western niche of Cave 231. The inscription written beside the image reads:

*Tian zhu mo jia guo guan shi yin pu sa*⁶⁷
The Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara of the
Magadha kingdom in India.

This image has been tentatively identified as the icon of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, which was worshipped in a temple near the famous Nālandā Temple (*Nalanduo si*) in ancient Magadha.⁶⁸

The third image in the third row is a seated bodhisattva with four arms. Two of his arms are raised, holding the sun and the moon in his hands. The other two arms are held together in front of his chest. A similar image can be seen on the eastern slope of the western niche of Cave 237 (Fig. 2.23). The inscription beside the image reads:

*Mi le pu sa sui shi jia lai mo cheng*⁶⁹
Following Śākyamuni, the Bodhisattva
Maitreya comes to Mocheng.

According to the inscription, this image represents the Bodhisattva Maitreya, who came to Mocheng with Śākyamuni.

The fifth icon in the third row is extremely



Figure 2.21 |
“Buddha offering a
pearl to the thief,”
ceiling of the west-
ern niche, Cave 72,
Dunhuang, Five
Dynasties (907–959
c.E.).

Figure 2.22 |
(right) The
Avalokiteśvara
from the
Magadha
kingdom, ceil-
ing of the
western niche,
Cave 237,
Dunhuang,
middle Tang
(781–847 C.E.).



Figure 2.23 |
(far right)
Image of
Maitreya in
Mocheng,
ceiling of the
western niche,
Cave 237,
Dunhuang,
middle Tang
(781–847 C.E.).



interesting. Various duplications of the image have been found in the paintings and sculptures in the Dunhuang caves and the silk paintings discovered in the “library cave.” This image of the Buddha is in an unusual posture. His right arm hangs down straight while the left hand is raised to his stomach, holding a corner of his robe. Some Western scholars believed that this image represents Śākyamuni preaching the Law on Vulture Peak.⁷⁰ Recent Chinese scholarship has proven, however, that this image actually represents a local stone statue of the Buddha, originally located in Panhe County, not far from Dunhuang.⁷¹

This image appeared in the Dunhuang caves in the early Tang period and gradually became popular after the middle Tang. One inscription written beside a similar image, which is depicted on the east slope of the western niche of Cave 231 of the middle Tang (Fig. 2.24), reads:

*Pan he du du fu yang rong shan pan he xian bei
sheng rong rui xiang*⁷²

The holy auspicious image in the north of
Panhe County near Yangrong Mountain
in Panhe Province.

Panhe County was located in the Liangzhou region; therefore, the *ruixiang* in Panhe County was also popularly called the “auspicious image in Liangzhou” (*Liangzhou ruixiang*).⁷³

According to legend, a Chinese monk named Liu Sahe predicted that an image of the Buddha would appear on the Yugu Hill (a part of the Yangrong Mountain) in Panhe County. If the Buddha image were perfect, he said, the world would be at



Figure 2.24 | Auspicious image of the Buddha in Panhe County, ceiling of the western niche, Cave 231, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 C.E.).

peace; if something were missing from the image, there would be unrest and pain in society. In the first year of the Zhengguang era (520 c.e.) of the Northern Wei, eighty-seven years after Liu Sahe's prediction, a large Buddha image did appear on the hill during a thunderstorm. Unfortunately, the Buddha's head was absent, and wars and disasters followed. Forty years later, the head of the Buddha image was discovered in a valley east of Liangzhou. The head matched the body perfectly. The Buddha's head, however, fell off again several times during the Northern Zhou dynasty (557–580 c.e.), and this unusual phenomenon was said to be related to the persecution of Buddhism during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou. In 609 c.e., Emperor Yang of the Sui dynasty visited the image and ordered it to be reproduced all over his empire.⁷⁴

In addition to the thirty-three auspicious images, more than five miraculous stories from Buddhist history were also represented on both sides of the holy icons and the lower section of the painting on the south wall of Cave 220. The most impressive motif on the wall represents the historical narrative concerning the establishment of the Khotan kingdom. It covers almost half of the lower section of the painting. The story, preserved in ancient Tibetan texts, goes like this:

In ancient times, when first the Buddha Kāśyapa appeared in the world the Li country had just then become land. The people who settled in it practiced the Law. Afterwards, when Kāśyapa's teaching of the Law, having been established by him, declined and the Law of the Li country also decayed, many sages including the sages Kharaśva and Kharehustēn by name, settled within a short period at mount Rāca-dag in a part of the Li country. Thereupon, acting as pious friends afterwards certain evil men, harming

them treated them with contempt, showing them no honor or respect, and the sages, being displeased, left the Li country. Soaring into the air they went to another country. Then the people of the Li country, not believing in the Law, held false views. The Nāga being displeased, the water came in, and the Li country became a lake.

After it had been a lake for a long time, the Buddha Śākyamuni was born in the country of India. Working for the sake of beings, he did the acts and deeds of a Buddha such as turning the Wheel of the Law. When the time was at hand for manifesting his *nirvāṇa*, the Buddha, the Lord Śākyamuni, staying in Rājagṛha on mount Gṛdhrakūṭa, when he had preached the *Candragarbha*, on the occasion of appointing protectors of the various lands and such guardians as Devas and Nāgas, prophesied also of the Li country. He appointed Vaiśravaṇa and Saṃjñāya, general of the Yakṣas, and King Ajātaśatru's daughter Vimalaprabhā, and Kumāra Vajrasena, and the Devakanyā Susthīramatī, and the Devī Hārītī etc., accompanied by their retinues. The Lord himself with fourfold retinue, many hundred thousand, soaring into the air, came to the Li country. In the direction where now stands the great stūpa of Hgum-tir, he sat on a lotus-throne which was some seven palm-trees high above the lake into the air of the sky. From the various Buddha-fields in the ten directions, the Tathāgatas, in order to take control over the Li country, sent forth, filling the quarters, rays of admonition. And all the Tathāgatas in the ten directions, in order to take control over the Li country, sent from their various Buddha-fields their retinues of Bodhisattvas to do worship to the Buddha Śākyamuni and the *sn ags-kyi snin-pos* to guard and control the realm, and their rays. At one time they assembled on the crown of the head of the Buddha Śākyamuni, and when they had taken control, there arose a great cry of "Bravo!"

Then the Lord Śākyamuni, having filled with his rays the Li country that had become a lake, from those rays there arose in the water

three hundred and sixty-three lotuses. On the several lotuses appeared several lamps. Then those rays, coming together, circling three times toward the right above the water, will sink into the midst of the water. Then the Lord ordered Ārya Śāriputra and Vaiśravaṇa: “Do you break up this lake that resembles the color of ink at the mountain called Māṃsa-varṇa-parvata (flesh-colored mountain).” So he ordered. And the lake was broken up by the end of Ārya Śāriputra’s mendicant’s staff and by Vaiśravaṇa’s spear-point. And the Lord for the sake of working the purpose of the beings remained there a week on the Gośīrṣa hill, at a place where there is now a small stūpa, inside a shrine to the left of where stands a great image.

Then Ārya Ānanda asked the Lord: “Lord, through what cause, what reason do these rays and lotuses and lamps appear? Through what cause, what reason did these rays come together and, circling three times toward the right, sink into the midst of the water?”

Then the Lord said to Ānanda: “The lake being broken up by the end of Śāriputra’s mendicant’s staff and by Vaiśravaṇa’s spear-point, on the lake’s subsequently drying up, after my *nirvāṇa*, this country called the Li country will exist. In the place where the rays circled three times, afterwards, in a circle, the fortress of Hu-then, the great city Līṇa-ldan, will be built. In the place where the rays sank into the midst of the water, taking control over and guarding the country, an image of the Buddha of Rājagrāma, made with my controlling that bodily defilement should not sink into sandal, will come through the air from the country of India and remain.”⁷⁵

This story is illustrated on the lower section of the south wall painting. Located to the left side of the painting, it starts at the lower center. The Buddha Śākyamuni is coming to the lake with his followers. He sits on a lotus pedestal, with his followers

sitting and flying on both sides. This is perhaps the moment when the holy group landed at the lake. At the far left (near the edge), Śāriputra and Vaiśravaṇa breach the lake with their monk’s staff and spear. Some small buddhas sit on the lotus flowers floating in the lake, which probably symbolize the locations of the three hundred and sixty-three rays. Between the two major scenes, some other Heavenly Kings, dressed like Vaiśravaṇa, breach the lake in different locations. The images of these Heavenly Kings were puzzling at first because they were not recorded in the story as joining Vaiśravaṇa in breaching the lake. After checking Paul Pelliot’s records of the inscriptions remaining in the cave in 1908, however, the confusion was cleared up.⁷⁶ According to Pelliot’s record, one inscription reads:

Bei fang zhong □ *tian wang jue hai zhi yu tian guo shi*⁷⁷

The moment when many Heavenly Kings of the north came to Khotan to breach the sea [lake].

This inscription implies that there is a group of many (*zhong*) Heavenly Kings who came to Khotan to breach the lake. Therefore, it is not surprising that we see several Heavenly Kings breaching the lake in the painting. This episode differs slightly from the earlier version, which concentrates only on Śāriputra and Vaiśravaṇa. In the middle Tang caves, we usually see a small simple scene representing the moment when Śāriputra and Vaiśravaṇa are breaching the lake (Fig. 2.25). The inscription written beside a similar scene in Cave 237 reads:

*Yu tian guo she li fo bi sha men tian wang jue hai shi*⁷⁸

The moment when Śāriputra and the Heavenly King Vaiśravaṇa are breaching the sea [i.e., the lake] in Khotan kingdom.

This inscription mentions Śāriputra and Vaiśravaṇa only, excluding other Heavenly Kings. It seems that the story about the formation of the Khotan kingdom was elaborated, both literally and visually, during the Five Dynasties. This elaboration of the history of the Khotan kingdom must have been re-



Figure 2.25 | Śāriputra and Vaiśravaṇa breaching the lake, ceiling of the western niche, Cave 231, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 c.e.).

lated to the special relationship between Dunhuang and Khotan in that period. It must have also been related to the close relationship between the Cao family, which was the ruling family of Dunhuang, and the Zhai family, which owned the painting.

At the right section of the painting, there are probably six stories depicted on a smaller scale. I have been able to identify four of these stories, including the story of the miraculous image of the Buddha made by King Udayana, the story of covering the sunbeams with a single hand, the story of the fire pond in Nepal, and the story of the great stupas made by King Aśoka.⁷⁹

The story of the miraculous image of the Buddha made by King Udayana has been recorded in various Buddhist texts, including *Guanfo sanmei hai jing*, *Zengyi ahan jing*, *Jinglu yixiang*, *Faxian zhuan*, *Fayuan zhulin*, *Da Tang Xiyu ji*, and *Da Ci'ensi Sanzang fashi zhuan*. The version told by Xuanzang reads:

When Tathāgata first arrived at complete enlightenment, he ascended up to heaven to preach the law for the benefit of his mother, and for three months remained absent. This king [i.e., Udayana], thinking of him with affection, desired to have an image of his person; therefore he asked Mudgalyāyanaputra, by his spiritual power, to transport an artist to the heavenly mansions to observe the excellent marks of Buddha's body, and carve a sandal-wood statue. When Tathāgata returned from the heavenly palace, the carved figure of sandal-wood rose and saluted the Lord of the World. The Lord then graciously addressed it and said, "The work expected from you is to toil in the conversion of heretics, and to lead in the way of religion future ages."⁸⁰

The pictorial representations of the story began in the middle Tang period. The small picture on the



Figure 2.26 | Story of the sandalwood image of the Buddha, ceiling of the western niche, Cave 237, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 C.E.).

northwest corner of the ceiling of Cave 237 depicts the Buddha descending from the clouds and talking to a smaller buddha image who kneels down with his two hands held together in front of his chest (Fig. 2.26). The inscription beside the picture reads:

*Shi fo cong tian jiang xia qi tan xiang nai yang li
bai shi*⁸¹

The moment when the Buddha descended from heaven and the sandalwood image of him faced upward to worship him.

The simple composition of the narrative painting became gradually more sophisticated in the late Tang and the Five Dynasties. On the south wall of Cave 220, this story is seen at the upper right-hand corner. It covers the right side of the three rows of the auspicious images. Two episodes are shown. The first scene represents the moment when the Venerable Master Maudgalyāyana took the sculptor to heaven to see the Buddha. Maudgalyāyana and the sculptor stand on clouds, facing the Buddha, who sits

on clouds in a higher place. The second scene represents the moment when the Buddha descended from heaven and the sandalwood image of him knelt in front of him to show his respect to the real Buddha.

Below this picture is the story of the arhat who blocks the sun rays with a single hand. The popular version of the story told by Xuanzang reads:

After King Aśoka had destroyed the hell, he met Upagupta, a great Arhat, who, by the use of (proper) means, allured him in a right way according as the opportunity (or springs of action, i.e., his power or capacity to believe) led, and converted him. The king addressed the Arhat and said, "Thanks to my acquired merit in former births, I have got (by promise) my kingly authority, but in consequence of my faults I did not, by meeting Buddha, obtain conversion. Now, then, I desire in all the greater degree to honour the bequeathed remains of his body by building stūpas."

The Arhat said, "My earnest desire is that the great king by his merits may be able to employ the invisible powers (the spirits) as agents in fulfilling his vow to protect the three precious ones." And, then, because of the opportune occasion, he entered largely on the narrative of his offering the ball of earth, and on that account of Buddha's prediction, as the origin of his desire to build.

The king having heard this, was overpowered, and he summoned the spirits to assemble, and commanded them, saying, "By the gracious disposal and spiritual efficacy of the guiding power of the King of the Law I have become, as the result of my good actions in former states of life, the highest amongst them. (I wish now) with especial care to prepare a means of paying religious worship to the bequeathed body of Tathāgata. Do you, then, spirits and genii, by your combined strength and agreement of purpose, raise stūpas for relics of Buddha throughout the whole of Jambudvīpa, to the very last house of all

(i.e., to the extremity of the land). The mind (or purpose) is mine, the merit of completing it shall be yours. The advantage to be derived from this excellent act of religion I wish not to be confined to one person only; let each of you, then, raise a building in readiness (for completion), and then come and receive my further commands."

Having received these instructions, the genii commenced their meritorious work in the several quarters where they were; and having finished the task (so far), they came together to ask for further directions. Aśoka-rāja (Wu-yau-wang) having opened the stūpas of the eight countries where they were built, divided the relics, and having delivered them to the genii, he addressed the Arhat and said, "My desire is that the relics should be deposited in every place at the same moment exactly: although ardently desirous of this, my mind has not yet been able to perfect a plan for accomplishing it."

The Arhat addressed the king and said, "Command the genii to go each to his appointed place and regard the sun. When the sun becomes obscured and its shape as if a hand covered it, then is the time: drop the relics into the stūpas." The king having received these instructions, gave orders accordingly to the genii to expect the appointed day.

Meantime the king, Aśoka, watching the sun's disc, waited for the sign; then at noon (or the day) the Arhat, by his spiritual power, stretched forth his hand and concealed the sun. At the places where the stūpas had been built for completion, all (the genii) observing this event, at the same moment concluded the meritorious undertaking.⁸²

The visual representations of the story appeared in the middle Tang and continued through the late Tang, Five Dynasties, and Song periods (Fig. 2.27). An inscription written beside a picture of the story on the ceiling of Cave 454, built in the Song dynasty, reads:



Figure 2.27 | Arhat blocking the sun with a single hand, ceiling of the passageway, Cave 9, Dunhuang, late Tang (848–906 c.e.).

radiate. Twelve stupas, which symbolize the eighty-four thousand stupas built by King Aśoka, are depicted within the radius of the sunbeam.

Next to the Aśoka story is the story of the fire pond in Nepal. This story has been recorded by Buddhist and historical texts, including *Da Tang Xiyu ji*, *Fayuan zhulin*, *Jiu Tang shu*, and *Xin Tang shu*. The version told by

Daoxuan in his *Fayuan zhulin* is as follows:

*A yu wang qi ba wan si qian ta luo han yi shou
zhe ri*

*Ri guang xia chu jian zhi*⁸³

King Aśoka raised eighty-four thousand stupas;
the arhat obscured the sun with his hand;
they [the stupas] can be seen where the
sun's rays descend.⁸⁴

This is one of the most popular Buddhist stories represented in the Dunhuang caves. In Chinese history, at least two emperors imitated Aśoka's stupa-building activity. Emperor Wen of the Sui dynasty, with the Aśoka story in mind, ordered stupas built in every county in his empire in the Kaihuang era (581–600 c.e.). King Qian Shu of the Wuyue kingdom of the Five Dynasties, inspired by the Aśoka story, made eighty-four thousand miniature stupas in which Buddhist sutras were enclosed. It took ten years to complete the project.⁸⁵

On the south wall of Cave 220, we see a large hand covering the sun, from which some beams

In the second year of the Xianqing era of the Tang dynasty (657 c.e.), the royal envoy Wang Xuance and his followers went to present *kasaya* [*kasāya*, or the monk's robe] to countries in the West. When they arrived at the east border of a village called Poluodulai in southwest Nepal, they saw a pond of water and fire. If illuminated by a fire torch, fire came out from the water. When [one] wanted to put out the fire with water, the flames [in the pond] became stronger. The Chinese envoys once set up a cauldron on the fire [in the pond] and cooked their meals. The envoy asked the [local] king [about the pond]; the king answered: "We once touched a golden wardrobe with sticks. I asked people to draw it out, but the harder they drew, the deeper the wardrobe sank. According to legend, the heavenly golden crown of Buddha Maitreya was enclosed [in the wardrobe], which was protected by the fire dragon. The fire from the pond is the fire of the fire dragon."⁸⁶

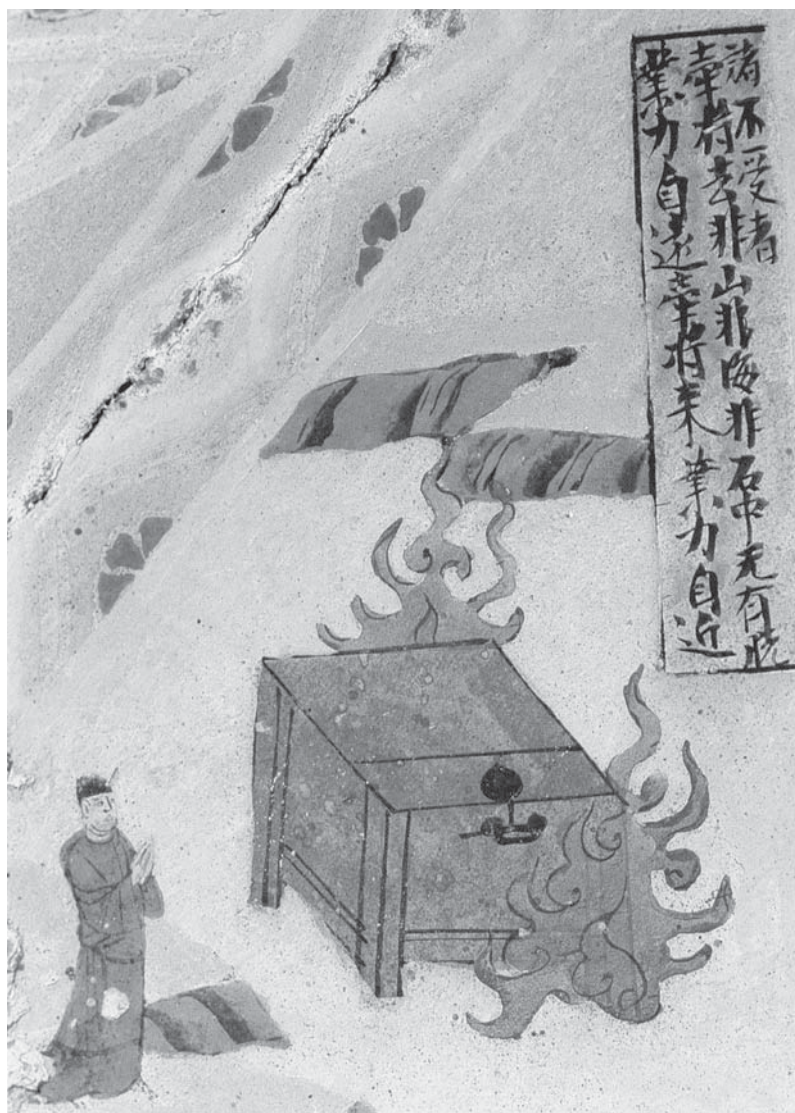


Figure 2.28 | Fire pond in Nepal, ceiling of the west niche, Cave 237, Dunhuang, middle Tang (781–847 c.e.).

This story was represented with a similar composition in several caves at Dunhuang, including Caves 231, 237, and 98. The picture on the ceiling of the passageway of Cave 98 shows a group of people trying to draw the wardrobe out of the water with

sticks. Flames are shining around the wardrobe. The inscription beside the picture reads:

*Zhong tian zhu ni po luo guo
you mi le tou guan gui
zhai shui zhong you lai
qu shui zhong huo chu*⁸⁷

The wardrobe enclosing Maitreya's crown was in the water [pond] in the kingdom of Nepal in central India. If somebody came to take it, fire would appear from the water.

The picture in Cave 237 represents a person (the Chinese envoy Wang Xuance?) standing in front of the pond (Fig. 2.28). A wardrobe with flames is shown in the water. The composition of the picture depicting the same story on the south wall of Cave 220 is identical to this one. Next to the story of the fire pond is a five-story pagoda. A similar picture has been found on the ceiling of the passageway of Cave 108 (Fig. 2.29). The inscription written beside the picture reads:

Qi ta a yu wang zhao shen bian duo neng yu □
*shen bian*⁸⁸

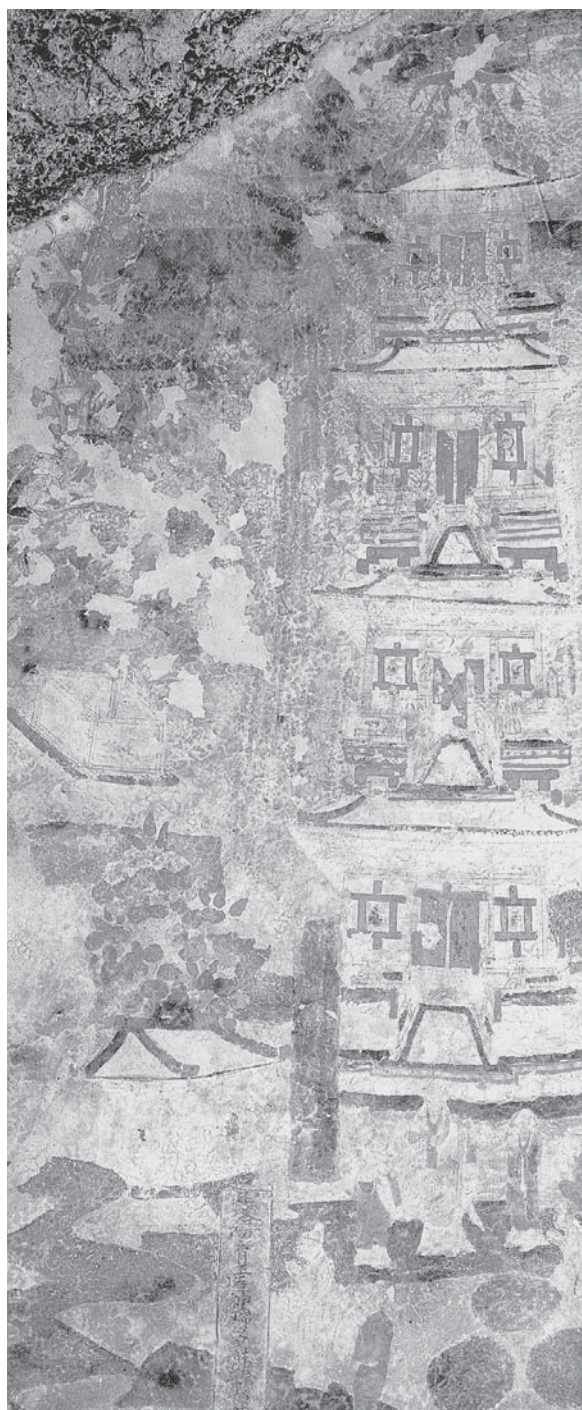
This stupa was built by King Aśoka. Its divine power of transformation was unlimited. The rest . . . divine power of transformation.⁸⁹

Based upon this inscription, Sun Xiushen has made a few tentative suggestions for the identification of the picture. None of them, however, perfectly matches the painting.⁹⁰ Although we know the basic information about the pagoda, a further investigation is needed to recover the whole story.

