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**Local Monuments, Local Narratives:
The Emergence and Development of Buddhist Rock Carvings in
Northern Sichuan, 618-907 CE**

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the emergence and development of Buddhist grottoes in Northern Sichuan 四川, southwestern China, during the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE). The discussion centers on twelve rock carvings sites scattered in Guangyuan 廣元, Mianyang 綿陽, Bazhong 巴中, Nanchong 南充, Guang'an 廣安, and Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture 阿坝藏族羌族自治州, marking the early traces of Buddhist grottoes in this area. This dissertation aims to move the discussion of these sites beyond the present discourse of central-peripheral dichotomy by focusing on the construction of the sites in their physical and social contexts. By employing an interdisciplinary approach using archaeological, art historical and historical geographical research methods to examine these sites, I have been able to reconstruct the generation of Buddhist sites within the dynamic complex web of influences both local and external, past and present from which these sites emerged. In so doing it gives a voice to Buddhist material culture of local monuments in the local perspective and also to regional social histories recorded in the grottoes which has hitherto been silenced by the over-arching narrative of "Localization".

It is herein argued that Buddhist grottoes in Northern Sichuan are not a derivation of the monumental sites in Northern China, but a varying combination of elements from the three most important types of Buddhist material culture in medieval China: the construction of Buddhist grottoes in the Northern Dynasties (386-581 CE), the sculptural art style of the Southern Dynasties (420-589 CE), and the "Tang Metropolitan Art Style" of the Tang dynasty. The earliest group of Buddhist sites in this area follows the practice of constructing niche-based grottoes through collective patronage which originated from Northern China during Northern Dynasties, while the carvings themselves follow the Buddhist artistic tradition of the Southern Dynasties centered in Chengdu, Sichuan. The agents of this integration were migrant monks fleeing civil unrest and government officials who had been assigned to this area from the north in the early seventh century. From the end of the seventh

century to the mid-eighth century, the new metropolitan style of the Tang dynasty, which originally developed as a regional art style in Chang'an 長安 and Luoyang 洛陽, became an important new element in the Buddhist art of Northern Sichuan. The adoption and adaption of these external influences was not passive. The importance of the local as an active agency is highlighted by the differentiation in the rock carvings in the two regional centers, Guangyuan and Bazhong. Although to date the difference between these two centers has generally been explained as being a direct consequence of the two different roads linking Chengdu to Chang'an and Luoyang, it is herein argued that the asymmetric development appears to have resulted not only from the temporal-spatial variation in the matrix of Buddhist art but also from their different attitudes and responses past-present and internal-external influences.

Acknowledgements

My love affair with the Buddhist grottoes of Northern Sichuan started in the spring of 2013 when, on the advice of my Master's supervisor Professor Li Jingjie, I travelled to Chengdu in order to write a paper on the Baoguang Temple. It was on my way there that I stopped in Guangyuan and visited the Qianfoya there for the first time. Although I spent the next two years focusing on Dazu rock carvings in Southern Sichuan, my mind kept being drawn back to the hundreds of niches on the cliff in Guangyuan. Therefore, when I wrote my doctoral dissertation proposal, I decided to shift to study the treasure houses of Chinese medieval sculpture hidden in Northern Sichuan. This dissertation would not have been possible without the input of Professor Li who lit the spark.

A considered and interrogative regional study of the Buddhist grottoes in Northern Sichuan is an ambitious project to undertake in the limited duration of a Ph.D. project. Fortunately, with the support and encouragement I have received at Heidelberg University I have been able to devote myself to this somewhat grand topic. In particular, I am indebted to Sarah E. Fraser who opened my eyes to the ways in which Buddhist art can be conceptualized within a broader context as part of material culture. Without her patience and forbearance this dissertation would not have been possible. In addition, I am very grateful to Professor Michael Radich who generously served as the second reader of the dissertation. His inspiring criticism and insightful comments helped me to improve upon my initial submission and present my arguments in a stronger manner.

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INTRODUCTION

噫吁嚱，危乎高哉！
 蜀道之難，難於上青天！
 蠶叢及魚鳧，開國何茫然！
 爾來四萬八千歲，不與秦塞通人煙。
 ——李白·蜀道難

Aiyaiyai!! High!! My, my!! Steep?!! Yep. Yipes!!
 The way to Shu is hard, harder than climbing blue sky.
 Dzhom-dzhung and Ngiu-bhio
 in the far, murky past founded this land;
 for forty-eight thousand years after them
 hearth smoke of me did not stretch through the passes
 into Qin.
 ——Li Bai, *Hard Ways to Shu*¹

In the early seventh century, the practice of carving sacred images and scripture into natural rock faces started to flourish in Sichuan 四川, southwestern China (Map 1). Although there are a few earlier sporadic projects, it is not until this period that the construction of Buddhist sites emerged as regional practice in the Sichuan area as well as Southern China.² While Buddhist grottoes were extremely prevalent in Northern

¹ Owen argues that in this poem the poet-narrator “warns an imaginary traveler from Chang’an not to undertake the hardships of the journey through the mountains.” Stephen Owen ed. and trans., *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 213. The hardships and dangers of travelling to *Shu* 蜀 is a topic of the *yuefu* 樂府 even before the Tang dynasty. See Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan wenxue yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院文學研究所 [Literature Research Centre of the Chinese Academy of Social Science], *Tangshi xuanzhu* 唐詩選注 [An Anthology of Tang Poetry with Commentary] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1982), 119.

² Northern China and Southern China are two proximate mega-regions of within China which are separated by the Qinling Range-Huai River 秦嶺-淮河 line. More discussions of the Qinling Range-Huai River line see Gong Shengsheng 龚胜生, “*Yugong zhong de Qinling Huaihe dili jixian* 《禹貢》中的秦嶺淮河地理界線 [Qinling Range-Huai River as the Geographic Boundary as Outlined in the *Yugong*],” *Hubei daxue xuebao: Zhexue shehui kexue ban* 湖北大學學報: 哲學社會科學版 [Journal of Hubei University: Philosophy and Social Science], no.6 (1994): 93-97. The recognition of these two mega-regions and the Qinling Range-Huai River line in the Tang dynasty see Zhang Weiran 張偉然 and Zhou Peng 周鵬, “Tangdai de nanbei dili fenjixian ji xiangguan wenti 唐代的南北地理分界線及相關問題 [Dividing Line of South and North China in the Tang Dynasty and Related Questions],” *Zhongguo lishi dili luncong* 中國歷史地理論叢 [Journal of Chinese Historical Geography] 20, no.2 (2005): 5-11. In terms of the modern administrative divisions used in this dissertation, Gansu 甘肅 and Shaanxi 陝西 located in the northwestern China, Shanxi 山西, Shandong 山東, Henan 河南, and Hebei 河北 located in the Northern China, belong to the mega-historical region herein referred to as Northern China; Sichuan 四川 and Chongqing 重慶 located in the southwestern China, Guangxi 廣西 located in the southern China and Jiangsu 江蘇 located in the southeastern

China during the fifth and sixth centuries, they did not occur to the south of the Qinling Range 秦嶺 and Huai River 淮河 line in a meaningful manner. Over the following centuries, this enthusiasm for Buddhist monuments spread through the entire Sichuan Basin 四川盆地, and persisted until the Mongol invasion of the Southern Song (1127-1279 CE) in the middle of thirteenth century. Over six hundred years of continuous carving activity has resulted in hundreds of Buddhist monuments scattered across the Sichuan basin, marking this area in Southern China as a hitherto underexplored treasure house of Buddhist material culture to rival the Central Plain 中原地區 and the Hexi Corridor 河西走廊 in Northern China.

This dissertation concentrates on the emergence and development of Buddhist rock carvings in the Sichuan area. At the center of the discussion here are twelve Buddhist sites in its northeastern section (herein referred to as Northern Sichuan), a transitional region between Northern China and Southern China (Map 2).³ From the Zhenguan 貞觀 reign (627-649 CE) of the Tang dynasty (608-907 CE) onwards, a cluster of Buddhist sites were carved into the living rock along the roads into the *Shu* 蜀 area in Northern Sichuan. This marks the first phase of prolific construction of Buddhist grottoes in the Sichuan area.⁴ The upsurge of carving activity in this area continued to mid-eighth centuries. It is during this period that Guangyuan 廣元 and Bazhong 巴中 became the two centers of Buddhist art in Northern Sichuan. These two regional centers, which are situated a mere 150 kilometers apart and were carved

China, belong to the mega-region herein referred to as South China.

³ The division of Buddhist grottoes in the Sichuan area see Henrik H. Sørensen, “The Buddhist Sculptures at Feixian Pavilion in Pujiang, Sichuan,” *Artibus Asiae* 58, no.1/2 (1998): 33–67. Chen Hongshuai 陳紅帥, “Sichuan Chongqing Tangdai shike foxiang xulie kaocha 四川重慶唐代石刻佛像序列考察 [A Typological Study of the Chronology of Tang Dynasty Stone Carved Buddha Images in Sichuan and Chongqing],” *Gugong xuekan* 故宮學刊 [Journal of Gugong Studies] 5, (2009): 558-669.

⁴ Wang Jianping 王劍平 and Lei Yuhua 雷玉華, “6 shiji mo zhi 7 shiji chu de Sichuan zaoliang 6 世紀末至 7 世紀初的四川造像 [Sichuan Sculptures during the Late Sixth and Early Seventh Centuries],” in *Chengdu kaogu yanjiu* 成都考古研究(二)[Chengdu Archaeology Study 2], ed. Chengdu shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 成都市文物考古研究所 [Chengdu Municipal Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology] (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2013), 357-371.

over roughly the same time, were constructed with significantly different artistic styles and images.

This study has two principal goals. The first is to elucidate the way in which the rock-carved Buddhist sites, which had been prevalent in Northern China during the Northern Dynasties, took root in Northern Sichuan during the first half of the Tang dynasty. Naturally, this aims to provide a closer examination of the origins of Buddhist grottoes in the Sichuan area in which this architectural genre from Northern China was introduced and reformed to a new and dynamic system in this new territory. As Northern Sichuan was the first location in the Sichuan area to employ Buddhist art from Northern China, this examination is of great significance to the understand the corpus of Buddhist grottoes and their sculptures in the Sichuan area.

Secondly, Buddhist rock-cut monuments in Northern Sichuan provides perfect material through which to approach a nuanced understanding of the transregional transmission of Buddhist material culture. It is herein argued that Buddhist grottoes were constructed within a complex web of influences that was formed by the past and the present and shaped by the local and the external worlds. There are significant variations in the form of the sites, and images therein, between Guangyuan and Bazhong. Since these two sites were constructed in close temporal and spatial proximity, it follows that place-based Buddhist material production was shaped not only by the position of the site within this web, but also the response of the in-situ agents to various forms of knowledge, techniques and symbols.

Earlier studies have treated Buddhist rock-cut sites in Northern Sichuan as a derivation of an orthodox form of Buddhist material culture which, having emanated from a perceived cultural center, was reshaped in a less cultured periphery.⁵ This

⁵ The following list is merely a representative sample of the statement in this area. Luo Shiping 羅世平, "Sichuan Tangdai fojiao zaoliang yu Chang'an yangshi 四川唐代佛教造像與長安樣式 [Tang Buddhist Sculptures in Sichuan and their Relationship to the Chang'an Form]," *Wenwu* 文物 [Cultural Relics], no.4 (2000): 46-57. Yao Chongxin 姚崇新, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaoliang chubu yanjiu: yi Chuanbei diqu wei zhongxin* 巴蜀佛教石窟造像初步研究:以川北地區為中心 [A Preliminary Study

supposition is largely based on the fact that the majority of Buddhist grottoes dating to the fifth and sixth centuries are in Northern China. The great reputation of the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style”, which rose to prominence in Chang’an 長安 (now Xi’an 西安) and Luoyang 洛陽 in Northern China, has further bolstered this narrative of “northern influence”. The emergence of an apparently new Buddhist rock-carving tradition in Sichuan in the early seventh century has generally been interpreted as the “Localization/Sichuanization” of “northern influence”. This, however, is an oversimplification. This narrative overemphasizes the influence of northern sites in the construction of Buddhist grottoes in the Sichuan area, and overlooks the pre-existing regional traditions and the involvement of local participants.

This dissertation, therefore, seeks to shift the study of Sichuan sites from a discussion of “Localization/Sichuanization” to a situated local perspective. Knowledge, concepts, and techniques from Northern China shape the local monuments in this area. However, the artistic production system, which had been cultivated in the Sichuan area in the fifth and sixth centuries, also played a significant role in the construction of Buddhist rock-cut sites in the early seventh century. Once the Tang dynasty had stabilized and developed its own Buddhist art style in Chang’an and Luoyang, the local artistic system in Northern Sichuan did not fade away. The rock carvings in this region reveal a continual negotiation between the new “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” and the reformed local artistic conventions. The variation in the forms of the Buddhist sites in Guangyuan and Bazhong has, to date, primarily been attributed to the different trade roads which connect these regions to Chang’an and Luoyang respectively. This narrative needs to be reconsidered in terms of the

of Buddhist Caves and Sculptures in the Sichuan Area: Focusing on Northern Sichuan] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 260-282. Lei Yuhua 雷玉華, Luo Chunxiao 羅春曉 and Wang Jianping 王劍平, *Chuanbei fojiao shiku he moya zaoliang yanjiu* 川北佛教石窟和摩崖造像研究 [Buddhist Caves and Cliff Sculptures in Northern Sichuan] (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2017), 426-427. Jiang Xiaochun 蔣曉春 et al., *Jialing jiang liuyu shikusi diaocha ji yanjiu* 嘉陵江流域石窟寺調查及研究 [An Survey Report and Study of Caves Temples along the Jialing River] (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2018), 210.

engagement of the entire community associated with the sites, both local residents and the transitory community, which presented their distinct choices in terms of iconography and design in their rock carvings with the two distinct artistic style systems.

Buddhist Sites in Northern Sichuan

Northern Sichuan is herein identified as the region between Northern China to the north and the Sichuan Plain around the Chengdu 成都 to the south (Map 2). It consists of the modern city districts of Guangyuan, Jian'ge 劍閣, Zitong 梓潼, Mianyang 綿陽, Wangcang 旺蒼, Bazhong, Langzhong 閬中, Santai 三台, Nanchong 南充, Dazhou 達州, Guang'an 廣安, and Maoxian 茂縣.⁶ The northern part of this region is mountainous, formed of the Ba mountains 巴山 and Micang mountains 米倉山. As part of the Qinling Range which divides Northern and Southern China, the Ba and Micang mountains form the geographical barrier between Northern China and the Sichuan Plain. Historically there were two main trade routes which passed through the mountains of the Northern Sichuan area, the Golden Ox Road 金牛道 and the Rice Granary Road 米倉道.⁷ A third road, the Henan Road 河南道 or Tuyuhun Road 吐谷渾道, ran west from Mianyang to the Tibetan Plateau.⁸

Although there are some caves and niches in Northern Sichuan which predate the Tang dynasty, the first phase of prolific carving of Buddhist statues into the surface of cliffs and boulders occurred during the early seventh century.⁹ Five of these sites are located along the Golden Ox Road: Qianfoya 千佛崖 and Huangzesi 皇澤寺 in Guangyuan, Hengliangzi 橫樑子 in Jian'ge, Wolongshan Qianfoya 臥龍山千佛崖

⁶ North Sichuan here is mainly based on Chen's division based on the image systems of Tang Buddhist sites. See Chen, "Sichuan Chongqing Tangdai shike foxiang xulie kaocha," 558-669.

⁷ Yen Keng-wang 嚴耕望, *Tangdai jiaotong tu kao: Shan, Jian, Dian, Qian qu* 唐代交通圖考: 山劍滇黔區 [Studies on the Trade Routes of the Tang Dynasty: Shan, Jian, Dian, Qian Areas] (Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1985), 863-906 and 1007-1028.

⁸ Ibid, 925-1006.

⁹ Wang and Lei, "6 shiji mo zhi 7 shiji chu de Sichuan zaoxiang," 357-371.

(shortened to Wolongshan) in Zitong, and Bishuisi 碧水寺 in Mianyang. There are a further five sites along the Rice Granary Road and its surrounding areas, including Foyedong 佛爺洞 in Wangcang, Xikan 西龕 in Bazhong, the Leishendong 雷神洞 and Qianfoyan 千佛岩 in Langzhong, and Chongxiangsi 沖相寺 in Guang'an. The final early seventh Century site in this region is Dianjiangtai 點將台, near Maoxian along the Tuyuhun Road.

In the mid-seventh century and the eighth century there were two clear zones of Buddhist rock-carving practice in Northern Sichuan. One was the Guangyuan region, where most of rock carvings were concentrated in Qianfoya located directly on the Golden Ox Road. The combined sponsorship of the local residents and those passing-by on the road led to 848 caves or niches being carved into this single cliff.¹⁰ The second zone is the Bazhong region, at the southern end of the Rice Granary Road. There are, in all, nineteen sites which contain over 450 niches which date to the Tang scattered across this region. The largest of these is Nankan 南龕 in the south of ancient Bazhong town, in which there are 176 niches that contain the greatest variety of themes amongst the rock carvings in Bazhong.¹¹

The earliest modern resources are the photographs taken by early Japanese, European and Chinese scholars who visited Sichuan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹² Three of these early explorations are of particular note. In 1914 and 1917, Victor Segalen, Gilbert de Voisins, and Jean Lartigue took photographs and

¹⁰ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 10-14.

¹¹ Lei Yuhua 雷玉華, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu* 巴中石窟研究 [A Study of Bazhong Grottoes] (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011), 10-15.

¹² There are other earlier explorers who visited Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See Hida Romi 肥田路美, "Joron: Bukkyō bijutsu kara mita Shisen chiiki 序論: 仏教美術からみた四川地域 [Preface: Looking at Sichuan Area through Buddhist Art]," in *Bukkyō bijutsu kara mita Shisen chiiki* 仏教美術からみた四川地域 [Looking at Sichuan Area through Buddhist Art], ed. Nara bijutsu kenkyūjo 奈良美術研究所 [Research Institute of Nara Bujutsu] (Tōkyō: Yuzankaku, 2007), 1-20. Eduard Kögel, *The Grand Documentation: Ernst Boerschmann and Chinese Religious Architecture (1906-1931)* (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2015).

made ink rubbings at various sites in the Sichuan region.¹³ In 1918, Sekino Todashi conducted an investigation in Northern Sichuan, the photographs from which were published in the *Shina bunka shiseki* 支那文化史蹟 [Historical Remains of Chinese Culture] in 1940.¹⁴ In 1939, the *Society for the Study of Chinese Architecture* 營造學社 led by Liang Sicheng and Liu Dunzhen made a comprehensive investigation of the ancient remains in Sichuan. Their survey was only published at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The publication is only partial but provides invaluable early photos.¹⁵

Interpretive studies by scholars began in the second half of the twentieth century. Angela Falco Howard's "Tang Buddhist Sculpture of Sichuan: Unknown and Forgotten" sought to encourage more engagement with the rock carving sites in Sichuan which date to the Tang dynasty.¹⁶ Ma Yan, Ding Mingyi, Luo Shiping et al. published a series of articles following a survey of Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan in 1990. These articles engage with a variety of research topics, such as the relationship between Guangyuan and Bazhong, and the iconography of the "Puti Ruixiang 菩提瑞像 [Bodhi Auspicious Image]", which are still the focus of academic debate.¹⁷ Hu Wenhe's comprehensive investigation of Sichuan sites, the *Sichuan*

¹³ Victor Segalen, Gilbert de Voisins, and Jean Lartigue, *Mission Archéologique En Chine (1914 et 1917), La Sculpture et Les Monuments Funéraires* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1923).

¹⁴ Tokiwa Daijō 常盤大定 and Sekino Tadashi 関野貞, *Shina bunka shiseki* 支那文化史蹟 [Historical Remains of Chinese Culture] 10 (Kyōto: Hozōkan, 1940).

¹⁵ Some photos from this trip was published in Lin Zhu 林洙 ed., *Foxiang de lishi* 佛像的歷史 [The History of Buddhist Statues] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2010). Liang Sicheng 梁思成, *Liang Sicheng xinan jianzhu tushuo: shougao ben* 梁思成西南建築圖說:手稿本 [Liang Sicheng's Pictorial References for Architecture in Southwestern China: Manuscript], ed. Lin Zhu 林洙 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2014).

¹⁶ Angela F. Howard, "Tang Buddhist Sculpture of Sichuan: Unknown and Forgotten," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 60, (1988): 1-164.

¹⁷ Ma Yan 馬彥 and Ding Mingyi 丁明夷, "Guangyuan Huangzesi shiku diaocha ji 廣元皇澤寺石窟調查記 [Investigative Notes on the Huangzesi Grottoes in Guangyuan], no.6 (1990): 24-33. Ding Mingyi 丁明夷, "Chuanbei shiku zhaji: cong Guangyuan dao Bazhong 川北石窟札記:從廣元到巴中 [Notes on Grottoes in Northern Sichuan: From Guangyuan to Bazhong]," *Wenwu* 文物 [Cultural Relics], no.6 (1990): 41-53. Luo Shiping 羅世平, "Qianfoya Lizhou Bigong ji zaixiang niandai kao 千

daojiao fojiao shiku yishu 四川道教佛教石窟藝術 [Daoist and Buddhist Grottoes in Sichuan] published in 1994, includes most of the sites which had previously been reported by local cultural heritage administrations and provides a preliminary study of the sites in this region in terms of their chronology and iconography.¹⁸

From 2000 onwards there has been a concerted effort to publish archaeological reports and regional studies of the Sichuan Grottoes. This study would not have been possible without reference to the three substantial published surveys of the Tang Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan. Yao Chongxin's *Bashu fojiao shiku zaoxiang chubu yanjiu: yi Chuanbei diqu wei zhongxin* 巴蜀佛教石窟造像初步研究:以川北地區為中心 [A Preliminary Study of Buddhist Caves and Sculptures in Sichuan: Focusing on Northern Sichuan] in which he presents his painstaking typological analysis of the Buddhist sites in Guangyuan, with the stated aims of determining the timeframe of site construction, identifying the iconography, and comparing it to Buddhist art in the surrounding areas.¹⁹ Lei Yuhua's *Bazhong shiku yanjiu* 巴中石窟研究 [A Study of Bazhong Grottoes] which provides a detailed study of Bazhong sites analyzing the chronology and the iconography before undertaking a discussion of the regional characteristics.²⁰ The *Mianyang kanku: Sichuan Mianyang gudai zaoxiang diaocha yanjiu baogao ji* 綿陽龕窟:四川綿陽古代造像調查研究報告集 [Niches of Mianyang: Reports on the Ancient Sculptures in Mianyang, Sichuan] presents various tiny but inspiring Buddhist and Daoist sites in Mianyang.²¹

佛崖利州畢公及造像年代考 [Dating the Sculptures of Duke Bi of Lizhou in Qianfoya],” *Wenwu* 文物 [Cultural Relics], no.6 (1990): 34-36.

¹⁸ Hu Wenhe 胡文和, *Sichuan daojiao fojiao shiku yishu* 四川道教佛教石窟藝術 [Daoist and Buddhist Grottoes in Sichuan] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1994).

¹⁹ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaoxiang chubu yanjiu: yi Chuanbei diqu wei zhongxin*.

²⁰ Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*.

²¹ Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan 四川省文物考古研究院 [Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology] and Mianyang shi wenwuju 綿陽市文物局 [Mianyang Cultural Heritage Administration], *Mianyang kanku: Sichuan Mianyang gudai zaoxiang diaocha yanjiu baogao ji* 綿陽龕窟:四川綿陽古代造像調查研究報告集 [Niches of Mianyang: Reports on the Ancient Sculptures in Mianyang, Sichuan] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2010).

Multiple Disciplines, One Narrative

Buddhist grottoes are constructed by carving sacred images or scriptures in the living rock at a certain *location* at a fixed *time*.²² As an immovable monument resulted from the settled practice, the selection of the location, construction of the space and the creation of the image making are by necessity a simultaneous event. To understand the historical heritage behind these Buddhist grottoes, it is necessary to integrate knowledge drawn from a wide variety of sources and methodologies.

The scholarship of Buddhist grottoes in Northern Sichuan reveals an apparent multidisciplinary tendency.²³ An examination of a certain grotto or a series of grottoes in a certain area usually consists of three parts, corresponding to the research paradigms of archaeology, art history and historical geography. (1) The researchers start with the description of the grottoes, in which the sequence of carving within the site is discussed and a chronology of individual niches is created using taxonomic typologies. (2) They then select several well-preserved niches with clear and interesting iconographic motifs and trace their prototypes, interpret their contents, and examine how they combine with other niches. (3) At the end of the study is a comparative study of the grottoes upon which the study is focused with other grottoes in the surrounding area. To date the two trade roads and their associated historical records have largely been used to explain the similarities and differences of Buddhist sites between Guangyuan and Bazhong.

This paradigm leads to two key conclusions in current scholarship. The first is that the Sichuan grottoes are basically a variant of Buddhist grottoes in northern and

²² As Bender states “People’s sense of place and landscape... extends out from the locale and from the present encounter and is contingent upon a larger temporal and spatial field of relationships.” See Barbara Bender, “Introduction,” in *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*, eds. Barbara Bender and Margot Winer (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), 1-18.

²³ As Fraser states “for those who research Buddhism, multidisciplinary studies are nothing new.” Sarah E. Fraser, “An Introduction to the Material Culture of Dunhuang Buddhism: Putting the Object in Its Place,” *Asia Major* 17, no.1 (2004): 1–13.

northwestern China. This conclusion almost universally takes the Buddhist art in Chang'an and Luoyang, the two capitals of the Tang dynasty, as nearly universally taken as the primary source for the Buddhist art in Sichuan during this period.²⁴ The second is that there is a direct causal relationship between variations of the rock carvings sites in Guangyuan and Bazhong respectively and the transmission of Buddhist art along the two different trade roads—the Golden Ox Road 金牛道 and the Rice Granary Road 米倉道—linking the supposed central area of Buddhist art in Northern China to these locations which are labelled as “peripheral”.²⁵

The multidisciplinary tendency in the currently accepted research paradigm has some rational aspects. The textual evidence related to Buddhist grottoes in Northern Sichuan is limited in comparison with Buddhist sites in Northern China.²⁶ Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan consist of many small and medium-sized niches containing relatively simple images which are carved repeatedly. Focusing on key or interesting images is a plausible strategy, but it does tend to overlook the majority of the niches within a site. Another problem the study of these sites in Northern Sichuan faces is the limited presence of sponsorship inscriptions preserved in sites and historical narrative related to local monuments or communities. To discuss the differences and similarities of grottoes in different areas in combination with the recording of

²⁴ Luo, “Sichuan Tangdai fojiao zaoxiang yu Chang’an yangshi,” 46-57.

²⁵ Ding, “Chuanbei shiku zhaji,” 41–53. Yao Chongxin 姚崇新, “Shilun Guangyuan, Bazhong liangdi shiku zaoxiang de guanxi: jianlun Bazhong yu Dunhuang zhijian de gudai jiaotong 試論廣元、巴中兩地石窟造像的關係:兼論巴中與敦煌之間的古代交通 [On the Relationship between the Grottoes in Guangyuan and Bazhong: A Discussion of the Historical Connections Between Bazhong and Dunhuang],” *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Cultural Relics], no.4(2004): 63–70.

²⁶ This can be observed in the very sharp contrast between Qianfoya in Guangyuan and Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang. The over 800 grottoes in Qianfoya, Guangyuan, only contains 7 dated devotional inscriptions. In comparison in the 2,345 grottoes of the Longmen grottoes bear nearly 3,000 votive inscriptions. See Lin Tsuey-yun 林翠雲, *Sichuan Guangyuan Qianfoya de chengli yu Tangdai qianqi zaoxiang yishu* 四川廣元千佛崖的成立與唐代前期造像藝術 [Formation of Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan and the Sculptural Art of the First Half of the Tang Dynasty] (M.A., Taipei National University of the Arts, 1995), 9-10. Amy McNair, “Introduction,” in *Donors of Longmen: Faith, Politics, and Patronage in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Sculpture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i press, 2007), 1.

historical roads demonstrates the flexibility of the scholars who have previously undertaken research in this area.

Although the present mode of scholarship is largely multidisciplinary, the significant shortcoming is that there is little interaction between the different disciplinary perspectives. Instead, the discussion from different perspectives are bound together based on the fact that both of their conclusions rely heavily on an over-arching narrative of “Localization/Sichuanization”. This narrative asserts that the north influences the south, and the central artistic paradigms influence the local sites.²⁷ Buddhist grottoes in a certain place are largely imagined as a direct reflection of Buddhist material culture introduced into a specific place along the trade roads from the imperial center. Another concern with modern scholarship is that the local art traditions of Sichuan are not regarded as an independent art style but only as the source of some idiographic local statues or decorative elements. The creativity of local artisans in the reception of the external influence (not to mention local traditions that have not been carefully discussed) that would have been a factor in the distinct images present in Guangyuan and Bazhong is also largely ignored in modern scholarship. Although some of the resulting works are extremely detailed, the final discussion does not move away from the narrative of the “self-contained object” to the “social, political, and institutional context from which the work emerged”.²⁸

In all, the present multidisciplinary paradigm using archaeological, art historical and historical geographical methods do provide different perspectives on these sites. However, the lens of the “Localization/Sichuanization” has created Plato’s Cave within scholarship on these sites, wherein scholars are unable to look beyond the structures

²⁷ For instance, Yao notes with some regrets in the postscript of the book that his own study also fell into this trap. Yao, “Houji 後記 [Postscript],” in *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 434.

²⁸ The shifting of Buddhist art to the social-context approach has been discussed by Robert Sharf, “Art in the Dark: The Ritual Context of Buddhist Caves in Western China,” in *Art of Merit: Studies in Buddhist Art and Its Conservation*, eds. David Park, Kuenga Wangmo, and Sharon Cather (London: Archetype Publications, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2014), 28-65.

of their current research paradigm to explore beyond the immediately obvious research objectives. The integration of multiple perspectives into a structural and systematic understanding of Buddhist grottoes and their context necessitates moving beyond the fixed perspective of the “Localization/Sichuanization” paradigm.

Engaging with Local Narratives

This dissertation examines the possibility of a new paradigm through which to examine the Buddhist grottoes in Northern Sichuan. This new paradigm is based upon the concept that Buddhist grottoes as immovable monuments retain an imprint of the local society from which they emerged. A reconstruction of the process through which these grottoes were constructed reveals details of the local social history recorded in rock carvings. Instead of slavishly following the over-arching narrative of the “Localization/Sichuanization”, this dissertation aims to trace the local narratives locked within the Buddhist material culture and its transregional transmission by creating a “Thick Description” of the construction of individual grottoes within their local contexts.²⁹

This new paradigm highlights the consideration of Buddhist sites through a local lens beyond the “homeland-transplant mode” or the “metropolitan-local paradigm”.³⁰ Although, there was a pre-existing tradition of Buddhist art in the Sichuan area prior

²⁹ Clifford Geertz, “Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 3-30.

³⁰ Fraser examines Tibetan Buddhist Temples in Taiwan through a “wider lens beyond the metropolitan-local paradigm or homeland-transplant mode and emphasizes the transcultural nature of Tibetan Buddhist Diasporic and exile communities.” Herein a “local lens” is adopted to emphasize that research needs to start from the observation of local monuments and work towards a reconstruction of local narratives. Sarah E. Fraser, “Tibetan Buddhist Temples in Taiwan: An exploration of Transnational Religious Architecture,” in *The Hybridity of Buddhism: Contemporary Encounters between Tibetan and Chinese Traditions in Taiwan and the Mainland*, ed. Fabienne Jagou (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2018), 41–65: 44.

to the profusion of Buddhist grottoes in the area during the early seventh century,³¹ the discussion of this local tradition is limited in scholarship on Buddhist art following the unification of Northern and Southern China in the Sui dynasty. Some scholars mention the remnants of local traditions when analyzing certain decorative patterns or sculptural form in Buddhist grottoes in Northern Sichuan, however the local art system has never been traced as a unique creative system. Instead, the narrative is dominated by the discussion of Northern styles and of “Localization/Sichuanization”. Therefore, a re-examination of the Sichuan grottoes requires reconsidering the local traditions and innovations and moving beyond contrasting Buddhist art between this region and Northern China or Chang'an and Luoyang.

However, this does not mean that the examination of the local sites is limited to local conventions. The local is not isolated, and it is connected to the surrounding areas. The transculturality of Buddhism even when considered on a pan-Asian scale is inherently tied to local monuments. The point is that the discourse needs to shift from a source-seeking mode of external influences to an acknowledgement that these sites are formed within the complex web of influences both local and external, past and present. Moreover, this complex web of influences is not static but dynamic. Through the interdisciplinary comparison of the grottoes in Northern Sichuan with other Buddhist material and cultural relics, from both local and external contexts, it is possible to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the way in which the knowledge and skills from different sources and areas worked together in these grottoes.

This dissertation seeks to replace the metanarrative of the “Localization/Sichuanization” of Buddhist grottoes, with the local narratives of the

³¹ Buddhist statues dating to the Southern Dynasties have been excavated in Chengdu (the best known of which is Wanfosi) and have attracted considerable academic attention as examples of the Buddhist art style of Southern Dynasties in the early medieval China. Sichuan bowuyuan 四川博物院 [Sichuan Museum], Chengdu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 成都文物考古研究所 [Chengdu Municipal Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology] and Sichuan daxue bowuguan 四川大學博物館 [Sichuan University Museum], *Sichuan chutu Nanchao fojiao zaoxiang* 四川出土南朝佛教造像 [Southern Dynasties Buddhist Sculptures Excavated in Sichuan] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013).

construction of Buddhist grottoes in Northern Sichuan.³² It does not deny the inevitable connection between the geographical expansion of Buddhist rock-cut sites and the transregional transmission of certain images or styles. Instead, it aims to build a historical description of the materialization of the grottoes in their local context, in which the narrative of central-peripheral localization is just one strand. In a sense, what is pursued here are the localized narratives of “Localization/Sichuanization” which are encased with these local monuments. Instead of a self-contained narrative of “Localization/Sichuanization”, the local narratives or the localized narratives point to a research path rather than a specific interpretation. Therefore, local narratives are plural and open to diverse interpretations.

The analysis centering on the construction of the sites is carried out on three levels in this dissertation:

1) Distinguishing the order in which the niches within each individual site were carved. This is undertaken through the study of the periodization of Buddhist sites with the chronology of the niches, which is largely based on an archaeological typology of sculpture styles.

2) Tracing the ways in which elements from different sources are used in the formation of the grottoes in different time periods. This is done by synthesizing data taken from the form of the site, carved statues and devotional inscriptions. This requires the use of archaeological, art historical and epigraphic methodologies, in order to build a structural depiction of the way that the various knowledge and skills entered into the grottoes.

3) Contextualizing the construction of a certain site or sites in a certain place. This is done by referencing the locality which is largely formed by local culture and community through textual recordings. Special attention is required on several

³² Lyotard defines “*postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives” and states “They only give rise to institutions in patches—local determinism.” Jean-François Lyotard, “Introduction,” in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), xxiv.

specific historical events or elements such as increasing migration, imperial exile, the tension between Buddhism and Daoism, and the convenience of external traffic, amongst other factors in local society.

The historical context of these Buddhist sites is constructed using the method of “Thick Description” by Clifford Geertz.³³ This first requires a “Thin Description”, a factual description of the sequence of carving of the grottoes based on the study of chronology and periodization. However, more critical is the deep story, that comprehensively discusses the formation of Buddhist sites. This is done through the observation of three different types of remains that can still be found within the grottoes: the site structures, statues and inscriptions. The “Thick Description”, then, can be used to re-examine the historical texts (specifically those detailing local society in Buddhist history, biographies of monks, collection of miraculous tales, local and distant gazetteers, and national geographical recordings) to ascertain their meanings and dynamics. By contextualizing these local monuments in their local historical context as depicted in these textual references, it is possible to reveal a new level of understanding in the meanings of local monuments, this can be understood as the “Thicker Description” of the site construction.

Naturally, this methodology presents many challenges. It requires readers to be able to move between the micro details of the niches in the sites to the macro depiction of the role of the sites within the broader human landscape. The interpretation of the site construction, with the “Thin Description”, the “Thick Description”, and the “Thicker Description”, brings the risk of over-interpretation. However, the tediousness and risk are worthwhile. Instead of repeating the narrative of the “Localization” or trimming the foot (material evidence) to fit the shoe (historical records), this new interdisciplinary model provides the possibility of tracing the fragments of references to popular religion in local society preserved in Buddhist grottoes as local monuments.

³³ Geertz, “Thick description,” 3-30.

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation examines how Buddhist grottoes emerged and developed in Northern Sichuan during the Tang dynasty. This study focuses on twelve sites scattered over Northern Sichuan. The dissertation is organized along both chronological and geographical lines. The first chapter examines the upsurge of Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan at the start of the seventh century. This cluster of Buddhist sites is examined in terms of their site structure, carved images, and extant traces of the organization of patronage therein. The second and third chapters discuss the continuous construction which was undertaken in the two largest sites in Northern Sichuan, Qianfoya in Guangyuan and Nankan in Bazhong between the mid-seventh and mid-eighth centuries. The sections within each of these chapters are arranged chronologically, in order to present the formation of these two largest sites and their distinctive rock carving traditions.

Chapter One examines the emergence of Buddhist sites as a material expression of the encounter between the sculptural conventions centered in the Chengdu area in the Southern Dynasties and the construction of rock-cut caves which had been popular in Northern China during the Northern Dynasties. The multi-layered figural representations and the exquisite artistic style reflect a close association with the free-standing statues and steles of the Southern Dynasties. They were combined with the practice of carving into the living rock, inclusive of niche-based site structures, the carving of Buddhist scripture on stone, and collective patronage in the form of associations called *yiyi* 邑義, which originated in Northern China. By examining the historical documents and religious inscriptions, it is clear that the refugee monks and the government officials arrived in this region from Northern China at this time also played an important role in this cross-regional integration.

Chapter Two concentrates on how the dialogue between the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” and the local artistic system shaped Qianfoya in Guangyuan over three successive phases. The first phase starts in the middle and late seventh century when

the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” occupied a strong position in China. The second phase starts at the beginning of the eighth century, between 700 to 715 CE. During this period although the main Buddhas were shaped by the newly arrived northern forms, the characteristic elements of the local art convention such as the *Babu zhong* 八部眾 [Eightfold celestial assembly] were revived alongside the development of a new local form of cave, the central-altar caves. The third phase runs from 715 to the 750s CE. Although Buddhist grottoes in the two-capitals region declined with the measures against Buddhism during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, the local agents in Qianfoya continued to construct niches. The circumstances led to the requirement to adjust the size and content of the carved projects and the forms of sponsorship employed. The mottled appearance of Buddhist art in Qianfoya vividly reflects the social history of Guangyuan as a border city between Northern China and the Sichuan area which exemplifies the varying levels of the central government’s control of ideology in the local community during the Tang dynasty.

Chapter Three turns to Nankan in Bazhong, construction at which can be also divided into three phases: *circa* 710s CE, the 715-750s CE, and after the 750s CE. Nankan was built with a relatively uniform plan: this site demonstrates a strong preference for the “Ruixiang 瑞像 [Auspicious Images]” in both phases one and two; almost all of the niches in this site are decorated with the three-dimensional parasols above the primary icon and a pavilion-like tent niche frame. It should be pointed out that the reception of the northern style and images in Bazhong reflects a more active attitude than that seen in Guangyuan. By the time that construction started in Nankan, the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” had started to decline in Chang’an and Luoyang. The carving of the images with obvious northern roots cannot be understood as the product of a passive reception of images as seen in the Qianfoya in Guangyuan but are the result of more active collection of forms. It is further argued that it was not only the slight difference in their locations in the dynamic web of Buddhist material

culture, but also their different responses to the complex web of influences that led to the notable difference in Buddhist carvings in Guangyuan and Bazhong.

Although this dissertation attempts a holistic study of Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan in the Tang dynasty, not every niche in every site has been discussed. Due to the limited space of a dissertation, choice of representative works is inevitable. The point here is not to provide a meticulous description of individual niches, but a presentation of the basic structure and features that reflect the social practices that created them with the historical context. In addition, because this dissertation is intended for scholars from different backgrounds, I consistently avoid using Sanskrit names for Buddhist sculptures, for instance the *Diamond Sutra* is used instead of the *Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā*. As for the romanization of Chinese terms, I use the pinyin system except for in the case of certain place-names, like the Yangtze river, where alternative transliterations are more familiar to non-Chinese speakers.

CHAPTER I The Emergence of Buddhist Sites in Northern Sichuan

This chapter examines how and why the construction of Buddhist caves, which was prevalent in Northern China during the fifth and sixth centuries, started to flourish in Northern Sichuan during the Tang dynasty (618-906 CE). This discussion centers on a cluster of Buddhist rock carving sites in Northern Sichuan, involving Guangyuan 廣元, Mianyang 綿陽, Bazhong 巴中, Nanchong 南充, Guang'an 廣安, and the Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture 阿坝藏族羌族自治州. The rock carvings in these sites which date to the Zhenguan 貞觀 reign (627-649 CE) mark the earliest traces of the localized practice of carving Buddhist icons into natural rock faces in the Sichuan area. The following discussion approaches these rock carvings from three perspectives: site form, image making, and the organization of patronage, to contextualize the emergence of Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan in terms of their technical, artistic, religious and social contexts.

The earliest discussions related to these sites can be traced to European and Japanese expeditions in the early twentieth century, which have been followed by additional scholarly and institutional investigations in the second half of the twentieth century.³⁴ The vigorous promotion of interest in these sites by the Sichuan Provincial

³⁴ Selected relative research of the twentieth century see Segalen, Voisins and Lartigue, *Mission Archéologique En Chine (1914 et 1917)*. Tokiwa and Sekino, *Shina Bunka shiseki*. In addition, Liang Sicheng and his collages from the Society for the Study of Chinese Architecture 營造學社 investigates some sites in Northern Sichuan in 1939 CE, which is partly published in Lin ed., *Foxiang de lishi*. Howard, "Tang Buddhist Sculpture of Sichuan," 1-164. Yan Wenru 閻文儒, "Sichuan Guangyuan Qianfoya yu Huangzesi 四川廣元千佛崖與皇澤寺 [Qianfoya and Huangzesi in Guangyuan, Sichuan]," *Jiangnan kaogu* 江漢考古 [Jiangnan Archaeology], no.3 (1990): 85-91. Ma and Ding, "Guangyuan Huangzesi shiku diaocha ji," 24-33. Ding, "Chuanbei shiku zhaji," 41-53. Wen Qiguo 文齊國, "Mianyang Tangdai fojiao zaoxiang chutan 綿陽唐代佛教造像初探 [A Preliminary Study of the Tang Buddhist Sculptures in Mianyang]," *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Culture Relics], no.5 (1991): 47-53. Mu Xueyong 母學勇, "Sichuan Jian'ge Wulian Hengliangzi moya zaoxiang 四川劍閣武連橫樑子摩崖造像 [Cliff Sculptures of Hengliangzi in Jian'ge, Sichuan]," *Kaogu* 考古 [Archaeology], no.5 (1992): 424-427. Liu Min 劉敏, "Guang'an Chongxiangsi moya zaoxiang ji shike diaocha jiyao 廣安沖相寺摩崖造像及石刻調查紀要 [Investigation of Buddhist Cliff Sculptures in Chongxiangsi, Guang'an]," *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Culture Relics], no.6 (1993): 45-50.

Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology 四川省文物考古研究院 and the Chengdu Municipal Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology 成都市文物考古研究所 at the beginning of the twenty-first century has led to the publication of detailed reports on many of the sites.³⁵ To date, scholarship has considered the upsurge of Buddhist site in this area in the early seventh century in terms of external influence and local conventions.³⁶ However, current discussions are limited to an element-based analysis which lacks a structural and holistic examination of these

³⁵ Guangyuan Huangzesi bowuguan 廣元皇澤寺博物館 [Guangyuan Huangzesi Museum] and Chengdu shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 成都市文物考古研究所 [Chengdu Municipal Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology], “Guangyuan Jian’ge Hengliangzi moya shike zaixiang diaocha jianbao 廣元劍閣橫樑子摩崖石刻造像調查簡報 [A Brief Survey of Hengliangzi Cliff Sculpture in Jian’ge, Guangyuan],” in *Chengdu kaogu faxian* 成都考古發現 [Archaeological Discoveries in Chengdu] 2001, ed. Chengdu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2003), 484–493. Guangyuan Huangzesi bowuguan and Chengdu shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, “Puji zhen foyedong moya shike zaixiang diaocha jianbao 普濟鎮佛爺洞摩崖石刻造像調查簡報 [A Brief Survey of Foyedong Cliff Sculpture in the Puji Town],” *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Cultural Relics], no.1 (2004): 72–74. Chengdu shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, Guangyuan shi wenwu guanlisuo 廣元市文物管理所 [Guangyuan Municipal Cultural Heritage Administration], and Beijing daxue kaogu wenbo xueyuan 北京大學考古文博學院 [School of Archaeology and Museology of Peking University], “Guangyuan Huangzesi shiku diaocha baogao 廣元皇澤寺石窟調查報告 [Survey Report for the Huangzesi Grottoes in Guangyuan],” *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Cultural Relics], no.1 (2004): 75-84. Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan 四川省文物考古研究院 [Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology] and Sichuan sheng Maoxian bowuguan 四川省茂縣博物館 [Maoxian Museum in Sichuan], “Sichuan Maoxian Dianjiangtai Tangdai fojiao moya zaixiang diaocha jianbao 四川茂縣點將台唐代佛教摩崖造像調查簡報 [A Brief Survey of Dianjiangtai Cliff Sculpture in Maoxian, Sichuan],” *Wenwu* 文物 [Cultural Relics], no.2 (2006): 40-53. Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju 四川省文物管理局 [Sichuan Cultural Heritage Administration] et al., *Guangyuan shiku neirong zonglu: Huangzesi juan* 廣元石窟內容總錄:皇澤寺卷 [Catalogue of the Contents of Guangyuan Grottoes: Huangzesi] (Chengdu: Bashu shuju, 2008). Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Mianyang shi wenwuju, “Mianyang Bishuisi moya zaixiang 綿陽碧水寺摩崖造像 [Bishuisi Cliff Sculptures in Mianyang],” and “Zitong Wolongshan Qianfoya moya zaixiang 梓潼臥龍山千佛崖摩崖造像 [Qianfoyan Cliff Sculpture in Wolongshan, Zitong],” *Mianyang kanku*, 1-30 and 115-156. Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*. Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*. Wang and Lei, “6 shiji mo zhi 7 shiji chu de Sichuan zaixiang,” 357-371. Lei, Luo, and Wang, *Chuanbei fojiao shiku he moya zaixiang yanjiu*. Jiang et al., “Sichuan Guang’an Chongxiangsi shiku 四川廣安沖相寺石窟 [Chongxiangsi Grottoes in Guang’an, Sichuan],” “Sichuan Langzhong Qianfoyan shiku 四川閬中千佛岩石窟 [Qianfoyan Grottoes in Langzhong, Sichuan],” and “Sichuan Langzhong Leishendong shiku 四川閬中雷神洞石窟 [Leishendong Grottoes in Langzhong, Sichuan],” *Jialing jiang liuyu shikushi diaocha ji yanjiu*, 7-95, 261-270 and 271-278.

³⁶ Wang and Lei, “6 shiji mo zhi 7 shiji chu de Sichuan zaixiang,” 357-371.

newly emergent local monuments.

The Buddhist rock carvings in Northern Sichuan appeared in the early Tang as a new and energetic practice. It is a material expression of the encounter between the sculptural conventions that had developed in Sichuan in the Southern dynasties (420-589 CE) and the construction practices of cave temples from local society in Northern China that started during the Northern Dynasties (386-581 CE). The multi-layered figural representations show a close association with the free-standing statues and steles of the Southern Dynasties that have been excavated in the Chengdu 成都 area. However, the niche-based site structure, the carving of scripture on stone, and the presence of collective patronage in the form of associations called *yiyi* 義邑, show the connection to the rock carving traditions that had developed in the countryside in Northern China during the Northern Dynasties. In examining historical texts and devotional inscriptions, it is apparent that assigned government officials and refugee monks, both of which emigrated to this area from Northern China, were the active agents in this transregional dialogue during the early seventh century. They brought their knowledge and experience of Buddhist practices as practiced in Northern China with them to Northern Sichuan. Their arrival reshaped the religious and cultural fabric of this area which had been Daoist-dominated area since the Eastern Han (25-220 CE).³⁷

1. Between North and South

Northern Sichuan occupied a crucial strategic position in the geography of ancient China. Several key transport routes traversed this region, which led to it

³⁷ Northern Sichuan encompasses most of the *ershisi zhi* 二十四治 [twenty-four dioceses] in the Tianshi school of Daoism. Franciscus Verellen, “The Twenty-four Dioceses and Zhang Daoling: The Spatio-liturgical Organization of Early Heavenly Master Taoism,” in *Pilgrims, Patrons, and Place: Localizing Sanctity in Asian Religions*, eds. Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohra (Toronto: University of British Columbia, 2003), 15-67. For more discussion of the material remains see Wu Hung, “Mapping Early Daoist Art: The Visual Culture of Wudoumi Dao,” in *Taoism and the Arts of China*, ed. Stephen Little (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 77-93.

holding strategic, commercial and military significance throughout history (Map 2).³⁸ The most famous of these trade routes was the Golden Ox Road, which was the main thoroughfare linking the Sichuan area and Northern China. It ran between the city of Hanzhong 漢中 in Shaanxi 陝西 and Chengdu in the center of the Sichuan Basin, passing through Guangyuan and Mianyang. Another road, the Rice Granary Road, also connected Hanzhong and Chengdu, but passed through Bazhong and Langzhong 閬中. Another crucial path was the Tuyuhun road, which ran between Mianyang and the Songpan 松潘 area, before connecting to the Tibetan plateau in northwestern China. In addition, the headwaters of two key tributaries of the Yangtze river the Jialing river 嘉陵江 and Fu river 涪江, are also in this region. Their channels and the neighboring valleys provide routes to the middle and the lower reaches of the Yangtze river and would therefore, have served as gateways to the entirety of Southern China.

During the Northern and Southern Dynasties, this area was the frontier between the Tuoba-dominated northern states and the Han-Chinese southern regimes.³⁹ The region was initially held by southern regimes of the Liusong 劉宋 (420-479 CE) and the Xiaoqi 蕭齊 (479-502 CE) who were able to hold the Northern Wei 北魏 (386-534 CE) north of the Qinling Range throughout the fifth century. In 505 CE, Northern Wei invaded Northern Sichuan, seizing the modern prefectures of Guangyuan, Mianyang and Bazhong, this action coincided a change of regime in the south from the Xiaoqi to the Xiaoliang 蕭梁 (502-557 CE). The Xiaoliang reclaimed power in Northern Sichuan in 535 CE, however regional rebellions in Southern China between 548 CE and 551 CE led to Guangyuan falling to the Western Wei 西魏 (535-557 CE), one of the two successor states of the Northern Wei, in 550 CE. Thereafter, the Western Wei became the Northern Zhou 北周 (557-581 CE) and was then replaced by the Sui 隋 (581-618 CE). Northern Sichuan remained under the control of three northern-based regimes and therefore fairly stable from the second half of the sixth century onwards.

³⁸ Yen, *Tangdai jiaotong tu kao: Shan, Jian, Dian, Qian qu*, 863-1027.

³⁹ For further discussion of the confrontation between northern and southern regimes in this area see Yan, "Qianfoya yu Huangzesi" 85-91.

Given its geographical location and the frequent changes in government, it is perhaps unsurprising that, during Northern and Southern dynasties, this area became a transitional zone for Buddhist art and practice. Its transitional character can be seen clearly in the Buddhist stele of Monk Xuansong 玄嵩 (Figure 1. 1) originally found in Maoxian, a town on the Tuyuhun road.⁴⁰ It is the earliest dated Buddhist stele in the Sichuan area. According to its devotional inscription, it was completed in the first year of the Yongming 永明 reign (483 CE) through co-operation between donors from both the Northern and Southern regimes. The main sponsor, Xuansong, describes himself as the “Monk Cao from the Western Liang 西涼曹比丘”, who had served as an administrator in the former Western Liang 西涼 (400-421 CE), a state of the Sixteen Kingdoms the capital of which was in Dunhuang in the Hexi Corridor. His endeavor was assisted by other sponsors from local society. One of them was the chief of a garrison town “Town mayor 鎮主”, who would have been assigned by the Xiaoli, which was a southern regime and still held absolute control of Northern Sichuan during this period.

In the early sixth century, Guangyuan and Mianyang were under the rulership of the northern and southern regimes respectively. It was during this period that cave temples started to be carved in Guangyuan, the northernmost city in Sichuan. There are two sites that contain caves which date to this period: Caves 726 and 226 in Qianfoya 千佛崖 and Cave 45 in Huangzesi 皇澤寺 which can be attributed to the Northern Wei occupation (505-535 CE) (Figure 1. 2).⁴¹ Their sculptures have the same plain and stiff formal style as contemporaneous statues in Northern China. In contrast, Buddhist art in the Mianyang area during this period appears to be more refined. Archetypal examples include the free-standing sculptures excavated in Wenchuan 汶川 (Figure 1. 3), and a group of relief sculptures carved on a pair of

⁴⁰ Sichuan bowuyuan et al., *Sichuan chutu Nanchao fojiao zaixiang*, 192-197 and Pl. 167-1. For a more detailed discussion of this stele, see Dorothy C. Wong, “Four Sichuan Buddhist Steles and the Beginnings of Pure Land Imagery in China,” *Archives of Asian Art* 51, (1998): 56-79.

⁴¹ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 35-39.

ceremonial gate towers called *Pingyang fujun que* 平陽府君闕.⁴² Their sculptural style and the decorative motifs employed can also be seen in stone sculptures from the Southern Dynasties that have been excavated from the Chengdu area. For instance, the statues excavated from Wanfosi 萬佛寺 are arguably the best known examples of this type of statue (Figure 1. 4).⁴³

During the Sui dynasty, Emperor Wen of Sui 隋文帝 (541-604 CE) distributed physical relics of the Buddha to various monasteries on three occasions.⁴⁴ During the second and third distributions, Guangyuan, Langzhong, and Mianyang each received Buddhist relics sent from Chang'an.⁴⁵ Yang Xiu 楊秀 (573-618 CE), the son of Emperor Wen, was given control over the Sichuan area. He was also a strong supporter of Buddhism.⁴⁶ While the arrival of sacred objects and the endorsement of imperial authority might have been expected to cause Buddhism to flourish in Northern Sichuan, there is limited evidence of Buddhist rock carvings from this

⁴² Although the religious carvings can be dated to the third year of the Datong 大通 reign (529 CE) due to the presence of a devotional inscription, the gates themselves were originally built in the Han Dynasty. Sichuan bowuyuan et al., *Sichuan chutu Nanchao fojiao zaixiang*, pl. 69-1. Sun Hua 孫華, “Sichuan mianyang pingyang fujun que qeshen zaixiang: jian tan Sichuan diqu nanbeichao fo dao kanxiang de ji ge wenti 四川綿陽平陽府君闕闕身造像:兼談四川地區南北朝佛道龕像的幾個問題 [A Study of Buddhist and Daoist Images on the Pingyang Fujun Pillars in Sichuan],” in *Han Tang zhijian de zongjiao yishu yu kaogu* 漢唐之間的宗教藝術與考古 [Between Han and Tang: Religious Art and Archaeology in a Transformative Period], ed. Wu Hung 巫鴻 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2000), 89-139. Lin Sheng-chih 林聖智, “You muque dao futu: Sichuan Mianyang pingyang fujun que de yanjiu 由墓闕到浮圖:四川綿陽平陽府君闕研究 [From *Que* to *Futu*: the Study of *Pingyang fujun que* in Sichuan],” in *Yishushi zhong de Han Jin yu Tang Song zhi bian* 藝術史中的漢晉與唐宋之變 [Transitions in Chinese Art History: Han to Jin and Tang to Song], eds. Yen Chuan-ying 顏娟英 and Shih Shouqian 石守謙 (Taipei: Rock publishing, 2014), 127-168.

⁴³ Sichuan bowuyuan et al., *Sichuan chutu nanchao fojiao zaixiang*, 36-1.

⁴⁴ A detailed discussion on the distribution of Buddhist relics by Emperor Wen of the Sui 隋文帝 can be found in: Ōshima Sachiyo 大島幸代 and Manna Keisuke 萬納惠介, “Zui Jinju Sharitō kenkyū josetsu 隋仁壽舍利塔研究序説 [Introduction of the Śarīra-Pagoda in the Renshou reign, Sui dynasty],” *Nara bijutsu kenkyū* 奈良美術研究 [Journal of Nara Art Studies] 12, (2012): 85-113.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 54-56.

period.⁴⁷ One of the few carvings which can be dated to this period is Niche 26 in Chongxiangsi 冲相寺 (Figure 1. 5) in Guang'an 廣安.⁴⁸ This niche contains a standing Buddha wearing a robe covering both shoulders with his two hands open next to body. His gesture cannot be found in the pre-existing artwork in Sichuan and should be taken as a new introduced element, indicating the increasing communication between Northern Sichuan and Northern China during the Sui dynasty.⁴⁹

From the Han Dynasty onwards, Northern Sichuan, in particular Mianyang and Langzhong, had a strong local tradition of Daoism. The first official school of Daoism, the Tianshi Dao 天師道 [The Way of the Celestial Masters] was founded here by Zhang Daoling 張道陵 (134-156 CE).⁵⁰ Several Daoist rock carving sites were also constructed in this region during the fifth and sixth centuries. Xiasi 下寺 in Jian'ge contains niches which have been attributed to the Northern Wei.⁵¹ Meanwhile carving activity in Xishangguan 西山觀 (Figure 1. 6 and Figure 1. 7) in Mianyang and Shishiguan 石室觀 in Langzhong started in the Sui dynasty.⁵² The niches at both of

⁴⁷ Ishida Yoshiyuki 石田德行, "6 seiki kōhan no Hashoku to Bukkyō 6 世紀後半の巴蜀と仏教 [Sichuan and Buddhism in the Second Half of the Sixth Century]," *Tōhō shūkyō 東方宗教* [The Journal of Eastern Religions] 48, (1976): 30-55.

⁴⁸ According to the devotional inscription in Niche 51 in the sixth year of Kaiyuan 開元 reign (718 CE), Chongxiangsi was first built in the eighth year of the Kaihuang 開皇 reign (588 CE). According to the brief report for this site, Niche 26, which is carved close to the topmost part of the cliff, can be securely dated to the Sui dynasty. This is on the basis of an inscription carved into the left wall outside Niche 26 which is taken to be its devotional inscription. Jiang et al., "Sichuan Guang'an Chongxiangsi shiku," in *Jialing jiang liuyu shikusi*, 37-95: 73.

⁴⁹ According to the report by Fu and Wang, the devotional inscription of this niche states that the standing Buddha is the Dīpaṃkara Buddha and was carved during the Kaihuang 開皇 reign (581-600 CE). Fu Yongli 符永利 and Wang Shoumei 王守梅, "Sichuan Guang'an Chongxiangsi dingguangfo kanxiang yanjiu 四川廣安冲相寺定光佛龕像研究 [A Research into the Statue of Dīpaṃkara Buddha in the Chongxiangsi in Guang'an, Sichuan]," *Dunhuang yanjiu 敦煌研究* [Dunhuang Research] 172, no.6 (2018): 38-48.

⁵⁰ Wu, "Mapping Early Daoist Art," 77-93. For a more detailed discussion of Zhang Daoling and this area see Verellen, "The Twenty-Four Dioceses and Zhang Daoling," 15-67.

⁵¹ There is no independent report of Xiasi, but a brief introduction and two photographs were published in Lei, Luo and Wang, *Chuanbei fojiao shiku he moya zaixiang yanjiu*, 256-257.

⁵² Lin Sheng-chih 林聖智, "Daojiao zaixiang yu diyu shehui: Sichuan Mianyang Yunüquan Sui zhi chu Tang daojiao moya zaixiang 道教造像與地域社會:四川綿陽玉女泉隋至初唐道教摩崖造

these Sui sites are characterized by a Mandorla-shaped frame into the semicircular inner niches are set. This type of niche is different from those seen in the Xiasi but similar to the shallow niches carved in the mid-sixth century in the Gongyi Grottoes in Gongyi, Henan. In particular, the intrusive niches on the surface of the outside wall between Caves 2 and 3 which were completed during the Western Wei and the Northern Qi (Figure 1. 8).⁵³ That the niche structures in these two Sui dynasty Daoist sites borrowed from Buddhist cave temples in Northern China demonstrates the increase in communication between Northern Sichuan and the Central Plain which occurred during the Sui dynasty.⁵⁴

In summary, a unique set of geopolitical and historical condition contributed to the mixing and melding of different artistic, cultural and religious practices in Northern Sichuan prior to the Tang dynasty. Although Northern Sichuan did not see the development of a multitude of Buddhist cave temples, especially when compared to the number of contemporaneous sites in Northern China, the techniques and practices which developed in this area provided the foundation for the proliferation of Buddhist rock carving sites in the region during the early Tang.

2. “Cave Temples without Caves”

This section re-examines the site forms, basic structure, and wooden structures of Buddhist grottoes in Northern Sichuan. It should be noted that the shape and structure of the rocks into which the rock carvings in Northern Sichuan were carved and therefore the sites themselves vary significantly. The diversity of site forms is largely possible the niche-based structure, which is markedly different from the cave temples

像 [Daoist Sculptures and Regional Society: A Study of the Yunü quan Cliff Sculptures in Mianyang in the Sui and Early Tang Dynasties],” in *Zhongguo Zhongguo yanjiu* 中古中國研究 1 [Medieval China] 1, ed. Yu Xin 余欣 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2017), 151-190.

⁵³ Henan sheng wenwu yanjiusuo 河南省文物研究所 [Henan Provincial Institute of Cultural Heritage], *Zhongguo shiku: Gongxian shikusi* 中國石窟: 鞏縣石窟寺 [Chinese Grottoes: Gongxian Grottoes] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), pl.216-218.