On the whole, the iconographic study of the tenth-century painting on the south wall of Cave 220 suggests that the worship of local icons became very popular after the decline of the Tang dynasty. Local icons became more important than traditional Indian icons of the Buddha, indicating the strong influence of local communities in the development of Buddhist art along the Silk Road. In particular, the stories surrounding a certain icon, created often by local believers, could somehow turn the icon into a “miraculous” or “auspicious” image whose divine power of protection might be much stronger than other traditional icons in the minds of the local population.

The historical context of Dunhuang during the Five Dynasties further explains the reasons for the great popularity of the localized icons. The statue of the Buddha in Panhe County, for example, reveals the relationship between local icons and local history. Located at the center of the tenth-century south wall of Cave 220, the Buddha statue in Panhe County naturally becomes the visual focus of the painting (Fig. 2.30). The miraculous stories surrounding this icon were recorded in various texts. Different versions of the stories have also been found in the Dunhuang manuscripts.⁹¹ Apparently, this image became very popular after the period of the Tang dynasty, particularly in the Hexi area, including Dunhuang.

Figure 2.29 | Five-story pagoda built by King Aśoka, ceiling of the passageway, Cave 108, Dunhuang, Five Dynasties (907–959 C.E.).

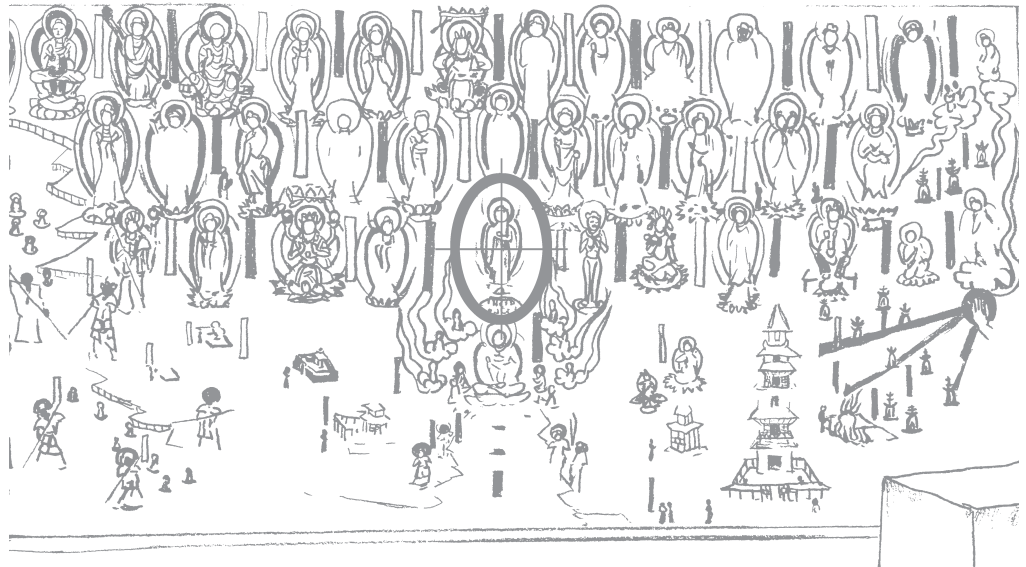


During the Five Dynasties, the visual representation of this image reached its peak. Several extremely large paintings of the image were created on the backs of the central pillars in large caves, including Caves 98 and 61, which were sponsored by the ruling Cao family. According to legend, if this image were complete, society would be peaceful and prosperous; if any part of the image were missing, there would be wars and disasters. Apparently, the patrons from the Cao family expressed their strong wish for peace during that unstable period by portraying a complete image of the stone statue: the Buddha's body and head were always united in the Cao family caves. This was also probably why the Zhai clan chose to depict this icon at the center of the south wall painting of its family cave. A large painting covering the whole south wall of Cave 72 of the Five Dynasties is full of various details from the stories on this auspicious image (Fig. 2.31).⁹² The great popularity of this local icon reflects the magical power of local icons in the local mentality as well as the desperate wish for peace among local residents.

The idea of using powerful icons as a divine force for protection seems to have come from the Khotan kingdom, an allied regional power of the local government at Dunhuang during the Five Dynasties and Song periods. Although most identifiable auspicious images on the south wall of Cave 220 were originally from India, the central icon was the local Panhe Buddha. The prominent placement of this local icon reflects the desire of local people, including the patrons, artists, and general audience, for peace and divine protection.

Another striking motif in this painting is the historical narrative concerning the establishment of the Khotan kingdom, which was far west of Dunhuang. Depicted with many individual icons, this motif fully elaborates the story of Khotan with vivid details. The Buddha Śākyamuni is shown on the central axis, appearing like an individual icon. Śāriputra and Vaiśravaṇa are represented together with many Heavenly Kings, pricking the lake with their spears and sticks in order to turn the lake into a piece of land for the Khotan kingdom.

Figure 2.30 | South wall (second layer) of Cave 220 with a focus on the Panhe Buddha, Dunhuang. Drawing by Ning Qiang from the original painting made in the Five Dynasties (907–959 C.E.).



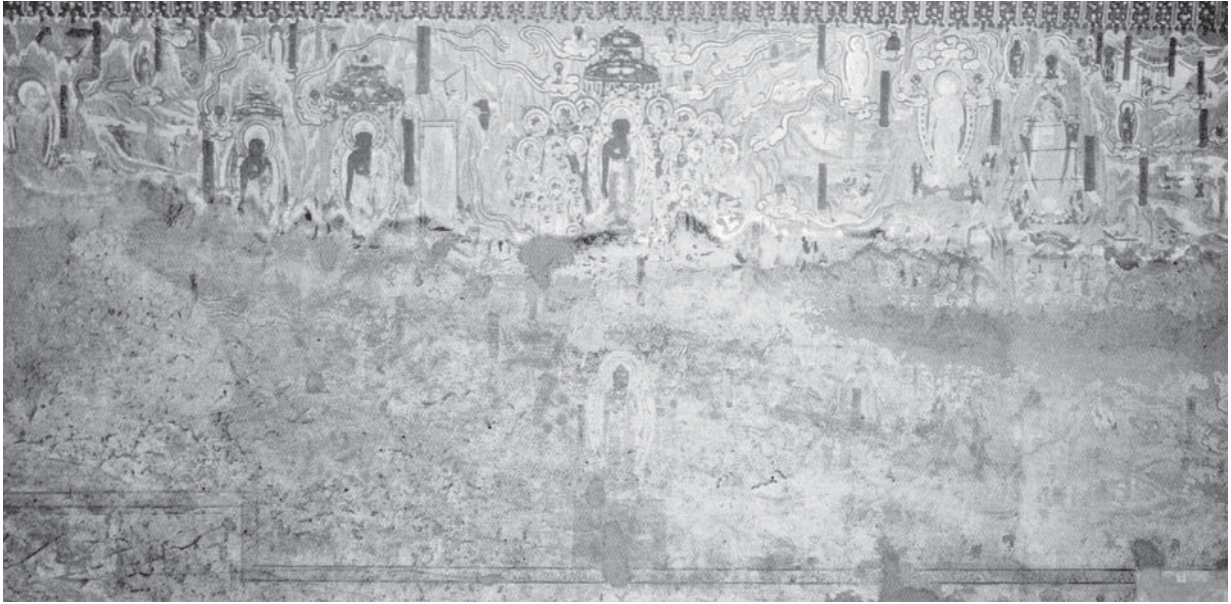


Figure 2.31 | Painting of the Liu Sahe story on the south wall of Cave 72, Dunhuang, Five Dynasties (907–959 c.e.).

This story had been depicted in previous murals, but only the two key figures, Śāriputra and Vaiśravaṇa, were featured in those paintings. In addition, those paintings are very small, and their locations are insignificant. In contrast, the picture of the Khotanese history on the south wall of Cave 220 is extremely large and filled with details. The impressive scale and prominent placement of the picture, therefore, raise an interesting question: why was the legend of the Khotan kingdom so important in the Zhai family cave?

Paul Pelliot's records of the inscriptions remaining on the wall in 1908 further suggest a close link between the motifs depicted on the south wall of Cave 220 and the Khotan kingdom. He recorded eight inscriptions:

*Jia ye ru lai cong she wei guo teng kong zhi yu tian guo*⁹³

The Buddha Kāśyapa flew to the Khotan kingdom from Śrāvastī.

*Fen shen fo cong zhong yin du jian tuo luo guo lai*⁹⁴

The [image of the] Buddha with divided bodies came to [Khotan] from Gandhara in middle India.

*Shi fo ying xian yu tian guo shi*⁹⁵

The moment when the stone Buddha appeared in the Khotan kingdom.

*Shi jia mu ni fo bai tan zhen rong cong han guo lai kan cheng zhu*⁹⁶

The white sandalwood image of the Buddha Śākyamuni came to stay in Kancheng City from China.

□ *bi po si fo cong she wei guo teng kong zhi yu tian guo shi*⁹⁷

□ the moment when the Buddha Vipasyin flew to the Khotan kingdom from Śrāvastī.

*Pu zhou xiang [tie fo?] . . . zhi yu tian guo shi*⁹⁸

The moment when the [iron image?] of the
Buddha . . . came to Khotan from the
Puzhou County.

*Nan wu ju liu sun fo . . . lai zhu yu tian guo shi*⁹⁹

The moment when the venerable Buddha
Krakucchanda . . . came to stay in the
Khotan kingdom.

*Bei fang zhong □ tian wang jue hai zhi yu tian
guo shi*¹⁰⁰

The moment when many [?] Heavenly Kings
of the north came to Khotan to breach the
sea [lake].¹⁰¹

Significantly, although these icons were not created in Khotan, the inscriptions indicated that they all came to Khotan. Previous inscriptions written beside the icons do not identify their contemporary locations, but the inscriptions in Cave 220 identify them as in Khotan. For example, the inscription written beside the “double-bodied Buddha” in Cave 237, built during the middle Tang period (781–847 C.E.), mentions the original location of the icon (Gandhara) and the miraculous story concerning its creation, but it does not indicate where this icon is now. On the contrary, the inscription on the south wall of Cave 220 does not mention the story about its creation at all; instead, it emphasizes the icon’s “coming to (Khotan).” Apparently, the motifs and inscriptions on the south wall of Cave 220 delivered a clear message to its viewers: Khotan was the residence of many auspicious images that would protect that divine kingdom.

In Cave 108, built by the ruling Cao family, we see an even more specific protective function of the icons. Pelliot recorded four inscriptions in this cave:

*Bi sha men tian wang shou hu yu tian guo*¹⁰²

The Heavenly King Vaiśravaṇa defends and
protects the Khotan kingdom.

*Mo ke jia luo shen hu yu tian guo*¹⁰³

The god Mahākāla protects the Khotan
kingdom.

□□□□□ *hu yu tian guo*¹⁰⁴

. . . protects the Khotan kingdom.

*Sha ye mo li hu yu tian guo*¹⁰⁵

Shayemoli protects the Khotan kingdom.¹⁰⁶

These inscriptions clearly declared that the function of the icons was to protect the Khotan kingdom. Their protective function, emphasized in the inscriptions written beside them, eventually turned these holy images into local guardians.

It has been suggested that there are two reasons for the emergence of the divine guardians of the Khotan kingdom: a sociohistorical reason and a religious one.¹⁰⁷ According to Zhang Guangda and Rong Xinjiang, the great number of divine protectors of the Khotan kingdom reflects the desperate wish for protection of the Khotanese, who were threatened by invasion from the Islamic empire west of them. Zhang Guangda and Rong Xinjiang have also suggested a religious reason: the flourishing of the Tantric school of Diamond Vehicle in Khotan. F. W. Thomas has pointed out a famous prophecy recorded in ancient Tibetan texts, which predicted that varied Buddhist icons would come to protect Khotan.¹⁰⁸ However, the distance between Khotan and Dunhuang was great, and it normally took at least three months for a round-trip. Why, then, did Zhai Fengda choose to portray the protective icons of the Khotan kingdom in his family cave?

Many manuscripts discovered in the “library cave” and the inscriptions found in the Mogao caves suggest that Khotan was a close ally of Dunhuang’s during the Five Dynasties and Song periods. The official and nonofficial exchanges between the two places were intensive. In particular, there was a marriage relationship between the ruling families of Khotan and Dunhuang. A daughter of Cao Yijin, governor of Dunhuang, married Li Shengtian, the king of Khotan. Cao Yuanzhong, son of Cao Yijin, received a letter in 970 C.E. when he was the governor of Dunhuang from the new king of Khotan, who called him *jiufu* (mother’s brother). The new king of Khotan, Visa Sura, was the son of Cao Yuanzhong’s elder sister. He reported his victory over the Islamic empire to the Dunhuang governor and asked his mother’s brother to send troops to help him in further military operations.¹⁰⁹

When the south wall of Cave 220 was repainted during the second to the fourth moon in 925 C.E., official envoys from the Khotan kingdom were visiting Dunhuang. They visited the Mogao caves and made their offerings to the Buddha in this holy site.¹¹⁰ As a cultural representative of the local government, Zhai Fengda chose to depict the protective icons of Khotan and to write inscriptions to emphasize their function as divine guardians of this allied kingdom. He eventually turned this religious painting into a work of political propaganda for local diplomacy. When the envoys from Khotan saw this large painting representing their national guardians and the founding history of their country, they surely understood the political gesture by the Dunhuang government.

Another interesting painting related to the Khotan kingdom, also a product of the patronage of Zhai Fengda, is the so-called new type of Mañjuśrī

picture depicted on the north wall of the passageway of Cave 220 in 925 C.E. The king of Khotan was depicted strikingly in this painting (Fig. 2.32). His prominent placement, colorful dress, and large scale (almost as large as the icon of Mañjuśrī) imply his importance. It has been suggested that the sketch of the painting probably came from central China and that the image of the king of Khotan in this paint-



Figure 2.32 | King of Khotan, detail of the Mañjuśrī picture, north wall of the passageway of Cave 220, Dunhuang, 925 C.E.

ing was just “a typical barbarian warrior in the mind of the Chinese living in the central plain of China, not the realistic portrait of the contemporary Khotanese king.”¹¹¹ This Khotanese king was completely different from the Khotanese king depicted in Cave 98, whose royal dress was fashioned in the Chinese style (Fig. 2.33).¹¹² Comparing the two images of the Khotanese king very carefully, however, reveals obvious similarities: the elliptical face, big eyes, heavy eyebrows, straight nose, wide mouth, and strong body. In terms of differences, one is young, thick-bearded, and in casual dress, while the other is mature and in formal royal dress. These differences could be explained by the different dates and visual contexts of the two paintings. The one in Cave 220 was created in 925 C.E., and the Khotanese king was represented as the groom of Mañjuśrī. It is hard to imagine that the king would have worn his formal imperial attire, which was extremely complicated and difficult to wear, when he worked as a groom of the deity. The Khotanese king in Cave 98 was created between 940 and 945 C.E., about twenty years later than the painting in Cave 220. This portrait was made to celebrate his new title as the Son of Heaven in Khotan, bestowed by the Chinese emperor. Within this historical context, it was natural to depict the king in formal imperial attire. His mature appearance disclosed the difference of age of twenty years.

Figure 2.33 | King of Khotan (Li Shengtian), east wall of Cave 98, Dunhuang, 940–945 C.E.



In sum, the two images of the Khotanese king, one created in 925 c.e. and another during 940–945 c.e., represent the same king of Khotan: Li Shengtian, son-in-law of the Dunhuang governor Cao Yijin. Because the official and nonofficial exchanges between Dunhuang and Khotan were frequent despite the distance between them, many people of Dunhuang knew what the king of Khotan, Li Shengtian, looked like. When the king was depicted

in Cave 220, his official envoys were at Dunhuang and visited the site. I do not think that they could have accepted a regular “barbarian warrior” image as that of their king. It is possible that Zhai Fengda hired someone who had seen the king personally to create his portrait. By depicting the king of Khotan with the icon of Mañjuśrī, Zhai Fengda elevated this secular figure and pleased the official envoys from Khotan.

CHAPTER THREE

Historical and Cultural Values of the Zhai Family Cave

THIS CASE STUDY of the original pictorial program of the Zhai family cave and its reconstruction history suggests that the meaning and function of the cave are closely tied to the religious, political, and social changes within the local context. If research is limited to using only Buddhist scriptures to explain the paintings and sculptures in the cave, or if energy is concentrated solely on describing the formal features of the artwork, a full understanding of this important cave-temple cannot be achieved.

In the first two chapters, attention was paid to the political intentions of the original pictorial program and the redecorations of the cave and revealed how members of the Zhai clan used their family cave as a political showcase to respond to various political circumstances in different historical periods. This study has also discussed the possibilities of Buddhist practitioners from the patron family using the cave as a place for their religious rituals. The dual functions of the cave as a political showcase for the lay patrons and a sacred place for religious practitioners may shed light on our understanding of the nature of the Dunhuang caves in general, especially of the family caves. Therefore, this discussion on the historical and cultural values of the Zhai family cave begins with an investigation of the functions of the family caves at Dunhuang.

The “Family Caves” at Dunhuang

The Zhai family cave is the first clearly identifiable and firmly dated family cave at Dunhuang. The participation of prominent local clans in constructing cave-temples at Dunhuang, however, began much earlier than the Tang dynasty.

It has been suggested that the earliest family cave surviving at Dunhuang is Cave 285, which was built by the Yin family in 538 C.E. during the Western Wei period; it is referred to as the Yin family cave.¹ However, the patrons’ images and inscriptions remaining on the north wall of the cave indicate that various families in addition to the Yin, such as the Hua, Lin, and Wu families, were involved with this cave, as well as other families that might have been described in the faded inscriptions.² Even the contemporary governor of Dunhuang—Yuan Rong, the prince of Dong Yang (Dongyangwang)—was probably involved in the patronage of this cave.³ Apparently, this important cave was sponsored by multiple families and therefore should not be called the Yin family cave.

In comparison with the family caves of the Tang dynasty, Cave 285 has some unique features. First, it appears to be a community-oriented cave, patronized by several families, which included local Chinese patrons and non-Chinese sponsors.⁴ Second, the pictorial program of the cave does not reflect the ideology of a specific family, as can be seen in Cave 220. Instead, most motifs in Cave 285 represent typical Buddhist content such as the icons of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, the meditative monks, and Buddhist stories.⁵ Third, the wall paintings in the cave exhibit two strikingly different artistic styles, one from central China and the other from central Asia, and reveal the varied tastes of patrons from different regional traditions. Fourth, although the patrons of

the cave are from different families, their portraits are grouped according to their family identities. Patrons from the Yin family, for example, were painted together under the same icon of a single Buddha. The inscriptions on the right side begin with a monk named Honghua, who is followed by the male patrons from the Yin family. Female members of the Yin family are painted on the other side of the dedicative inscription, which was written in a rectangle at the center (Fig. 3.1) between the male and female patrons.

The inscriptions on the male side read:

*Bi qiu hong hua gong yang shi*⁶

The time when Monk Honghua worships
[the Buddha].

*Qing xin shi yin an gui suo gong yang shi*⁷

The time when the pure devoted man Yin
Angui worships [the Buddha].

*Xin shi yin gou sheng gong yang*⁸

Devoted man Yin Gousheng worships
[the Buddha].

*Xin shi yin wu ji gong yang*⁹

Devoted man Yin Wuji worships [the
Buddha].

*Xin shi yin hu ren gong yang*¹⁰

Devoted man Yin Huren worships
[the Buddha].

*Xin shi yin pu ren gong yang*¹¹

Devoted man Yin Puren worships
[the Buddha].

*Xin xi zai he gong yang*¹²

Devoted son [Yin] Zaihe worships
[the Buddha].

The inscriptions on the female side read:

*Qing xin nü shi chong ji suo gong yang shi*¹³

The time when the pure devoted woman Shi
Chongji worships [the Buddha].

*Xin nü a chou gong yang*¹⁴

Devoted woman Achou worships
[the Buddha].

*Xin nü qian fu gong yang*¹⁵

Devoted woman Qianfu worships
[the Buddha].

*Xin nü qian li gong yang*¹⁶

Devoted woman Qianli worships
[the Buddha].

*Xin nü a mei gong yang*¹⁷

Devoted woman Amei worships [the Buddha].

*Xin nü e nü gong yang*¹⁸

Devoted woman Enü worships [the Buddha].

The inscriptions show that the leading figure of the patrons is a Buddhist monk, who might have provided religious services to the Yin family. The primary patron couple, Yin Angui and Shi Chongji, stand as the first figure on the male and female sides, respectively. Their inscriptions are longer and more formal than those of the others. The wife has a surname Shi and might be a non-Chinese woman from the Shi kingdom (*shi guo*, or Kesh in Sogdiana) in central Asia.¹⁹ The surnames of the rest of the women are not shown in the inscriptions and should be those of daughters and wives of the Yin family. The other patrons in Cave 285 are also shown as groups of family members. Clearly, family identities of the patrons have been established in the cave, and

the patron family groups, in turn, suggest a significant role of local clans in the construction of the early Dunhuang caves.

In the following Northern Zhou and Sui dynasties, many caves were built at Dunhuang, but almost none of them could be clearly identified as a family cave except Cave 62, which seems to have been patronized by the Cheng family alone. Cave 62 was constructed in the Sui dynasty but partially damaged by the passageway of Cave 61, which was built in the Five Dynasties period (907–959 C.E.). Most of the patron images in Cave 62, however, are well preserved along with the inscriptions. The primary patron, according to the inscriptions, is a man named Cheng Tuoluo, who also had the images and names of his deceased grandfather, his deceased father, his deceased and living brothers, his sons and grandsons, as well as his deceased mother, his wife, and other female members of the family, painted as patrons in the cave (Plate 13). The first leading figure in the row of patrons is again a Buddhist monk, named Puji, and the second figure (the first of the lay patrons) is the deceased grandfather Cheng Tianci, who is followed by the deceased father Cheng Sengnu. The fourth figure is the deceased elder brother Cheng □□, who is followed by two more deceased elder brothers (Cheng Baoxiang and Cheng Boxiang). The seventh figure is Cheng Tuoluo himself, whose younger brother, two sons, and two grandsons are shown behind him. The female members of the Cheng family are depicted after the male members along the same row of patrons. The first female is Cheng Tuoluo's deceased mother Zhao Taogen, who is followed by Tuoluo's wife, Suo Yusi. Tuoluo's three daughters and two deceased daughters are shown at the end of the row (Plate 14). Although Cave 62 is a partially damaged small cave, the single-family patronage of the cave makes it more likely to be the



Figure 3.1 | Patrons from the Yin family, north wall, Cave 285, Dunhuang, 539 c.E.

first family cave at Dunhuang, which perhaps should be called the Cheng family cave.

Given that Cave 62 has no certain date and is only generally dated to the Sui dynasty, the real beginning of the family cave tradition, therefore, should be marked by the Zhai family cave of the early Tang, built in 642 c.E. The original patrons' inscriptions in the Zhai family cave are severely damaged; fortunately, the first inscriptions on the right and left can still be seen. And, clearest of all, the three large characters that identify the ownership of the cave, "Zhai Jia Ku" (Zhai family cave), are seen at the lower center of the rear wall, between the two chief patrons.

The first figure on the left looks like a Buddhist monk (Fig. 3.2), and the inscription reads:

... *dao gong zhai si yuan yi xin gong yang*.²⁰
... devotee of the Dao, Zhai Siyuan, worships
[the Buddha] with whole heart.

Some three hundred years later, his descendant of the ninth generation, Zhai Fengda, identified him as the creator of the family cave and the first ancestor to whom a painting of Mañjuśrī icons was dedicated.²¹ Zhai Fengda described Zhai Tong (whose style-name was perhaps Siyuan) as an official of the Tang dynasty, a military officer in charge of supplies at Dunhuang.²² The inscription for the next patron on the left is incomplete, and only three remaining characters can be seen, including his family name "Zhai" and "*gongyang*" (worships) at the end.