⁵⁴ The increase in transregional communications during the Sui has also been discussed in Wang and Lei, “6 shiji mo zhi 7 shiji chu de Sichuan zaixiang,” 366-367.

in Northern China which, with their large internal spaces, require tall and relatively vertical cliffs. Therefore, the crucial issues discussed below lies in creating a regional study without overlooking the variations between the Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan and effectively explaining their difference to the northern grottoes which have to date been regarded as their prototype.

Three Types of Site Form

Chapter One focuses on the ten sites in Northern Sichuan that contain rock carvings that can be relatively securely dated to the Zhenguan reign.⁵⁵ There are four sites on the Golden Ox Road (Huangzesi, Hengliangzi, Wolongshan, Bishuisi) and five sites in the vicinity of the Rice Granary Road (Foyedong, Xikan, Qianfoyan, Leishendong, Chongxiangsi). The final site, Dianjiangtai near the Maoxian, is set on the Tuyuhun road. Only four of these sites can be directly dated using dated devotional inscriptions: Dianjiangtai (631 CE), Wolongshan (634 CE), Qianfoyan (635 CE), and Hengliangzi (647 CE).⁵⁶ The other sites have been dated to the same

⁵⁵ There are other sites this region which might date to the Zhenguan reign, like the Mumensi 木門寺 and Gutian ba 固天壩 in Wangcang 旺蒼, the Fozi yan 佛子岩 in Langzhong 閬中. However, either due to weathering or restoration, their original appearances can no longer be ascertained. Chengdu shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Guangyuan Huangzesi bowuguan, “Wangcang xian Mumensi moya shike diaocha jianbao 旺蒼縣木門寺摩崖石刻調查簡報 [A Brief Survey of Mumensi Cliff Sculptures in the Wangcang County],” in *Chengdu kaogu faxian* 2001, 498-508. Sichuan wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan, Xibei daxue wenhua yichan xueyuan and Guangyuan shi wenwuju, “Gutianba moya zaoxiang 固天壩摩崖造像 [Gutianba Cliff Sculptures],” in *Sichuan sanjian Tang Song fo dao kanku zonglu: Guangyuan juan* 四川散見唐宋佛道龕窟總錄:廣元卷 [Buddhist and Daoist Shrines and Grottoes from the Tang and Song Dynasties in Sichuan Province], ed. Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan 四川省文物考古研究院 [Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology], Xibei daxue wenhua yichan xueyuan 西北大學文化遺產學院 [Academy of Cultural Heritage of Northwestern University] and Guangyuan shi wenwuju 廣元市文物局 [Guangyuan Cultural Heritage Administration] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2018), 144-147. Jiang et al., “Sichuan Langzhong Foziyan shiku 四川閬中佛子岩石窟 [Foziyan Grottoes in Langzhong, Sichuan],” in *Jialing jiang liuyu shikusi*, 271-278.

⁵⁶ Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Sichuan sheng Maoxian bowuguan, “Dianjiangtai maoya zaoxiang,” 40-53. Jiang et al., “Sichuan Langzhong Qianfoyan shiku,” in *Jialing jiang liuyu shikusi*, 261-270. Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Mianyang shi wenwuju, “Zitong Wolongshan Qianfoya moya zaoxiang,” in *Mianyang kanku*, 115-156. Guangyuan Huangzesi bowuguan and Chengdu shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, “Hengliangzi zaoxiang,” in *Chengdu kaogu*

period by comparison with the sculptural forms and styles present at these four sites, although the dating of some specific niches is still somewhat controversial.⁵⁷

It should be noted that, although these sites were carved in a restricted geographical region and over a relatively short period, there are significant variations in their site forms. Through examining the forms of the sites, it has been possible to divide these ten sites into three types. The first type is defined by having been carved into a steep cliff, usually a vertical or nearly vertical rock exposure with a relatively large surface area available for the excavation of niches and caves. This type of site is eminently suitable for monumental projects. Examples of such sites include Chongxiangsi and Huangzesi, both of which started to be carved before the Tang and where the bulk of carving activity occurred in this period.⁵⁸ The most impressive

faxian 2001, 484-493.

⁵⁷ Most scholars agree that Huangzesi Niche 28 dates to the first half of the seventh century but have different opinions about the specific date. As most of the statues in this niche are similar to Wolongshan Niche 2 and 3 in Zitong dated to 634, I suggest that this niche was also excavated around the early Zhenguan reign. The related discussion can be found in Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaoxiang chubu yanjiu*, 114. Guangyuan Huangzesi bowuguan, “Guangyuan Huangzesi 28 hao ku shidai kaozheng 廣元皇澤寺 28 號窟時代考證 [A Proposed Dating for Niche 28 in Huangzesi, Guangyuan],” *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Culture Relics] 113, no.1 (2004): 64-67. Kim Euna 金銀兒, “Shisen shō Kōgen Kōtaku ji dainijūhachikutsu ni tsuite 四川省廣元皇澤寺第二八窟について [Guangyuan Huangzhesi Cave 28 in Sichuan Province],” *Bijutsushi* 美術史 [Journal of the Japan Art History Society] 60, no.1 (2010): 89-105. Another site with problematic chronology is the Xikan in Mianyang. Lei Yuhua argues that Niche 19 and 21 in Xikan date to the Sui dynasty. Yagi Haruo points out that the disciples in Niche 19 are almost identical to those found in Huangzesi Niche 28, 55 and 56, which would place it in the 630s or 640s CE, while he believes that Xikan Niche 21 dates to 715-725CE due to its similarity to Niche 14 in Beikan 北龕, another site in Bazhong. In terms of sculptural style, I think Xikan Niches 18 and 21 evidently date to the early Tang dynasty. However, due to the lack of comparable chronological works, it is hard to certain the precise date they were carved and they most likely consider their date from the seventh century to the early eighth century. Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 177-180. Yagi Haruo 八木春生, “Bazhong diqu fojiao zaoxiang kan zhi yanjiu: yi chu Tang shiqi zhi Kaiyuan chuqi wei zhongxin 巴中地區佛教造像龕之研究:以初唐時期到開元初期為中心 [Buddhas Carved in Niches in the Bazhong Area from the Start of the Tang to the Early Kaiyuan Period],” trans. Wang Yiwen 王怡文 and Chen Po-yu, *Guoli Taiwan daxue meishushi yanjiu jikan* 國立臺灣大學美術史研究集刊 [Taida Journal of Art History] 45, (2018):1-49.

⁵⁸ Jiang et al., “Sichuan Guang’an Chongxiangsi shiku,” in *Jialing jiang liuyu shikusi*, 37-95. Yagi Haruo 八木春生, “Guangyuan Huangzesi chutang zaoxiang kao 廣元皇澤寺初唐造像考 [A Study of the Early Tang Dynasty Statues in Huangzesi, Guangyuan],” trans. Li Mei 李梅, *Zhongguo guojia meishu* 中國國家美術 [National Art of China] 17 (2013): 148-157.

project is Niche 28 in Huangzesi. This niche is 6.86 meters tall, 5.55 meters wide and 3.60 meters deep. It occupies the main part of the cliff surface, forming an extremely striking feature within the landscape (Figure 1. 9).

The second type, the most common form of Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan, were carved into rocky outcrops, either where the bedrock of mountains is exposed on slopes, or along river banks. Examples include Foyedong in Wangcang, Xikan in Bazhong, and Leishendong in Langzhong.⁵⁹ Two other sites were set into similar environments but made use of the natural scenery: Qianfoyan in Lanzhong was carved within a natural cave, and Bishuisi in Mianyang was built into an overhang of bedrock that runs parallel to the river (Figure 1. 10).⁶⁰ The scale of these sites which are carved into outcrop is not large. However, the Xikan in Bazhong also shows such sites have the potential to develop into medium or even large sites (Figure 1. 11). After the earliest construction during the early Tang, artisans continued to carve statues along the rock surface in the eighth century in the Xikan. As niches were carved at eye level along the cliff, niche by niche, they transformed the space into a long gallery of carvings.

Boulders comprise the third site type. Three sites were carved into boulders of various sizes and shape: the largest, Dianjiangtai in Maoxian is an oval monolith around 7 meters high with a circumference of 40 meters (Figure 1. 12).⁶¹ Hengliangzi in Jian'ge is carved on a boulder 6.6 meters high and 4.4 meters wide.⁶² The third example at Wolongshan is set on a cuboid boulder that measures 5.5 meters by 5.2

⁵⁹ Guangyuan Huangzesi Museum, "Foyedong moya shike zaoliang 佛爺洞摩崖石刻造像 [A Brief Survey of Foyedong Sculptures]," in *Chengdu kaogu faxian* 2001, 494-497. Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 177-180. Jiang et al., "Sichuan Langzhong Leishendong shiku 四川閬中雷神洞石窟 [Leishendong Caves in Langzhong, Sichuan]," in *Jialing jiang liuyu shikusi*, 271-278.

⁶⁰ Jiang et al., "Sichuan Langzhong Qianfoya shiku," in *Jialing jiang liuyu shikusi*, 261-270. Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Mianyang shi wenwuju, "Mianyang Bishuisi moya zaoliang," in *Mianyang kanku*, 1-30.

⁶¹ Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Sichuan sheng Maoxian bowuguan, "Dianjiangtai moya zaoliang", 40-53.

⁶² Guangyuan Huangzesi bowuguan and Chengdu shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo, "Hengliangzi zaoliang," 484-493.

meters and is approximately 3.2 meters tall (Figure 1. 13).⁶³ Although all the niches in Hengliangzi were carved on its southern side, the niches at the other two sites carved were on different faces of the boulder, from the earliest phase of construction.⁶⁴ The presence of carvings on multiple sides leads to various viewpoints and appears to have been intended to guide the viewers to look around the boulder. This would appear to indicate that these two boulder sites were intended for circumambulation.

The three types of the site outlined above are defined by the natural topography of the sites themselves rather than by the man-made features at the site.⁶⁵ Since the Buddhist rock carving sites in Sichuan are almost entirely made up of niches rather than caves, there is significantly more freedom in the selection of the site location, as the excavation of medium or small niches does not require tall and relatively vertical cliffs. Meantime, the niche-based structure means there is no need to modify the cliff surface on a large scale, so the natural appearances of the sites were usually preserved in the final construction.⁶⁶

Niche-Based Structure

Although Buddhist sites in Sichuan are referred by scholars as the “*Shiku* 石窟 or *Shikusi* 石窟寺 [grottoes or cave temples]”, most of the “cave temples” in Sichuan only consist of niches. This makes them “cave temples without caves”.⁶⁷ The interior

⁶³ Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Mianyang shi wenwuju, “Zitong Wolongshan Qianfoyan moya zaoxiang,” in *Mianyang kanku*, 115-156.

⁶⁴ Dianjiangtai started from two niches sponsored by the same group of people that were carved into two different sides of the boulder. In Wolongshan, three identical-sized niches were carved in three sides of the boulder with the final side completely occupied by a relief of a thousand Buddhas.

⁶⁵ For an analysis of the site selection of Buddhist rock carvings in Sichuan, see Francesca Monteith 鳳飛, “Chuannan Tang Song moya zaoxiang xuanzhi de jingguan kaogu yanjiu 川南唐宋摩崖造像選址的景觀考古研究 [Analyzing Rock Carvings of Tang and Song Dynasties in Southern Sichuan Using Landscape Archaeology],” *Nanfang minzu kaogu* 南方民族考古 [Southern Ethnology and Archaeology] 17, (2019): 188-208.

⁶⁶ For a more discussion of the shaping of the cliff faces in Yungang Grottoes see Peng Minghao 彭明浩, *Yungang shiku de yingjian gongcheng* 雲岡石窟的營造工程 [Construction of Yungang Grottoes] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2017), 47-54.

⁶⁷ This is the reason why most scholars have argued that “Moya zaoxiang 摩崖造像 (Cliff sculptures)” is a better term than “cave temples” to describe the Buddhist sites in the Sichuan area. For

spaces carved into the rockfaces were only intended to house the sculptures. This is in direct contrast with the cave monasteries in Northern China such as the Yungang Grottoes 雲岡石窟 and Longmen Grottoes 龍門石窟 which are formed of large-scaled caves that allowed devotees to gather, circumambulate, and hold rituals within the caves.

The origins of this niche-based structure require further inquiry. Some scholars consider this structure to be localization of cave temples of Northern China, arguing that the disappearance of the caves is an adaptation of cave temples to the natural and social environment in the Sichuan area.⁶⁸ However, such niche-based structures also occurred in Buddhist sites dating to the early Tang outside the Sichuan area including Qinglianshan 青蓮山寺 in Linyou 麟游, Shaanxi 陝西, and Qianfuyan 千佛岩 in Shentongsi 神通寺 in Ji'nan 濟南, Shandong 山東 (Figure 1. 14).⁶⁹ These sites indicate that niche-based structures existed in Buddhist sites outside the Sichuan area. Therefore, instead of taking this structure a regional characteristic, the presence of this niche-based structure in Buddhist sites in Sichuan needs to be taken as part of the marginalization of the architectural function in which can be observed in Buddhist caves temple sites throughout China in the sixth and seventh centuries.

Although they are relatively understudied, most of the non-Imperial Buddhist sites that date to Northern Dynasties are formed of niches carved into natural caverns or directly on to cliff faces. This can be clearly seen by examining the Buddhist rock-cut monuments in the Central Plain 中原地區 during Northern Dynasties. Zhen Yan

a related discussion, see Lei, Luo and Wang, “Chuanbei shiku de gainian 川北石窟的概念 [The Concept of Grottoes in Northern Sichuan],” in *Chuanbei fojiao shiku he moyu zaixiang yanjiu*, 3-5. Hida, “Joron: Bukkyō bijutsu kara mita Shisen chiiki,” 14.

⁶⁸ Jiang et al., *Jialing jiang liuyu shikusi*, 358-360. Hida believes that the humid climate is one of the main reasons for the use of the niches-based structure in the Sichuan grottoes. Hida, “Joron: Bukkyō bijutsu kara mita Shisen chiiki,” 14.

⁶⁹ Jing Sanling 荆三林 and Zhang Heyun 張鶴雲, “Shentongsi shiji chubu diaocha jilue 神通寺史蹟初步調查記略 [Notes of Survey Work Undertaken at the Historical Remains in Shentong Monastery],” *Wenwu cankao ziliao* 文物參考資料 [Cultural Relics Reference] 74, no.10 (1956): 30. Chang Qing 常青, “Shanxi Linyou Qinglianshan moyu zaixiang diaocha 陝西麟游青蓮山寺摩崖造像調查 [Survey Report for the Cliff Sculptures in Qinglianshan Monastery in Linyou, Shaanxi],” *Wenbo* 文博 [Cultural Relics and Museology], no.3 (2015): 19-27.

has discussed the term “stone caves,” which has been used to describe monumental cave temples such as Yungang Grottoes, also appears in the devotional inscriptions in some local sites, for example the Huangshiya 黃石崖 in Shandong 山東, to describe shallow niches in natural openings or on cliff surfaces.⁷⁰ According to an investigation undertaken by Yang Eungyeng, with the exception of Tianlongshan 天龍山 Cave 8 in Taiyuan 太原, Shanxi 山西, none of the currently extant caves from the Sui dynasty in the Central Plain have an internal floor area of more than 1 square meter, which would have made it hard, if not impossible for devotees to enter.⁷¹ Therefore, it is unsurprising that most of the sites carved in the early Tang also took on a niche-based structure.

In Northern Sichuan, the proliferation of Daoist sites during the Sui dynasty ushered in a wave of the niche-based construction which may also provided a model for the construction of Buddhist sites of the early Tang in this area. All the statues in the Xishanguan and the Shishiguan both of which date to the late Sui dynasty were carved in small niches, which integrated with rather than reshaped the surrounding natural environment.⁷² The most convincing evidence comes from Langzhong. There are two rock carvings sites dating to the early seventh century in the area, the Shishiguan, a Daoist site and Qianfoyan, a Buddhist site. Although the semi-circular niche with the Mandorla-shaped frame can be traced back to Northern China, the identical structure of pairing two niches within an outer frame in Shishiguan and Qianfoyan suggests that the Buddhist site might have borrowed this niche form

⁷⁰ Zhen Yan, “Yellow Stone Cliff: Buddhist Cave Temples in Shandong,” in *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province III* 中國佛教石經:山東省(第三卷), eds. Wang Yongbo 王永波 and Tsai Suey-Ling 蔡穗玲 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag; Hangzhou: China Academy of Art, 2017), 19-26.

⁷¹ Yang Eungyeng 梁銀景, *Liangdai fojiao kukan yanjiu* 隋代佛教窟龕研究 [A Study of Buddhist Caves and Niches in the Sui dynasty] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2004), 82.

⁷² This kind of niche-based structure may also be a reflection of the cult of nature. Spring water and natural caves are usually regarded as spiritual places. More discussion see “Dixing yu xinyang 地形與信仰 [Geography and Sacred Geography]” in Francesca Monteith 鳳飛, *Quwei, xuanzhi he jiegou: Sichuan nanbu Tang Song moya zaixiang de yizhi fenxi* 區位、選址和結構:四川南部唐宋摩崖造像的遺址分析 [Location, Setting and Structure: Contextualizing Tang and Song Dynasty Religious Rock Carvings in Southern Sichuan] (Ph.D., Peking University, 2021), 58-62.

directly from the Daoist site in the same area, especially since the two sites are within 20 kilometers of each other (Figure 1. 15 and Figure 1. 16).

In addition, even in the large-scale projects, the desire to create space within the cliff appeared to have disappeared by the sixth century. The new practice appears to have been to carve Buddha statues into cliffs and then protect them with wooden buildings. The internal ritual space within the sites shifted from the cliff to the wooden buildings. The earliest example of this sample are the colossal Buddhas at Qixiashan 栖霞山 in Nanjing 南京, Jiangsu 江蘇 and Shichengshan 石城山 in Xinchang 新昌, Zhejiang 浙江, both of which are set within shallow recesses carved into the rock faces.⁷³ Based on the presence of grooves and holes surrounding the niches, Su Bai and Li Chongfeng argue that these Buddhas would originally have had wooden structures to shelter them. Su Bai further believed that this method of using external structures to protect monumental Buddhas was then transmitted to the Northern dynasties. For example, Tongzisi 童子寺 in Taiyuan 太原 may also have originally been constructed with a similar structure.⁷⁴ Carved on a cliff that occupies the entire mountainside, the exterior sections were completed using mudbrick and wood structures instead of being carved into the cliffs.⁷⁵ Clear evidence for this kind of structure can be found in the only large-scale project in Northern Sichuan in the early seventh century, Huangzesi Niche 28. There is strong evidence that this large niche was protected with a wooden building no later than the mid-seventh century (more discussion in “Traces of External Shelters”). However, due to the fact that

⁷³ Su Bai 宿白, “Nanchao kanxiang yiji chutan 南朝龕像遺跡初探 [A Initial Study of Statues in Niches in Southern Dynasties],” in *Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu* 中國石窟寺研究 [A Study of Cave Temples in China] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1996), 176-178. Li Chongfeng 李崇峰, “Yinyan jiegou yu linyan gouyu: Zhongyin shikusi waiguan chutan 因岩結構與鄰岩構宇: 中印石窟寺外觀初探 [Evolution of the External Appearance of the Buddhist Cave Temples],” *Shikusi yanjiu* 石窟寺研究 [The Study of Cave Temples] 8, (2019): 1-52.

⁷⁴ Li Yuqun 李裕群 and Yan Yuejin 閻躍進, “Taiyuan shi Longshan Tongzisi yizhi fajue jianbao 太原市龍山童子寺遺址發掘簡報 [A Brief Report of Tongzisi Site in Taiyuan City],” *Kaogu* 考古 [Archaeology], no.7 (2010): 43-56.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

similar practice can be found both in South China and North China during the sixth century, it is difficult to certain whether its source came from the north or the south.

Buddhist rock carving sites in Northern Sichuan from the early Tang were not just simple imitations of previous grottoes. They are characterized by a prevalence of medium-sized niches (Figure 1. 17).⁷⁶ This kind of niches has a double-layered structure, an arched inner niche carved within a rectangular recess. The statues within these niches are approximately the same height as an average person. Jiang argues that it might have been inspired by the double-frames of the Han dynasty cliff tombs indigenous to the area.⁷⁷ However, this hypothesis ignores the difference in the spatial design: the chambers in the cliff tombs have internal space and flat ceilings, while the double-layered niches take the form of an arched dome. A more likely prototype is the double-layered central niches on the back wall of some caves in Northern China which date to the Northern Dynasties and the Sui dynasty. For examples, Caves 420 (Figure 1. 18) and 276 in the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang share the same double-layered form as the niches in Sichuan. They are the same shape and size, even the form and format of their decoration are similar. Both have flame-shaped lintels which extend to the ceiling of the outer frame, creating an interesting interaction between the inner and outer parts of the double-framed niches. It seems that the craftsmen in Northern Sichuan adopted a niche form which had previously only been used as the central niche in caves and carved it directly on to boulders and cliffs.

Structure is related to function, and the shifting of the basic units in Buddhist grottoes from the caves to niches reflects that the function of grottoes had, by this point, changed from providing residential or ritual space for people to housing sacred images. The archaeological excavation of the free standing temples at the top of the cliff where Yungang Grottoes are serve to illustrate that the decline of the residential function of Buddhist grottoes in Northern China had started even during Northern

⁷⁶ For example, Huangzesi Niches 12 and 13 in Guangyuan, Foyedong Niche 1 in Wangcang, and Leishendong Niches 1 and 2 in Langzhong.

⁷⁷ Jiang et al., *Jialing jiang liuyu shikusi*, 210.

Dynasties.⁷⁸ In addition, the niches-based format of the sites means the rock carvings focus more on the “zaoxiang 造像 [image-making]”, which fit the changes of the patrons with the reducing economic abilities and social sources when the Buddhist grottoes as material culture spread from the upper class to the lower class, from the metropolitan city to the countryside.⁷⁹

Last but not least, the carvings of Buddhist statues to natural rock faces to shape the natural landscape into a sacredscape can be seen throughout Asia during this period. For instance, rock carvings in Swat in the seventh and eighth centuries are limited in size, yet this does not affect their roles of shaping their surroundings as sacred places.⁸⁰ The same strategy was adapted by Hinduism and Jainism in Southern India between the eighth and twelfth centuries. Owen argues that instead of creating an internal sacred space, sacred images carved on the surface of cliffs were able to project outwards and upwards, broadcasting the power of religious art and devotional practice beyond the immediate vicinity.⁸¹ Therefore, the enhancement of the landscape function of Buddhist grottoes is also an important perspective through which to understand the niche-based structure of the sites.

In all, it is emphasized here that the niche-based structure in Buddhist grottoes in Northern Sichuan did not result from a “Localization” of the cave-based structure

⁷⁸ Yungang shiku yanjiuyuan 雲岡石窟研究院[Yungang Grottoes Research Institute], Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 山西省考古研究所[Shanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology] and Datong shi kaogu yanjiusuo 大同市考古研究所[Datong Municipal Institute of Archaeology], “Yungang shiku kuding xiqu Beiwei fojiao siyuan yizhi 雲岡石窟窟頂西區北魏佛教寺院遺址 [The Remains of the Buddhist Monastery of the Northern Wei Dynasty in the Western Zone of the Top of the Yungang Grottoes],” *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 [Acta Archaeologica Sinica], no.4 (2016), 533-562. Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo, Yungang shiku yanjiuyuan and Datong shi kaogu yanjiusuo, “Yungang shiku kuding erqu Beiwei Liao Jin fojiao siyuan yizhi 雲岡石窟窟頂二區北魏遼金佛教寺院遺址 [The Buddhist Monastery Site of the Northern Wei, Liao and Jin Dynasties in Zone II on the top of the Yungang Grottoes],” *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 [Acta Archaeologica Sinica], no.1 (2019): 109-142.

⁷⁹ Zhen Yan, “Yellow Stone Cliff: Buddhist Cave Temples in Shandong,” 22.

⁸⁰ Anna Filigenzi, *Art and Landscape: Buddhist Rock Sculptures of Late Antique Swat/Uddiyana* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015).

⁸¹ Owen Lisa N, “Demarcating Sacred Space: The Jina Images at Kalugumalai,” *International Journal of Jaina Studies* 6, no.4 (2010): 1-28. Kristina Ann Youso, *Power in Stone: Rock-Cut Architecture and the Stone Medium in Tamil Nadu* (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2000).

grottoes in Northern China. Instead it is a reflection of the pan-Asian undercurrent of the marginalization of the architectural function in Buddhist grottoes.

Traces of External Shelters

The form and even presence of wooden structures protecting the rock carved sites is a matter of contentious academic debate.⁸² The following discussion concentrates on the reconstruction of the wooden shelters know to have been present at two sites during their initial construction. Since no archaeological excavations have been undertaken in front of the sites, and in most cases due to modern constructions or erosion will not be possible in the future, this discussion is limited to the installation marks on the cliffs and sporadic records in historical texts.

After his field investigation at Wolongshan in 1939, the architectural historian Liang Sicheng recorded that:

There is a stone square pillar at the entrance. It has been carved with Buddha statues on all four sides, it is similar to the *caitya* pillars in the Yungang Grottoes. It is suitable for circumambulation and the chanting of sutras.

入門有方石柱四面鑄佛像若雲岡之支提柱可繞行誦經。⁸³

His observations are useful to our understanding of the site. The boulder of Wolongshan has a square form, three sides of which have one medium-sized niche carved into them (Figure 1. 19). This form is very similar to the central part of Cave 1 in Xiangtangshan Southern Grottoes 響堂山南石窟 (Figure 1. 20).⁸⁴ The west and north rock faces at Wolongshan are set at a right angle to each other and parallel to

⁸² Peng Minghao 彭明浩, “Zhongguo shikusi kuqian jianzhu de faxian yu yanjiu 中國石窟寺窟前建築的發現與研究 [The Discovery and Study of the Architecture In Front the Caves in Chinese Cave Temples],” *Zhongguo wenhua yichan* 中國文化遺產 [Chinese Cultural Heritage], no.5 (2018), 4-13.

⁸³ Liang, *Liang Sicheng xinan jianzhu tushuo*, 129.

⁸⁴ Mizuno Seiiki 水野清一 and Nagahiro Toshino 長廣敏雄, *Kyōdōsan sekkutsu: Kahoku Kanan shō sakai ni okeru Hokusei jidai no sekkutsu jiin* 響堂山石窟:河北河南省境における北齊時代の石窟寺院 [The Buddhist Cave-temples of Xiangtangshan on the Frontier of Henan and Hebei] (Kyōto: Kyoto Research Center of Academy of Oriental Culture, 1937), fig. 7.

the carved rock faces, this indicates that the creation of a path for circumambulation was part of the initial design.⁸⁵

The prototype for the Wolongshan site is not limited to the central-pillar cave. It is structurally similar to two single-story pagodas in Northern China, constructed in the Sui dynasty. Bahuisi 八會寺 (Figure 1. 21) in Quyang 曲陽 in Hebei 河北 was built between 583 and 604 CE.⁸⁶ A carved boulder with an irregular parallelogram layout, measuring 3.75-4.04 meters north-south, 3.33-3.5 meters east-west and is 2-2.4 meters tall, occupies the center of this site. Its four sides are fully carved with engraved sutras and relief sculptures. A second example is Simenta 四門塔 (Figure 1. 22) attributed to 611 CE in Shentongsi in Shandong.⁸⁷ This site is smaller, similarly centered on a boulder whose sides are *circa* 2.3 meters long. A Buddha is carved on each side of the boulder, forming the sacred foci of the pagoda. Both central pillar caves and single-story pagodas are constructed with the intention of creating a focus for circumambulation. They have a similar layout, although their external structure is different. Therefore, it is also possible that Wolongshan was initially designed as a single-story, central-pillar pagoda.

There are also traces of a wooden shelter in Huangzesi in Guangyuan which may also date to this period.⁸⁸ The giant niche and its surroundings are now protected by a

⁸⁵ There is also a central-pillar cave in Jinpingshan 錦屏山, a Daoist site in Jian'ge, Guangyuan. Cave 1 has an interior space 5.20 meters wide, 2.20 meters high and 3.11 meters deep. The front and center of this space is occupied by a central pillar. Although there are no extant inscriptions at this site, it has been attributed to the Sui dynasty or to the early Tang dynasty on stylistic grounds. This provides circumstantial evidence that the structure of the central-pillared cave was introduced into Northern Sichuan. Sichuan Archaeology Institute, "Jingpingshan moya zaixiang 錦屏山摩崖造像 [Jinpingshan Cliff Sculptures]," *Sichuan sanjian kanku: Guangyuan juan*, 92-94.

⁸⁶ Zhao Zhou 趙州, "Hebei sheng Quyang xian Bahuisi shijing kan 河北省曲陽縣八會寺石經龕 [Stone Scripture Niches in Bahui Temple in Quyang, Hebei Province]," *Shikushi yanjiu 石窟寺研究 [Studies of Cave Temples]* 1, (2010): 12-35.

⁸⁷ An inscribed brick found in its pavilion-shaped roof dates the site to 611 CE. More discussion to this site see Eugene Y. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle, Wash Chesham: University of Washington Press, 2007), 324-325. Wei-Cheng Lin, *Building a Sacred Mountain: The Buddhist Architecture of China's Mount Wutai* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2014), 73.

⁸⁸ Chengdu shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo et al., "Guangyuan Huangzesi shiku diaocha baogao," 75-

modern pavilion. There was no wooden structure in front of the site in photographs of the site from the early twentieth century, however the post holes cut into the cliff are clearly visible. The historical presence of a wooden shelter can be stated with certainty, however the date at which this structure was initially constructed is more difficult to ascertain. A group of small niches are arranged on a horizontal line that parallels the groove which marks the lowest extent of Niche 28 (Figure 1. 23 and Figure 1. 24), none of these niches extends past this groove in the rock.⁸⁹ This indicates that they were carved after the construction of the wooden structure. These small niches can be attributed to the early Tang based on their sculptural styles and the accompany tourist's inscription dated to the second year of Linde 麟德 reign (665 CE)⁹⁰, which therefore can be used to assume that there was already a wooden shelter as early as the first half of the seventh century.

A commemorative inscription titled “Xikan foge 西龕佛閣 [Buddhist Pavilion of West Niches]” in Niche 12, in the “Writing the *Heart Sutra* Cave 寫心經洞” which is in form set on a boulder which rests below the cliff containing Niche 28, also may testify to the presence of a wooden structures (Figure 1. 25 and Figure 1. 26).⁹¹ It was written by a mayor of Lizhou 利州 (the name for Guangyuan during this period) who had the surname Cui 崔 to commemorate his sponsorship of the restoration of a wooden pavilion in the second year of the Baoli 寶歷 reign (826 CE).⁹² This

84 and 99-97.

⁸⁹ Lin ed., *Foxiang de lishi*, 124.

⁹⁰ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 109.

⁹¹ 西龕佛閣……益昌郡城江岸之□□十里有鑿石古龕，龕有釋迦如來像設並諸聖賢，為侍御之儀□□□□□□□□則□□。聖唐貞觀二載，郡□武都督楊夫□靈異如響，建其□□□□□□居諸而□□□兆聖儀容□□為風雨所侵。我太守北平公崔□於□□□□□□□□□□捨淨縉□□□□□勝因，遂令良工□□□□□□水□□□□□一方□□□□□榮□□。大唐寶歷二年歲次□□□□□日□。 Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 110.

⁹² Mayor Cui, who wrote the inscription, was probably Cui Pu 崔朴, who also appeared in an anecdote recorded by Sun Qiao 孙樵 (fl. 867 CE). Yu Xianhao considered Cui Pu's tenure the Huichang reign (841-846 CE), yet his opinion is challenged by two points. First, Sun Qiao recorded he was transferred to the magistrate of Luojiang 羅江 county in Mianzhou 綿州 after his three years in Yichang county, when Pei Xiu 裴休 (791-864 CE) served as the prefectural governor. According to Ran Yunhua's study, Pei Xiu had close contacts with Monk Zongmi 宗密 (780-841 CE) during his stay in Mianzhou. In a prayer by Zongmi, he left a postscript, “The prefectural governor of Mianzhou, Pei

inscription mentions that the original Buddhist pavilion was first completed with the support of the local military governor and his wife, Wu Shiyue 武士護 (577-635 CE) and Lady Yang 楊夫人 (579-670 CE), in the second year of the Zhenguan reign (628 CE). Wu Shiyue and Lady Yang were the parents of Empress Wu Zhao 武曩 (a.k.a. Wu Zetian 武則天, 624-705 CE), who went on to become the first and only female monarch in the history of China. It is said that the wooden pavilion sponsored by this couple was intended to protect a niche on the boulder which contains a carving of Śākyamuni Buddha and other saints from weathering by rain and wind.

Yao believes that the Buddhist pavilion in the text was intended to protect the “Writing the *Heart Sutra* Cave” since this is where the inscription was found. He further speculated that Niches 12 and 13 may have been sponsored by Wu Shiyue and Lady Yang.⁹³ Regardless of the patronage of Niches 12 and 13, the biggest challenge to this interpretation is that the term “foge 佛閣 [Buddhist pavilions]” in the title of the inscription is usually used to refer to colossal constructions.⁹⁴ This makes it more likely that the building built by the Wu couple was a multi-layered structure

Xiu, records in the third year of Kaicheng reign (838 CE) 開成三年六月綿州刺史裴休記”. Therefore, the story of He and Cui must have happened several years earlier than 838 CE, and Cui’s term of office in Lizhou might have overlapped with the inscription of 826 CE in Huangzesi. In addition, the *Taiping Guangji* 太平廣記 records Cui Pu titled with the “Beijiepan 北節判”, which may be the source of the title of Mayor Cui the “Duke of Beiping 北平公” in the stele. Yu Xianhao 郁賢皓, *Tang Cishi kao quanbian* 唐刺史考全編 [A Complete Study of the Tang Prefects] (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2000), 2829. Ran Yunhua 冉雲華, “Pei Xiu fojiao shenghuo de yanjiu 裴休佛教生活的研究 [A Study of Pei Xiu’s Buddhist Life],” in *Guogu xinshi: Zhongguo chuantong wenhua de zai quanshi* 國故新知: 中國傳統文化的再詮釋 [New Knowledge of National Heritage: A Reinterpretation of Chinese Traditional Culture], ed. Tang Yijie 湯一介 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1993), 299-312. Li Fang 李昉, *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 [Extensive Records of the Taiping Reign] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 1097-1098.

⁹³ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu* [Buddhist Caves and Sculptures in the Sichuan area], 111.

⁹⁴ One of the examples comes from the “月燈閣避暑 [Seeking Cool in the Yudeng Pavillion]” written by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846 CE) in 807 CE, in which the Buddhist Pavillion was clearly described as a high-rise construction, “行行都門外，佛閣正岩巖。” Bai Juyi 白居易, *Bai Juyi shiji jiaozhu* 白居易詩集校注 [The Annotated Anthology of Bai Juyi’s Poetry], ed. Xie Siwei 謝思焯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 33-34.

constructed against the cliff to protect Niche 28.⁹⁵ As discussed in the previous paragraph, this external structure already existed before the middle of the seventh century, which matches the record that the Wu couple sponsored the “foye” in the year of 628 CE.

In all, the form of Buddhist grottoes in Northern Sichuan in the early seventh century was largely dependent upon the natural form of the rock, and can be divided into three types: cliff, outcrop, and boulder. The niche-based structure does not come from an abstract “Localization” of cave temples in North China, but a concentrated manifestation of the undercurrent of the decline of architectural function in Buddhist grottoes in China in the fifth and sixth centuries.

⁹⁵ This is further supported by the fact that most scholars have identified the standing Buddha in Niche 28 has been identified as the Śākyamuni, which also matches the description in the text. A comprehensive discussion on the identification of the standing Buddha in Huangzesi Niche 28 can be found in Kim Euna’s essay. As the Buddha in Niche 28 wears a pair of flowery earrings in his ears and holds a cintāmaṇi in his left palm, typical features for the Śākyamuni Buddha based on known statues from the 6th century, she argues that the giant standing Buddha should be identified as the Śākyamuni Buddha. However, the two bodhisattvas in Niche 28 are Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, which seems to indicate that the center figure is the Amitābha Buddha, forming an Amitābha triad. Therefore, Kim Euna argues that the giant Buddha in Niche 28 might possess a double identification, as for the reception of “Two aspects of original and derivative 本跡二門” thought developed around the *Lotus Sutra* in the 6th century. However, this interpretation is largely challenged by the absence of evidence that the triad of the Western Paradise, the Amitābha flanked by *Avalokiteśvara* and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, was popular in Northern Sichuan in the early Tang. More detail discussion see Huang Xia’s essay, in which he cites Hu Wenhe’s recording of an inscription of 719 CE preserved in Niche 35, in Qianfoya 千佛崖 in Tongjiang 通江, that shows the donors intended to carve a Śākyamuni Buddha flanked by Bodhisattvas *Avalokiteśvara* and Mahāsthāmaprāpta. Therefore, I prefer to just consider the giant Buddha as the Śākyamuni Buddha. Kim, “Shisen shō Kōgen Kōtakuji dainijūhachikutsu ni tsuite,” 89-105. Huang Xia 黄夏, “Hashoku chiiki ni okeru Amidabutsu Gojūnibosatsu zō: chiriteki bunpu·kōsei mochifu no hensen o chūshin 巴蜀地区における阿弥陀仏五十二菩薩像: 地理的分布・構成モチーフの変遷を中心 [The Amitābha and Fifty-two Bodhisattvas Image in the Sichuan area: Focusing on the Geographical Distribution and the Development of the Motif Construction],” in *Bijutsu shiryō toshite yomu Shūjīnshūsanbōkantsūroku—shakudoku to kenkyū* 美術史料として読む『集神州三宝感通録』—釈読と研究 [Reading the Collected Records of the Mysterious Stimuli and Responses Related to the Three Jewels in China as the Material of Art History: Interpretation and Research] vol. 10, ed. Hida Romi (Tōkyō: Sumassyu, 2017), 111-159: 115. Hu, *Sichuan daojiào fojiào shiku yishu*, 111.

3. Images, Scriptures, and Miracles

Those rock carved Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan which date to the early seventh century evidence of a vividly creative period of carving activity. This creativity was the result of exchange between the northern and southern conventions of Buddhist art. The mainstream of Buddhist images in this period, like Huangzesi Niche 28 in Guangyuan, uses a multi-layered figural arrangement as a framework. The similar framework can be found in the early free-standing statues of Southern Dynasties excavated in the Chengdu area. The Amitābha and the fifty-two bodhisattvas' image and the stone scripture of the *Diamond Sutra* in the Mianyang area are the novel artistic representations, the prototypes of which can be traced back in rock carvings in Northern China.

From Statues to Sites

I have chosen to focus on Buddhist statues in Huangzesi to illustrate the carving style present during the early seventh century, as its images are characteristic for this period and they are carved in a rich, well-developed style. Additionally, as one of the first sites in the region to be known to academia the site has attracted significant attention in previous studies.

Niche 28 is the central project in Huangzesi (Figure 1. 27 and Figure 1. 28). A giant standing Buddha occupies the center of the niche. The right hand of the statue is set in the *abhaya-mudrā* and left hand is in the *varada-mudrā*. He is flanked by two disciples: one is depicted an old man, Mahākāśyapa the oldest disciple of the Buddha, stands on the left holding a lamp with a long handle, while a young man, Ānanda the youngest disciple of the Buddha, stands on the right, holding prayer beads in his left hand. Next to the two disciples are two bodhisattvas. The one on the right can be identified as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva by the presence of a meditating Buddha carved into his crown. The bodhisattva on the left can be identified as Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva because of the bottle in his crown. The eightfold

celestial assembly is carved in bas-relief on the back wall.⁹⁶ The two figures closest to the central Buddha are easily identified: the three-faced and six-armed demon is Asura, while the figure with a dragon above his head is Nāga. A pair of *vajrapānis* appear to have been carved flanking the frame of niche. While the body shape of the figure on the left can still be discerned, the one on the right now is completely destroyed.

There is some controversy over the source of the imagery in Niche 28. Some scholars believe that this image is strongly reminiscent of Buddhist art of Southern Dynasties in the Sichuan area. For example, Kim argues that the gesture and garments of the central Buddha in Niche 28 is identical to that of Buddhist steles centered with a standing Buddha from Southern Dynasties excavated in Chengdu.⁹⁷ A relatively well-preserved example can also be seen in a stele in the Wanfosi collection which has an inscription which dates it to 523 CE (Figure 1. 29). However, some scholars emphasize the influence of Northern China in this image. Fujioka Yutaka successfully demonstrates that the animal-head panel at the intersection of the long jewelry crossed in front of the abdomen can be traced back to early Sui sculptures in Shandong and Hebei.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ The classes of gods and demons includes the devas, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, and mahoragas.

⁹⁷ The Buddha of Huangzesi Niche 28 is decorated with a floral earring and holds the peach shaped *cintāmaṇi* in his left hand. According to Kim Euna, the Buddha with these two features started to be made in the Chengdu area and are identified to the Śākyamuni if there is devotional inscription. The two motifs were transmitted to the Guangyuan area after the unification of Sichuan with the northern-based regimes. A good example is the seated Buddha in Cave 15, Huangzesi, which is dated to sometime between the Northern Zhou and the Sui. Kim, “Shisen shō Kōgen Kōtakuji dainijūhachikutsu ni tsuite,” 99. Wang Jianping and Lei Yuhua have argued that the earliest known Buddha with these earrings and the *cintāmaṇi* in the hand may be traced back to the Buddhist statues of Southern Liang around the Chengdu area. Wang and Lei, “6 shiji mo zhi 7 shiji chu de Sichuan zaoliang,” 366-67.

⁹⁸ Fujioka Yutaka 藤岡穰, “Shotōki ni okeru Chōan zōzō no fukugenteki kōsatsu 初唐期における長安造像の復元的考察 [Reconstructing the Early Tang Buddhist Sculptures of Chang’an],” in *Tōajia II Zui-Tō (Ajia Bukkyō bijutsu ronshū)* 東アジア II 隋・唐 (アジア仏教美術論集) [East Asia II Sui and Tang (Asian Buddhist Art)], ed. Hida Romi (Tōkyō: Chuōkan shimizuya ryokan, 2018), 65-103.

Although their discussion of the components within the niches is appropriate, each of these arguments fail to consider the overall imagery and therefore fail to notice that the arrangement of the statues in Niche 28 is reminiscent of art conventions of Southern Dynasties. As for the stele dated to 523 CE, the main statues, which are carved in high relief, consist of a standing Buddha, four flanked bodhisattvas and a pair of *vajrapānis* standing at front. Behind the main statues, carved in high relief, four disciples were added in bas-relief to the background. Although the figures are crowded, the degree of raised relief clearly distinguishes the main statues and the background figures from each other. Huangzezi Niche 28 shows a similar representation, though in this image the two disciples replace the two bodhisattvas next to the central Buddha, and the eightfold celestial assembly occupy the position originally occupied by the four shamans in the stele. Notably, the lower half of the background figures are blocked by the statues in front of them, meaning that only their heads or heads and chests are visible. However, these details do play a significant role in shaping the visual effect of the sculptures: not only does it allow more figures to be added to the assembly and visually indicate a deeper space behind the statues, communicating a crowded yet lively impression to an observer.

The figures in Niches 55 and 56 in Huangzezi follow a similar arrangement, taking the new figural forms in the framework of the artistic styles seen in statuary excavated in the Chengdu area.⁹⁹ Niche 55 (Figure 1. 30) contains three seated Buddhas: the one on the left holds a bowl, the middle one is shown meditating and the right one appears to have been posed in the *dharmacakra-mudrā* (although both hands are destroyed).¹⁰⁰ Niche 56 (Figure 1. 31) contains two seated Buddhas. Each is

⁹⁹ The western side of this boulder was buried until it was recovered during a repair project undertaken in 2005. For more details see Luo Zongyong 羅宗勇 and Wang Jianping 王劍平, “Sichuan Guangyuan Huangzezi Xin faxian de Tangdai shike moya zaoxiang 四川廣元皇澤寺新發現的唐代石刻摩崖造像 [A New Discovery of Tang Rock Carvings in Huangzezi, Guangyuan, Sichuan Province],” *Wenwu* 文物 [Cultural Relics], no.8 (2009): 72-82.

¹⁰⁰ There are some disputes over the iconology of the three Buddhas. Li Jingjie 李靜傑, “Tang Song shiqi sanfo tuxiang leixing fenxi: yi Sichuan, Shanbei shiku sanfo zuhe diaoke wei zhongxin 唐宋時期三佛圖像類型分析:以四川、陝北石窟三佛組合雕刻為中心 [Typology of the Three Buddhas Images in Tang and Song: Focusing on the Carvings of Three Buddhas in Sichuan and

a reflection of the other, with the inside hand lying on the knee and the outside hands in the *abhaya-mudrā*. The composition of niches 55 and 56 are similar and possibly related to Stele No. 5 from 545 CE (Figure 1. 32) and No. 4 (Figure 1. 33) from around the same period that were excavated from Chengdu and are collected in the Chengdu Municipal Cultural Heritage and Archaeology Research Institute.¹⁰¹

Although there are new elements from Northern China, the arrangement of the main statues, attendants and background figures is still similar to the examples from the Southern dynasties.¹⁰²

Of course, this does not mean that there are not many new elements from the north in the rock carvings of this period. For instance, the eightfold celestial assembly placed in the background is generally considered as a northern motif. Their depiction in bas-relief as standing anthropomorphic figures are similar to the guardians on the corridor section of Cave 4 of the Maijishan Grottoes, although there are still debates about whether this example in Maijishan was actually intended to represent the eightfold celestial assembly or if this is just an early proto form of the motif.¹⁰³ It seems that the craftsmen in Northern Sichuan during this period employed this northern-sourced motif within the multi-layered framework for representing Buddhist sculptures that had developed in the Chengdu area during the Southern dynasties. Remarkably, this idiosyncratic form of the assembly of Buddhist statues which emerged from rock carving sites in Northern Sichuan in the early seventh century is full of vitality and is one of the most common forms in the Sichuan area throughout the

Northern Shaanxi Grottoes],” *Gugong xuekan* 故宮學刊 [Journal of Gugong Studies] 4, (2009): 308-341.

¹⁰¹ Sichuan bowuyuan et al., *Sichuan chutu nanchao fojiao zaoxiang*, 65 and 67.

¹⁰² Yagi has suggested that the rounded thighs of the seated Buddhas in Huangzesi Niche 55 are reminiscent of the artistic style of Shandong province during the early Sui, where the legs of the seated Buddhas are shaped with similar curves. Yagi, “Guangyuan Huangzesi chuting zaoxiang kao,” 148-57.

¹⁰³ Tianshui maijishan shiku yishu yanjiusuo 天水麦積山石窟藝術研究所 [Maijishan Caves Art Research Institute, Tianshui], *Zhongguo shiku: Maijishan shiku* 中国石窟·麦積山石窟 [Chinese Grottoes: Maijishan Grottoes] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1998). Mizuno Saya 水野さや, “Shisen shō no Hachibushū zō 四川省の八部衆像[the Eightfold Celestial Assembly in the Sichuan Province],” in *Hachibushū zō no seiritsu to tenkai* 八部衆像の成立と展開 [The Formation and Evolution of the Eightfold Celestial Assembly] (Tōkyō: Chūōkōron bijutsu shuppan, 2017), 67-118.

Tang and into the Song.

Amitābha and Fifty-two Bodhisattvas

A full depiction of Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas is an impressive and complex composition. It consists of a Buddha, usually wears the robe covering both shoulders and with his hands set in the *dharmacakra-mudrā*, seated in the lotus position on a large lotus rising from a pool of water. He is usually flanked by two standing bodhisattvas and fifty small seated bodhisattvas. These small bodhisattvas are placed on small lotuses which either connect to the main stem of the large lotus or rise directly from a pool. The study of this image started with the samples found in the Hexi Corridor and the Central Plain.¹⁰⁴ The two best known examples are the southern mural on the eastern wall of Cave 332 in Mogao Grottoes 莫高窟 which dates to the early Tang, and the rock carvings in Jingshansi Cave 敬善寺洞 carved between 650s and 660s in the Longmen Grottoes.¹⁰⁵ This image had been transmitted to Japan by the end of the seventh century. This is evidenced by mural no. 6 in the kondō in the Hōryū-ji 法隆寺, Nara, which is widely acknowledged as the best-preserved ancient depiction of the Amitābha paradise in Japan.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ The earliest study of the Amitābha and fifty-two Bodhisattvas image was Matsumoto Eiichi's discussion of relevant examples in the Dunhuang Grottoes. Matsumoto Eiichi 松本栄一, "Amidabutsu Jōdo hensō oyobi Kangyō hensō 阿弥陀仏浄土变相及觀經变相," *Tonkō ga no kenkyū: zuzō hen* 燉煌畫の研究: 圖像篇 [A Study of Dunhuang Paintings: Images] (Tōkyō: Tōhō bunka gakuin Tōkyō kenkyūjyo, 1937), 1-44. Wang Huimin 王惠民, "Yifo wushi pusa tu yuanliu kao 一佛五十菩薩圖源流考 [The Origin of the One Buddha and Fifty Bodhisattvas Image]," in *Maijishan shiku yishu wenhua lunwen ji* 麥積山石窟藝術文化論文集 [A Collection of Essays on Art and Culture of Maijishan Grottoes], eds. Zheng Binglin 鄭炳林 and Hua Pingning 花平寧 (Lanzhou: Lanzhou daxue chubanshe, 2004), 529-545. A more detailed research review see Huang Xia 黄夏, "Amidabutsu Gojūnibosatsu zō no kenkyū no genjō 阿弥陀仏五十二菩薩像の研究の現状 [The Research on the Amitābha and Fifty-two Bodhisattvas Image]," in *Bijutsu shiryō toshite yomu Shūjinshūsanbōkantsūroku—shakudoku to kenkyū* 美術史料として読む『集神州三宝感通録』—釈読と研究 [Reading the Collected Records of the Mysterious Stimuli and Responses Related to the Three Jewels in China as the Material of Art History: Interpretation and Research] vol. 10, ed. Hida Romi (Tōkyō: Sumassyu, 2017), 87-110.

¹⁰⁵ See Wang, "Yifo wushi pusa tu yuanliu kao," 529-545.

¹⁰⁶ Hida Romi, "Hōryūji Kondō hekiga to Tonkō daisanbyakusanjunikutsu no Amidabutsu Bosatsugojū zu 法隆寺金堂壁画と敦煌第三三二窟の阿弥陀仏菩薩五十図," in *Shotō Bukkyō*

The Sichuan area has more than 40 extant depictions of Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas, which date to the Tang and Five Dynasties.¹⁰⁷ The two earliest known dated examples of all this kind of the Amitābha image are found in two rock carving sites in Northern Sichuan and can be securely dated to the early seventh century. One is Wolongshan Niche 1 carved on the western side of the boulder (Figure 1. 34). It consists of a niche with a semi-circular inner niche and a rectangular outside frame. The main triad and fifty bodhisattvas fill the inner niche. Two *vajrapānis* flank the entrance to the outer frame. A stele carved in bas-relief into the boulder to the right of the niche. It details the story of the image (Appendix 1), gives a list of patrons and provides a date (634 CE) for when the image beside it was carved.¹⁰⁸ The

bijutsu no kenkyū 初唐仏教美術の研究[A Study of Buddhist Art of the Early Tang] (Tōkyō: Chūōkōron bijutsu shuppan, 2011), 378-385.

¹⁰⁷ Katsuki Gen'inchiro's report on the Wolongshan site in Mianyang has aroused academic interest around this image with the samples in the Sichuan region. Katsuki, Gen'inchiro 勝木言一郎, "Chūgoku ni okeru Amidabutsu sanzō Gojūbosatsu zu no zuzō ni tsuite – Garyūzan Senbutsugan no sakurei shōkai to sono igi 中国における阿彌陀三尊五十菩薩図の図像について—臥竜山千仏巖の作例紹介とその意義 [The form of the Triad in depictions of the Amitābha Buddha and Fifty Bodhisattvas: An Introduction of Qianfoyan of Wolongshan and Its Meaning]," *Bukkyō geijutsu* 仏教芸術 [Ars Buddhica] 214, (1994): 61-73. Okada Ken 岡田健, "Shotōki no Tenpōrin'in Amida zuzō ni tsuite no kenkyū 初唐期の sutra についての研究 [A Study of the Amitābha Buddha with the Dharmacakra-Mudrā during the Early Tang]," *Bijutsu kenkyū* 美術研究 [The Journal of Art Studies] 373, (2000): 159-205. The distribution of for the Amitābha and fifty-two Bodhisattvas see Huang, "Hashoku chiiki ni okeru Amidabutsu Gojūnibosatsu zō," 111-159.

¹⁰⁸ The stele records the tale of how the Wutong Bodhisattva 五通菩薩 at Jitoumosi 雞頭摩寺 [Kukkutārāma Monastery] brought an image of Amitābha and fifty-two Bodhisattvas to the saḥā World and how the image was thereafter transmitted to China. The tale of the image is also recorded in the *Ji Shenzhou sanbao gantonglu* 集神州三寶感通錄 [Collected Records of the Mysterious Stimuli and Responses Related to the Three Jewels in China; T2106; hereafter *Sanbao lu*] which was compiled by Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667 CE) in 664 CE and the *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 [Forest of Pearls in the Garden of the Dharma; T2122], which was compiled by a monk named Daoshi 道世 (d. 683 CE) in 668 CE. 《集神州三寶感通錄》卷 2: “阿彌陀佛五十菩薩像者。西域天竺之瑞像也。相傳云，昔天竺雞頭摩寺五通菩薩，往安樂界請阿彌陀佛，娑婆眾生願生淨土，無佛形像願力莫由，請垂降許。佛言，汝且前去，尋當現彼，及菩薩還，其像已至，一佛五十菩薩各坐蓮花在樹葉上。菩薩取葉所在圖寫流布遠近。漢明感夢使往祈法，便獲迦葉摩騰等至洛陽。後騰姊子作沙門，持此瑞像方達此國，所在圖之，未幾齋像西返，而此圖傳不甚流廣。魏晉已來年載久遠，又經滅法經像湮除，此之瑞迹殆將不見。隋文開教，有沙門明憲，從高齊道長法師所得此一本，說其本起與傳符焉，是以圖寫流布遍於宇內。時有北齊畫工曹仲達者，本曹國人，善於丹青，妙盡梵迹傳模西瑞，京邑所推。故今寺壁正陽皆其真範。” T2106, 421a17-b3. 《法苑珠林》卷 15:

second is Bishuisi Niche 19 (Figure 1. 35). This niche can be securely dated to the early Zhenguan reign, as its image strongly resembles Wolongshan Niche 1.

It is unclear where this form of Amitābha image originated. Akira Miyaji and Amy McNair argue that the prototype can be found in fourth-sixth centuries statues from Sārnāth during or in Gandharan artworks such as the Mohammed Nari Stele which is attributed to the fourth century.¹⁰⁹ However, other scholars have pointed out that, although there are a considerable number of similar elements, there are also many key differences between the Chinese example and the central or northwestern Indian “prototype”.¹¹⁰ Due to the lack of a clear prototype, Okada Ken argues that the motif is a Chinese invention on the back of a survey of Southern and Central Asian sources for crucial elements of this motif.¹¹¹ Therefore, he identifies the image of “Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas” as being formed by the combination of several aspects in China. The identification of a Buddha called Amitābha, the concept of a pure land, and presence of the seated bodhisattvas on the multiple lotuses.

Okada has two key findings which support his conclusions. First, is the presence of an image of the Buddha with the *dharmacakra-mudrā* flanked by two standing bodhisattvas among the clay tablets excavated in Chang’an from sites which date to the late Sui and early Tang dynasties (Figure 1. 36). Such clay tablets, which were portable, malleable and would have been mass produced, formed an ideal medium for

“隋時有阿彌陀佛五十菩薩像者，西域天竺之瑞像也……時有北齊畫工曹仲達者，本是曹國人，善於丹青妙盡梵迹。傳摸西瑞，京邑所推。故今寺壁正陽皆其真範云(右一驗出西域傳記)。” T2122, 401a18-b5. A textual comparison see Okada, “Shotōki no Tenpōrin`in Amida zuzō ni tsuite no kenkyū,” 169.

¹⁰⁹ Miyaji Akira 宮治昭, *Bukkyō bijutsu no Ikonorōji: Indo kara Nihon made* 仏教美術のイコノロジー—インドから日本まで [Iconology of Buddhist Art - From India to Japan] (Tōkyō: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1999), 58. McNair, “Amitābha and Fifty-two bodhisattvas,” in *Donors of Longmen: Faith, Politics, and Patronage in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Sculpture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i press, 2007), 104-107.

¹¹⁰ For example, all the figures surrounding the Sārnāth example are standing or seated Buddhas rather than bodhisattvas. The assistant figures in the Gandharan stele include Bodhisattvas, Buddhas, donors, and so on, but most of the “Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas” only feature the bodhisattvas. Huang, “Amidabutsu Gojūnibosatsu zō no kenkyū no genjō,” 87-110.

¹¹¹ Okada Ken, “Shotōki no Tenpōrin`in Amida zuzō ni tsuite no kenkyū,” 187-205.

the transmission and proliferation of Buddhist images in the medieval period.¹¹² Thus, we cannot ignore its role in the transition of this triad image, which later came to be the central focus of the “Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas image” in the earliest works we can observe. Second, Okada assumes that Indian elements were not simply mechanically copied after they arrived in China, but were also recombined with other elements, or the imported images possibly acquired new meanings. This relatively form of flexible reproduction is a key characteristic of art production in medieval China.¹¹³ In the mural paintings in Dunhuang, instead of mechanically enlarging the identical image on the walls, the craftsmen usually created the complex scenes from sections sketched discretely and kept in drawing manuals (*fenben* 粉本).¹¹⁴ Another sample is a gilt-bronze plaque from seventh century Tōshōdai ji, Nara. This plaque was created using three modular components, the triad of Maitreya Buddha, six standing Buddhas and a rounded canopy.¹¹⁵

The crucial question when and where the composition seen in the image of “Amitābha and fifty-two Bodhisattvas” first occurred. Huang suggests that the image

¹¹² The clay tablets were certainly not created to provide samples of the Buddhist images for craftsman to copy. Their function extended far beyond providing patterns for craftsmen. However, as it is easy to carry and can be remodeled using existing works, it was easy to use as a medium for spreading images. More discussion of the clay tables’ functions can be seen in Hida Romi 肥田路美, “Seian shutsudo Senbutsu no seisaku jijō to igi 西安出土塼仏の制作事情と意義 [The Making and Meaning of the Clayed Buddha excavated from Xi’an],” in *Shotō Bukkyō bijutsu no kenkyū* 初唐仏教美術の研究 [A Study of Buddhist Art of the Early Tang] (Tōkyō: Chūōkōron bijutsu shuppan, 2011), 55-90. Hsueh-man Shen, “Mold-made Images in the Interconnected Buddhist World of East Asia,” in *Authentic Replicas: Buddhist Art in Medieval China*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2019), 123-136.

¹¹³ A pioneering and comprehensive study on this issue is Lothar Ledderose attributes the productivity of Chinese artists to “production systems to assemble objects from standardized parts” in modules. Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University, 2000), 1.

¹¹⁴ Sarah E. Fraser considers the strategy of separating scenes into discrete sections to allow the artist to make the murals suitable to the caves or temples with various sizes and shapes. Sarah E. Fraser, “The Cognitive Practices of the Wall Painter,” in *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618-960* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 48-108.

¹¹⁵ Hsueh-man Shen, “Mold-made Images in the Interconnected Buddhist World of East Asia,” 128-130.

originated in the Northern Qi, specifically in the region of modern-day Henan.¹¹⁶ This view is of course related to the devotional inscription of Wolongshan Niche 1, in which the image was recorded as having been introduced from Yuzhou 豫州, that is Henan, to Jinshi 京師, that is Xi'an, in the Sui dynasty. It is also related to the scene of Pure Land in Xiaotangshan Cave 1 and 2 (Figure 1. 37 and Figure 1. 38), which is dated stylistically to the middle of the sixth century. This depiction contains the characteristic combination of a Buddha and multiple seated bodhisattvas. The lower section of this carving also contains a depiction of a water pond that could be the prototype of the lotus pond in the image of Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas at the Wolongshan site.

I agree with Huang that many elements in the image of “Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas” can be traced back to Northern China, and the most likely place where this image originally appeared was in Northern Qi. However, considering that the earliest known example was found in Northern Sichuan, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that its final composition occurred in Northern Sichuan. The examples in Wolongshan and Bishuisi, predate the depictions of this image in Dunhuang grottoes and Longmen grottoes by several decades. The long-stemmed form of the lotus supporting Amitābha in these images seems to be reminiscent of the full vase motif which is relatively common in Buddhist statues from Chengdu during Southern dynasties.¹¹⁷ It is also possible that these two depictions in the Mianyang area are the original prototypes.

The *Diamond Sutra* and Its Tale

The treatment of the *Diamond Sutra* in Bishuisi provides us with a clear insight into the way in which religious texts as well as images came to be used as auspicious motifs in Sichuan during the early seventh century. At the Bishuisi site in Mianyang,

¹¹⁶ A more systematic discussion of this assumption can be found in Huang, “Amidabutsu Gojūnibosatsu zō no kenkyū no genjō,” 87-110.

¹¹⁷ There is a clear example of this form, the full vase in two standing Bodhisattvas of Southern dynasties from Wanfosi. Sichuan bowuyuan, *Sichuan Nanchao fojiao zaixiang*, 36-1.

there is a rectangular niche (Niche 10) inscribed with a Buddhist sutra on the surface of a protruding rock face (Figure 1. 40), this niche shares an outer frame with Niche 19 which has already been discussed above.¹¹⁸ The lower section of this niche has fallen away. The extant section is 1.20 meters tall, 2.73 meters wide and 0.25 meters deep. The text was originally arranged into 94 columns, each of which was 54 characters long. The extent of the damage to the peripheral sections of the niche is such that only 89 of the columns still contain legible characters. The maximum number of characters still legible in a single column is 49. The extant text is a transcription of the *Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā* 金剛般若波羅蜜多經 (referred to as the *Diamond Sutra* 金剛經; T235), following the translation of Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344-413 CE). Although there is a section 64 characters long missing from the seventy fourth column and 14 variants in wording or compound particles, the remaining text is identical to the extant version from the *Taishō Tripitaka*.¹¹⁹ At the end of the last column, there is a colophon which states that the carving was completed on the eighth day of the fourth month. This date was likely chosen deliberately because it is the birthday of the Śākyamuni Buddha.

¹¹⁸ Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Mianyang shi wenwuju, “Mianyang Bishuisi moyā zaoxiang,” in *Mianyang kanku*, 1-30.

¹¹⁹ 《金剛般若波羅蜜經》：“爾時，慧命須菩提白佛言，世尊！頗有眾生於未來世，聞說是法生信心不？佛言，須菩提！彼非眾生，非不眾生。何以故？須菩提！眾生、眾生者，如來說非眾生，是名眾生。” T235, 751c16-19. These sixty characters were also called the “Mingsi ji 冥司偈 [the Gāthā of the Underworld Bureau]”. They were not part of the original translation of Kumārajīva, but was added in the Tang dynasty due to a miraculous tale related to Monk Lingyou 靈幽. Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2003), 95-98. Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮, “Kan’yaku butten denshōjō no ichimondai: Kongo hannya kyā no meishi ge nit suite 漢訳仏典伝承上の一問題---金剛般若經の冥司 [A question in the Circumstances of Chinese Buddhist Scripture: the Underworld Bureau in the *Diamond Sutra*],” in *Chūgoku bukkyō shi kenkyū* 中国仏教史研究 [A Study of Chinese Buddhist History], vol. 2 (Tōkyō: Daitō shuppansha, 1984), 85-98. Gu Weikang 顧偉康, “Guanyu *Jingang jing yu minsiji* 關於《金剛經》與‘冥司偈’ [Notes on the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Gāthā of the Underworld Bureau*],” *Minnan foxue* 閩南佛學 [Buddhist Studies of Minnan] 5, (2007): 372-79. Chiew Hui Ho, “The Additional Gāthā from the Underworld Bureau,” in *Diamond Sutra Narratives: Textual Production and Lay Religiosity in Medieval China* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 234-244.

The practice of carving sutras into rock was prevalent in Northern China from the mid-sixth century onwards.¹²⁰ It occurred across a variety of formats, with sutras being carved into cliffs, caves, steles, or slabs.¹²¹ Based on extant materials and historical records, this practice was introduced to Sichuan in the early Tang dynasty. In addition to the example in Bishuisi, stone sutras have also been found in Sichuan carved into stone slabs and steles in an archaeological context in Lingyan Mountain 靈巖山 in Guanxian 灌縣, Dujiangyan 都江堰.¹²² The stone sutras in Guanxian were all carved into stone slabs, which were then stacked in two caves in Lingyan Mountain. A similar practice can also be seen in Yunjinsi 雲居寺 in Fangshan 房山, Beijing, where sutras were carved on stone tablets and placed in caves in the mountains.¹²³ However, the carvings in Bishuisi in Mianyang do not appear to have

¹²⁰ “Buddhist Stone Inscriptions in Northern China,” Heidelberg Akademie der Wissenschaften, June 16, 2012, accessed March 7, 2019. https://www.haw.uni-heidelberg.de/forschung/forschungsstellen/buddhistische_inschriften.en.html.

¹²¹ More details see Lothar Ledderose, “Buddhist Stone Sutras in Shandong,” in *Buddhist Stone Sutras in China: Shandong Province I 中國佛教石經:山東省(第一卷)*, eds. Shandong sheng shike yishu bowuguan 山東省石刻藝術博物館 [Shandong stone carving art museum] and Haidebao kexueyuan 海德堡科學院 [Heidelberg Akademie der Wissenschaften] (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag; Hangzhou: China Academy of Art, 2013), 19-47.

¹²² Hu Wenhe argues that the Monk Daoyin 道因 (586-658 CE), who had escaped from Shandong to Chengdu at the end of Sui initiated the practice of rock carving of Buddhist sutras in Guanghuansi 光化寺 on Pengmen Mountain 彭門山 in the Zhenguan area, which is nowadays Lingyan Mountain. Hu Wenhe 胡文和, “Guanxian Lingyanshan Tangdai shijing 灌縣靈岩山唐代石經 [Stone Scripture of the Tang in Lingyanshan, Guanxian],” *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Culture Relics], no.2 (1984): 33-35. The biography of Daoyin see the *Datang gu fanjing dade yizhou Duobaosi Daoyin fashi bei* 大唐故翻經大德益州多寶寺道因法師碑 [The Stele of the Former Translator, Master Daoyin of Duobao Temple in Yizhou of the Great Tang Dynasty] carved in 663 CE held by the Beilin 碑林 Museum, Xi’an (whose rubbing of Song dynasty is held in the Palace Museum, Beijing, see <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/impres/228474.html>) and “Tang Yizhou Duobaosi Daoyin zhuan 唐益州多寶寺道因傳 [Biography of Daoyin in Duobao Temple, Yizhou, Tang]” in the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 [Biographies of Eminent Monks compiled under the Song] (T2061, 716c25-26). Also, Sonya S. Lee mentioned another record by Wang Bo 王勃 (r. 656-676 CE) that mentions a sutra carving in a monastery in the Santai 三台, which is also in Mianyang. Sonya S. Lee, “The Buddha’s Words at Cave Temples,” *Ars Orientalis* 36, (2009): 36-76.

¹²³ More discussion of the Yunjusi see Tsukamoto Zenryū 塚本善隆, “Hōzan Ungoji to Sekkei Daizōkyō 房山雲居寺と石經大藏經 [Yunju Monastery at Fangshan and the Tripitaka in stone scriptures],” in *Tsukamoto Zenryū chosakushū 5: Chūgoku kinsei Bukkyōshi no shomondai* 塚本善隆著作集 5: 中国近世仏教史の諸問題 [Collection of Tsukamoto Zenryū’s Works 5: Issues of Buddhist

been part of this practice. Instead, the site seems to be intended to create a locus for ritual activity. In this way it is more similar to the Bahuisi, which dates to the Sui dynasty.¹²⁴ The carvings at this site are carved on a boulder which has a parallelogram plan. The boulder is encased in a single-layer pagoda. Buddhist scriptures in Bishuisi are inscribed and displayed in prominent location within rectangular niches, indicating their function as sacred objects of worship. They are open to viewers and intended to be seen.

It should be noted that Niche 10 and 19 (Figure 1. 41) share the same outer frame. They are also flanked by Niches 7 and 28, which are of a similar size and contain matched images. These four niches formed the main project on the western surface of a protruding rock face. There is no indate connections between the *Diamond Sutra* (carved in Niche 10) and the Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas' image (depicted in Niche 19). Their pairing in Bishuisi is therefore quite strange. It is perhaps due to the fact that they had both developed into perceived sources of supernatural power. As the discussed in the above section, the Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas' image is a typical "Efficacious Images 靈像" that is recorded as having originally come from a sacred realm in the miraculous tale. The *Diamond Sutra* is one of the most well recorded of the "Auspicious Sutras 瑞經" in Medieval China. A similar juxtaposition can be traced to their tales as found in the *Sanbao lu*. They are recorded under two different categories, "Auspicious Sutras" and "Efficacious Images" respectively, which provides proof for the sacredness of the Buddha and Buddhist teachings, two of the three treasures in Buddhism.¹²⁵

History in Modern China] (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1975), 291-610; Lothar Ledderose, "Ein Programm für den Weltuntergang: Die Steinerne Bibliothek eines Kisters bei Peking," *Heidelberger Jahrb cheß6* (1992): 15-33; Ledderose, "Changing the Audience: A Pivotal Period in the Great Sutra Carving Project at Cloud Dwelling Monastery near Beijing," in *Religion and Chinese Society, vol. 1: Ancient and Medieval China*, ed. John Lagerwey (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press; Paris: cole française d'Extrême-Orient, 2004), 385-409.

¹²⁴ Zhao, "Hebei sheng Quyang xian Bahuisi shijing kan," 12-35.

¹²⁵ 《集神州三寶感通錄》卷 1: "初明舍利表塔，次列靈像垂降，後引聖寺、瑞經、神僧。" T2106, 404a17-18.

The scholarship related to the donors of the rock carvings of Bishusi provides some supports to this assumption. He Zhiguo and Li Qitang believe that Bishuisi is the Shuigeyuan 水閣院 recorded in the *Mianyang xianzhi* 緜陽縣志 [Local Gazetteer of Mianyang Country] printed in 1932 (Appendix 2).¹²⁶ A restoration inscription from 1107 CE, states that Song Wenzhen 宋文軫 and his two brothers visited the Shuigeyuan built by Li Tongshu 李同叔 and saw the exquisite sutras and statues on the northern cliff 北岩 which had been carved using money donated by Linghu Wengui 令狐文軌 in the Zhenguan reign. As the rock carving had lost some of its brilliance during the Huichang 會昌 reign, they decided to donate funds towards repainting to so as to make it brilliant once more.

Yu Chun suggests that the Linghu Wengui referred to in the inscription may be an incorrect rendering of “Linghu Yuangui 令狐元軌”, who is associated with a miraculous story in Daoxuan’s *Sanbao lu* (T2106).¹²⁷ The tale mentions that Lihun Yuangui was the commander of Longzhou 隆州 (that is Mianyang) and that in the fifth year of the Zhenguan reign he ordered some scriptures to be copied and then took them back with him to his home in Qizhou 岐州. One day his house burnt down and only the sutra box survived the fire. While the Daoist sutras in the box were destroyed, the Buddhist texts, which included a copy of the *Diamond Sutra*, survived. It is highlighted that the preface to the *Diamond Sutra* which had been written by a local official in a beautiful calligraphic style but who had not undergone ritual

¹²⁶ He Zhiguo 何志國 and Li Qitang 李其堂, “Mianyang Bishuisi moya zaoxiang 綿陽碧水寺摩崖造像 [Bishuisi Cliff Sculptures in Mianyang],” *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Culture Relics], no.3 (1987): 36-38.

¹²⁷ 《集神州三寶感通錄》卷3: “貞觀五年。有隆州巴西縣令令狐元軌者，信敬佛法，欲寫法華金剛般若涅槃等，無由自檢，憑彼土抗禪師檢校。抗乃為在寺如法潔淨，寫了下帙。還岐州莊所經留在莊，并老子五千文同在一處，忽為外火延燒。堂是草覆一時灰蕩。軌于時任憑翊，令家人相命撥灰取金銅經軸。既撥外灰，其內諸經宛然如故。黃色不改，唯箱帙成灰。又覓老子便從火化。乃收取諸經。鄉村嗟異。其金剛般若經一卷題字焦黑。訪問所由，乃初題經時，有州官能書，其人行急，不獲潔淨直爾立題。由是被焚。其人見在，瑞經亦存。京師西明寺主神察目驗說之。” T2106, 428a25-b8. Yu Chun 于春, and Wang Ting 王婷, “Sichuan Mianyangshi Bishuisi moya zaoxiang de xiangguan wenti 四川綿陽市碧水寺摩崖造像的相關問題 [Issues Relating to the Bishuisi Cliff Sculptures in Mianyang, Sichuan],” *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Culture Relics], no.3 (2009): 73-79.

purification before copying it, was also burnt to black, while the text the monk had copied was well-preserved.

The name “Linghu Wengui” is mentioned three times in the official historical literature. Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠 (1081-1129 CE) recorded a devotional inscription in 641 CE attributed to Linghu Wengui in the *Jinshilu* 金石錄 [Record of Stone and Metal Inscriptions], the earliest epigraph book in China.¹²⁸ The *Yuanhe xing zuan* 元和姓纂 [Register of the Great Families from the Yuanhe Reign (806-820 CE)], edited by Lin Bao 林寶 in 812 CE, mentioned that Linghu Wengui belonged to the Linghu family from Shazhou 沙洲 (present day Dunhuang).¹²⁹ An epitaph of the great-granddaughter of Linghu Wengui, which clearly traced the Linghu clan’s relocation from Shazhou to Qizhou during the Tang dynasty, corroborates this information.¹³⁰ As Linghu Wengui’s home, where the miraculous tale happened, was also in Qizhou, it is reasonable to assume that the two are the same person. Considering that the name of “Linghu Wengui” appears multiple sources, such as inscriptions, epitaphs, and history books, whilst the records of “Linghu Yuanguai” can all be traced to Daoxuan’s *Sanbao lu*, I prefer to use Linghu Wengui as the correct form of his name, and ascribe Linghu Yuanguai as the result of a transcription error.

There are two rock carvings sites recorded in the gazetteer as belonging to separate temples, Kaiyuansi and Bishuisi, both of which are present in all three extant

¹²⁸ Zhao Mingcheng records that “a devotional inscription of Linghu Wengui, which was written with regular script by Xue Chuntuo 薛纯陀 (active in the Zhenguan reign, 627-649 CE) in the sixth month, the fourteenth year of Zhenguan reign (640 CE).” Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠, *Songben Jinshi lu* 宋本金石錄 [Song Version of the *Jinshi lu*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1991), 68.

¹²⁹ Lin Bao 林寶, *Yuanhe xing zuan (fu:si xiao ji)* 元和姓纂 (附: 四校記) [Clan Genealogies of the Yuanhe Period (Appendix: Notes of Fourth Edition)], ed. Cen Zhongmian 岑仲勉 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), 632-633. The Linghu family in Dunhuang was known as an important patron of Dunhuang scripture writing based on documents taken from the library cave, which coincides with a preference for Buddhism and the sponsorship of scripture writing as narrated in the story of Linghu Wengui.

¹³⁰ Sun Lanfeng 孫蘭風 and Hu Haifan 胡海帆, *Sui Tang Wudai muzhi huibian: Beijing daxue di yi ce* 隋唐五代墓誌匯編: 北京大學第一冊 [Epitaphs of the Sui, Tang and Five Dynasties: Peking University, I] (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1992), 67.

editions of the Mianyang local gazetteer.¹³¹ Both sites are recorded as being located one *li* north of the city, with Kaiyuansi been located at the foot of Tianchi Mountain 天池山 and Bishuisi on the Bishui cliff 碧水崖. The inscription which recorded Linghu Wengui's donation is included under the entry for "Kaiyuansi" in each edition. The most detailed description comes from the 1932 gazetteer which records that the rock carvings in Bishuisi were most likely carved at the same time as the scriptures and sculptures in Kaiyuansi. Obviously, the editors of this edition thought that there were two rock carvings that could be seen simultaneously. Therefore, it cannot link Linghu Wengui definitively to the carvings at Bishuisi based on the historical evidence presented in the gazetteers.

This is not to say, however, that the miraculous tale of Linghu Wengui has no relevance to the stone scriptures of Bishuisi. In addition to the tale of Linghu Wengui, there are a number of miraculous tales related to the *Diamond Sutra* in the early seventh century. The *Jin'gang bore jing lingyan ji* 金剛般若經靈驗記 [A Record of the Proven Efficacy of the *Diamond Sutra*; hereafter *Lingyan ji*] compiled by Xiao Yu 蕭瑀 (575-648 CE) during the Zhenguan reign was the first collection of the miraculous signs that relate to a single Buddhist scripture.¹³² In fact, whether or not the current *Diamond Sutra* in Bishuisi was made by Linghu Wengui, the tale indicates that the *Diamond Sutra* in Bishuisi is linked to the cult of the "Ruijing 瑞經 [Auspicious Sutra]". The term "Auspicious Sutra" refers to the cult of some sutras which their believers considered to be not only the recording of the Buddha's words, but also texts full of supernatural power that were able to inspire or manifest various miracles.¹³³ From this point of view, the function of the carving at Bishuisi may be

¹³¹ The related depiction of the Kaiyuansi and the Bishuisi are recorded in the *Sichuan tong zhi* 四川通志 [Local Gazetteers of the Sichuan area] printed in 1816 (vol. 204, 6706), the *Zhili Mianzhou zhi* 直隸綿州志 [Zhili Mianzhou Gazetteer] printed in 1873 (vol. 55, 1214) and the *Mianyang xianzhi* 緜陽縣志 [Gazetteer of Mianyang County] printed in 1932 (vol. 2, 389) (Appendix 2) from the China Local Gazetteers Database 中國方志庫.

¹³² For further discussion of the *Lingyan ji*, see Chiew Hui Ho, "Early Collections of *Diamond Sutra* Tales," in *Diamond Sutra Narratives*, 44-45.

¹³³ The term of the "Ruijing 瑞經" was used to describe the Buddhist sutras in the miracle tales in T2106, 404a17-18. More discussion of Buddhist sutras depicted in the miracle tales see Robert F.

intended as Buddhist treasures intended to perform the functions that Daoxuan articulates at the beginning of the *Sanbao lu* that is: “to evidence the miracles in the past, to manifest them in the future, to reveal them for monks or laymen, and to raise the faith from obsession.”¹³⁴

Last but not least, the Mianyang area played a significant role in the cult of the *Diamond Sutra* as an “Auspicious Sutra”. The *Lingyan ji* compiled by Xiao Yu in the early Tang has been lost. The most useful text for modern research into the cult of the *Diamond Sutra* is the *Jin’gang bore jing jiyuan ji* 金剛般若經集驗記 [A Record of Collected Proofs of the *Diamond Sutra*], written by Meng Xianzhong 孟獻忠 in 718 CE.¹³⁵ Interestingly, Meng Xianzhong 孟獻忠 refers to himself as the Adjutant of Zizhou 梓州司馬 (present day Zitong, near to Mianyang). According to the book’s preface, Meng compiled the miraculous stories from books he read and from tales he heard in daily life. As a collection of the tales relating to the *Diamond Sutra* that circulated in the Mianyang area this naturally gives a relatively geographically restricted picture of the cult. Even if the stone scripture at Bishuisi was not sponsored by Linghu Wengui, it should be taken a symptom of the enthusiasm for the *Diamond Sutra* in this area during the first half of the Tang. In this sense, it should be regarded as a crucial source for information with regards to the cult of the *Diamond Sutra* as the “Auspicious Sutra” and an important contribution to discussion on the collective imagination of the *Diamond Sutra* in Medieval China.

This section concentrates on the image carved in Buddhist grottoes in the early seventh century in Northern China. It is herein argued that the main formula of the

Campany, “Notes in the Devotional Uses and Symbolic Functions of Sūtra Texts as Depicted in Early Chinese Buddhist Miracle Tales and Hagiographies,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14, no.1 (1991): 28–72. Robert F. Campany, “Miracle Tales as Scripture Reception: A Case Study Involving the *Lotus Sutra* in China, 370–750 CE,” *Early Medieval China* 24, (2018): 24–52.

¹³⁴ 《集神州三寶感通錄》卷 1: “或見於既往，或顯於將來，昭彰於道俗，生信於迷悟。” T2106, 404a14-15.

¹³⁵ For a full translation of this book: Chiew Hui Ho, “A Record of Collected Proofs of the Efficacy of the *Diamond Sutra*: *Jin’gang bore jing jiyuan ji* 金剛般若經集驗記 Composed by Meng Xianzhong 孟獻忠, Adjutant of Zizhou 梓州司馬,” in *Diamond Sutra Narratives*, 297–393.

image, especially the arrangement of Buddhist assembly, recalls the sculptural art convention of the Southern Dynasties around the Chengdu area. However, there are also many contents and images that were introduced from or affected by Northern China, which include the Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas and carved scriptures of the *Diamond Sutra*. Interestingly, both of these new elements were popular in the Mianyang area and were related to the miraculous tales. This will be further discussed at the end of this chapter.

4. The Introduction of Collective Patronage

Devotional inscriptions preserved at these rock-cut sites in Northern Sichuan provide crucial evidence for reconstructing the social context behind the formation of these sites. This section concentrates on collective patronage and charitable organizations (*yiyi* 邑義) to show how they were introduced into Northern Sichuan and supported site construction in this region during the early Tang.

Buddhist Associations before the Tang dynasty

The concept of collective patronage arose from the idea of cultivating a “*field of merit* (福田, *puṇya-kṣetra*)” for all people. In the *Xiangfa jueyi jing* 像法決疑經 [Sutra of Resolving Doubts Concerning the Semblance Dharma; T2870], one of the Chinese apocrypha which was popular in the sixth century,¹³⁶ the practice of

¹³⁶ This scripture has long been considered to be apocryphal. Lai argues it was probably written between 517 CE and 520 CE in Luoyang, whose content contains Buddhist tradition of Liangzhou and some translations of Kumarajiva. Whalen W. Lai, “Dating the Hsiang-fa Chueh-i Ching (像法決疑經),” *Ōtani daigaku shinshū sōgō kenkyūsho kenkyū kiyō* 大谷大学真宗総合研究所研究紀要 [Annual memoirs of Otani University Shin Buddhist Comprehensive Research Institute], no.4 (1987): 61-91. It should be noted that this apocryphal text would have been widely circulated in Medieval China. For instance, Kamitsuka Yoshiko has pointed out its impacts in the *Taishang yichen haikong zhizang jing* 太上一乘海空智藏經 [Scripture of the Perfected of Sealike Emptiness, Storehouse of Wisdom], a Daoist canon compiled around the 660 CE. Kamitsuka Yoshiko 神塚淑子, “*Kaikū chizō kyō maki jū Shin-ki-hin* ko kō: Dōkyō kyōten to Chūgoku senjutsu butten 『海空智藏經』卷十「普記品」小考: 道教經典と中国撰述仏典 [A Study of *Puji Pin* in *Haikong Zhizang Jing*: Daoist Scriptures and Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha],” in *Dōkyō kyōten no keisei to bukkyō* 道教經典の形成と仏教 [Formation of Daoist Scriptures and Buddhism] (Nagoya: University of Nagoya Press, 2017),

monarch-patronage was derided as being of limited religious benefit.¹³⁷ The best way to cultivate a “field of merit,” this text argues, is to gather together all the common people from a single place and encourage a collective donation, no matter their wealth, prestige or religious roles.¹³⁸ This concept can be traced back to early Buddhist monuments, such as the Sanchi stupa or the monastic rock-cut chapel at Karla, which were constructed between 100 BCE-100 CE in India. Since they were constructed from gifts and donations given by the common man rather than through royal decree, Vidya Dehejia refers to these structures as impressive monuments to the empowerment of the common man.¹³⁹

During the Northern and Southern Dynasties, collective patronage was prevalent in Northern China through charitable organizations called *yi* 義 or *yiyi* 邑義. The leader of a *yiyi* was not necessarily a monk or a nun from the sangha but could also be an influential secular person. The members sometimes, but not necessarily, shared kinship, residence or occupation. The size of a *yiyi* could vary from tens to thousands of members. According to Wong, the earliest record for the existence of a Buddhist association called *yi* or *yiyi* is found at Yungang Grottoes but that the practice then continued at the Longmen Grottoes especially during the last two decades of the fifth century.¹⁴⁰ In the sixth century, such grassroots voluntary organizations mushroomed throughout the north, supporting the production of stelae and rock-cut sites of all shapes and sizes, in locations from ranging from regional capitals to the depths of the

273-290.

¹³⁷ 《像法決疑經》：“獨行布施其福甚少。” T2870, 1336b7-8.

¹³⁸ 《像法決疑經》：“不如復有眾人眾，不同貧富貴賤。若道若俗，共相勸他各出少財聚集一處。” T2870, 1336b3-5. See Liu Shu-fen 劉淑芬, “香火因緣: 北朝的佛教結社 [Meeting of Merit: Buddhist Devotional Societies of the Northern Dynasties],” in *Zhongjiaoshi xinlun: jiceng shehui fenci* 中國史新論: 基層社會分冊 [New Perspectives on Chinese History: Local Communities], ed. Huang Kuanzhong 黃寬重 (Taipei: Linking Publishing Company, 2009), 219-272.

¹³⁹ Vidya Dehejia, “The Collective and Popular Basis of Early Buddhist Patronage: Sacred Monuments, 100 BC-AD 250,” in *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*, ed. Barbara Stoler Miller (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 35.

¹⁴⁰ Dorothy C. Wong, *Chinese Steles: Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Use of a Symbolic Form* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i, 2004), 52.

countryside.¹⁴¹ The verse at the end of the inscription, “carving the images for all the sentient beings”, should be understood as a part of the concept of “field of merit” rather than a genuine or formalized wish.

However, the phenomenon of collective patronage does not appear to have been present in Southern China during this period.¹⁴² Buddhist sculptures and stelae in Southern China, most of which are from the Sichuan region, were donated either by individuals or by a small group of people from a single family, or by the sangha. Buddhist devotional associations in Southern China were formed of, and for, the social elite, including monks, scholars and the aristocracy. The most famous example of such a Buddhist social association is that of the Monk Lushan Huiyuan 廬山慧遠 (334-416 CE) who along with his followers took a collective vow in front of an image of Amitābha to seek rebirth in the west 西方 in the year 402 CE.¹⁴³ Regardless of whether or not this kind of Buddhist association engaged with the laity, this organization primarily concentrated on doctrinal teachings and theological practices.¹⁴⁴ There is no indication that they engaged in the joint sponsorship of image making or other social welfare activities.

¹⁴¹ Hao Chunwen 郝春文, “Dongjin nanbeichao shiqi de fojiao jieshe 東晉南北朝時期的佛教結社 [Buddhist Association in East Jin Dynasty and Northern and Southern Dynasties],” *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 [History Research], no.1(1992): 90–105. Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, translated by Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia Univ Press, 1995), 261-263.

¹⁴² Liu Shufen 劉淑芬, “Cong zaoxiangBeikan Nanbeichao de jige mianxiang: Shixiang, yiyi he zhongguo zhuanshu jingdian 從造像碑看南北朝佛教的幾個面向:石像、義邑和中國撰述經典 [Facets of Chinese Buddhism during the Southern and Northern Dynasties as Seen in Statuary Stele Inscriptions],” in *Zhongguoshi xinlun: zongjiaoshi fence* 中國史新論:宗教史分冊 [New Perspectives on Chinese History: History of Religions], ed. Lin Fu-shih 林富士 (Taipei: Linking Publishing Company, 2011), 217-273.

¹⁴³ The recording of this assembly in the biography of Lushan Huiyuan in the *Gao seng zhuan* 高僧傳 (T2059, 357-361) has long been considered as evidence for his reputation as the founder of the Pure Land movement. Yet Charles B. Jones challenges the extent to which Huiyuan might be considered a “Pure Land Buddhist” by examining his correspondence with Kumārajīva about *Nianfo* 念佛 practice. See Charles B. Jones, “Was Lushan Huiyuan a Pure Land Buddhist? Evidence from His Correspondence with Kumārajīva About Nianfo Practice,” *Zhonghua foxue xuebao* 中華佛學學報 [Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal] 21, (2008): 175–191.

¹⁴⁴ See Huang Huaide 黃懷德, “Dongjin Nanchao de fohui 東晉南朝的佛會 Buddhist

Collective Patronage of Local Officials

Dianjiangtai demonstrates the practice of collective patronage amongst provincial officials (Figure 1. 42). There are 21 niches and 15 inscriptions left at this boulder site. Most of the donors were either civil or military officials and their family members that lived in Yizhou 翼州 and gathered to carve Buddhist images on this rock during the last four lunar months of 631 CE. The crucial inscriptions associated with collective patronage are adjacent to Niches 1 and 6 (Figure 1. 43 and Figure 1. 44), the earliest images at the site. They were completed on the fifth day of the ninth lunar month (October 26, 630 CE). They contain carvings of Śākyamuni Buddha and Maitreya Buddha, respectively. Their devotional inscriptions are almost identical, although the inscription associated with Niche 6 adds “梓州前州行參軍韓義展 the Former Acting Military Consultant of Zizhou, Han Yizhan” to the supporting sponsors.¹⁴⁵

The inscription for Niche 1 reads as follows:

On the fifth day, a *dingchou* day, of the ninth month, a *guihai* month, in the fourth year of the *zhenguan* reign of the Great Tang, a *gengyin* year, the major sponsor, the Commissioner-with-special-power of Various Military Affairs in Yizhou, the Prefect of Yizhou, and the Superior Generalissimo, Li Xuansi, and his acting deputy, Zhang Zhongping, made two niches of Śākyamuni Buddha and Maitreya Buddha. The supporting sponsors include the Administrative Supervisor, Chang Quanzhou, the Administrator of the Provisions, Li Dechao, the Acting Administrator of the Residence, Wang Jizha, the Acting Administrator, Liu Shaoyue, the Magistrate of Yizhen country, Fan Xiaotong, his assistant Feng Shicai, the Magistrate of Yishui country, Xi Yijing, his assistant Yang Heluan, the Magistrate of Zuofeng country, Liu Baodao, his assistant Chang Baikuan, the General of Ruhe Troop, Song Wei, the Adjunct Right General, Wang Junxiang, the Adjunct Commander of Shichong Garrison, Zheng

Association in Eastern Jin and Southern Dynasties,” in *Han Tang minjian jieshe yanjiu* 漢唐民間結社研究 [A Study of Social Association from Han to Tang] (Taipei: Huamulan chubanshe, 2010), 155-169.

¹⁴⁵ Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Sichuan sheng Maoxian bowuguan, “Dianjiangtai moya zaoxiang,” 46.

Baoxian. These carvings are made for (all sentient beings) in this Dharma realm.....¹⁴⁶

惟大唐貞觀四年，歲次庚寅，九月癸亥，十五日丁丑，大施主持節翼州諸軍事翼州刺史上大將軍李玄嗣，行治中張仲品，敬造釋迦及彌勒佛二龕。助布施主錄事參軍常詮胄，司庫參軍李德超，行司戶參軍王季札，行參軍劉紹約，翼針縣令范孝同，丞馮師才，翼水縣令席義靜，丞楊和鸞，左封縣令劉保德，丞常白寬，如和府統軍宋威，右別將王君相，石臼戍副鄭寶賢，敬造為法界……

The leader of this joint patronage was the highest commander of the Yizhou 翼州, Li Xuansi 李玄嗣 (fl. early seventh century), he was both the military commissioner and the civil prefect. He belonged to a powerful family which had been the main authority in the Ankang 安康 area for one hundred years – the area is between Northern Sichuan and Chang'an in North China. In the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 [Former Book of Tang], Li Xuansi appeared in the biography of his father, Li Xizhi 李襲志 (fl. early seventh century), the leader of the Li family in Ankang between late Sui and early Tang.¹⁴⁷ More interestingly, Li Xuansi's uncle, Li Xiyu 李襲譽 (fl. early seventh century), was recorded at least twice in the Buddhist history of the early Tang as the protector of Buddhism.¹⁴⁸ Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Li Xuansi may possibly have been a Buddhist adherent due to his family's faith.

¹⁴⁶ Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Sichuan sheng Maoxian bowuguan, "Dianjiangtai moya zaixiang," 42. Translation and punctuation by the author.

¹⁴⁷ Li Xizhi was defeated by Xiao Xian 蕭銑 (583-621 CE) and then became an official in Xiao's short-lived court in southwestern China. The founder of the Tang dynasty, Emperor Gaozu 高祖 (566-635 CE), asked Li Xuansi to take a letter to his father and make him an ally inside the enemy's camp. This was a strategic ploy which allowed the Tang to conquer Xiao's regime. To reward their contributions, Emperor Gaozu invited the Li family of Ankang to join the imperial clan. 《舊唐書》：“襲志固守，經二年而無援，卒為蕭銑所陷，銑署為工部尚書、檢校桂州總管。武德初，高祖遣其子玄嗣齋書召之，襲志乃密說嶺南首領隨永平郡守李光度與之歸國。”Liu Xu 劉昫 et al. eds, “李襲志 [The Biography of Li Xizhi],” in *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 [Former Book of Tang] vol. 59 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 2331.

¹⁴⁸ 《續高僧傳》卷 24：“釋道會……有道士宋冀。是彼梁棟，於隆山縣下新立道觀。屋宇成就置三十人。會經總管段倫陳牒改觀為寺。其郭內住者並是道宗不伏。移改囑安撫大使李襲譽，巡察州縣，會以事達，乃引兵過城。四面鳴鼓一時驅出。舉宗怨訴噂諧街衢。會曰，未能令天下改觀為寺，此之一所終不可奪。遂依立寺，至今不毀。”T2060, 642b28-c4. 《集神州三寶感通錄》卷 2：“唐貞觀十七年九月，涼州都督李襲譽。內巡境至州東南昌泉縣界。有石表文，合一百一十字，乃有七佛八菩薩上果佛田等字，以狀奏聞。有勅覆檢如其所奏，下詔涼府給複一年罪者赦之。” T2106, 421c21-26.

Remarkably, the other donors listed include most of the officials in the government of Yizhou 冀州. They are separated into three groups, which reflected the local administrative system. The first four donors were the so-called “*Canjunshi* (Adjutant Administrators).” However, their specific duties listed before this title indicates that they did not belong to the military system and were instead civil administrators at the prefectural level in charge of documents, provisions, and domestic residences of the prefect. The second group consisted of six officials, one magistrate and one assistant from each of the three counties of Yizhou 冀州. The third group included three persons, all of whom are local military personnel. The first two of these donors were a general and an adjunct general of the *Ruhe fu* 如和府. These were titles of the leaders of the military of the early Tang in the Fubing 府兵 system.¹⁴⁹ The third was an adjunct commander from the *Shijiu shu* 石臼戍, a grassroots frontier martial unit from the early Tang.¹⁵⁰

In Northern Dynasties, Buddhist associations (usually named *yiyi* 義邑) organized by the local officials were usually a way for a newly arrived chief to build connections with the great clans or communities in the local society.¹⁵¹ A typical example was Bai Shi 白實, a military commissioner in Gucheng 固城, who called together most the senior civil and military officials and other non-governmental individuals in the district to form a *yiyi* in 545 CE, which is recorded in the devotional

¹⁴⁹ Meng Yanhong 孟彥弘, “Tang qianqi de bingzhi yu bianfang 唐前期的兵制與邊防 [The Military System and Frontier Defense of the Early Tang],” in *Tang yanjiu* 唐研究 [Study of Tang] 1, (1995): 245-276. David A. Graff, “The Reach of the Military: Tang,” *Journal of Chinese History* 1, no.2 (2017): 243-268.

¹⁵⁰ Similar organizations are found in the Turfan document. Cheng Xilin 程喜霖, “Tulufan wenshu suojian Tangdai *Zhenshu Shouzhuo* 吐魯番文書所見唐代鎮戍守捉 [*Zhenshu* and *Shouzhuo* of Tang dynasty in the Turfan Documents],” in *Tulufan Tangdai Junshi wenshu yanjiu: yanjiu pian* 吐魯番唐代軍事文書研究:研究篇 [Studies of Military Documents of Tang Turfan: Research], eds. Cheng Xilin 程喜霖 and Chen Xigang 陳習剛 (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2013), 259.

¹⁵¹ Tu Cheng-yu 杜正宇, “Junzheng shouzhang yu difang kongzhi 軍政首長與地方控制 [Military Leaders and the local Control],” in *Xiwei Beizhou shiqi ju guangfang secail de fojiao yiyi* 西魏北周時期具官方色彩的佛教義邑 [Official Buddhist *yiyi* in the Western Wei and the Northern Zhou] (Taipei: Huamulan chubanshe, 2010), 77-99.

inscription for a statue in Zhongxingsi 中興寺.¹⁵² The organization in Dianjiangtai could have been an attempt to undertake the same approach. The local community in the Yizhou 冀州 was complex, with the Qiang 羌 people and on the border with Tuyunhun to the north. As Li Xuansi and his family were based in the Ankang area, when the Tang court sent him to govern the Yizhou, he would have needed to build his authority and local connections.

Another inspiration for this association might also have been Emperor Taizong's 太宗 sponsorship of seven monasteries on the seven battlefields of the war of unification in the third year of the Zhenguan reign (630 CE).¹⁵³ One of the seven monasteries is the Dafosi 大佛寺 of Binxian 彬縣, which is a typical rock-cut monastery carved into the surface of cliff.¹⁵⁴ In the year 625 CE, the Tuyunhun invaded the Songzhou 松州, while the army of Tang passed through Yizhou 冀州 to arrive at the frontier.¹⁵⁵ It seems reasonable to consider the creation of the Buddhist images might have been undertaken in response to Emperor Taizong's patronage, and as part of the transformation of a battlefield into a sacred space.

Buddhist monks and *yiyi* Associations

Another type of Buddhist association was organized by members of the Buddhist clergy. An example of this was recorded on an inscription in the Qianfoyan site in

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Song Minqiu 宋敏求 ed., “wei yunshen rongzhen zhe li sicha zhao 為殞身戎陣者立寺刹詔 [The edict of settling up the temple for the deceased on the battlefield],” in *Tang da zhaoling ji* 唐大詔令集 [Collected Grand Edicts and Decretes of the Tang Dynasty] vol. 113 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 586.

¹⁵⁴ Chang Qing 常青, *Binxian Dafosi zaixiang yishu* 彬縣大佛寺造像藝術 [The Sculpture of Dafosi in Binxian] (Beijing: Xiandai chubanshe, 1998), 20.

¹⁵⁵ 甲戌，羌與吐谷渾同寇松州（吐，從噉入聲。谷，音浴。），遣益州行臺左僕射竇軌自翼州道，扶州刺史蔣善合自芳州道擊之。（西魏逐吐谷渾，置鄧州，隋開皇七年，改曰扶州，同昌郡。武德元年，分會州之左封、翼斜，置翼州，臨翼郡。唐制，上州刺史，從三品；中，正四品上；下，正四品下。）Sima Guang 司馬光 et al. eds., *Zi zhi tong jian* 資治通鑑 [Comprehensive Mirror for the Aid of Government], vol. 190, annotated by Hu Sanxing 胡三省, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956), 5983.

Wolongshan.¹⁵⁶ At the top of the stele, the words “A Four-faced Niche constructed by the Monk Daomi 造四面龕僧道密” emphasized the centrality of the Monk Daomi 道密 to this rock carving project. Halfway up the stele, below the title of the miracle tale, “The Record of Amitābha Buddha and fifty-two bodhisattvas”, there are two names – one is the calligrapher who wrote the inscription, Deng Yuanjue 鄧元覺, and the other the stonemason, Yang Zishang 楊子尚. On the lower half of the rock face, the names of forty-seven donors are listed in four lines. The variety of family names present would seem to indicate that this stele was not constructed by a single kinship group. Both men and women are listed, as can be ascertained from the fact that some of the names contain the feminine character “niang 娘”. Yet the lack of any background information for these names makes it difficult to understand if they were connected by any other social structure. The whole site was completed in the fourteenth day of the seventh month, the day before the Ghost Festival, suggesting that the project was possibly a memorial service to pray for their deceased ancestors or relatives.

In the *Xu gao seng zhuan* 續高僧傳 [Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks] (T2060), a Buddhist community which was referred to a *yiyi* appears in the biography of the Monk Baoqiong 寶瓊 (d. 634 CE).¹⁵⁷

Monk Baoqiong, whose family name was Ma, was born in Mianzhu in Yizhou. He went around the villages, had no mysterious arts, and focused solely on diligently converting the people to Buddhism. When he was old, he moved to the prefectural capital and lived in the Fushou Temple. He supervised the residents in the city and first gathered them to join in *yiyi* (associations). Each *yi* consisted of thirty persons, who gathered to recite the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā*. Each person in the *yi* was responsible for a single volume, each month they

¹⁵⁶ More discussions see Hida Romi 肥田路美, “Shisen shō Men’yō chiiki no Magai zōzō chōsa to sono igi — Dōkyō zōgan、Amidabutsu Gojūbosatsu zōgan kara mita chiikisei no mondai o chūshin ni 四川省綿陽地区の摩崖造像調査とその意義—道教像龕、阿弥陀仏五十菩薩像龕からみた地域性の問題を中心に [Survey Report the Cliff Sculptures in the Mianyang area, Sichuan Province and Preliminary Research: Focusing on the regional form of the Daoist niches and the Amitābha Buddha and fifty Bodhisattvas niches],” in *Tōajia no rekishi · minzoku · kōko* 東アジアの歴史・民族・考古 [History, Ethnicity and Archaeology in East Asia], eds. Shinka Watokio 新川登亀男 and Takahashi Ryuzaburo 高橋龍三郎 (Tōkyō: Yuzankaku, 2009), 90-120. Huang, “Amidabutsu Gojūbosatsu zō no kenkyū no genjō,” 98-101.

¹⁵⁷ T2060, 688a10-b7.

would gather and recite the sutra in sequence. (He) organized such *yiyi* thousands of times, to which the persons who had heard of this all came.....In the eighth year of the Zhenguan reign (634 CE), [Baoqiong] died at his residence.

釋寶瓊，馬氏，益州綿竹人。歷遊邑洛，無他方術，但勸信向尊敬佛法。晚移州治，住福壽寺，率勵坊郭，邑義為先。每結一邑必三十人，合誦大品，人別一卷。月營齋集，各依次誦，如此義邑，乃盈千計。四遠聞者皆來造款……以貞觀八年，終於所住。

Although the Monk Baoqiong moved to Yizhou 益州 (modern day Chengdu) in his old age, in his younger years he was a wandering monk, travelling around the countryside and organizing *yiyi* in order to preach Buddhism to the masses. These activities seem to have been focused on the countryside of Mianyang, his hometown. His death, in the eighth year of the Zhengyuan reign (634 CE), occurred in the same year as the construction of the Wolongshan.

These two sources evidence that *yiyi* organizations were introduced to the Mianyang area from Northern China. Daomi's organization of 47 laymen and laywomen organized to carve the Amitābha Buddha image was a typical *yiyi* association led by the clergy. As for Baoqiong's *yiyi* association, it mainly appears to have intended to organize the chanting of sutras and gathering for feasting, which may have retained more of the characteristics of the Buddhist associations organized by Lushan Huiyuan in the Southern Dynasties.¹⁵⁸ The two associations outlined above are characterized by their emphasis on the combination of organizations with specific practice. Wolongshan's association consisted of the organizer Daomi, the inscription writer, the craftsmen, and another 47 sponsors. The sponsors each donated one or two more statues, totaling 50 statues, which exactly corresponds to the number of 50 small bodhisattvas in the Amitābha image. In the *yiyi* association of Baoqiong, each person was responsible for a volume of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā* and each month they would gather and recite the sutra volume by volume, in order. This organizational method, which closely combines the contents of practice and highlights the cooperation and equality of statues among members, undoubtedly promoted

¹⁵⁸ Ishida, "6 seiki kōhan no Hashoku to Bukkyō," 30-55.

Buddhism and the construction of a common identity as Buddhists among people with different backgrounds.

To sum up, the social organization behind the construction of Buddhist rock carvings in Northern Sichuan changed in the early seventh century. Although there are some indicators of the presence of collective patronage prior to the Tang, the devotional inscriptions in Dianjiangtai and Wolongshan provide clear evidence for the presence of the collective patronage in the construction of Buddhist monuments in Northern China in the early Tang. The prefectural commander Li Xuansi organized the local officials to start the carvings in Dianjiangtai, while Monk Daomi lead other forty-seven donors in the making of the Wolongshan. The cooperative sponsorship presented in both these examples can be traced back to *yiyi* models from Northern China, although some small differences exist.

5. Assigned Officials, Migrant Monks and Regional Changes

This chapter has approached the construction of rock carving sites in Northern Sichuan in the early Tang dynasty from the perspective of the sites, images and patrons. The rock carving sites in Northern Sichuan not only integrated the multiple art conventions cultivated in this region before the Tang dynasty, but also adopted and adapted many new images, techniques and practices from both the Chengdu area and Northern China. The transregional nature of these rock carvings, with their multiple sources and influences, gave these sites a distinctive style which is exuberant in its creativity.

As discussed above, the construction of some or all of these sites was achieved through the sponsorship of local government officials, who were of northern origin. It should be noted that it was not unusual for local officials in the Sichuan area to come from Northern China. The power structure of the Tang dynasty continued to be centered on the Guanlong 關隆 aristocracy, as it had been in Northern dynasties and Sui dynasty.¹⁵⁹ The highest officials in the Empire's local government offices were

¹⁵⁹ Jonathan Karam Skaff, "Tang Military Culture and Its Inner Asian Influences," in *Military*

usually selected from the great clans of the Guanlong aristocracy. Even the local officials discussed above, Wu Shiyue and Lady Yang, the parents of Emperor Wu supported the construction of the pavilion in Huangzesi, and Li Xuansi, who was the main sponsor of Dianjiangtai, were also members of the northern nobility. Considering the significant role that Buddhism and the imperial cave temples played in the sovereignty of the northern-based states, it is not surprising that these assigned officials, who would have been familiar with the phenomenon of cave temples in Northern China, would participate in the sponsorship of new Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan. As these officials were essentially agents of the Tang court in Chang'an, these Buddhist rock carvings in Northern Sichuan, in some sense, may also have acted as an extension of northern imperial power in this region.

A slight problem with this line of reasoning is that rock carved sites only started to flourish in this region in the early Tang, over eighty years after the first group of northern officials would have been posted to the region after it was conquered by the Western Wei. There must, therefore, be a further reason for the sudden explosion in carving activity in the 630s CE. Wang Jianping and Lei Yuhua argue that the wave of immigration into the region which occurred during the late Sui and early Tang dynasties was the reason for the growth of site construction in the early seventh century.¹⁶⁰ Due to rebellions in Northern China, many brilliant monks fled the turbulence in Northern China to the Sichuan area. Among them was Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664 CE), who would go on to become the most famous Chinese cleric and translator of the Tang dynasty.¹⁶¹ His biography provides a detailed record of his travels from his hometown near Luoyang to Chang'an and then along the Golden Ox

Culture in Imperial China, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 165-191.

¹⁶⁰ Wang and Lei, "6 shiji mo zhi 7 shiji chu de Sichuan zaixiang," 367.

¹⁶¹ 《大唐故三藏玄奘法師行狀》：“初，煬帝於東都建四道場，召天下名僧居焉。其徵來者，皆一藝之士，是故法將如林，景、脫、基、暹為其稱首。末年國亂，供料停絕，多遊綿、蜀，知法之眾又盛於彼。”T2053, 222a10-13. A full translation see Rongxi Li, *A Biography of the Tripitaka Master of the Great Ci'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty* (Berkeley, Calif: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1995), 14.

Road to Chengdu. One of the problems with this line of discussion is a lack of concrete evidence demonstrating the participation of monks. The only monk who directly participated in the construction of these Buddhist stone carvings and left a name was the Monk Daomi. Although the Wolongshan that constructed under his guidance has many features related to the northern tradition, it is difficult to confirm whether or not he came from the north based on current evidence.¹⁶²

The heterogeneity of Buddhist rock carvings in Northern Sichuan may provide circumstantial evidence for the influence of immigrant monks. As discussed above, many new images, techniques and practices, which were previously popular in Northern China started to appear in the Mianyang area at this time. These include stone scriptures, the four-sided niches, the Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas image, and the *yiyi* organizations. Compared to Guangyuan, Mianyang is relatively far from Northern China and the artistic tradition in this region was more closely related to the one that had been present in Chengdu area from the sixth century onwards. It seems unlikely that the gradual spread of ideas and motifs would skip Guangyuan but influence Mianyang without any special reason. If we consider what is known of the movement of the sangha, the sudden rise of Northern motifs and techniques in this region becomes much more understandable. According to the biography of Xuanzang, most of the refugee northern monks settled in Mianyang and Chengdu. The new practical content, knowledge of images and organizational systems they brought with them could have greatly stimulated the enthusiasm of groups of craftsmen (the sculptural style would appear to indicate that local craftsmen held some power in these constructions) which may then led to a great burst of creativity and carving activity.

¹⁶² Hida Romi pointed out that it is possible that Monk Daomi of Wolongshan was the Daomi recorded in the *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* as the disciple of Monk *Narendrayāśas 那連耶舍 who lived at the Daxingshan Monastery 大興善寺 in Chang'an in the Sui dynasty (the biography can be found in T2060, 667b22-668a21). If this conjecture holds, Dawei was obviously one of the monks who immigrated from Northern China in the end of the Sui. Hida, "Shisen shō Men'yō chiiki no Magai zōzō chōsa to sono igi," 120.

The relationship between Buddhism and Daoism became increasingly tense during the early Tang dynasty in Northern Sichuan. This increased tension may have been caused by the influx of Buddhist monks from the north. There are large number of efficacious stories of Buddhism triumphing over Daoism with the background of Northern Sichuan, especially the vicinity of Mianyang, in the memoirs of eminent monks and the collection of miraculous tales in Buddhism. For instance, a significant detail in the story of Linghu Wengui is that while the scripture case was recovered from the remains of the flame, only the Buddhist sutras survived the fire, but the accompanying Daoist scriptures were turned to ashes.¹⁶³ The contrast between the different destinies of the two religious scriptures clearly shows Buddhism as being superior to Daoism. Another interesting story is from the second half of the biography of Baoqiong provides a rare story in which the statues became the “protagonist” of the struggle between Buddhism and Daoism in Mianyang during this period.¹⁶⁴ Monk Baoqiong was invited to a ceremony organized by a Daoist association and the Daoists forced him to worship the statue of Tianzun.¹⁶⁵ However, when Baoqiong bow down to the Daoist statue, the statue of Tianzun shook dramatically and fell to the ground. The superiority of Buddhism over Daoism is demonstrated by the fact that

¹⁶³ 《集神州三寶感通錄》卷 3：“既撥外灰，其內諸經宛然如故。黃色不改，唯箱帙成灰。又覓老子便從火化。” T2106, 428ab2-4.

¹⁶⁴ 《續高僧傳》卷 28：“本邑連比什邡諸縣，並是道民尤不奉佛……李氏諸族正作道會，邀瓊赴之，來既後至不禮而坐。僉謂，不禮天尊非法也。瓊曰，邪正道殊所事各異。天尚不禮何況老君。眾議紜紜，頗相凌侮。瓊曰，吾禮非所禮，恐貽辱也。遂禮一拜，道像並座動搖不安。又禮一拜，連座返倒摧殘在地。道民相視謂是風鼓，競來周正。瓊曰，斯吾所為，勿妄怨也。初未之信，既安又禮，如前崩倒。合眾驚懼，舉掌禮瓊。一時迴信從受戒法。傍縣道黨相將歎訝，咸復奉法。時既創開釋化，皆授菩薩戒焉。” T2060, 688a19-b3.

¹⁶⁵ As a traditionally Daoist-dominated area, the Mianyang area belonged to the twenty-four prefectures of the Daoist local management. Verellen, “The Twenty-four Dioceses and Zhang Daoling: The Spatio-liturgical Organization of Early Heavenly Master Taoism,” 15-67. Lin cites the biography of Monk Huikuan 惠寬 from the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* to demonstrate that Huikuan’s father was titled the Sandong Boshi 三洞博士 and therefore may have been the leader of one of the twenty-four prefectures, Lutangshanzhi 鹿堂山治 and Gengchuzhi 庚除治. Other ranks that can be found in the devotional description in the Shishiguan include the Sandong Dizi 三洞弟子 and Daomin 道民. Lin, “Daojiao zaoliang yu diyu shehui,” 184.

the Daoist idol, as the symbol of Daoism, cannot be worshipped by a Buddhist monk who is the agent of Buddhism.

This tension seems to not only have been the background to the production of the auspicious tales (Linghu Wengui's tale) but also to the expansion of Buddhist art. Lin Sheng-chih has already pointed out that Mianyang's religious landscape underwent great changes in the early Tang dynasty.¹⁶⁶ Construction centered on Daoist sites in the Sui dynasty was gradually challenged by the increase in Buddhist stone carvings. He highlights Niche 2 in Shengshuisi 聖水寺, a Daoist site in northern Mianyang, which was carved in 650 CE (Figure 1. 39).¹⁶⁷ This niche takes the form of the image of "Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas" in that it contains multiple seated attendants, but it is centered on two seated figures from two different religious traditions: Tianzu 天尊 from Daoism and Amitābha from Buddhism. There are 108 assistant figures seated on lotuses surrounding the central figures.¹⁶⁸ The use of the framework from Buddhist images, argued by Lin, reflects the expansion of Buddhism and the reduction of Daoism in Mianyang during this period, a drastic change on the geographic territory of religion.

In all, during the Zhenguan reign, the unique sculptural style and site construction system developed along with the first clusters of Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan. This style and system continuously re-appeared in the carving of

¹⁶⁶ Lin, "Daojiao zaoxiang yu diyu shehui," 189.

¹⁶⁷ Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Mianyang shi wenwuju, "Mianyang Shengshuisi moyā zaoxiang 綿陽聖水寺摩崖造像 [Shengshuisi Cliff Sculptures in Mianyang]," in *Mianyang kanku*, 68-89.

¹⁶⁸ Of particular note is the representation of the eight assistant figures above the heads of the two main statues. These figures are depicted seated on the branches of a tree which is carved in bas-relief above the two main figures rather than on stemmed lotuses rising directly from the pool at the bottom of the niche. Huang Xia highlights the similarity of this motif to that seen in Buddhist stone statues in Northern Qi in which small figures are often set into tree. The motif has also been found in bronze sculpture from Chang'an during the Sui. He identifies this motif as the "nirmāṇakāya on the leaves 樹葉化身", a motif which might help to link the origins of the "Amitābha and fifty-two Bodhisattvas image" to the Northern Qi. Yet the problem with this argument is that the Shengshuisi example is the only one to contain this motif. This image appears to be a derivation from the image of "Amitābha and fifty-two Bodhisattvas" rather than a prototype. Huang, "Amidabutsu Gojūnibosatsu zō no kenkyū no genjō," 101-103.

subsequent Buddhist sites in this area over the course of the rest of the Tang dynasty. Xuanzang and Wu Zhao, who both lived in the Sichuan area during this period, went on to have a significant impact on Buddhism and Buddhist art in the imperial capitals of Chang'an and Luoyang later in the seventh century. Buddhist images and practices in Chang'an and Luoyang were a second force that shaped Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan between the 650s and 750s CE. This interweaving of newly established indigenous tradition and inspiration from the two-capital area is discussed further in Chapters Two and Three.

CHAPTER II On the Border: Qianfoya in Guangyuan

Located in the northeastern section of Sichuan Province, Guangyuan was of considerable strategic importance in ancient China (Map 2).¹⁶⁹ It was located on the Golden Ox Road that connected the Sichuan Basin to northern and northwestern China. The Jialing River 嘉陵江, a tributary of the Yangtze River, passes through the city, linking it to the Yangtze plain and thereafter on to southeastern China. The strategic position of this prefectural-level city reached its peak during the Tang empire (618-907 CE) under the name of Lizhou 利州 or Yichang jun 益昌郡. This rise in status was due to the rising status of the Sichuan area, which was not only the principle grain and silk producing area but also had a strong military garrison against invasion by the Tibetan Empire (*circa* 620-842 CE) and the Nanzhao 南詔 (738-902 CE). Guangyuan is also closely associated with several famous emperors. Such as the Empress Wu, the only female monarch in China's history, who spent a period of her childhood here with her parents.¹⁷⁰ It is also recorded that the Emperors Xuanzong 玄宗 (685-762 CE) and Xizong 僖宗 (862-888 CE) passed through Guangyuan, when they fled into the Sichuan area via the Golden Ox Road when the two Tang capitals, Chang'an and Luoyang, fell during the An Lushan rebellion.¹⁷¹

The history of the golden age of Guangyuan, as well as of imperial China, is flourished in the Buddhist rock carvings in the vicinity of this river port city. There are three Buddhist rock-cut sites directly associated with Guangyuan: Huangzesi 皇澤寺, Qianfoya 千佛崖 and Guanyinyan 觀音岩. These three sites are carved on the river cliffs of the Jialing River (Figure 2. 1).¹⁷² Carving activity in both Huangzesi and Qianfoya started during a short period occupation (505-535 CE) by Northern Wei

¹⁶⁹ More detailed discussions on the historical geography of Guangyuan see Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 1-7.

¹⁷⁰ More discussions on the relationship between Guangyuan and Empress Wu see *ibid*, 334-337.

¹⁷¹ Yen, *Tangdai jiaotong tu kao: Shan Jian Dian Qian qu*, 863.

¹⁷² An overall introduction on Buddhist sites in Guangyuan, Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 7-20.

(386-534 CE) however there are only six caves in the Guangyuan region which date to this period. The majority of the carving activity at these sites dates to the Tang Dynasty. Huangzesi saw the start of a new tradition of Buddhist rock carving in the early seventh century, which was part of a larger trend which occurred throughout Northern Sichuan during this time (this has already been discussed in Chapter One). Carving activity at Qianfoya restarted slightly later in the middle to late seventh century. However, it soon replaced Huangzesi as the largest site in Guangyuan. Although some statues in its southern section were destroyed in 1935 CE when the ancient road was widened into a modern highway, the majority of the site is still relatively well-preserved with over 800 shrines and 7,000 statues extant on a 355-meter long and 45-meter high section of river cliff (Figure 2. 2).¹⁷³ Guanyinyan, the third site in Guangyuan, was carved between the middle of the eighth and ninth centuries and represents the dying embers of Buddhist rock carving practice in Guangyuan.

This chapter concentrates on the construction of Qianfoya during the Tang Dynasty. The choice to focus on Qianfoya was in part made due to it being the largest site in Guangyuan. Its monumental scale means that it played a significant role in the transregional transmission of Buddhist art between Northern China and the Sichuan area during the Tang Dynasty. Most rock carvings in Qianfoya were carved between the reigns of the Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (628-683 CE) and the Emperor Xuanzong (685-762 CE). This period overlaps with the rise and fall of the Tang metropolitan art style which flourished in Chang'an and Luoyang regions during this period. This style, characterized by its voluptuous figures and flowery motifs, is also referred to in modern scholarship as the "Tang International Art Style".¹⁷⁴ As Guangyuan is the

¹⁷³ Guangyuan Qianfoya shiku yishu bowuguan 廣元千佛崖石窟藝術博物館 [Art Museum of Qianfoya Caves in Guangyuan], *Guangyuan Qianfoya* 廣元千佛崖 [Qianfoya in Guangyuan] (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubanshe, 2016), 4-5.

¹⁷⁴ Sherman E. Lee ed, *A History of Far Eastern Art* (New York: Abrams, 1982), 154-155. Dorothy C. Wong, "Introduction," in *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks as Agents of Cultural and Artistic Transmission: The International Buddhist Art Style in East Asia, ca. 645-770* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2018), 1.

northernmost city in Sichuan and Qianfoya is set beside the Golden Ox Road that links the area to the two capitals, it is not surprising to find that Qianfoya was one of locations through which the imperial artistic styles of Northern China were transmitted into the Sichuan area.¹⁷⁵ However, the “influence” of Northern China is insufficient to explain the multitude and variety of carving activity in Qianfoya which is evidenced by the various sculptural styles present and innovative use of space within individual projects. A re-examination of the site construction is necessary to expound the ways in which the “influences” from Northern China interacted with local artistic conventions, and the extent to which local design influenced the reception process.

It is herein argued that Qianfoya was not carved merely in the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” or its localized form, but that, instead, it preserved the narrative of a continuous and shifting stylistic dialogue between the local (Southern) style, which is known to have been present at the beginning of the Tang dynasty, and the Imperial (Northern) style which was transmitted into the region from Northern China, from the two-capitals area centered on Chang’an and Luoyang. This interweaving of two heterogeneous art styles have led to the rock carvings in Qianfoya having an inconsistent artistic texture on the cliff. The Tang metropolitan art style waxed during the reigns of pro-Buddhist emperors such as Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu but waned during the reigns of non-Buddhist rulers such as the

¹⁷⁵ Shi Yan 史岩, “Guan yu Guangyuan Qianfoya zaoxiang de chuanshi shidai wenti 關於廣元千佛崖造像的創始時代問題 [Discussion of the Date of the First Carvings in Qianfoya, Guangyuan],” *Wenwu* 文物 [Cultural Relics], no.2 (1961): 24-26, 62. Ding, “Chuanbei shiku zhaji,” 41-53. Yan, “Qianfoya he Huangzesi,” 87-93. Lei, Luo, and Wang, “Guangyuan diqu shiku he moya zaoxiang de fenqi yu niandai 廣元地區石窟和摩崖造像的分期與年代 [Periodization and Chronology of Grottoes and Cliff Sculptures in Guangyuan area],” in *Chuanbei fojiao shiku he moya zaoxiang yanjiu*, 29-168. Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaoxiang chubu yanjiu*. Lin Ying-suan 林映萱, *Guangyuan shiku Tangdai zaoxiang yanjiu* 廣元石窟唐代造像研究 [The Studies on The Statuary of Guangyuan Grottoes in the Tang Dynasty] (M.A., Tainan National University of the Arts, 2010). Yagi Haruo 八木春生 and Yao Yao 姚瑤, “Sichuan Guangyuan Qianfoya Wuzhou zhi Kaiyuan shiqi fojiao zaoxiang yanjiu 四川廣元千佛崖武周至開元時期佛教造像研究[A Study of the Changes in Buddhist Imagery in the Qianfoya in Guangyuan, Sichuan, from the Reign of Empress Wu to the Kaiyuan Reign],” *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang Research] 180, no.2 (2020): 34-48.

Emperor Xuanzong. This is further evidenced by the form of the artworks produced in Qianfoya in different periods. The local art traditions and the creativity of local craftsmen are more in evidence within the rock carvings in these periods when the imperial influence was weak or in decline. In all, the shift of Buddhist art between the art styles of the imperial authority and the local conventions in Qianfoya is the material expression of the tension between the imperial and local in Guangyuan, while the geographical position of Guangyuan as the cultural border between the Sichuan area and Northern China appears to have amplified this expression.

1. Chronology and Periodization

To contextualize the construction of Qianfoya which contains a very large number of individual projects carved over an extended period, a chronological framework is necessary. The following chronology, which divides the carving of the niches into three successive phases, presents a revision of the chronologies proposed by earlier scholars. The chronology herein presented also relies upon the same four sources as previous studies, namely: dated inscriptions, the forms of the caves/niches, the style of the sculptures, and the pairing/grouping of caves/niches on the cliff. Taking into account the variations present in the evidence, it is possible to divide the majority of the niches in Qianfoya into three successive, though partially overlapping, stages – 650-700 CE, 700-715 CE, and 715-750s.

Phase One: 650-700 CE

Buddhist statues in Qianfoya which date to this phase usually take the form of a triad: a single Buddha flanked by two disciples or two bodhisattvas. The primary focus is the shape and volume of the physical bodies of the statues, while decorative elements like the seats of the Buddhas, are relatively simple. There are four projects in Qianfoya that can be reliably dated to this stage, although their exact chronology is still the subject of academic debate.