The first figure at the right side is a Buddhist monk named Dao[?], who is from the Dayun Si, or Grand Cloud Temple. Significantly, the inscription adds four smaller characters at the end to identify the monk's secular family name as Zhai (*suxing zhaishi*). This is the first time that we see a secular name of a monk written after his monastic name in the patrons' inscriptions in the Dunhuang caves. This Monk Dao[?] is mentioned again as Daohong from



Figure 3.2 | Portrait of patron Zhai Siyuan, south side of the west wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E. Photo of a copy made by the Dunhuang Art Institute in the 1940s.

Tianyun Si (Heavenly Cloud Temple) in another inscription on the north wall of the cave that has a date of the sixteenth year of the Zhenguan era (642 C.E.).²³ A damaged inscription remaining on the east wall contains the same dating information (642 C.E.) and identifies the military titles of the patrons as Zhaowu Xiaowei and Bobao Zhenjiang (Fig. 3.3).²⁴

According to the tenth-century inscription by Zhai Fengda, the chief patron of the Zhai family cave was Zhai Tong (Siyuan), an officer of the Tang army, whose portrait appears to be the first figure on the left side of the “Zhai Jia Ku” family label. The first patron on the other side, as mentioned previously, is Daohong, a Buddhist monk from the Heavenly Cloud Temple. The combination of a lay devotee and a monastic practitioner from the same family, first seen in the Zhai family cave, soon became a popular pattern of patronage of family caves during the Tang dynasty. For instance, the primary patrons of the two tallest statues of the Buddha at Dunhuang, in Caves 96 and 130, respectively, were recorded as “Monk Lingyin and layman Yin Zu” (Cave 96) and “Monk Chuyan and countryman Ma Sizhong.”

Scholars in China, Japan, and the West have examined textual records on the local prominent clans of Dunhuang, and most of them focus on the origins of local clans.²⁵ Local scholars at Dunhuang paid more attention to the relations between the prominent clans and the Mogao caves.²⁶ The most comprehensive investigation of the family caves at Mogao is the ninth chapter of Ma De’s book *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, in which he identifies six caves made by the Yin family (Caves 285, 96, 321, 217, 231, and 138), six caves by the Li family (Caves 331, 332, 148, 56, and 57 and the small niche above the gate of Cave 55), six caves by the Wu family (Caves 152, 153, 154, 366, 365, and 16), two caves by the Zhai family

Figure 3.3 | Patron's inscription on the east wall of Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.



(Caves 220 and 85), two caves by the Suo family (Caves 144 and 12), one cave by the Wang family (Cave 143), one cave by the Murong family (Cave 256), two caves by the Du family (Caves 76 and 5), one cave by the Zhang family from Qinghe (Cave 201), two caves by the Song family (Caves 146 and 72), and one cave by the Chen family (Cave 320).²⁷ The local rulers of Dunhuang from the late Tang to the Song dynasties, who were from the powerful Zhang and Cao clans, built most of the large-scale caves at Dunhuang, which are also surveyed in Ma De's book.²⁸

Most of the above-mentioned studies, however, concentrate on matching the textual records on local clans and the existing caves at Dunhuang to establish individual ownership for some of the caves. This study attempts to move forward to examine the political implications of the pictorial programs in the family caves and intends to understand how the lay patrons used their family caves to reach social and political goals. I have chosen not only the Zhai family (Cave 220) to illuminate the issue of cultural politics of the early Tang dynasty but also two other important family caves, Caves 96 and 321, which were built by the Yin family in the early Tang,

slightly later but still quite close to the construction time of the Zhai family cave.

Cave 96: The "Female Buddha"

According to an inscription written on the east wall of Cave 156, dated to the sixth year of the Xiantong era (865 C.E.) of the late Tang, Beidaxiang (North Great Image) (in Cave 96) was patronized by a *dhyāna* master named Lingyin and a Buddhist layman named Yin Zu.²⁹ Several copies of this inscription have been found in the library cave and suggest that this was a well-known text among the local population in the Tang and Song periods. The recorded patrons of the cave include a monk and a layman and perfectly fit into the pattern of patronage of the Tang family caves at Dunhuang.

Many eminent local clans sent some of their sons or daughters to the local Buddhist temples to become monks or nuns. Although they were supposed to cut off ties with their secular families, they eventually became representatives of their clans in the Buddhist community. During the Tang and Song periods, many Dunhuang caves were patronized by individual local families. When a family wanted to build a cave-temple, the Buddhist monks

or nuns from the same family would join the secular patrons. The Zhai family cave, for example, was patronized by the monks from the Zhai clan and lay members of the family, and the secular family name of Monk Daohong (Zhai) was pointedly explained in the inscription next to his portrait to clarify his family identity as a Zhai.³⁰ Another famous case is Cave 85, which was built by the Zhai family to celebrate the promotion of Monk Farong (originally from the same Zhai family) to be the chief of the Buddhist community in the entire Hexi region, including Dunhuang.³¹ Apparently, the combination of Buddhist monks and nuns and their secular relatives was a popular form of patronage during the Tang dynasty, and the patrons of Cave 96 fit in this pattern. Monk Lingyin and layman Yin Zu were very likely from the same Yin family. Cave 96, therefore, should be called a Yin family cave.

The Yin family was an elite clan, which resided in Dunhuang for hundreds of years. This family became very powerful and started to sponsor the making of Buddhist caves as early as the Western Wei period. As previously mentioned, some members of the Yin clan joined the construction of Cave 285, which was completed in 539 C.E. The successful careers of the Yin family members in the local government throughout the Sui, Tang, Five Dynasties, and Song periods demonstrate the political sensitivity and capability of this renowned clan. Cave 96 is the earliest clearly identifiable Yin family cave surviving today and reflects a strong political position in the early Tang historical context.

The central image in Cave 96 is a giant statue of the Future Buddha Maitreya, which was completed in 695 C.E. during the rule of the famous “female emperor” of China, Wu Zetian.³² The Future Buddha Maitreya was specially chosen to create a legend of a divine ruler over China during Wu

Zetian’s campaign for the throne, and the local clans at Dunhuang, particularly the Yin family, responded to her call vigorously and positively by both textual and visual means.

Dunhuang manuscript S.6520 was one of the documents used for political propaganda to support the Empress Wu. Entitled *Dayun jing shenhuang shouji yishu* (Commentary on the meaning of the prophecy about the divine emperor in the *Grand Cloud Sutra*), this manuscript declares that Empress Wu was the incarnation of the Bodhisattva Maitreya and should be the ruler of China. To make the female ruler more acceptable to Chinese society, the story of *tiannü* (Daughter of Heaven) was quoted from the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* to explain the empress’ “bodily transformation from male into female.”³³ Indeed, the term “*tiannü*” corresponds to “*tianzi*” (Son of Heaven), the traditional title of Chinese emperors. The giant statue of Maitreya Buddha in Cave 96 at Dunhuang also demonstrated the local support for the empress Wu Zetian in the capital, Chang’an. These visual and textual materials reveal the local responses to the political reforms that took place in the capital and, specifically, to the establishment of the legitimacy of a female monarch.³⁴

Furthermore, a group of Buddhist monks wrote a commentary for *Dayun jing* (Grand cloud sutra), a minor Buddhist scripture translated into Chinese by two Vietnamese monks in southeastern China in the Liang period (502–557 C.E.). This sutra did not attract much public attention until 690 C.E., when Empress Wu was eager to find spiritual weapons to justify her political status. The sutra contained an important prophecy of the imminent reincarnation of Maitreya as a female deity, monarch of all the world, and Empress Wu needed this prophecy to justify her position as a female ruler. One text describes happiness in the world under the female ruler: “Harvests

will be bountiful, joy without limit. The people will flourish, free of desolation and illness, of worry, fear, and disaster. . . . At that time all her subjects will give their allegiance to this woman as the successor to the imperial throne. Once she has taken the Right Way, the world will be awed into submission.”³⁵

According to most resources, Empress Wu’s monk-lover, Xue Huaiyi, discovered this sutra and organized a group of nine monks to write a commentary to legitimize the rulership of the female ruler. In the commentary, the religious leaders asserted that Empress Wu was the reincarnation of Maitreya, the Future Buddha, who was supposed to rule the wealthy and happy world of Yanfuti (or more specifically, the Paradise of Maitreya on the continent of Jambudvīpa). The commentary of the *Grand Cloud Sutra* was presented to Empress Wu in April 690 C.E. when she was about to formally take over the imperial throne. The empress was so pleased that she rewarded the nine eminent monks who compiled the commentary with the title of “Dukes of Counties” (*xiangong*). She soon took steps to promulgate the sutra and the commentary throughout the entire country. She issued an order to found a state-maintained Grand Cloud Temple in every prefecture of the empire and asked eminent monks to lecture on the sutra in these temples. The empress later incorporated the words “Maitreya the Peerless” into her title.³⁶

Significantly, the *Grand Cloud Sutra* and the commentary immediately became very popular at Dunhuang, a remote frontier thousands of miles from the capital. Copies of the sutra and of the commentary have been discovered in the “library cave.” In particular, a unique version of the commentary, entitled *Dayun jing shenhuang shouji yishu* (Commentary on the meaning of the prophecy about the divine emperor in the *Grand Cloud Sutra*), not only

declared that Empress Wu was the incarnation of Maitreya but also included the story of the Daughter of Heaven, explaining the empress’ transformation from male to female. Apparently, the identity of gender was taken as a serious issue at that time.

In 691 C.E. a young member of the Yin family claimed to have discovered a “five-colored bird” (*wuseniao*) and reported this discovery to the local government immediately. The governor of Dunhuang, named Li Wukui, reported this auspicious omen to the court of Wu Zetian with a special note in which he explained: “The five-colored bird was found by Yin Cijian. I believe it is female in accordance of the path of yin [feminine]. A smart person must know what this means.”³⁷ The special attention paid to the female identity of the bird by the governor reflected the importance of a female identity in contemporary political symbols. Four years later, when the Yin family had the giant statue of the Maitreya Buddha in Cave 96 made, it was intended to declare publicly the family’s support of the female emperor.

The giant statue of Maitreya, in fact the largest among the more than two thousand sculptures remaining in the Dunhuang caves, is about 99 feet (33 meters) high.³⁸ It is commonly known as the North Great Image or North Great Statue (Beidaxiang). The monumental size and central location of the statue at the Mogao site indicate the significance of this Buddha image to the local audience.

Instead of following the common practice of molding the Buddha in the form of a male body covered by a monk’s robe, this statue was shaped according to a woman’s bodily form and clothing. The imposing breasts are exposed to clarify the sex of the Buddha. The womanly dress further ensures her female identity (Plate 15). These unique features have not been found in other Buddha images.

It has been repeatedly suggested that Cave 96, in which the colossal Maitreya is located, is one of the Grand Cloud Temples built all over China under the royal patronage of Wu Zetian.³⁹ The large size and the female features of the Buddha statue argue for agreement with this assertion. The chief patrons, nevertheless, were recorded as members of the Yin family. It is possible that this powerful local clan voluntarily took over the highly political construction project and intentionally created a female Buddha to please the female ruler of the nation.

Cave 321: The “Female Emperor”

Cave 96, built during the reign of Wu Zhao, was only one of the Yin family’s responses that had as their motivation political propaganda in support of Empress Wu. Cave 321, another Yin family cave built in the same period, had a large painting created with the same political motivation as that behind the female Maitreya.

Although the original patron images and the inscriptions in Cave 321 are no longer visible, the patrons who renovated the cave in the Five Dynasties period (907–959 C.E.) were all from the Yin family.⁴⁰ It was common practice in Dunhuang that the offspring of a clan would continue to maintain and renovate the family cave. The Zhai family cave, for example, was built, maintained, and renovated by the same clan for hundreds of years from the early Tang to the Song dynasty. Cave 321, therefore, was very possibly built by the Yin family in the Zhou dynasty—a short-lived dynasty created by Wu Zetian during the Tang—and maintained and renovated by later generations of the same clan.

The most revealing work in the cave is the painting on the south wall, which is an illustration of *Baoyu jing* (Treasury rain sutra). This sutra was a new version of the *Grand Cloud Sutra*, which was trans-

lated by a Western Regions monk, Putiliuzhi, and his helpers from the original Sanskrit text of the sutra (*Mahamegha*)⁴¹ in 693 C.E., the third year of the Zhou dynasty of Wu Zetian. The supervisor of this translation project was Xue Huaiyi, the notorious monk-lover of Empress Wu, who also organized the writing of a commentary for the sutra. The newly translated *Treasury Rain Sutra* was circulated at Dunhuang very early on. Many copies of the sutra were made in a short time and are preserved in the “library cave.” One of the copies is dated to 695 C.E., only two years after the completion of the new translation.⁴² Shi Weixiang, a senior research fellow at the Dunhuang Research Academy who identified the content of the south wall painting in Cave 321, has pointed out two striking differences between the new translation of the sutra and the old translation from the Liang period (502–556 C.E.):

First, to create political propaganda for Wu Zetian’s usurping of the imperial throne of the Tang dynasty, [the new translation] inserts a large chapter of prophecy to introduce the Female King of the Light of the Sun and Moon (Ri Yue Guang Nüwang): “She rules the great Zhina Country [i.e., China] in the northeast of Zhanbuzhou [Jambudvīpa] and resides in Apibazhi. In reality, she is a bodhisattva appearing in the bodily form of a woman and as the independent master [of the country].” To flatter the female emperor, the forged part of this “new translation” even reverses the traditional form of narration of Buddhist sutras. A regular sutra begins with a bodhisattva’s invitation of the Buddha to lecture on the sutra. The new translation, in contrast, begins with a section in which the Buddha voluntarily speaks to the [female] “Son of Heaven of the Light of the Sun and Moon in the East.” . . . This kind of “changes” in the new translation increases the mythical nature of the sutra.

Second, the words [of the new translation] are difficult to understand. This translation transliterates directly many foreign terms.⁴³

Obviously, this new translation of the sutra intends to prove its authenticity by using transliterations that could somehow scare away the critics who do not know Sanskrit. The employment of a foreign monk to be the chief translator of the sutra could also help convince the public that the Buddhist prophecy about a female ruler of China was original and true.

Both the *Grand Cloud Sutra* and the new *Treasury Rain Sutra* were highly valued by Wu Zetian, who took them as signs from heaven to legitimize her rule.⁴⁴ In response to Wu Zetian's promotion of the new *Treasury Rain Sutra*, the Yin family patronized the empress with the creation of a visual version of the sutra in their family cave.

The illustration of the *Treasury Rain Sutra* in Cave 321 is a relatively faithful visual translation of the scripture except for the sections with special political meanings (Fig. 3.4). The central part of the painting represents the Female King of the Light of the Sun and Moon in the East receiving the prophecy about her rulership of the kingdom from the Buddha (Fig. 3.5). Above this scene, we see treasures showering down from the sky illustrating the title of the sutra, the "treasury rain." Particularly interesting is a striking band of clouds crossing the upper part of the entire painting. The location of the band of clouds indicates that it may symbolize the sky from where the treasures are falling. Two big hands emerge in the clouds, holding the sun and moon, respectively (Fig. 3.6). If these visual symbols are interpreted into a written Chinese character, the character pronounced "zhao" is formed, which consists of the sun (*ri*) and the moon (*yue*) on the upper part and the sky (*kong*) in the lower part. This char-

acter unmistakably corresponds to the personal name of Wu Zetian. This Chinese character did not exist in Chinese history until Empress Wu created it and used it as part of her personal name "Wu Zhao." The visual play with the character and the two hands holding the sun and moon in the sky unmistakably refer to Wu Zetian. The visual transformation of the personal name of Wu Zhao in the large illustration of the *Treasury Rain Sutra* in Cave 321, as Shi Weixiang has pointed out, "should be viewed as the official seal of the Wu Zhou dynasty."⁴⁵

The other details of the painting are relatively accurate in illustrating the content of the sutra. It is possible that the patrons or artists intended to make this painting look more reliable or authentic in terms of religious content by depicting many details from the sutra in a faithful fashion. The political message, therefore, would be delivered in a more believable way. This strategy corresponds to the format of the new translation of the sutra.

From the "female Buddha" in Cave 96 to the "female king in the East" in Cave 321, we see the political nature of Buddhist art in medieval China. The emphasis on the female identity of the Buddha and the king is intended to satisfy an urgent political need of the female ruler. In this context, gender is no longer an issue between women and men but a political issue in general, which eventually reflected a form of political expression of local people toward the court in the capital. The strong political messages delivered by the artworks in the two Yin family caves apparently reveal the sociopolitical intentions of the lay patrons and may help in understanding the non-religious aspects of the Tang family caves at Dunhuang. They may also enlighten us on how social and political issues are addressed under the cover of religious art. This is exactly what we see in the Zhai family cave.



Figure 3.4 | Illustration of the *Treasury Rain Sutra*, south wall of Cave 321, Dunhuang, reign of Wu Zhao (684–705 c.e.).

Artists, Patrons, and Monks and Nuns

The social and political messages implied in the original pictorial program of the Zhai family cave and the renovation projects of the cave suggest that the social or religious intentions of the patrons dominated whatever message the artists might have wanted to express through their artwork. In fact, the

artists remain anonymous, thereby making it impossible to research their personal motivations for their work. Therefore, to understand the process of the construction of the cave and how the artwork came into being, we must rely on varied resources, including archaeological findings, relevant local texts, and art historical records. Fortunately, a few archaeological and textual materials related to the Mogao caves



Figure 3.5 | The “Female King” and her followers, detail of the illustration of the *Treasury Rain Sutra*, south wall of Cave 321, Dunhuang, reign of Wu Zhao (684–705 c.e.).

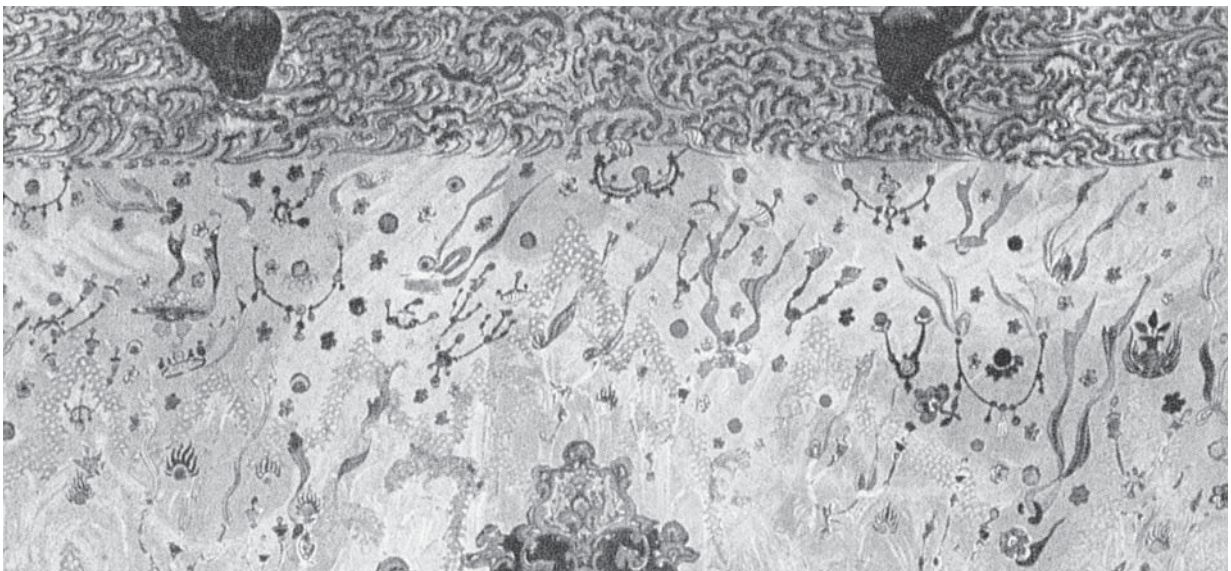


Figure 3.6 | Visual symbol of Wu Zhao’s personal name and the “treasures showering down from the sky,” detail of the illustration of the *Treasury Rain Sutra*, south wall of Cave 321, Dunhuang, reign of Wu Zhao (684–705 c.e.).

have been published in recent years, including detailed archeological reports on the foundations of ancient temples in front of the caves⁴⁶ and on the abandoned caves in the north section of the cave site,⁴⁷ as well as a complete record of the remaining inscriptions of patrons in the Dunhuang caves.⁴⁸ In addition, two books by Ma De, one on the history of the Mogao caves and the other on the textual records concerning the ancient artists and craftsmen at the Mogao site, also provide us with exciting references to how the Dunhuang caves were made.⁴⁹ These more recently available materials enable us to examine the relationships between patron and artist, between patron and religious practitioner, and between patron and audience.

My study of the Zhai family cave demonstrates the close tie between the patron family and the artwork in the cave. It also indicates possibilities that the Buddhist practitioners from the patron family used the cave as a place for their religious practice. A further clarification on the relationships among the patrons, artists, and Buddhist practitioners could deepen understanding on how the Zhai family cave was made and what would be a more appropriate way to interpret the pictorial programs in the cave.

Patrons and Artists

Duan Wenjie places the identification of patrons of the Dunhuang caves into four categories: local officials (dukes, high-ranking officials, low-ranking officials, and their relatives), military personnel (officers and soldiers who guarded the frontiers), religious practitioners (monks and nuns in various ranks), and commoners (farmers, craftsmen, and members of various communes). He also includes a special category, the non-Han minority groups.⁵⁰ One group that perhaps is missing from his catego-

rization is foreigners, who also contributed to the cave construction projects at Dunhuang. Two foreign merchants, probably from India,⁵¹ joined the patronage of Cave 294 of the Northern Zhou (557–580 C.E.) period. Their identities as foreign merchants (*shang-hu*) were clearly indicated in the inscriptions.⁵² The patrons of the Dunhuang caves include nearly all social classes of the local population, and their impact on the artwork in the caves varies greatly.

The patrons must have relied on the artists and craftsmen to build and decorate the cave-temples for them. How did the patrons find these artisans? What were the relationships between them in the cave construction process? The inscriptions remaining on the walls of the caves give information on only the patrons, such as their names, family affiliations, official titles, and reasons for sponsoring the projects, but no records have been found about the artists and craftsmen who actually made the caves, except a few who became patrons themselves.⁵³ Some fragmentary documents from the “library cave” may provide clues to understand the patron-artist relationship.

According to local documents, most artists who worked in Buddhist cave-temples belonged to a very low socioeconomic class, and those on the construction team were further reduced in status.⁵⁴ Often, they were hired by wealthy patrons to dig a cave and to create paintings and sculptures according to the patrons’ ideas. Textual evidence suggests that patrons, not artists, made the decisions about the location, size, and pictorial programs of the caves. The complexity of the motifs and diversity of the styles of the caves, however, certainly go beyond the influence of the patrons and reveal the creative capability of the artists and craftsmen. There must have been a process of discussion and negotiation, probably through the mediation of monks or nuns, between

the patrons and the artists as to where and how to build a cave. In the late Tang through the Song dynasty a few painters received official patronage from the local government and payments from private patrons; these painters became rather wealthy and started to build and decorate their own cave-temples.⁵⁵ When artists became patrons, they had the freedom to express their ideas and tastes in their own caves.

In the manuscripts from the “library cave,” we have found some clues to the relationship between the patrons and artists at Dunhuang. According to these texts, when patrons planned to build a cave, they would *zhao* (call) or *xuan* (select)⁵⁶ or *mao* (hire) or *ming* (order)⁵⁷ craftsmen-artists to work on their projects. These verbs suggest that the relationship between patron and artist was an employer-to-employee relation and imply that the patron, not the artist, was the decision maker. One document reveals a relatively equal relation between patron and artist. This manuscript is a contract between a Buddhist monk named Cideng and a craftsman named Fan Yingzhen and was probably written in the eighth or ninth century when Dunhuang was occupied by the Tibetans. Monk Cideng wanted to hire Fan Yingzhen to build a Hall of the Buddha for him in Donghe village. The term used in this contract is “*pingzhang*” (negotiation) instead of “*ming*” or “*mao*.” This negotiation concerns an agreement about the payment for the craftsman and what should be done, including the construction of the Hall of the Buddha and a wall opposite the hall. It also mentions the penalties for either side’s breaking the contract.⁵⁸ One document (P.2641v) uses the more respectable term “*qing*” (inviting) when hiring artists and describes the artists’ job, that is, to paint the “bodhisattvas of ten directions” and decorate the “three bodies

of the Buddha.”⁵⁹ Another document mentions the honorable seats in the main hall for painters and sculptors at an official dinner of the local government.⁶⁰ These historical records indicate that a few artists and craftsmen had higher positions. However, most of these artisans occupied a rather low social status and lived a poor life.

Working for the government as military and civil officials, the members of the Zhai family were wealthy enough to patronize a mid-sized cave-temple such as Cave 220. The written identification of their clan name in the cave establishes an intimate relationship between the patrons and the cave and creates a public showcase for the patron family. The link between the artist and the cave, by contrast, is completely missing from known documentation. The unique composition of the paintings and the inscriptions in the Zhai family cave, as I have explained in preceding discussions, definitely attests to the important role of patronage in the selection of themes and motifs. With a public audience in mind, the Zhais expressed their personal wishes, political ideas, and religious feelings in their choice of particular subjects and images for their family cave. At the same time, they demonstrated their social and economic power by sponsoring this very expensive building project.

Buddhist Practitioners and Artists

Documentary and archaeological evidence suggests a close relationship between local artists and Buddhist temples. Many day-to-day accounts of local temples record the amount of food, wine, and other supplies used by painters, sculptors, cave diggers, and carpenters. For example, manuscript S.1366 contains the following records:

The 15th day, paid the cave diggers with 20 pieces of “barbarian cake” [*hubing*], which were made from one *dou* of flour and two *sheng* of oil.

The 17th day, paid the cave diggers with 20 pieces of “barbarian cake,” which were made from one *dou* of flour.

Paid the cave diggers with two *sheng* of the first-grade oil and 20 pieces of “barbarian cake,” which were made from one *dou* of flour.⁶¹

Another document (S.2474) describes the daily food supplies provided by a temple to the artists, as follows:

Paid the master in cave with five *dou* of flour and one *sheng* of oil; paid the painter with three *dou* of flour; paid the envoys from Suzhou with two *dou* of flour; paid the envoys from Khotan with one *dou* of flour.

The 6th day, supplied the five painters and three sculptors working in the Eastern Garden of the city with daily meals, one *sheng* of flour each morning and two pieces of “barbarian cake” each noon. This service stopped by noon of the 8th day.

Paid the painter with one *dou* of white flour and a half *sheng* of oil.

The 12th day, paid the painter with two *sheng* of “red oil.”⁶²

Manuscript S.4899, tentatively dated to 978 C.E., indicates that sculptors and carpenters ate together in a temple, as follows:

The 8th day of the 2nd month, paid sculptor Zhao Sengzi with one *dou* of millet.

Supplied the sculptors and carpenters with breakfast and lunch, which used two *dou* of millet and some wine.⁶³

These records suggest that the cave builders ate at the temples and that the monks or nuns probably managed their work schedules and tasks.

It has been suggested that monks and nuns lived side by side with artists and craftsmen in the small caves in the north section of the Mogao site. Some of the caves in the north section were shaped according to the requirement of meditative practice observed by monks and nuns, whereas other small caves were equipped with clay beds and stoves (Fig. 3.7).⁶⁴ It is possible that some monks or nuns lived along with cave builders, including painters and sculptors, in the northern section of the caves.⁶⁵ These religious practitioners perhaps belonged to a lower monastic rank and lived in a relatively poor condition. It is also possible that they exercised esoteric Buddhist practices and voluntarily stayed in the small caves.⁶⁶

The close relationship between Buddhist temples and the cave builders suggests that the monks and nuns could have had a strong influence on the cave construction projects at Mogao. They were probably the everyday managers of the cave construction activities. What, then, was the relationship between these religious practitioners and the patrons of the caves?

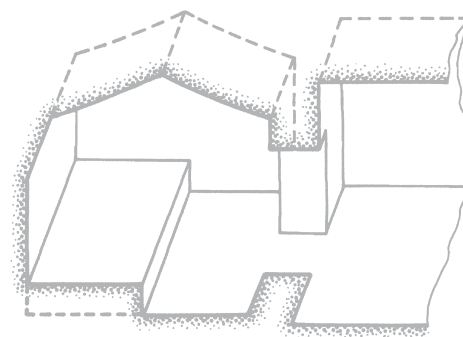


Figure 3.7 | Sketch of a residential cave in the north section of the Mogao caves. After Dunhuang yanji-yuan, ed., *Dunhuang Mogaoku beiqu shiku*, p. 338.

Buddhist Practitioners and Patrons

The portraits of the original early Tang patrons remaining at the lower section of the west wall of Cave 220 reveal important clues for our understanding of the relationship between patron and religious practitioner. The secular patrons—including the head of the family, Zhai Tong (also known as Zhai Siyuan)—are shown at the south side. Monastic patrons—including Monk Daohong from the Grand Cloud Temple, who was originally from the same Zhai family—are depicted at the north side.⁶⁷

Daohong's monastic name and secular name are written together in the inscription in Cave 220. The same phenomenon of inscribing both monastic and secular names of a monk also appears in other caves. Of the seven middle Tang monks shown as patrons in Cave 386, for example, the monastic and secular names for six of them are inscribed.⁶⁸ An inscription of a patron monk of the Five Dynasties in Cave 33 includes his monastic name, Fasang, and his secular name, Zhai,⁶⁹ and indicates that he was from the Zhai family too. It seems that many Dunhuang monks kept their secular family names after they left home to practice their calling. By keeping their family names after becoming monks, these religious practitioners kept close ties with their natal families.

Many Tang caves, in fact, were patronized by a combination of religious practitioners and secular donors. The two largest caves housing giant Buddha images at Mogao, for example, were chiefly sponsored by two pairs of monks and secular donors. The North Great Image Cave was sponsored by Monk Lingyin and layman Yin Zu in the early Tang. The South Great Image Cave (Nandaxiang) was sponsored by Monk Chuyan and layman Ma Sizhong in the High Tang period. The monks and the lay

patrons were very possibly from the same families, that is, the Yin and Ma families.

In the tradition of family caves, a pattern of joint patronage of secular patrons and religious practitioners from the same family is apparent. The Zhai family cave is a distinctive example. Other family caves—including the Yin family caves (Caves 231 and 138), the Suo family caves (Caves 144 and 12), and another Zhai family cave (Cave 85)—display the same pattern of patronage. The monks from the individual families played dual roles in the cave construction activities. On the one hand, they participated in the cave-temple construction to express their own religious feelings and to accumulate Buddhist merit. On the other hand, they served as representatives of their natal families in these activities by managing the construction projects and maintaining the daily usage of their family caves.⁷⁰

Patrons and Audiences

Many important social activities, including the celebration of the New Year, the birthday of the Buddha, and lamp-lighting ceremonies, took place at the Mogao site every year and attracted most local people to visit the caves. Therefore, the audience at the caves included the entire local population, as well as envoys and travelers from central China and foreigners from the Western Regions. The public nature of the caves provided the owners of the caves with opportunities to express their political ideology and demonstrate their social status to the public, thereby transforming the caves into showcases for the patrons.⁷¹

This beautiful and quiet holy site of Buddhism additionally served as an official place to receive international envoys. The official journals of the local government recorded the food and wine consumed in the reception of foreign envoys and indicated that

these foreign visitors stayed near the caves. Manuscript 1 in the collection of the Dunhuang Research Academy, for example, is a record of the use of wine by the local government, stating that “a half jar of wine was used to receive the envoy from Ganzhou [a Uighur kingdom near Dunhuang] who went to the caves.” Manuscript S.2474 records that “ten pieces of *xigong* (fine food) and ten pieces of dessert, which were made from one *dou* plus one *sheng* of flour and one *sheng* of oil, were used to receive the envoys from Khotan at the caves.”⁷² These records suggest important political functions of the Mogao caves.

Because of their strategic location on the Silk Road, these beautiful caves served as political arenas for the frequent visits by official international envoys. The local government and civic leaders, moreover, used this venue to deliver their diplomatic messages. The tenth-century Khotanese icons and the founding history of this Uighur kingdom depicted on the second layer of the south wall of Cave 220 vividly illustrate the diplomatic policy of the local government and demonstrate the political ideology of the patrons.

Pictorial History of Medieval China

The intimate ties between the pictorial program of the Zhai family cave and the local history of Dunhuang have been examined with the use of historical evidence to explain the meaning and function of artwork in the cave. Many visual details of the wall paintings in the cave, in turn, could also help in understanding missing links in the social history of medieval China. The painting on the north wall of Cave 220, for instance, may provide clues to comprehending the changing history of the New Year celebration tradition and may enrich our imagination on the visual aspects of a well-known dance with

central Asian origins. This painting may be seen as an example that illustrates the connections between the artworks in the Dunhuang caves and the social history of medieval China. The connections are demonstrated further with a Song poem that describes a vivid scene of the New Year celebration.

Fire trees with silver flowers are eye-catching
red,
Sounding drums and trumpets stir the spring
breeze.
My new love moves in my arms with sadness,
The old events still awake me from a dream.
May the lovers be deeply attached to each
other for a moment,
Let the moon be blurred frequently.
How can one be drunk when watching the
lamps,
You may not have the same chance next year!⁷³

Zhu Shuzhen, a female poet of the Southern Song (1127–1279 C.E.), composed this beautiful poem, entitled “Yuan ye” (The first evening), which depicts the sentimental feeling of a lady in love during the Lantern Festival on the eve of the New Year. It is not certain if this is a true story or merely literary effort. The significance of the Lantern Festival in medieval Chinese social life, however, is clearly revealed in the poem.

The Lantern Festival normally takes place in a period of three days around the fifteenth day of the first moon. Its main goal is to celebrate the New Year, and it is an integral part of New Year festivals, which in medieval times provided entertainment for the public and a chance for people to meet in a romantic lantern-lit environment. *Shangdeng* (watching the lamps) was at the center of the New Year celebration.

A famous Song scholar described vividly what happened in the Song capital during the Lantern Festival celebration:

In the evening of the fifteenth day of the first moon, long poles and large sheds were set up in front of the royal palace, directly opposite the Xuande Hall. . . . The images of “Mañjuśrī [Wenshu] Riding on Lion” and “Samantabhadra [Puxian] Riding on White Elephant” were made with colorful fabrics. Water was issued from the channels set in the five fingers of each of the images. Water was also transferred onto the top of the “hill of lamps” [*dengshan*] by using water-wheels and then stored in a wooden closet. When the stored water was released gradually from the closet, it seemed like a waterfall. Straws were bound in the shapes of “playing dragons” [*xilong*], which were covered with blue curtains. Several tens of thousands of lamps were concealed in the dragons, whose wavy bodies looked like a pair of dragons flying away. Between the “hill of lamps” and the gate of the Xuande Hall . . . two long poles were erected in a circle of thorn bushes, which was called “thorn basin.” Colorful ropes were bound on the poles, which were tens of *zhang* [hundreds of feet] in height. Various dramatic characters made of paper were hung on the ropes, looking like flying immortals in the wind. . . . Sometimes when the singers sang, the masses would follow.⁷⁴

Lighting lamps in the evening of the fifteenth day of the first moon in the Chinese calendar was often encouraged by the authorities, including the court and the local government. The *Jiu Wudai shi* (The old history of the Five Dynasties) records: “There was an old custom that every family went out in the fifteenth evening of the first moon in the Hesu area (north of the Yellow River). When (Yang) Shi-hou became the top official, he ordered each family to erect a pole with lamps. Thousands of lamps and ten thousands of torches illuminated the whole city. Women and men were allowed to play and wander in the streets.”⁷⁵

With support from the government, the celebration of the Lantern Festival developed on a large scale and became one of the most colorful social events in medieval China. The origins of the festival were closely connected with the Healing Ritual from the Buddhist tradition.

According to a Song dynasty record, the tradition of the Lantern Festival began in the late Sui dynasty during the reign of Emperor Yang.⁷⁶ However, given that the record was written hundreds of years after the Sui, its reliability is questionable. Modern scholars have proposed two other theories about the origin of the Lantern Festival. One suggests that it was an old tradition that began in India,⁷⁷ and the other argues for a Chinese origin dating back to the pre-Qin period (before 246 B.C.E.).⁷⁸ The north wall of Cave 220 provides some clues to clarify the confusion concerning the origin and development of this important medieval Chinese tradition.

The north wall of Cave 220 represents the Healing Ritual devoted to Bhaiṣajya-guru and satisfies the psychological need of healing of the patron family. The visual features of the painting, however, appear to be more historically informative than one would expect. In addition to depicting the key elements of the ritual, this painting also shows something that is not directly related to the ritual. The large scene of dance (Fig. 3.8), for example, is not even recorded as a part of the ritual in the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*, which is the textual basis for the painting.⁷⁹ Why did the artist depict such a large scene of “dancing under the lamp trees” in the painting? Who were these dancers? Why did they dance in the light of the shining lamps?

Dancing under the Lamp Trees

“Dancing under the lamp trees” was not a typical everyday form of entertainment in the Tang

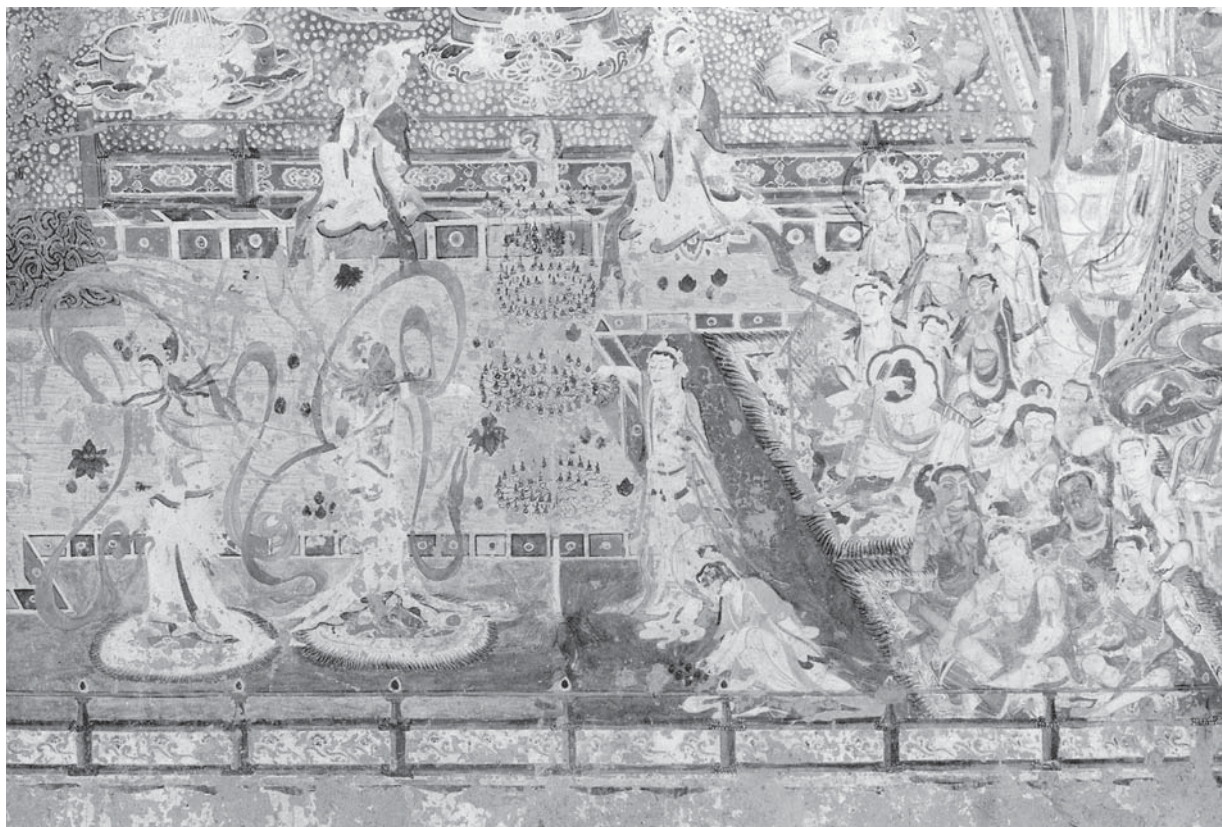


Figure 3.8 | Dancing under the lamp trees, detail of the north wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 c.e.

dynasty.⁸⁰ Rather, it was reserved for the New Year celebration and, in particular, for the Lantern Festival. According to a record found in the third chapter of *Chaoye qianzai* (Collected records on the official and nonofficial events):

In the nights of the fifteenth and sixteenth days of the first moon in the second year of the Xiantian era [713 c.e.] of Emperor Ruizong, the lamp wheels, which were as tall as twenty *zhang* [about two hundred feet], were set up outside the Anfu Gate in the capital. The lamp wheels were decorated with brocade and damask and golden and jade objects. Fifty thousand lamps were lit

on the wheels, looking like flowering trees. One thousand-plus court ladies, dressed in fancy garments and decorated with beautiful scarves, let their decorations of pearls and jades shine [under the light]. They made up their faces with fragrant powders. A single flower-crown or a single scarf costs ten thousand *qian* [cash]. To decorate a courtesan would cost three hundred *guan*. More than one thousand girls and women were selected from the Chang'an and Wannian areas. Their decorations, including garments, head decorations, and facial decorations, were similar to [those of] the palace ladies. These ladies danced and sang under the trees of the lamp wheels for three days and three nights.

This is indeed a joy that had never been recorded in history!⁸¹

This literary depiction of female dancers performing under the lamp trees with “lamp wheels” in the Lantern Festival in the Tang capital corresponds with the vivid visual details shown in the north wall painting of Cave 220 (Fig. 3.9). Therefore, it is highly possible that the artist experienced the joyful scene in the Lantern Festival and incorporated it into his painting of the Healing Ritual. If so, the north wall of Cave 220 provides a detailed visual record of the important social event in medieval China.

In the late Sui dynasty, when the Lantern Festival was still in its early stage, the New Year celebration festival appeared to be like a party:

The streets and lanes are filled with joyful people in the evening of the fifteenth day of the first moon of each year in the capital and even in various prefectures. Friends come together. [They] play drums, the noise of which goes up to the sky; [they] light up torches, which shine over the ground. People are wearing animal masks, and men are wearing women's clothes. Entertainers and acrobats look grotesque and bizarre. The fantastic masks and unusual dresses make people laugh. Women and men enjoy salacious jokes together without the necessary evasion. High sheds cross the roads, and wide curtains reach the clouds. The colorful clothing and beautiful makeup dazzle passengers. The horses and carts block the streets. Delicious food and good wine are on sale everywhere. Huge parties of music and dance are held in various places. [The party-

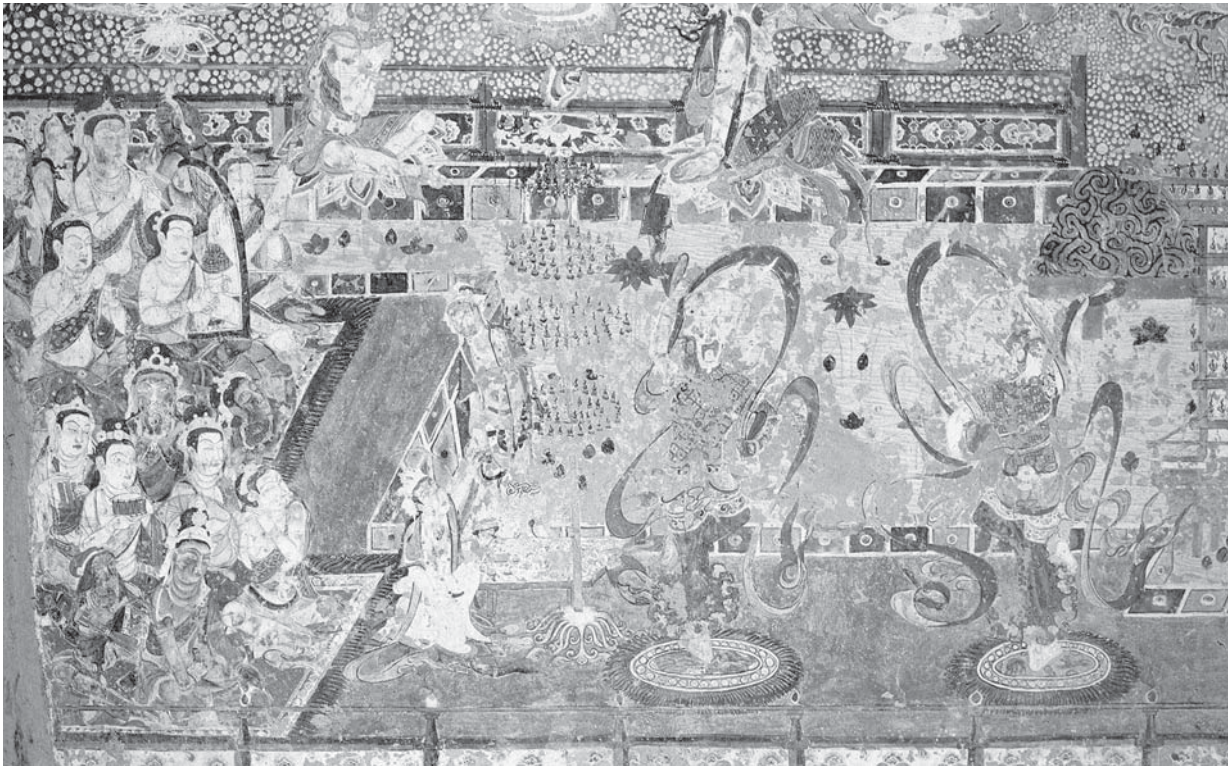


Figure 3.9 | Dancers and lamp trees, detail of the north wall, Cave 220, Dunhuang, 642 C.E.

goers] vie against one another to seize this moment of fame, even if it means exhausting their wealth and ruining their business.⁸²

This record from *Sui shu* (History of the Sui dynasty) gives us various details about the event, but it does not focus on the three-day long, grand-scale dance of women under the lamp trees with lamp wheels, as the Tang record does. The poem by Sui emperor Yang on this event also does not mention the dance.⁸³ The paintings of the Healing Ritual in the Sui-dynasty Dunhuang caves do not include the dance either. It seems that the custom of having many women dance under the lamp wheels, the climax of the Tang celebration of the Lantern Festival, was fully established in the early years of the Tang dynasty, as is evident in the north wall painting of the Zhai family cave.⁸⁴

The dance portrayed in the painting was probably a popular dance known as *hu xuan wu* (whirling barbarian dance) and described by the famous Tang poet Bai Juyi (772–846 C.E.).

Barbarian whirling girls, barbarian whirling
girls—
Their hearts answer to the strings,
Their hands answer to the drums.
At the sound of the strings and drums, they
raise their arms,
Like swirling snowflakes tossed about, they
turn in their twirling dance.
Whirling to the left, turning to the right, they
never feel exhausted,
A thousand rounds, ten thousand circuits—it
never seems to end.⁸⁵

Yuan Zhen (779–831 C.E.), another well-known Tang poet, also wrote a poem entitled “Hu xuan nü” (Whirling barbarian girl), and his description of this

dance also appeared to be very similar to the dance represented in the north wall painting of Cave 220:

The meaning of *hu xuan* is unknown to the
world,
But the appearance of the dance I can describe.
Tumbleweeds nipped from their roots by the
frost and blown wildly by a twister,
The red dishes and fire wheels shine on the
poles.
Black-dragon pearl earrings fly out like
shooting stars,
Rainbow haloes of the light scarves move as
fast as a flash of lightning.⁸⁶

According to a note in Chapter 567 of *Taiping yulan*, the *hu xuan* dance means that the dancer keeps whirling or jumping on a small circular carpet, never leaving it.⁸⁷ This record also matches the details shown in the painting.⁸⁸

Lamp Wheels and Lamp Trees

The shining “fire wheels” described in Yuan Zhen’s poem are very likely the lamp wheels used in the Lantern Festival. When piled up, the lamp wheels would form lamp trees. From a written description, it is hard to imagine what the lamp trees or lamp wheels in the Tang dynasty looked like; however, the north wall painting of Cave 220 offers an example (Plate 16). Furthermore, this painting also shows how to prepare the lamps. One figure is lighting several small lamps on the ground, while another person is putting a shining lamp on the second level of the lamp wheels on a tall pole. The empty lamp holders on the lower levels of the lamp wheels suggest that the lighting of lamps started from the top and moved to the bottom, and the lamps hanging on the wheels, with a tall standing pole as the central axis, form a lamp tree.