The most secure dating is that of Cave 535 which is also known as the “Lianhua dong 蓮花洞 [Lotus Cave]” (h. 3.6 m, w. 4.95 m, d. 3.55 m). Its internal structure contains three large niches, one on each wall, each of which contains a seated Buddha

flanked by two standing bodhisattva (Figure 2. 3-Figure 2. 5). Although there are no devotional inscriptions directly associated with the main cave, Niche 10 (Figure 2. 6), an intrusive niche located in the upper right corner of the rear wall, contains an inscription which dates it to the reign of Wansuitongtian 萬歲通天 (696-697 CE).¹⁷⁶ It therefore provides a *terminus ante quem* for the carving of the grotto and its three large niches since the intrusive niche must postdate the cave in which it is carved. It is also possible to date most of the intrusive niches in Cave 535 to the end of the seventh century since the Buddhas all have the same figural form as the one in Niche 10, in that they all have a robust upper body with a narrow waist.

The chronology for the restoration in Cave 726 is also fairly certain. The standing Buddha on the back wall (Figure 2. 7) and the two large bodhisattvas on the two side walls (Figure 2. 8 and Figure 2. 9) date to the Northern Wei,¹⁷⁷ however, the intrusive niches that cover the three walls can all be attributed to the second half of the seventh century based on their sculptural style. There are two pairs of figures that are larger than the others. One pair consists of two disciples carved next to the Buddha, while the other pair the two disciple-like figures (believed to be depictions of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva) are carved in the upper left and right corners of the back

¹⁷⁶ The inscription of Cave 535-10 states: “竊以法門布澤拯群生於苦□□□□。因是以萬□歸依□□□，況弟子王行淹生逢興運□□□□之榮願植善根，歸依三寶，敬造釋迦牟尼佛一鋪，救苦觀世音菩薩一軀，願使□代先□□□□見□□□諸苦□一切……大周萬歲通天□年(696-697CE)。”Avalokiteśvara refers to Niche 6 in Cave 535, whose devotional inscription states: “仕議大夫行利州長史上柱國弟子王行淹，敬造救苦觀世音、佛供養，書人皇甫思義。” Sichuan sheng wenwu guanlijū 四川省文物管理局 [Sichuan Cultural Heritage Administration], Chengdu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 成都文物考古研究所 [Chengdu Municipal Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology], Beijing daxue zhongguo kaoguxue yanjiu zhongxin 北京大學中國考古學研究中心 [Chinese Archaeology Research Center of Peking University], and Guangyuan Qianfoya shike yishu bowugun 廣元千佛崖石刻藝術博物館 [Art Museum of Qianfoya Grottoes in Guangyuan], *Guangyuan shiku neirong zonglu: Qianfoya juan* 廣元石窟內容總錄:千佛崖卷 [Catalogue of the Contents of Guangyuan Grottoes: Qianfoya] II (Chengdu: Bashu shuju, 2014), 140-141.

¹⁷⁷ Shi Yan pointed out that this triad was carved in an art style which is identical to the central Binyang Cave 賓陽中洞 and the Putai Cave 普泰洞 of the late Northern Wei in Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang. This strongly indicates that Qianfoya Cave 726 was carved during the occupation of the Northern Wei (*circa* 502 - 520 CE) in Guangyuan. Shi, “Guanyu Guangyuan Qianfoya zaixiang de chuanshi shidai wenti,” 62.

wall. The figural form of the two standing disciples is the same as that in Qianfoya Niche 138 and Huangzesi Niches 28, 55 and 56, all of which are attributed to the Zhenguan 貞觀 reign (627-649 CE) (See Chapter One for more details). Two depictions of Kṣitigarbhas can be dated to the middle of the seventh century, as their thin cassocks are similar to the main Buddha on the rear wall of Huangzesi Cave 38, the *terminus ante quem* for which is by a tourist inscription which dates to the second year of the Linde 麟德 reign (665 CE).¹⁷⁸ The rest of the intrusive niches in Cave 726 host many images identical which are to those in Cave 535, so their excavation can also be presumed to have also occurred roughly at the end of the seventh century.

The date for the remaining two caves is less secure. Niche 138 (Figure 2. 10) which is located at the top of the northeastern section of the cliff face is probably an earlier construction than the previous two niches discussed. Its main statue, a Maitreya Buddha, sits on a rectangular seat with both feet resting on the ground. He is flanked by two standing disciples: the disciple on the left holds his hands palm to palm in front of his chest, while the one on the right holds a sutra box in front of his chest. Yao Chongxin highlights the similarities between this Buddha and the main Buddhas in Niche 13 and Cave 5 of the Sui Dynasty in Maijishan 麥積山, Gansu Province 甘肅省, and dates Niche 138 to the Sui Dynasty.¹⁷⁹ However, Lei and Wang date this niche to the Zhenguan reign as the main Buddha of Niche 138 is similar to the monumental Buddha in Dafosi 大佛寺 in Binxian 彬縣, Shaanxi Province 陝西省, which contains an inscription dating it to the second year of the Zhenguan reign (628 CE).¹⁸⁰ Additionally, Lei and Wang highlight the form of the right disciple, whose left hand holds a sutra box with his right-hand resting upon it. This figural form is unknown in the extant statues of Sui but is consistent with the right disciple in Huangzesi Niche 56 which dates to the Zhenguan reign. Based on this I follow the dating of Early Tang as proposed by Lei and Wang.

¹⁷⁸ Lei and Wang, *Guangyuan shiku*, 19-23.

¹⁷⁹ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 44-46.

¹⁸⁰ Lei and Wang, *Guangyuan shiku*, 24-25.

The final grotto which can be securely dated to Phase One is Cave 746 which contains a representation of the *parinirvāṇa* theme (Figure 2. 11). While the Buddha rests on the central couch, narrative scenes related to the death of the Buddha are carved into the side and back walls of the cave. Lei and Wang date this cave to the reign of Empress Wu as the two bodhisattvas with their exaggerated twisting posture standing on the central altar are similar to the bodhisattvas in Niche 10 in Cave 535 which dates to 696-697 CE.¹⁸¹ However, Yao attributes it to the first half of the eighth century, his reasons for this dating are not explained in detail but he probably based his dating on the distinctive form of the construction as well as the theme. That is to say the central-altar cave form, and the *parinirvāṇa* theme, as he attributes all central-altar caves and all *parinirvāṇa* images to that period.¹⁸² I concur with Lei and Wang's chronology based on the sculptural style. The form of the central couch in Cave 746, with two trees as the back screen, differs from other central-altar caves. It was probably a prototype of the more standard central-altar caves and therefore should be dated to an earlier period.

Phase Two: 700-715 CE

The sculptural style in this stage is characterized by robust form of the figures. The modelling of the chest with faintly raised muscles makes the Buddha statues more imposing. A more natural pose replaces the exaggerated twisting posture of the bodhisattvas characteristic of Phase One. Niche 493 (706 CE, Figure 2. 12) which contains the largest Maitreya Buddha in Qianfoya, and Niche 187 (713 CE, Figure 2. 13), which is representative of a large number of replicated medium-sized niches, provide key insights into the sculptural style from this period. For the purpose of this dissertation, the dating for the six central-altar caves (Caves 365, 366, 744, 689, 805, and 806), a localized cave form in which the main iconic statue was installed on a raised platform in the center of the cave, are also taken as a chronological marker.

Caves 365 and 366 (Figure 2. 14) can be securely dated to 712 CE, based on the content of the devotional inscription on the right wall of Cave 366 which is entitled

¹⁸¹ Lei and Wang, *Guangyuan shiku*, 30.

¹⁸² Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 105-107, 145, 171.

the “Eulogy to the *Puti Ruixiang* of Duke Bi, Governor of Lizhou of Great Tang and its Ode 大唐利州刺史畢公菩提瑞像頌並序”.¹⁸³ Although the dated colophon of the stele has not been preserved, the posthumous title of Emperor Wu as the “Heavenly Empress and Sacred Emperor 天后聖帝” gives a clear date for the carving. This title was only used from the sixth to the eighth month in the first year of the Yanhe 延和 reign (712 CE) during the reign of Emperor Ruizong 睿宗 (662-716 CE).¹⁸⁴ This therefore securely dates the completion of the stele of Duke Bi, as well as the cave into which it is carved, to 712 CE.

Caves 805, 806, 365 and 366 are dated to the end of seventh century and the first half of eighth century, that is, from the reign of Empress Wu to the reign of Emperor Xuanzong.¹⁸⁵ However, a closer examination of the sculptural style of these caves allows for further refinement of the chronology. Earlier scholars have assumed that Caves 805 (Figure 2. 15) and 806 (Figure 2. 16) were carved in the late reign of Emperor Xuanzong, between 730 and 756 CE. This dating is usually based on the high artistic level of the left bodhisattva in Cave 806, which is embodied in its natural standing posture and expressive facial expressions. However, this kind of bodhisattva, with its subtle and realistic style, can also be found in the attendants in Caves 365 and 366. In both cases, the bodhisattvas are decorated with simple ornaments, idealized proportions and a relatively short face. Therefore, I assume that Caves 805 and 806 are contemporaneous to, or perhaps slightly later than, Caves 365 and 366, which means they date to *circa* 712 CE.

The final two central-altar caves are Caves 744 and Cave 689. Cave 744 (Figure 2. 17) appears to date to 706-712 CE. The upper body of its main Buddha is very similar to that of Maitreya in Niche 493 of 706 CE, while the human-sized disciplines

¹⁸³ Luo, “Qianfoya Lizhou Bigong ji zaixiang niandai kao,” 34-36.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Due to the limited space, I present my analysis and evidence here but do not respond to early research by detail. Previous discussion see Yagi and Yao, “Sichuan Guangyuan Qianfoya Wuzhou zhi Kaiyuan shiqi fojiao zaixiang yanjiu,” 34-48. Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 105-107. Lei, Luo, and Wang, *Chuanbei fojiao shiku he moya zaixiang yanjiu*, 80-118. Lin, *Guangyuan shiku Tangdai zaixiang yanjiu*, 8-62.

on the cave's three walls are identical to those in Cave 366, which is dated to 712 CE.¹⁸⁶ Cave 689 (Figure 2. 18) is the only central-altar cave with a frontal wall and outer corridor. In comparison to the other six caves, the statues on its central altar are carved in a more decorative style, which is close to that of Niche 513 which can be dated to 715 CE and is discussed in detail in the next phase. Since the *vajrapānis* in Cave 689 do not have the slender bodies and refined necklace characteristics of the later style in Niche 513, the carving of Cave 689 likely predated that of Niche 513.¹⁸⁷

Phase Three: 715-750s CE

This phase roughly corresponds to the reign of Emperor Xuanzong (713-756 CE). As discussed above, earlier scholars have chosen to view the first half of the eighth century as one stage. Instead, I divide this half century into two phases because of the presence of two distinct sculptural forms, the first is present 706-715 CE while the second is present from 715 CE through to the 750s CE. The fleshy and voluptuous bodily representation that characterized the Phase Two is replaced by a more decoration-oriented approach in Phase Three. There are also some novel figural forms, for instance, it is during this period that *vajrapānis* start to be depicted wearing necklaces, the heavenly kings are shown wearing armor and helmets, and bodhisattvas wearing bejeweled crowns. These are characteristics which are also present in later projects.

Niche 513 (Figure 2. 19) which is herein dated to in 715 CE plays a pivotal role in distinguishing these two stages. There is a stele in bas-relief on the right wall of the outer chamber of Niche 513 which states that it was commissioned by “The

¹⁸⁶ The inscription of Niche 493 states: “神龍二年三月八日(April 24, 706 CE) □□□轉運使敬造 供養兒田周(?)敬造兒田壽(?)敬造。” Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Guangyuan shiku neirong zonglu: Qianfoya juan II*, 79.

¹⁸⁷ Yagi considers that the sculptural style of two heavenly kings on the back screen in Cave 689 give evidence that Cave 689 was carved relatively late among these central-altar caves. I basically agree with his consideration as the heavenly king was primarily popular in Qianfoya since the Kaiyuan period. However, I do not think Cave 689 was completed until the middle of eighth century as the two heavenly kings are not as sophisticated as the heavenly kings in Niche 513, which should also be considered as the evidence that Cave 689 is earlier than Niche 513. Yagi and Yao, “Sichuan Guangyuan Qianfoya Wuzhou zhi Kaiyuan shiqi fojiao zaixiang yanjiu,” 44-45.

Surveillance Commissioner of the Jiannan Circuit, the Grand Master for Imperial Entertainments with Silver Seal and Blue Ribbon, the Administrator of the Chief Military Commission of Yizhou, Wei Kang, made this merit 劍南道按察使銀青光祿大夫行益州大都督府長史韋抗功德 (Figure 2. 20)".¹⁸⁸ The stele, contains a clear date, "The seventh day of the sixth month in the tenth year of Kaiyuan reign 開元十年六月七日 (24 May, 722 CE)". Yao considers this to be the initial date of the niche and therefore dates Niche 513 to 722 CE.¹⁸⁹ However, this interpretation is problematic as, according to the official history, Wei did not hold this official position at this time.¹⁹⁰ The dating proposed by Ding is more convincing. He suggests that this is a later inscription and that Niche 513 should be dated to 715 CE when according to the historical records Wei Kang was assigned as the commissioner of the Jiannan Circuit. It is possible that he donated Niche 513 when he passed through Guangyuan on the way to Chengdu, the capital of the Jiannan Circuit, along the Golden Ox Road when he came to take up this post in 715 CE.

Another two dated projects that can be securely dated to this phase are Niches 150 and 211, which were both carved around the tenth year of the Kaiyuan reign (722 CE). Niche 150 contains a devotional inscription which dates it to 722 CE, which states that Peng Jingxuan 彭景宣 sponsored a statue of Śākyamuni for his deceased

¹⁸⁸ Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Guangyuan shiku neirong zonglu: Qianfoya juan II*, 114.

¹⁸⁹ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 116. Yu Xianhao also dates the devotional inscription 722 CE and takes it the evidence to argue Wei Kang was ordered as the commissioner of Jiannan Circuit for the second time. Yu, *Tang Cishi kao quanbian*, 2943.

¹⁹⁰ Yao has noticed that there is a disparity the title given on the stele position on the stele and the title that Wei would have held at that time, since he was demoted to the position of prefectural commander of Puzhou 蒲州刺史 in 722 CE. However, he still considers the date is the colophon of the stele. Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 116. Lei, Luo and Wang suggest the carving of Niche 513 ranges from 713 to 722 CE, as a way to save the "two dates issue". Lei, Luo, and Wang, *Chuanbei fojiao shiku he moya zaixiang yanjiu*, 114-118. Lin provides a more convincing discussion in that she dates Niche 513 to 715 CE as its statues resemble that of Niche 187 dated to 713 CE and based upon the location of the date against the format of the colophon. The colophon always appears at the end of the inscription. However, the "tenth year of Kaiyuan reign" was carved on the left side of the stele, at the beginning of the whole inscription. This placement makes it almost impossible that this date is the colophon or part of it for the original stele. Lin, "Guangyuan shiku Tang dai zaixiang yanjiu," 16-17.

mother, Lady Guo 郭氏 (Figure 2. 21).¹⁹¹ Niche 211 (Figure 2. 22) has an inscription on the left side of the niche which states that, “The Administrator of the Commandery, the Military Commissioner of Jiannan Circuit Commissioned with Special Powers, the Supreme Pillar of State, Duke of Xuguo, Su Ting 都督府長史持節劍南道節度使上柱國許國公武功蘇頌”.¹⁹² Su Ting 蘇頌 (670-727 CE) was recorded as having visited the Sichuan area twice, the first time in the eighth year of the Kaiyuan reign (634 CE), after which he returned to Chang’an in the same year, and the second time in the eleventh year of the Kaiyuan reign (723 CE), returning to Chang’an the following year. Therefore, Niche 211 must have been carved between 720 and 723 CE.¹⁹³

Niche 86 (Figure 2. 23) is the archetype for the niches carved from the late Kaiyuan to the Tianbao reign. It is similar to Niche 513 in that it also consists of an inner niche with a round-arched ceiling (H. 2.86 m, W.2.9 m, D 1.60 m) and an outer chamber with a flat ceiling (H. 3.64 m, W. 3.8 m, D 1.40 m). There are five statues carved in high relief in the inner niche: a standing Buddha, two disciples and two bodhisattvas. A further two small bodhisattvas are depicted genuflecting in front of the Buddha. A depiction of the eightfold celestial assembly is carved in bas-relief

¹⁹¹ The devotional inscription of Qianfoya Niche 150 states: “開元十年太歲壬戌二月癸酉朔八日庚滿(February 28, 722 CE), 弟子彭景宣奉為亡妣郭氏敬造釋迦牟尼佛一龕。願亡妣魂路乘此善根, 千華台上凝法性以生身, 七覺池中悼禪波而悟道。見存大小, 身康十力, 九橫雲消, 體被三堅, 千災自散, 上資有頂, 下及無邊, 同預勝因, 俱登佛果。” Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Guangyuan shiku neirong zonglu: Qianfoya juan I*, 135-136.

¹⁹² Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Guangyuan shiku neirong zonglu: Qianfoya juan I*, 200.

¹⁹³ The biography of Su Ting see Liu et al. eds., *Jiu Tang shu*, 2880-2884. Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Song Qi 宋祁 et al. eds., *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 [New History of Tang] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 4399-4403. Su Ting wrote two poems for the Qianfoya, the “Memorial to the Buddhist Shrine in the northern of Lizhou 利州北題佛龕記” and the “Before the inscription of Last Year in the Buddhist Shrine in the northern of Lizhou 利州北佛龕前重於去歲題處作”. These two poems should be finished during his second visit to Sichuan as for the expression as the “last year” in the title of the second poem which indicates he has passed one year in the Sichuan area. If these two poems are related to his sponsorship of Qianfoya Niche 211, Niche 211 should be able to determine to his second visiting to Sichuan, that is, 723-724CE. More detailed discussion on the two poetries see Wu Mingxian 吳明賢, “Su Ting ru shu kao 蘇頌入蜀考 [A Study of Su Ting’s Visit to Shu],” *Sichuan shifan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 四川師範大學學報(社會科學版) [Journal of Sichuan Normal University: Social Sciences] 33, no.1 (2006): 58-62.

above the main statues. There are two *vajrapānis*, two heavenly kings, as well as two supporting bodhisattvas carved in the outer chamber of the niche. The *vajrapānis* (Figure 2. 24), which are depicted with as well muscled, are identical to those in Niche 47 (Figure 2. 25) in Guanyinyan which can be dated by an inscription to the tenth year of the Tianbao reign (751 CE), which helps to date Qianfoya Niche 86 to the 730s-740s CE.¹⁹⁴

Although there were still sporadic excavations undertaken after 750 CE, the majority of the carving activity in Qianfoya occurred during these three phases. The following discussion examines variations in the construction of Qianfoya in each of these three phases and focuses on the interaction between outer and local visual repertoires in the rock carvings. As I have noted, the entanglement between external and indigenous styles in the Qianfoya reflected the tension between imperial authority and local conventions during the Tang dynasty.

2. Imperial Trends in Local Construction

The development of Qianfoya during Phase One was strongly influenced by a series of Buddhist movements in Chang'an and Luoyang, which were part of the formation of a Buddhist art style that was undertaken at the direction of, or supported by, the imperial court. There were three movements or ideological trends that appear to have had a significant influence on Qianfoya: the drive to restore the pre-existing sacred site, the influence of Indian Buddhism and art, and the politicization of Buddhist art related to Empress Wu. Qianfoya is almost synchronous with art observed in Chang'an and Luoyang, from whence these movements originated. By tracing the carvings in Qianfoya, one can gain insight into the reception of the Tang Metropolitan Art Style at the regional level.

¹⁹⁴ Luo Zongyong 羅宗勇, Wang Jianping 王劍平 and Shen Tao 盛滔, "Guangyuan Guanyinyan shiku diaocha ji 廣元觀音岩石窟調查記 [Investigation of the Guanyinyan Grottoes in Guangyuan]," 四川文物 [Sichuan Relics], no.3 (2002): 3-12.

“Making Anew is Inferior to Restoring the Old”

The reuse of caves carved in earlier periods can be understood as financially motivated. It was much less labor-intensive to carve statues within an existing cave than to excavate a new one. Yet it is clear that money was not the only, or even the main reason, for this practice. There were additional benefits in the use or reuse of old holy places or sacred objects. The scripture, *Xiangfa jueyi jing* 像法決疑經 [*Resolving Doubts Concerning the Semblance Dharma*; T2870], which appeared between 517 and 520 CE, clearly expounds that “making a new thing is inferior to restoring the old”.¹⁹⁵ It exhorts Buddhists to repair pre-existing monasteries, pagodas, statues and scriptures, and states that renovation or restoration brings more merit than making these things anew.¹⁹⁶

We have discussed the remodeling of Qianfoya Cave 726 in the second half of the seventh century in the section on chronology. In addition to the cluttered intrusive niches, there are two pairs of larger figures, Ānanda and Mahākāśyapa, flanking the main Buddha and two Kṣitigarbha on the left and right upper corners, that were carved symmetrically on the rear wall. Their sizes and position indicate that they were intended to supplement the original triad in the cave which dates to the Northern Wei. This indicates that the renovation was at least partly planned. Another similar project in Guangyuan was the refurbishment of Huangzesi Cave 45 (Figure 2. 26). At the center of this cave is a central pillar, shaped as a two-layered, four-sided stupa, dated by Yao to the late Northern Wei (557-581 CE).¹⁹⁷ However, the three groups of one seated Buddha and two bodhisattvas (Figure 2. 27), which were carved within the three large niches on each of the three outer walls, were shaped with a distinctive sculptural style.¹⁹⁸ Their extremely thin *kāśāyas* without any folds are similar to that

¹⁹⁵ The introduction of *Xiangfa jueyi jing* see Lai, “Dating the Hsiang-fa Chueh-i Ching,” 61-91.

¹⁹⁶ 《像法決疑經》：“復有眾生見他舊寺塔廟形像及以經典破落毀壞不肯修治，便作是言，非我先崇所造，何用治為，我寧更自造立新者。善男子一切眾生造立新者不如修故其福甚多。” T2870, 1336a15-19.

¹⁹⁷ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaoxiang chubu yanjiu*, 39.

¹⁹⁸ Ma and Ding, “Guangyuan Huangzesi shiku diaocha ji,” 24-27. Yagi, “Guangyuan Huangzesi chuting zaoxiang kao,” 154-255.

found in Cave 38 in Huangzesi which can be dated by a tourist inscription dated to 665 CE which provides the *terminus ante quem* of its completion (Figure 2. 28).¹⁹⁹ The restoration of Huangzesi Cave 45, then, most likely occurred in the middle of the seventh century.

Although the renovations of these caves always changed and sometimes damaged the pre-existing carvings, it also recalled the early cave form in the local practice. For example, the newly excavated caves in Qianfoya during the seventh century, like Cave 535, adopted a spatial design that included three large niches on each of the three walls. This arrangement was popular in the early and mid-sixth century but was rarely seen in the seventh century. Yao notes that the unusual popularity of this form in Guangyuan at this time seems to have been an imitation of the similar cave form presented in pre-existing caves such as Qianfoya Niche 226 and Huangzesi Cave 45.²⁰⁰ Of course, there are also spatial designs in Cave 535 that better reflect the trend of the seventh century. As pointed out by Yao, the lotus carved at the center of its round-arched ceiling and the low platform which runs across the foot of all three walls, are reminiscent of caves carved in the Longmen Grottoes during the middle of the seventh century.

The carvings in the Longmen Grottoes during the Zhenguan period (627-649 CE) are another well-known case of the revival of a pre-existing and potentially abandoned site. Li points out that the earliest dated activity at the Longmen Grottoes in the Tang dynasty is an intrusive niche (Figure 2. 29) on the back wall in Cave Poyao 破窯, which was sponsored by Concubine Liu of Emperor Gaozong for her son, Prince Li Yuanqing 李元慶 in the eleventh year of the Zhenguan reign (637 CE).²⁰¹ Other Buddhist carvings from the Early Tang in the Longmen Grottoes also focused on the completion of unfinished Northern Dynasty caves, such as Cave

¹⁹⁹ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 93.

²⁰⁰ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 142-145.

²⁰¹ Li Chongfeng 李崇峰, "Longmen shiku Tang dai kuan fenqi shilun: yi daxing kuan wei li 龍門石窟唐代窟龕分期試論:以大型窟龕為例 [A Chronology of the Rock-Cut Caves of the Tang Dynasty at Longmen, Luoyang]," *Fojiao kaogu: cong Yindu dao Zhongguo* 佛教考古:從印度到中國 [Buddhist Archaeology: From India to China] II (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2015), 441-528 .

Tangzidong 唐字洞 and Cave South Binyang 賓陽南洞.²⁰² Some of the statues carved as part of these restoration projects are quite similar to the rock carvings undertaken in Cave 726 and 535 which further indicates that they occurred in the same period. For example, the Buddha sponsored by Concubine Liu in Cave Paoyao has a very similar posture to one found in an intrusive niche on the left wall in Cave 535 (Figure 2. 30). Both depict a seated figure with his left hand raised, palm facing upward. These similarities in sculptural forms provide further evidence for direct or indirect interaction between Qianfoya and the Longmen Grottoes.

The current evidence suggests that the desire to restore old sacred sites in the Early Tang was related to its promotion by the imperial family and groups within the sangha. A stele preserved in the Xiudingsi 修定寺, in Yexian 鄴縣, Hebei Province, the “Record of Xiudingsi of the Great Tang, Yexian 大唐鄴縣修定寺傳記”, dating to the seventh year of the Kaiyuan reign (719 CE), records a court-sponsored drive to repair ruined temples instigated during the reign of Emperor Taizong 太宗 (627-649 CE). This stele mentions that in order to accumulate merit for the health of Empress Zhangsun 長孫皇后 (601-636 CE), Emperor Taizong ordered the repair of 392 temples throughout the country and the construction of seven pagodas in the fourth month of the tenth year of the Zhenguan reign (636 CE).²⁰³ Although there is no evidence that the two restoration projects in Guangyuan were among the 392 temples mentioned in this edict, a nationwide revival of abandoned monasteries supported by the emperor would have undoubtedly encouraged the restoration of other abandoned sacred sites. This then provides us with clear insight into the social context for the reuse space in pre-existing caves in this period.

Another institution which supported the restoration of old statues and temples was the *Wujin zang* 無盡藏 [Inexhaustible Storehouse], which was “a charitable

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ 《大唐鄴縣修定寺傳》：“至貞觀十年四月，勅爲皇后虛風日久，未善痊除，修復廢寺，以希福力。天下三百九十二所佛事院宇，並好山水形勝有七塔者，竝依舊名置立。” Dong Gao 董誥 et al. eds. *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 [The Complete Collection of Tang Literature] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 10938.

lending institution for people in need and a site of San-chieh cultus and institution” related to the Sanjie School 三階教 [literally means “Three Stages School”].²⁰⁴ The Inexhaustible Storehouse accumulated great wealth through popular donations after the Zhenguan reign (627-649 CE), and records indicate that it supported the repair of monasteries not only in Chang’an and Luoyang, but also in Yan 燕, Liang 涼, Shu 蜀, Zhao 趙 and other places.²⁰⁵ There is no textual evidence to support a direct connection between the Guangyuan sites and works of the Inexhaustible Storehouse and the Sanjie School. However, records relating to these two institutions demonstrate that there were both doctrines and mechanisms in place with the Buddhist sangha for the restoration of earlier, potentially abandoned, sacred spaces in the early Tang. Given the presence of these institutions and the imperial support for such activities, restoration projects in Qianfoya and Huangzesi in Guangyuan, which synchronized these in the Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang, are unsurprising.

The Fervor for the “Indian Buddha Image”

During the second half of the seventh century, a vogue for Indian art swept Chang’an and Luoyang. The catalyst for foreign icons appears to have been the knowledge and objects brought back from India by monks, officials, merchants and other travelers. For example, when Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664 CE) returned to Chang’an after his fifteen-year sojourn in India, he brought with him seven Buddha statues from various sacred places in India in addition to a large number of Buddhist

²⁰⁴ Jaime Hubbard, *Absolute Delusion, Perfect Buddhahood: The Rise and Fall of a Chinese Heresy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2000), 151. The Sanjie School was founded by Monk Xinxing 信行 (540-594 CE) in the Sui dynasty and was based in the Huadusi 化度寺 in Chang’an. More studies see Yabuki Keiki 矢吹慶輝, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū 三階教の研究* [A Study of the Sanjie School] (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1927.) Nishimoto Teruma 西本照真, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū 三階教の研究* [A Study of the Sanjie School] (Tōkyō: Shunjūsha, 1998.) Zhang Zong 张总, *中國三階教史* [The History of the Sanjie Teaching in China] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2013.)

²⁰⁵ 貞觀之後,錢帛金玉積聚,不可勝計。常使名僧監藏,供天下伽藍修理。藏內所供,燕、涼、蜀、趙,咸來取給,每日所出,亦不勝數。Wei Shu 韋述, *Liangjing xinji jixiao 兩京新記輯校* [New Records of the Two Capitals], ed. Xin Deyong 辛德勇 (Xi’an: Sanqin chubanshe, 2006), 57.

scriptures.²⁰⁶ These statues were first displayed to the public south of the Zhuque men 朱雀門 on the day of Xuanzang's return and moved the following day to Xingfusi 興福寺 in the Xiude fang 修德坊. They were thereafter installed in the newly established Ci'ensi 慈恩寺 in 648 CE with a large ceremony attended by members of the imperial family, in addition to civil and military officials. The arrival of sacred images from foreign lands with the endorsement of eminent monks and imperial authority would have aroused public interest in India and Indian art.

The reception of Indian art in the Tang can be directly traced through a cluster of clay tablets that depict the Buddha in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* that were excavated at Xi'an and attributed to 650 and 670 CE (Figure 2. 31).²⁰⁷ These tablets contain inscriptions which identify them as an "Indian Buddha image 印度佛像", while their main Buddha follows the figural form from Sārnāth and Bodhgayā dating to the sixth century (Figure 2. 32).²⁰⁸ An apparent Indian prototype for this image is a statue from

²⁰⁶ More details discussion see Hida, "Genjō ni yoru Shaka-zō nanaku no shōrai 玄奘による釈迦像七軀の請来 [The Seven Buddha Statues invited by Xuanzang]," *Shotō Bukkyō bijutsu no kenkyū*, 29-54.

²⁰⁷ Hida dates its production to sometime between 650 CE and 670 CE on the basis of a convincing survey of the biography of the "Attendant Su 蘇常侍". Hida Romi 肥田路美, "Seian shutsudo Senbutsu no seisaku jijō to igi 西安出土塼仏の制作事情と意義 [The Making and Meaning of the Clayed Buddha excavated from Xi'an]," in *Shotō Bukkyō bijutsu no kenkyū*, 55-90. Dorothy C. Wong, "Xuanzang and his Image-Making Activities: Mass Reproduction and Materiality in Buddhism," in *Buddhist Pilgrim-monks as Agents*, 23-56. The round clay tablet is with the "All dharmas arise from a cause, the Tathāgata has explained their cause. The cessation of the cause of these dharmas, this the great Śramaṇa has explained 諸法從緣生,如來說是因,諸法從緣滅,大沙門所說" on the obverse and the "Indian Buddha Image was commissioned by the Attendant Su and others of the Great Tang 印度佛像大唐蘇常侍普同等共作" on its reverse. The four verses on the obverse is recognized as a Chinese translation of the "the gāthā of dependent-origination 緣起偈 [Sanskrit *Pratīyasamutpāda gāthā*]" (also known in Chinese as the "the gāthā of Dharma body 法身偈 [Sanskrit *Dharmakāya gāthā*]" or the "the verse on dependent arising 緣起法頌 [Sanskrit *Ye Dhammā Hetu*"]) which is different from other translations in the scriptures. More discussion of the *Pratīyasamutpāda gāthā* see Daniel Boucher, "The Pratīyasamutpādagāthā and Its Role in the Medieval Cult of the Relics," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14/1, (1991):1-27. Similar votive tables were also found in Burma, see John Guy, "Offering up a Rare Jewel: Buddhist Merit-Making and Votive Tablets in Early Burma," in *Burma: Art and Archaeology*, eds. Alexandra Green and T. Richard Blurton (London: British Museum Press, 2002), 22-33.

²⁰⁸ Wong, the "Bodhgayā Prototype," in *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks as Agents*, 39. Janice Leoshko, "About Looking at Buddha Images in Eastern India," *Archives of Asian Art* 52, (2000/2001): 63-82.

Bodhgayā dated to the seventh century, which is currently held in the Nalanda Museum, Bihar.²⁰⁹ More interestingly, a round clay tablet with an identical image but with the same *gāthā* written in Sanskrit was also excavated at Xi'an.²¹⁰ This clay tablet could have been carried from India or made from a mold brought from India, as nearly identical objects have been excavated from Sirpur in Mahasamud in the Indian state of Chattisgarh.²¹¹

It is clearly apparent that Chinese craftsmen were familiar with Indian images and styles.²¹² This is evidenced by the use of Indian elements in the modelling of Buddha statues. For instance, the Indian style of the statue of Vairocana in Fengxiansi at the Longmen Grottoes. It has also been argued that the robe covering both shoulders, the wavy hair, and the broad face of the statue of Vairocana are all derived from drawings or copies of statues brought from Gandhāra.²¹³ In addition, the redesigns of the Indian prototype can also be overserved. The so-called “King Udāyana Buddha,” of which there are dozens of examples in the Longmen and Gongyi Grottoes dating to 650s -680s CE, is a typical example. Although its name attributes the form of the first statue of Śākyamuni to a sandalwood statue made by an ancient Indian monarch, King Udāyana, scholars now consider the final formation of this image to lie in China rather than India.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks as Agents*, 34-39.

²¹⁰ Hida cites a rubbing from the Zunguzhai Hida, “Seian shutsudo Senbutsu no seisaku jijō to igi,” 62-67. Huang Jun 黄濬, *Zunguzhai taofu liuzhen 尊古齋陶佛留真* [Reproductions of the Buddhist Pottery Plaques in Zunguzhai] (Beijing: Zunguzhai, 1937). For a discussion on the replication see Shen, “Terracotta Tablets with Buddhist Images: Chinese Deviations from the Indian Prototype,” in *Authentic Replicas*, 110-111.

²¹¹ Hida Romi, “Seian shutsudo Senbutsu no seisaku jijō to igi,” 67-71.

²¹² The discussion on the creation of a foreign style image see Sun-ah Choi, “Zhenrong to Ruixiang: The Medieval Chinese Reception of the Mahābodhi Buddha Statue,” *The Art Bulletin* 97, no.4 (2015): 364-387. McNair, *Donors of Longmen*, 120-121.

²¹³ McNair, *Donors of Longmen*, 120.

²¹⁴ The “King Udāyana Buddha” was clad in a thin robe revealing the contour of the body, similar to the sixth-century Gupta-Sārnāth objects of India. Yet the throne of the Buddha, whose back is decorated with miraculous animals like *makara* or *vyālaka*, was not included in any Indian samples with a similar figural form. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the assembly of the Buddha and the throne was made by Chinese craftsmen who hybridized various exotic elements into a new image.

There appears to have been a great enthusiasm for the “Indian Buddha Image” and related Indian styles in Guangyuan in the second half of the seventh century. To some extent, the main driving force behind the shift in the style of rock carvings in Guangyuan from the local conventions style around the 630s CE to a more northern style from the 650s CE onwards appears to have been due to the concurrent upsurge of Indian Buddhist art. The earliest work with “Indianized” elements is the Buddha on the rear wall of Cave 38 in Huangzesi, which was carved before 665 CE, in which Buddha is set in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* and wears an extremely thin cassock (Figure 2. 28) with no folds that clearly reveals the shape of his chest, abdomen and arms.

Another image which appears to have a similar posture to the “Indian Buddha image” is the bejeweled Buddha in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* on the right wall of Cave 535 (Figure 2. 33). This image is believed to be a depiction of the “Puti Ruixiang 菩提瑞像 [Bodhi Auspicious Image],” which is associated with a statue of Śākyamuni in Bodhgayā, India, made by Maitreya Bodhisattva as recorded in a miraculous story from Xuanzang’s *Datang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 [Record of the Western Regions] compiled in 646 CE.²¹⁵ The potential connection between a bejeweled Buddha and the

The image of “King Udāyana Buddha” popular in Luoyang and Gongyi in the second half of seventh century has long been considered to be one of the seven statues that Xuanzang brought back from India to China. For instance, McNair has supported this idea in her *Donors of Longmen*, 99-102. Yet the interpretation is challenged by some scholars like Inamoto Yasuo, especially the source of the throne. Inamoto Yasuo 稲本泰生, “Uten’ō zō tōden kō: Chūgoku Shotōki o chūshin ni 優填王像東傳考: 中國初唐期を中心に [On the Propagation of the Buddha Image of King Udāyana: With Special Reference to the Early Tang Dynasty],” *Tōhō gakuhō* 東方學報 [Journal of Oriental Studies] 69, (1997): 357-457. Hida Romi 肥田路美, “Shotō jidai ni okeru Uten’ō zō: Genjō no Shaka zō shōrai to sono juyō no issō 初唐時代における優填王像: 玄奘の釈迦像請来とその受容の一相 [The King Udāyana Image in the Early Tang: Reception of the Image of Śākyamuni introduced by Xuanzang],” *Bijutsushi* 美術史 35, no.2 (1986): 81-94.

²¹⁵ Selected research to this image sees Chuan-ying Yen, *The Sculpture from the Tower of Seven Jewels: The Style, Patronage and Iconography of the Monument* (Ph.D., Harvard University, 1986), 84-97. Hida Romi, “Tōdai ni okeru Buddagayā Kongōza shin’yō no ryūkō ni tsuite 唐代における仏陀伽耶金剛座真容の流行について [On the image of the true visage on a diamond seat from Bodh Gaya during the Tang Dynasty],” in *Ronsō Bukkyō bijutsushi* 論叢仏教美術史 [The History of Buddhist Art], ed. Machida Koichi sensei koki kinenkai 町田甲一先生古稀記念会 [The 70th Anniversary of Professor Machida Kōichi] (Tōkyō: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1986), 155-186. The revised version see Hida Romi, “Bōdogayāka kongōza shin’yō no juyō to tenkai ボードガヤーカ金剛座真容の受容と展

auspicious tale of Maitreya Bodhisattva was first pointed out by Hida Romi and is now been widely accepted by scholars. Recent studies by Choi and Wong, however, argue that the ornamentation of the Buddha may not come from the original Indian image.²¹⁶ Regardless of whether the "Puti Ruixiang" is a real Indian image or a re-creation of an actual Indian icon, the presence of this image in Cave 535 is clearly connected to the upsurge of "Indian art" during this period.

A final example of 'Indian images' in Guangyuan is the pair of Kṣitigarbha on the upper left and right corners of the back wall of Cave 726 (Figure 2. 34 and Figure 2. 35). The closest example can be found on a clay tablet depicting Kṣitigarbha excavated from Xi'an (Figure 2. 36), yet the *mudrā* and the representation of the

開 [The Reception and development of the True Visage on the Diamond Seat of Bodh Gaya],” in *Shotō Bukkyō bijutsu no kenkyū*, 91-132. Lee Yun-min 李玉珉, “Shilun Tangdai xiangmo chengdao shi zhuangshi fo 試論唐代降魔成道式裝飾佛 [A Preliminary Discussion of Tang Dynasty Bejeweled Buddhas in the Bhūmisparśa-mudrā],” *Gugong xueshu jikan* 故宮學術季刊 [The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly] 23, no.3 (1995): 39-90,157. Li Chongfeng 李崇峰, “Puti xiang chutan 菩提像初探 [Preliminary Study of the ‘Puti Xiang’],” in *Fojiao kaogu* 佛教考古 II, 809-834. Choi, “Zhenrong to Ruixiang: The Medieval Chinese Reception of the Mahābodhi Buddha Statue,” 364-387. Dorothy C Wong, “Genesis of the Bejeweled Buddha in Earth-touching Gesture: Wu Zhao and Her Monk-Advisers,” in *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks as Agents of Cultural and Artistic Transmission: The International Buddhist Art Style in East Asia, ca. 645-770* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2018), 57-94. Lei Yuhua 雷玉華 and Wang Jianping 王劍平, “Shilun Sichuan de Puti ruixiang 試論四川的‘菩提瑞像’ [A Preliminary Discussion on the Puti Ruixiang in Sichuan],” *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Cultural Relics], no.1 (2004): 85-91.

²¹⁶ Remarkably, in the miraculous tale, the jewelries of the Buddha were the result of veneration by human devotees rather than being part of the image created by Maitreya Bodhisattva. 《大唐西域記》卷 8: ”精舍既成，招募工人，欲圖如來初成佛像。曠以歲月，無人應召。久之，有婆羅門來告眾曰，我善圖寫如來妙相。眾曰，今將造像，夫何所須？曰，香泥耳。宜置精舍之中，并一燈照，我入已，堅閉其戶，六月後乃可開門。時諸僧眾皆如其命。尚餘四日，未滿六月，眾咸駭異，開以觀之。見精舍內佛像儼然，結加趺坐，右足居上，左手斂，右手垂，東面而坐，肅然如在。座高四尺二寸，廣丈二尺五寸，像高丈一尺五寸，兩膝相去八尺八寸，兩肩六尺二寸，相好具足，慈顏若真，唯右乳上圖瑩未周。既不見人，方驗神鑒，眾咸悲歎，慙懃請知。有一沙門，宿心淳質，乃感夢見往婆羅門而告曰，我是慈氏菩薩，恐工人之思不測聖容，故我躬來圖寫佛像。垂右手者，昔如來之將證佛果，天魔來嬈，地神告至，其一先出，助佛降魔，如來告曰，汝勿憂怖，吾以忍力，降彼必矣。魔王曰，誰為明證？如來乃垂手指地，言，此有證。是時第二地神踊出作證，故今像手做昔下垂。眾知靈鑒，莫不悲感。於是乳上未周，填廁眾寶，珠瓔寶冠，奇珍交飾。” T2087, 916a16-b8. For an English Translation see Choi, “Zhenrong to Ruixiang: The Medieval Chinese Reception of the Mahābodhi Buddha Statue,” 367-388.

garments are different.²¹⁷ Interestingly, the upper body of the Kṣitigarbha in Cave 726 is very like that of the “Indian Buddha image” discussed above, especially how the robe covers the left shoulder without any folds and the posture of the *bhūmiśarśa-mudrā*. The Kṣitigarbha in Qianfoya Cave 726 seemingly mimics the representation of the upper body of the “Indian Buddha image”. The two semi-circular decorations sticking out from behind the Kṣitigarbha next to his upper arms are reminiscent of the cushions also protruding from behind the Buddhas’ upper arms in the clay tablet of the “Indian Buddha image.” A similar motif can also be seen on a sculpture held in Nalanda Museum. The semi-circular decorations appear to be a transformation of the original decorative patterns on each side of the cushion. This whole image has been constructed from elements of the “Indian style” created by Chinese craftsmen.

The way in which Indian motifs entered Sichuan is also a matter of academic concern. Howard argues that Pujiang is the regional center of the Burma route and furthered consider the “Puti Ruixiang” in Feixian’ge Niche 9 and Niche 44 as evidence of an extension of an “further Indian Silk Road” or the Burma route that linking Sichuan and Southeastern and Southern Asia.²¹⁸ However, her view has been refuted by Sørensen who considers the prototype of the “Puti Ruixiang” in Pujiang as due to “the influence of Indian sculpture dating from the High Gupta period, transmitted via the central Asian Silk Roads to the area via the Tang capitals at

²¹⁷ Yin Fu 尹富, “7 shiji zhongye zhi 8 shiji chu dizang zaoxiang lunkao 七世紀中葉至八世紀初地藏造像論考 [Textual Research on Kṣitigarbha Images in the Period of 651-712 CE],” *Fagu foxue xuebao* 法鼓佛學學報 [Dharma Drum Journal of Buddhist Studies], 2009, 75-146. Chang Qing 常青, “Longmen shiku Dizang pusa ji qi youguan wenti 龍門石窟地藏菩薩及其有關問題 [Issues Regarding the Depictions of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattvas in Longmen Grottoes],” *Zhongyuan wenwu* 中原文物 [Cultural Relics of Central China], no.4 (1993): 29-36. Kuno Miki 久野美樹. “Tōdai Ryūmonsekkutsu no Jizōbosatsu zō 唐代龍門石窟の地藏菩薩像 [Statues of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva in the Longmen Grottoes during the Tang],” *Joshi bijutsu daigaku kenkyū kiyō* 女子美術大学研究紀要 [Bulletin, Joshibi University of Art and Design], no.33 (2003): 13-20. Zhiru, *The Making of a Savior Bodhisattva: Dizang in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007). Zhongguo guojia bowuguan 中國國家博物館 [National Museum of China] ed. *Zhongguo gudai fozaoxiang yishu* 中國古代佛造像藝術 [Buddhist Sculptural Art in Ancient China] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2011), pl36, 62.

²¹⁸ Angela F. Howard, “Buddhist Sculpture of Pujiang, Sichuan: A Mirror of the Direct Link between Southwest China and India in High Tang,” *Archives of Asian Art* 42, (1989): 49-61.

Chang'an and Luoyang".²¹⁹ Lee provides more critical evidence for Sørensen's argument by stating that the ornate backrest which Howard argues was an Indian element was first present in Northern China in the late seventh century and then was transmitted into the Sichuan area in the first half of the eighth century.²²⁰

Not only is the "Puti Ruixiang" image present in Northern Sichuan before this time but the depiction of Buddha in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* was introduced from Chang'an and Luoyang during this period. The evidence can be traced from the images themselves, the drapery pattern hanging from the seat are typical of the Buddhist art of Northern China during this period. A similar example is a Buddha in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* dated to 676 CE in Guilin, Guangxi Province.²²¹ Although the geographic location was quite close to the maritime trade route to India, Yamana Shinsei still argues that the image was transmitted via Chang'an and Luoyang and therefore was introduced from India via the Central Asian along the Silk Road. He points out the lower rim of the Buddha's robe is simplified to a curve, which is typical of sculptures in Northern China but not in India.²²²

There is a fervor for Indian style images depicting the Buddha in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā*. The popularity of such a figural form in different regions like Chang'an, Luoyang, Guangyuan, and Guilin can be regarded as direct evidence of the development of a universal standard of Buddhist art throughout the Tang. On the other hand, however, the crucial role of Indian images in the formation of such a trans-regional art system is also highlighted. For one thing, the longing for the images from the absolute center of the Buddhist world seem to have driven the flow of Buddhist art from the heart of Tang empire, Chang'an and Luoyang, out to its marginal areas like Sichuan and Guangxi. For another thing, the arrival of exotic elements stimulated the creativity and imagination of Chinese craftsmen both in the

²¹⁹ Sørensen, "The Buddhist Sculptures at Feixian Pavilion in Pujiang, Sichuan," 42.

²²⁰ Lee, "Shilun Tangdai xiangmo chengdao shi zhuangshi fo," 39-90, 157.

²²¹ Yamana Shinsei 山名伸生, "Keirin no Chōro gan'nen mei Magaibutsu ni tsuite 桂林の調露元年銘摩崖仏について [Rock-carved Buddha dating to the First Year of Tiaolu Reign in Guilin]," *Bukkyō geijutsu* 仏教芸術 [Buddhist Art] 198, no.9 (1991): 85-108.

²²² Ibid.

capital area and the Sichuan area. This resulted in the creation of new images such as the “King Udāyana image” in Longmen and Gongyi, and the Kṣitigarbha in Qianfoya Cave 726.

Empress Wu’s Political Use of Buddhism

The extent to which the Empress Wu used Buddhism for political gain and the way in which it affected the material production of Buddhist art has been the focus of significant academic debate for many years.²²³ The following discussion concentrates on Caves 535 and 746, two large projects in Qianfoya that were completed during the reign of Empress Wu. The content of these niches reflects a close association to two of the forms of “Buddhist propaganda” which have been attributed to her reign. These are the depiction of the Empress Wu as Maitreya Buddha and the Empress Wu’s promotion of the cult of the relics of the Buddha.

Cave 535

The first one to be discussed here is Qianfoya Cave 535. The program of this cave consists of three seated Buddhas, each depicted in a separate niche on a separate wall flanked by two standing bodhisattvas. The Buddha on the rear wall, who wears a robe which covers both shoulders with his two legs naturally hanging down, is certainly Maitreya Buddha.²²⁴ The identity of the bejeweled Buddha in the

²²³ See Chen Yinke 陈寅恪, “Wu Zhao yu fojiao 武曩與佛教 [Wu Zhao and Buddhism],” in *Chen Yinke shixue lunwen xuanji* 陈寅恪史學論文選集 [An Edited Volume of Historical Studies by Chen Yinke] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992), 352-370. Antonino Forte, *Mingtang and Buddhist Utopias in the History of the Astronomical Clock: The Tower, Statue and Armillary Sphere Constructed by Empress Wu* (Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente; Paris: Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient, 1988). Jinhua Chen, “Śarīra and Scepter: Empress Wu’s Political Use of Buddhist Relics,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 25, 1/2 (2002): 33–150.

²²⁴ The making of Maitreya Buddha in the early Tang dynasty in Sichuan see Hida Romi 肥田路美, “Mirokubutsu no shinkō to Izakei Nyorai zō: go seiki kara Sokutenbukōki izen made 弥勒仏の信仰と倚坐形如来像: 五世紀から則天武后前期以前まで [The Cult of Maitreya Buddha and the Image of Buddha Sitting with Pendant Legs: From the fifth Century to the Reign of Empress Wu],” in *Chūōajia Bukkyō bijutsu no kenkyū—Shaka · Miroku · Amida shinkō no bijutsu no seisei o Chūshin ni* 中央アジア仏教美術の研究—釈迦・弥勒・阿弥陀信仰の美術の生成を中心に [A Study of Buddhist Art in Central Asia: Focusing on the Artwork relating to the Śākyamuni, Maitreya, and Amida Faiths], *Heisei 26 nendo ~29 nendo kagakukenkyūhi hojokin kibankenkyū(B) hōkokusho* 平成

bhūmisparśa-mudrā on the right wall is attributed by most scholars as Śākyamuni.²²⁵

The Buddha on the left wall is set a *mudrā* which mirrors the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā*

26 年度～29 年度科学研究費補助金基盤研究(B)報告書 [2014-2017 Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B)], 47-64.

²²⁵ While Lei and Wang identify the Buddha on the right wall of Cave 535 in Qianfoya Śākyamuni, Kim identifies the bejeweled Buddha Vairocana whom she specifically refers to as the Dharmakāya Buddha from the *Da fang guang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 [the Buddhāvataṃsaka; T279] translated by Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀 (652-710) around 699 CE. Lei Yuhua 雷玉華 and Wang Jianping 王劍平, “Zailun Sichuan de Puti Ruixiang 再論四川的菩提瑞像[Rethinking the Puti Ruixiang in Sichuan],” *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 [Palace Museum Journal], no.6 (2005): 142-148. Kim Euna 金銀兒, “Kōgen Senbutsugan Renkadō Shokuchiin zō ni tsuite 広元千仏崖蓮花洞触地印像について [A Buddha in Bhūmisparśa-Mudrā in the Lotus Cave in Guangyuan Qianfoya],” *Kyōto bigaku bijutsu shigaku* 京都美学美術史学 [Kyoto Studies in Aesthetics and Art History], no.7 (2008): 33-65.

The identity of the “Puti Ruixiang” is problematic. Hida Romi names this kind of image with the terminology used by Yijing 義淨 (635-713 CE), who brought back a *pu* 鋪 of “Jingangzuo Zhenrong 金剛座真容 [True visage of the Diamond Throne]” to Luoyang in 694 CE. The Jingangzuo refers to the place where Śākyamuni Buddha attained final awakening in the Bodhgayā. The image has the alias of the “Puti Shu Xiang 菩提樹像 [Image of the Bodhi Trees]” or the “Puti Xiang 菩提像 [Image of the Bodhi]” in the travel notes wrote by the pilgrimage monks or Buddhist encyclopedia compiled in the Tang. The “Puti Shu Xiang” refer to this image under the Bodhi tree, which is another narrative for the awakening place of Śākyamuni Buddha. The “Puti Xiang” can be short for the “Puti Shu Xiang”, yet also can be understood as an image from the Bodhgayā, or the status of the awakening as the bodhi means wisdom or awakening. However, she also argues that depictions of the Buddha set in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* are usually interpreted as representations of Śākyamuni Buddha in his first awakening and that the meaning of the Buddha in his first awakening indicates the possibility of the double nature. At this moment, Śākyamuni would have been Nirmāṇakāya, meaning that his awakening was a manifestation of a need to teach sentient beings. Simultaneously, the status of the awakening is also Dharmakāya, the transcendence of form and realization of thusness in Buddhism. The combination of these two attributes means that a depiction of Śākyamuni at this moment contained the nature of a Dharmakāya Buddha. For instance, Lee points out a special case, Niche 12 completed in Late Tang in Beishan 北山, Dazu 大足 county, Chongqing 重慶, in which “Puti Ruixiang” is flanked by Samantabhadra Bodhisattva and Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva. As for this sample, the “Puti Ruixiang” can be designed as the representation of Vairocana Buddha to compose the Huayan sanshen 華嚴三聖 [Three Holy Ones of the Huayan] which refers to the primary deities in the lotus-womb world in the Avataṃsaka belief. Romi, “Bōdogayāka kongōza shin'yō no juyō to tenkai,” in *Shotō Bukkyō bijutsu no kenkyū*, 91-132. Lee Yun-min, “Shilun Tangdai xiangmo chengdao shi zhuangshi fo,” 61-64.

However, an image which contains the nature of Dharmakāya Buddha is not equal to a representation of Dharmakāya Buddha. More evidence is required to make the case that the bejeweled Buddha in Qianfoya Niche 535 was a representation of Vairocana, Dharmakāya Buddha from the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*. A related issue is the identification of the bejeweled Buddhas with the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* (the “Puti Ruixiang”) which date to the Tang in Feixian’ge 飛仙閣, Pujiang 浦江. Sørensen attempts to use the opening scene in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* [translated by Buddhahadra 佛

whose identity cannot be determined. If inferred from the common combination of the “three Buddhas of three times or three worlds 三世佛” during this period, it is probably Amitābha or one of the Buddhas of the past, potentially Mahākāśyapa.²²⁶

陀跋陀羅 (358-429) around 420 CE; T 278] to prove the connection between the “Puti Ruixiang” in Feixian’ge and the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*. The scripture describes the Buddha preaching in Magadha in the place where he originally awakened and where the tale of the “Puti Ruixiang” occurred. However, the problem is that there is no mention of the Buddha being adorned with the necklaces or other decorations or being set in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*. Thus, it seems that there is limited evidence to support the connection between the “Puti Ruixiang” and the opening scene in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka*. Therefore, I prefer to consider the “Puti Ruixiang” in Qianfoya Cave 535 as a representation of Śākyamuni. In fact, most scholars have admitted that there is no persuasive evidence which can testify the connections between the “Puti Ruixiang” and the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* during the reign of Empress Wu. For example, Kuno, who are used to be influential supporters for the hypothesis of Vairocana, have changed their idea in their later publication. Henrik H. Sørensen, “The Buddhist Sculptures at Feixian Pavilion in Pujiang, Sichuan,” 40. 久野美樹 Kuno Miki, “Kyūraikodai Nandō chū sonzō shūhen no zōzō ni suite 旧擂鼓台南洞中尊像周辺の造像について [Buddha in South Cave, Leigutai, and its related statues],” in *Tōdai Ryūmonsekkutsu no kenkyū : zōkei no shisōteki haikai ni suite 唐代龍門石窟の研究 : 造形の思想的背景について* [Study of Longmen Grottoes in the Tang Dynasty] (Tōkyō: Chūōkōron bijutsu shuppan, 2011), 355-436.

In addition, Kim compares Qianfoya Cave 535 with the Central Cave of 565 CE in the Xiaonanzhai Grottoes 小南海石窟 and the Dazhushen Cave 大住聖窟 of 589 CE in Baoshan 寶山, both in Handan 邯鄲, Hebei Province, the only two known cases which scholars consider the three Buddha imagery of Vairocana, Amitābha, and Maitreya. Both of their Vairocana Buddhas were installed in the rear wall and occupy the dominant position in the grottoes, this spatial arrangement is not surprising because the Vairocana as Dharmakāya Buddha has more authority than the other two Buddhas. However, this interpretation has faced some challenges by Michael Radich’s article. See Yen Chuan-ying 顏娟英, “Beiqi changuan ku de tuxiang kao: cong xiaonanzhai shiku dao xiangtangshan shiku 北齊禪觀窟的圖像考——從小南海石窟到響堂山石窟 [Iconography of the *Changuan* Cave in Northern Qi: From Xiaonanzhai Grottoes to Xiangtangshan Grottoes],” in *Jinghua shuiyue: Zhongguo gudai meishu kaogu yu fojiao yishu de tantao 鏡花水月: 中國古代美術考古與佛教藝術的探討* [Visualizing the Miraculous World: Reflections on the Buddhist Art in Medieval China] (Taipei: Rock Publishing Intl., 2016), 261-320. Sunkyung Kim, “Seeing Buddhas in Cave Sanctuaries,” *Asia Major* 24, no. 1 (2011): 87-126. Michael Radich, “Reading the Writing on the Wall: ‘Sengchou’s’ Cave at Xiaonanzhai, early Chinese Buddhist Meditation, and Unique Portions of Dharmakṣema’s Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 42, (2019): 515-632.

²²⁶ The tree buddhas is usually considered as the *Sanshifo* 三世佛 [three Buddhas], represent the three Buddhas of the three times or three worlds. If they are intended to represent the Buddhas of the three times, which would then mean that the Buddha of the past, potentially represented by Mahākāśyapa, is depicted on the left wall, Śākyamuni as the Buddha of the present occupies the right, and Maitreya as the Buddha of the future occupies the primary focal location on the rear wall. If they are intended to represent the Buddhas of the three worlds, then the left wall will be occupied by the Amitābha of the western paradise, the right wall by the Śākyamuni in the Sahā world, and finally the

The use of three Buddhas imagery to reaffirm imperial prerogative had historical antecedents. Previous emperors that had also been represented as a Tathāgata in order to be reaffirm their legitimacy. For example, the “Five Caves of Tanyao 曇曜五窟”, the earliest five caves in the Yungang Grottoes, are believed have been intended to represent the first five emperors of the Northern Wei. Each of these caves have been intended the Buddhas of the past, the present and the future.²²⁷ A perhaps more analogous project that features the three Buddhas imagery centered on Maitreya Buddha can be found in the Longmen Grottoes, the “Cliff-carved three Buddhas 摩崖三佛” (Figure 2. 37) which was carved during the reign of Empress Wu.²²⁸ Therefore, this imagery had a long-standing association with the affirmation of imperial legitimacy as well as the propaganda of Empress Wu as the messianic Maitreya. It is therefore likely that the program in Cave 535 may have been intended as a declaration of support for the legitimacy of the reign of the Empress Wu and her messianic role as the manifestation of Maitreya in the world.

The intrusive niches dated to 696-697 CE carved on the rear wall of Qianfoya Cave 535 provide a *terminus ante quem* for the main three Buddhas theme of the cave. This aligns with the decline of the cult of the Empress Wu as Maitreya following the burning of the Mingtang 明堂 by Monk Huaiyi 懷義 (d. 694 CE).

rear wall would contain either Maitreya Buddha in his pure land. We Yucheng discusses the Amitābha is usually used as one of the past Buddhas in the three Buddhas imagery. Wen Yucheng 溫玉成, “Longmen shiku painian 龍門石窟排年[Chronology of Longmen Grottoes],” in *Zhongguoshiku: Longmen shiku*, 172-216: 205. More discussion about the iconology of the three Buddhas see Li Jingjie, “Tang Song shiqi sanfo tuxiang leixing fenxi: yi Sichuan, Shanbei shiku sanfo zuhe diaoke wei zhongxin,” 308-341. Also, Hamada Tamami 濱田瑞美, “Tangdai sanshifo zaoxiang:yi Sichuan Jiajiang Qianfoyan wei zhongxin 唐代三世佛造像:以四川夾江千佛岩為中心 [Statues of Three Buddhas from Tang Dynasty: Focusing on the Qianfoyan in Jiajiang, Sichuan],” *Dazu xuekan* 大足學刊 [Journal of Dazu Studies] 1, (2016): 116-124.

²²⁷ Wang Youkui argues that their iconography is a clever combination of the succession in the secular imperial lineage and the cyclical thought about the Buddhas of three ages whose prototype can be traced back to Gandharan Art in Central Asia. Wang Youkui 王友奎, “Yungang Tanyao wuku tuxiang zuhe fenxi 雲岡曇曜五窟圖像組合分析 [A Multi-Perspective Analysis of Images in the Five Grottoes of Tanyan, Yungang],” *Yishushi yanjiu* 藝術史研究 [The Study of Art History] 18(2016): 225-68.

²²⁸ Lei and Wang, *Guangyuan shiku*, 33.

Forte's research highlights Huaiyi as the greatest supporter of Maitreyism among the monk advisors to the empress.²²⁹ After the destruction of the Mingtang, the Empress Wu abandoned the title of *Cishi* 慈氏 through which she had assumed the role of Maitreya. Furthermore the cataloguing of the *Zhengming Sutra* 證明經 (T2879), the sutra that had served as a lynchpin in Empress Wu's Maitreyist political theology, as a pseudoscripture in the *Corrected and Authorized Catalog of Scriptures of the Great Zhou Dynasty* 大周刊定眾經目錄 (T2153) which was compiled in 695 CE, serves as further evidence for this theological and political shift.²³⁰ This means it is highly possible that Cave 535 was constructed during the brief period when the Empress Wu still held the title of *Cishi*. The three Buddhas imagery in Cave 535 should therefore be considered alongside her use of Maitreyism in her political theology.

Cave 746

Another example is Qianfoya Cave 746 which contains a *parinirvāṇa* image. Cave 746 is a central-altar cave, in which a Buddha is depicted lying on his right side on a rectangular platform (Figure 2. 38). A female figure, probably Lady Māyā, stands to the Buddha's right.²³¹ Behind the Buddha there are ten disciples set in two

²²⁹ Forte, *Political Propaganda and Ideology*, 147-157.

²³⁰ 《大周刊定眾經目錄》卷 15: “偽經目錄……普賢菩薩說證明經一卷。” T2153, 472a23-c25.