The lamp trees were the main source of lighting in the evenings during the Lantern Festival in the Tang dynasty. It was recorded that the sister-in-law of the emperor, Lady Hanguo, had a lamp tree 80 feet tall with one hundred branches made for the Lantern Festival, and its shining light could be seen within 100 square *li* (about 35 miles).⁸⁹ Two “lamp trees” are impressively shown in the painting of the Healing Ritual on the north wall of Cave 220. According to the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*, only lamps “as large as cartwheels” should be used in the ritual; however, the sutra does not mention “lamp trees.”

According to a historical record, two “agate lamp trees” were brought to the Tang court in the middle of the seventh century by the son of the king of a small kingdom in the Western Regions called Tukhara. These artificial lamp trees, according to Edward H. Schafer, “were used during the most brilliant of all T’ang festivals, the New Year’s illumination, a celebration of three days or more held in the middle of the first month of the year.”⁹⁰ Seemingly, the two agate examples from Tukhara suggest that these kinds of lamp trees have a Western Regions origin. Alternatively, their origin, based on this single extant record, may be that the economic value of the material of the two trees (agate), rather than the cultural value of the design of the trees, played a more important role. It is possible that the king of Tukhara made two lamp trees in the favorite design of the Tang emperor with expensive material in order to exchange other things with the Tang court. Because of the long distance between Tukhara and Chang’an, it would have been wise to send things made of high-value materials, and, for commercial purposes, it would have made sense to present a desirable commodity that the emperor would want to possess.

Archaeological discoveries strongly suggest a

Chinese origin for the lamp trees. One of the earliest known examples was a lamp tree excavated in 1978 from Tomb 1 in the cemetery of a king of the Zhongshan kingdom in modern-day Pingshan County, Hebei Province, and dating to the Warring States period (475–221 B.C.E.). This lamp tree consists of fifteen branches, and each branch has only one lamp. A few monkeys and birds are represented on the branches, creating a “wild environment” for the tree. Two men in casual clothing play with the monkeys under the tree by throwing fruit to them (Fig. 3.10).⁹¹ The real meaning of the work is unclear; however, its form may be considered a prototype of later “lamp trees.”

Various lamp trees, differing in shape and material, of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) and later periods have been found in numerous areas, including Shandong, Gansu, Hebei, Henan, Guangxi, Guizhou, and Shaanxi provinces.⁹² Their wide distribution in Han tombs suggests their popularity during that period.

The ancient texts also record multiple-branched lamp trees. *Xijing zaji* (Casual records of the western capital), for example, describes a lamp tree discovered in the palace of the Qin emperor: “When Emperor Gaozu [of the Han; r. 206–195 B.C.E.] first entered the Xianyang Palace . . . there was a nine-branched [tree of] lamps made with blue jade, which was seven feet and five inches high. The lamps issued forth from the mouth of a circling dragon. When the lamps were lighted, the scales and shells of the dragon seemed to be moving, shining like the stars in the house.”⁹³

In the post-Han periods, there is continuous reference to the use of the lamp tree in historical records. According to *Ye zhong ji* (Records in Ye): “When Shi Hu [r. 335–348 C.E.] had a party in the evening of the New Year, he erected a lamp [tree] with one hundred and twenty branches in front of his

palace, which was made of iron.”⁹⁴ Poems composed during this period also suggest the large scale of the lamp trees. Zhi Tandi’s poem “Deng zan” (Praising the lamps) states:

A thousand lamps shine together,
With a hundred branches glittering at the
same time.⁹⁵

Yu Xin’s “Deng fu” (Prose poem on lamps) records the following:

A hundred branches share the same tree trunk,
Lamps on the connected dishes shine in the
four directions.⁹⁶

The symbolic meaning of the multibranched lamp tree is probably related to the concept of longevity. Just as the “tree of money” (*qianshu*) symbolizes the growth of wealth, the “tree of light” implies the growth of life. This kind of lamp may also be called *changming deng* (eternal shining lamp). “*Changming*” (eternal shining) is homonymous with “*changming*,” which means “long life.” According to *Sui Tang jiahua* (Good tales of the Sui and Tang dynasties): “There was a *changming deng* of the Jin dynasty [266–420 C.E.] in Jiangning County. Its flame had become blue and cool when Emperor Wen of the Sui [r. 582–604 C.E.] conquered the Chen dynasty, who was surprised by the longevity of the lamp. It is still extant today.”⁹⁷

The lamp’s symbolic meaning of longevity is very close to the function of the Healing Ritual, which focuses on the extension of human life. The famous Dunhuang poet Wang Fanzhi of the early Tang wrote, “If one wants to reach longevity, the best way is to light an eternal shining lamp.”⁹⁸ The Chinese lamp trees and the Western Regions lamp

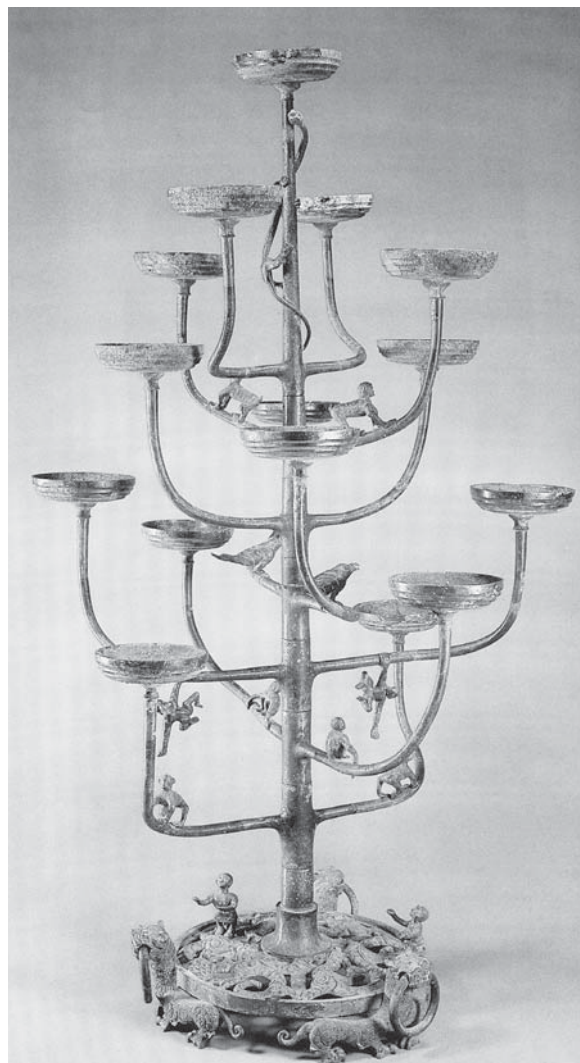


Figure 3.10 | Lamp tree, from Tomb 1 of Zhongshan kingdom (?–296 B.C.), Hebei Province. After *Zhongguo meishu quanji, diaosu bian* 1, p. 110.

wheels used in the Healing Ritual have in common their expression of the desire for a long life.

Lamp wheels were referred to as “lamp wheels from the Western Regions” (*Xiyu denglun*) during the Sui and Tang dynasties.⁹⁹ This particular name sug-

gests their Western Regions origin. However, it is not certain when and where the lamp wheels from the Western Regions and the traditional Chinese lamp trees fused. The paintings of the Healing Ritual in the Sui-dynasty Dunhuang caves depict lamp wheels piling up on a pole (Fig. 3.11) and look more like pointed stupas than trees. Nevertheless, they may be considered as the beginning of the fusion of the lamp wheels and the lamp trees, which was extremely popular during the following Tang dynasty. The two large lamp trees in the north wall painting of Cave 220 are shaped like two poles with multitiered lamp wheels hanging on them and reflect the combination of the Western Regions lamp wheel and the Chinese lamp tree in the early Tang period.

In addition to the lamp tree and the lamp wheel, we find a “lamp tower” (*denglou*) in the records about the Lantern Festival in the Tang dynasty. According to *Minghuang zalu* (Casual records on Emperor Minghuang): “The emperor unexpectedly spent the fifteenth evening of the first moon in the Eastern Capital [Dongdu], so he moved to the Shangyang Palace and arranged a splendid celebration by lighting numerous lamps. . . . On this occasion, a craftsman, Mao Shun, made a clever work. He created a colorful lamp tower, which was one hundred fifty feet high, consisting of three thousand rooms. The sounds of

pearls, jades, and golden and silver objects hanging on the building created a rhythmical music in the gentle breeze. The lamps were made in the shapes of dragons, phoenixes, tigers, and leopards.”¹⁰⁰

When the Japanese traveling monk Ennin (794–864 c.e.) visited Yangzhou in 839 c.e., he went to a Buddhist temple in the fifteenth evening of the first moon and saw a lamp tower in front of the main hall of the temple. There were also numerous lamps in the courtyard and along the left and right corridors.¹⁰¹ An impressive lamp tower can be seen on the north wall of Cave 220, depicted at the center of the painting, just in front of the image of Bhaiṣajya-guru. It consists of ten floors on which countless lamps are placed. Although this lamp tower is not as elaborate as the one made by Mao Shun in the Eastern Capital, it is the earliest visual example of this type of lamp tower extant today.

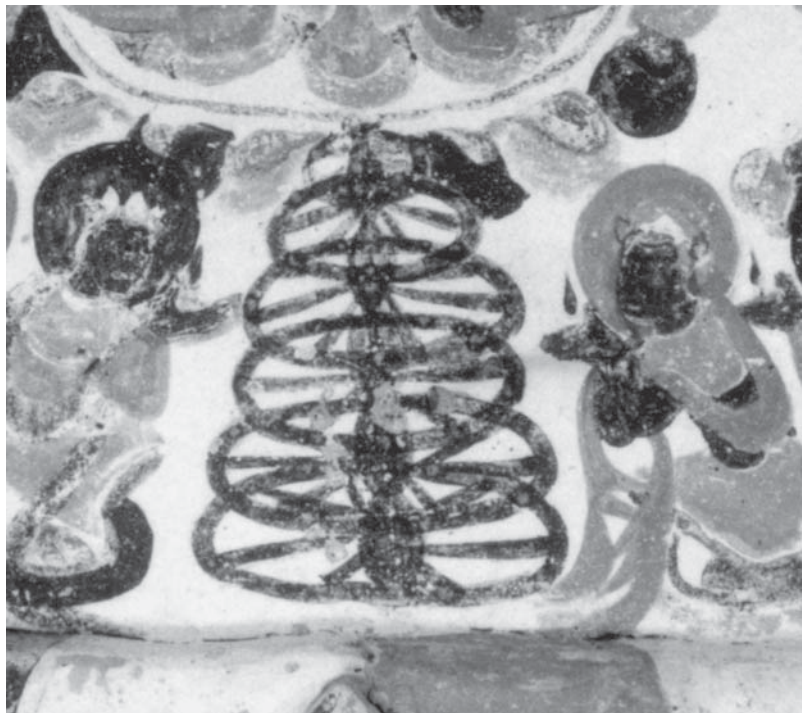


Figure 3.11 | Lamp wheels, detail from the illustration of the Healing Ritual, Cave 417, Dunhuang, Sui dynasty (581–618 c.e.).

The Healing Ritual and the Lantern Festival

In his poem on the Lantern Festival, Emperor Yang of the Sui dynasty begins by mentioning the “wheel of Dharma” (*falun*) of Buddhism and “Indian music” (*fansheng*). He also describes the “golden ground” (*huangjindi*), the “terrace of lapis lazuli” (*liulitai*), and banners (*fan*), which are all Buddhist terms in the poem.¹⁰² The inclusion of these Indian Buddhist terms in a poem about the Chinese Lantern Festival may indicate that the origins of this festival include not only Chinese traditions but also influences from the Western Regions and India. It is also interesting to note that the terms mentioned in Emperor Yang’s poem are also found in the records about the Healing Ritual and in the cave paintings of the ritual dating to the Sui and early Tang. It is reasonable, therefore, to consider the Healing Ritual performance as one of the origins of the Lantern Festival.

Alexandra Soper has suggested that the “light worship” in the Healing Ritual should be connected with the Christian tradition. “If we are dealing with lamps in sevens,” Soper argues, “it is impossible not to think of the seven-branched candles of the Israelites (Exodus, xxv, 31–37), or of the ‘seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God’ (Revelations, iv, 5).”¹⁰³ Although Soper’s theory about the lamp-lighting tradition of the Healing Ritual is still questionable, I believe the custom of lighting lamps existed in the Western Regions, which focused on the lamp wheel as recorded in Buddhist sutras and other texts. During the Tang dynasty, the lamp wheels were still referred to as *Xiyu denglun*, or “lamp wheel from the Western Regions.” The Tang poet Zhang Yue (667–730 C.E.) composed two poems in front of the emperor on the evening of the Lantern Festival; in one of them he wrote:

A thousand shadows of the lamp wheels from
the Western Regions overlap one another,
Ten thousand golden gates of China in the
East are opened.¹⁰⁴

The contrast between the Western Regions and China in the East is not merely literary rhetoric; it suggests the origin of the lamp wheels.

The lamp wheels came into China with the introduction of the Healing Ritual in the *Bhaiṣajyaguru Sūtra* and were gradually adapted into the Chinese Lantern Festival, perhaps in the late Sui period during the reign of Emperor Yang. The north wall of Cave 220 suggests that the lamp wheels were mixed with the Chinese lamp trees in the early Tang, and this mixture reveals the eclectic appearance of the Lantern Festival, which is a combination of the Healing Ritual and the traditional Chinese New Year celebration.

Scholars have tried to trace the origin of the Lantern Festival back to the Warring States period, believing that the worship of Taiyi is the beginning of the Lantern Festival tradition.¹⁰⁵ Some Tang texts also link this tradition to the Taiyi worship of the Han dynasty.¹⁰⁶ The details of how to celebrate the Lantern Festival, however, were not clearly recorded until the Sui dynasty, when the Healing Ritual was also visually depicted.

As previously mentioned, there are four paintings of the Healing Ritual extant in the Sui-dynasty caves at Dunhuang. The lamp wheels and five-colored banners shown in these paintings, as well as the flying *apsarasas* throwing flowers to the holy figures, create a sense of celebration. These four paintings and their similarities to textual descriptions of the Lantern Festival dating to the same time attest to their close relationship in the sixth and early seventh centuries.

Historical records suggest that the tradition of the Lantern Festival was established in the late Sui during the reign of Emperor Yang. According to the “Treatise on Music” (*Yinyue zhi*) in the *Sui Shu* (History of the Sui dynasty):

In the first moon of each year, [envoys] from various countries come to pay their tributes to the Sui court. They are kept in the capital until the fifteenth day [when the Lantern Festival is celebrated]. An area of performance, which covers a wide space of eight *li* [4 kilometers] between the Duan Gate and the Jianguo Gate, is defined. Numerous officials build sheds on both sides of the road. From the evening to the [next] morning, [the officials] let the [foreign envoys] watch until the night comes [again]. . . . Numerous torches are set up, which illuminate the sky and the ground. All kinds of shows [*baixi*] have never reached such a flourishing state in history. From now on, [the Lantern Festival] becomes an annual celebration.¹⁰⁷

Official historical records on the celebration of the Lantern Festival in the early years of the Tang dynasty do not exist. However, the north wall of Cave 220 provides reliable visual references concerning this important national festival, though in an indirect way.

During the High Tang period (705–780 c.e.), the celebration of the Lantern Festival reached its zenith and became one of the largest social activities throughout the empire. Various texts recorded the grand-scale social event, including the eighth chapter of *Da Tang xinyu* (New talks on the great Tang): “A spectacular lamp-lighting ceremony was held on the fifteenth day of the first moon in the capital during the Shenlong period [705–707 c.e.]. Jinwu¹⁰⁸ loosened the restrictions and allowed people to pass the streets in the evening. Everybody, including

aristocrats, royal relatives, bond servants, craftsmen, and merchants, went out in the evening. With so many carriages and their horses milling around, there was no way to watch for passersby. Princes and princesses let their orchestras play on the backs of horses, competing with each other. Each scholar composed a poem for the occasion.”¹⁰⁹

Interestingly, the annual celebration of the Lantern Festival in 712 c.e. was initiated by a Buddhist monk named Poluo¹¹⁰ and again, in the next year (713 c.e.), by a Buddhist monk named Potuo, both of whom were from the Western Regions, as their names indicate.¹¹¹ If the tradition of the Lantern Festival was purely a Chinese custom, it should have been the emperor or his court officials who presided over the events that required loosening the night restrictions in the capital. The important role of the Buddhist monks in the Lantern Festival celebration again suggests the deep relationship between the New Year lamp-lighting ceremony and Buddhism, particularly the Buddhist Healing Ritual.

Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang (r. 712–756 c.e.) was a fan of the Lantern Festival, according to *Jiu Tang shu* (The old history of the Tang dynasty): “Emperor Xuanzong went to watch the lamp-lighting ceremony on the Qinzhen Hall in the evening of the fifteenth day of the first moon each year during his reign. The imperial relatives, aristocrats, and high officials watched the ceremony from the watching tower. After the performance of the royal orchestra at midnight, the palace ladies were asked to make a stand in front of the Hall and to dance around it to please spectators. Some dance programs like ‘playing on a rope’ or ‘performance on a pole’ were fantastic and ingenious. Nothing could match this sort of performance!”¹¹² The forty-ninth chapter of *Tang hui yao* (Collected records of the Tang dynasty) also records the following: “On the

fifteenth day of the first moon in the twenty-eighth year of the Kaiyuan era [740 C.E.], [Emperor Xuanzong] offered a banquet to his officials at the Qinzheng Hall, but the evening lamp-lighting ceremony was stopped by heavy snow. He thus ordered the ceremony to be held on the fifteenth day of the second moon beginning with this year. . . . The emperor, however, restored the old tradition of lighting lamps and freeing the streets and markets for three days and three nights on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth days of the first moon. He ordered this tradition to be kept forever.”¹¹³

With the advocacy of the court, the lamp-lighting ceremony became extremely popular and influential in the capital and throughout the nation. Emperor Xuanzong not only attended the three-day-long celebrations but also composed poems on the event. His beloved scholar-officials created poems on the same event in response to the royal literary interests. Emperor Xuanzong’s poem on the Lantern Festival celebration in the capital and a story about his magical visit to the Lantern Festival in the province of Shu (modern-day Sichuan) have fortunately been preserved in the “library cave” at Dunhuang.¹¹⁴

Local Tradition of the Lantern Festival at Dunhuang

The finding of Emperor Xuanzong’s poem about the Lantern Festival in the “library cave” at Dunhuang suggests that people living in remote regions were aware of the grand celebrations of the festival in the Tang capital Chang’an. Dunhuang manuscript P.2555 contains a poem entitled “Watching Lamps under the Qinzheng Hall,”¹¹⁵ which has been widely agreed to be a poem composed by the emperor himself. It reads:

Bright moon shines in the double cities,
Colorful lamps illuminate the nine streets.
Open the doors to receive the harmonious air,
The royal sedans follow the gentle breeze.
Bells and drums echo each other through the
 night,
The voices of songs are still high when it is
 the dawn.
The colorful light is not for myself,
It is shared by people everywhere.¹¹⁶

This poem is not recorded in the classic collections of Tang poems and can be found only among the Dunhuang manuscripts. It not only provides evidence of the wide circulation of the royal poem throughout the empire but also is an indication of the influential power of the capital culture in the frontiers. The story of Xuanzong’s magic trip to see the Lantern Festival in Shu of the southwest, on the other hand, indicates the popularity of regional celebrations of the New Year.¹¹⁷

Local records found in the “library cave” suggest that the celebration of the Lantern Festival developed at Dunhuang in the early years of the Tang dynasty. The formality of the celebration in this region, however, reveals a much stronger influence of Buddhist ceremonies, especially the Healing Ritual.

The textual records on the Lantern Festival found at Dunhuang can be divided into two categories: one is the record of the oil and food used for the lamp-lighting event, and the other is a special type of literature used in the event. Most Buddhist temples in ancient Dunhuang kept day-to-day records of income and spending (*rupoli*). Among these detailed day-to-day records were entries on the amounts of oil and food used for the celebration of the Lantern Festival on the fifteenth days of the first

moons. In addition, Dunhuang manuscripts P.2049, P.3490, P.3234, S.4642, and S.1316 note various records on the amounts of oil and wheat used for the festival.¹¹⁸ All of these records show that Buddhist temples played an important role in organizing the festival activities.

In addition to Buddhist temples, ordinary residents at Dunhuang also organized special groups called lamp-lighting societies (*randeng she*) to help in the preparation for the celebrations. An announcement of such a society is preserved in Dunhuang manuscript P.3434, which is entitled “Shesi zhuan tie” (Announcement for circulation within the society). This announcement requires each member of the society to contribute a half *sheng* of oil for the lamp-lighting activity in the first moon of 893 C.E.¹¹⁹

Along with the development of the Lantern Festival, a special type of literature called *randeng wen* (lamp-lighting eulogy) became popular at Dunhuang during the Tang dynasty and continued to be used in the Five Dynasties and Song periods, as the thirty-four extant Dunhuang manuscripts of the theme indicate.¹²⁰ The standard format for the lamp-lighting eulogies includes a rhetorical exposition on the merits of Buddhism, an explanation of the identity of the chief patrons of the event, and a list of wishes of the patrons. In most cases, the large-scale celebrations of the Lantern Festival were mainly patronized by the local government, with the chief patrons being the contemporary governors of

Dunhuang. Their main wish was always “*jiuren huguo*,” or “to rescue the people and protect the nation.”¹²¹ As for ordinary people, to live a longer and wealthier life was the most popular wish. Significantly, the Mogao caves, often called Lingyan (Divine Cliff) or Qiankan (Thousand Niches) in the Tang and Song periods, were used as the main location for the celebration of the Lantern Festival in the Dunhuang area. Buddhist temples in front of the caves supplied the participants of the events with food and oil. Clearly, the local celebrations of the Lantern Festival were connected with the Buddhist communities at Dunhuang.

Some lamp-lighting eulogies mention the Yakṣa generals and lapis lazuli, which are associated with the Healing Buddha.¹²² The memory of the Healing Ritual as one of the origins of the Lantern Festival survived in the formality of the celebration in the capital and at Dunhuang, as well as in the literary rhetoric on the event. Generally speaking, the Healing Ritual was understood first as a way of healing and of extending people’s lives. During the late Sui and early Tang periods, this ritual was partially adapted and transformed into a way of celebrating the New Year with the Lantern Festival. The large painting on the north wall of Cave 220 not only reveals the patrons’ desire for the healing of their family members but also illuminates the partial transformation of the ritual from a religious ceremony to a secular celebration.

APPENDIX ONE

Illustrations of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* in the Mogao Caves

Period	Cave Number	Location	Total
Sui			4
	433 ^a	Ceiling	
	436 ^a	Ceiling	
	417 ^a	Ceiling	
	394 ^a	East wall	
Early Tang			1
	220 ^a	North wall	
High Tang			3
	148	East wall	
	180	South wall	
	214	South wall	
Middle Tang			32
	92	North wall	
	93	West niche ^b	
	112	North wall	
	134	East wall	
	154	South wall	
	154	West niche ^b	
	159	North wall	
	159	West niche ^b	
	200	North wall	
	200	West niche ^b	
	202	East wall	
	222	North wall	

Period	Cave Number	Location	Total
Middle Tang	222	West niche ^b	
(cont.)	231	North wall	
	236	North wall	
	237	North wall	
	238	North wall	
	240	North wall	
	358	North wall	
	358	West niche ^b	
	359	North wall	
	359	West niche ^b	
	360	North wall	
	361	North wall	
	369	North wall	
	369	West niche ^b	
	370	North wall	
	386	North wall	
	468	West niche ^b	
	471	North wall	
	471	West niche ^b	
	475	West niche ^b	
Late Tang			34
	8	East wall	
	12	North wall	
	14	South side of the central pillar	

Appendix One

Period	Cave Number	Location	Total
Late Tang (cont.)	18	North wall	21
	20	North wall	
	54	West niche ^b	
	57	Ceiling of the entrance tunnel	
	85	North wall	
	107	South wall	
	128	South wall	
	132	North wall	
	138	North wall	
	141	North wall	
	144	North wall	
	145	North wall	
	145	West niche ^b	
	147	North wall	
	150	East wall	
	156	North wall	
	156	West niche ^b	
	160	East wall	
	167	North wall	
	173	East wall	
	177	East wall	
	190	West wall	
	192	North wall	
	196	North wall	
	227	North wall	
	232	North wall	
	232	West niche	
	337	East wall	
	338	Ceiling of the entrance tunnel	
	343	West wall	
	473	North wall	
Five Dynasties			
	5	North wall	21
	6	North wall	
	22	South wall	
	61	North wall	
	98	North wall	
	100	North wall	
	108	North wall	
	113	Ceiling of the entrance tunnel	
	119	Ceiling of the front chamber	
	120	Ceiling of the entrance tunnel	

Period	Cave Number	Location	Total
Five Dynasties (cont.)	146	North wall	9
	205	West wall of the front chamber	
	288	Ceiling of the entrance tunnel	
	294	Ceiling of the entrance tunnel	
	296	Ceiling of the front chamber	
	334	South wall of the front chamber	
	384	North wall of the entrance tunnel	
	428	Ceiling of the front chamber	
	446	East wall	
	468	North wall	
	474	North wall	
Song			
	7	South wall	7
	15	North wall	
	55	North wall	
	76	North wall	
	118	North wall	
	264	Ceiling of the entrance tunnel	
	449	North wall	
	452	North wall	
	454	North wall	
Western Xia			
	88	North wall	111
	164	South wall	
	164	North wall	
	234	West wall	
	400	North wall	
	408	East wall	
	418	South wall	
Total			

^a These murals represent the Healing Ritual. Because these paintings are also based on the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*, they are included here.