²³¹ Most scholars consider that the female figure next to the central Buddha in Qianfoya Cave 746 Lady Māyā, who descends to the place with the sāla trees after that she heard the news of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*. See 《摩訶摩耶經》卷2: “時摩訶摩耶說此偈已，涕泣懊惱不能自勝，與於無量諸天女等眷屬圍遶，作妙妓樂、燒香、散花歌頌讚歎，從空來下趣雙樹所。到娑羅林中已，遙見佛棺即大悶絕不能自勝，諸天女等以水灑面然後方蘇。前至棺所頭頂作禮，垂淚悲惱而作此言：昔於過去無量劫來，長為母子未曾捨離，一旦於今無相見期。嗚呼苦哉！眾生福盡，方當昏迷，誰為開導？” T383, 1012c8-16. This judgment is mainly based on the convention of representing Lady Māyā in the nirvana scenes from Central Asia to the northwestern and northern China. See Miyaji Akira 宮治昭, “Zhongya niepantu de tuxiangxue kaocha: aidao zitai yu nvshen xinyang 中亞涅槃圖的圖像學考察: 哀悼姿態與女神信仰 [An Iconographic Study of *Parinirvāṇa* Scenes in Central Asia: Mourning Figures and Goddess Belief],” *Niepan he mile de tuxiangxue* 涅槃和彌勒的圖像學 [The Iconography of Nirvāṇa and Maitreya] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2009), 453-477. As for the sample in Xiangtangshan Grottoes, Mizuno Seiichi 水野清一 considers the figure kneeling before the couch of the Buddha Lady Māyā. Mizuno Seiichi 水野清一 and Nagahiro Toshino 長廣敏雄, *Kyōdōsan sekkutsu: Kahoku Kanan shō zakai ni okeru hokusei jidai no sekkutsu jūin*, 32. However, Liu Yongzeng argues that the figure before the Buddha, including the examples in Cave 5 in

rows, who are depicted seated and kneeling in mourning. The two bodhisattvas stand slightly apart from the mourning disciples in front of the two sāla trees which frame the scene. Although the whole of the left wall is occupied with intrusive niches, the four narrative scenes carved in relief on the right and back walls are still extant. These scenes were set in a continuous landscape. Running counterclockwise around the walls of the cave, the scenes are: the “encasement in the coffin”; the “lifting the coffin (Figure 2. 39)”; “cremation (Figure 2. 40)”; and finally, a scene identified as “the six female disciples (possible related to Lady Māyā)”.

The *parinirvāṇa* image in Cave 746 reflects both a slight “Indian” influence and a continuation of the Buddhist art from northern China in the sixth Century. The Buddha is depicted wearing a garment that covers only the right shoulder, which is similar to a clay tablet with the “Indian Buddha Image” discussed above. Yet the way in which the Buddha is depicted, lying on his right side with both arms running straight along his sides, is a clear deviation from the “standard *parinirvāṇa* image” in northwest India and Central Asia, in which the Buddha always holds his face with his right hand (Figure 2. 41).²³² The prototype for the *parinirvāṇa* images in Guanyuan

Xiangtangshan Grottoes, Handan and in Qianfoya Grottoes, Guanyuan, should be understood as Jīvaka (耆婆 or 時縛迦), a lay physician who used to treat the Buddha. Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, “Dunhuang Mogaoku di yiwuba ku de yanjiu 敦煌莫高窟第一五八窟的研究 [Study of Cave 158 in Mogaoku, Dunhuang],” *Dunhuang shikuyishu mogaoku di 158 ku, Zhongtang* 敦煌石窟藝術·莫高窟第158窟(中唐) [Art of Dunhuang Caves: Mogaoku Cave 158, Middle Tang] (Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 1998), 11-35. Fan and Yin point out that there is no depiction of Jīvaka in the *parinirvāṇa* scene, and argues that the figure in Xiangtangshan Cave 5 without the head is hard to judge, the samples in Qianfoya, Guanyuan were female and should be Lady Māyā, but did not deny the possibility of the male figure who touches the Buddha’s pulse in Wofoyuan 臥佛院 in Anyue 安岳 as Jīvaka. The archaeological report of Wofoyuan in Anyue considers the figure Subhadra, the last disciple of the Buddha. Fan Xuesong 樊雪崧 and Yin Bo 殷博, “Weijing de shiji: Dunhuang Xi Qianfodong di ba ku niepan tu xintan 未竟的示寂:敦煌西千佛洞第8窟涅槃圖新探 [Unfinished Silence: A New Study on the *Parinirvāṇa* Scene in Cave 8 of the Western Thousand-Buddha Grottoes at Dunhuang],” *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang Research] 177, no.5 (2019): 34-42. Dazu shike yanjiuyuan 大足石刻研究院 [Dazu Rock Carvings Academy], *Anyue Wofoyuan kaogu diaocha yu yanjiu* 安岳臥佛院考古調查與研究 [Archaeological Report and Research on the Wofoyuan in Anyue] (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2015), Figure 2.

²³² More discussion on the *parinirvāṇa* image see Miyaji Akira 宮治昭, “Jiantuoluo niepantu de jiedu: shijia zhi si gushitu de chuxian 犍陀羅涅槃圖的解讀: ‘釋迦之死’故事圖的出現 [Analysis of

Qianfoya is more likely to have come from early Chinese Buddhist prototypes (Figure 2. 42). An example with a similar posture can be found in the *parinirvāṇa* scene on a Buddhist stele that is currently held in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, which has an inscription that dates it to the seventeenth year of the Datong 大統 era (551 CE) in the Western Wei period (Figure 2. 43).

Cave 746 is in fact the earliest example of making the *parinirvāṇa* image form the primary focus in an independent space in a territory completely controlled by the Tang Court. The reclining Buddha and the ten mournful disciples in Cave 746 are almost identical to those in Niche 495 (Figure 2. 44), the other *parinirvāṇa*-themed project in Qianfoya.²³³ The following case can also be found in Wofoyuan 臥佛院 in Anyue 安岳, which was carved in the middle of the eighth century in the Sichuan area.²³⁴ Ennin 圓仁 (793-864 CE), a Japanese monk who visited Mount Wutai 五台山 in 841 CE, mentions a visit to the *Parinirvāṇa* Hall 涅槃院 in Dahuayan si 大花嚴寺.²³⁵ Similar examples include the ninth century Caves 148 and 158 in the Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang, the presence of which has been attributed by previous scholars to inspiration by the Kizil Caves, Baicheng County, Aksu Prefecture, Xinjiang.²³⁶

the *Parinirvāṇa* scene in Gandharan Art Emergence of the narrative scene of *the death of Śākyamuni*,” *Niepan he mile de tuxiangxue*, 92-124. The different posture in the *parinirvāṇa* image in China seems to be related to few depiction of supporting the head with the right hand. The only known cases before Tang Dynasty is 《佛所行讚》卷 5: “如來就繩床，北首右脇臥，枕手累雙足，猶如師子王。” T192, 46b14-15.

²³³ Niche 495 was carved next to Niche 493 of Maitreya Buddha, which contains a devotional inscription of 706 CE. As the pairing of Maitreya Buddha and *parinirvāṇa* are common in Buddhist art, it is highly possible that Niche 495 was carved together with Niche 493. Then, it is reasonable to consider that Niche 493 of 706 CE, which also dates from around the reign of Empress Wu, whose *terminus ante quem* is 705 CE.

²³⁴ Sonya S. Lee, “The Buddha’s Words at Cave Temples,” *Ars Orientalis* 36 (2009): 36-76. Dazu shike yanjiuyuan 大足石刻研究院 [Academy of Dazu Rock Carvings], *Anyue wofoyuan kaogu diaocha yu yanjiu* 安岳臥佛院考古調查與研究 [Archaeological Investigation and Research of the Wofoyuan in Anyue] (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2015).

²³⁵ 《入唐求法巡禮行記》卷 2: “入涅槃道場，禮拜涅槃相，於雙林樹下右脇而臥，一丈六尺之容，摩耶悶絕倒地之像。四王八部龍神，及諸聖眾，或舉手悲哭之形，或閉目觀念之貌，盡經所說之事，皆模為像也。” B95, 66b16-67a2.

²³⁶ Liu, “Dunhuang Mogaoku di yiwuba ku de yanjiu,” 11-35.

The presence of an independent *parinirvāṇa* space in Guangyuan Qianfoya, Cave 746 is related to the popularity of *parinirvāṇa* imagery during this period. One example of such *parinirvāṇa* imagery is a *parinirvāṇa* stele in the Dayunsi in Yishi county. This temple was originally named Renshouji 仁壽寺, one of the state monasteries of the Sui which received the sacred relics distributed by Emperor Wen of Sui 隋文帝 (541-604 CE). Its name was changed to Dayunsi 大雲寺 by a political decree issued by the Empress Wu in 690 CE, but its original name was soon restored. Lee further argues the pictorial representation of the *parinirvāṇa* narrative an innovative form of Buddhist art that rose to prominence during the reign of Empress Wu. She bases her argument on the Dayunsi stele and another three cases, including a stele held in the Hamamatsu Municipal Museum of Art and the murals in Caves 332 and 148 in the Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang.

Some have suggested that the production of *parinirvāṇa* images in this period was connected with Empress Wu's political use of sacred relics.²³⁷ Chen Jinhua considers the *parinirvāṇa* stele in Renshouji 仁壽寺 as evidence of Empress Wu's encouragement of relic veneration throughout her rule, which he argues a way to recall the relationship between Empress Wu and Emperor Wen, who happened to be Empress Wu's matrilineal ancestor and appears to have been an important source of inspiration. Lee also suggests that the detailed narrative scenes centered on the

²³⁷ What needs to be added here is the rise of the nirvāṇa imagery can be considered in terms of the significance of the *Da banniepan jing* 大般涅槃經 [the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*; T374] in the Buddhist theology of Empress Wu. The *Mahāmegha Sūtra* explains that the reason why the goddess of Pure Light 淨光天女 was able to meet Buddha and why he predicted that she would be reincarnated as a female Cakravartin is because in a past life she had heard the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* from the Tongxingdeng Buddha 同姓燈佛. This narrative is fully cited at the beginning of the *Commentary of the Great Cloud Sutra*. The writers of the *Commentary* list the hearing of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*, the goddess receiving the assurance of Śākyamuni, and her final ascent as a female monarch, which indicates Empress Wu's accession to the throne. The significant role of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* in the *Mahāmegha Sūtra* and the *Commentary of the Great Cloud Sutra*, which has not been noticed by prior scholars in the past, provides another perspective for understanding the popularity of the *parinirvāṇa* imagery during the reign of Empress Wu. 《大方等無想經》卷4：“佛即讚言，善哉善哉！夫慚愧者，即是眾生善法衣服。天女！時王夫人，即汝身是。汝於彼佛，暫得一聞《大涅槃經》，以是因緣，今得天身，值我出世，復聞深義，捨是天形，即以女身，當王國土，得轉輪王所統領處四分之一。” T387, 1098a1-6.

formation and distribution of the relics of Śākyamuni were intended to project Empress Wu's roles as "the rightful custodian of the relics of Śākyamuni" and as a "predestined universal wheel-turning king (*Cakravartin*) like the future Buddha."²³⁸ In Qianfoya Cave 535, this argument is supported by the prominence of Buddha's coffin in the narrative scenes which is crowded by the mourning disciples. The prominence given to the coffin appears to be intended to promote the importance of the cult of relics and serves to further affirm the importance that was attached to this cult during the reign of the Empress Wu.

Notably, although the view that Guangyuan is the hometown of Wu Zetian has been denied by the modern scholars, Empress Wu did pass a short period of her childhood in Guangyuan when her father was assigned as the commander of the Lizhou during the early Tang and there are various tales related to the legendary monarch's life in Guangyuan that come from the late Tang. The construction of Caves 535 and 746, especially the selection of their themes, which reflect the influence of Empress Wu's Buddhist theology in the local community, appears to fill the gap between history and legend. They reflected a period of time in which the legend of Empress Wu in Guangyuan was in its nascent form. The presence of these niches later caused fantastic tales to flourish in the collective imagination in the following centuries.

In the second half of the seventh century, the cultural centers of Chang'an and Luoyang, witnessed the formation of Tang Metropolitan Art Style and the continuous support of the imperial court. This style can also be observed in Qinfoya. Similarly, the middle- and late-seventh century saw a phase of reuse and restoration of pre-existing and potentially abandoned Buddhist sites. Although the best-known example of this is the Longmen Grottoes, Qianfoya also saw a revival during this period with the restoration of caves which appear to have been abandoned for at least a two-hundred-year period. Their sculptural styles and forms primarily reflected the "fervor

²³⁸ Sonya S. Lee, "Transformation: Pictorial Narratives," in the *Surviving Nirvāṇa: Death of the Buddha in Chinese Visual Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press), 84.

for Indian style” in the formation of the “Tang International Art Style.” Examples include Kṣitigarbha in the form of an “Indian Buddha” with his hands set in the *bhūmiśarśa-mudrā*. The iconographic programs, both the three Buddhas imagery centered on the Maitreya Buddha and the *parinirvāṇa* space with narrative scenes, are taken as evidence of the path of Empress Wu’s political theology, in which the female monarch attempted to legitimize her authority through association with the coming of the *Cakravartin* and Maitreya.

3. Multiple Styles, Local Design

Although the carvings in Qianfoya during Phase Two still show strong influences from Northern China in terms of the motifs, styles, and techniques employed, the stone carvings at this stage reflect tendency towards decentralization. This is characterized by the central-altar cave form which appears to be an innovation in this site at this time, alongside a revival of local styles and designs. It is also characterized by a greater sensitivity to the underlying religious significance of the imagery and a retreat of political motivations behind the constructions undertaken at the site.

Central-Altar Caves

Although Cave 746 was carved in the first phase and has been discussed in the previous section, the other six center-altar caves at this site, Caves 744, 365, 366, 805, 806, and 689, are all carved during Phase Two of Qianfoya in Guangyuan. Compared with their prototype (Cave 746), they show a more standard, or unified, design format. In these caves, a raised altar or platform in the center or at the front of the chamber upon which a group of statues is carved in openwork or full relief. A screen rising from the back of the platform connects to the flat ceiling. These screens are usually composed of the aura of the Buddha, bodhi trees, and the eightfold celestial assembly.

All the central-altar caves in Qianfoya in Guangyuan with the exception of Cave 689 were carved in pairs on the cliff surface. These three pairs of fairly large niches

with similar structure stand out from the surrounding cacophony of small and medium-sized niches:

- ①. Cave 744 (h. 2.3 m, w. 3.5 m, d. 3.6 m) (Figure 2. 45) is added to the right of the pre-existing Cave 746 (h. 2.2 m, w. 3.2 m, d. 2.9 m);
- ②. Cave 365 (h. 2.4 m, w. 3.1 m, d. 2.3 m) is carved to the left of Cave 366 (h. 3.2 m, w. 3.5 m, d. 3.3 m) but not completely aligned. Based on their sculptural style, these two caves are carved at the same time.
- ③. Cave 805 (h. 2.0 m, w. 2.9 m, d. 2.8 m) is located below Cave 806 (h. 2.2 m, w. 3.0 m, d. 3.6 m). Their identical sculptural style indicates they were carved simultaneously.

Previous scholarship has largely focused on tracing the origin of this cave form. Ding has suggested that the cave form comes from the central-pillar caves which had probably been popular in Northern China, or is related to ritual spaces with a central altar, which are common in Tang Esoteric Buddhism.²³⁹ Yao refutes these two assumptions as there were few central-pillar caves constructed during the Tang and, additionally, the altars in esoteric Buddhist ritual spaces do not feature the screen that is present in these caves.²⁴⁰ Yao follows Xiao Mo in his study of the central-altar caves in the Mogao Caves from the late Tang to the Five Dynasties and connects this cave structure with a form of lecture hall that contains a central altar.²⁴¹ Although the central altar caves in Mogao are set under a truncated-pyramid ceiling, they do have a central altar with a back screen similar to the Sichuan examples.²⁴²

²³⁹ Ding, “Chuanbei shiku zhaji,” 41-53

²⁴⁰ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 145-150.

²⁴¹ Xiao Mo 蕭默, “Dunhuang mogaoku de dongku xingzhi 敦煌莫高窟的洞窟形制 [Cave Forms of Mogaoku in Dunhuang],” *Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang mogaoku 中國石窟·敦煌莫高窟* [Chinese Grottoes: Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes] II, ed. Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院 [Dunhuang Academy] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984), 197.

²⁴² Yao’s analysis is convincing, but the only problem which may slightly weaken this interpretation is that the known remains of the lecture halls with a similar structure are later than those in Sichuan. The earliest known case of such architecture is the main hall built in 857 CE, in Foguangsi 佛光寺 on Mount Wutai 五台山, Shanxi Province. Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 148.

What I want to emphasize here is that whether the cave form of the central-altar caves was inspired by the central-pillar caves or the lecture hall in the free-standing temple, the kind of cave form is likely designed to adapt to the unique natural conditions of Qianfoya. As discussed earlier, Qianfoya was the result of the reconstruction of a pre-existing site. The remains of Northern Wei gave authority to the site, yet also determined its very location, the steep terrain at this presented various challenges to the artisans and visitors. The central-altar caves are all carved in the middle of the cliff, most of them would have been difficult to access. Based on the observation of their spatial structure and carving technique, especially the paired caves, it is herein argued that the central-altar caves is related to the steep terrain of Qianfoya and is intended to display the statues to the viewers on plank roads and in rivers rather than being intended for circumambulation.

One of the evidences that supports this interpretation comes from the grotto structure. Although the paired caves in Qianfoya are cave-like in form, Caves 365/366 and Caves 805/806 were carved with no front wall. The situation of Caves 744/746 is more complex, since these two caves were not initially designed a pair of caves. Although Cave 744 was constructed from the outset as an open cave, Cave 746 still retains some traces of its front wall. This suggests it might have been originally designed as an individual cave with a front wall, which was then removed when Cave 744 was constructed next to it.

As the front wall of a cave serves to isolate the interior 'sacred' space from the 'profane' external space, this structure is usually regarded as an important element of caves structures which formed a relatively independent space for ritual activities. The absence of the front wall in these 'Caves' indicates that they were carved as an enlarged version of the "Niches", as the absence of a frontal wall makes the group of statues easily visible from the outside. According to the natural conditions, it is possible that the absence of the front wall in these paired caves resulted from an intentional design decision that enabled visitors to observe the caves from afar and not have to climb to the grottoes in the middle of the cliff. Nevertheless, these open caves,

together with the installment of Buddhist statues on the central altar, provide a spectacle for passersby whether on the river or the plank road.

Another related evidence is the hollowing-out of the background on the back screen. This technique is newly introduced from Northern China and will be further discussed in the next section. It provides a strong contrast between the physicality of the statue and the empty space behind it, and also sharpens the contours of the statues. Cave 365 and 366 are good examples. The use of the hollowing technique makes the Buddha, bodhisattvas, disciples and *vajrapānis* on the central altar become three-dimensional round statues. The dark virtual space behind the statues makes the outer contours of Buddhist statues prominent, which renders these statues more visible than the statue assemblies of equal size in normal niches. In this sense, the extensive use of openwork carving in these caves can also be regarded as the same purpose as the open entrance of the caves. Both of these innovations mean that these Buddhist statues carved into the steep cliff in Qianfoya were more likely to be noticed under the open sky.

The source for the pairing of the central-altar caves is unclear. Some may consider its prototype to be the “Paired Caves 雙窟” that had been a feature in Chinese cave temples since the fifth century. The earliest examples are Caves 7 and 8, and Caves 9 and 10, in the Yungang Caves 雲岡石窟, Datong 大同, which were completed with the sponsorship of the imperial family between 470 to 483 CE.²⁴³ There is, however, a chronologically closer local precedent for the “Double Niche” form in the Early Tang rock carvings sites in Northern Sichuan. Examples of paired niches include Niches 12 and 13 (Figure 1. 25) in Huangzesi, Guangyuan, and Niches 1 and 2 in Leishendong, Langzhong. Although the statues in some of these cases are

²⁴³ Su Bai proposed that the “Double Caves” structure was intended to reflect the doctrine of the “Two Saints 二聖”. These two saints were embodied by the Dowager Empress Feng 馮太后 and the Emperor Xiaowen 孝文帝, who controlled the Northern Wei jointly during this period. The layout characteristics and historical background of the double caves can be referred to Su Bai, “Pingcheng shili de juji he *Yungang moshi* de xingcheng yu fazhan 平城實力的聚集和“雲岡模式”的形成與發展 [The gathering of the strength of Pingcheng and the formation and development of *Yungang Model*]”, *Zhongguo shikusi kaogu*, 114-144.

poorly preserved, it is clear that these niches were carved side by side and were a paired construction. As the above discussion to the lack of frontal walls, the paired caves in Qianfoya in Guangyuan are more closely connected to the “Paired Niches” in Northern Sichuan in the early Tang dynasty, than to the paired cave tradition of Northern Wei, both in terms of their spatial structure and the intended function.

The Revival of the Local Art Style

At the beginning of the eighth century the art style in Qianfoya starts to become complex. It is apparent from the form of these central altar caves that the craftsmen in Qianfoya were familiar with two distinct artistic repertoires. One was the continuous influence of the mature “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” from Northern China, and the other was the revival of local conventions rich in decorative patterns and multi-layer carvings, which had been part of the local rock carving tradition in the early seventh century. These two systems are synthesized into a cohesive artistic style in the rock carvings during this reign, this highlights the extraordinary ability of local craftsmen to master artistic traditions from various sources.

A typical case is Qianfoya Cave 744 (Figure 2. 17). Cave 744 has a flat-topped ceiling, the space within the cave tapers slightly towards the rear of the cave. In the center of this cave there is a low rectangular altar upon which a seated Buddha, two disciples, two bodhisattvas and two *vajrapānis* have been carved. The back screen of the altar contains a three-faced-six-armed Asura on the right, on the left a figure holds the tail of a dragon which then wraps through the branches of the tree above him. The trunks and branches of these two trees are carved with masterful openwork. Narrow ledges were carved along the base of the left and right walls. Each wall contains life-sized depictions of five standing disciples. The main Buddha is generally believed to be the Śākyamuni due to his attributes and *mudrā*, while the ten disciples on the side walls are considered to be his ten principal disciples.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Lei and Wang, *Guangyuan shiku*, 26-27.

The revival of local artistic conventions can be seen on the central altar. The eightfold celestial assembly was a motif from the local artistic repository which first appears in this refined form in a cluster of rock carvings in Northern Sichuan around the 630s CE. A typical example can be seen in Huangzesi Niche 28, which was discussed in Chapter One as a representative artwork. Another element which is indicative of revival of local style is the presence of the heads of miraculous animals on the pedestal of the main Buddha (Figure 2. 46). Similar examples can be seen in Bishuisi Niche 20 (Figure 2. 47) in Mianyang, carved in the early seventh century. This kind of pedestal can be traced back further to the end of the sixth century in the Chengdu area. Chen Hongshuai points out that the earliest known example of this is a free-standing Daoist statue excavated from Longxingsi 龍興寺 in Pengzhou 彭州, which has an inscription that dates it to 591 CE (Figure 2).²⁴⁵

The final key characteristic of these central altar caves their back screen which with their fine open work carvings appear to be drawn from Northern Chinese artistic conventions. Early examples of this technique can be found in the free-standing statues of the Northern Qi. Although the existing examples in the Northern Qi are much smaller, they herein are considered to be the source for the openwork carving in the large caves in Qianfoya because of the similarities in their designs and motifs. The earliest use of openwork carving in Qianfoya is the back screen of the central altar in Cave 746 (Figure 2. 49). The standing figures before the trunks of the trees seen in this image are very similar to those in the free-standing statues of the Northern Qi currently held in the collection of the Tokyo National Museum, Japan (Figure 2. 50). The motif of two trees with dragons wrapped around their trunks also has a precedent in a carving of two pensive bodhisattvas which has an inscription that dates it to the fourth year of the Heqing 河清 reign (565 CE), currently held in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (Figure 2. 51).²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Chen, "Sichuan Chongqing Tangdai shiku," 558-669.

²⁴⁶ He Liqun, "On the Development of Buddhist Sculpture in Ye City and the 'Ye City Style' Reflected by the Bei Wuzhuang Hoard," *Chinese Archaeology* 16, no.1 (2016): 189-200. Song Hyun-

The revival of the local style is not indicative of a reduction in influence from the north. The continuous absorption of northern styles and images can be seen from the form of the main Buddha. The broad chest of the Buddha conveys a sense of monumentality and powerful robustness, comparable to the Maitreya Buddha in Qianfoya Niche 493 which dates to 706 CE (Figure 2. 12). Both of them reflect the reception of the mature phase of the “Tang International Art Style” from the Chang’an and Luoyang areas. An archetypal example of this style is the main Buddha from the Qianxisi 潛溪寺, Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang, Henan Province (Figure 2. 52). Another obvious element which was introduced from Northern China is the arrangement of the disciples on the three surrounding walls (Figure 2. 53). A similar arrangement can be seen in Qianfoya Cave 366, although not only disciples but also musicians were carved on the three walls. The arrangement of processions of figures is reminiscent of the middle cave of Leigutai in the Longmen Grottoes, which is believed to have been carved between 690 and 705 CE (Figure 2. 54). In this case, however, there are 25 figures of eminent monks carved as life-size figures on its left, right and back wall, with the biographies from the *Fu fazang yinyuan juan* 付法藏因緣傳 [Transmission of the Dharma Treasury; T2058] carved into the wall beside each. This text claims to be a translation of an Indian text by Jijiaye 吉迦夜 and Tan Yao 曇曜 (fl. 460-480 CE) but modern scholars largely regard it as apocryphal.²⁴⁷

In all, the rock carvings during this stage demonstrate that the artisans possessed enough skill to combine the different artistic languages. They learnt from the strong points of each and redesigned the motifs and figures from both Southern and Northern China with openwork carving to adapt to the specific conditions at this site.

Sook, “On White Marble Half-Lotus Meditation Statues Carved in Wuding Era of the Eastern Wei Dynasty,” *Chinese Archaeology* 19, no.1 (2019): 182-94.

²⁴⁷ Longmen wenwu baogaosuo 龍門文物保管所 [Longmen Grottoes Cultural Heritage Administration] and Beijing daxue kaogu xi 北京大學考古系 [Department of Archaeology of Peking University], *Zhongguo shiku: Longmen shiku* 中國石窟·龍門石窟 [Chinese Grottoes: Longmen Grottoes] II (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1992), 273-274. For recent discussions of the *Fu fazang yinyuan juan* see Stuart Young, *Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2015), 73-79.

The Return of Maitreya Faith

The projects in this period suggest a greater interest in the Maitreya faith itself. This trend is particularly evident in the design of Caves 365/366 and Caves 805/806, two influential projects which date to this stage. These two pairs of central-altar caves were carved with the Maitreya Buddha and certain images related to the Śākyamuni, either the “Puti Ruixiang” or “Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna”. Their coherent iconographic program presents a shift towards a more theological interest instead of imperial ideological influences. This shifting can be understood with a relatively free and relaxed religious and political atmosphere during the reigns of Emperors Zhongzong and Ruizong.

Caves 355 and 366

Compared to its pairing Caves 365 with Maitreya Buddha, Cave 366 (Figure 2.55) has attracted most of the discussion for its main statue, the “Puti Ruixiang”. It is depicted as wearing a crown, necklaces and an armband. It is seated in the lotus position on a throne with a backrest. The left hand of the figure is held in front of the abdomen while the right hand is set in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā*. The openwork screen at the back of the altar is carved with Bodhi trees and the throne is decorated with *vyala* (or *griffon*), *makara*, and other mythical creatures. In common with the adorned Buddha on the right wall of Cave 535, this statue has also been interpreted as a “Puti Ruixiang”, whose identification is endorsed by the devotional inscription entitled “Paean to the *Puti Ruixiang* of Duke Bi, Governor of Lizhou of Tang, in Botang Monastery and its Ode 唐利州刺史畢公柏堂寺菩提瑞像頌並序” (Appendix 3) on the right wall.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ Sun-ah Choi highlights the fact that the significance of this image was as a “Ruixiang 瑞像 [auspicious image]”, which she contrasts with the use of the term “zhenrong 真容 [true visage]” in the records of Yijing 義淨 (635-713). She argues that the shift from the *zhenrong* to the *ruixiang* reflects the Tang’s reception of Indian Buddhist images within the “medieval Chinese tradition of imagining and inventing auspicious images.” Choi, “Zhenrong to Ruixiang: The Medieval Chinese Reception of the Mahābodhi Buddha Statue,” 381.

The combination of Caves 365 and 366 (Figure 2. 56) in Qianfoya are a paired depiction of Maitreya Buddha (Cave 365) and a “Puti Ruixiang” (Cave 366) on the same cliff. Lei and Wang have previously highlighted the prevalence of this pairing in Tang Buddhist sites across the Sichuan area. In addition to Caves 365 and 366 in Qianfoya. A similar pairing of Maitreya Buddha and the “Puti Ruixiang” can also be seen in Niches 90 (Figure 2. 57) and 87 (Figure 2. 58) in Xikan, Bazhong, and Niches 14 and 15 in Jigongshushan 雞公樹山, Pujiang.²⁴⁹ More interestingly, the Maitreya and the “Puti Ruixiang” are also sometimes found paired in a single niche. For example, Niche 12 in Shimensi 石門寺 (Figure 2. 59) and Niche 73 in Xikan (Figure 2. 60), both of which are located in Bazhong, depict Maitreya and the “Puti Ruixiang” sitting side by side.²⁵⁰

This combination could be understood as a pairing of the present and future Buddhas, as the “Puti Ruixiang” is attributed to be an image of Śākyamuni by Maitreya Bodhisattva, the future Buddha. According to Xuanzang, Maitreya Bodhisattva was motivated to create this image of the Buddha which came to be known as “Puti Ruixiang” since he feared that no mortal artist could conceive the beauty of the sacred features of the Śākyamuni. The pairing highlights the sanctity of the “Puti Ruixiang” by attributing its origin to the sacred rather than secular world. It also serves to endorse the authority of the future Buddha in that it is a miraculous tale centering on Maitreya Bodhisattva.²⁵¹

Two anecdotes in Buddhist history present the possibility of a more specific doctrinal meaning for their pairing. One is from the biography of Xuanzang. It is said that before his death, Xuanzang asked the sculptor Song Fazhi 宋法智 to make a “Puti shu xiang 菩提樹像 [Image related to Bodhi trees]” and then chanted a *gāthā* to wish for his rebirth within the court of Maitreya.²⁵² The other anecdote is from the

²⁴⁹ Lei and Wang, “Zailun Sichuan de *Puti Ruixiang*,” 143.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Lee Yun-min, “Shilun Tangdai xiangmo chengdao shi zhuangshi fo,” 60.

²⁵² 《大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳》卷 10：“其日又命塑工宋法智於嘉壽殿豎菩提像骨已，因從寺眾及翻經大德并門徒等乞歡喜辭別……復口說偈，教傍人云，南無彌勒如來、應、正等覺，願與含識速奉慈顏，南無彌勒如來所居內眾，願捨命已，必生其中。” T2053, 277a10-23.

writings of Yijing 義淨. It tells the story of Lingyun 靈運, a Chinese monk who undertook a pilgrimage to India, and drew full scale and accurate images of the Maitreya and the “Puti shu xiang” in Nalanda that he then carried back to China.²⁵³ The “Puti shu xiang” is generally interpreted in modern scholarship as another name for the “Bodhi Auspicious Image”. Li and Lee have examined these two records in detail to with the aim of understanding the potential connection between monastic pilgrimage, Buddhist teachings in Bodhgayā and Nalanda, and the rise of the paired combination of Maitreya and the “Bodhi Auspicious Image” during this period.²⁵⁴ They argue that the popularity of this pairing in Sichuan was not only based on universal religious thought but might also be related to specific religious practices related to Xuanzang and his followers (or the Faxiang school 法相宗) and could have been rooted in Indian sources.

Caves 805 and 806

Now let us turn to examine Caves 805 and 806. Cave 805 is carved with an assembly of Buddhist statues centering on a Maitreya Buddha, seating with two legs naturally hanging down. Cave 806 is focused on two Buddhas that sit side by side on a rectangular seat which occupies the center of the central altar in this cave. This seat is flanked by two disciples and two bodhisattvas. The composition is set in front of an elaborate back screen which is decorated with the eightfold celestial assembly carved in bas-relief. Although there are some projects which contain a double representation of Śākyamuni Buddha or Amitābha Buddha, the image in Cave 806 is most likely to be a representation of “Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna” in the *Miao fa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 [the *Lotus Sutra*, Sanskrit: the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*; T262] translated by Kumārajīva (344-413 CE).²⁵⁵ In the *Lotus Sutra*, when Śākyamuni Buddha spoke of

²⁵³ 《大唐西域求法高僧傳》卷 2: “靈運師者, 襄陽人也。梵名般若提婆。志懷耿介情存出俗。追尋聖跡, 與僧哲同遊, 戲南溟達西國。極閑梵語, 利物存懷。所在至處君王禮敬, 遂於那爛陀畫慈氏真容、菩提樹像。一同尺量, 妙簡工人。齋以歸唐廣興佛事, 翻譯聖教實有堪能矣。” T2066, 8b19-25.

²⁵⁴ Lee, “Shilun Tangdai xiangmo chengdao shi zhuangshi fo,” 60. Li, “Puti xiang chutan,” 809-834.

²⁵⁵ More discussions see Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 175-186.

the *Lotus Sutra* on the Vulture Peak, Prabhūtaratna Buddha shared half of his throne in his tower with Śākyamuni.²⁵⁶ The rectangular pedestal where two Buddhas sit is rare in Guangyuan but commonly used in depictions of the “shared throne” in the “Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna” (Figure 2. 61).

The pairing of Caves 805 and 806 provides further evidence that Cave 806 was a representation of “Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna”. Paired presentations of “Śākyamuni-Prabhūtaratna image” and Maitreya had been prevalent since the late fifth century. An early example can be seen in Caves 10 in the Yungang Grottoes, which are usually believed to have been carved between 471 and 494 CE (Figure 2. 62).²⁵⁷ On the outer wall of their main chambers, the “Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna” were paired either with the Maitreya Bodhisattva or the Maitreya Buddha. Some scholars believe that the depiction of “Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna image” might have been intended to serve as a representation of the *Lotus Sutra*. Li Jingjie argues the pairing of “Śākyamuni-Prabhūtaratna image” with Maitreya could be intended as a pictorial representation of the doctrine that reciters of the *Lotus Sutra* would be able to go to the world of the Maitreya.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ 《妙法蓮華經》卷4〈見寶塔品〉：“即時一切眾會，皆見多寶如來於寶塔中坐師子座，全身不散，如入禪定。又聞其言，善哉，善哉！釋迦牟尼佛！快說是法華經，我為聽是經故而來至此。爾時四眾等，見過去無量千萬億劫滅度佛說如是言，歎未曾有，以天寶華聚，散多寶佛及釋迦牟尼佛上。爾時多寶佛於寶塔中分半座與釋迦牟尼佛，而作是言，釋迦牟尼佛！可就此座。即時釋迦牟尼佛入其塔中，坐其半座，結加趺坐。爾時，大眾見二如來在七寶塔中師子座上結加趺坐，各作是念，佛座高遠，唯願如來以神通力，令我等輩俱處虛空。” T262, 33b28-c11.

²⁵⁷ Yungang wenwu baogaosuo 雲岡文物保管所 [Yungang Cultural Heritage Administration], *Zhongguo shiku: Yungang shiku* 中國石窟:雲岡石窟 [Chinese Caves: Yungang Caves] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), pl 46.

²⁵⁸ Li Jingjie 李靜傑, “Beichao houqi fahuajing tuxiang de yanbian 北朝後期法華經圖像的演變 [Transformation of the *Lotus Sutra* images in Late Northern Dynasties],” *Yishu xue* 藝術學 [Art Studies] 21, (2004): 67-108. It should be noted here that several scholars consider the pairing of these two images as a special kind of the three Buddhas for the Past, Present and Future worlds. Yet I agree with the refutation by Wang Youkui that the “Śākyamuni-Prabhūtaratna image” is presented as a uniform image, that they should not be separated into the present Buddha and the past Buddha. Wang Youkui, “Yungang shiku tuxiang zuhe yanjiu,” 39.

The *Lotus Sutra*, which spread widely during the Northern Dynasties, became the seminal scripture in the Tang. Its popularity can be traced in two parasutraic texts of the *Lotus sutra*, the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* 弘贊法華傳 [Eulogizing the Anthology of the Lotus Sutra; T2067] and the *Fahua zhuanji* 法華傳記 [Biographies of the *Lotus Sutra* devotees, T2068] which record various miraculous occurrences which occurred in relation to the circulation and belief of the *Lotus Sutra*.²⁵⁹ Yao pointed out that the story of Xiao Yu 蕭瑀 and his sons provides evidence for the popularity of the *Lotus Sutra* in Northern Sichuan during the early Tang.²⁶⁰ Xiao Yu was best known for copying and preaching the *Lotus Sutra*, and of his sons, Xiao Rui 蕭銳, the eldest, was a Zhangshi 長史 of Jiannan circular, and his second son Xiao Qian 蕭錢, was mayor of Lizhou (present-day Guangyuan), are recorded as sharing the same beliefs as their father. It was said that Xiao Qian participated in the preaching of the *Lotus Sutra* and presented his father's explanations of the sutras many times.

The Shift of the Maitreya Faith

The Maitreya belief and its images were prevalent in large projects in Qianfoya during the first two phases. This is perhaps not surprising. The Maitreya Buddha, the future Buddha who will follow Śākyamuni into Buddhahood, was also deeply connected to the concept of the *Cakravartin* as the representation of idealized kingship in Buddhism, and therefore became a symbol of the ideal world shared by both the sacred and secular world.²⁶¹ Interestingly, the carvings of Maitreya imagery in Qianfoya in different phases have different emphases according to their combination with other images. Cave 535 with the three Buddhas imagery centered on Maitreya reflects the promotion of the Maitreya cult by the Emperor Wu Zhao in order to legitimize her crown. In Caves 365/366 and Caves 805/806 the role of Maitreya is more closely associated with his prominence within Buddhist doctrine.

²⁵⁹ Chiew Hui Ho, "Buddhism on the Ground: Parasutraic Narratives and Lay Religiosity," in *Diamond Sutra Narratives*, 36-94.

²⁶⁰ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 185.

²⁶¹ Jan Nattier, "The Meanings of the Maitreya Myth: A Typological Analysis," *Maitreya, the Future Buddha*, eds. Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 23-50.

This was caused by the prominence of Maitreya within the *Lotus Sutra* and the degree of adherence by the Faxiang school.²⁶²

The shift to a stronger emphasis on religious expression appears to be directly related to the withdrawal of imperial power over Buddhism and the lack of promotion of material production during the reign of Emperors Zhongzong and Ruizong. In contrast to their mother Emperor Wu, Emperors Zhongzong and Ruizong were of the blood imperial and therefore were part of the line of succession. They therefore lacked the motivation to prove their legitimacy by deifying themselves as Buddhist monarchs. Neither of the two sons of Empress Wu put forward measures to directly oppose or restrict Buddhism. Emperor Zhongzong and his wife Empress Wei were both devout Buddhists, to the extent that their generosity toward the Buddhist causes led to considerable criticism by the scholar-officials for the social burden caused by the proliferation of temples and saṃghās. Emperor Ruizong showed a more explicit respect for Daoism, yet he still held a relatively supportive attitude towards Buddhism, for instance, he wrote the preface to the translation of the *Da baoji jing* 大寶積經 [the *Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra*, T310] by Bodhiruci (died. 727 CE).²⁶³ It is not surprising that the voice of Buddhism itself became clearer in local monuments like Qianfoya within this more relaxed religious atmosphere.

²⁶² The reference of Maitreya belief and its image in Tang Buddhism see Lee Yu-min 李玉珉, “Sui Tang zhi Mile xinyang yu tuxiang 隋唐之彌勒信仰與圖像 [The Maitreya Cult and Its Art in the Sui and Tang Dynasties],” *Yishuxue* 藝術學 [Art Studies] 1, (1987): 90-117. Wang Juan 汪娟, “Tangdai mile Xinyang yu zhengzhi guanxi de y ice mian—Tangchao huangshi dui Mile xinyang de taidu 唐代彌勒信仰與政治關係的一側面—唐朝皇室對彌勒信仰的態度 [One Perspective of the Relationship between the Cult of Maitreya and Politics in the Tang Dynasty: The Attitude of the Ruling House towards the Maitreya Movement],” *Zhonghua foxue xuebao* 中華佛學學報 [The Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies] 4, (1991): 268-76. Wang Juan, “Tangdai Mile xinyang yu fojiao zhu zongpai de guanxi 唐代彌勒信仰與佛教諸宗派的關係 [The Maitreya Cult in the Tang and its Relationship with Buddhist Schools],” *Zhonghua foxue xuebao* 中華佛學學報 [Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal] 5, (1992): 193-231. Chen Jinhua, “The Statues and Monks of Shengshan Monastery: Money and Maitreya Buddhism in Tang China,” *Asia major* 19, no.1/2 (2006):111-160.

²⁶³ 《大寶積經》卷1：“大寶積經并序，大唐太上皇製。朕聞，天之為大也高，上下之容可紀……劫火燒天，不壞多羅之典。” T310, 1a03-2b10.

The extremely prosperous stone carvings of this period undertaken with the support of local officials. According to the inscriptions preserved at this site, these projects were deeply associated with the sponsorship of local officials. For example, although the stele of Duke Bi in Cave 365 (Figure 2. 63) was partly damaged, it is still possible to figure out that its main content includes praise of the temple, Botangsi 柏堂寺, the image as the “Bodhi Auspicious Image”, and then the aristocratic lineage of Duke Bi, its main sponsor. In addition, the lower part of the inscription records the local officials and military personals under the secretariat of Lizhou, involving all the seven counties Yichang 益昌, Miangu 綿谷, Tingmeng 葭萌, Jiachuan 嘉川, Qiping 歧坪, Yiqing 義清 and Sanquan 三泉. This demonstrates that collective sponsorship, led by the head of the local administration, still played a role in the construction of the regional monuments. As discussed in Chapter One this model was also present in Dianjiangtai and Li Xuansi. In this sense, masterpieces like Cave 366 and 365, which marked the golden age of this local monument, resulted from cooperation between the local temples, local officials and local craftsmen. In the next phase, such collaboration came to an end with Emperor Xuanzong’s ascension to power and his less than supportive attitude toward Buddhism and its monasteries.

Phase Two occurred during the reigns of Emperor Zhongzong and Ruizong between 705 and 712 CE. The relatively free atmosphere of this phase led a a period of considerable creativity in the construction at Qianfoya which combined the conventions and techniques of the Northern and Southern art styles. One aspect of this was the central-altar caves, which were a local innovation adapted to the terrain in Qianfoya. The statues within these caves are carved in mature “Tang Metropolitan Art Style”, but their decorative features reflect the indigenous art practices cultivated in Northern Sichuan from the 630s CE onwards. The image of Maitreya persisted as a common theme in this period, but its role as a total for political propaganda declined. This is expressed by the way in which Maitreya often appears paired with various images related to Śākyamuni, such as the *parinirvāṇa*, the “Puti Ruixiang”, and the “Śākyamuni-Prabhūtaratna Image”. Their combination appears to be more concerned with religious doctrine than political merit.

4. Local Response to Imperial Restrictions

During the early reign of Emperor Xuanzong (713-756 CE), the emperor introduced several policies to restrict Buddhist monastic economy.²⁶⁴ Yen points out that Emperor Xuanzong gave up the policy of propagating the Emperor as the Tathāgata and no longer supported the construction of caves, which led to the decline of the Longmen Grottoes.²⁶⁵ It is argued herein that the implementation of Emperor Xuanzong's religious policy did have an impact on Qianfoya yet construction soon resumed. The following discussion concentrates on the site construction in Qianfoya under the reign of Emperor Xuanzong. It seeks to trace how the local agents of Qianfoya maintained prosperity of this local monument when Buddhist material production in the capitals largely decline due to the drastic changes in the political environment.

Abandoned and Restarted

The large entrance (h. 3.2 m and w. 5.6 m) and the central location of Huangzesi Cave 512, also known as the “Dayun gudong 大雲古洞 [Ancient Cave of the Great Cloud]”,²⁶⁶ clearly indicate that it was planned as an ambitious project from the

²⁶⁴ Denis Twitchett, “The measures against Buddhism,” in *The Cambridge History of China III: Sui and T'ang China, 589-906 AD* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 335-374.

²⁶⁵ Yen, “Shentang Xuanzong chao fojiao yishu de zhuanbian 盛唐玄宗朝佛教藝術的轉變 [Changes in Buddhist Art during the reign of Tang Xuanzong],” in *Jinghua shuiyue*, 127-206. Petra Hildegard Rösch, “‘Golden Age’ and ‘Decline’ in Art-Historical Writing on Chinese Buddhist Sculpture: Describing a Shifting Discourse,” in *In the Shadow of the Golden Age: Art and Identity in Asia from Gandhara to the Modern Age*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald (Berlin: EB-Verl, 2014), 171-195.

²⁶⁶ There is a plaque with “Ancient Cave of Dayun 大雲古洞” carved at the entrance with the date 1839 CE. Jiang assumes Qianfoya Cave 512 is possible to be related to the Dayunsi, the most important institutional device in the local community in the political propagation of Emperor Wu. Regardless of whether the evidence is sufficient or not in Jiang's study, the Dayunsi issue is worth discussing as the imagery in 690s CE is closely associated with the Empress Wu. By tracing the epigraphical study of Qing Dynasty and photos shot in the early twentieth century, I find the name seemingly come from a stele entitled with “Dayunsi 大雲寺” preserved in Cave 512, which seemingly be lost in the twentieth century. Liu Xihai 劉喜海 (1793-1852 CE), the scholar-officials and epigraphists of the late Qing recorded an illustration of the stele with its full text in his *Jinshi Yuan 金石苑* compiled in 1847 CE. When Segalan visited Guangyuan in 1914 CE, the rectangular tablet whose head is

beginning and was designed to create a core for the whole site. Yet, the present structure of Cave 512 is very atypical, which indicates that its carving encountered some difficulties. Although the whole cave has a flat ceiling, the floor of the cave consists of several different levels. The main statue, a standing Buddha, is carved into a section of the back wall which protrudes *circa* 2.5 meters into the center of the cave. The two spaces formed by the protrusion upon which the Buddha is carved link back to two medium-sized niches which are carved into each section of the bisected back wall. The two side walls are covered with multiple rows of small standing bodhisattvas.

Previous scholars have already determined that Cave 512 was not completed according to its original plan. Lei and Wang posit that the original plan of Cave 512 was to carve a central-altar cave (Figure 2. 64).²⁶⁷ The central standing Buddha was

inscribed with the “Dayunsi” was still installed close to the left wall of Cave 512. However, the precious early recording and photos provide key information for us to understand the nature of the Dayunsi stele. Although the left part of the stele has been partly damaged, the remaining content resembles it was a memoir for the visiting of a group of officials leading by Wang Zhengchen 王正臣, the administrative assistant of the transport commissioner 轉運判官. Although there is also no mention of the date, it is possible to date the stele to Northern Song with sculptural style and the information of its sponsors. For one thing, The emaciated dragons at the top of the stele distinguishes from the known Tang stele and shares the similar features with other steles of Song Dynasties like the one with the praise of Dark Sage and Exalted King of Culture 玄聖文宣王贊 dated to 1008 CE preserved in Mianyang. For another thing, one of the sponsors, Cu Yi 崔嶧, engaged in a restoration of Buddhist shrine in Huangzesi dated to the first day after the *shangyuan* 上元 Day, the *bingwu* 丙戌 year of Qingli 慶曆 reign (February 24, 1046 CE). It is therefore reasonable to assume the stele around the middle of the eleventh century. Jiang Baolian 姜寶蓮, “Guangyuan Qianfoya Dayundong shike foxiang de diaocha yanjiu 廣元千佛崖大雲洞石刻佛像的調查研究 [Investigation of the Stone Sculpture in the Great Cloud Cave in Qianfoya, Guangyuan],” *Wenbo* 文博 [Cultural Relics and Museology], no.4 (2015): 28-35.

²⁶⁷ Lei Yuhua 雷玉華 and Wang Jianping 王劍平, “Sichuan Guangyuan Qianfoya Dayun gudong (512 hao ku) de kaoguxue guancha—jian jiyu Weikang ku (513 ku) zhi guanxi 四川廣元千佛崖大雲古洞(512 號窟)的考古學觀察:兼及與韋抗窟(513 窟)之關係 [An Archaeological Investigation of Cave 512 in Qianfoya of Guangyuan, Sichuan and its Relationship to Niche 513],” *Chengdu kaogu yanjiu* 成都考古研究 (三) [Chengdu Archaeology Study 3], ed. Chengdu shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 成都市文物考古研究所 [Chengdu Municipal Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology] (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2016), 374-388. A revised version, the “Dayundong de kaogu xue guancha yu Qianfoya de kaizao shunxu ji qita 大雲洞的考古學觀察與千佛崖的開鑿順序及其他 [An Archaeological Investigation of the Dayun Cave, the Construction of Qianfoya and Others],” was

carved with two attendants, whose presence can be traced by two small nubs on the floor that flank the central Buddha to form a central altar (Figure 2. 65). This part, as the first phase of the carving, was likely contemporaneous with the construction of Caves 365 and 366, which have similar cave forms and sculptural style, *circa* 710-712 CE. Subsequently, the craftsmen changed the initial design and chiseled off the two flanking statues and dug out the two spaces on each side of the central protrusion (Figure 2. and Figure 2. 67). Thereafter, a medium sized niche was carved into each side of the rear wall. As these two medium niches are almost identical to Niche 513 which contains an inscription 715 CE. This indicates that they must have been carved close to that date. The rows of small standing bodhisattvas on the left and right walls, which are of uniform design, also appear to belong to this second phase of construction in the cave (Figure 2. 68 and Figure 2. 69). There is an inscription on an intrusive niche on the left wall of the cave which is dated to the tenth year of the Kaiyuan reign (723 CE). As this niche was carved later than the rows of bodhisattvas the sidewalls, it provides a *terminus ante quem* for the second phase.

While this assessment of the construction of Cave 512 is reasonable, the context for the abandonment of the original plan requires further consideration. Lei and Wang suggest that the reason for the abandonment of these caves was the fragility of the rock.²⁶⁸ There are large cracks running across the front section of Cave 512. Of particular note are two cracks which run across the front section of the right wall to the ceiling above the central Buddha. Another piece of evidence which they use to support their interpretation is Cave 400 which was never completed (Figure 2. 70). Similar to Cave 512, Cave 400 also appears to have been as a monumental project. It was originally intended to be a central pillar cave, whose central pillar of which is still connected to the back wall, an assembly of Buddhist statues in a large niche occupies each of its three sides (Figure 2. 71-Figure 2. 73). There are also several large cracks in this cave. Several of these cracks run across the statues on the right side of the

collected in Lei, Luo and Wang, *Chuanbei fojiao shiku he moya zaoxiang yanjiu*, 104-126.

²⁶⁸ Lei and Wang, "Sichuan Guangyuan Qianfoya Dayun gudong (512 hao ku) de kaoguxue guanch," 108-109.

central pillar, which were almost completed yet have been abandoned without decoration or detail.

I agree with Lei and Wang's assessment that the cracks likely played a significant role in the uncompleted carving of the original plan in Cave 512. However, I argue that the interruption of the construction of Cave 512 should not be seen as an isolated event but should be considered alongside the measures against Buddhism propagated in the early reign of Emperor Xuanzong. The abandonment of Caves 512 and 400 both occurred before 715 CE. As Lei and Wang point out, the original plan of Cave 512 must have been adjusted before 715 CE i.e. prior the carving of two medium niches on the back wall. Cave 400 seems to have stopped at a similar period. The statues in the front niche of the central pillar contain two small *shenwangs*. Such *shenwangs* are also a new aspect which also appears in Niche 513 dated to 715 CE, and helps to date the last phase of carving in Cave 400 to *circa* 715 CE.²⁶⁹ This was during the very period that Emperor Xuanzong, who ascended the imperial throne in 713 CE, implemented a relatively restrictive policy on Buddhism to restrain the excessive expansion of the monastic economy, which had flourished in the Early Tang. This is characterized by a cluster of imperial decrees between 713-715 CE in the first three years of the Kaiyuan reign.

It is during this period that Emperor Xuanzong proclaims various measures against Buddhism, with the restrictions on building monasteries and expanding the sangha, as a way for the government to recover the social wealth, labor and tax that had been diverted to the monasteries.²⁷⁰ A crucial ban at this point was the “Prohibition of the casting Buddha statues and copying of scriptures in *Fang* and *Shi* 禁坊市鑄佛寫經詔” in the second year of the Kaiyuan reign (714 CE).²⁷¹ The *Fang*

²⁶⁹ Another new element which was also observed in Niche 513 is the *vajrapānis* with the necklaces standing on the left side of the entrance to Cave 400.

²⁷⁰ Twitchett, “The measures against Buddhism,” 335-374.

²⁷¹ 《禁坊市鑄佛寫經詔》：“佛教者，在於清淨，存乎利益。今兩京城內，寺宇相望，凡欲歸依，足申禮敬。下人淺近，不悟精微，觀菜希金，逐談思水，浸以流蕩，頗成蠹弊，如聞坊巷之內。開鋪寫經，公然鑄佛，口食酒肉，手漫羶腥。尊敬之道既虧，慢狎之心斯起。百姓等或緣求福，因致饑寒，言念愚蒙，深用嗟悼。殊不知佛非在外，法本居心，近取諸身，道則不遠。溺

and *Shi* respectively refer to the residential area and the trading area in all Tang cities. Therefore, the purpose of this policy has long been understood as regulating the market in Buddhist art. However, if we carefully consider the text, it is quite obvious that this decree opposed the overall system of statue-making and sutra-copying. For one thing, it underlines that people who spent money to make statues or write sutras in order to gain blessings are unwise, and the practice only serves to intensify their poverty. For another, it emphasized that the Buddhists who wanted to respect the Buddha or read the scriptures should go to monasteries to worship statues or read the sutras. The subtext was to discourage believers from actively participating in the making of statues or scriptures.

The opposition to the system of gaining merit through the sponsorship of sutras and statues can also be seen intuitively in the testament that Yao Chong 姚崇 (651-721 CE) gave to his sons for his own funeral.²⁷² Yao Chong is believed to be the minister who encouraged Emperor Xuanzong to act against Buddhism in the early Kaiyuan reign. He repeatedly reiterated that the important things in the Buddhist faith are equality, compassion and doing good rather than evil. He purported that it was inappropriate that a person could be obsessed with donations to make statues and write sutras that he might cause the ruination or even abandonment of his own body. He also stated that it made no sense to make statues for the dead in the name of accumulating merit. If the imperial edict was still obscure in its words, the resistance to the making of statues and scriptures in Yao Chong's will was very straightforward.²⁷³

於積習，實藉申明，自今已後，禁坊市等不得輒更鑄佛寫經爲業。須瞻仰尊者，任就寺拜禮，須經典讀誦者，勒於寺取讀。如經本少，僧爲寫供。諸州寺觀並準此。” Dong et al. eds., *Quan Tang wen*, 300.

²⁷² Twitchett, “The Early Reign (713-20): Yao Chu'ung and Sun Ching” in “Hsüan-tsung (reign 712-56),” 335-374. More discussions see Chen Za-lung 陳祚龍, “Li Tang mingxiang Yao Chong yu fojiao 李唐名相姚崇與佛教 [On Primere Yao Ch'ung and Buddhism],” *Zhonghua foxue xuebao* 中華佛學學報 [Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal] 2, (1988): 241-264.

²⁷³ The biography of Yao Chong 姚崇: “崇先分其田園，令諸子姪各守其分，仍爲遺令以誡子孫，其略曰……且佛者覺也，在乎方寸，假有萬像之廣，不出五蘊之中，但平等慈悲，行善不行惡，則佛道備矣。何必溺於小說，惑於凡僧，仍將喻品，用爲實錄，抄經寫像，破業傾家，

However, Emperor Xuanzong's attitude towards Buddhism undertaken an obvious change in the middle and late periods of his reign. This is indicated by the “repair of Fengxiansi with a Vairocana Buddha built by Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu”, which was undertaken by the Emperor Xuanzong after a flood in 722 CE. This aligns with the fact that after 720 CE some large-scale statues, like Niche 150 in Qianfoya began to be carved. The crucial turning point of resuming site construction for Qianfoya in Guangyuan seems to be the arrival of Wei Kang 韋抗 (666-726), the main sponsor for the completion of Cave 512.²⁷⁴ Lei and Wang believe that the stele of Wei Kang does not belong to Niche 513 but to Cave 512. They highlight the fact that there is a stele similar in size to the stele of Wei Kang on the opposite wall. Although the present inscription on this stele was re-carved in the Yuan Dynasty, they argue that it would originally have been identical to Wei's stele and therefore propose that the left and right steles are the devotional inscription for Niche 513 and Cave 512 respectively. Several of the bodhisattvas on the sidewalls of Cave 512 are accompanied by devotional inscriptions. Most of these appear to have been carved by officials assigned as governors to prefectures in the Sichuan area, notably those assigned to Guozhou 果州, Jianzhou 劍州 and Qiongzhou 邛州 represent prefectures from the Jiannan Circuit 劍南道 and Western Shannan Circuit 山南西道.²⁷⁵ As Wei Kang's official position was higher than the other sponsors named in the inscription in Cave 512, they believe that this indicates that Cave 512 could have been carved through the collective patronage of other assigned officials in the Sichuan area under the leadership of Wei Kang.

However, this argument, especially the Wei's stele is the devotional inscription for the construction of Cave 512 lacks strength. This stele was carved on the right sidewall of the outer niche of Niche 513. Although it is located in front of and to the

乃至施身亦無所吝，可謂大惑也。亦有緣亡人造像，名為追福，方便之教，雖則多端，功德須自發心，旁助寧應獲報？”Liu et al. eds, *Jiu Tang shu*, 3026-3028.

²⁷⁴ Lei and Wang, “Sichuan Guangyuan Qianfoya Dayun gudong (512 hao ku) de kaoguxue guanch,” 379.

²⁷⁵ Lei and Wang, “Dayun gudong de kaoguxue guancha,” 380.

left side of Cave 512, this stele is still clearly in the outer niche of Niche 513. The identical plant patterns on the two steles and the inner niche frame might intended to integrate the devotional inscriptions and inner niche of Niche 513. It is far-fetched to regard it as the devotional inscription of Cave 512. Moreover, it is unclear how Wei Kang would have been able to organize officials from the two circuits when he was only the commissioner for the Jiannan circuit. The *Law of the Tang* prohibited assigned officials from leaving their administrative area without specific permission.²⁷⁶ Therefore, it is quite hard to imagine the circumstances under which Wei Kang would have been able to gather local officials from not only own his jurisdiction but also the neighboring circuit to participate in a collective act of devotion.

I think it is more likely that the excavation of Niche 513 by Wei made an impression on other officials who passing through Guangyuan on their way to or from postings and encouraged them to participate in the renewed construction activity in Cave 512. Judging from the lack of planning in the later development of Cave 512, for example, the way in which two medium-sized niches on the back wall are not symmetrical, the completion of Cave 512 was not the result of a systematically planned collective sponsorship, but was constructed over time with independent and individual sponsorship from passing provincial governors. This would explain how official assigned to both the Jiannan Circuit and Western Shannan Circuit are listed as donors in Cave 512. The Qianfoya rock-carving site marks the boundary between Sichuan to the south and the imperial capitals region centered on the cities of Chang'an and Luoyang to the north. These cities hosted the Tang court and would have been the starting point or destination for any government officials assigned to circuits in southwestern China who would then have had to pass through Guangyuan on their way to assume their posts. The governors of prefectures in both the Jiannan and Western Shannan Circuits would have had to pass through it. It is therefore

²⁷⁶ 《職制•93 刺史縣令私出界》：“諸刺史、縣令、折衝、果毅私自出界者，杖一百。經宿乃坐。”Liu Juwen 劉俊文, *Tanglu shuyi qianjie* 唐律疏議箋解 [An Annotated Edition of the *Exposition of the Tang Penal Code*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 709.

possible that the government officials gave their donations directly to the monks at this temple and it was these monks who oversaw the construction and maintenance of Cave 512. This would therefore suppose that Cave 512 was formed through “diachronic collective patronage” in which the role of the monks as project managers was strengthened.

This sponsorship model can also help us understand another problem: the iconology of Cave 512. Lei and Wang argue that the original plan of Cave 512 was to create a center-altar cave with a standing Amitābha Buddha as the primary focus. They identify the Buddha as Amitābha on the basis of the numerous bodhisattvas on the sidewalls, which they claim were intended to form an image of the western paradise of Amitābha.²⁷⁷ However, in the existing images of the paradise of Amitābha Buddha in Sichuan, such bodhisattvas are usually depicted seated in various postures on stemmed lotus pedestals. The lack of the stemmed lotus pedestals between the statues in Qianfoya Cave 512, in addition to the rigid uniformity of their depiction, makes the intention of creating multiple copies of a single standing statue of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva seem more probable. This assumption can be partially supported by the fact that at least two of the statues identified by their inscription as depictions of Avalokiteśvara (Figure 2. 74).²⁷⁸ They are identical in size, form and style to the bodhisattvas in rows on the side walls. This would strongly suggest that they were carved as part of a single project. It would therefore follow that these bodhisattvas were carved as part of a cult of mass production which is more usually seen in the Thousand Buddhas image. Although the bodhisattvas in Qianfoya are the only known case of the mass production of the image of a single standing bodhisattva in the Tang, a similar image, which is referred to as the “ten-thousand bodhisattvas 萬菩薩” motif, was popular in Buddhist caves in Shaanxi during the Northern Song.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Lei and Wang, “Sichuan Guangyuan Qianfoya Dayungudong (512 hao ku) de kaoguxue guancha,” 386-387.

²⁷⁸ The inscription of the two statues carved on the left wall close to the entrance to Cave 512 is “敬造觀音兩尊二……” More information see Lei and Wang, “Dayun gudong de kaoguxue guancha,” 386-387.