^b Only the “nine untimely deaths” and the “twelve great vows” are represented in the West niche.

APPENDIX TWO

Illustrations of the Western Paradise in the Mogao Caves

Period	Cave Number	Location	Total
Sui			3
	393	West wall	
	401	East wall	
	433	Ceiling	
Early Tang			15
	71	North wall	
	78	South wall	
	205	North wall	
	211	South wall	
	211	North wall	
	220	South wall ^a	
	331	North wall	
	332	North wall	
	329	South wall	
	331	North wall	
	334	North wall	
	335	South wall	
	341	South wall	
	372	South wall	
	431	North, west, south walls ^a	
High Tang			28
	23	Ceiling	
	44	North wall	
	45	North wall ^a	
	66	North wall ^a	
	103	North wall ^a	
	113	South wall ^a	
	116	South wall ^a	
	120	South wall ^a	
	122	North wall ^a	
	123	South wall	
	124	North wall	

Period	Cave Number	Location	Total
High Tang (cont.)	148	East wall ^a	
	171	East wall ^a	
	171	South wall ^a	
	171	North wall ^a	
	172	South wall ^a	
	172	North wall ^a	
	176	South wall ^a	
	194	North wall ^a	
	205	South wall	
	208	South wall ^a	
	215	North wall ^a	
	217	North wall ^a	
	218	South wall ^a	
	320	South wall	
	320	North wall ^a	
	445	South wall	
	446	South wall ^a	
Middle Tang			41
	7	North wall ^a	
	44	East wall ^a	
	44	South wall ^a	
	91	South wall ^a	
	92	South wall ^a	
	112	South wall	
	117	South wall ^a	
	126	South wall ^a	
	126	North wall ^a	
	129	South wall ^a	
	134	West wall ^a	
	154	North wall ^a	
	155	South wall ^a	
	159	South wall ^a	
	159	South wall	

Appendix Two

Period	Cave Number	Location	Total
Middle Tang (cont.)	180	East wall ^a	30
	180	North wall ^a	
	188	South wall ^a	
	188	North wall ^a	
	191	West wall ^a	
	197	North wall ^a	
	199	North wall ^a	
	200	South wall ^a	
	201	South wall ^a	
	201	North wall ^a	
	202	East wall	
	231	South wall ^a	
	236	South wall ^a	
	237	South wall ^a	
	238	South wall ^a	
	240	South wall ^a	
	258	North wall ^a	
	358	South wall ^a	
	359	South wall	
	360	South wall ^a	
	361	South wall	
	369	South wall	
	370	South wall ^a	
	379	South wall ^a	
	386	South wall	
	471	South wall	
Late Tang			
	8	West wall ^a	30
	12	South wall ^a	
	18	South wall ^a	
	19	South wall ^a	
	20	South wall ^a	
	24	West wall	
	85	South wall	
	107	North wall	
	111	South wall ^a	
	128	North wall	
	132	South wall ^a	
	138	South wall	
	141	South wall ^a	
	144	South wall ^a	
	145	South wall ^a	
	147	South wall ^a	
	150	East wall	
	156	South wall	
	160	West wall ^a	
	167	South wall	
	173	West wall	
	177	West wall ^a	
	192	South wall	
	195	West wall ^a	
	196	South wall	
	227	South wall	
	232	South wall ^a	
	337	West wall ^a	
	343	East wall ^a	
	473	South wall ^a	

Period	Cave Number	Location	Total
Five Dynasties			13
	4	South wall	13
	5	South wall	
	6	South wall	
	22	South wall ^a	
	61	South wall	
	98	South wall	
	100	South wall	
	108	South wall	
	146	South wall	
	205	West wall of the front chamber ^a	
	334	North wall of the front chamber ^a	
	390	West wall of the front chamber	
	468	South wall ^a	
Song			9
	15	South wall ^a	9
	55	South wall ^a	
	76	South wall ^a	
	118	South wall ^a	
	136	South wall	
	136	North wall	
	449	South wall ^a	
	452	South wall	
	454	South wall ^a	
Western Xia			19
	88	South wall	19
	140	South wall	
	140	North wall	
	142	South wall	
	142	North wall	
	151	South wall	
	151	North wall	
	164	South wall	
	164	North wall	
	165	South wall	
	224	South wall	
	234	South wall	
	234	North wall	
	306	East wall	
	306	West wall	
	351	South wall of the front chamber	
	351	North wall of the front chamber	
	400	South wall	
	418	North wall	
Total			158

^a Identified by scholars at Dunhuang Research Academy as illustrations of the *Visualization Sutra*.

APPENDIX THREE

Illustrations of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* *Sūtra* in the Mogao Caves

Period	Cave Number	Location	Total
Sui			11
	206	West wall	
	262	Ceiling	
	276	West wall	
	277	North wall	
	314	West wall	
	380	West wall	
	417	West wall	
	419	West wall	
	420	West wall	
	423	Ceiling	
	433	Ceiling	
Early Tang			10
	68	West wall (inside the niche)	
	203	West wall	
	220	East wall	
	242	West wall (inside the niche)	
	322	West wall	
	332	North wall	
	334	West wall (inside the niche)	
	335	North wall	

Period	Cave Number	Location	Total
Early Tang (cont.)	341	West wall (inside the niche)	
	342	West wall (inside the niche)	
High Tang			3
	44	South wall of front chamber	
	103	East wall	
	194	South wall	
Middle Tang			9
	133	East wall	
	159	East wall	
	186	South wall	
	231	East wall	
	236	East wall	
	237	East wall	
	240	West wall	
	359	East wall	
	360	East wall	
Late Tang			9
	9	North wall	
	12	East wall	
	18	East wall	

Appendix Three

Period	Cave Number	Location	Total
Late Tang (cont.)	85	East wall	
	138	East wall	
	139	East wall	
	141	West wall	
		(front chamber)	
	150	South wall	
	156	East wall	
Five Dynasties			16
	5	East wall	
	6	East wall	
	22	East wall	
	53	North wall	
	61	East wall	
	98	East wall	
	100	East wall	
	108	East wall	
	121	East wall	
	132	East wall	
	146	East wall	
	261	West wall	
		(front chamber)	
	288	South wall	
		(front chamber)	

Period	Cave Number	Location	Total
Five Dynasties (cont.)	334	West wall	
		(front chamber)	
	342	North wall	
	369	East wall	
Song			9
	7	East wall	
	25	North wall	
	172	West wall	
		(front chamber)	
	202	South and north walls	
		(front chamber)	
	203	West wall	
		(front chamber)	
	264	West wall	
		(front chamber)	
	335	West wall	
		(front chamber)	
	437	West wall	
		(front chamber)	
	454	East wall	
Total			67

Notes

Introduction

1. Refer to Mair, “The Significance of Dunhuang,” p. A-1.
2. Turfan is another site on the Silk Road, located in the eastern part of Xinjiang, not far from Dunhuang.
3. Mair, “The Significance of Dunhuang,” p. A-1.
4. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival*, pp. 19–20.
5. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, p. V.
6. In Cave 285, for example, we find that the Yin family patronized a painting of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas on the north wall, with the portraits of the male and female members of the family shown below the iconic painting. Patrons from other families such as Hua (a non-Han surname) and Lin, are also shown in this cave.
7. Shi Weixiang has published extensively on the role of local prominent families in the construction of the Mogao caves at Dunhuang, including an article dealing exclusively with the topic. See Shi Weixiang, “Shizu yu shiku,” pp. 151–164.
8. In addition to the Zhai family cave, other family caves built in the first half of the Tang dynasty include the two Li family caves (Caves 332 and 148) and three Yin family caves (Caves 96, 321, and 217). Many more caves were constructed by powerful local clans such as the Zhang and Cao families in the following periods.
9. The ancient term “Xiyu” (Western Regions) in Chinese texts referred to the vast area of central Asia, including the area to the northwest of Dunhuang in which many small kingdoms existed.
10. Gaochang kingdom (Karakhoja) was located in the present-day Turfan region, which is about 500 kilometers northwest of Dunhuang. The ruins of the ancient city of Gaochang are still extant today.
11. Two Tang military titles, Zhaowu Xiaowei (Zhaowu commandant) and Bobao Zhenjiang (Bobao garrison defense commander), appear in the inscription of patrons on the east wall of Cave 220, dated to 642, and suggest that Zhai family members served in the Tang army. According to historical records, Tang troops invading Karakhoja (in present-day Turfan) included local people from Dunhuang, led by Liu Demin, governor of Shazhou (Tang name for Dunhuang). See Shi Weixiang, “Sichou zhilu shang de Dunhuang yu Mogaoku,” p. 57 and n. 33.
12. Twitchett and Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, pp. 220–224. The presence of these non-

- Chinese kings and princes in the Zhai family cave seems also to suggest their significance in the mind of the patrons.
13. Pelliot, *Les grottes de Touen-houang*.
 14. The Tibetans conquered Dunhuang and ruled this region for the sixty-six years from 781 to 847 C.E., during the Tang dynasty. Therefore, this period is known as the Tibetan period or the middle Tang period in the local history.
 15. Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo, ed., “Mogaoku di 220 ku xin faxian de fubi bihua.”
 16. Akiyama and Matsubara, *Arts of China*.
 17. Ibid., p. 14.
 18. Ibid.
 19. Higashiyama, “Tonkō Bakkōkutsu dai 220 kutsu shiron.”
 20. Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo, ed., *Zhongguo shiku—Dunhuang Mogaoku*.
 21. For more information on the textual basis of the paintings, see the section “West Wall” in Chapter 1.
 22. Whitfield, *Dunhuang*, vol. 2, p. 306.
 23. For more discussion on this issue, see the section “West Wall” in Chapter 1.
 24. Fujieda, “Guanyu 220 ku gaixiu de ruogan wenti,” pp. 67–84.
 25. The Khotan kingdom was an important small kingdom on the Silk Road, west to Dunhuang, in the south part of present-day Xinjiang.
 26. Duan, “Tangdai qianqi de Mogaoku yishu,” pp. 168–195. Most scholars who wrote introductions to the Dunhuang caves included Cave 220 but provided only a brief description of the famous early Tang paintings in the cave.
 27. See Li Yumin, “Dunhuang Yaoshi jingbian yanjiu”; Luo Huaqing, “Dunhuang bihua zhong de dongfang Yaoshi jingtu bian”; He, “Dunhuang Mogaoku bihua zhong de Weimojie jingbian”; Donohashi, “Dunhuang de Yaoshi jingbian yu riben de Yaoshi rulai xiang”; Ma Hualong, “Mogaoku 220 ku Weimojie jingbian yu Chang’an huafeng chutan”; and Katsuki, “Tonkō Bakkōkutsu dai 220 kutsu Amida Jodo Hensōzuko.”
 28. Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China*; Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine*.
 29. In the field of Chinese Buddhist art, Alexander Soper examined the relationships between the Northern Wei court and the identities of the five giant images of the Buddha in the Yungang caves, located near present-day Datong in Shanxi Province, in the 1960s, but his approach to the political implications of Chinese Buddhist art seems to have not attracted enough attention in the following decades. See Soper, “Imperial Cave-Chapels of the Northern Dynasties.” More recently, Amy McNair has published her exciting study of the Longmen caves from various angles, including political uses of image and writing. See McNair, “The Fengxiansi Shrine” and “On the Tang-Dynasty Patronage of Nuns.”
 30. Abe, “Art and Practice.”
 31. Wu Hung, “Reborn in Paradise.”
 32. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival*.

Chapter One | Iconography of the Original Early Tang Paintings

1. Shi Weixiang, “Sichou zhilu shang de Dunhuang yu Mogaoku,” p. 56.
2. Refer to Twitchett and Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, p. 224.
3. Ibid., p. 225.
4. Ibid., p. 35.
5. Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, p. 77.
6. It has been commonly agreed among the Dunhuang scholars that the characters are original writings of the early Tang. The calligraphy style and ink type of the characters are the same as other early Tang inscriptions remaining in the Dunhuang caves and the early Tang manuscripts discovered from the “library cave” at Dunhuang.
7. For more details on the numbers and locations of the paintings of the Western Paradise in the Dunhuang caves, see Appendix 2.
8. Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo, ed., *Dunhuang Mogaoku neirong zonglu*. A revised version was published by the same press in 1996.
9. The sculptures of warriors first appeared in the Dunhuang caves in the Northern Wei period (Cave 435) and then during the Sui Dynasty (Cave 427).

- They became popular in the first half of Tang dynasty (Caves 202, 206, 321, 194).
10. Rhie, “A Periodization of the Early T’ang Caves,” p. 303.
 11. Ibid.
 12. Xie and Ling, *Dunhuang yishu zhi zui*, p. 284.
 13. Shi Weixiang, for example, thinks that this painting represents “the seven images of Bhaiṣajya-guru and the Eastern Paradise.” See Shi Weixiang, “Guanyu Dunhuang Mogaoku neirong zonglu,” p. 187. Duan Wenjie also believes that “the main motifs [on the north wall of Cave 220] are the seven images of Bhaiṣajya-guru and the surroundings are the Pure Land of the Healing Master in the East.” See Duan, *Dunhuang shiku yishu lunji*, p. 179. Japanese scholar Higashiyama Kengo considers this painting an image of the Pure Land and emphasizes its significance in the history of the Pure Land tradition. See Higashiyama, “Tonkō Bakkōkutsu dai 220 kutsu shiron.” In recent years, younger scholars have undertaken more detailed studies of this painting. They basically concur with the traditional identifications. See Li Yumin, “Dunhuang Yaoshi jingbian yanjiu,” and Luo Huaqing, “Dunhuang bihua zhong de dongfang Yaoshi jingtu bian.”
 14. The translation of the sutra has been attributed traditionally to Śrīmitra, a monk from central Asia who was active in Nanjing in the first decade of the fourth century.
 15. Translated by Dharmagupta in 617 C.E.
 16. Translated by Xuanzang in 650 C.E.
 17. Translated by Yijing in 707 C.E. Additional, later translations have been preserved in the Tripitaka. Because their dates are later than the construction of Cave 220, I do not include them in this discussion.
 18. The local version found at Dunhuang is almost the same as the *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Abhiṣeka [Initiation] of Clearing Off the Sins of the Past and the Birth and Death to Reach the Pure Land*, attributed to Śrīmitra but in fact a modified version by Huijian, except that the latter has an additional short incantation for life extension and different names of the eight bodhisattvas. To simplify the discussion on the varied versions of the sutra, I consider the two slightly different versions as one version and call them the Dunhuang-Huijian version. For a detailed discussion of the versions of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra*, see Ning, “Foijing yu tuxiang.”
 19. For discussion of these versions of the sutra, see Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha*, pp. 52–76.
 20. Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 1, p. 42.
 21. A historical record shows that Xuanzang personally translated some Chinese texts into Sanskrit. See T., vol. 52, p. 386.
 22. All inscriptions remaining in the Dunhuang caves built during the first half of the Tang dynasty are in Chinese and suggest that the main textual bases of the Dunhuang paintings are Chinese Buddhist texts.
 23. According to an inscription written at the end of Dunhuang ms. S.4415, Yuan Rong, prince of Dongyang and governor of Dunhuang, made copies of Buddhist sutras, including a *Yaoshijing (Bhaiṣajya-guru sūtra)*, in 533 C.E.
 24. For a clarification of the Dunhuang-Huijian version and other versions of the sutra, see Ning, “Foijing yu tuxiang.”
 25. See Li Yumin, “Dunhuang Yaoshi jingbian yanjiu.”
 26. T., vol. 21, pp. 53–534. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
 27. T., vol. 14, p. 404. Emphasis added.
 28. Ibid.
 29. Ibid.
 30. Duan, *Dunhuang shiku yishu lunji*, p. 179.
 31. Yijing’s translation was made in 707 C.E., sixty-five years later than the north wall painting of Cave 220.
 32. T., vol. 14, p. 404.
 33. Actual banners made for the ritual have been found in the “library cave” and are now in the collection of the British Museum. They are made of different-colored squares of silk or other textiles, without painted subjects. See Whitfield, ed., *The Art of Central Asia*, pl. 10, 11, and 12.
 34. T., vol. 14, p. 404.
 35. Ibid.
 36. Ibid., p. 403.
 37. Ibid., p. 404.
 38. These symbols probably represent their relationship to the twelve Shengxiao animals that were popularly

- represented in the *sancai*, three-colored ceramic figurines in the Tang tombs.
39. T., vol. 14, p. 402.
 40. Roderick Whitfield suggests that the patrons are shown on the west wall below the niche, where they can be interpreted as making offerings and so on. If one regards the cave as having an integral iconographic scheme, the patrons, monks, and so forth are not missing or absent. Their performance of the ritual is signified by the depictions on the adjacent walls. This interesting comment was sent to me via personal communication.
 41. T., vol. 21, p. 534.
 42. Ibid.
 43. Li Yumin and Akira Fujieda investigated, respectively, the facing representations of the Eastern Paradise and the Western Paradise in the Dunhuang caves. See Li Yumin, "Dunhuang Yaoshi jingbian yanjiu," and Fujieda, "Guanyu 220 ku gaixiu de ruogan wenti."
 44. T., vol. 21, p. 533.
 45. T., vol. 14, p. 402.
 46. The relationship between the Healing Ritual and the New Year celebration is discussed in detail in the section "Pictorial History of Medieval China" in Chapter 3.
 47. The English translation of this poem is quoted from Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, p. 260. The original poem reads:

法輪天上轉，梵聲天上來。
 燈樹千光照，花燄七枝開。
 月影疑流水，春風含夜梅。
 幡動黃金地，鐘發琉璃臺。
 48. For more detailed information on these sutras and the record about the lotus pond, see the following section.
 49. Ning, "Dunhuang zaoqi tu'an yanjiu."
 50. According to Han prose poems such as "Xijing fu" and "Lulingguangdian fu," lotus flowers were often shown in *zaojing* decorations on the ceilings of palace halls. "Xijing fu," for example, states, "The lotus flower is hung upside down by its stalk in the *zaojing* (on the ceiling of the hall)." Xue Zong adds a note to this sentence: "*Jia* means the lotus stalk. This is to describe the appearance of an upside down lotus flower whose stalk is planted in the *zaojing* in a reversed direction." "Lulingguangdian fu" also mentions, "Round mouth (of a spring) in square well in which a lotus flower is planted in a reversed direction." Ying Shao's *Fengsutong* explains the symbolic meaning of the lotus flower in *zaojing* as "suppressing fire": "(The ceiling of) the hall is designed according to the shape of the well of the east with a lotus flower carved (at the center). Lotus is an aquatic plant and therefore it can suppress fire." The same book also mentions, "The halls that are shaped according to round-mouth spring and square well with a lotus flower (at the center) are supposed to (use the symbol to) suppress fire." For more information on the meaning of the *zaojing* design, see Ning, "Dunhuang zaoqi tu'an yanjiu," p. 44.
 51. For details of the nine untimely deaths, see Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha*, pp. 167-169. For the content of the twelve great vows, see the same book, pp. 152-155.
 52. See Li Yumin, "Dunhuang Yaoshi jingbian yanjiu," p. 5.
 53. Longmen is a very important site of Buddhist art near Luoyang. Guyang cave is one of the earliest caves at the site, where work began shortly after the Northern Wei moved its capital from Pingcheng to Luoyang. For a comprehensive introduction to the site, see Longmen shiku yanjiusuo, ed., *Zhongguo shiku—Longmen shiku*.
 54. Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon Sekkutsu no kenkyū*, p. 308. A part of the inscription reads, "the imperial family, master monks, parents, myself and my relatives live forever . . . this is my wish" (皇家，師僧，父母，己身，眷屬，命道無窮 . . . 愿如是)。
 55. For more information on Huijian's edition of the sutra and its relations to other versions, see Ning, "Foijing yu tuxiang."
 56. The story of Zhang Yuan is recorded in the 84th *juan* of *Beishi*. Also see the 62nd *juan* of *Fayuan zhulin*. See T., vol. 53, p. 761.
 57. Ibid.
 58. "水火盜賊疾疫飢饉，怨家債主王法縣官。" In T., vol. 52, p. 334.
 59. Wright, "T'ang T'ai-tsung and Buddhism," p. 247.
 60. T., vol. 52, p. 329.
 61. Wright, "T'ang T'ai-tsung and Buddhism," pp. 247-248.

62. Ibid., p. 247.
63. Shi Weixiang, “Sichou zhilu shang de Dunhuang yu Mogaoku,” p. 59.
64. Twitchett and Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, pp. 224–230.
65. Lighting lamps in a cave was a common practice at Mogaoku, and the oil remains do not exclusively prove that the Healing Ritual took place inside the cave. It is one of the possibilities.
66. Dunhuang ms. P.2049 (dated to 933 C.E.) records the use of oil in the caves to light lamps on the fifteenth day of the first moon.
67. Duan, *Dunhuang shiku yishu lunji*, p. 176.
68. This theory was initiated by Japanese scholar Matsumoto Eiichi in the 1930s. See Matsumoto, *Tonkō ga no kenkyū*.
69. Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo, ed., *Dunhuang Mogaoku neirong zonglu*, p. 77.
70. Katsuki Gen'ichiro also identifies the painting as a representation of the *Visualization Sutra*, but he does not link the painting to the visualization practice. See Katsuki, “Tonkō Bakkōkutsu dai 220 kutsu Amida Jodo Hensōzuko.”
71. Although some scholars believe that this painting is based on the *Amitābha Sūtra* whereas I think it is based on the *Visualization Sutra*, we all agree that this painting represents the Western Paradise.
72. Gomez, *The Land of Bliss*, p. 127.
73. Ibid., pp. 146–147.
74. Ibid., p. 244.
75. Tanaka, *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism*, p. 16.
76. Gomez, *The Land of Bliss*, p. 127.
77. Ibid.
78. Jiangliangyeshe, trans., *Foshuo guan Wuliangshou jing*.
79. The *Visualization Sutra* groups the nine ranks into three *bei* instead of *pin* when they become the objects of meditation. They are called *shangbei shengxiang* (meditation on the upper generation of rebirth), *zhongbei shengxiang* (meditation on the middle generation of rebirth), and *xiabei shengxiang* (meditation on the lower generation of rebirth). See T., vol. 12, pp. 345–346.
80. The second patron at the south side of the west wall, below the niche, has an inscription that reads, “Dao □, monk from the Dayun Temple, worships [the Buddha] with whole heart.” At the end of the inscription, four characters are added in a smaller font, which identify the monk's family origin (*suxing Zhaishi*, “his secular family name is Zhai”). See *Donors' Inscriptions*, p. 103.
81. Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, p. 35.
82. For a detailed discussion about the shift in burial customs during the Qin-Han periods, see *ibid.*, pp. 30–37.
83. Ibid., p. 33.
84. For more information on the renovation history of the Zhai family cave, see Chapter 2.
85. For a detailed discussion on the local cultural traditions at Dunhuang, see Shi Weixiang, “Dunhuang fojiao yishu chansheng de lishi yiju,” pp. 129–151.
86. Twitchett, “The Composition of the Tang Ruling Class,” p. 60.
87. Ibid., p. 61.
88. Eberhard, “The Leading Families of Ancient Tunhuang,” p. 222.
89. The text prepared for the inscription on the stela was discovered in the “library cave” at Dunhuang and is now collected in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, numbered P. 4640. For full content of the inscription on the east wall of Cave 220, see *Donors' Inscription*, pp. 101–104.
90. T., vol. 12, pp. 345–346.
91. T., vol. 12, p. 272. Luis Gomez has translated *sanbei* as “three kinds of believers”: “persons of superior faith,” “persons of middling faith,” and “persons of inferior faith” (Gomez, *The Land of Bliss*, pp. 187–188). This “free translation,” in my opinion, misses partially the original Chinese implication of categorizing people according to the hierarchy of generations.
92. Bunker, “Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakirti,” p. 28.
93. For an index of the Sui illustrations of the *Vimalakirti-nirdeśa*, see Appendix 3.
94. Some other translations were made in the second through the fourth centuries but are no longer extant. For a detailed discussion of the translation history of the sutra, see Lamotte, *The Teaching of Vimalakirti*.