²⁷⁹ Li Jingjie, “Shanbei Song Jin shiku fojiao tuxiang de leixing yu zuhe fenxi 陝北宋金石窟佛教

Niches with Complex Images

During the first decade of the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, the craftsmen working at Qianfoya started to re-examine the art repository which had accumulated there over the course of the first half of Tang dynasty. There is a notable tendency toward reusing and reshaping existing elements or motifs to make new images. Through analysis of Niche 513 and Niche 86, it can be demonstrated that the reformism and revivalism present in this period reflects the decline in Buddhist art in Northern China during this phase. This decline was a direct response to the withdrawal of imperial patronage of monumental projects and to the court's restrictions on Buddhism and its monasteries.

As discussed above, the carving of large caves was replaced by detailed medium-sized niches. One clear example is Niche 513 (Figure 2. 76 and Figure 2. 76), commissioned by Wei Kang during this period. It consists of an inner niche with a hemispherical domed ceiling (H. 2.20 m, W. 2.32 m, and D. 1.34 m) and an outer chamber with a flat ceiling (H. 2.48 m, W. 2.22 m and D. 2.10 m). The inner niche contains a seated Buddha flanked by two disciples and two bodhisattvas. Two standing *vajrapānis* flank the entrance to the inner niche. A standing heavenly king and a bodhisattva bringing offerings occupy each of the sidewalls of the outer niche. In addition, traces of statues on the floor of the inner niche indicate that the arrangement might originally have been more complex. Niches 222 (Figure 2. 77), 421 and the two medium sized niches on the back wall of Cave 512, are almost identical to Niche 513 apart from the two additional bodhisattvas that kneel in front of the seat of the main Buddha.

The inner niche of Niche 513 imitates the iconography of the many medium-sized niches made in Qianfoya. An early example is Niche 187 (Figure 2. 13), carved

圖像的類型與組合分析 [Typology and Combination of Buddhist Images in Rock-cut Caves of Song and Jin Dynasties in Northern Shaanxi],” *Gugong xuekan* 故宮學刊 [Journal of Palace Studies] 11, (2014): 558-669.

in the second year of the Xiantian 先天 reign (713 CE).²⁸⁰ These niche not only have a similar arrangement of statues but share the characteristic motif of the lotus pedestal of the Buddha being connected to his attendants using delicate bas-relief vegetal friezes. The use of such vegetal friezes can be traced back to the rock carvings of Northern Sichuan in the early seventh century. A more direct prototype for Niche 513 is the group of statues on the central altar in Cave 689 in the previous stage. In addition to their vegetal friezes, the lotus pedestals are decorated with jeweled orbs which is another characteristic of the local style. In this period, the designer of Niche 513 added six small figures, two kneeling bodhisattvas in the inner niche, and two heavenly kings and two supporting bodhisattvas on the outer chamber, to increase the complexity of the iconographic program. This increase in the number of figures would have allowed Niche 513 to offer an advanced form of the original medium-sized niches which may have served to flatter the egos of elite patrons like Wei Kang.

Niche 86 also has a structure similar to Niche 513. The inner niche has a round-arched ceiling (H. 2.86 m, W. 2.9 m, D 1.60 m) with an outer chamber with a flat ceiling (H. 3.64 m, W. 3.8 m, D 1.40 m). There are five statues carved in high relief in the inner niche - a standing Buddha, two disciples and two bodhisattvas. Two small bodhisattvas are depicted genuflecting in front of the Buddha. A depiction of eightfold celestial assembly is carved in bas-relief above the main statues. In addition, the arrangement of sculptures in Niche 86 clearly resembles Niche 28 in Huangzesi, *circa* 630 CE. Of particular note is the flame-shaped depiction of the outer aura of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, which in each case surrounds a round inner aura. The patterns that decorate the inner auras of the two bodhisattvas even have the same geometric decorations as those in Huangzesi Niche 28. The only slight difference in their depiction is that the outer auras in the small niches in Cave 28 are replaced with simpler round flowers in Niche 86. Another slight variation is that in Niche 86 a “curtain” occupies the space behind the Buddha. Its source may be related to the

²⁸⁰ The style comparison of these two niches can be referred to Lin Ying-suan, *Guangyuan shiku Tang dai zaixiang yanjiu*, 15.

curtains hanging on the backrest of the chair, which is can be seen in several decorative panels dated to around 701 CE in the Pagoda of Seven Treasures 七寶塔 in Baoqingsi 寶慶寺 in Chang'an (Figure 2. 78).²⁸¹ Craftsmen in the Tang also used this motif as an independent decoration. In a plaque from Baoqingsi the curtain occupies the space behind the Buddha and appears to have lost its original iconographic significance (Figure 2. 79). In the Guangyuan area this motif is used to fill up the space between statues which are carved in high relief in Qianfoya Niche 86. This space was left blank in Huangzesi Niche 28. This appropriation is quite clever, as it makes the original image more convincing and creates a more realistic visual experience.

The Decline of Maitreya Faith

As can be seen in the examples outlined above, there was a distinct shift in the choice of themes present in the caves and niches carved in Qianfoya, Guangyuan during the Kaiyuan reign. The most obvious shift is the decline in the Maitreya belief, which had occupied an extremely central position in early Tang, but which saw a dramatic decline during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong. Only two medium-sized niches, Niche 788 (Figure 2. 80) and Niche 211 (Figure 2. 22), carved during this period take the future Buddha as their primary focus. There are several reasons for this apparent decline in the cult of Maitreya.

One of these appears to have been an imperial edict titled the “Prohibition of Evil Deception and Other 禁斷妖詐等敕” issued in 715 CE, which banned several heterodox cults, one of which was related to the cult of Maitreya. It states that: “...for example, some who wear white garments and have long hair, or under the guise of the belief of Maitreya Buddha, extensively gather disciples and companions, pretend to explain meditation, and make false claims of disaster and good fortune.”²⁸² Scholars

²⁸¹ Yen Chuan-yin, *The Sculpture from the Tower of Seven Jewels: The Style, Patronage, and Iconography of the Monument*, 84-97.

²⁸² 《禁斷妖詐等敕》：“蘇頌敕。釋氏汲引，本歸正法，仁王護持，先去邪道，失其宗旨。乃般若之罪人，成其詭怪，豈湮盤之信士，不存懲革。遂廢津梁，眷彼愚蒙，將陷阨窞。

believe that this decree refers simultaneously to several rebel movement during this period that claimed religious sanction. One such was led by Wang Huaigu 王懷古 (d. 713 CE), who used the belief of Maitreya Buddha to deceive people with the “New Buddha” at the beginning of the Kaiyuan reign.²⁸³

Since the imperial ban focused on heterodox rather orthodox Buddhism, it is unclear whether it also impacted upon legitimate Maitreya practices. Of note is the fact that the depictions of Maitreya on the left side of the pillar in Cave 400 have been left unfinished, having been blocked out but not shaped. The above discussion of the chronology shows that all the work in this cave stopped before 715 CE, the exact year of the ban. This might not be coincidental. However, it is impossible to confirm a direct association between the decree against heterodoxy and the abandonment of Cave 400. Moreover, even if this ban had a negative impact on making Maitreya in Qianfoya, the decree becomes defunct *circa* the tenth year of the Kaiyuan reign (723 CE). Interesting evidence for this issue can also be found in Niche 211 in Qianfoya, one of the two only depictions of Maitreya Buddha which can be dated to this phase. Its sponsor, Su Ting, was the author of the imperial edict declaring the “Prohibition of Evil Deception and Other” in 715 CE.²⁸⁴ Su had been minister in the Ministry of Rites

比有白衣長髮，假託彌勒下生，因爲妖訛，廣集徒侶，稱解禪觀，妄說災祥。或別作小經，詐云佛說，或輒蓄弟子，號爲和尚，多不婚娶，眩惑閭閻。觸類實繁，蠹政爲甚。刺史縣令，職在親人。拙於撫馭，是生姦宄。自今已後，宜嚴加捉搦。仍令按察使採訪，如州縣不能覺察，所由長官並量狀貶降。開元三年十一月十七日”Song Minqiu 宋敏求 ed., *Tang dazhao lin ji* 唐大詔令集 [Collected Edicts of the Tang] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 588.

²⁸³ More see Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 48-49. Daniel L. Overmyer, “Messenger, Savior, and Revolutionary: Maitreya in Chinese Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *Maitreya, the Future Buddha* eds. Alan Sponberg and Alan Hardacre (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 110-134: 114. Hubert Seiwert and Ma Xisha, *Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 122.

²⁸⁴ Lin Yin-suan has noticed the relationship between Su and the “Prohibition of Evil Deception and Other”. Lin offered two possible reasons: one is that Su intended to sponsor the banned image to vent his disgraced grief and anger for his demotion, and the other is that the popularity of the Maitreya faith in the Tang made the ban ineffective. Yet these two suppositions fail to account for either the role of Su Ting in the reign of Emperor Xuanzong or his commissioning of a Maitreya in Qianfoya. Carving Buddha statues to express grievances is not in line with the ancients’ habitus of making Buddha. According to historical records, Su’s relationship with the emperor did not deteriorate. Just in the

early in the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, which meant that he was, at the time directly in charge of religious affairs related to Buddhism and Daoism.²⁸⁵ Therefore, his sponsorship of a niche containing Maitreya might be considered a semi-official statement to the Buddhists in the Guangyuan area that the imperial ban was not intended to be directed against the normal Maitreya cult.

If the fall of Maitreya in Qianfoya cannot be affixed to the imperial ban, we must seek alternative explanations. One possible explanation is that the decline of the cult of Maitreya may have been connected to an overall waning of the practice of Buddhist rock carving in Northern China. This practice had been closely related to imperial power in the North, meaning that after Emperor Xuanzong withdrew from the sponsorship from Buddha grottoes there were no longer funds to continue their development.²⁸⁶ This decline is very obvious in the Longmen Grottoes, where the making of Maitreya or its related images was also extremely prosperous before the 710s CE.²⁸⁷ Then, it is not surprising that Qianfoya, whose rock carvings reflect a long-term and close interaction with the Longmen Grottoes in the first half of Tang, shows a similar decline.

The decline of the cult of Maitreya led to an iconographic vacuum. This was largely filled by two new motifs which became popular in the middle of the eighth century in Qianfoya. The first was the depiction of standing Buddhas, and the second was the depiction of bodhisattvas, both of which are life-sized statues. In addition to Niche 86, which has already been discussed above, another representative work centered on the standing Buddha is Niche 150 (Figure 2. 21). This niche is an open niche with a flat ceiling (h. 1.99 m, w. 2.13 m, d. 1.03 m) with one standing Buddha and two standing bodhisattvas. Life-sized standing bodhisattvas can be seen in Niche 169 which contains three bodhisattvas and Niche 250 which contains five. Although

following year, he transferred back to the power center from Sichuan. There is only one statue of Maitreya in Qianfoya after 715 CE. Lin Ying-suan, *Guangyuan shiku Tangdai zaixiang yanjiu*, 64.

²⁸⁵ The biography of Su Ting states, “八年，除禮部尚書，罷政事，俄知益州大都督府長史事。” Liu et al. eds., *Jiu Tang shu*, 2881.

²⁸⁶ Yen Chuan-ying, “Shentang Xuanzong chao fojiao yishu de zhuanbian,” 136.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, 136-138.

there are no devotional inscriptions, the crowning ornaments on the bodhisattvas are very similar to those in Niche 150, which helps to date the niches to the middle of the eighth century.²⁸⁸

The popularity of the life-sized standing Buddha in Qianfoya is contemporaneous to the development of the so-called “Equal to the Body Statue 等身像” in the Longmen caves.²⁸⁹ A comparable case to Qianfoya Niche 150 is a trio centered on a standing Buddha carved in 710 CE by a Tocharian monk called Baolong 寶隆 in the Longmen Grottoes (Figure 2. 81), whose inscription also states that the main statue is the Śākyamuni.²⁹⁰ Another example can be seen in a group of intrusive niches on the sidewall of the Fengxiansi cave (Figure 2. 82). These niches were all carved with standing Buddhas, which scholars attribute to a project of the forty-eight vows of the Amitābha Buddha sponsored by imperial eunuchs led by Gao Lishi 高力士 (690-762 CE) around the tenth year of the Kaiyuan reign (723 CE).²⁹¹

There is also an increase in the number of life-sized bodhisattvas carved in the Longmen Grottoes during the middle of the eighth century (Figure 2. 83). However, most of these depictions of single bodhisattva are accompanied by an inscription which states “Avalokiteśvara saving the suffering 救苦觀世音菩薩”. The often-repeated title of the figure identifies the image as a sponsor-oriented image which promises several direct benefits for the believers. The popularity of the helpful and more approachable bodhisattvas can be understood as a manifestation of the increase in the sponsor’s right to influence site construction. Due to the imperial withdrawal

²⁸⁸ Their crown-shaped adornments are reminiscent of the Bodhisattvas in the murals of the southern wall in Cave 57 of the Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang, in the High Tang. Although it is impossible to confirm whether or not they are related, it is certain that this decoration was a new element during the Kaiyuan reign. Another related piece of artwork with such a head decoration is the bodhisattva in Niche 1 in Shimensi 水寧寺 in the Bazhong area, which is likewise dated to the late Kaiyuan reign.

²⁸⁹ Wen Yucheng 溫玉成, “Longmen shiku painian 龍門石窟排年[Chronology of Longmen Grottoes],” in *Zhongguoshiku: Longmen shiku*, 172-216.

²⁹⁰ Longmen shiku wenguansuo and Beijing daxue kaogu xi, *Zhongguo shiku: Longmen shiku II*, pl. 240.

²⁹¹ Longmen shiku wenguansuo and Beijing daxue kaogu xi, *Zhongguo shiku: Longmen shiku II*, pl. 133. Wen, “Longmen shiku painian,” 202-203.

from Buddhist statue making and the restriction on Buddhist monasteries during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, this rise in the power of donors was perhaps inevitable.

The third phase of construction is characterized by Emperor Xuanzong's suppression of Buddhism. Its influence can be seen in large projects like Cave 512 in Qianfoya which was started to be carved before the Kaiyuan reign but was abandoned for a period following the initial phase of construction. The original plan was abandoned, and the cave was later completed through the patronage of a dispersed group of sponsors. The site continued to flourish through the presence of medium-sized niches sponsored by notable officials, in which sculptural styles kept on developing, but which simultaneously reflected a tendency toward reformism and archaism. This period sees a reduction in the depiction of Maitreya Buddha, with standing Buddhas and bodhisattvas becoming more popular.

5. Modular Design and Mass Production

This section turns to small and medium-sized niches in Qianfoya. Except for special examples such as Niche 513 and Niche 210, the small and medium niches which make up the majority of carvings in this area, even niches in which the statues are well preserved are generally overlooked in the contemporary scholarship. However, it is impossible to trace the overall logic of construction in Qianfoya without a better understanding of the carving of these small and medium niches, which form the main corpus of construction activity at the site. Moreover, the medium-sized niches play an extremely critical role in the vast grottoes in Sichuan, which can be observed even more clearly in the next chapter on the Bazhong grottoes. Therefore, the following discussion concentrates on the forgotten majority in Qianfoya, to trace how modular design was used in the mass production of niches.

Different Foci, Same Attendants

One of the most common arrangements of statues within a niche is a seated Buddha accompanied by varying arrangements of standing attendants. The most common sculptural sets include three figures, in which the Buddha is only

accompanied by a pair of bodhisattvas, or five figures, with both disciples and bodhisattvas, or seven figures in which the Buddha is flanked by paired disciples, bodhisattvas and vajrapānis. Although the central Buddhas in these niches are depicted in various mudrās or wearing distinctive garments, the repetitive appearance of the attendants and decorative features, such as the protective lions, is a formulaic design that provides a coordinated and unified impression to the devotional audience.

During the mid-seventh century through to the early years of the eighth century, there are three kinds of the Buddhist assembly following the formulaic arrangement. The first form is centered on a Buddha depicted with both shoulders covered by his outer robe, which runs under his right arm, then runs across his lap and then rests on top of his left forearm (Figure 2. 6). His left-hand rests on his left knee and holds a ball-shaped gem, while his right-hand rests palm down on his right knee in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā*. The second form depicts a Buddha with his robe covering both shoulders (Figure 2. 84). His hands are held clasped in front of his chest in what appears to be a variant of the *dharmacakra-mudrā*. The third one is a Buddha wearing a garment with a loose neckline (Figure 2. 85) depicted with his hands held in front of his abdomen, sometimes holding a jewel, in what would appear to be a meditation mudrā.

These three types of central Buddhas show the hybrid of Buddhist styles in Chang'an and Luoyang. The cassocks of the Buddhas in these small and medium niches in Qianfoya, Guangyuan, especially the treatment of the folds covering their legs, are fairly consistent with the main Buddha in Cave Qianxisi carved in the middle of the seventh century in the Longmen Grottoes. Yet the upper body shows the new tendency toward the “fervor of Indian art”. All of their cassocks were extremely thin and without folds, they cling to the body meaning that the shape of the chest, abdomen and arms can all be seen clearly. Some of the statues in Guangyuan were carved with fine lines on the smooth surface of the robe to indicate the folds - this form is similar to Mathura school statuary from the Gupta period. The slender waist of the Buddha also appears to be a typical imitation of Indian elements in the metropolitan style. Examples of the style, but not the iconography, can be seen in the

depiction of Kṣitigarbha in Qianfoya Cave 726 and the “King Udāyana images” (Figure 2. 86) carved in the Longmen Grottoes and Gongyi Grottoes during the reign of Emperor Gaozong.

The three images all appear carved into the cliff to the left of Niche 28 in Huangzesi (Figure 2. 87), but they occur in larger numbers in Qianfoya, specifically intrusive niches in Caves 726 and 535 and on the lower part of the cliff. The first and second type seems to have been most prevalent at the end of the seventh century. The devotional inscription for intrusive Niche 10, in Cave 535, which dates it to 696-697 CE also identifies the Buddha as the Śākyamuni, is carved with the first form. The third form appears to be a later innovation, since their locations are usually suboptimal compared to the other two. For example, this image is found carved in marginal or corner spaces, within Cave 535. However, these three images continued to be carved in the early eighth century. For instance, the intrusive niches on the left and right wall of Niche 299, and Niches 307, 308, 309, 310, 312 and 314, which were near to Niche 226, were all carved with robust torsos similar to Niche 187 of 713 CE, which means that they would have been carved around 700-710s CE.

In the eighth century, there is another type of Buddha which appears to have been the most popular in Qianfoya. These niches center on a Buddha seated in the lotus posture. His left-hand rests on his left knee, either in the *varada-mudrā* or with the palm facing down and the right hand in the *abhaya-mudrā*. A typical example of the fourth niche type is Niche 187 (Figure 2. 13), which contains a devotional inscription that dates it to 713 CE. The Buddha is carved with a square face and a very thick and broad chest. The style of the main statue, which highlights the corporeal volume, reflects a mature incarnation of the Tang international style seen in the Longmen Grottoes in this period. Interestingly, the Buddha and the four attendants’ seats are interconnected by lotus stems, a motif that is clearly a simplification of other early Tang niches in Northern Sichuan. The blend of local motifs and northern-sourced statues reflects the extraordinary creativity of local craftsmen nourished by the rich cultural exchanges in Guangyuan.

There are more than 70 niches that contain the fourth type of Buddha as their primary focus in Qianfoya. The gathering of Niches 421, 443, 444, 449 on the cliff above Cave 512 or Niches 690 and 691 along the passage that links to Cave 689 implies the possibility that these niches were carved in batches. Its influence can be also traced in Niche 513 which, as discussed above, was also designed with the fourth form of the statue groups at its core. There is also a niche carved in this style in Guanyinyan, a third carving site and much smaller Buddhist rock-carving site in the Guangyuan area.²⁹² Two of the niches carved in this form in Guangyuan contain dated devotional inscriptions. They are Qianfoya Niche 187 and Guanyinyan Niche 47. Both of these two inscriptions identify the main Buddha in their respective niches as the Śākyamuni, the Buddha of the present and the founder of Buddhism.

By tracing the development of the four core images systematically, it is possible to clarify the *raison d'être* behind the carving of small and medium-sized niches. This high rate of repetition implies that monasteries may have exercised relatively strict management of this Buddhist rock-carving site during this period. The neat arrangement of some niches of similar sizes and images on the cliff implies the possibility some form of plan to their arrangement and even that sets of niches may have been carved in batches. It appears possible that sponsors may only have been permitted to choose from a limited number of drawings or motifs. It is even possible that there were ready-made niches available to be 'purchased' by visiting donors, especially since Qianfoya's location on the Golden Ox Road meant that many patrons would have been passing by in a hurry.

Replication of Icons

Many of the small and medium-sized niches in Qianfoya contain a single or a pair of bodhisattvas, usually depictive of Avalokiteśvara or Kṣitigarbha, sometimes doubled, sometimes paired. The fact that these icon-style representations of the

²⁹² More discussions on the "King Udāyana images" see "The Fervor for the 'Indian Buddha Image'" in Chapter Two.

bodhisattva statues contained significantly less elements than the groups of statues centered on a seated Buddha leads their image similar to the modules in the mass production which can be produced independently but also possible to be paired or multiplied.

The majority of the niches which contain a single bodhisattva statue are usually interpreted as depictions of Avalokiteśvara.²⁹³ The earliest dated statue in this style is in an intrusive niche (numbered as Niche 8, Figure 2. 88) that is carved into the corner between the right and back walls of Cave 535. Its inscription states that it was donated by Wang Xinyan 王行淹, who was a prefectural official in Lizhou, in the year 696 CE. The clothing consists of a single sash that runs diagonally across the chest and a double-layered skirt. The elbow is shown in a characteristic v-shape, a form which is often found in art works found in Chang'an and Luoyang that can be dated to the reigns of Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu. In those statues which date to the eighth century, the s-shaped arrangement of the bodies is less pronounced, and the raised forearm is aligned with the upper arm (Figure 2. 89). The ornaments on these later bodhisattvas are much more elaborate than in earlier examples. In addition to various crowns and necklaces with intricate pendants, they also wear long jeweled chains that hang down in front of the lower abdomen, where they intersect and then loop behind the knees of the statue.

Although images of Kṣitigarbha are less common than Avalokiteśvara, they are still very eye-catching. The early works are also primarily found in intrusive niches in Cave 726 and Cave 535 in the second half of the seventh century. Like the larger sample in Cave 736, which has been discussed already, the Kṣitigarbha of this phase are all represented as a disciple sitting with one leg hanging down. However, they are not depicted in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* which is in line with other depictions from Chang'an and Luoyang.²⁹⁴ For instance, the double Kṣitigarbha in Qianfoya Niche

²⁹³ Dorothy C. Wong, "Guanyin Images in Medieval China, Fifth to Eighth Centuries," in *Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin) and Modern Society*, ed. William Magee (Taipei: Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2007), 254-302.

²⁹⁴ The historical text records that there are sketches of Kṣitigarbha in the form of the disciple in

268 (Figure 2. 90) shares many characteristics with Niche 123 in Cave 23 in the Dafosi, Binxian (Figure 2. 91).²⁹⁵ It is in the eighth century, that life-sized standing Kṣitigarbhas became popular in Qianfoya. Some of these hold spheres in their right hands. Similar examples can also be found in the Longmen Grottoes.²⁹⁶

In addition to a single icon, the most common format was carving the icon in pairs. The double Kṣitigarbha in Qianfoya Niche 268 has already been discussed, in addition to this the motif of a double depiction of Avalokiteśvara was also a common theme, examples include Niches 208, 230, 264, 544 and 547. Kṣitigarbha and Avalokiteśvara were often carved together as a pair as they were both cast as deliverers who promised to save their believers from suffering in both the present world and after death.²⁹⁷ Niches 270, 381, and 576 contain these two deities standing side by side in a single shrine. They can also be found carved into two paired niches, like Niches 630 and 631.

Most of the icon-style bodhisattvas are scattered across the cliff surface, filling the empty spaces between other niches. However, there were also examples in Niches 499, 500, 501, 503, 504, and 505 in the middle of the eighth century that are gathered together on a single section of the cliff. As previously discussed, the prominence of

the Fajusi 法聚寺 in Chengdu have been determined to be the artwork of Zhang Sengyou 张僧繇 (479-?) and were introduced to Chang'an and Luoyang in the middle of the seventh century. See Wang Delu 王德路, *Luoyang yu guanzhong diqu chu sheng Tang shiqi dizangpusa xiang fenxi* 洛陽與關中地區初盛唐時期地藏菩薩像分析 [Analysis on the Statues of Kṣitigarbha from Early and High Tang Dynasty in Luoyang and Guanzhong Areas] (MA, Tsinghua University, 2020), 37-43. As Guangyuan is on the road between Chengdu and the capitals, it is hard to determine which side of this route transmitted the image to Qianfoya.

²⁹⁵ Chang, "Longmen shiku Dizang pusa ji qi youguan wenti," 29-36. Chang, *Binxian Dafosi zaoliang yishu*, pl. 148.

²⁹⁶ Chang, "Longmen shiku Dizang pusa ji qi youguan wenti," 29-36.

²⁹⁷ Hida Romi, "Guanyu Sichuan diqu de Dizang, Guanyin binglie xiang 關於四川地區的地藏、觀音並列像 [Pairing of Guanyin and Dizang in the Sichuan Area]," in *2005 nian Chongqing Dazu shike guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwen ji* 2005 年重慶大足石刻國際學術研討會論文集 [Proceedings of the 2005 International Symposium on Dazu Rock Carvings, Chongqing] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2007), 519-539. Chün-fang Yü and Chongxin Yao, "Guanyin and Dizang: The Creation of a Chinese Buddhist Pantheon," *Asiatische Studien - Études Asiatiques* 70, no.3 (2016): 757-796.

the bodhisattva imagery during this period can be understood as part of the narrative of the rising status of the sponsors in the process of the rock carvings. This change is consistent with the overall change in practices that occurred over the course of the Tang dynasty, with the shift from carving the idealized Buddha to carving the helpful and more approachable bodhisattvas who had sworn themselves to ease the suffering of the saḥā world.

Large Made Small

Not all medium-sized niches are completely independent designs. Some niches were clearly intended to be miniatures of larger niches at the site. These replicas were not exact facsimiles in terms of either technique or iconography. Although the replicas sometimes imitated the original large project as a whole, at other times the replication simplified the imitated image - some components were removed or other elements were added, creating a new image.

Niche 150, which is carved close to the top of the cliff, contains a Buddha and two bodhisattvas. All three figures in Niche 150 are depicted standing on a platform with no halos. This distinctive triad, with its notable lack of halos, also occurs in Niches 151, 152, 145, 146, 147 (Figure 2. 92), and 139. These are all small and medium-sized niches which have been carved below and around Niche 150. This clustering of replicated images around a pre-existing larger carving shows the influence that large projects could have on future projects in the same section of the site. However, not all the details are identical between the original and the replicas. An obvious difference is that the Buddha in Niche 150 was carved with a garment that has full U-shaped folds. This is the earliest depiction of this kind of robe in Qianfoya and is, therefore, a novel element. However, not all the replicas imitate this form. Such as the one in Niche 152, the Buddha wears a robe that is depicted with the U-shaped folds above the abdomen but with concentric ovals on the thighs. This form is more conventional in Qianfoya, where typical examples include the standing Buddhas in Niche 299 and those in Cave 512.

Another influential image is the central Buddha of the triad on the front of the central pillar in Cave 400, which dates to the early eighth century. This Buddha is characterized by the *dharmacakra-mudrā*. This means that both hands are held close together in front of his chest with his right palm forward and his left palm facing towards his chest, and the thumb of the left hand touching the little finger of the right hand. Compared with Niche 150 and its replicas, the niche in Cave 400 was replicated in a more flexible way. Although some of the replicas of this cave were carved in its direct vicinity, there are still more examples that are scattered around other locations on the cliff. Identical triads that contain replications of the seated Buddha and two bodhisattvas can also be found in Niches 286, 290, 405 (Figure 2. 93), and 532. This Buddha is also shown without attendants, for instance in Niche 416 (Figure 2. 94), or with six attendants, like in Niches 247, 253, and 356, through the addition of two disciples and two vajrapānis. In Niches 247 (Figure 2.95) and 253, the lotus pedestals on which the figures stand are linked by complex vegetal designs. Such designs were first seen in Sichuan in the Mianyang region in artwork dated to the early seventh century.

It should be noted that the relationship between the “original” and its “copies” can be discussed more clearly in the case of the imitation of the larger projects by medium niches, mainly because in the miniatures of the large niches the distinction between the “original” and the “copies” or “errors” in the copying process can be recognized easily. Of course, neither the whole image of Niche 150 nor the one in Cave 400 in Qianfoya were copied strictly in the replication. Such “errors” could be considered in part due to the technical limitations of pre-mechanical replication or the result of adjustments to the standard images by craftsmen or donors. The gathering of the “copies” around an “original” like Niche 150 provides a good example for discussing the agency of the object. It appears that such impressive large projects aroused the audience’s enthusiasm for imitation and led to the desire for further productions of the image.

In all, the small and medium-sized niches in Qianfoya, Guangyuan present a sheer degree of replication with formulaic design, the multiplication or the imitation.

This is not surprising as scholars have criticized the value of the copying in the religious art. The action of its making had a symbolic meaning that was independent of the image itself. Replication with a guarantee of quality was desired rather than abhorred. This mode of artistic production did not lend itself to making masterpieces as religious spectacles, but was imperative to the religious, financial and practical requirements of most of the sponsors in the local community as can be clearly see in modern ritual practices like prayer flags and mandalas.²⁹⁸

6. Local as Liminal: Geography, Community and the Empress

As discussed above, Qianfoya in Guangyuan was built in the liminal space between the influence of the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” and local Sichuan art conventions in the mid-seventh and mid-eighth centuries. It bears repeating that this study is not intended to trace the sources of elements in rock carvings in the two artistic systems, but to highlight how practitioners creatively employed these elements and techniques in the construction of the site within the context of changing power relations between the imperial and the local. It has been argued here that not only its geographical location as the north-south transition, but also fluctuations in the Tang Empire’s influence on the local community, which led to a “mottled” use of the art styles and iconographic forms in Qianfoya. Over the course of three centuries emperors, monasteries and lay patrons took turns in holding a dominant position and influencing the primary form of construction at the site.

As has been repeatedly emphasized in the above discussion, Qianfoya’s position on the border where the culture of Northern China encountered the markedly different culture of the Sichuan area led to the Buddhist rock-carvings at this site having a distinctly mottled site form. The gazetteer for the Southern Song noted that the

²⁹⁸ Shen’s discussion on the block in Beishan 北山 rock carving site in Dazu 大足, Chongqing 重慶 with Ledderose’s analysis of the modular components, that the individual figures in the sculptural groups is the basic visual elements, which can be used to form a formulaic grouping. Shen, “Modular Configuration and a Visuality of Multiplicity,” in *Authentic Replicas*, 87-95. Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things*, 9-23.

communities to the south of Guangyuan still had the accent of the Ba 巴 district, which was the dialect spoken in the Sichuan plain, while people living to the north of Guangyuan spoke the dialect of the Qin 秦 area, which was spoken in the Guanzhong Plain.²⁹⁹ This endogenous cultural structure can be seen in rock carvings in Guangyuan. The practice of carving Buddhist icons on the cliff indicates the convention of Buddhist grottoes in Northern China as well as the memory of this city occupied by Northern Wei in the sixth century, while the statues in Huangzesi, such as Niche 28, exemplify the strong influence of southern culture in the Guangyuan area in the early-seventh century. The interaction and entanglement between Tang Metropolitan Art Style and the local art system reflects the continuity of this cultural mottling in Guangyuan in Tang dynasty.

Moreover, it can be better understood through the double structure of the donors. The devotional inscriptions of Qianfoya indicate that this site received sponsorship not only from local residents but also from passing officials, merchants, monks, craftsmen and the like, from both Northern China and the Sichuan area. Although there are many local officials and residents in Guangyuan, a large number of inscriptions apparently left by sponsors who were just passing-by can be regarded as excellent evidence for the vitality and mobility of the community associated with the Qianfoya in Guangyuan.³⁰⁰ They were not necessarily involved in the trans-regional transmission of art and knowledge, but the high degree of mobility in the society of the time indicates that there was an intensively cultural communication with the outside world. Therefore, it is not surprising to find the local artisans were able to show a rapid response to the ongoing changes of the imperial center in Qianfoya. This

²⁹⁹ Zhu Mu 祝穆, “Lizhou•fengsu 利州•風俗 [Lizhou: Custom],” in *Fang yu sheng lan* 方輿勝覽 [A Comprehensive Overview of the Regions of the World], annotated by Shi Hejing 施和金 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 1155.

³⁰⁰ Related discussion see Dong Huafeng 董華鋒 and Yan Yuexin 閔月欣, “Chuan yu shiku Tang Song mingke cailiao de fojiaoshi ji shehui lishi yanjiu jiazhi 川渝石窟唐宋銘刻材料的佛教史及社會歷史研究價值 [The Value of the Tang and Song Epigraph in Chuanyu Grottoes for Buddhist History and Social History],” *Nanfang minzu kaogu* 南方民族考古 [Southern Ethnology and Archaeology] 20, (2021): 254–262.

includes not only the rapid reception of Tang Metropolitan Art Style, but also the rapid response to opportunities and challenges after changes to the political situation in the court.

In addition, the instability and fluctuation in the cultural structure of Guangyuan was further amplified by the construction and de-construction of the universal Buddhist style art of the two-capitals area between the 650s CE and 710 CE. The construction of Qianfoya occurred over the course of the rise and decline of the Tang metropolitan art style in Chang'an and Luoyang. During the period in which Buddhist art was flourishing in Chang'an and Luoyang flourished, Qianfoya shows a deep fervor for exotic Indian styles. After Buddhist art began to decline in the capitals, the local artistic system rose and filled the vacuum created by imperial decline. Meantime, although Guangyuan has been proved not to be the birthplace of Empress Wu, the various literary tales that emerged in the late Tang dynasty still evidences the strong influence of the only female monarch in Guangyuan area.³⁰¹ The special relationship between Guangyuan and Empress Wu may play a special role in the synchronicity between the Buddhist art in Guangyuan and imperial trends.

The mottled cultural texture of Qianfoya in Guangyuan marks its sensitivity to but also its “passivity” towards northern influence and imperial authority. The carvings at Qianfoya largely paralleled the evolution of Buddhist art policy in the political center, while local artistic conventions and the innovative situated design were largely occurred in the wake of external influence. However, is not the only way in which Buddhist art from Northern China, centered on styles emanating from Chang'an and Luoyang, was adopted in the Sichuan region. The following chapter examines the second largest site in Northern Sichuan, Nankan in Bazhong, which exemplifies a more “active” absorption of external images and styles. It will be argued that the different attitude toward, and treatment of, the external ‘Imperial’ style led to the degree of variation that can be observed between the Bazhong and Guangyuan Buddhist rock carving sites.

³⁰¹ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 334-337.

CHAPTER III Beyond Landlocked: Nankan in Bazhong

This chapter focuses upon the Buddhist rock carving sites in Bazhong 巴中, which is located in the hinterland of Northern Sichuan (Map 2). There are 19 Buddhist sites with more than 450 niches between them in the Bazhong region, which can be dated, on the basis of sculptural style or inscriptions, to the Tang dynasty.³⁰² The Bazhou 巴州 district which occupies the original district capital of Bazhou is surrounded by three large sites: Nankan 南龕 [South Shrine], and Xikan 西龕 [West Shrine], Beikan 北龕 [North Shrine]. The earliest project in the region is Niche 18 in Xikan, which has been attributed to early seventh century by other scholars (as discussed in Chapter One), and the majority of the remaining carvings were completed by the first half of the eighth century. There are other Buddhist sites which are scattered across more peripheral locations, such as Shimensi 水寧寺 in Shuining Town 水寧鎮, Longmencun 龍門村 in Sanjiang Township 三江鄉, and Shimensi 石門寺 in Huacheng Town 化城鎮. Site construction in the countryside started later than in the three sites associated with the district seat and appear to date from the mid-eighth century onwards.

The discussion here focuses on Nankan (Figure 3. 1), the largest site in Bazhong. The majority of the niches at this site are carved into sections of a long escarpment (Figure 3. 2) close to the top of Nankan Mountain 南龕山.³⁰³ It consists of three sections. The southernmost section contains a collection of mortuary stupas (Niches 150-176) but does not appear to have been assigned a name in modern scholarship. The middle section is Shenxianpo 神仙坡 and forms the core of carving activities at the site (Niches 12-138);³⁰⁴ it contains a cave which is usually referred to as

³⁰² Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 10-15.

³⁰³ This dissertation follows the numbering system employed by Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju 四川省文物管理局 [Sichuan Cultural Heritage Administration] et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu* 巴中石窟內容總錄 [Catalogue of the Contents of Bazhong Grottoes] (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2006). Cheng Chongxun 程崇勳, *Bazhong shiku* 巴中石窟 [The Bazhong Grottoes] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2009).

³⁰⁴ In the previous publications, Shenxianpo is also used to describe the whole escarpment,

Laojundong 老君洞. The furthest north section of the site is Guanyinyan 觀音岩 (Niches 139-150). In addition to the carvings on the escarpment, there are further carvings on two boulders on the slope in front of the cliff face. Yunpingshi 雲屏石 is an enormous boulder which is located low on the slope to the southeast of the majority of the carvings at the site. Niches 1-8 and 151 are carved into this boulder. Tianmenshi 天門石 is located 20 meters northeast of Yunpingshi (Niches 9-11) and is set in front of the entrance to Laojundong which is located on the Shenxianpo section of the site.

It is herein argued that the Buddhist sites in Bazhong and its vicinity elucidate the way in which the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” entered marginal sites in the form of a localized style. This form of medium-sized niches which contained groups of statues carved in northern style framed by local decorative motifs is herein referred to as the “Bazhong Model”. This use of motifs, apparently indigenous to Bazhong, to frame Northern style statues first appeared in Nankan as a local design feature. It later had a significant role in the development of other rock-carving sites in the Bazhong region. As a localized form of the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style”, it was later transmitted to a cluster of sites to the south of the Ba mountains in the middle of the eighth century. I attempt to challenge the widely accepted theory proposed by previous scholars that it was the presence of two different trade routes, the Rice Granary Road and the Golden Ox Road from the Central Plain, that led to the difference in Buddhist art in Guangyuan and Bazhong. Yet the presumption of this interpretation that there was limited cultural communication between Guangyuan and Bazhong during this period, is contradicted by the material and literary evidence. It is, therefore, problematic to attribute the differences of Buddhist art between Guangyuan and Bazhong to being solely due to the two roads upon which they are set. A more complex set of factors, including different pre-existing conventions, slight temporal

involving Guanyinyan, Shenxianpo and area of mortuary stupas. However, in order to make the reference below clearer, I consider Shenxianpo merely refers to the middle section of the cliff. Herein when talking about all three sections I will just refer to it as the escarpment.

discrepancies, and distinct preferences in terms of sacred images could have led to the degree of variation present in the rock carvings in Guangyuan and Bazhong.

1. Chronology and Periodization

The level of detail possible with the chronology of Nankan, and of the whole of the Bazhong region, is restricted by the limited number of dated devotional inscriptions. Most of the niches in Bazhong are dated on the basis of their sculptural style. The following section presents a discussion of the chronology and periodization by re-considering previous stylistic studies of the sites and thereafter dividing the carving activity in Nankan into three phases which starts in the high Tang and continuous through to the Southern Song.

Phase One: Around the 715 CE

Although there are no works in Nankan with devotional inscriptions that date before 740 CE, the style of the Buddhist statues in Niche 139, 140, 37, 116 and 118 indicates that they were probably carved in early eighth century as their decoration motifs and sculptural styles resembles that of Xikan Niche 10 which contains an inscription which dates it to 715 CE (Figure 3. 3).³⁰⁵

Lei dates Nankan Niches 139 and 140 (Figure 3. 4 and Figure 3. 5) to the Zhenguan 貞觀 reign (627-649 CE), as the flame pattern and geometric pattern that frames these two niches were popular in Northern Sichuan at the beginning of the seventh century.³⁰⁶ This dating has been challenged by Yagi, who convincingly dates Niches 139 the 710s CE as the vegetal motifs on the pedestals in these niches resemble these in Xikan Niche 10 of 715 CE.³⁰⁷ In addition, Lei attributes Niches 37, 116 and 118 (Figure 3. 6-Figure 3. 8) as the second set in her chronology, between 649 CE and 715 CE.³⁰⁸ Yagi persuasively modifies the date of these three niches to

³⁰⁵ 菩薩聖僧金剛等，郭玄亮昆季奉為亡考造前件尊容。願亡考乘此微因，速登淨土，彌勒座前同初會法，開元三年，歲次乙卯，四月壬子朔（8 May 715 CE）。Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al. *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 263.

³⁰⁶ Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 180.

³⁰⁷ Yagi, "Bazhong diqu fojiao zaoxiang kan zhi yanjiu," 59-64.

³⁰⁸ Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 181.

the 710s or 720s CE with two reasons.³⁰⁹ First, the “Puti Ruixiang” in Nankan Niche 37 is similar to Qianfoya Cave 366 in Guangyuan, which is dated to 712 CE. Second, Yagi illustrates that the pose of the attendant bodhisattvas seated with one leg pendant in Nankan Niche 37 (Figure 3. 9) are comparable to those seen in Cave 14 in the Tianlongshan Grottoes 天龍山石窟 (Figure 3. 10), Cave 563 in the Longmen Grottoes and Cave 328 in the Mogao Grottoes, all of which he attributes to *circa* 710 CE.³¹⁰ In addition, I also attribute Nankan Niche 105 (Figure 3. 11) to the 710s CE. This is on the basis of the similarity of the decoration of the bas-relief trees and the sculptural style to Nankan Niche 118. It also has a lotus throne whose petals are decorated with delicate lines and round jewels which can also be seen in Nankan Niches 116 and 118 which date to this period.³¹¹

Phase Two: the 715-750s CE

Phase Two is characterized by the presence of the multiple depictions of the standard Buddhist assembly of a main Buddha flanked by two disciples, two bodhisattvas, and two *shenwang* or vajrapānis. Two examples of this form are Niches 69 and 71 which are carved as a pair and both of which contain dated foundational inscription which date them to 740 CE. Niche 69 (Figure 3. 12) was donated by Dang Shouye 黨守業, the *Xianwei* 縣尉 [Prefect] of Huacheng County 化城縣, and Niche 71 (Figure 3. 13) was donated by Zhang linggai 張令該, the *Zhubu* 主簿 [Registrar] of Huacheng county.³¹² Another example that dates to the later Kaiyuan reign is

³⁰⁹ Yagi, “Bazhong diqu fojiao zaoxiang kan zhi yanjiu,” 59-64.

³¹⁰ Yagi considers Tianlongshan Cave 14 *circa* 707 CE, Longmen Cave 563 *circa* 710 CE, and Mogao Cave 328 the early Tang to high Tang. Ibid, 60.

³¹¹ In addition, Nankan Niche 105 shares lotus throne whose petals are decorated with delicate lines and round jewels with Nankan Niches 116 and 118 which are also attributed to Phase One.

³¹² 維大唐開元廿三年，前鄉貢明經黨守業，拜化城縣尉。發願為亡考妣，敬造釋迦牟尼像一鋪，願罪障銷滅，早生淨土。功德先已，莊嚴表慶。至廿八年十二月一日 (December 23, 740 CE) 歸，□□□之以石。□□□□□河南□□書。Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al. *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 159. 給事郎行化城縣主簿張令該，幸以微班，來臻此邑。屢逢兇賊，得免阡危，爰抽薄料，敬造釋迦牟尼佛一鋪，於巴州西南。山美夫鬱穹，崇懸石壁，雕始就，毫相星開，裝飾已成。金容月滿，當願見在。兄弟合家長幼，永無灾厄，永保康寧。加以法界蒼生，共同斯福。時開元廿八年中春之二月 (March 740 CE) 也。Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al. *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 110.

Nankan Niche 83 (Figure 3. 14), which contains three standing Buddhas. There is a weathered stele carved on the left wall of the outer niche, on which Lei records the presence of the characters "Great Tang, Kaiyuan 大唐開元".³¹³ Although I agree with this dating I would further add Niche 83 also belongs to this period as its sculptural style and niche form are identical to that of Niches 69 and 71, which, as stated above, date to 740 CE.

There are two more niches I consider to be carved at this period. One is Nankan Niche 25 (Figure 3. 15). Lei attributes it to the Qianyuan 乾元 reign (759-760 CE).³¹⁴ Her primary basis for this is that Nankan Niche 80 (Figure 3. 16) also contains an Kṣitigarbha whose devotional inscription dates it to the second year of the Qianyuan reign (759 CE).³¹⁵ However, despite sharing the same theme, the seated Kṣitigarbha in Niche 25 and the standing figure in Niche 80, have notably different forms and styles of carving. The blocky and robust body of the Kṣitigarbha in Niche 25 indicates it is a work of the Kaiyuan reign. The other is Nankan Niche 103 which contains "Puti Ruixiang" (Figure 3. 17). Lei posits that Niche 103 was carved in 877 CE.³¹⁶ This supposition is based on an inscription left on the left wall of the shrine that states that "On the twelfth day, the fourth month, the fourth year of the Qianfu 乾符 reign (May 28, 877 CE), the engraver, Zhao Xingtong 趙行同 and the donor, Xin Mu 辛目 made this record."³¹⁷ However, this inscription is far more likely to be a restoration inscription than a record of its initial construction.³¹⁸ The figural style of the statues in the niche, in particular the vajrapānis, are clearly the high Tang rather than the late

³¹³ ".....中天.....州.....玉石.....登.....當發原.....大唐開元.....年。" Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu* [A Study of Cave Temples in Bazhong], 39.

³¹⁴ Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 183, 258 and 337.

³¹⁵ "乾元二年十二月廿六日 (January 18, 760 CE) 趙□□此記。" Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 127.

³¹⁶ Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 56-58, 67 and 341.

³¹⁷ 乾符四年四月十二日鑄石人趙行同並口飯人辛目記。Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 159. Interestingly, the donors is called "Fanren 飯人" which may mean the "Meal provider". More discussion on the food as the payment for the artisans in Tang see Fraser, *Performing the Visual*, 42-47.

³¹⁸ Cheng Chongxun does not consider the inscription of 877 CE as a devotional one, and dated Niche 103 to High Tang based on the sculptural style. Cheng, *Bazhong shiku*, 124-125.

Tang and so these niches probably date to the Kaiyuan reign.³¹⁹

Phase Three: 758 CE onwards

Nankan became an official temple following Yan Wu's petition to the imperial government during the Qianyuan reign (758-760 CE). There are fewer carvings undertaken after 758 CE than the first two phases yet almost all the niches from this phase contain dated inscriptions which permits a relatively accurate reconstruction of the sequence of construction of different types of projects undertaken at the site.

The first group is from the Qianyuan reign and consists of Niches 4, 6, 60, 61, 79, 80 and 87. Niche 87 (Figure 3. 18), donated by Yan Wu, contains an inscription that dates it to 759 CE. It contains a single life-sized standing figure of Avalokiteśvara with a relatively square face and an s-shaped curve to its posture. Lei demonstrates that the single bodhisattva figures in niches 4, 6, and 79 are almost identical to Niche 87.³²⁰ Niches 4 and 6 were carved on Yunpingshi boulder, rather than Shenxianpo, which seems to indicate that the carving activity at the site most likely extended on to this boulder during this period. Niche 60 which contains the Kṣitigarbha is paired with Niche 61 which contains the Avalokiteśvara (Figure 3. 19). They resemble the pairing of these two figures in Niche 80, which may all be attributed to the same period because of its sculptural style.

There are five niches that date to the second period of the third phase of construction (*circa* 850-900 CE). These are small niches which were carved at the behest of specific individuals. Three of these, Niches 93, 94 and 95 (Figure 3. 20), were carved as a group. Niche 93 houses a stele which retains a devotional inscription dated to the twenty-second day, the twelfth month, the sixth year of the Huichang 會

³¹⁹ The *vajrapānis* on the left side of Nankan Niche 103 have the same posture as those on the left side of Nankan Niche 123 and Xikan Niche 90 which are usually dated on the basis of their sculptural style to the Kaiyuan reign.

³²⁰ 《唐救苦觀世音菩薩像銘》：“茲救苦觀世音菩薩像者，巴州刺史嚴武奉報烈考中書侍郎遠日之所鑿也。乾元二年正月十三日 (February 15, 759 CE)，大理評事兼巴州長史韓濟銘曰：於鑿使君，孝心不忘，菩薩靈相，克彰昊天，永永思報，無量岳岳，庶乎有常。”Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 138-139.

昌 reign (January 12, 847 CE).³²¹ According to the inscription in Niche 93, Duke Zheng 鄭公 of Xingyang 滎陽, the governor of Bazhou, was a devotee of *Pishanmen tianwang* 毘沙門天王 (Vaiśravaṇa; also the subject of Niche 94), and he and his consort, Lady Liu 劉氏 of Peng County 彭城, donated the money to carve an Avalokiteśvara at the site (presumably Niche 95).³²² The two other niches carved during this period are the statue of Vaiśravaṇa in Niche 65 which contains an inscription which dates it to 877 CE (Figure 3. 21)³²³ and the *Ruyilun guanyin* 如意輪觀音 [Cintāmaṇicakra-avalokiteśvara] in Niche 16 (Figure 3. 22)³²⁴. Although Niche 16 does not contain an inscription, the two heavenly kings which flank the main figure are almost identical to the Vaiśravaṇa in Niche 65 which is taken to indicate a similar dating.

The third group comes from the Song Dynasties. One was Niche 10 (Figure 3. 23), which contains a life-sized standing Avalokiteśvara that was carved on the Tianmenshi in 1174 CE under the patronage of Yang Gai 楊概 (fl. 1170s CE).³²⁵ Another project from the Song Dynasty is the construction, or reworking, of the Laojundong (Figure 3. 24), opposite the Tianmenshi. The three walls of the only cave in Nankan are covered with poems written by local officials. Although there are no

³²¹ 《巴郡太守滎陽鄭公新建天王記》：“浮圖教以象法化人，修功德者於經文為定，學在俗緣缺五字歸於善也。又按釋氏說，毘沙門居須彌一面，為四方缺六字義輩受約束取指手為於我，北方以衛群有。向肆幕餘，嘗諷佛書，見毘沙門本經，則杖 戟掌塔廟鎧甲而立者，常儀也。南瞻部洲之□□戾神為時患者，毗沙必乘逸足手斧，驅山林江海之神，王師伐叛，以剪殄邪謬，為民除害，別於生人，亦謂有功者。巴郡太守滎陽公，惠於民，信於士，虔於浮圖者也。居家必潔室嚴香，大□□之具，置毗沙其間。歲時月弦朔，必儼默簪裾，跪禮至再。前剖郡符，皆建厥像於其土，必盡嚴飾，果求精妙。既迨巴川，於郡之南山，視峭嶂斗絕，有嚴黃門武鑄鏤釋像之所。乃命工，為國及闔境寮庶，立毗沙於其側，姿容端莊，丹腹顯布，就建華屋，以護風雨。豈唯將來之勝因，亦郡城之佳玩。公夫人彭城劉氏，初從公來郡，自魚軒在途，寒暑生疾，亦有善願。乃立救苦觀音於毗沙之左，具妙誠恪，莫可殫說。响實從公為州從事，奉命紀述，有愧不填。時會昌六年十二月廿二日(January 12, 847 CE)記。”Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 146.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ 朝散郎化成縣令趙薦凡為自身疾苦，發願敬鑄北方大聖毘沙門天王一軀，今已成就。乾符四年四月八日(May 24, 877 CE)，修齋表讚訖，永為供養。Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 96.

³²⁴ 裝如意輪觀音左右側天王……護咸通…… Ibid, 32.

³²⁵ Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 27.

clearly dated inscriptions for these engraved poems, some of these scholars are recorded in the official histories as being assigned as officials to the Bazhong region *circa* 1180-1200 CE. This then gives a *terminus pre quem* dating for the completion of the Laojundong. The final section of carvings that date to this period are the tomb-stupa niches on the southern section of the cliff (Figure 3. 25). The only dated stupa, Niche 167 (Figure 3. 26), was carved in the year 1191 CE, and its inscription records that it was carved for a monk called “Cuizhi shangren 智摧上人 [Master of Overpowering Wisdom]”.³²⁶

The chronology presented above has divided the rock carving activities undertaken at Nankan in the Tang and Song Dynasties (618-1279 CE) into three phases.³²⁷ The majority of the carving activity in Nankan occurred in the first two phases, the first was from the start of the eighth century to 715 CE, and the second was from 715 to 750 CE, while the construction undertaken after 758 CE, the third phase, takes place in terms of the history of Nankan as a temple. For completeness sake, it should also be noted that there are five niches that were carved in the early twentieth century -Niches 7, 8, 9, 11, and 26. Since these niches are chronologically distinct from the other niches at the site, they will not be discussed further.

2. Framing External Images with Local Decorations

Two distinct sculptural styles, the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” and the local artistic style, can be seen in the carvings in Bazhong, these styles are consistent with

³²⁶ 報恩南回智護上人華口此塔，紹熙辛亥九月口申吉日謹題。Ibid, 205. Due to the absence of the character before “shen 申”，there are three possibilities in the ninth month of the *xin hai* 辛亥 year (1191 CE), that is the *wu shen* day 戊申日 (September 22, 1191 CE), the *gen shen* day 庚申日 (October 4, 1191 CE) or the *ren shen* day 壬申日 (October 16, 1191 CE).

³²⁷ The chronology of several niches remains highly controversial which will be discussed in detail in the following discussion. Ding, “Chuanbei shiku zhaji,” 41-53. Gu Sen 顧森, *Bazhong “Nankan moya zaoliang yishu xingcheng niandai chutan* 巴中南龕摩崖造像藝術形成年代初探 [A Preliminary Study of the Chronology of Buddhist Cliff Sculptures in Nankan, Bazhong],” in *Xianpu ji: Gu Sen zixuan yishu wenlun* 獻曝集:顧森自選藝術文論 [Gu Sen’s Anthology of Artistic Essays] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014). Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*. Yagi, “Bazhong diqu fojiao zaoliang kan zhi yanjiu,” 49-108.

these which can be seen in Guangyuan (discussed in Chapter Two). However, compared with the mottled texture of Qianfoya in Guangyuan, Nankan in Bazhong, especially the rock carvings of Shenxianpo, presents a clear preference of the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” and the “Auspicious Images”. In particular grottoes with particular compositions or particular characteristics for the images, it is by framing these external images and elements with a local ornamental format, that the Buddhist grottoes start to take on a local style.

Demarcating Sacred Space

There are two distinct decorative elements that appear repeatedly, especially in Nankan, but which are also at all the other sites in Bazhong. One is the presence of a rounded canopy on the ceiling, and the other is an outer niche that takes the form of a pavilion-shaped shrine. In using these two elements to bring together this diverse set of images in a cohesive whole, the local craftsmen created a decorative formula which then developed into a clear and established obvious regional characteristic.

The rounded canopies on the ceilings of the niches in Nankan are usually interpreted as items for providing shade such as parasols or umbrellas (Figure 3. 27 and Figure 3. 28). Such paraphernalia would have been used in outdoor settings by monarchs and other aristocrats in the secular world in both India and China.³²⁸ Such canopies or parasols were usually large and were intended to draw attention in a public space. Their use was frequently symbolic, and it often served a ceremonial function in that it was intended to display the superiority and wealth of the user. Buddhism adopted this iconography in order to imbue these qualities on depictions of

³²⁸ Early representation of the canopies in Buddhist statues of the fifth-sixth centuries in China see Marilyn Martin, Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia, Volume 3: The Western Ch'in in Kansu in the Sixteen Kingdoms Period and Inter-Relationships with the Buddhist Art of Gandhāra* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 40-41. Yangzhishui 揚之水, “Fo ru zhongtu zhi xiju II: Zhang, san, chuang, fan xibu goujian de kaoding 佛入中土之‘栖居’(二):帳、傘、幢、幡細部構件的考訂 [Setting Buddha in China (2): A Study of the Components of Zhang, San, Chuang and Fan],” in *Ceng you xifeng bandian xiang: Dunhuang yishu minwu zhuanke* 曾有西風半點香:敦煌藝術名物叢考 [Residual Fragrance from the West Wind: A Study of the Nomenclature in Dunhuang Art] (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2012), 49-81.

the Buddha and the bodhisattvas. The act of placing a parasol or canopy above the head of the Buddha serves to highlight the sanctity and supremacy of the statue as an embodied depiction.

Although the motif is well known in Buddhist art in India, the three-dimensional representation of these canopies is rarely seen in Buddhist art in China prior to its depiction in the niches in Bazhong. There are only two known earlier examples. One is the canopy above the two standing Buddhas on the left and right walls in Cave 18, Yungang Grottoes, Datong. This cave is one of “Five Caves of Tanyao 曇曜五窟”, the earliest project in Yungang and dated to 460-465 CE (Figure 3. 29).³²⁹ The other is a fragment of a stele that was unearthed in Chengdu and attributed to the Southern Dynasties by its sculptural style (Stele No. 3 in Sichuan museum) (Figure 3. 30).³³⁰ The top of the fragment has a tenon joint, the upper part is a mushroom-shaped Mountain Sumeru, and the lower part is a rounded canopy carved in high relief. The presence of this structural slab could indicate that the three-dimensional canopies in Bazhong originated from Buddhist art styles seen in Chengdu in the Southern Dynasties.

Since the forms of the parasols found in the niches in Bazhong (Figure 3. 31) are fairly diverse it is apparent that the local craftsmen were able to experiment with the form in this context. The most common form is that of a flat cylinder that hangs from the ceiling above the head of the Buddha. The best examples are the ones in Xikan Niches 6, 10 and Nankan Niches 37, 118. The bottoms of these cylinders are usually decorated with a lotus pattern in bas relief, while their sides are garlanded with strings of pearls and jewels with small, bell-like tassels. A more exquisite example can be

³²⁹ The carving of the “Five Caves of Tanyao” is generally attributed to the early years of Heping 和平 reign (460-465 CE) in Northern Wei. Mizuno Seiichi 水野清一, and Nagahiro Toshio 長廣敏雄, *Unkōsekkutsu: seireki go seiki ni okeru Chūgoku hokubu Bukkyō kutsuin no kōkogakuteki chōsa hōkoku* 雲岡石窟:西曆五世紀における中国北部仏教窟院の考古学的調査報告 XIII [Yungang Grottoes: Archaeological Investigation Report of Buddhist Temples in Northern China of the fifth Century 13] (Kyoto: the Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University, 1954), 2. Su Bai 宿白, “Yungang shiku fenqi shilun 雲岡石窟分期試論 [On the Chronology of Yungang Grottoes],” in *Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu*, 76-88.

³³⁰ More details see Sichuan bowuyuan, *Sichuan Nanchao fojiao zaixiang*, 110-114.

seen in Nankan Niche 116, where the canopy takes the form of a lotus carved in high relief, rather a cylinder. The canopy in Xikan Niche 5 is deceptively simple. The parasol is carved in relatively low relief but is hollowed out to represent the underside of the canopy. In so doing the craftsmen tactfully showed the spatial relationship between the head of the Buddha and the canopy directly above it.

Another characteristic is a pavilion-like decoration of the frame of the open niche. The upper section of these frames takes the form of a truncated pyramid. Although the pavilion-like frame shares many features and elements with a built architecture, scholars generally believe the prototype for this were *zhang* 帳, which were tents that were erected on portable platforms to provide spaces for ceremonial or social functions from the Han Dynasty onwards. The most well-preserved example of a tent-shaped shrine from the Tang dynasty is a stone model marked with an inscription that labels it as a “Śākyamuni-tathāgata relic’ treasure tent 釋迦如來舍利寶帳”. It was unearthed from the underground palace of the pagoda at Qingshan Temple 慶山寺 in Lintong 臨潼 County, Shaanxi Province (Figure 3. 32).³³¹ Another example is a white marble relief shrine unearthed from the underground palace of Famensi 法門寺 in Fufeng 扶風 County, Shaanxi Province (Figure 3. 33).³³²

Lei argues that the tent-style niches in Bazhong are drawn from the tent patterns of seen in artworks from the northern dynasties in the Central Plain.³³³ The earliest case of a tent-style niche in Sichuan is Niche 60 of Feixian’ge 飛仙閣 in Pujiang 浦江, which is dated to 689 CE (Figure 3. 34).³³⁴ The realistic representation of a curtain that is held back from the entrance to the niche with ties can also be seen at the

³³¹ Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 東京国立博物館 [Tokyo National Museum], *Kyūtei no eiga: Tō no jotei Sokutenbukō to sono jidai ten* 宮廷の栄華:唐の女帝則天武后とその時代展 [The Glory of the Court: Tang Dynasty Empress Wu and her Times] (Tokyo: NHK Puromōshon, 1998), 76.

³³² Shanxi sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 陕西省文物考古研究所 [Shaanxi Heritage and Archaeology Administration] et al., *Famensi kaogu fajue baogao* 法門寺考古發掘報告 [Archaeological Report for the Excavation of Famen Temple] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2007), pl. 23.

³³³ Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 301-305.

³³⁴ More discussion of this site see Sørensen, “The Buddhist Sculptures at Feixian Pavilion in Pujiang, Sichuan,” 33-67.

entrance to Buddhist niches that date to the Northern Dynasties (Figure 3. 35). The pavilion-like frames in Bazhong present a more mature depiction of this form. The high relief representation with the physical eaves, the plantain leaf motif employed on the corners of the pavilion, and the subtle overlapping of the curtains with the columns are all exceptionally realistic. This kind of realistic representation echoes the parasols discussed above and serves to demonstrate the desire of the craftsmen attempt to make a three-dimensional Buddhist shrine for the icons carved within these niches on the living rock.

Xikan Niche 21 (Figure 3. 36) is perhaps earliest example of the pavilion-like tent niche in Bazhong. Although this niche is badly damaged, the level of detail present in the carving of the floral decorations and the miraculous animal motifs on its eaves, can be observed still. Another example is Beikan Niche 7 (Figure 3. 37), in which the architectural structure here is simpler than that of Xikan Niche 21. However, it shows a high degree of creativity in this carving can be observed in the seven small Buddha statues above the representation of the eaves. Some of the pavilion-shaped niche frames seen in Nankan like those in Niches 105 (Figure 3. 11) and 116 (Figure 3. 7), are even further simplified.³³⁵ Both of these niches are carved with the two sets of eaves decorated with the plantain-leaves and *cintāmaṇi* gems. The lintel between the eaves and the entrance to the inner niche is decorated with the hanging curtains and various jeweled pendants. Two upright columns, usually adorned with floral scrolls or the lotus pattern, extend from this lintel to the floor of the outer niche. In some cases the base of the inner niche contains musicians holding instruments in the *kunmen* 壺門 on the platform of the assembly of the statues.

Although rounded canopies and the pavilion-shaped tent are common and employed in many regions to define sacred space in Buddhist art, the representations in Nankan are characterized by the three-dimensionality of their representation. The

³³⁵ The pavilion-like tent is a popular theme in the sacred ornaments in Buddhist art during Tang dynasty. Mogao Grottoes has adopted a fantastical representation of the *Zhang* combining real space with illusion painting. David Neil, "The Material Culture of Exegesis and Liturgy and a Change in the Artistic Representations in Dunhuang Caves, ca. 700-1000," *Asia Major* 19, no.1/2 (2006): 171-210.

role of these pavilion-shaped frames as a boundary to mark sacred space is further reinforced by the very life-like apsarases, *shenwang* (or *lokapālas*), or *vajrapānis* (or *dvārapālas*), which occupy the outer niche and guard the boundary between the sacred and the profane spaces. By mimicking the Buddhist ritual apparatus, these sacred ornaments were used as physical objects to create a physical sacred space. It is this feature which clearly distinguishes the rock carvings in Bazhong from other areas.

Toward the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style”

The following section discusses the changes which occurred in artistic style of the niches in Nankan during the first phase of construction. Although carving activity at this site started in the Guanyinyan section (Niches 139 and 140) it transitioned to the Shenxianpo section of the site during the latter part of this phase (Niches 37, 116 and 118). This is evidenced by the fact that while Niches 139 and 140 are carved from the local artistic repository, the niches from the late phase on Shenxianpo, Niches 37, 116 and 118, are carved in a new style. This has yet to have been discussed in detail by other scholars since Nankan Niches 139 and 140 are poorly preserved. However, the similarity between these two niches and Xikan Niches 2, 3, 5, and 6 makes it possible to analyze the style of these niches in greater detail.

In order to understand this transition, it is necessary to first focus on the characteristics of the local style that dominated the carving activities undertaken in rock carving sites in Bazhong at the beginning of the eighth century. Niches 139 and 140 in Nankan, and Niches 2, 3, 5, and 6 in Xikan, share three key characteristics with the art style found in niches carved in the early seventh century Buddhist rock carvings in other areas of Northern Sichuan.³³⁶

- ①. Double-layer niches framed by vegetal arabesques and geometric patterns.
- ②. Vegetal motifs decorating the pedestals of the main figures within the niche.
- ③. Multiple layered ranks of statues carved in varying degrees of relief.

³³⁶ For example, Wolongshan Niches 2 and 3 which have already been discussed in detail in Chapter One.

The Buddha and his basic attendants, usually two disciples, two bodhisattvas and two vajrapānis, are carved in high relief on a large scale relative to the other statues within the niche. Other attendants were often placed in the gaps between main statues. The upper sections of the walls of these niches were then occupied by the eightfold celestial assembly which is carved in bas-relief.

However, there are also some clear alterations to this local art style over time. Primarily the openwork carving technique which, alongside the thick bodies of the statues, indicate that the artisans in Bazhong were employing new carving techniques from Northern China alongside figural forms from the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style”, similar to their contemporaries in Qianfoya, Guangyuan. Another new element are the female figures in elite outfits who appear near the entrances of these caves in Xikan, Bazhong. They wear a high-waisted short sleeved garment (*banbi* 半臂) over a long robe with long billowing sleeves which fall to the knees and “cloud” shoes with exaggerated upturned toes (Figure 3. 38). In her discussion of a similar statue in Beikan Niche 1 (Figure 3. 40), Lei highlights the similarity of this form to terracotta figurines from the Tang tombs (Figure 3. 39).³³⁷ However, a closer antecedent may come from the depictions of goddess figures in Daoist rock carving sites in Northern Sichuan. For instance in the standing female attendant at Zhaojiapo 趙家坡, Cangxi 蒼溪, Guangyuan (Figure 3. 41).³³⁸ It is therefore very possible that these new Daoist figures were then transmitted back to the Buddhist artistic system.³³⁹

The niches in the Shenxianpo section of the Nankan site did not use this idiosyncratic set of decorative forms and auxiliary figures. Here the niches are instead carved with a relatively simple ornamentation with greater weight given to the modeling of sculptures. This shift can be observed across all the sites in Bazhong. For instance, in Beikan Niche 13 (Figure 3. 42), which can be dated to the early eighth

³³⁷ Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 69-70.

³³⁸ Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan et al., *Sichuan sanjian Tang Song fo dao kanku zonglu (Guangyuan juan)*, 114-129.

³³⁹ It is conceivable that Buddhist and Daoist artworks were carved by the same craftsman at this time the entanglement of Buddhist and Daoist art in Sichuan continues in Song Dynasties. Suchan, “The Cliff Sculpture of Stone-Gate Mountain,” 51-94.

century based on the resemblance of its statues to those in Xikan Niche 10, presents a similar tendency. Yet the appearance of the bodhisattvas sitting with crossed legs or one leg pendant in Niche 116 and 37 makes Nankan a prominent recipient at in the upsurge of the new northern-oriented art in Northern Sichuan; such a figure of a bodhisattva especially represented by the statue in the Tianlongshan Grottoes in which the cloth pleats covering the legs replace the stylistic patterning, a figure form which has long been regarded as the most representative element of the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style”.³⁴⁰

Around the 710s CE, there was a notable decline in the previously strong promotion of Buddhism and Buddhist art by the imperial centers of Chang’an and Luoyang which had occurred throughout the reigns of Emperor Taizong and Empress Wu in the second half of the seventh century. This appears to have been the cause of the increasing presence of the northern art style in Bazhong during this period, especially the new forms of the bodhisattvas in Nankan.

Preference for the “Auspicious Images”

The position of Niches 116 and 37 and the arrangement of statues within them indicates that, if they were not carved as a pair, the niche was carved second was intended to pair with the earlier one. The vertical axes if these two niches are aligned. Both of their main Buddhas were placed in the middle of the niches with two seated bodhisattvas against the sidewalls. In addition, a restoration inscription on the left wall of Niche 37 contains recognizable text naming “The Stone Buddha[s] in the upper and lower niches in the Shoushengsi 壽聖寺石佛上下龕”.³⁴¹ Judging from the arrangement of the niches on the cliff surface (Figure 3. 43), the “upper and lower

³⁴⁰ Sherman E. Lee ed, *A History of Far Eastern Art* (New York: Abrams, 1982), 155.

³⁴¹ 本……上裝……壽聖寺石佛上下龕……者伏願過去現在……各菩薩……樂謹題。Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 63. As the Nankan was named as the “Guangfusi 光福寺” after the 759 CE by the imperial edict which will be discussed in Section 3, it is possible that the “Shoushengsi” is the early name of the Nankan before the 759 CE. Therefore, the inscription can be dated not later than that year, that is, will not be too far from the carving of Niches 37 and 116.

niches” here must refer to Niches 116 and 37. Although this inscription is not necessarily the devotional record of these two niches, it at least proves that they were regarded as a pair in the eyes of later visitors to the site.

Neither the “Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas” in Niche 116 nor the “Puti Ruixiang” in Niche 37 were new themes in Northern Sichuan, as there are several examples which pre-date them.³⁴² However, it is, however, unclear why these two images were paired. As these two themes are not directly connected in the Buddhist canon, I consider their pairing to be due to the fact that they are both “Auspicious Images”. The “Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas” is intended to represent the true imagery of the Western Paradise as transmitted Amitābha to Wutong Bodhisattva to Buddha. In a similar vein, the “Puti Ruixiang” is supposedly an image of Śākyamuni made by the Maitreya. The miraculous tales related to these two images have been discussed in chapters one and two, so they will not be repeated here. The point is that both of these themes have been described as “Ruixiang 瑞像 [Auspicious Images]” in their devotional inscriptions in Sichuan. The devotional inscription for Wolongshan Niche 1 starts with the statement, “Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas is an auspicious image from the western regions”.³⁴³ The stele of Duke Bi in Guangyuan Qianfoya Cave 366 also identifies the statue as the “Puti Ruixiang 菩提瑞像 [Bodhi Auspicious Image]” (Appendix 3). Therefore, the person in charge of the arrangement of the rock carvings in Nankan may have put them together as both images have a similar nature.

In all, the first phase in Nankan is characterized by the “Tang Metropolitan Art Styles” centering on Chang’an at this period. There is also a clear desire to collect “Auspicious Images” with special compositions or iconographic traits. This distinguishes Nankan from other sites in Bazhong, such as Xikan, which draws much

³⁴² More discussions of the Amitābha and fifty-two Bodhisattvas in Northern Sichuan in early Tang see “The Amitābha and fifty-two bodhisattvas” in Chapter One. The “Puti Ruixiang” has been discussed in “The Fervor for the ‘Indian Buddha Image’” and “Faith Over Politics” in Chapter Two.

³⁴³ 阿彌陀佛五十菩薩像者，蓋西域之瑞像也。Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Mianyang shi wenwuju, *Mianyang kanku*, 133.

more heavily on the “conventional” local art repository. However, this does not mean that the local craftsmen completely gave up their artistic voices in the construction of Nankan. Buddhist shrines in Nankan. Their voices can be ‘heard’ in the three-dimensional indigenous decorations, such as the rounded canopies above the heads of the Buddhas and the pavilion-like tent shrine frames with eaves, curtains, and fringes.

3. Collecting the Auspicious, Replicating the Sacred

Most of the Nankan niches in Bazhong were completed in the middle to late Kaiyuan reign. The rock carvings from this stage show a strong degree of continuity from previous stage specifically in terms of the decorative methods and the preference for the “Auspicious Images”. In addition, there are also a large number of medium-sized niches with the standard “Buddha with attendants” format. While the “Auspicious Images” created a strong aura of sanctity and authority at the site, the standard image of a Buddhist assembly centering on a seated Buddha was also carved extensively at the site.

A New “Puti Ruixiang”

Niche 103 has attracted a good deal of attention from scholars in the past few years as a typical example of the “Auspicious Images” in Sichuan.³⁴⁴ Yet there is no

³⁴⁴ Ning Qiang 寧強, “Bazhong moyazaoxiang zhong de fojiao shiji gushi chutan 巴中摩崖造像中的佛教史蹟故事初探 [A Preliminary Study on the images of Buddhist historical tales in the Cliff Sculptures in Bazhong],” *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Cultural Relics], no.3 (1987): 40-42. Lei Yuhua and Wang Jianping, “Shilun Sichuan de Puti Ruixiang 試論四川的菩提瑞像 [Discussion on Puti Ruixiang in Sichuan],” *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Cultural Relics], no.1 (2004): 85-91. Lei Yuhua and Wang Jianping, “Zailun Sichuan de Puti Ruixiang,” 142-148. Wang Jianping, and Lei Yuhua, “Sichuan Tangdai moyazaoxiang zhong bufen ruixiang de bianshi 四川唐代摩崖造像中部分瑞像的辨識 [Identification of Some Auspicious Images in Cliff Sculpture of the Tang Dynasty in Sichuan],” *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊 [Journal of Dunhuang Research], no.1 (2009): 81-93. Zhang Xiaogang 張曉剛, “Fenshen Ruixiang yanjiu: jiantan Bazhong Nankan di 83 kann de sanzun ruixiang 分身瑞像研究:兼談巴中南龕第 83 龕的三尊瑞像 [A study on the Fenshen Ruixiang: Also on the Three Auspicious Images of Nankan Niche 83 in Bazhong],” in *Dunhuang fojiao gantong hua yanjiu* 敦煌佛教感通畫研究 [Research on Buddhist Miraculous Paintings in Dunhuang] (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2015), 427-444.

discussions on their similarity to the silk painting of “the famous representations of the Buddha” (Ch.xxii.0023, hereafter referred to as the Ch.xxii.0023), which was recovered from Mogao Grottoes Cave 17. By undertaking a close examination, I argue the “Puti Ruixiang” in Niche 103 shares several details with some images of “the famous representations of the Buddha”.

Described by Alexander C. Soper as “one of the most remarkable of the finds made by Sir Aurel Stein at the Dunhuang Grottoes”³⁴⁵ the Ch.xxii.0023 (Figure 3. 44) is currently held in two separate institutions. The largest and most coherent portion of the painting is held in the National Museum, New Delhi, India, while several other smaller fragments are held in the British Museum, London.³⁴⁶ This painting unique in that it is a collection of a series of famous images with captions describing the various places in India and Central Asia where they were made.³⁴⁷ Whitfield dates this

³⁴⁵ Alexander Coburn Soper, “Representations of Famous Images at Tun-Huang,” *Artibus Asiae* 27, no.4 (1964): 349-64.

³⁴⁶ The most well-accepted reconstruction is made by Whitfield. Roderick Whitfield, “Ruixiang at Dunhuang”, in *Function and meaning in Buddhist Art*, eds. K. R. van Kooij and H. van der Veere (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), 149–156.

³⁴⁷ The format led Roderick Whitfield to link its making with Wang Xuance 王玄策 (fl. 646-661 CE), who visited India three times with the assignment of Emperor Taizong. It is recorded that on Wang’s second time to India he was accompanied by the artist Song Fazhi 宋法智 (fl. 640s CE), who made sketches of famous monuments and images in India. 《法苑珠林》卷 29: “王使至彼請諸僧眾，及此諸使人至誠殷請累日行道懺悔兼申來意。方得圖畫，髣髴周盡。直為此像出其經本。向有十卷，將傳此地，其匠宋法智等，巧窮聖容圖寫聖顏，來到京都道俗競摸。” T2122, 503a8-12. Whitfield, “Ruixiang at Dunhuang”, 149-156. Zhang Xiaogang points to the similarity between the Ch.xxii.0023 and the “Xiyuzhi 西域志 [Records of Western Regions]” ordered by Emperor Gaozong. This text, consisting of 60 volumes of text and 40 volumes of illustrations, is an encyclopedia of the then-current knowledge of Northwestern China in addition to Central and Southern Asia. It is a comprehensive review of the earlier tourists’ notes and illustrated reports by Xuanzang, Wang Xuance and other relative recordings. Zhang, “*Xiyu zhi yu dunhuang fojiao gantonghua* 《西域志》與敦煌佛教感通畫 [Xiyu zhi and Dunhuang Miraculous Paintings],” in *Dunhuang fojiao gantonghua yanjiu*, 384-388. I think their discussions are inspiring. Even though neither the book by Wang Xuance nor the later compiled “Records of Western Regions 西域志” were the direct prototype for the Ch.xxii.0023, their compilation might have played a significant role in reshaping the form of knowledge either through the text or the images related to the western regions. The collective format of these images subsequently shaped the circulation and production of these “Auspicious Images” in East Asia in the following centuries. More discussion of Song Fazhi can see Tansen Sen, *Buddhism*,

painting to the seventh-eighth centuries on the bases of several elements within its composition, such as the face, dress and ornaments, that were popular in Gandharan art and in China during the Northern Dynasties.³⁴⁸ Zhang Xiaogang suggests that it was painted in the middle to late parts of the eighth century based on a perceived connection between the depiction of a seated Buddha with two legs pendent on the painting and the tale of the “iron Maitreya Buddha from Puzhou 濮州鐵彌勒”.³⁴⁹

There are two images on the Ch.xxii.0023 both of which are considered to be the “Puti Ruixiang” and bear a striking resemblance to Niche 103 in Nankan. The one without any inscription (Figure 3. 45) shares the same basic “framework” as Nankan Niche 103 (Figure 3. 13). The Buddhas all wear cylindrical crowns, necklaces and armbands on their left arms. In each case the aureole and mandorla are framed with a flame-shaped band. Another image of the “Puti Ruixiang” which is labeled as a “lightning-emitting auspicious image from Magadha in Central India 中天竺摩伽陀國放光瑞像” (Figure 3. 46), wears a crown with a snarling human face in the center and the heads of sea monsters spitting bell-shaped jewels on each side (Figure 3. 47). Two sea monsters can be discerned entwined with the vegetal motifs on the crown of the Buddha in Nankan Niche 103 (Figure 3. 48).³⁵⁰ Their mouths are wide open and their trunks are curled above their heads.

Interestingly, Nankan Niche 103 shares similar details to other “Auspicious Images” in the Ch.xxii.0023. For example, the aureole in Niche 103 is framed with a

Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i press, 2003), 34.

³⁴⁸ Roderick Whitfield, *The Art of Central Asia: The Stein Collection in the British Museum II: Paintings from Dunhuang II* (Tōkyō: Kodansha, 1982), 307, fig. 11.

³⁴⁹ Zhang point out the inscription with the same images preserved in Cave 72 of the late Tang and Cave 76 of Northern Song involves that “now changed to Puyang jun 濮陽郡”. As the Puyang jun was merely used between 742-760 CE in the administrative system of the Tang, Zhang considers this colophon should copy after the early version of their sketches and indicates the images were made in the 742-760 CE. He then considers the Ch.xxii.0023 with the “iron Maitreya Buddha from the Puzhou 濮州” should be made in the second half of the High Tang, that is the middle and late of the eighth century. Zhang, *Dunhuang fojiao gantonghua yanjiu*, 302-303.

³⁵⁰ Soper has suggested the two heads of Capricorn-fish a symbol of the Buddha's victory over the demon hosts of Mara. Soper, “Representations of Famous Images at Tun-Huang,” 349.

band of rectangular squares which alternating images of small Buddhas and lotuses. This frame is then outlined in both cases with flames carved in bas-relief. A similar form of decoration can be seen in several of the images from the Ch.xxii.0023 (Figure 3. 49). Another similar detail is the necklace of the Buddha in Niche 103, the chain is formed of a series of geometric ornaments upon which square and crescent shaped pendants are hung. Similar details can be seen in a standing Buddha wearing the crown in the Ch.xxii.0023 (Figure 3. 50). Although the details of the ornaments are not completely consistent, the central rectangle gemstone and the tendril pattern pendant are present in both cases which would seem to indicate a connection between these two images.

The fact that these are found in both the Ch.xxii.0023, which is the only extant collection of the “Auspicious Images” from the Tang dynasty, and the carvings in Nankan is significant. As places in which these two representations were preserved are extremely geographically distant from each other, it is hard to argue that there is a direct connection between Nankan Niche 103 and the Ch.xxii.0023. However, the high degree similarity of their details indicates the craftsmen of Nankan Niche 103 were familiar with the pictorial and decorative repository of the “Auspicious Images” that is can be seen in Ch.xxii.0023. The unusual similarity provides a rare evidence to Whitfield’s conjecture that paintings like Ch.xxii.0023 could have been used as the sketches from which the replications of “Auspicious Images” could have been made.³⁵¹

Three Auspicious Images

There are three Buddha statues in Nankan Niche 83 (Figure 3. 14). The central Buddha is depicted with two heads and is seated in the lotus position. His left hand touches the earth and the right-hand rests in his lap with the palm upward. His robe exposes his left shoulder, and a five-pointed collar rests over both shoulders. The statue is flanked by two Buddhas, each of which wears a cassock that covers both

³⁵¹ Whitfield, “Ruixiang at Dunhuang”, in *Function and meaning in Buddhist Art*, 149-156.

shoulders. The left figure is depicted with his left hand raised and the right hand hanging down beside the body. The hands of the Buddha on the right are held at chest height. His left hand is set in a gesture to the similar *abhaya-mudrā*, while the right hand holds the edge of the Buddha's cassock.

Ning argues that the three Buddhas in Nankan Niche 83 were intended to represent three "Auspicious Images", primarily based on their similarity to the murals in Mogao Grottoes Caves 231 and 237, which date to the Middle Tang, and Cave 72, which dates to the Five Dynasties.³⁵² In these caves in the Mogao Grottoes, clusters of "Auspicious Images" are painted on the ceilings of the main niches as decoration. The middle Buddha in Nankan Niche 83 is the "splitting-body auspicious image 分身瑞像" (Figure 3. 51), this tale was recorded by Xuanzang in the *Record of the Western Regions of the Great Tang*, a Buddha image was painted on the southern side of the stone steps of the Great Stupa in Gandhāra, which was divided into two bodies above the chest, but which stemmed from a single trunk. The origin of this image was that a painter accepted the request of two poor people to make a Buddha image for them with only one golden coin. The painter made only one Buddha, but it miraculously split into two bodies.³⁵³ Ning interprets the other two standing Buddhas in Nankan Niche 87 as an "auspicious image pointing to the sun and moon 指日月瑞像" and the "auspicious image from the Haiyan Temple in Khotan 于闐海眼寺瑞像".

Zhang provides a more detailed discussion of the comparison of these images to the examples in Dunhuang.³⁵⁴ He points out that the middle Buddha was mixed with the form of the "Puti Ruixiang", as its body below the two heads is similar to that in the Ch.xxii.0023 and the "lightning-emitting auspicious image" in Cave 237. He agrees with Ning's identification of the figure on the left as an "auspicious image pointing to the sun and moon" and adds a further example of a stone relief panel

³⁵² Ning, "Bazhong moyao zaixiang zhong de fojiao shiji gushi chutan," 40-42.

³⁵³ For example, Mogao Cave 237 of the middle Tang was scribed with the "分身瑞像者，犍陀羅國貧者二人出錢畫像，其功至已，一身二像。" "分身像者胸上分現，胸下體，其像遂為變形。" Ibid, 41.

³⁵⁴ Zhang, "Fensheng Ruixiang de yanjiu: jiantan Bazhong Nankan di 83 kan de san zun ruixiang," 427-444.

excavated from the suburbs of Xi'an (i.e. Chang'an) in 1955 (Figure 3. 52). The statue on the right in Nankan Niche 87 is a standard form of "Auspicious Images", most examples of which can be related to Khotan, but also to other areas, was based on the images from the Dunhuang area. Therefore, it is impossible to confirm whether or not it is this statue that is the auspicious image of Haiyan Temple as Ning has argued.

Of considerable interest is, as Zhang notes, that the three auspicious figures in Niche 87 are all mirror images of their "standard formats". The gesture of the central Buddha is a mirror image of the standard "Puti Ruixiang", in that it is the left hand rather than the right which is set in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā*.³⁵⁵ The two standing Buddhas in this niche are also shaped with the gesture exchanged from the left to the right side when compared to their corresponding images in Xi'an and Dunhuang. If the three images' sketches were transmitted separately, then there is only a 12.5% probability that all three sketches would have come to be reversed to form the image in Niche 83. If they were all were painted on a piece of thin paper or silk, as can be seen in the "famous representations" painting from Dunhuang, then it would be much easier for the craftsmen to misread the drawing and carve all three statues as mirror images.

The significance of Nankan Niche 83 pertains to which the "Auspicious Images" have been carved together. There are another two cases in which several "Auspicious

³⁵⁵ Zhang believes that the seated Double-headed Buddha image in Nankan Niche 83 was constructed using a somewhat ambiguous text as a guide, which has led to this atypical depiction as a seated Buddha. This may indeed be a kind of truth. Yet it is a bit hard to imagine the artisans would have been able to make an auspicious image just on the basis of these ambiguous narrative. As the circulation of the standard standing "Double-headed Auspicious Image" in Bazhong can be testified by the standing figures with two heads on the back wall in Xikan Niche 21, I prefer to consider the seated Double-headed Buddha as the combination of its standard version and the "Puti Ruixiang". In addition, Xikan Niche 21 has long been considered as the artwork of Sui dynasty, yet a recent study by Yagi considers it the high Tang as its various decorations like the flying apsaras with round faces reminds of Beikan Niche 7 which was used to be dated the eighth century. If his speculation is correct, Nankan Niche 83 will be built shortly after the completion of Xikan Niche 21, and the possibility of appropriating the form is even greater. Zhang, *Dunhuang fojiao gantonghua yanjiu*, 444. Yagi, "Bazhong diqu fojiao zaoxiang kan zhi yanjiu," 70-71.

Images” were installed into a single niche. One of these is Guangyuan Qianfoya Niche 251, which contains three standing Buddhas (Figure 3. 53). Wang and Lei consider the left one to be the auspicious image by Liu Sahe and the middle one to be the Buddha visiting the Vaiśālī, while the one on the right has few traits to identify his iconology. The other example is Shixiasi 石匣寺 Niche 6 in Lezhi 樂至, which contains eight standing Buddha statues, four on the back wall and two apiece on the left and right walls.³⁵⁶ Wang Jianping believed that the eight Buddha were all “Auspicious Images”, in which the third and fourth are the same as the middle and the left figures in Qianfoya Niche 251.³⁵⁷ This close examination of Nankan Niche 83 has served to shed light on an important of the transmission of “Auspicious Images” during this period. It is apparent that “Auspicious Images” were transmitted in groups rather than as individual images.

Kṣitigarbha and the Six Paths

Another crucial project for our understanding of this phase is Niche 25 which contains a depiction of Kṣitigarbha and the six paths (Figure 3. 15). At the center of Niche 25 is a seated Kṣitigarbha, who appears as a monk wearing a cassock with a hook button. His left hand is placed on his left leg in front of his abdomen, it holds a jewel. His right arm is lifted up, but the hand is damaged. Four clouds fly out from each side of his body. The top two clouds each contain two seated Buddhas, the other six clouds contain figures intended to represent the six paths. On left side from the top to down these are Heaven or divinity/god wearing a helmet and armor, the human realm wearing the high cap, and a lost one which is suspected to be a figure depicting hell. The right side is comprised of a three-sided six-armed Asura, an animal, and a hungry ghost. In addition, there is another intrusive niche with seven standing Buddhas on the left wall. Based on current evidence it is impossible to ascertain whether or not the seven Buddhas were carved at the same time as the main image of

³⁵⁶ Wang and Lei, “Sichuan Tangdai moyazaoxiang zhong bufen Ruixiang de bianshi,” 87.

³⁵⁷ Ibid, 88.

Kṣitigarbha and six paths. The similarity in the sculptural style employed strongly indicates that they were carved at the same time, or soon after, the construction of the main niche.

Previous scholars have highlighted the fact that the depiction of Kṣitigarbha and the six paths in Nankan Niche 25 is quite similar to two examples from in Chang'an which have been dated to the late seventh century.³⁵⁸ However, the Kṣitigarbha in Nankan Niche 25 is depicted in a lotus posture rather than sitting with one pendant leg as in the other two examples. This, then, has led to this statue being interpreted as a localized form of the northern prototype. However, a closer examination of Niche 25 *in situ* found that the statue had been reconstructed by later craftsman. The pendant left leg of the statue had been cut off to permit the cave below to be carved. The craftsman was very careful in handling this amputation, and even made a dent under the left knee to create the suggestion of a rounded knee, pretending that the left leg was hidden under the right one. However, we can connect the draperies of the knee and what remains on the pedestal to restore the upper part of the left leg. This therefore means that the original posture of this Kṣitigarbha would have been identical to those in the northern cases, or another Kṣitigarbha in Niche 31 (Figure 3. 56) in Nankan.

The interpretation of the Buddhas on the clouds related to Kṣitigarbha and the six paths is contentious. Schmid suggests that might be a prototype of the “path of becoming a Buddha 成佛道” motif.³⁵⁹ He argues that it is added as a salvific path alternative to the saṃsāric possibilities of life and death with two paintings around the ninth-tenth centuries excavated from Mogao Cave 17, Dunhuang. One is a deva (or a bodhisattva) which has been labeled with the “path of becoming a Buddha 成佛道” in

³⁵⁸ The one is Niche 8 of Yaowangshan 藥王山 in Yao country 耀縣 (Figure 3. 54) and the another is on the back of a stele the recto of which contains a depiction of Maitreya Buddha and which was commissioned by Cui Shande 崔善德 which is dated to 670 CE (Figure 3. 55); Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaoxiang chubu yanjiu*, 195-224. Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 259. Zhiru, “Icons of Dizang and the Six Paths in Shaanxi Art,” in *The Making of a Savior Bodhisattva: Dizang in Medieval China*, 68-75.

³⁵⁹ David Neil Schmid, “Revisioning the Buddhist Cosmos: Shifting Paths of Rebirth in Medieval Chinese Buddhism,” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 17 (2008): 293-325.

a silk painting which dates to 851 CE (Figure 3. 57). He lists another case in which the appearance of a Buddha with a label of “path of Buddha 佛道” on the lotus seat appears together with five paths in the scene of “King who Turns the Wheel of the Five Paths 五道輪王” (Figure 3. 58) from an illuminated manuscript of the *Scripture of the Ten Kings*, attributed to the ninth century. I consider the Buddhas on the clouds in the image of Kṣitigarbha and six paths in Niche 25 as a representation similar to the “path of Buddha 佛道” in keeping with the examples from Dunhuang. As the path of the Buddha has been placed above the six paths, rather replacing one of the six paths in Nankan Niche 25, it seems to be a very straightforward expression of the transcendence of this salvific path.

In addition, Yao considers the seven standing Buddhas in the intrusive niche in Nankan Niche 25 as the seven past Buddhas. He has also pointed out there are two cases, Niche 9 in Cave 746 and Niche 38 in Cave 806 (Figure 3. 59), in Qianfoya of Guangyuan, in which either seven Buddhas or the ten Buddhas were represented on the clouds rising from the hands of the Kṣitigarbha.³⁶⁰ He considers the small Buddhas in the intrusive niche to be the past seven Buddhas or the past ten Buddhas, and argues that their affiliation with the Kṣitigarbha points to Kṣitigarbha’s encouragement to believers to chant the names of the past Buddhas in order to remove bad karma and avoid falling into hell or rebirth in evil ways as described in the *Dizang pusa benyuan jing* 地藏菩薩本願經 [Sutra on the Past Vows of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva; T412], attributed to *Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀 (652-710 CE).³⁶¹ Regardless of whether the sutra was popular in certain areas in the seventh and eighth centuries, it should be noted that the depictions of seven Buddhas in the imageries of Kṣitigarbha in Guangyuan are very different to the depiction in Nankan Niche 25 and should be

³⁶⁰ Yao, *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 210-215.

³⁶¹ The *Dizang pusa benyuan jing* has long been considered as an apocryphal scripture and its earliest traceable popularity in China dates to around the ninth century, based on the known evidence. A review of the relative study see Zhang Zong 張總, *Dizang xinyang yanjiu* 地藏信仰研究 [A Study of Kṣitigarbha Faith] (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2003), 5-9. Zhiru, “The Scripture on the Past Vows: A Cannonization of Filial Piety and Afterlife Practices,” in *The Making of a Savior Bodhisattva*, 107-115.

taken as part of a different tradition. As for the two case in Qianfoya, Niche 9 in Cave 746 and Niche 38 in Cave 806, these are similar to the seven small Buddhas connected to Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva in an intrusive niche carved on the corridor of Cave 1931 in the Longmen Grottoes in 707 CE which Wang Delu argues are the “figures of the path of *karma* 業道像” (Figure 3. 60).³⁶² However, the seven standing Buddhas in the intrusive niche in Nankan Niche 25 is independent theme, and I agree with Yao that it is highly possible that they were intended to represent the seven past Buddhas.³⁶³

Replication of Standardized Buddha Images

A large number of highly stylized medium niches were carved in the middle and late Kaiyuan reign. The size of this kind of niche ranges from 1.30 m high, 1.20 m wide and 0.60-0.80 m deep to 2.00 m high, 1.70 m wide and 1.20 m deep. The standardization of Buddhist niches here means not only a similar sculptural style but also a relative fixed or unified format of the carved images. While the *mudrās* or garments of the main Buddhas vary, the rest of the attendants, incense burners, lions and other ancillary elements, as well as the position of patrons, were all essentially identical. Specifically, there are two main types, which correspond to the two decorative methods which had developed at the site in the previous period (Figure 3. 61).

The first type is based on the lineage of Niche 37 and consists of a round-arched

³⁶² Wang points out there are thirteen cases of the “figures of *karma*” in the Longmen Grottoes that are all small meditating Buddhas and have been defined by their devotional inscriptions. These images vary from one, two, four, six, seven, ten, and fifty Buddhas. Wang, *Luoyang yu guanzhong diqu chu sheng Tang shiqi dizangpusa xiang fenxi*, 32-33.

³⁶³ If the seven Buddhas in the intrusive niche are carved as the seven past Buddha, the designers of Nankan Niche 25 might aim to present Kṣitigarbha as the heir to the Śākyamuni Buddha in a “world without a Buddha”, which has been highlighted in the *Scripture on the Ten Wheels*. Zhiru argues that this special identity of Kṣitigarbha also echoes the anxiety that Buddhists felt at the coming of the future Buddha Maitreya and resulted in its combination with the Maitreya in Cui’s stele, dated to 670 CE. Zhiru, “Icons of Dizang and the Six Paths in Shaanxi Art,” in *The Making of a Savior Bodhisattva*, 73-75.

inner section and a rectangular outer section without any relief decoration. The inner section contains a Buddha seated on a lotus pedestal with a lobed stem, flanked by two standing disciples and two standing bodhisattvas. In the outer section, two standing *vajrapānis* flank the opening to the inner niche. An incense burner and a pair of lions are carved on the sill of the niche. Donor figures are also often to be carved on the two sidewalls of the outer niche during this period. This type of Buddhist shrine mainly appears on the cliff around Laojundong on the south section of Shenxianpo. Based on the representation of the *vajrapānis*, most of these niches' date to the middle of the Kaiyuan reign, *circa* 720s CE. A total of ten niches has this form: six of these niches (Niches 17, 23, 39, 42, 97 and 124) are carved with a Buddha with its hands set in the *abhaya-mudrā*, the form usually used to depict Śākyamuni Buddha in Northern Sichuan during the Tang dynasty. Three of the remaining four niches contain depictions of the Buddha with his hands set in the *dharmacakra-mudrā* (Niches 21, 22, 67). This could be either Amitābha or Śākyamuni.³⁶⁴ The remaining form is that of Maitreya Buddha with two pendant legs (Niche 100).

The second type is similar to Niche 118, with a characteristic pavilion-shaped niche frame which serves to separate the internal and external sections of the niches. In addition to the common seven figures (one Buddha, two disciples, two bodhisattvas and two *vajrapānis*), the pavilion-like tent niche usually contain an additional pair of heavenly kings next to its columns. The heavenly kings stand face to face and appear to guard the threshold. There are also often two flying *apsaras* carved into the upper section of the sidewalls of the outer section. Most of the niches of this type are carved into the northern section of Shenxianpo, below Niche 103. Since two of these niches,

³⁶⁴ The Buddha with his hands in the *dharmacakra-mudrā* is usually considered as the Amitābha. However, it is also possible to be the Śākyamuni. The Buddha with the same *mudrā* was carved Niche 1 and Niche 3 in Foziya 佛子崖 in Wangcang country, Guangyuan, while a devotional inscription between these two niches states the carving of Śākyamuni Buddha. Guangyuan Huangzhesi bowuguan 廣元皇澤寺博物館 [Guangyuan Huangzhesi Museum], and Chengdu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 成都文物考古研究所 [Chengdu Municipal Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology], "Wangcang xian Foziya moyā shike zaixiang diaocha jianbao 旺蒼縣佛子崖摩崖石刻造像調查簡報 [A Brief Survey Report for the Foziya Rock Carving in Wangcang County]," *Sichuan Wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Cultural Relics], no.1 (2004): 57-63.

Niches 69 and 71, contain devotional inscriptions dating them to 740 CE, it is assumed that most of the second type were carved in the late Kaiyuan reign in the middle of the eighth century. A total of eighteen niches have this form. Of these, fifteen niches center on a depiction of Śākyamuni Buddha with his hands set in the *abhaya-mudrā* (Niches 38, 47, 50, 51, 53, 54, 63, 69, 70, 71, 74, 77, 99, 101 and 113), two center on a Buddha depicted in the *dharmacakra-mudrā*, which is assumed to be Amitābha (Niche 45 and 49), and one centers on Maitreya Buddha with two legs pendent (Niche 82).

Some of these stylized niches appear to have been carved in pairs. This supposition can be made on the basis of their position on the cliff and the relative sizes of some of the niches, for example, Niches 45 and 47, Niches 99 and 100, and Niches 21 and 22. Niche 69 and 71 (Figure 3. 62) are further linked by the unusual arrangement of the donors' figures, carved flanking the incense burner and lions at the front of the platform in the niches. This arrangement is atypical since the donors are usually carved into the sidewalls of the outer niche in this type of project. Interestingly, their devotional inscriptions provide evidence that this pair of niches were sponsored by different donors. Niche 71 was donated by Zhang linggai 張令該, the Registrar of Huacheng county.³⁶⁵ His main reason for carving the shrine was that he encountered thieves and other threats on the road to Bazhong. By carving a Śākyamuni Buddha statue in this mountain to the southwest of the city, he hoped that his whole family would forever gain protection from danger and disaster, and he also hoped that all living beings can share the good merit. The sponsor of Niche 69 is the Prefect of Huacheng County, Dang Shouye 黨守業, who vowed to make a statue of Śākyamuni for his dead mother, hoping that she could eliminate her sin and go to the pure land.³⁶⁶ Interestingly, it is also recorded that the inscription was not engraved immediately after the completion of the niche (probably at the same time as Niche 71, that is March 740 CE) but until the first day of the twelfth month, the twenty-eighth year of the Kaiyuan reign (December 23, 740 CE) when Dang returned.

³⁶⁵ Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al. *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 110.

³⁶⁶ Ibid, 159.

In order to understand the standardization of the medium niches in Nankan, it is necessary to compare the evolution of the practice with that of Qianfoya in Guangyuan. As mentioned above, medium-sized niches containing groups of statues centered on a Buddha depicted in the *abhaya-mudrā* were dominant in the first half of the eighth century. Qianfoya Niche 187, dated to 712 CE, helps us to ascertain that the replication of such groups started after *circa* 710 CE. The first type in Nankan is a group of figures identical to that in Qianfoya, Guangyuan, although the lobed stem of the lotus pedestal is a new element. The most commonly replicated Buddha form at both sites is that of the Buddha depicted in the *abhaya-mudrā*. The second type, which is assumed to date to the late Kaiyuan period, can be considered to be a localized form of the first type, with the addition of the pavilion-shaped niche frame and the heavenly kings, both of which had appeared earlier in Niches 116 and 105. This kind of stylized model was extremely successful in the later rock carvings sites. It not only affected other rock carvings in the vicinity of the Bazhong but also can be seen in a series of small sites along the Rice Granary Road.

This section has discussed the second phase of carvings at Nankan. There is a continuing focus on “Auspicious Images” with unique compositions or iconographical forms. However, the images of a Buddhist assembly centering on a seated Buddha were also carved extensively during this phase. These unique “Auspicious Images” and these standard “Buddha with attendants’ images” together created a strong aura of sanctity and authority, which shifts the emphasis from Nankan mountain to a religious place full of sacred images.

4. From Nankan to Guangfusi

The third phase of construction in Nankan, runs from Late Tang to Southern Song. The nature of Nankan changed during this phase. With the support of Yan Wu, who was prefectural administrator of Bazhou during the Qianyuan 乾元 reign (758-760 CE), Nankan became an official registered temple with a given name, the Guangfusi 光福寺. Although carvings actively reduced significantly after the establishment of

Guangfusi, there are plenty of inscriptions on the cliff which reflects the multiple interactions between the temple and local society.

The Multiple Interactions of Yan Wu (726-765 CE)

Although construction at the other sites surrounding the prefectural seat in Bazhong declined at the end of the eighth century, construction at Nankan continued into the ninth century. This appears to have been due to the intervention of Yan Wu during the Qianyuan 乾元 reign (758-760 CE). Yan Wu was a general who rose to prominence during the An Lushan 安祿山 Rebellion (755-763 CE).³⁶⁷ After the rebellion, he was rewarded with the position of Deputy of the Metropolitan Magistrate 京兆少尹 in Chang'an. However, in 758 CE he was demoted to prefectural commander of Bazhou, where he stayed for two years.³⁶⁸ During his term as a local official, he played a significant role in promoting the construction of the Nankan site. His triple status as an official, patron and poet had a profound impact on how Nankan was perceived by later generations.

His most crucial contribution assisting in the conversion of Nankan into an official monastery. Nankan Niche 1 contains a carved transcription of Yan's petition to the imperial court and the retrospective official approval dated to the thirteenth day of the fourth month of the third year of the Qianyuan reign (May 2, 760 CE; Figure 3. 63; Appendix 4) carved on Yunpingshi, a boulder which lies at the entrance to the site. Although there are traces of repeated renovations to the original inscription, its content is in line with what can be ascertained from historical records. The text is, therefore, most likely authentic although the characters are a later re-carving of the

³⁶⁷ The biography of Yan Wu see Liu et al. eds., *Jiu Tang shu*, 3395-3396. Ouyang and Song ed, *Xin Tang shu*, 4484.

³⁶⁸ Liu considered Yan was assigned as the prefectural commander of Mianzhou 綿州 in 758-760CE, while Ouyang and Song recorded Yan was in charge of Bazhou. Based on the stone carvings left by Yan in the Nankan and the titles of poems written by Du Fu, Yu Xianhao makes the convincing argument that Yan Wu should be the prefectural commander of Bazhou. Yu, *Tang cishi kao quanbian*, 2870-2871.

original Tang inscription.³⁶⁹ Further evidence from the Tang is found in a poem written by Yang Shi'e 羊士諤 (762-819 CE), who was the governor of Bazhou between 808 CE and 811 CE. In his "Writing an inscription in the Guangfusi of the southern mountain in Bazhou 題郡南山光福寺," the colophon mentions that "the temple was set up by Yan Huangmen 寺即嚴黃門所置."³⁷⁰ Yan Huangmen refers to Yan Wu, who had been named as a Gentleman at the Yellow Gates 黃門侍郎, one of the chancellors of Tang, after the 760s CE.

The content of Yan's memorial to the imperial court for permission concentrates on converting the temple built without permission (無額寺) into one with official approval (有額寺). The division into these two kinds of temples emerged after Emperor Xuanzong imposed certain reasons on the construction and management of Buddhist monasteries in the middle of the eighth century.³⁷¹ In addition to the temples to be registered, the number of monks was also controlled by official nomination, which is why Yan's request to the court also included the request for seven monks to serve as the hosts in the temple.³⁷² In addition, it should be noted that the niches in Nankan which would have already have been carved at this point are referred to as "ancient Buddhist shrines" in Yan's request. Regardless of whether the Tang considered niches carved around 50 years prior to really be ancient, this phrase obviously had a practical function in that it helped to shift the emphasis from the

³⁶⁹ Early recording of this document see Wang Xiangzhi 王象之, "Guangfusi qishu 廣福寺契書 [Document of Guangfusi]," *Yudi jisheng 輿地紀勝* [Records of Famous Places] (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1962), 896.

³⁷⁰ 《題郡南山光福寺》（寺即嚴黃門所置，時自給事中京兆少尹出守，年三十，性樂山水，故老云每旬數至，後分闢西川，州門有去思碑，即郗拾遺之詞也。）：“傳聞黃閣守，茲地賦長沙。少壯稱時傑，功名惜歲華。岩廊初建刹，賓從亟鳴笳。玉帳空嚴道，甘棠見野花。碑殘猶墮淚，城古自歸鴉。籍籍清風在，懷人諒不遐。”Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 et al. eds., *Quan Tang shi 全唐詩* [Complete Collection of Tang Poems] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 3705.

³⁷¹ More discussion see Twitchett, "The measures against Buddhism," 335-374.

³⁷² Ibid.

establishment of a new temple to the renovation of a pre-existing site. The latter had not been prohibited in Emperor Xuanzong's decree.³⁷³

In addition to appealing to the Imperial court for Nankan to be acknowledged as an official temple, Yan Wu undertook two further projects at the site. The first, which has been discussed by previous scholars, is Niche 87. Niche 87 contains a single life-sized standing figure of Avalokiteśvara with a relatively square face and an s-shaped curve to its posture (Figure 3. 18). The niche contains a devotional inscription written by Yan Wu's secretary, Han Ji 韓濟, which dates the consecration of the niche to the 13th day of the first month of the second year of the Qianyuan 乾元 reign (February 15, 759 CE).³⁷⁴ The inscription further states that this depiction of Avalokiteśvara was donated by Yan Wu to honor his late father, the Assistant Minister Yan Tingzhi 嚴廷之 (673-742 CE). Yan Tingzhi was a devout Buddhist and was closely associated with the monk Huiyi 惠義.³⁷⁵ Yan Tingzhi had dressed in mourning garb and took part in the funeral procession after Huiyi's death, and after his own death was buried beside Huiyi's pagoda. There is no direct mention of Yan Wu's beliefs in his biography. However, judging from his support for the establishment of an official temple in Nankan, he may have inherited his late father's Buddhist piety, or at least adopted a relatively supportive attitude towards Buddhism.

The second project is a poem inscribed into the cliff next to the Laojundong. The poem is entitled "An ode to the cedars inscribed on the cliff at Guangfusi 題南龕光福寺楠木".³⁷⁶ Another poem by Shi Jun 史俊, in response to Yan Wu's poem, was later carved below. These two engraved poems are inconspicuous but provide significant

³⁷³ The "Jin chuangzao si guan zhao 禁創造寺觀詔 [Prohibition on setting up si and guan]", published on the nineteenth day, the second month of the second year of Kaiyuan reign (9 March 714 CE), Dong et al. eds., *Quan Tang wen*, 304.

³⁷⁴ Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 138-139.

³⁷⁵ The biography of Yan Tingzhi see Liu et al. eds., *Jiu Tang shu*, 3106.

³⁷⁶ 《題巴州光福寺楠木》：“楚江長流對楚寺，楠木幽生赤崖背。臨谿插石盤老根，苔色青蒼山雨痕。高枝鬧葉鳥不度，半掩白雲朝與暮。香殿蕭條轉密陰，花龕滴瀝垂清露。聞道偏多越水頭，煙生霽斂使人愁。月明忽憶湘川夜，猿叫還思鄂渚秋。看君幽靄幾千丈，寂寞窮山今遇賞。亦知鐘梵報黃昏，猶臥禪床戀奇響。”Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 42.

insight into Yan Wu as a person in addition to the function of the site. Although he was best known for his military success and official career, Yan Wu was also a member of the literary elite during the Tang dynasty. Although the official history records that he was an outstanding military general with an uncontrollable rage, his friendship with Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770 CE) and their mutual corresponding poems give us another perspective on this as a historical figure. These two poems provide material evidence that the practice of writing poetry on walls and cliff faces in Buddhist monasteries started in the Tang dynasty.³⁷⁷ These occasional poetries, written on the walls of a public space such as Buddhist temples and government inns, can be considered as a conscious, public self-presentation to the literati.³⁷⁸ The preservation of the poetry left by visiting poets and officials also benefited the monastery since it allowed for the accumulation and displays of cultural capital that transformed what may just have been a fleeting visit into a part of the legacy of the site.

The practice of carving Buddhist icons into the living rock declined significantly in the Bazhong region after the end of the eighth century. It appears that Nankan, as the only officially approved temple site, was the only place which saw the construction of new niches between the Late Tang and the Southern Song. Later visitors associated this site with Yan Wu, and through Yan Wu, with the heyday of the High Tang. This yearning for the past formed the backdrop for construction in Nankan during its post-Yan period.

³⁷⁷ More discussion on the relationship between poems and its place can be referred to Stephen Owen, "Place: Meditation on the Past at Chin-ling," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 50, 1990, 417-457. Shang Wei 商偉, *Tixie mingsheng: Cong Huanghelou dao fenghuangtai* 題寫名勝:從黃鶴樓到鳳凰台 [Writing on Landmarks: From Yellow Crane Tower to Phoenix Pavilion] (Beijing: Sanlian Publishing House, 2020).

³⁷⁸ Shang, "Fenbi yu tishi: shige xiezuode wuzhi meijie ji qi yuyan mima 粉壁與題詩: 詩歌寫作的物質媒介及其語言密碼 [Fenbi yu tishi: The Material Media and Language Code of Poetry Writing]," in *Tixie mingsheng*, 107-118.

Rock Carvings in Post-Yan Tang Dynasty

There was a hiatus in carving at Nankan following Yan Wu's projects at the site. The next significant project was the carving of Niches 93, 94 and 95 (Figure 3. 20). These three niches are located on the empty northern end of the Shenxianpo at a distinct distance from the earlier large projects. There are traces of grooves on the cliff face above these niches, which appears to be the traces of a wooden structure above the three niches mentioned in the devotional inscription.³⁷⁹ Niche 93 houses a stele which retains a devotional inscription dated to the sixth year of the Huichang reign (846 CE), while Niches 94 and 95 contain Vaiśravaṇa and Avalokiteśvara respectively. The inscription in Niche 93 states that when Duke Zheng 鄭公 of Xingyang 滎阳, who was a devotee of Vaiśravaṇa, became the governor of Bazhou, he decided to sponsor a niche with the Vaiśravaṇa in Nankan. His consort, Lady Liu 劉氏 of Peng County 彭城, also donated money to carve an Avalokiteśvara as she had been taken ill during the journey to Bazhou.

The iconography of Niche 94 (Figure 3. 64) has attracted a significant degree of academic interest. Ning and Lei point out the Vaiśravaṇa is in the "Khotan form", a special form of the Heavenly King that was associated with the miracle of Vaiśravaṇa as the protector of the Khotan. In this form, Vaiśravaṇa is generally depicted wearing a tubular crown and chainmail, holding a tower in the left hand and a halberd in the right, and being held up by earth spirits. The unusual costume is usually assumed to be a local interpretation of the clothing worn by the warriors in Khotan.³⁸⁰ Typical

³⁷⁹ The devotional inscription see Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 146.

³⁸⁰ Ning Qiang 寧強, "Bazhong Nankan di 93 hao Pishamen tianwang zaoxiang kan xintan 巴中南龕第 93 號毘沙門天王造像龕新探 [Re-examination of the Vaiśravaṇa in Nankan Niche 93 in Bazhong]," *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang Research] 20, no.3 (1989): 11-15. More discussion see Lei, "The Image of Vaiśravaṇa 毘沙門天王像," in *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 231-242. The figure wearing a cylindrical crown on the right side of Niche 93 is recognized by Ning as the representation of Duke Deng. However, in terms of costumes and ornaments, I prefer to consider it as the female figures which was also depicted in Khotan images unearthed in Dunhuang, which is highly possible to be the goddess of Konyodha 恭御陀天女. More discussion on the Konyodha see Zhang Guangda 張廣達 and Rong Xinjiang 榮新江, "Hetian, Dunhuang faxian de zhonggu yutian shiliao gaishu 和田、敦煌發現的中古於闐史料概述 [Introduction to Historical Records of the Medieval Khotan in Khotan and

examples include the Vaiśravaṇa of Mogao Cave 154 in Dunhuang, and a free-standing statue unearthed from Xingtangsi 興唐寺 in Qionglai 邛崃 (Figure 3. 65).³⁸¹ Although the Vaiśravaṇa in Nankan Niche 94 is not depicted in chainmail armor, the breastplate and abdominal plate linked by two sets of crossed chains and the sword belt shown buckled diagonally across the chest, still indicate that his armor is consistent with the “Khotan form”.

Lei argues that the popularity of Vaiśravaṇa needs to be considered in the context of the repeated invasions of the Sichuan area in the late Tang by the Nanzhao and Tubo, which led to Vaiśravaṇa becoming the focus of worship as it was believed it could protect the state.³⁸² According to the devotional inscription in Niche 93, such carving of Vaiśravaṇa, particularly those which are represented in “Khotan form”, was intended to emphasize the role of Buddhism in the protection of the state. As Ōshima Sachiyo argues, the cult of the Khotan Vaiśravaṇa appears to have first entered the Central Plains during the Tubo invasion in 756 CE. This invasion was made possible by the disruptions caused by the An Lushan Rebellion.³⁸³ The King of Khotan sent 5,000 soldiers to support the Tang army, and it appears that many of these warriors then chose to stay in the Central Plains region. Thereafter, there are many records of miraculous incarnations of Vaiśravaṇa, all of which involve the

Dunhuang,” in *Yutianshi congkao (Zengding ben)* 於闐史從考 (增訂本) [Collected Studies on Khotanese History (Expanded edition)] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2008), 12. Huo Wei 霍巍, “Cong yutian dao yizhou: Tang Song shiqi Pishamen tianwang tuxiang de liubian 從於闐到益州:唐宋時期毘沙門天王圖像的流變 [From Khotan to Yizhou: the evolution of the image of the Vaiśravaṇa in the Tang and Song Dynasties],” *Zhongguo zangxue* 中國藏學 [Chinese Tibetology], no.1 (2016): 24-43.

³⁸¹ Huo, “Cong yutian dao yizhou,” 24.

³⁸² Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 239.

³⁸³ Ōshima Sachiyo 大島幸代, “Tōdai chūki no Bishamonten shinkō to zōzō katsudō — Gensō kara Kensō e 唐代中期の毘沙門天信仰と造像活動:玄宗から憲宗へ [On the Worshipping and Image Production of Vaiśravaṇa during the Middle Tang Dynasty: From Xuanzong to Xianzong],” *Bijutsushi kenkyū* 美術史研究 [Study of Art History] 45, (2007): 57-74. Sato Yukiko 佐藤有希子, “Dunhuang Tubo shiqi Pishamen tianwang xiang kaocha 敦煌吐蕃時期毘沙門天王像考察 [A Study of the Vaiśravaṇa Images at Dunhuang during the Tibetan Occupation],” tran. Niu Yuan 牛源, *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang Research] 140, no.4 (2013): 33-41.

Emperor Xuanzong, Amoghavajra (705-774 CE) and the foreign invasion.³⁸⁴ The popularity of this tale appears to have spawned many pseudo-sutras which are attributed to the “translation of Amoghavajra”.³⁸⁵ Although the presence of this tale and its related pseudo-sutras do not serve as a historical record, it is obvious that the promotion of Vaiśravaṇa is closely related to the protection of the state. This also provides a crucial context for its carving in Nankan.

Although the stele gives specific reasons for the constructions of each of these images, the combination of Vaiśravaṇa and Avalokiteśvara in Niches 94 and 95 is unlikely to have been entirely accidental. Sato has discussed the fact that these two motifs were often depicted as a pair in the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang.³⁸⁶ For instance, Vaiśravaṇa and Avalokiteśvara are painted opposite each other on the north and south walls of the corridor to the main chamber of Mogao Cave 130. These deities are also depicted paired on the south wall of Mogao Cave 154 (Figure 3. 66). Another example is the two heavenly kings and the four Avalokiteśvara on the ceiling of Mogao Cave 44, which was repainted in the middle Tang. That Vaiśravaṇa is one of the manifestations of Avalokiteśvara is evidenced in a mural of the thirty-three incarnations of Avalokiteśvara on the south wall of Mogao Cave 45 which dates to the high Tang. Vaiśravaṇa is depicted in the top right of the mural as one of the incarnations of Guanyin. The inscription associated with the scene in the *Pumen ping* 觀世音菩薩普門品 [The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the

³⁸⁴ The earliest recording is usually traced to the *Shenji zhidi taibai yin jing* 神機制敵太白陰經 [Secret Classic of the Grand White for Defeating the Enemy with Superb Strategy] by Li Quan 李筌 completed in the second year of Qianyuan 乾元 reign (759 CE), records the tale of Emperor Xuanzong asking the Amoghavajra to set up an altar in order to beg the assistance of Vaiśravaṇa in their fight against the Tubo in the Anxi 安西 region. More discussion on the version and compilation of this book see Yuasa Kunihiro 湯浅邦弘, “*Taihakuinkei* no heigaku shisō 『太白陰經』の兵学思想 [The Military Thought of Taibaiyinjing],” *Ōsakadaigaku daigakuin bungakukenyūka kiyō* 大阪大学大学院文学研究科紀要 [Memoirs of the Graduate School of Letters, Osaka University] 40, (2000): 1-40.

³⁸⁵ Yukiko, “Dunhuang tubo shiqi Pishamen tianwang xiang kaocha,” 38-39.

³⁸⁶ Sun Xiushen 孫修身, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: fojiao dongchuan gushi huajuan* 敦煌石窟全集: 佛教東傳故事畫卷 [Complete Catalogue of Dunhuang Grottoes: Narrative Painting of the Transmission of Buddhism to the East] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2000), 74. Also Sato, “Dunhuang tubo shiqi Pishamen tianwang xiang kaocha,” 39.

World's Sounds] in the *Lotus sutra* states that “if they need Vaishravana (Vaiśravaṇa) to be saved, immediately he becomes Vaishravana and preaches the Law for them.”

³⁸⁷ Therefore, this pairing of the two figures may be related to the idea that the Vaiśravaṇa could be an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara, in addition to the fact that they are both believed to be the gods of compassion sworn to help all living beings.

Most of the niches constructed in Nankan after the construction of Niches 94 and 95 by Duke Zheng and Lady Liu, contain themes related to the cult of Vaiśravaṇa and Avalokiteśvara. For example, Niche 65 (Figure 3. 21) also shows a depiction of the Heavenly King of the North. The inscription in this niche states that the county magistrate, Zhao Jianfan 趙薦凡, sponsored the statue of Vaiśravaṇa in the hope that it would ease his own suffering on the eighth day of the fourth month of the fourth year of the Qianfu 乾符 reign (May 24, 877 CE).³⁸⁸ Another example is Niche 16 (Figure 3. 22) which contains a seated Avalokiteśvara in the form of Cintāmanicakra, flanked by two heavenly kings.³⁸⁹ The king on the left side is Vaiśravaṇa, the northern heavenly king, who is depicted with a pagoda in hand and is supported by a female deity. The king on the right holds a sword and is probably Virūḍhaka, the southern heavenly king, which would then also serve to pair with the northern heavenly king. It is important to note that although these later Vaiśravaṇa images retain many earlier characteristics, such as the figure being supported by *yakṣas*, the armor is not much different from that of the ordinary heavenly kings depicted as guardian figures in the normal shrines in Nankan, for example in Niche 106. This indicates that the influence of the “Khotan form” had become attenuated by the late ninth century.

³⁸⁷ 《妙法蓮華經》卷 7: “觀世音菩薩普門品……應以毘沙門身得度者, 即現毘沙門身而為說法。” T262, 57b4-5. Burton Watson trans., *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 301. Yukiko, “Dunhuang tubo shiqi Pishamen tianwang xiang kaocha,” 40.

³⁸⁸ Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 96.

³⁸⁹ The popularity of Cintāmanicakra-avalokiteśvara in Sichuan see Thomas Suchan, *The Eternally Flourishing Stronghold: An Iconographic Study of the Buddhist Sculpture of the Fowan and Related Sites at Beishan, Dazu, ca. 892-1155* (Ph.D., Ohio State University, 2003), 266-279.

The Literati in Southern Song

There were relatively few new rock carvings in Nankan during the Song Dynasty. However, with its official status Nankan was recorded in greater detail in gazetteers. This, alongside the abundant inscriptions by tourists and poems written after visiting the site, allow for a much richer and nuanced understanding of the cultural activities which occurred here during this period. Combining evidence from literary and material remains, there are three key projects which had a significant impact on the physical appearance of the Nankan site during the Song Dynasty. The way in which these changes to the landscape affected the imagery employed in the poems written about Nankan provides a good corpus through which understand the interaction between the site and site-specific poetry creation.

The earliest project in this period is the carving of Avalokiteśvara in Niche 10 (3. 24) on the Tianmenshi. This is the only Buddhist statue to be carved in this period. According to the inscription on the right side of the niche, it was carved by Yang Gai, the commander of Banan County 巴南太守.³⁹⁰ Although the face was reshaped in a later period, the overall figure still retains the basic format of the Song. He stands on two lotuses, holding a rosary in his right hand and resting his left hand on the right wrist.³⁹¹ The statue is accompanied by a philosophical poem which is carved on the left side of the niche:

When we call it Avalokiteśvara, it was carved from stone by the masons.
 If it is not Avalokiteśvara, its form is solemn. Encompassing all possibilities
 and achieving utter freedom, he vows to deliver all beings. Hearing,
 thinking and practicing in one thought-moment, he would appear anywhere.
 I now make this statue specially for the benefit of my late father. Who
 doesn't have parents? The truth is more enduring than the mountain.
 Bowing deeply to the Sage King of the Pureness, who has been alongside
 with the mountain for tens and thousands of years. When someone comes to
 venerate, the existence and non-existence are both the splendid completion.

³⁹⁰ Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 27.

³⁹¹ This kind of figural form was not a new image in the Sichuan area. From the Five Dynasties, similar statues were made in large numbers in Dazu and Anyue in southern Sichuan. For instance, Niche 125 in Beishan, Dazu. Li Fangyin 黎方銀, *Dazu shiku diaosu quanji: Beishan shiku juan 大足石刻雕塑全集: 北山石窟卷* [Complete Catalogue of Dazu Rock Carvings: Beishan Grottoes] (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1999), 123, fig 125.

謂此是觀音，初因匠石鑄。謂此非觀音，形相已儼然。圓通大自在，有願度無邊。一念聞思修，何處不現前。我今造此像，特以報所天。人誰無父母，是山孰比堅。稽首淨聖王，與山千萬年。有來修敬者，存沒俱妙圓。³⁹²

The poem, of course, is about Yang's purpose in sponsoring the making of Avalokiteśvara for his late father. However, he also expresses his understanding of filial piety and posits the feelings of future visitors. Considering that Yan Wu also made a statue for his father, and Yang himself also observed Yan's statue, his poem seems to record not only his own sponsorship but could also have been intended as a reflection of his own viewing of Yan's statue in Nankan.

The second project was the carving or restructuring of the Laojundong (Figure 3.24) on the cliff behind Tianmenshi. All three of the walls of the Laojundong contain poems carved by the local officials and literati of the Southern Song. There is a poem entitled "Shui diao ge tou 水調歌頭 [Water Melody]" on the back wall of the cave, which is recorded as having been written by the governor Duke Wan 萬公. There are another two poems associated with it that are responses to the poem written by Wan.³⁹³ The left wall contains 29 poems arranged in four rows. These all appear to have been written by Feng Bogui 馮伯規 (act. 1190 CE) and Zhao Xixuan 趙希璇 (act. 1250 CE). According to previous research, Feng was the Tongpan 通判 of Bazhou, he left two further inscriptions under this title in Nankan in 1189 CE and 1190 CE. Zhao was the Zhizhou 知州 of Bazhou during the Jiading 嘉定 reign (1208-1224 CE).³⁹⁴ There are four poems inscribed on the right wall of the cave. Two of these were written by Zhao Gongshuo 趙公碩, the governor of Bazhou between the

³⁹² Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 27.