- See also Zurcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, pp. 50 and 70.
95. He, “Dunhuang Mogaoku bihua zhong de Weimojie jingbian,” p. 62.
 96. For a detailed discussion on the commentaries of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, see Fang and Xu, “Dunhuang yishu zhong de Weimojie suoshuo jing jiqi zhushu,” pp. 145–151. For the reference on the sheet-based payment of the “copy students,” see the same article, pp. 146–147.
 97. Soper, *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China*, p. 36.
 98. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
 99. Bunker, “Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti,” p. 30.
 100. For more detailed information on the numbers and locations of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* illustrations in the Dunhuang caves, see Appendix 3.
 101. Bunker, “Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti,” pp. 49–52.
 102. Jin Weinuo, “Dunhuang bihua Weimo bian de fachen,” p. 4.
 103. He, “Dunhuang Mogaoku bihua zhong de Weimojie jingbian,” p. 63.
 104. Dong, *Binglingsi 169 ku*, p. 7.
 105. He, “Dunhuang Mogaoku bihua zhong de Weimojie jingbian,” p. 63.
 106. For more details, see Appendix 3.
 107. Jin Weinuo, “Dunhuang bihua Weimo bian de fazhan,” p. 4.
 108. A scene of the Buddha preaching the Law at the upper center area, just above the entrance, has not been fully explained. It is possible that this preaching scene represents another episode of the sutra that shows the Buddha commenting on Vimalakīrti after the debate. It is also possible that this preaching scene represents something that is not relevant to the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*. The real meaning of the painting needs further research.
 109. Duan Wenjie links the royal costume of the emperor in this painting to the historical records on the early Tang regulation of imperial costume, and he believes they are the same. See Duan, “Dunhuang bihua zhong de yiguan fushi,” p. 169.
 110. The non-Chinese kings and princes have been identified as from central Asian kingdoms such as Kucha (Qiuzi), Karakhoja (Gaochang), Khotan (Yutian), and Shule, as well as from countries in southern and Southeast Asia. See Duan, *Dunhuang shiku yishu lunji*, pp. 290 and 294. In addition, Roderick Whitfield suggests that one of the non-Chinese figures wearing a headdress with a narrow cap and two feathers, fastened with a strap under the chin and going alongside the ears, might be someone from Korea. A similar figure can be seen in the tomb of Prince Zhang Huai. See Whitfield, ed., *Treasures from Korea*, p. 89.
 111. He, “Dunhuang Mogaoku bihua zhong de Weimojie jingbian,” p. 68.
 112. *Ibid.*
 113. Giles, *Gems of Chinese Literature*, vol. 1, p. 124. Although Han Yü’s memorial dates from 819, much later than Cave 220, it shares the same historical context of Buddhist-Daoist-Confucian conflicts in the Tang dynasty.
 114. The issue of imperial support of Buddhism in the Tang dynasty has been discussed by Stanley Weinstein in his “Imperial Patronage in the Formation of T’ang Buddhism.”
 115. Zheng Binglin, *Dunhuang beimingzan jishi*, pp. 54–62.
 116. For a complete record of the inscription, see *Donors’ Inscriptions*, p. 101.
 117. See Twitchett and Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, pp. 224–228.
 118. Shi Weixiang, “Sichou zhilu shang de Dunhuang yu Mogaoku,” p. 57.
 119. According to historical records, the Tang troops invading Karakhoja included local people from Dunhuang, led by Liu Demin, governor of Shazhou (Dunhuang). See *ibid.*, p. 57 and n. 33.
 120. Duan, *Dunhuang shiku yishu lunji*, p. 254.
 121. See Chen Gaohua, *Sui Tang huajia shiliao*, pp. 40–43.
 122. Twitchett and Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, pp. 220–224.
 123. Shi Weixiang, “Sichou zhilu shang de Dunhuang yu Mogaoku,” p. 57.
 124. According to historical records, Yan Liben painted a

portrait of Emperor Taizong that was copied by other artists and displayed on the wall of a temple. What Yan's portrait of Taizong looked like is unknown, but a scroll painting showing the past emperors, attributed to Yan Liben but probably a Song-dynasty copy of the original, is still extant. This scroll has been finely reproduced in a catalogue edited by Wu Tung, curator of Asian art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. See Wu Tung, ed., *Tales from the Land of Dragons*, pp. 45-47.

125. Watson, trans., *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, p. 77.

126. Ibid., p. 112.

127. Ibid., p. 134.

128. For a detailed discussion on the issue of magic demonstration in the context of the Buddhist-Daoist conflict of the early Tang and the politico-religious culture in medieval Chinese society, see Ning, "Buddhist-Daoist Conflict and Gender Transformation."

Chapter Two | Reconstruction

1. Fujieda, "Guanyu 220 ku gaixiu de ruogan wenti," p. 70.

2. Ibid.

3. For details on the numbers and locations of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru Sūtra* illustrations in the Tibetan-period Dunhuang caves, see Appendix 1.

4. *Donors' Inscriptions*, p. 102. The original Chinese characters read:

南無藥師琉璃光佛觀自在菩薩
薩 [眷屬?] 聖□□普二為先亡父母

5. *Donors' Inscriptions*, p. 244.

6. When this inscription was first published in 1978, the fourteenth and fifteenth characters were recorded as "feng wei" (for, with respect) instead of "juan shu" (relatives). See Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo, ed., "Mogaoku di 220 ku xin faxian de fubi bihua." The original Chinese characters should be read as

南無藥師琉璃光佛觀自在菩薩
薩奉為聖□□普二為先亡父母

7. Stein painting no. 14.Ch.liv.006.

8. Translation adapted from Whitfield, ed., *The Art of Central Asia*, vol. 2, p. 301, with some changes; emphasis added. The original Chinese characters read:

南無大慈大悲救苦觀世音菩薩永充供養
奉為國界清平法輪常轉二為阿姉師
為亡考妣神生淨土敬造大聖一心供養

9. *Donors' Inscriptions*, p. 137; emphasis added. The original Chinese characters read: "奉為亡夫及男女兒在眷屬等普為法界含生..."

10. Ibid., p. 89; emphasis added. The original Chinese characters read:

弟子宋文君敬畫菩薩四軀
一為已亡慈母二為已息已亡索氏娘子

11. Ibid., p. 101. The original Chinese characters read: "先奉為造窟亡靈...次為我過往慈父長兄."

12. Emphasis added.

13. *Donor' Inscriptions*, p. 207.

14. Dunhuang ms. S.1438, line 15.

15. The restored Chinese inscription reads:

南無藥師琉璃光佛，觀自在菩薩
薩·奉為聖[神贊]普；二為先亡父母。

16. For more details on the An-Shi rebellion, see Twitchett and Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, pp. 453-463.

17. On the story of Dunhuang's resistance against the Tibetan invasions, see Shi Weixiang, "Tubo wang-chao guanxia Shazhou qianhou."

18. Zheng Binglin, *Dunhuang beimingzan jishi*, p. 15.

19. *Donors' Inscriptions*, p. 102. The original Chinese characters read:

大悲救苦觀世音菩薩 □(敬) □(國)
清信佛弟子敬國清一心供養

20. *Donors' Inscriptions* does not record the inscriptions written on the west and east walls of the small niche. All the inscriptions on these two walls are my own records made during my fieldwork in the cave. In Chinese, this inscription reads: "徒彌勒佛并二菩薩一軀."

21. *Donors' Inscriptions* does not record this inscription. I personally copied it from the wall. The original inscription reads: “先亡慈母 □(清) 信女一心供養。”
22. See the Tibetan section of *Xin Tangshu*, p. 6601.
23. Dunhuang ms. P.4638. See Zheng Binglin, *Dunhuang beimingzan jishi*, p. 15.
24. Ibid.
25. The original Chinese inscription reads: “釋迦牟尼佛并二菩薩。”
26. Donald Lopez warned me that Buddhism did not quite develop in Tibet in the eighth century, and it might be unreliable to claim that Vairocana was a particularly favored deity of the Tibetans in that time. It is possible, however, during the reign of Tri Songdetsen (r. 754–797), who promoted Buddhism in Tibet, Vairocana became popular in Tibetan Buddhist iconography and left its impact on the regions ruled by the Tibetans such as the Dunhuang region. Latter Tibetan kings could have used Buddhism as a means to enhance political power in the areas populated by Buddhist believers, including Dunhuang. Archaeological discoveries in Tibet and Dunhuang seem to support this assumption. For a survey of the religious practices in ancient Tibet, see Lopez, ed., *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, pp. 2–36. For a detailed discussion on the popularity of Vairocana in Tibetan art in the eighth and ninth centuries, see Heller, “Eighth- and Ninth-Century Temples.”
27. For relevant images in Tibet, see Heller, “Ninth Century Buddhist Images,” pp. 335–347.
28. The original inscription reads:

造窟一所并盧那□□佛
并亡母
大中十一年六月三日信士男力一心供養
29. Su, *Dunhuangxue gaiyao*, pp. 114–115.
30. Dunhuang ms. S.2404.
31. See the inscription on the same wall (east wall of Cave 220).
32. See Dunhuang ms. P.3247. The Chinese characters read: “隨軍參謀翟奉達撰。”
33. This manuscript is in the collection of the Dunhuang Research Academy.
34. Dunhuang ms. S.95.
35. The translation of the official title of Zhai Fengda was done by Stephen Teiser. See Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings*, p. 103. The original title reads: “檢校尚書工部員外郎。”
36. Dunhuang ms. P.2623.
37. My brief reconstruction of the biography of Zhai Fengda is based on the studies of previous scholars, particularly those of Su Yinghui and Wan Genyu; see Su, *Dunhuangxue gaiyao*, pp. 114–115, and Wan, “Zhengui de lishi ziliao.” Shi Pingting and Stephen Teiser have also done extensive studies on Zhai Fengda, focusing on his activities related to the copying of sutras for his deceased wife (or mother) and to the making of calendars; see Shi Pingting, “Yijian wanzheng de shehui fengsu shi ziliao,” and Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings*, pp. 102–121.
38. The so-called *Kunlun nu*, or slave of Kunlun, was described in historical texts as one of the black inhabitants of the island of Kunlun in the South Sea (possibly modern-day Sri Lanka). See Duan, *Dunhuang yishu lunji*, p. 260.
39. Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo, ed., “Mogaoku di 220 ku xin faxian de fubi bihua.”
40. The calligraphy of Zhai Fengda remaining on the east wall of Cave 220 matches the writing style of the paper documents created by him. For a detailed comparison of the inscription and the documents, see Fujieda, “Guanyu 220 ku gaixiu de uogan wenti.”
41. Zhai Fengda's inscription has been published in *Donors' Inscriptions*, p. 101.
42. Fujieda, “Guanyu 220 ku gaixiu de ruogan wenti,” p. 70.
43. Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo, ed., “Mogaoku di 220 ku xin faxian de fubi bihua,” p. 41.
44. *Grottes de Touen houang*, vol. 2 (1983), pp. 33–34 and 72.
45. Wu Hung, “Rethinking Liu Sahe.”
46. Soymié, “Quelques représentations de statues miraculeuses.”
47. Soper, “Representations of Famous Images at Tunhuang.”
48. Chinese scholars, particularly those who work at Dunhuang, named this kind of images “*Fojiao shiji hua*,” or “paintings of the stories and relics in Buddhist

- history.” See Sun, “Mogaoku fojiao shiji gushi hua jieshao (yi).” See also Shi Weixiang, “Guanyu Dunhuang Mogaoku neirong zonglu.”
49. Sun, “Mogaoku de fojiao shiji gushi hua,” p. 213.
 50. This identification was made by Matsumoto Eiichi. See Matsumoto, *Tonkō ga no kenkyū*.
 51. A few scholars mentioned the painting but have not done research on it. See Fujieda, “Guanyu 220 ku gaixiu de ruogan wenti”; Whitfield, ed., *The Art of Central Asia*, vol. 2, pp. 303–308; Zhang Guangda and Rong, “Dunhuang ruixiangji ruixiangtu jiqi fanying de Yutian”; and Whitfield, “Ruixiang at Dunhuang.”
 52. See Piotrovsky, ed., *Lost Empire of the Silk Road*, catalog 1, pp. 104–105.
 53. Ning, “Sichuan Bazhong shike zhong de fojiao shiji gushi.”
 54. The original Chinese inscription reads: “中天竺波羅奈國鹿野院(苑)瑞像。”
 55. For more literary references, see Sun, “Mogaoku fojiao shiji gushi hua jieshao (er),” p. 104.
 56. An alternative interpretation is that this sign represents the Buddha’s footprint. I owe this identification to Roderick Whitfield, who referred me to Anna Maria Quagliotti’s monograph *Buddhapadas*, p. 118.
 57. See Ning, “Sichuan Bazhong shike zhong de fojiao shiji gushi.”
 58. Sun, “Mogaoku fojiao shiji gushi hua jieshao (qi).”
 59. Soper, “Representations of Famous Images at Tunhuang,” p. 362.
 60. This image was published by the Shaanxi Provincial Museum in 1957. See Shaanxi sheng bowuguan, ed., *Shaanxi sheng bowuguan cang shike xuanji*, pl. 37.
 61. The Chinese inscription reads: “釋迦牟尼降服外道時。”
 62. The inscription on the rectangular base, for instance, seems to be a later addition, and therefore it should not be taken as reliable information for identifying the content of the image.
 63. The original Chinese inscription reads: “天竺國白銀彌勒瑞像。”
 64. T., vol. 51, p. 934.
 65. For a detailed study of the painting on silk, see Whitfield, “Ruixiang at Dunhuang.”
 66. The original Chinese inscription reads: “中印度境佛頭上寶珠，時有貧士，既見寶珠，乃生盆(盜)心。像便曲既躬授珠於賊。”
 67. The original Chinese inscription reads: “天竺摩伽國觀世音菩薩。”
 68. Sun, “Mogaoku fojiao shiji gushi hua jieshao (si),” pp. 54–55.
 69. The original Chinese inscription reads: “彌勒菩薩隨釋迦來漠城。”
 70. Soper, “Representations of Famous Images at Tunhuang,” p. 349.
 71. Shi Weixiang, “Liu Sahe yu Dunhuang Mogaoku.” See also Sun, “Liu Sahe heshang shiji kao.”
 72. The original Chinese inscription reads: “盤和都督府仰容山番和縣北聖容瑞像。”
 73. Liangzhou (present-day Wuwei) was the political center of the Hexi region for centuries. It was located about 800 kilometers east to Dunhuang.
 74. Liu Sahe’s story and its visual representations have been studied by several scholars. If interested, one may read the following articles, published in Western languages, as a beginning point: Wu Hung, “Re-thinking Liu Sahe”; Whitfield, “The Monk Liu Sahe”; and Vetch, “Liu Sahe.”
 75. Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts concerning Khotan*, pp. 7–13.
 76. The missing character after “zhong” still makes the meaning of the inscription a little uncertain. My understanding is that the artist intended to emphasize the power of the Heavenly King from the north and painted several figures of him in the picture.
 77. The original Chinese inscription reads: “北方眾□天王決海至于闐國時。”
 78. The original Chinese inscription reads: “于闐國舍利弗毗沙門天王決海時。”
 79. King Asoka was a powerful ruler of much of India in the third century B.C.E.
 80. Beal, *Si-yu-ki*, vol. 1, pp. 235–236. For a Chinese version, see Ji et al., eds., *Da Tang Xiyuji jiaozhu*, p. 469.
 81. The original Chinese inscription reads: “時佛從天降下其檀像乃仰禮拜時。”
 82. Beal, *Si-yu-ki*, vol. 2, pp. 88–90. For a Chinese version, see Ji et al., eds., *Da Tang Xiyuji jiaozhu*, pp. 631–632.

83. The original Chinese inscription reads:
阿育王起八万四千塔羅漢以手遮日
日光下處見之
84. Roderick Whitfield helped me find the complete inscription recorded by Paul Pelliot and translated the inscription into English. See *Grottes de Touen houang*, vol. 4, p. 91.
85. Sun, “Mogaoku fojiao shiji gushi hua jieshao (san),” p. 98.
86. T., vol. 53, p. 405.
87. The original Chinese inscription reads: “中天竺泥泊羅國有彌勒頭冠櫃在水中有來取水中火出。”
88. The original Chinese inscription reads: “其塔阿育王造神變多能余□神變。”
89. Pelliot’s record of the inscription slightly differs from the one recorded by Sun Xiushen. Pelliot’s record reads: 其塔阿育王造神瑞多能餘神變. See *Grottes de Touen houang*, vol. 2, p. 68.
90. Sun, “Mogaoku fojiao shiji gushi hua jieshao (si),” pp. 50–52.
91. For details, see Wu Hung, “Rethinking Liu Sahe.”
92. For details, see Shi Weixiang, “Liu Sahe yu Dunhuang Mogaoku.”
93. The original Chinese inscription reads: “迦葉如來從舍衛國騰空至于闐國時。”
94. The original Chinese inscription reads: “分身佛從中印度犍陀羅國來。”
95. The original Chinese inscription reads: “石佛應現于闐國時。”
96. The original Chinese inscription reads: “釋迦牟尼佛白檀真容從漢國來坎城住。”
97. The original Chinese inscription reads: “□毗婆尸佛從舍衛國騰空至于闐國時。”
98. The original Chinese inscription reads: “濮州鑲 [鐵佛?] ... 至于闐國時。”
99. The original Chinese inscription reads: “南無拘留孫佛 ... 來住于闐國時。”
100. The original Chinese inscription reads: “北方眾 □ 天王決海至于闐國時。”
101. See *Grottes de Touen houang*, vol. 2, pp. 34 and 72.
102. The original Chinese inscription reads: “毗沙門天王守護于闐國。”
103. The original Chinese inscription reads: “摩訶迦羅

神護于闐國。”

104. The original Chinese inscription reads: “□□□□ □□ 護于闐國。”
105. The original Chinese inscription reads: “莎耶末利護于闐國。”
106. Quoted from Zhang Guangda and Rong, “Dunhuang ruixiangji ruixiangtu jiqi fanying de Yutian,” p. 91.
107. Ibid., pp. 123–128.
108. Thomas, *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents*, vol. 1, p. 91.
109. Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, p. 29.
110. Ibid., p. 17.
111. Ibid., p. 59.
112. Ibid.

Chapter Three | Historical and Cultural Values of the Zhai Family Cave

1. Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, p. 246.
2. For a full record of the inscriptions in Cave 285, see *Donors’ Inscriptions*, pp. 114–119.
3. He Shizhe has suggested that the two primary male and female patrons painted at the west end of the north wall might have been Governor Yuan Rong and his wife. See He, “Cong gonrangren tiji kan Mogaoku bufen dongku de yingjian niandai,” p. 198.
4. Jiang Boqin has suggested that the patrons who have Hua as their surname in Cave 285 were the Yanda people. See Jiang, “Dunhuang bihua yu Sute bihua de bijiao yanjiu,” p. 157.
5. The content of the paintings and sculptures in Cave 285 is extremely rich and complicated. For a brief introduction to the content and style of the cave, see Whitfield, *Dunhuang*, vol. 2, pp. 284–287.
6. The original Chinese inscription reads: “比丘譽化供養時。”
7. The original Chinese inscription reads: “清信士陰安歸所供養時。”
8. The original Chinese inscription reads: “信士陰苟生供養。”
9. The original Chinese inscription reads: “信士陰無忌供養。”
10. The original Chinese inscription reads: “信士陰胡

- 仁供養。”
11. The original Chinese inscription reads: “信士陰普仁供養。”
 12. The original Chinese inscription reads: “信息在和供養。”
 13. The original Chinese inscription reads: “清信女史崇姬所供養時。”
 14. The original Chinese inscription reads: “信女阿丑供養。”
 15. The original Chinese inscription reads: “信女乾婦供養。”
 16. The original Chinese inscription reads: “信女乾理供養。”
 17. The original Chinese inscription reads: “信女阿媚供養。”
 18. The original Chinese inscription reads: “信女娥女供養。”
 19. Most people from the central Asian commercial state Sogdiana, particularly those from Kesh, adopted a surname of Shi when they came to China, which was recorded in ancient Chinese texts as a member of the *Zhaowu jiuxing* (the nine surnames of Zhaowu). See Luo Feng, “Sogdians in Northwest China.” It is interesting to note that one of the military titles appearing on the east wall of the Zhai family cave also reads “Zhaowu” (Zhaowu Xiaowei, or Zhaowu commandant).
 20. The original Chinese inscription reads: “. . . 道公翟思遠一心供養。”
 21. For more information on Zhai Fengda’s inscription, see *Donors’ Inscriptions*, p. 101.
 22. It is quite curious that Zhai Siyuan is entitled a “devotee of the Dao,” which might be linked to the Daoist motifs in the cave. I have examined the conflict and dialogue between Buddhism and Daoism in the early Tang period by using the paintings from the Zhai family cave as a focus. See Ning, “Buddhist-Daoist Conflict and Gender Transformation.” Zhai Siyuan’s Chinese title reads: “唐任朝議郎敦煌郡司倉參軍。”
 23. *Donors’ Inscriptions*, p. 102.
 24. Most original inscriptions of the early Tang are severely damaged. The remaining readable characters are recorded and published by the Dunhuang Research Academy. Because the remaining early Tang inscriptions are too fragmentary and could provide only a few names and titles of the patrons and dates, it is unnecessary to translate every character here. Those who are curious about the inscriptions may refer to *Donors’ Inscriptions*, pp. 101–104.
 25. To name a few: Jiang, “Dunhuang miaozhenzan yu Dunhuang mingzu”; Ikeda, “Hasei-ki hajime ni okeru Tonko no shizoku”; and Eberhard, “The Leading Families of Ancient Tun-huang.” For a relatively complete list of publications on this topic, see Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, p. 241.
 26. Shi Weixiang, “Shizu yu shiku”; Wan Gengyu, “Zhengui de lishi ziliao,” “Cong gongyangren tiji kan Dunhuang shizu ji shiku xiujian”; Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, “Dunhuang shizu yu jiamiao jiaku.”
 27. Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, pp. 245–249.
 28. *Ibid.*, pp. 99–152.
 29. For a complete record of the inscription, see *Donors’ Inscriptions*, pp. 72–73.
 30. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
 31. For more details, see Ma De, “Dusengtong zhi jiaku jiqi yingjian.”
 32. For a brief introduction in English to the life of Empress Wu, see Wills, *Mountains of Fame*, pp. 127–148. More detailed information and analysis can be found in Fitzgerald, *The Empress Wu*, and Guisso, *Wu Tse-t’ien*.
 33. Forte, *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China*, pp. 156–157.
 34. For more examples on Empress Wu’s use of visual symbols in legitimizing her rulership, see Yen, “The Tower of Seven Jewels.”
 35. Twitchett and Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, p. 305.
 36. These events were recorded by various ancient Chinese historical texts. For detailed studies on these events, see Chen Yinke, “Wu Zhao yu Fojiao.” See also Twitchett and Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, p. 306.
 37. See Shi Weixiang, “Dunhuang Mogaoku de Baoyu jingbian,” p. 77.
 38. A recent archaeological excavation in front of the

- statue suggests that the original ground level was lower than the current one and that the actual height of the statue should be more than 33 meters.
39. Most Chinese scholars who have worked on this topic believe that Cave 96 is the Grand Cloud Temple in the prefecture of Shazhou (Dunhuang), which was built upon the request of the court of Wu Zetian. He Shizhe, for example, believes that the Grand Cloud Temple that was repeatedly mentioned in the Dunhuang manuscripts is Cave 96. See *Donors' Inscriptions*, p. 202.
 40. *Donors' Inscriptions*, p. 130.
 41. This Sanskrit title is given in the third volume of Twitchett and Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, p. 305.
 42. Shi Weixiang, “Dunhuang Mogaoku de Baoyu jingbian,” p. 70.
 43. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
 44. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
 45. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
 46. Pan and Ma, *Dunhuang Mogaoku kuqian diantang yizhi*.
 47. Dunhuang yanjiuyuan, ed., *Dunhuang Mogaoku beiqu shiku*.
 48. *Donors' Inscriptions*.
 49. Ma De, *Dunhuang gongjiang shiliao and Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*.
 50. *Donors' Inscriptions*, p. 1.
 51. Their adopted surname was Zhu, which was used by many people from India during the medieval period.
 52. *Donors' Inscriptions*, p. 123.
 53. Some artists received generous payments from private patrons and awards from the local government and became rich enough to join the sponsorship of building caves. A few artists left their names as patrons in the Mogao caves, such as in Caves 129, 322, 444, and 3, and in the nearby Yulin caves, including Caves 12, 19, 20, and 32.
 54. For a detailed discussion on the social and economic condition of the artists and craftsmen, see Ma De, *Dunhuang gongjiang shiliao*, pp. 28–34.
 55. Jiang Boqin introduces an important document on Dong Baode, who was a wealthy painter with official titles granted by the local government and collected money for and personally participated in the creation of a temple in the town of Dunhuang, as well as the decoration of five niches at the Mogao caves in the tenth century. See Jiang, “Dunhuang de huayuan yu huahang,” pp. 173–174.
 56. Quoted from Dunhuang ms. P.2551. See Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, p. 177.
 57. These terms were used in various Dunhuang manuscripts, including P.3262, P.3457, and P.3564. See Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, p. 178.
 58. Ms. Jian no. 59 in the Beijing Collection. For more details on the content of the manuscript, see Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, p. 180.
 59. Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, p. 178.
 60. Duan, “Wanqi de Mogaoku yishu,” p. 226.
 61. See Ma De, *Dunhuang gongjiang shiliao*, p. 66.
 62. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
 63. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
 64. Dunhuang yanjiuyuan, ed., *Dunhuang Mogaoku beiqu shiku*, pp. 338–351.
 65. Duan Wenjie mentions a sculptor named Zhao Sengzi and other poor artists who might have lived in the small caves at the Mogao site. See Duan, “Dunhuang caisu yishu,” p. 146.
 66. Peng Jinzhang suggests that some of the occupants of the small caves in the north section were monks who practiced the Tibetan style of esoteric Buddhism in the Yuan dynasty. See Dunhuang yanjiuyuan, ed., *Dunhuang Mogaoku beiqu shiku*, pp. 345–346.
 67. *Donors' Inscriptions*, p. 103.
 68. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
 69. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
 70. Ma De has provided a good discussion on the relationship between the monks and lay patrons in the family cave tradition at Dunhuang. See Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, pp. 245–252. I have also examined the role of Buddhist practitioners in the design and usage of the early Dunhuang caves. See Ning, “Patrons of the Earliest Dunhuang Caves.”
 71. I benefited greatly from my colleague Martin Powers, whose theory on political expression in early Chinese art inspired me to look at Chinese Buddhist art from different angles, particularly from the perspective of political intentions. See Powers, *Art and Political*

Expression in Early China.

72. Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, p. 201.
73. Zhu Shuzhen, “Yuan ye” (The first evening). See Chen Dakai, ed., *Song shi xuan*, p. 245. The original Chinese poem reads:
 火樹銀花觸目紅，揭天鼓吹鬧春風。
 新歡入手愁忙里，舊事警心憶夢中。
 但願暫成人譴倦，不妨常任月朦朧。
 賞燈那得工夫醉，未必明年此會同。
74. Meng, *Dongjing menhua lu*. See “Notes on Yuanxiao” in the 6th *juan* of the book, pp. 172–173.
75. See “Biography of Yang Shihou” in *Jiu Wudai Shi*, p. 298.
76. Sima, ed., *Zizhi tongjian*, p. 5649.
77. Jin Baoxiang, “He yindu fojiao youguan de liangjian Tangdai fengsu,” p. 44.
78. Niu, *Dunhuang bishu yueshi ziliao zonglu yu yanjiu*, “Zongjiao yuewu.”
79. The sutra mentions only “guyue gezan” (playing music and singing hymns). See T., vol. 14, p. 403.
80. Niu Longfei has done a great deal of research on the scene of dance in the north wall painting of Cave 220 and the New Year celebration tradition, and some of my references are based on his publication on the topic. See Niu, “Zongjiao yuewu.”
81. Zhang Zhuo, *Chaiye qianzai*, p. 247.
82. Wei, ed., *Sui shu*, *juan* 62, “Biography of Liu Yu.”
83. For the full content of the poem, see the section “Visual Representations of the *Bhaishajya-guru Sutra*” in Chapter 1.
84. One record mentions that “many singers and dancers wore women’s clothes” 其歌舞者多為婦人服。See Wei, ed., *Sui shu*, vol. 4, “Yinyue zhi” *xia*, p. 33. Another record from *Sui shu* indicates that “men wore women’s clothes” 男為女服 (vol. 16, “liezhuan” *juan* 27, p. 11). These records suggest that womenlike dancers may have appeared in the Lantern Festival in the late Sui.
85. Bai Juyi, “Hu xuan nü” (Whirling barbarian girls). The English translation is based on Victor H. Mair’s. See Mair, ed., *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, p. 486. The original Chinese poem reads:

胡旋女，胡旋女，
 心應玄，手應鼓。
 玄鼓一聲雙袖舉，
 迴雪飄飄轉蓬舞。
 左旋右轉不知疲，
 千匝萬周無已時。

86. Yuan Zhen, “Hu xuan nü” (Whirling barbarian girl). The English translation is based on Victor H. Mair’s. See Mair, ed., *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, p. 487. The original Chinese poem reads:
 胡旋之義世莫知，胡旋之容我能傳。
 蓬斷霜根羊角疾，竿戴朱盤火輪炫，
 驪珠并耳逐飛星，虹暈輕巾摯流電。
87. Li Fang, *Taiping yulan*, p. 2555.
88. Ellen Johnston Laing has published an interesting article discussing the stylistic features of the patterns on the carpets under the feet of the dancers and musicians in the painting. She believes that these patterns have a Sasanian origin. The Western origin of the carpet patterns corresponds with the non-Chinese dance style of the dancers. See Laing, “Evidence for Two Possible Sasanian Rugs.”
89. Wang Renyu, *Kaoyuan Tianbao yishi*, vol. 1035, p. 863.
90. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, p. 259.
91. See *Chūgoku sengoku jidai no yū*, plate 40. For a detailed discussion of the lamp tree, see Wu Hung, “Tan jijian zhongshan guo qiwu de zaoxing yu zhuangshi.”
92. See Dingxian bowuguan, “Hebei Dingxian 43 hao Han mu fajue jianbao”; Henan sheng bowuguan, “Lingbao Zhangwan Han mu”; Guangxi zhuangzu zizhi qu wenwu gongzuo dui, “Guangxi Guixian Luopowan yihao mu fajue jianbao”; and Luoyang bowuguan, “Luoyang Jianxi Qilihe Donghan mu fajue jianbao.”
93. Liu Xin, *Xijing zaji*, upper vol., *juan shang*, p. 17.
94. Lu, *Yezhong ji*, p. 310.
95. The original Chinese poem reads: “千燈同輝，百枝并曜。” From Zhi Tandi, “Deng zan” (Praising the lamps). See Niu, *Dunhuang bishu yueshi ziliao zonglu yu yanjiu*, p. 583.
96. The original Chinese poem reads: “百枝同樹，四照

- 連盤。” From Yu Xin, “Deng fu” (Prose poem on lamps). In Chen Yuanlong, ed., *Lidai fuhui*, juan 88, p. 366.
97. Liu Su, *Sui Tang jiahua*, p. 31.
98. See Dunhuang ms. P.2718.
99. The lamp wheels were called *Xiyu denglun* (lamp wheels from the Western Regions) in Tang texts. For example, a poem by the Tang poet Zhang Yue (667–730 c.e.) describes the following: “A thousand shadows of the lamp wheels from the Western Regions overlap one another / Ten thousand golden gates of China in the East are opened” 西域燈輪千影合，東華金闕萬重開. See *Quan Tang shi*, unit 2, vol. 4, p. 5.
100. Zheng Chuhui, *Minghuang zalu*, p. 55. In the 1997 Beijing reprint, the number of rooms of Mao Shun’s building is thirty instead of three thousand.
101. Ennin, *Ru Tang qiufa xunli xingji*. For an English translation of Ennin’s travel records, see Reischauer, *Ennin’s Diary*, p. 71.
102. The whole poem is cited in the section “Visual Representations of the *Bhaishajya-guru Sutra*” in Chapter 1.
103. Soper, *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China*, p. 175.
104. The original Chinese poem reads: “西域燈輪千影合，東華金闕萬重開。” Zhang Yue, “Shiwu ri ye yuqian kouhao tageci ershou.”
105. Gao, *Zhongguo minsu tanwei*, pp. 360–361.
106. See Xu, *Chu xue ji*, juan 4, and Ouyang, *Yiwen leiju*, juan 4.
107. The last sentence in the original record is “自是每年以為常焉。” “Treatise on Music” (*Yinyue zhi*) in *Sui shu*, vol. 4, “*Yinyue zhi*” xia, p. 11.
108. Jinwu was the high official who was in charge of the security of the capital.
109. Liu Su, *Da Tang xinyue*, p. 138.
110. See the 4th juan of *Fozu tongji*, p. 373.
111. Wang Fu, *Tang hui yao*, p. 1009.
112. See the “Treatise on Music” in *Jiu Tang shu*, juan 28, p. 1052.
113. Wang Fu, *Tang hui yao*, p. 1010.
114. For the poem by Xuanzong in the Dunhuang manuscripts, see Chen Zuolong “Li Tang Zhide yiqian xijing shangyuan dengjie jingxiang zhi yiban,” pp. 350–373. For the story on Xuanzong’s magic visit to Shu, see Gao Guofan, *Zhongguo minsu tanwei*, pp. 364–367.
115. The Chinese title is “御制勤政樓下觀燈。” For a detailed analysis of the poem, see Chen Zuolong, “Li Tang Zhide yiqian xijing shangyuan dengjie jingxiang zhi yiban.”
116. The original Chinese poem reads:
- 明月重城里，華燈九陌中。
開門納和氣，步輦逐微風。
鐘鼓連宵合，歌聲達曙雄。
彩光不為己，常與萬方同。
117. In the story, the magician told the emperor that the celebration of the Lantern Festival in Shu was even better than the celebration in the capital. The emperor thus decided to find out for himself. The story was probably intended to prove the emperor’s power to reach remote areas such as Shu in the southwest. At the same time, the story also suggests that the celebration of the Lantern Festival in the regional centers reached a high level.
118. See Gao Guofan, *Zhongguo minsu tanwei*, pp. 367–368.
119. The date of the manuscript is the fourth year of the Dashun era, but the Dashun era lasted only two years (890–891 c.e.). It is possible that the local people at Dunhuang were not aware of the change from Dashun to Jingfu; therefore, they continued to count with the Dashun era. In fact, the fourth year of Dashun (893 c.e.) should be the second year of Jingfu of the Tang dynasty.
120. Huang and Wu, eds., *Dunhuang yuanwen ji*, p. 37.
121. See the Dunhuang mss. S.4625 and P.3497, which provide detailed information on the local celebrations of the Lantern Festival.
122. These documents have been published in Huang and Wu, eds., *Dunhuang yuanwen ji*, pp. 509–538.

Chinese Characters

Akiyama Terukazu 秋山光和
Amituo jing 阿彌陀經
Amituo jingbian 阿彌陀經變
An Lushan 安祿山
Apibazhi 阿脾跋致

Bai Juyi 白居易
baixi 百戲
Baoyu jing 寶雨經
Bazhong 巴中
bei 輩
Beidaxiang 北大像
Beishi 北史
bianwen 變文
Binglingsi 炳靈寺
Bobao Zhenjiang 柏堡鎮將
buyi 布衣

Cao 曹
changming 長命
changming 長明

changming deng 長明燈
Chaoye qianzai 朝野僉載
Chen 陳
Cheng 成
Cheng Baoxiang 成寶相
Cheng Boxiang 成波相
Cheng Sengnu 成僧奴
Cheng Tianci 成天賜
Cheng Tuoluo 成陀羅
chujian jileguo di 初見極樂國地
Chuyan 處諺
Cideng 慈燈

Da Ci'ensi Sanzang fashi zhuan
大慈恩寺三藏法師傳
Da Shizhi 大勢至
Da Tang xinyu 大唐新語
Da Tang Xiyu ji 大唐西域記
Da Xigao 達奚高
Daohong 道弘
Daoxuan 道宣

Dashi 大食
Dashun 大順
Dayun jing 大云經
Dayun jing shenhuang shouji yishu
大云經神皇授記義疏
Dayun Si 大雲寺
dazhi Wenshu 大智文殊
de 德
“Deng fu” 燈賦
Deng Jianwu 鄧健吾
“Deng za” 燈讚
denglou 燈樓
denglun 燈輪
dengshan 燈山
dengshu 燈樹
Dizang 地藏
Dong Baode 董寶德
Dongdu 東都
Dongyangwang 東陽王
dou 斗
Dou Fuming 竇伏明

Du 杜
 Duan [men] 端[門]
 Duan Wenjie 段文杰
duanqu 斷取
Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu
 敦煌莫高窟史研究
duowen diyi 多聞第一

 Ennin 圓仁
erwei 二為

falun 法輪
fan 幡
 Fan 汜
 Fan Yingzhen 汜英振
fangjing 方井
fansheng 梵聲
 Farong 法榮
 Fasong 法松
Faxian zhuan 法顯傳
Fayuan zhubin 法苑珠林
Fengsu tong 風俗通
fengwei 奉為
Fo shuo guanding bachu guozui
shengsi dedu jing
 佛說灌頂拔除過最生死得
 度經
Fo shuo Weimojie jing
 佛說維摩詰經
Fo shuo Wuliangshou jing
 佛說無量壽經
Fo shuo Yaoshi rulai benyuan jing
 佛說藥師如來本願經
Fojiao shiji hua 佛教史跡畫
fu 父
 Fujieda Akira 藤枝晃
futian 福田

Ganzhou 甘州
 Gaochang 高昌
 Gaozu 高祖
gongyang 供養
 Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之
guan 貫
Guan Wuliangshou jing
 觀無量壽經
Guan Wuliangshou jingbian
 觀無量壽經變
Guanfo sanmei hai jing
 觀佛三昧海經
 Guanyin 觀音
 Guyangdong 古陽洞
guyue gezan 鼓樂歌讚

 Han Yü 韓愈
 Hanguo [furen] 韓國[夫人]
 He Shizhe 賀世哲
 Heba Xingwei 賀拔行威
 Heruo Huaiguang 賀若懷廣
 Hesu 河朔
 Hexi 河西
 Higashiyama Kengo 東山健吾
 Hou Junji 候君集
 “Hu xuan nü” 胡旋女
hu xuan wu 胡旋舞
 Hua 滑
 Huandi 桓帝
huangjindi 黃金地
Huayan jing 華嚴經
hubing 胡餅
huchuang 胡床

 Jia 茄
 Jiangliangyeshe 僵良耶舍
 Jianguo men 建國門

jiapu 家譜
 Jin 晉
 Jin Weinuo 金維諾
 Jing Guo 敬國
 Jingfu 景福
Jinglu yixiang 經律異相
jingsheng 經生
Jingxue Boshi 經學博士
 Jinwu 金吾
jiu hengsi 九橫死
Jiu Tang shu 舊唐書
Jiu Wudai shi 舊五代史
jiudai zengsun 九代曾孫
jiufu 舅父
Jiupin wangsheng 九品往生
jiuren huguo 救人護國
 Ju Wentai 麴文泰
juanshu 眷屬
jun 君

 Kaiyuan 開元
 Kang Sengkai 康僧愷
 Kelikezu 可黎可足
kong 空
 Kongwangshan 孔望山
Kunlun nu 崑崙奴

lan 欄
le zhuchi xingzhe 樂住持行者
li 理
li 里
 Li 李
 Li Shimin 李世民
 Li Tong 李通
 Li Wukui 李無虧
lianchi 蓮池
Liangzhou ruixiang 涼州瑞像

Lianyungang 連云港
 Lin 林
 Lingdi 灵帝
 Lingyan 靈岩
 Lingyan [ge] 凌煙[閣]
 Lingyin 靈隱
 Linjia 麟嘉
 Liu Demin 劉德敏
 Liu Hongshi 劉洪石
 Liu Sahe 劉薩河
 Liu Yu 柳彧
 liulitai 琉璃臺
 Lu she na Fo 盧舍那佛
 Lu Tanwei 陸探微
 “Lulingguangdian fu” 魯靈光殿賦
 Luo Yun 羅雲

Ma De 馬德
 Ma Sizhong 馬思忠
 mao 貿
 Mao Shun 毛順
 Matsumoto Eiichi 松本榮一
 Miaofa lianhua jing 妙法蓮花經
 miaoxi shijie 妙喜世界
 ming 命
 Minghuang zalu 明皇雜錄
 Murong 慕容

Nalanduo Si 那爛陀寺
 Nandaxiang 南大像

Panhe [xian] 番和[縣]
 Peng Jinzhang 彭金章
 pingzhang 平章
 Poluo 婆羅
 Poluodulai 頗羅度來
 Potuo 婆陀

Pude 普德
 Puer 普二
 Puhui 普惠
 Puji 普濟
 Putiliuzhi 菩提流支
 Puxian 普賢
 Puyao jing 普曜經
 qian 錢
 Qian Shu 錢俶
 Qiankan 千龕
 qianshu 錢樹
 Qin 秦
 qing 請
 Qinghe 清河
 qingshi 青獅
 Qinzhen [lou] 勤政[樓]
 Qisulizan 棄宿隸贊
 Qiuzi 龜茲

randeng she 燃燈社
 randeng wen 燃燈文
 ri 日
 Ri Yue Guang Nüwang
 日月光女王
 ruixiang 瑞像
 “ruixiangtu” 瑞像圖
 Ruizong 睿宗
 rupoli 入破歷

sanbei 三輩
 Sengzhao 僧肇
 Shancai tongzi 善財同子
 shangbei 上輩
 shangbei shengxiang 上輩生想
 shangdeng 賞燈
 shanghu 商胡

Shangpin shangsheng 上品上生
 Shangpin xiasheng 上品下生
 Shangpin zhongsheng 上品中生
 Shangyang [gong] 上陽[宮]
 Shazhou 沙州
 sheng 升
 Shengshen Zanpu 聖神贊普
 Shengxiao 生肖
 Shenlong 神龍
 “Shesi zhuan tie” 社司轉帖
 Shi guo 史國
 Shi Hu 石虎
 Shi Siming 史思明
 Shi Weixiang 史葦湘
 shida dizi 十大弟子
 shier dayuan 十二大願
 shiliuguan 十六觀
 shipu 氏譜
 Shizhe zhi xiang 侍者之像
 Shouchang [xian] 壽昌[縣]
 Shu 蜀
 Shule 疏勒
 Sichuan 四川
 Siyuan 思遠
 Song 宋
 Sui shu 隋書
 Sui Tang jiahua 隋唐嘉話
 Sun Xiushen 孫修身
 Suo 索
 Suo Yusi 索玉思
 suxing Zhaishi 俗姓翟氏

tai 臺
 Taiping yulan 太平御覽
 Taiyi 太一
 Taizong 太宗
 Tang hui yao 唐會要

Tian Kehan 天可汗
tiannü 天女
 Tianyun Si 天雲寺
tianzi 天子
toutuo diyi 頭陀第一
tu 徒
tu 圖

Wang 王
 Wang Er 王二
 Wang Fanzhi 王梵志
 Wang Gan 王干
 Wang Xianggao 王相高
 Wang Xuance 王玄策
wei xianwang fumu 為先亡父母
weijing 偽經
Weimo jing yi ji 維摩經義記
Weimo yi ji 維摩義記
Weimojie jing 維摩詰經
Weimojie jing zhu 維摩詰經注
Weimojie suo shuo jing
 維摩詰所說經
Weimojie zhi xiang 維摩詰之像

Wenshu 文殊
Wenshu bian 文殊變
Wenwu 文物

Wu 吳
 Wu Zetian 武則天
 Wu Zhao 武曩
Wuliang qingjing pingdeng jue jing
 無量清淨平等覺經

Wuliangshou Fo 無量壽佛
Wuliangshou jing 無量壽經
wuseniao 五色鳥

Wuyue 吳越

xiabei 下輩
xiabei shengxiang 下輩生想

Xiangjiguo 香積國
xiangong 縣公
xiangrui 祥瑞
 Xianqing 顯慶
 Xiantian 先天
 Xiantong 咸通
 Xianyang [gong] 咸陽 [宮]
Xiapin shangsheng 下品上生
Xiapin xiasheng 下品下生
Xiapin zhongsheng 下品中生
xifang sansheng 西方三聖
xigong 細供
 “Xijing fu” 西京賦
Xijing zaji 西京雜記
xilong 戲龍
 Xinjiang 新疆
xinyang 新樣
 Xiyu 西域
Xiyu denglun 西域燈輪
xuan 選
 Xuande [lou] 宣德 [樓]
 Xuanzang 玄奘
 Xuanzong 玄宗
 Xue Huaiyi 薛懷義
 Xue Zong 薛綜
xumingfa 續命法

Yan Liben 閻立本
 Yanda 厭嗟
 Yanfuti 閻浮提
 Yang Shihou 楊師厚
yangwei xianwang fumu
 仰為先亡父母

Yangzhou 揚州
Yaoshi liuliguang qifo benyuan
gongde jing 藥師琉璃光七佛
 本願功德經
Yaoshi liuliguang rulai benyuan

gongde jing
 藥師琉璃光如來本願功德經

Yaoshi qifo 藥師七佛
Yaoshijing 藥師經
Yaoshijing bian 藥師經變
Ye zhong ji 鄴中記
 Yijing 義淨
 Yin 陰
 Yin Cijian 陰祠鑒
 Yin Zu 陰祖
 Ying Shao 應劭
yinyuan 因緣
Yinyue zhi 音樂志
 Yu Xin 庾信
 Yuan Qian 袁倩
 Yuan Ron 元榮
 “Yuan ye” 元夜
 Yuan Zhen 元稹
 Yuanrong 元榮
yue 月
 Yugu [shan] 御谷 [山]
 Yutian 于闐
 Yutian Wang 于闐王

zaojing 藻井
zaxiang guan 雜想觀
Zengyi aban jing 增一阿含經
 Zhai Jia Bei 翟家碑
 Zhai Jia Ku 翟家窟
 Zhai Shende 翟神德
 Zhai Siyuan 翟思遠
 Zhai Tong 翟通
 Zhai Wenzheng 翟溫政
 Zhai Xin 翟信
 Zhanbuzhou 瞻部洲
zhang 障
zhang 丈
 Zhang 張

Zhang Er 張二
Zhang Hu 張護
Zhang Mo 張墨
Zhang Sengyao 張僧繇
Zhang Yangci 張揚刺
Zhang Yuan 張元
Zhang Yue 張說
zhao 壘
zhao 召
Zhao Jianxi 趙見嘻
Zhao Sengzi 趙僧子
Zhao Taogen 趙桃根

Zhaowu jiuxing 昭武九姓
Zhaowu Xiaowei 昭武校尉
Zhengguang 正光
Zhenguan 貞觀
zhi ri yue ruixiang 指日月瑞像
Zhi Tandi 支曇諦
Zhidu lun 智度論
Zhina 支那
Zhiqian 支謙
zhong 眾
zhongbei 中輩
zhongbei shengxiang 中輩生想

Zhongpin shangsheng 中品上生
Zhongpin xiasheng 中品下生
Zhongpin zhongsheng 中品中生
zhouxue 州學
Zhouxue boshi 州學博士
Zhu 竺
Zhu Fahu 竺法護
Zhu Shuzhen 朱淑貞
zongguan 綜觀
zongpu 宗譜
zupu 族譜

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