³⁹³ Ibid, 43.

³⁹⁴ Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 35, 44-45. Chen Xiaohui 陳小輝, "Jinshi wenxian yu *Quan Song shi* buzheng: yi Sichuan, Jiangxi, Anhui deng di jinshi wenxian wei li 金石文獻與《全宋詩》補正:以四川、江西、安徽等地金石文獻為例 [A Supplementary Discussion of *The Complete Collection of Poems of Song Dynasties*: Focusing on Epigraphy from Sichuan, Jiangxi, Anhui and Other Places]," *Chongqing shifan daxue xuebao (shehui kexueban)* 重慶師範大學學報(社會科學版) [Journal of Chongqing Normal University: Social Sciences], no.1 (2020): 70-79.

ninth and eleventh years of the Chunyou 淳佑 reign (1249-1251 CE), and other two are responses to his poems.³⁹⁵

In the previous section, we mentioned that the carving of the Laojundong partly damaged the Kṣitigarbha in Niche 25, which sits directly above the cave. The mason chiseled off the pendant leg of the Kṣitigarbha and cleverly recrafted the statue into a cross-legged sitting figure by reshaping a new knee. However, the motivation for this project is quite confusing. The care and ingenuity employed by the craftsman in reshaping this statue strongly indicates that the statue was not subject to malicious destruction. Considering that Yan Wu's poem was carved on the cliff on the outside to the left of the Laojundong, and some of the engraved poems in the grotto are poems responding to Yan's work, one possibility is that the cave was carved to expand the space available for local scholar-officials to carve their poems. Another possibility is that it was created in order to either commemorate or repair the damage caused by the fall of the ancient cedar which Yan Wu referenced in his poem. The inscription left by Zhao Shanqi 趙善期 on the right top of the back wall of the Laojundong records that the old cedar suddenly fell during the Wei hour 未刻 of the fourth day of the seventh month of the eighth year of the Chunxi 淳熙 reign (1-3 pm, August 5, 1181 CE).³⁹⁶ Zhao Shanqi's inscription is the earliest inscription in the Laojundong based on known evidence, and thus it may have been intended to serve as a record of the carving of the grotto.

The third project was the construction of the Yunjian Pavilion 雲間閣. The *Yudi jisheng* 輿地紀勝 [Records of Famous Places] completed by Wang Xiangzhi 王象之 (1163-1230 CE) in 1227 CE, mentions that there was a Yunjian Pavilion at the top of Nankan Mountain, whose name was taken from Du Fu's poem, "Knowing that you gather the horses, looking back between the white clouds 遙知簇鞍馬, 回首雲間" from his "Respectfully Sent to Duke Yan on the Ninth Day 九日奉寄嚴大夫".³⁹⁷ It is

³⁹⁵ Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al. *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 47-48.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 42.

³⁹⁷ 雲間閣在南龕山絕頂, 取桂少陵九日寄嚴大夫詩, 遙知簇鞍馬回首之句。Wang, *Yudi jisheng*, 894. In addition, Quan Wei's 權維 *Yunjian geji* 雲間閣記 [Record of Yunjian Pavilion], in

generally believed that this poem was written by Du Fu and sent to Yan Wu on Double-ninth Festival, when Du heard that Yan had been stuck in Northern Sichuan on his way back to Chang'an because of the Xu Zhidao rebellion 徐知道 (d. 762 CE). It should be noted that there is no direct connection between the poem and Nankan, and the naming of the pavilion as the Yunjian Pavilion reflects the fervor for Du Fu during Song Dynasty. Especially in Sichuan there was a strong desire to imbue the local landscape with Du Fu.

Although there is no trace of the Yunjian Pavilion at the site, its construction is significant as it seems to have replaced the fallen ancient cedar to become the core image in later poetry related to Nankan. Of the many poems written in Nankan before the Southern Song, most of them took Yan Wu's poem, and the old cedar depicted by him, as the focus of their response. Typical cases include the *Gu nan fu bing xu* 古楠賦並敘 [Ode of the Ancient Cedar and its Prelude] by Zong Ze 宗澤 (1060-1128 CE), a general known for his campaign against the invading armies of the Jin 金, when he was the *Tongpan* 通判 [controller-general] of Bazhou 1124-1126 CE.³⁹⁸ However, those poems which date to the Southern Song only occasionally refer to the poem inscribed by Yan Wu, with references to the Double Ninth Festival, climbing the hills, and admiring the chrysanthemums taking prominence. For instance, Yang Yuzhong 楊虞仲 (act. 1157-1179 CE) wrote at the end of his 1179 CE response to Yan Wu's poem, "Du's pen and ink were full of light 杜陵筆墨光萬丈." At that time, he regretted being unable to enjoy the time together. He sent a poem about yellow flowers [chrysanthemums] as is proper for the ninth day festival. It is apparent that Yang's yearning for the golden age focuses more on Du Fu than on Yan Wu.³⁹⁹

Quan Yuan wen 全元文 [Complete Prose of Yuan Dynasty], ed. Li Xiusheng 李修生 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998) vol. 1427, 272.

³⁹⁸ Gou Xiaomei 苟小梅, "Song Bazhou tongpan Zong Ze yu Nankan *Gu nan fu bing xu* 宋巴州通判宗澤與南龕《古楠賦並敘》 [Zong Ze, Controller-general of Bazhou in Song Dynasty and the *Ode of the Ancient Cedar and its Prelude* in Nankan]," *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Cultural Relics], no.3 (1997): 23-24.

³⁹⁹ 杜陵筆墨光萬丈，當時憾不同清賞。猶寄黃花九日詩，雲間聲作琳琅響。Lu Xinyuan 陸心源, *Songshi jishi buyi* 宋詩紀事補遺 [Supplement to Annals of Song Poetry] II (Taiyuan: Shanxi guji chubanshe, 1997), 1038.

Interestingly, some visiting poems from later dynasties indicate how the obsession on Song literati with Du Fu reshaped the local historical memory. Du Fu's Double Ninth festival poem is carved in Niche 1 on the Yunpingshi at Nankan.⁴⁰⁰ Although it is hard to be accurate about its carvings date, this transcription of the poem would appear to pre-date the Yuan Dynasty. There are also other carvings of the poem at that time. One of the inscriptions dated to 1285 CE states that "Speculators of Ba Mountain gather in Nan Mountain, climbing slowly over the rocks and drinking wine. The lovely inscription of Du Fu is in place, and the cloud pavilion is desolate."⁴⁰¹ It is apparent that the transcribed carving of Du's poem and the numerous "responsory" poems by the poets in the Southern Song led this later visitor to believe that Du Fu himself had visited the site and left the inscription.

It is apparent that in the eyes of the scholar-officials and local literati of the late Tang and Southern Song, Nankan became inextricably linked with Yan Wu and, through him, with the scholarly elite of the golden age of Chinese poetry. This association led to sacred icons being carved at a later date than seen in other sites in this region, as well as the construction of a pavilion. These 'tourists' were not passive in their observation of these local sights. The construction of the Laojundong and the Yunjian Pavilion marks their direct engagement in the discourse over the meaning of the place, which leads to a shift in focus of the 'pilgrimage' to this site. The transcription of Du Fu's poem in the Southern Song appears to have led later visitors to the site to mis-interpret the relationship between Du Fu and Nankan. In this sense, Nankan provides a perfect example of the meaning of the place in the literature of the Tang and Song. It also shows the way in which apocryphal local memories were created through the local sites and with narratives being built up over generations.

Mortuary Stupas on the Cliffs

The southernmost section of the Nankan site is an isolated rocky outcrop with 27

⁴⁰⁰ Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al. *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 17.

⁴⁰¹ 巴山勝概聚南崗，緩步重岩其舉觴。可愛少陵題品在，堪嗟雲閣已荒涼。Ibid, 48.

numbered niches. Many niches are carved in direct relief on the cliff face, while others are set within square niches (Figure 3. 25). Some niches in this section contain representations of stupas in which in turn contain a niche in which a monk is depicted seated in meditation. In the records of Southern Song, it is mentioned that Nankan has the black “true body 真身” left on the cliff by monks who have made achievements in their practice, which may be a misunderstanding of these small sculptures.⁴⁰² In 1989, the archeologists of the Bazhong Cultural Heritage Administration recovered ashes in a cavity (0.2 m high, 0.4 m wide, 0.3 m deep) in the base of the pagoda in Niche 165 (Figure 3. 67).⁴⁰³ Based on the presence of these ashes, it seems probable that the various cavities carved into this section of the cliff originally housed the relics or ashes of notable monks.

These pagoda niches can be roughly divided into two categories according to their shapes. One is carved with a single-story pagoda (Figure 3. 69). Several of these are depicted with a monk or a Buddha seated in meditation in an arched niche on the stupa. A dated example can be seen in Huoshenmiao 火神廟 in Zizhong 資中, Neijiang 內江. On the left side of the shrine is the inscription of the first year of the Yuanhe 元和 reign (806 CE) (Figure 3. 68).⁴⁰⁴ Similar representations of pagodas can be found in the Qianfoya in Jiajiang, which were carved among the statues from the late Tang dynasty, yet their date is unknown.⁴⁰⁵

Niche 167 in Nankan provides a representative example of the second form (Figure 3. 26). The niche is 340 cm high, 163 cm wide and 99 cm deep. The tower is

⁴⁰² 在南龕之上以漆漆其真身龕置石壁，不知其爲何時人也。惟嚴武秦乞寺額表云，願度有道行漆僧永以住持俾其修習，意亦唐以前人。Wang, *Yudi jisheng*, 897.

⁴⁰³ Chen, *Bazhong shiku*, 35.

⁴⁰⁴ Guojia wenwuju 國家文物局 [National Cultural Heritage Administration] ed., *Zhongguo wenwu dituji: Sichuan fence* 中國文物地圖集:四川分冊 II [Cultural Atlas of China: Sichuan II] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2009), 461.

⁴⁰⁵ Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan 四川省文物考古研究院 [Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology] et al. eds. *Jiajiang Qianfoyan: Sichuan Jiajiang Qianfoyan gudai moyao zaoxiang kaogu diaocha baogao* 夾江千佛岩:四川夾江千佛岩古代摩崖造像考古調查報告 [Qianfoya in Jiajiang: Archaeological Report of Qianfoya Cliff Statues in Jiajiang, Sichuan] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2012), 137-141.

also square shaped with an upper section that has four layered eaves with leaf-shaped tiles and multiple-parasols at the top. The lower section of the roof takes the form of a three-layer Sumeru base. There are two inscriptions carved into each side wall of the niche. These state that the stupa was carved for a monk called Baoen Nanhui Zhicui 報恩南回智摧上人 in the ninth month of the *xinhai* 辛亥 year, the *shaoxi* 紹熙 reign, which is the year 1191 CE. Therefore, this kind of pagoda niche is presumed to be a Song dynasty work.

Such pagoda niches are common in cave temples in Northern China from the Sui Dynasty onwards. Some of the earliest dated examples can be found in Lingquansi 靈泉寺 in Baoshan 寶山, Hebei (Figure 3. 70).⁴⁰⁶ This site features rows of niches that contain depictions of pagodas with detailed inscriptions, dating the niches to the Sui and Tang dynasties. These inscriptions designate them as the “cremated body stupa 燒身塔”, the “ash body stupa 灰身塔” or the “broken body stupa 碎身塔”, which describes in some detail the burial and cremation practices at the time.⁴⁰⁷ Based on this, Liu Shufen argues that these stupas were used as memorials following “forest burials”.⁴⁰⁸ This practice can be traced back to the Jataka tales, such as the Jataka of Prince Mahāsattva, in which the Buddha feeds himself to a starving tiger.⁴⁰⁹ The concept is that his now useless mortal shell is donated to feed the animals, thereby representing the ultimate relinquishing of the material world. Once the body has been picked clean, the bones are often collected or further cremated before being interred within a pagoda. Liu argues that the niches which contain pagodas without no cavities

⁴⁰⁶ Xiao Feng 笑峰, *Linshan Lingquansi 寶山靈泉寺* [Linquansi in Baoshan] (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1991). Liu and Wendi consider the Baoshan site with the Sanjie Movement. Liu Shu-fen 劉淑芬, “Linzang: Zhonggu fojiao lushizang yanjiu zhi yi 林葬: 中古佛教露屍葬研究之一 [Forest Interment: Exposure of the Corpse in Buddhism of Medieval China],” in *Zhonggu de fojiao yu shehui 中古的佛教與社會* [*Buddhism and Society of Medieval China*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), 183-243. Wendi Adamek, “Traces of the Sanjie (Three Levels) Movement at Baoshan,” in *Communities of Memory and Interpretation*, ed. Mario Poceski (Freiburg: Projektverlag, 2018), 9-68.

⁴⁰⁷ Katherine Tsiang, “‘King Asoka’ Reliquaries and Stupa Burials in Medieval China,” in *Refiguring East Asian Religious Art: Buddhist Devotion and Funerary Practice*, 52-79.

⁴⁰⁸ Liu, “Linzang: Zhonggu fojiao lushizang yanjiu zhi yi,” 183-243.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 183-187. 《賢愚經》卷 1: “摩訶薩埵以身施虎品。” T202, 352b19.

may be intended to commemorate “forest interment”, in which instead being installed within a niche, the ashes were scattered across the earth or in rivers for the benefit all sentient beings.⁴¹⁰ The pagodas carved into these niches are therefore intended as a memorial to the dead rather than as a place of internment.

The creation of a separate district for direct memorials and internments, as opposed to niches carved for the benefit of a deceased person, was not unique to the Nankan site. The pagoda niche carved in Huoshen Miao is carved on to a separate boulder set at a slight distance from the other carvings in the site.⁴¹¹ Similarly, the stupa niches at Longdong 龍洞 and Houlong Mountain 後龍山 in Rongxian 榮縣 were carved into separate sections of their respective sites.⁴¹² However, in most cases in Sichuan, these niches were usually carved among the other niches within the site. For instance, the pagoda niches in Xikan, Bazhong (Figure 3. 71), are not differentiated from the other carvings at the site. Regardless of whether they are gathered together or scattered among the other shrines, the memorialization of eminent monks has always been an important practice of Buddhist monasteries. Similar pagodas and stupas dating to the Tang and Song can be found in many temples in Northern China.

The third phase of construction at Nankan dates from 759 CE onwards, when Yan Wu 嚴武 (726-765 CE) applied to the imperial court to add Nankan to the register of official temples. From 759 CE onwards, Nankan started to gain more support from local officials. In contrast to most of the other sites in this area, there is

⁴¹⁰ Liu points out this argument can be supported by the name of such stupa niche without the sunken for the relics - they were called as the 支提塔. According to the *Mohe seng qi li* 摩訶僧祈律 [Great Compilation of Monastic Rules, T1425; Sanskrit: Mahāsāṅgha-vinaya]: “有舍利者名塔，無舍利者名支提。” Liu, “Linzang: Zhonggu fojiao lushizang yanjiu zhi yi,” 233, 238-239.

⁴¹¹ Gao, *Zhongguo wenwu dituji: Sichuan fence*, 461.

⁴¹² Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 四川省文物考古研究院 [Sichuan Provincial Cultural Heritage and Archaeology Administration] and Zigongshi wenhua guangbo yingshi xinwen chubanjū 自貢市文化廣播影視新聞出版局 [Zigong Bureau of Culture, Broadcasting, Films, News and Publication], “Houlongshan moya zaoxiang 後龍山摩崖造像 Houlongshan Cliff Sculptures” and “Longdong moya zaoxiang 龍洞摩崖造像 Longdong Cliff Sculptures,” in *Sichuan sanjian Tang Song fo dao kanku zonglu: Zigong juan* 四川散見唐宋佛道龕窟總錄:自貢卷 [Buddhist and Daoist Shrines and Grottoes from the Tang and Song Dynasties in Sichuan Province: Zigong] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2017), 28-33 and 45-65.

sporadic carving activity at Nankan in the late Tang and Song dynasties. Thereafter, Yan Wu's friendship with the poet Du Fu served to put Nankan on the "circuit" for Southern Song and Yuan Dynasty scholar-officials and literati, who traveled to Nankan in order to reconnect with an element of the former golden age of the Tang.

5. The Dispersal of "Bazhong Model"

In spite of the focus on "Auspicious Images" present in Nankan, they are relatively absent from the other sites in the Bazhong region, including Xikan and Beikan, in the middle of the eighth century. Instead the format of a "seated Buddha with attendants" set in a three-dimensional tent niche became the standard format. These medium-sized niches with the modular-designed images and uniform decorative elements originated in the Bazhong region and became a key regional characteristic which later spread to other prefectures. This sculptural format is herein referred as the "Bazhong Model". The internal statue assembly primarily comes from Chang'an and Luoyang and is a regionalization of the "Tang Metropolitan Art Style". However, some pre-existing and conventional local motifs, such as the eightfold celestial assembly, are also incorporated into the statuary of the "Bazhong Model".

The Bazhong Area

The Bazhong area forms the core of the territory of the "Bazhong Model". Although Nankan is the largest site in Bazhong, the "Bazhong Model" is not solely defined by the carvings in Nankan. The formation of the "Bazhong Model" is first occurs during the early phase of construction in all the three "urban" rock carving sites in Bazhong: Nankan, Xikan and Beikan. In the transmission this style to the rural regions of Bazhong, this carving mode still retained considerable internal innovation and vitality, and also the ability to incorporate new external images.

Identifying the "Bazhong Model"

In addition to the three sites in the present city of Bazhou, there are also several sites scattered around the region which fell under the jurisdiction of Bazhou 巴州 during the Tang. This region is almost identical to the modern city district of

Bazhong. There are three sites to the east: Fo'eryan 佛爾岩 in Yujing 玉井, and Fo'eryan 佛爾岩 and Qianfoyan 千佛崖 in Enyang 恩陽. To the west, there are two sites Shimensi 石門寺 and Shaxi 沙溪 sites which are located on the central section of the mountain path to the site of Shimensi 水寧寺 in Shuining Town 水寧鎮. Another site called Longmenshan 龍門山 is located in Sanjiang Village 三江, fifteen kilometers south along the Ba River. It is generally believed that the carving of these works began later than at the three sites in Bazhong.⁴¹³ It is evident that the art styles therein developed with reference to the earlier three sites. This serves to define the range of the “Bazhong Model”.

The formation of the “Bazhong Model” can be traced from the convergence of rock carvings in the three urban sites with the replication of the standard medium-sized niches. Despite the purported persecution of Buddhism, large numbers of niches containing a “seated Buddha with attendants” carved in a three-dimensional pavilion-like tent frames were produced during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong. The central Buddhas could differ, but the form of the decorations and attendants was almost unchanged. This standardization of the medium niches and their mass production can also be seen in the almost identical format of such niches in Beikan and Xikan with some novel elements. The artisans in Xikan arranged two standard niches side by side and framed them in a single shared outer niche (Figure 3. 72), while the sculptors of Beikan carved flying apsarases on the net-carved curtains of the pavilion-like tent (Figure 3. 73).

The seven sites in the rural area of the Bazhong were largely shaped by the “Bazhong Model” and mostly carved on main traffic routes that extended out from Bazhong. For example, Shimensi, is located 20 meters to the west of the location of the present administration hall of Shimen Township, which place it on the road that links Bazhong to Shuining, from which the roads to southern Jizhou and Bizhou started during the Tang dynasty. The Longmenshan site (Figure 3. 74) in Sanjiang Village is located alongside the modern road with the Nan River running to the south

⁴¹³ More information see Lei, *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 110-154.

of it. The images in these two sites are very homogeneous, with standard images occupying the dominant positions within the site. The arrangement of niches within the sites changes according to the available space. Shimensi (Figure 3. 75) was carved on the eastern side of an outcropping that runs in a north-south direction. The 19 extant niches are arranged in a single row creating a corridor-like gallery. Longmencun, however, was a boulder site, with a large niche carved into three sides of an isolated rock. This site is referred to locally as “one stone and three temples”.

A New Theme: the Buddha and Tianzun

Closer examination of the themes of the niches in the small sites surrounding Bazhong shows that they did not just draw their repertoire of images from Nankan, but in some cases reproduced niches from Xikan and Beikan. One such image is the paired representation of the Buddha and a Tianzun carved side by side in a niche. The earliest example, based on sculptural style, is in Shimensi Niche 19 which is attributed to the early seventh century (Figure 3. 76). This niche appears to have been carved in response to the initial interactions between Buddhism and Daoism in this region in the early seventh century.⁴¹⁴ The majority of the extant example of the Buddha and Tianzun seated side by side date to the high Tang. They include Niche 34 in Xikan and Niche 23 in Beikan (Figure 3. 77), both of which contain a Buddha-Tianzun image in the double-layered pavilion-like tent shrine. Niche 37 in the Shimensi (Figure 3. 78) adopts the pairing image to two independent shrines, which are framed by shared outer niches. In addition, Shimensi contains a niche with two Tianzhu sitting side by side among Buddhist rock carvings.

Mollier pointed out that the popularity of the Buddha-Tianzun image in the high Tang should be considered within the overall background of Emperor Xuanzong’s support for Daoism.⁴¹⁵ She highlights that the Buddha-Tianzun image appears in a cluster of the Buddhist and Daoist sites in the inner Sichuan area. Many of these

⁴¹⁴ It is also similar to the Shengshuisi Niche 2 in Weicheng, see Chapter One.

⁴¹⁵ Christine Mollier, “Iconizing the Daoist-Buddhist relationship: Cliff sculptures in Sichuan during the reign of Emperor Tang Xuanzong,” in *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* no.2 (2010): 95-133.

including the Xuanmiaoguan 玄妙觀 in Anyue 安岳, Niujiashan 牛角寨 in Renshou 仁壽, Longgushan 龍鵠山 in Danling 丹稜, and Longtuowan 龍拖灣 in Pujiang 浦江, were carved during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong. She considers the Buddha-Tianzun image to be associated with the *Laozi Huahu jing* 老子化胡經 [Sutra on Laozi's Conversion of Foreigners; T2139], a Daoist work traditionally attributed to Laozi and used to convert Buddhists to Daoism. Her main evidence comes from the arrangement of the Tianzun on the right and the Buddha on the left, which she explains is a visual expression of the *huahu* 化胡 (conversion of the barbarians) theory.

While I agree with her analysis of the social context during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, the interpretation with the *Huahu jing* is problematic. The discussion about the left-right issue is very exciting, but problems still exist in that there is no essential evidence to link the image with the *Huahu jing*. In particular, it has long been a political tradition in China to consider the right side to have more value than the left side, which is not limited to Daoism or the *Huahu jing*. Rather than the vague connection to Daoist scriptures, I prefer to consider the trigger behind the popularity of the Buddha and the Tianzun side by side image to be an edict of Emperor Xuanzong in the third month of the third year of the Tianbao reign (April 18-May 16, 744 CE):

In the third month of the third year (of the Tianbao reign), two capitals and all the prefectures cast bronze statues in Kaiyuan guan and Kaiyuan si, one of Tianzun and one of Buddha, with the height of Emperor Xuanzong.

三載三月，兩京及天下諸郡於開元觀、開元寺，以金銅鑄玄元等身天尊及佛各一軀。⁴¹⁶

Kaiyuansi and Kaiyuan Guan are state monasteries, which are generally believed to have held some ceremony on national festivals such as the emperor's birthday. As an extension of imperial power at the grassroots, their production of the statues of Buddha and the Tianzun would have taken the lead in their further dissemination on

⁴¹⁶ Liu et al. eds, "Liyi 禮儀四 [Etiquette IV]" in *Jiu Tang shu*, 926.

the regional level. That this image was created as part of a state rite may have been the reason why there was so little variation in the Buddha-Tianzun image as it spread across Sichuan during this period.

The Pinnacle: the Shuiningsi Rock Carvings

In contrast to the Longmencun and Shimensi sites, the carvings in Shimensi show an evolution away from the Bazhong style. This site is located in Shuining Town, 37 km east of the present Bazhong City and on the southern section of the Rice Granary Road. There are 38 niches which have been dated to the Tang at this site. The niches are distributed across 500 meters of cliffs on both sides of Shuining River. The most exquisite sections are Niches 1 to 9 on the cliff face, whose sculptural style is attributed to the late Kaiyuan reign (Figure 3. 79).

The carving at this site continues to employ some of the most important features from the three sites in Bazhong. For example, the three-dimensional representation of rounded canopies and tent-style shrines. However, it also transcends the carvings in the urban sites in Bazhong. The figural style becomes voluptuous and curvaceous, and the facial expressions and gestures are also more dynamic. Some figures employed the novel but realistic appearance, such as the depiction of a heavenly king as a barbarian holding a bow-and-arrow (Figure 3. 80). What is more interesting is the spatial arrangement of the Buddhist assembly. For example, in Niche 8 (Figure 3. 81), the central Buddha is flanked by disciples, bodhisattvas, and the eightfold celestial assembly, yet all the figures are carved in the round and arranged on the side walls, crowded together. Flying apsaras are also full bodied and span from the back wall to the entrance of the niche, forming an impressive and dynamic visual effect. The pursuit of hierarchy in the spatial arrangement, which had been present in such carvings since the Southern Dynasties, is abandoned in this niche.

Although this site still exists within the purview of the “Bazhong Model”, the quality of the carvings at this site surpasses the technical quality of the carvings in the sites in the regional capital. The flexibility and creativity of local artistic systems reflected in the Shuiningsi was particularly striking in the middle of the eighth century, as Buddhist art in Chang’an and Luoyang generally declined and did not

exert as strong an influence on local areas. This is not to say that Shimensi's sculpture did not absorb external influences, but what is emphasized here is the extent to which the local artisans were able to re-design the existing artistic language, no matter whether it was local or exotic, into a coherent local form. It is this capacity for evolution that would in later centuries eventually lead to the highly detailed and realistic Buddhist rock carvings found in Dazu and Anyue.⁴¹⁷

The Southern Extent of the Ba Mountains

From the middle of the eighth century onward, Buddhist sites increased quickly in the southern part of Northern Sichuan due to regional developments. Researchers point out that in the first half of the Tang dynasty a large number of households fled and migrated from the Chengdu Plain to Northern Sichuan, especially to the southern section of the Ba Mountains, which caused the population of this area to increase and the economy to develop rapidly.

Interestingly, these new sacred sites in the south of the Ba Mountains contain some niches carved with the "Bazhong Model". This particularly applies to the present Dazhou 达州 and Tongjiang 通江, which are located to the east of Shuining Town and belong to the territory of the Rice Granary Road. It is herein argued that these sites should be considered as extensions of the "Bazhong Model". Although this kind of sculptural format is not the only or dominant style in prefectures such as Dazhou and Tongjiang, the sporadic carving with the three-dimensional pavilion-shaped shrine shows that in the second half of the eighth century the "Bazhong Model" created a regional form to the south of the Ba Mountains.

Rock Carvings in Tongjiang

Tongjiang 通江 county, known as Bizhou 壁州 or in the Tang as Shining jun 始寧郡, is located to the east of Bazhong. The majority of Tongjiang is in the southern section of Ba mountains, with particularly steep terrain and mountains. According to

⁴¹⁷ The provincial style in the Sichuan area in song dynasties see Angela F. Howard, "Song Buddhist Cave Temples of Sichuan: The Merging of Secular and Spiritual," in *Chinese Sculpture* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2006), 331-344.

the recording in the *New Book of Tang*, it had 13,368 registered households and a population of 54,757, it was an inferior prefecture 下州 in the Tang administrative system.⁴¹⁸ The earliest rock carving sites started in the early seventh century, is roughly contemporaneous to those in Bazhong. However, the traces of the “Bazhong Model” can only be observed in the artworks from the high Tang period, which reflected the increasing influence of the “Bazhong Model” in the southern areas of the Ba Mountains.

The earliest site in the historical region of Bizhou is Qianfoya, which is located in the downtown of present-day Tongjiang county. It is the only site to the south of the Ba mountains known to predate. The earliest niche in this site is a depiction of Amitābha Buddha and fifty-two bodhisattvas which has a devotional inscription which dates it to 656 CE.⁴¹⁹ However, even this site did not totally escape the influence of the “Bazhong Model”. There is a niche with an archetypal depiction of Buddha and Tianzun within a pavilion-like tent shrine (Figure 3. 82). The sculptural style helps us to date it to the late reign of Emperor Xuanzong. The juxtaposition of the Buddhist and Daoist icons and the three-dimensional tent frames reveal its adherence to the “Bazhong Model”.

More obvious influences can be observed in Zhaoqiaoyan 趙巧岩, located on a cliff beside the west Nuojiang Road 諾江路 in Tongjiang County, and Bairuxi 白乳溪, located in Gouhua ping 枸花坪, 30 kilometers south of the county. It should be noted that Bairuxi contains several elements which are otherwise unique to Beikan, Xikan and Shimensi.⁴²⁰ The pavilion-shaped tent niche frame in Bairuxi Niche 6

⁴¹⁸ Ouyang and Song, “Dili 地理四• Shannan dao 山南道 [Geography IV, Shanan Circuit],” in *Xin Tang shu*, 1036-1037.

⁴¹⁹ Ding, “Chuanbei shiku zhaji,” 43.

⁴²⁰ Ding, “Chuanbei shiku zhaji,” 41-53. Sichuan daxue kaogu xue xi 四川大學考古學系 [Department of Archaeology of Sichuan University], Chengdu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 成都文物考古研究所 [Chengdu Municipal Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology], and Tongjiang xian wenwu ju 通江縣文物局 [Cultural Relic Bureau of Tongjiang County], “Sichuan Bazhong Tongjiang Bairuxi moyao zaoliang diaocha jianbao 四川巴中通江白乳溪摩崖造像調查簡報 [A Brief Report on the Bairuxi Cliff Buddhist Sculpture in Tongjiang County, Sichuan Province],” *Shikushi yanjiu* 石窟寺研究 [The Study of Cave Temples] 7, (2017): 1-19.

(Figure 3. 83) is decorated with several flying apsaras carved in openwork. This is reminiscent of Beikan Niche 14 in Bazhong (Figure 3. 84). The representation of the architecture in the images of Western Paradise in Bairuxi Niche 1 (Figure 3. 85) is comparable to that found in Xikan Niche 53 (Figure 3. 86). Additionally, the *vajrapānis* who stand with their legs crossed in Bairuxi Niche 11 (Figure 3. 87) and the flying apsaras niche frames, appear to draw from Shimensi Niche 2 (Figure 3. 88).

Rock Carvings in Dazhou

Dazhou, known historically as Tongzhou 通州 or Tongzhou jun 通州郡, is located to the east of Tongjiang county. It is usually regarded as an important station on the imperial road network as for the Rice Granary Road and the Litchi Road 荔枝道 run from here to the Hanzhong Plains. Based on the records of the *New Book of Tang*, Dazhou had a population of 40,743 households and a population of 110,840. It was the superior prefecture 上州 and was more developed than Bazhong (which was a middle level prefecture 中州 with 30,210 households and a population of 91,057).⁴²¹

The appearance of Buddhist stone carvings in Dazhou occurred later than in the Bazhong area.⁴²² The earliest artworks were carved in the Dujiawa site in the third year of the Kaiyuan reign of the Tang dynasty. The only niche with statuary in this site continues the multiple figure composition whose sources can be traced back to the Southern Dynasties and start to be seen in rock carvings sites in Northern Sichuan from the early seventh century. Yet there are also two Buddhist rock-carving sites in this region that contain clear traces of the “Bazhong Model”, these are Tangjiaba 唐家壩 and Langyangsi 浪洋寺, which indicate the emergence of Bazhong as a sub-regional art center.

⁴²¹ Ouyang and Song, “Dili 地理四• Shannandao 山南道 [Geography IV, Shanan Circuit],” in *Xin Tang shu*, 1036.

⁴²² Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 四川省文物考古研究院 [Sichuan Provincial Cultural Heritage and Archaeology Administration] and Dazhou shi bowuguan 達州市博物館 [Dazhou Museum] eds., *Sichuan sanjian Tang Song fo dao kanku zonglu: Dazhou juan* 四川散見唐宋佛道龕窟總錄:達州卷 [Buddhist and Daoist Shrines and Grottoes from the Tang and Song Dynasties in Sichuan Province: Dazhou], (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2017).

Tangjiaba is carved into a boulder just outside Hongfeng Village 紅峰鄉 and contains three niches.⁴²³ Tangjiaba Niche 2 (Figure 3. 89) at this site has a pavilion-shaped tent shrine frame with the double-decked eaves, as commonly seen in Nankan. The slight difference is that the Buddha's lotus seat is connected to those of the flanking disciples and the bodhisattvas. Langyangsi is located in Madu Village 馬渡鄉, and contains an inscription that dates the statues to the first year of the Yongtai 永泰 reign (765 CE).⁴²⁴ The frame of Langyangsi Niche 3 (Figure 3. 90) is carved in a pavilion form with the single-layer eaves. The side pillars and the decoration of the valance are similar to examples dated to the Kaiyuan period in Bazhong. The cassock of the Buddha covers the lotus throne, and the image of double trees appears in the background, the whole composition is very similar to that of Nankan Niche 105.

From the above it is apparent that the Buddhist art style of Bazhong had a direct influence on the Buddhist art styles of Tongjiang and Dazhou in the mid-eighth century. Of course, it should be noted that Buddhist sites and their statuary in these two areas are far more complicated and richer than the “Bazhong Model” that I have discussed here. This is why I consider them to be an extension of the “Bazhong Model” to depict the relevant carvings in this region. Nevertheless, the sculptural format marked by the three-dimensional tent niche is only one of the popular artistic languages in this area. In addition, the statues from these two places maintained considerable vitality in carving sacred images in the middle and late Tang, while the carvings in Bazhong generally declined. Therefore, the rock carvings to the south of the Ba Mountains in the ninth and tenth centuries are beyond the scope of the “Bazhong Model” and, as such, there will be no further discussion here.

In this section, we discussed the significance and popularity of the “Bazhong Model”. The “Bazhong Model” as a localized style of the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” in Bazhong is characteristic of Buddhist assembly centered with the seated Buddha framed by three-dimensional pavilion-shaped niche. Nankan is the center of

⁴²³ Ibid, “Tangjiaba moya zaoxiang,” 53-76.

⁴²⁴ Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Dazhou shi bowuguan, “Langyangsi moya zaoxiang,” in *Sichuan sanjian Tang Song fo dao kanku zonglu: Dazhou juan*, 85-234.

this style, yet there are also several elements appearing in Xikan and Beikan. The “Bazhong Model” had a greater influence in the southern area of Ba mountains in the eighth century. Shuiningsi represent the peak of its creativity which is also involved various local art conventions.

6. Moving Beyond the Paradigm of the *Ways to Shu*

The over aim of this study of these Buddhist rock-carving sites in Northern Sichuan has been to build a holistic understanding of the form and formation of the Buddhist carvings in Guangyuan and Bazhong. This was done to examine why these two regions which are located within 100 km of each other, cover approximately the same time period show strong yet markedly different reception of influences from the Buddhist art styles of Chang’an and Luoyang. Yao’s study of the Buddhist carvings in Northern Sichuan was one of the first systematic studies which argued the difference between the two regions was caused by the two separate trade roads which linked them to Chang’an and Luoyang.⁴²⁵ The basis of this discussion comes from the historical geography of the region. According to text-based geographical research by Yen Keng-wang and other historical geographers, there were indeed two roads that ran from Northern Sichuan to the Hanzhong area, which connected to Chang’an, Luoyang and other areas in Northern China.⁴²⁶ Therefore, Yao argues that although both their images came from the same source, different modes of circulation along these two roads led to different images being reproduced in Guangyuan and Bazhong.

Other researchers of Buddhist carvings in Northern Sichuan have accepted this theory. The representative research come from Lei Yuhua, who basically agrees with Yao’s interpretation, but also indicates that there is a slight variation in the time at which these sites were carved, which may also have been a factor in the variation

⁴²⁵ Yao Chongxin, “Shilun Guangyuan, Bazhong liangdi shiku zaixiang de guanxi,” 63-70. Yao, “Guangyuan Shiku yu Bazhong shiku zaixiang de guanxi 廣元石窟與巴中石窟造像的關係 [Relationship between Guangyuan Grottoes and Bazhong Grottoes],” in *Bashu fojiao shiku zaixiang chubu yanjiu*, 283-301.

⁴²⁶ Yen, *Tangdai jiaotong tu kao: Shan, Jian, Dian, Qian qu*, 863-1027.

between these two areas.⁴²⁷ She claims that the increasing significance of the Rice Granary Road in transportation between Northern China and the Sichuan area in the late Tang, led to a decline in the Guangyuan area but continuity in the Bazhong area. Lei claims that this is why some images, like the Vaiśravaṇa, which were popular in Chang'an after the Tianbao reign (742-756 CE), are found in Bazhong but not in Guangyuan, thus increasing the degree of variation between the two areas.

However, a closer examination of the history of the Rice Granary Road raises questions about its assumed role in creating the variation between these two sites. The premise of the “two-roads interpretation” is that there was not much communication between Guangyuan and Bazhong, otherwise the differences resulting from the circulation of Buddhist art along different roads would be largely diluted by their interaction. In fact, there is clear evidence to indicate that Bazhong’s connection to Northern China relied on Guangyuan as well as the Golden Ox Road. A strong testament to the presence of a connection between the Buddhist art of Guangyuan and Bazhong in the high Tang is an inscription left in Fo’eryan, Yujing (Figure 3. 91).⁴²⁸ Carved in Niche 9 (Figure 3. 92) it states that “in the twelfth month of the first year of Yongtai reign (January 16th- February 13th, 766 CE) this niche was carved by a *Boshi* carver of niches called Gou Shenyuan who came from Lizhou (Guangyuan) 永泰元年十二月利州鑄龕博士勾神遠.”⁴²⁹ This inscription provides clear evidence for the migration of craftsmen from Guangyuan to Bazhong, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that during the Tang dynasty Guangyuan and Bazhong were not isolated from each other.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁷ Lei, “Bazhong shiku yu Guangyuan shiku de guanxi,” in *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 281-295.

⁴²⁸ Fo’eryan is a tiny site located on a cliff in Yunü Village 玉女村 of Yujing Town 玉井鄉 in Bazhong. It contains a total of 9 niches most of which are poorly preserved. Lei, “Yujing Fo’eryan 玉井佛爾巖 [Fo’eryan in Yujing],” in *Bazhong shiku yanjiu*, 144-146.

⁴²⁹ In the Tang dynasty, the “*Boshi* 博士” can refer to professors who were specialized in a certain profession and provided the training in the school of the states or the prefectures, while it also was appropriated for the master who were only good at some fields. Regardless Gou Shenyuan gain the title from the government or not, Fraser, *Performing the Visual*, 35.

⁴³⁰ Another similar item of evidence is from Zhaoqiaoyan, Tongzhou. The craftsman of a Vaiśravaṇa carved in 892 CE, 嚴士寅 Yan Shiyin, also claimed that he came from Jiachuan 嘉川

In fact, it has been increasingly questioned whether the Rice Granary Road was an arterial road linking Northern Sichuan to the external world.⁴³¹ The description of this road only starts to appear in historical geographies in the Late Tang, which means that we know very little about it during the first half of the Tang Dynasty. If material remains are taken into account,⁴³² the carvings in Bazhong were not only carved earlier than in other places along the road that are closer to Northern China, but also with images similar to possible prototypes from Northern China. Therefore, more evidence is required if we want to argue that the images in Bazhong were transmitted via the Rice Granary Road. In addition, until the Late Tang, the relevant records still state that the Rice Granary Road was much more dangerous and difficult to pass through than the Golden Ox Road. In fact, the Golden Ox Road was the only official passage linking the Sichuan area and Northern China, and it originally contained a series of *yi* 驛 [courier stations]. These were constructed along all state highways to provide accommodation for the couriers carrying imperial messages from the capitals to the provinces.

As far as the current materials are concerned, it can be confirmed at least that the officials assigned to Bazhong would usually first go to Guangyuan by the Golden Ox Road, and then travel to Bazhong either by boat or over land in the Sichuan area. Evidence for this statement is the miraculous tale from the the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* 弘贊法華傳 [Eulogizing the Anthology of the Lotus Sutra; T2067] by Huixiang 惠詳 (fl. 667-716 CE).⁴³³ When Su Chang 蘇長 was assigned to be the commander of

County of Lizhou. Ding, “Chuanbei shiku zhaji,” 41-53.

⁴³¹ Guo Shengbo 郭聲波, “Lun micangdao de xitong wenti ji qi lishi diwei 論米倉道的系統問題及其歷史地位 [A Discussion of the Problems Concerning the Rice Granary Road Network and Its Historical Status],” *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Cultural Relics], no.6 (2012): 79-86. Peng Bangben 彭邦本, “Micangdao xuxian yu xingzhi chutan 米倉道路線與性質初探 [Preliminary Study on the Route and Nature of Rice Granary Road],” *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 [Sichuan Culture Relics], no.1 (2013): 63-71.

⁴³² Ren Jiang 任江 et. al, “Sichuan Nanjiang micangdao diaocha jianbao 四川南江米倉道調查簡報 [A Brief Report of the Rice Granary Road in Nanjiang, Sichuan],” *Wenwu* 文物 [Cultural Relics], no.9 (2013): 35-46.

⁴³³ T2067, 41b14-21.

Bazhou during the Wude 武德 reign, he travelled with his family to Bazhou by boat along the Jialing River. Strong wind caused their boat to sink in the middle of the river and the only survivor was one of Su's concubines, who was carrying a box containing the Lotus Sutra and refused to let go of it throughout the disaster. What is more miraculous is that the scriptures in the box were not wet. For our purposes the notable part here is that Su's route to Bazhou involved a journey by boat along the Jialing River, which means they first entered Guangyuan from the Golden Ox Road, boarded boats to travel along the river from Guangyuan to Langzhong. Presumably they would have then completed the last section of their journey to Bazhong by road. Of course, there may have been other ways to enter Bazhong from Guangyuan, but it is clear here that going through Guangyuan was the usual way to travel to Bazhong from Northern China.

As the "two-roads interpretation" is not sufficient, a re-examination is required for the many differences in the Buddhist art styles present in Guangyuan and Bazhong. One of the possible reasons could be the difference in the span of their active periods. Most niches shaped with an obvious northern style in Qianfoya were carved around 690-720 CE, while those in Nankan in Bazhong were built from around 710 CE onwards. The "Tang Metropolitan Art Style" in Chang'an and Luoyang underwent a series of changes between the reigns of Empress Wu and Emperor Xuanzong. These changes were then projected onto the statues of Guangyuan and Bazhong. For example, Buddhas dressed in robes without pleats around the 690s CE in Qianfoya reflect the fervor for the Indian style in northern art, but this had been transformed into a more mature physical expression by the time it was replicated in Nankan, completed in the 710s CE.

However, this slight difference in time period is still not sufficient to completely explain the degree of variation present between these two sites. This dissertation proposes that the variation between these different sites is also the result of the different local responses to the complex web of Buddhist material cultures by the *in-situ* agents who were participant in the site construction. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Qianfoya reflects a relative "passive" attitude to the external influences.

When the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” was endorsed and promoted by the imperial center, Qianfoya was very willing to accept new foreign styles, but when the center began to decline, the rock carvings in Qianfoya soon shifted to local artistic traditions and local creations. The participants in the construction of Nankan, instead, presented an “active” response to art styles which they then unified with the local decorative formula. Although the fervor for Buddhist grottoes and art had already started to decline in Chang'an and Luoyang, the active participants in Nankan still seem to have been interested in collecting the “Auspicious Images” with special compositions or iconological traits, like the “Puti Ruixiang” and the “Kṣitigarbha and the six paths” from Northern China.

This explanation seems to be a circular argument, yet I attempt to point out use rock carvings in Northern China to point out the thinking trap in the past discussion about the spread of Buddhist art. The dissemination of Buddhist image or style is not as uniform and static as has been the foundation of research to date. The reception Buddhist art trends within a region is not equal throughout the whole area. From another point of view, our discussion of the differences between Bazhong and Guangyuan may be based on some defects of modern academic observation. The perception of a close relationship of Buddhist art in two places requires the sharing of the exclusive elements. That is to say, not only should they consist of similar stylistic elements, but these elements should be unique to the regions. In the context of Buddhist carvings in Northern Sichuan, it could be necessary to find that the original elements of Guangyuan had been accepted by the sites in Bazhong so that we can confidently assume interaction and influence between these two areas. The absence of no such exclusive shared elements, does not exclude the possibility of cultural connections between the two areas. These two forms should, therefore, be regarded two nodes in the network of Buddhist art communication. Notably, the absence of evidence is not the same as the evidence of absence. In particular, Buddhist art in Guangyuan and Bazhong was largely based on two pre-existing image systems: the local conventions in North Sichuan and the metropolitan art forms from Northern China.

Therefore, I suggest that the research issue itself needs to be supplemented. There is a clear disconnect in the transmission of Buddhist art in Guangyuan and Bazhong, that is, the characteristic elements formed in Guangyuan were not transmitted to the carvings in Bazhong. However, there is historical evidence of connections between the two regions. The idiosyncratic elements created in the carvings of Qianfoya in Guangyuan, for example the central-altar cave or the medium niches with six attendants in its additional corridors, would not have been very practical in the niche-based sites in Bazhong, where the viewer appears to have been intended to stand in front of the cliff face.

Another reason for the close relationship between the Buddhist art of Bazhong and that of Northern China is that Bazhong was the place of exile for the imperial family during the first half of the Tang. The most famous exile was Li Xian 李賢 (655-684 CE), known as Prince Zhanghuai 章懷太子.⁴³⁴ He was exiled to Bazhou after falling out of favor with Empress Wu in 680 CE and was forced to commit suicide at his home in Bazhou four years later. It was not until 706 CE that his younger brother Emperor Zhongzong asked permission for his remains to be repatriated to Chang'an so that they could be reinterred in the Qianling Mausoleum.⁴³⁵ Although there is not much direct evidence to help us understand how exiled imperial members influenced the creation of Buddhist art in Bazhou, it is possible that the direct connection between Bazhou and the imperial power from Chang'an and Luoyang may have brought in art and cultural resources from the central capitals in a way that transcended its geography and also gave it regional influence beyond its own administrative level.

The current research paradigm sees the spread of Buddhist art as an irresistible torrent flowing from the “center” to the “margin”. Yet this perfect model is actually divorced from the historical perspective and overlooks the agency of local practitioners. Having zoomed in on the transmission of Buddhist art between Sichuan

⁴³⁴ The biography of Li Xian can be referred to Ouyang and Song et al. eds. *Xin Tang shu*, 3591.

⁴³⁵ In addition to Li Xian, Li Ke 李恪 (619-653 CE), the third son of Emperor Taizong was also demoted to Bazhou and died here. Ouyang and Song et al. eds. *Xin Tang shu*, 3574.

and Northern China, it is easy to find that the process involved a large number of independent movements of portable objects and people each of which existed within their own specific time and space. A typical example is the carvings of Vaiśravaṇa in Nankan. Lei considers the Vaiśravaṇa in the “Khotan form” to be evidence of how the increase in official traffic on the Rice Granary Road in the late Tang led to the continuous carving of northern images in Nankan, which enlarged the regional variation in Bazhong and Guangyuan. Yet the devotional inscription in Nankan Niche 93 provides an explanation that has little to do with the road. The donors of this niche, Duke Deng, is a devotee of the cult of Vaiśravaṇa.⁴³⁶ He not only had an altar for daily worship at home, but also constructed a shrine to Vaiśravaṇa in each prefecture to which he was posted. It also mentioned that Duke Deng’s sponsorship for Niche 94 was inspired by Yan Wu’s early carvings. Therefore, it was the private cult and the presence of carvings commissioned by Yan Wu that encouraged further carving at the Nankan site in the Late Tang, rather than the increase in official, military and mercantile traffic along the Rice Granary Road.

The presence of road-dominated theories that do not consider the dynamic of the associated population, is not limited to the discussion of the grottoes of Northern Sichuan and the ways to the *Shu*. There is no doubt that there is, at present, an over-emphasis on such large-scale geographical elements as the trade roads. Although the differences in the transmission of Buddhist art caused by different trade roads may explain some of the dissimilarities in sites on two different roads, that these regional differences could have been caused by the selections made by different communities in a specific chronological and spatial context must also be taken into account. Once more, this is not to deny the importance of traffic on the roads for cross-regional communication of culture. However, the geographical location and transportation routes are only two elements in this complex issue. It is only through careful consideration of the traffic road within its historical context, and the collaboration

⁴³⁶ Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 146.

between pan-Buddhist symbols and local practices at a site, that it is possible to build a clear understanding of its development.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has concentrated on the emergence and development of Buddhist rock carvings in Northern Sichuan over the course of the Tang dynasty. The current over-arching narrative of Buddhist grottoes in Northern Sichuan as a variant of cave temples in Northern China is herein explained as a hybrid of three forms of Buddhist material culture that were present in China in this period, namely: the construction of cave temples in Northern China during the Northern Dynasties, the sculptural art style around Chengdu during the Southern Dynasties, and the metropolitan artistic style of the Tang Dynasty. It is herein argued that the place-based material production was informed by a complex web of local-external past-present influences which were imposed on the site by the agency of the communities, both local and external, which interacted with the site over time. In undertaking a holistic approach to the study of local monuments it is apparent that the discourse of the sites in Northern Sichuan, which has been trapped for a long time by a fixed perspective of “Localization”, is open to interpretation. A holistic approach makes it possible to reconstruct the history of local society in a specific place during a certain time. This in turn provides a unique perspective on local community, its art practices, and the way in which Buddhism acted as a popular religion.

Emergence of Buddhist Grottoes in Northern Sichuan

The emergence of Buddhist grottoes in the Sichuan area has to date been discussed in terms of the “Localization” of the structure and the themes present therein. The “targeted” sites in a “peripheral” area are interpreted as a variant of the “archetypal” sites in the “central” area, the Longmen and Yungang Grottoes in Northern China in the case of Chinese Buddhist rock-cut sites. All differences in these “peripheral” forms are perceived as derivations of the “true” or “pure” forms of the central sites. However, although the influence of Northern China played a role, the transmission and reception of Buddhist rock-cut sites in Northern Sichuan resulted

from a much more nuanced and complex negotiation between the Buddhist practices of Northern and Southern China.

For instance, the niche-based site structure in the Sichuan region has been generally understood as a form of “Localization”. Although this discussion initially appears to be valid, it ignores the presence of niches carved into cliff faces or within natural caverns in Henan and Shandong during the Northern Dynasties. These non-imperial sites in Northern China indicate that the niche-based form of sites in Northern Sichuan is not necessarily a byproduct of the process of “Localization” that occurred in the transregional transmission of Buddhist grottoes. Another feature often presented as evidence of the “Localization” of Buddhist caves is the double-layered medium-sized niches. The craftsmen in the Sichuan area placed a niche form, which had previously only been carved within caves, onto the cliff surface. Although this appropriation of a pre-existing northern niche was related to a new “environment”, the double-layer structure did not result from adaptation to the rainy and humid environment of Sichuan or to the assimilation of local cliff tomb traditions as has been hypothesized by earlier scholars.

The two points outlined above challenge the prior supposition that the niche-based site structure in Northern Sichuan a regional variant of Buddhist grottoes with large caves in Northern China. The Sichuan grottoes should not be seen as a simplified or modified version of the northern grottoes (more precisely, of the few large imperial grottoes like Yungang Grottoes). Any discussion of localization with regards to the Buddhist rock-carved sites in Northern Sichuan needs to combine a detailed reading of the evidence preserved in the sites, with a careful and comprehensive examination of their relationship with the prior and contemporaneous sites. This will then permit a description and explanation the specific processes and methods that led to these differences with their historical context.

Continuity of the Southern Art Style into the Tang

Despite the paucity of Buddhist art in Southern China dating to the fifth and sixth centuries, scholars of early Chinese Buddhist art maintain that there was a

distinct Buddhist art style of the Southern Dynasties. This poly-centered interpretation of the development of Buddhist art forms is all but abandoned in studies of post-seventh century Buddhist art. The southern art style, with its own gravitas and influence, is almost entirely overlooked in research that focuses on the later periods. This dissertation provides a narrative of the evolution of this regional art style following the reunification of China under the Sui and Tang Dynasties. The art styles present in the multitude of cave temple sites in Northern Sichuan carved during the seventh and eighth centuries clearly indicate that the Southern Buddhist art style did not suddenly disappear at the end of the Southern Dynasties but continued as a unique and sustained regional artistic tradition in Sichuan during the Tang dynasty.

The Buddhist art tradition of the Southern Dynasties provided significant technical support to the process of building stone carving sites in Northern Sichuan in the early seventh century. At the same time, the local art system, which had up to this point had primarily carved free-standing sculptures, was also reshaped and reborn during the construction of Buddhist rock-carved monuments as a new artistic medium in the Sichuan area. The inheritance of Buddhist art in the Southern Dynasties in the Sichuan stone carvings of this period can be most clearly seen in some of the unique forms and decorative techniques that were employed. Yet, a more significant factor was the multi-layered representations of Buddhist statues, in which the Buddha and his main attendants were carved in high relief, while the secondary attendants were carved in bas relief in the background. The eightfold celestial assembly, which had been attributed as a typical motif from Northern China, were adopted as the main secondary attendants in the rock carvings of this period. This motif later internalized as a part of the local art style was prevalent in the Sichuan area during the rest of the Tang dynasty.

In the first half of the eighth century, the rock carvings in Northern Sichuan witnessed a new phase in the reconstructed local art tradition of the early Tang. This tradition was expressed in different ways in Guangyuan and Bazhong, the two centers of Buddhist art in this area. In Guangyuan, the local style is most strongly evident in the large central altar caves that were carved in the 710s CE, with open-work

representations of the eightfold celestial assembly being carved in delicate bas-relief. Meanwhile in Bazhong, the local artistic style was livelier and more creative. The Xikan site consists of a cluster of medium niches that are characteristic of the Southern Art style. This system was further developed in the carvings of the Shuiningsi in the mid-eighth century with the framework of “Bazhong Model”, which I consider to be the peak of the Southern art style.

Localization of the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style”

Another issue that is often overlooked is the localization of the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” in the local community. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties, carvings undertaken at a local level are generally perceived by modern scholars to be vulgarizations, since many of the Buddhas were carved without iconographic characteristics.⁴³⁷ Meaning that, in the absence of inscriptions, it is even impossible to identify whether they were intended to represent Buddhas. Yet the reception of the Tang imperial style in Sichuan always maintained a certain degree of accuracy, sometimes even surprising, to their prototypes in Northern China. It is against this background of iconographic consistency that the “Tang International Art Style” came to be localized in Northern Sichuan.

There are two different modes for the transmission of “Tang International Art Style”. The first is related to the “Auspicious Images”, images popularized by tales in which such icons were subject to miraculous occurrences or, were caused by them.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁷ This process is generally discussed with the “vulgarizations 土俗化 [Tusuhua in Chinese; Dozokuka in Japanese]”. Ishimatsu Hinako 石松日奈子, “Beiwei shiqi de difangzaoxiang he minjian zaoxiang: fojiaozaoxiang de puji 北魏时期的地方造像和民间造像:佛教造像的普及 [Local Sculptures in Northern Wei: the Popularity of Buddhist Sculptures],” in *Beiwei fojiao zaoxiangshi yanjiu* 北魏佛教造像史研究 [Buddhist Images in the Northern Wei Period], trans. Norio Shinphara 篠原典生 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2012), 170-194. Stanley K. Abe, “Alternatives”, in *Ordinary Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 259-314.

⁴³⁸ Wu considers the mechanism of the “Auspicious Images” as the “*system* and *ontology* of a Buddhist holy icon”, which is a *presentation* rather than a *representation* of the Buddha from the sacred world. Wu Hung, “Rethinking Liu Sahe: The Creation of a Buddhist Saint and the Invention of a ‘Miraculous Image’,” *Orientalisms* 27, no.10 (1996): 32-43.

That they originated from the sacred world gave these images an independent value that stimulated the transmission of this pictorial knowledge in an idiosyncratic form. The second mode is the standard Buddhist image, which was used in the mass production of rock carvings. For instance, a group of statues whose central statues are a seated Buddha with the *abhaya-mudrā*. Different from the “Auspicious Images”, they do not depend on the miraculous tale to ensure the accuracy in the replication. Instead it is the mass production of these standardized images serves to insure a stability of form in their transregional transmission.

The voices of local artisans can still be traced in the way in which these modes were redesigned to meet the requirements of different sponsors or the presence of certain regional characteristics. For example, the craftsmen in Qianfoya in Guangyuan added six smaller auxiliary attendants into the original group centered on a seated Buddha in a niche sponsored by a high-rank official. In Bazhong, both the auspicious image and the identical group type niches are framed by the pavilion-like tent shrine niche frames. Although there are northern antecedents for this form of jeweled pavilion, the three-dimensional representation makes pavilion-like tent in Nankan is clearly distinct from these earlier models and more similar to an actual Buddhist tent niche. The three-dimensional pavilion-like tent niche came to be the defining characteristic of the rock carvings in Bazhong. This new form, identified as the “Bazhong Model”, a localized form of the “Tang International Art Style” was thereafter transmitted from Bazhong and along the Rice Granary Road into the south of Ba mountains.

Regional Differentiation: Sites, Paths, and Places

Although the Qianfoya in Guangyuan and the Nankan in Bazhong on which this dissertation is based were carved within a relatively brief period of time in a restricted geographical region, they still show a significant degree of variation in the form of the carvings therein. Previous scholars have all tended to interpret variations in the artistic styles of these two areas as being due to the different routes which connect them to Northern China: Guangyuan is on the Golden Ox Road, while Bazhong belongs to the

territory of the Rice Granary Road. However, the lack of records relating to the Rice Granary Road prior to the late Tang, and the apparently close connection between Guangyuan and Bazhong, calls this neat and tidy explanation into question.

It is herein argued that the variations present in the sites in different regions resulted from the nature of the reception of Buddhist art by the local participants who are framed by their setting of the times and geography. Given its location on the border of two different cultural areas, Northern China and the Sichuan area, is unsurprising that the rock carvings in Qianfoya reflect the tension between the northern imperial style and local conventions. The waxing and waning of the northern influences within the site coincide with the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style” in Chang’an and Luoyang starting from the reign of Empress Wu Zhao and declining during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong. This indicates that Qianfoya in Guangyuan was relatively “passive” and unstable in its reception of artistic elements imported from the north.

In contrast, Nankan in Bazhong, reflects a more “active” attitude to adoption of northern elements and a relatively stable position in the cultural network. Nankan seems to be intended as a collection of “Auspicious Images”. Although its core carvings also lasted close to a hundred years, the whole site design was systematic in terms of the three-dimensional pavilion frame niche. It borrowed a lot of modeling skill and image representation from the north, and the carvings in Bazhong includes not only current elements but also some slightly outdated ones. The “active” and stable attitude seems to be related to its location closer to the Sichuan interior and also to the fact that carving activity at this site started after the peak of the imperial style.

To sum up, all these sites in Northern Sichuan serves as silent witnesses to the ongoing negotiation between the local southern-sourced style and changing northern influence which continued throughout the Tang dynasty. The paths, as the trade roads, should play a significant role in the transmission of Buddhist material cultures, needs to be considered in the discussion of the place-based material production. However, it should not be assumed as the only variable. The diversity of artistic repertoires presented on different sites in different regions are definitely related to the

chronological framework, while the artisans, managers or donors at each site also had their own understanding and different approaches to both indigenous conventions and external influences in different areas.

Entanglement of Local Monuments and Local Communities

Buddhist rock-cut monuments are the most prominent extant traces through which to examine the history of region in local communities that consists of not only local residents but also the passers-by. As such, a large-scale project would have been impossible to complete without the great efforts of the local community. Once the local monument has been shaped from the natural landscape, it becomes a permanent feature within the local landscape and a public or semi-public space which would then have developed its own significance within local historical memory and imagination.

The construction of the local monument is a presentation of religious enthusiasm, artistic outlook, social and economic forms in a specific area during a specific period of time. The emergence of Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan at the beginning of the seventh century coincided with the reunification of Northern and Southern China under the Sui and Tang. The rise of a new phase of Buddhist rock carving sites in the region following the fall of the Sui has been attributed to refugees fleeing from the north into Sichuan to avoid the rebellions and civil unrest in Northern China. The collective patronage, alongside the devotional association called the *yiyi* was also introduced into this area from Northern China. The collective organizations and patronage supported the large-scale construction of Buddhist sites in the new territory and would have served to increase social solidarity and cohesion in local community.

Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan also exemplify how Tang Buddhist sites came to be reshaped as material evidence of the Tang in the collective imagination and memory of later dynasties. This can be clearly seen in the Nankan in Bazhong, which gained official permission with the support of Yan Wu. The literati in the Song Dynasties wrote responsory poetry to Tang poetry, gradually moved their dialogue from Yan Wu to his friend, Du Fu, this subsequently created an apocryphal visit by

Du Fu to the Nankan site in local collective memory. Nankan itself was thereby also converted from a Buddhist sacred place into a curiosity for the literati of the Song Dynasty. This role, as the witness of the Tang culture in the past, continues to the modern day.

To sum up, Buddhist rock carvings in Northern Sichuan drew upon the northern practice of making sacred monuments with living rock and was driven by the reunification of the north and south in the late sixth and early seventh centuries after a long period of division during the early medieval period in China. Its continuous development between the seventh century and the middle of the eighth century in Northern Sichuan then led to the development of a local form of the “Tang Metropolitan Art Style”, which was prevalent in Chang’an and Luoyang during this period and marked the peak of Buddhist art in China. However, this reception was not passive. The agency of artists in Northern Sichuan reveals the continuation of its own artistic style, the conscious selection of northern images, and creativity of its cave/niche forms. Correspondingly, the statues carved into these cliffs and the boulders during the Tang dynasty changed the natural landscape into a sacred landscape, and in so doing created an eternal monument to local memory of the past.

In undertaking an analysis of the Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan through the lens of a situated analysis, it has been possible to figure out the overall imagery of the sites and understand the sites within the social and cultural networks they originally inhabited. The contextualization of site construction with image-making practices in Northern Sichuan presented in this dissertation represents a new holistic and interdisciplinary approach to the study of rock-carved religious sites. The site-based methodology promises a geographically robust study that captures not only the meaning of the images in their context, but also helps to reconstruct a regional history that does not overlook the local agency that resulted from local practice. It is hoped that the more localized and dynamic implications of the art-historical aspects of this study will provide a foundation for future studies of cave temples in other regions of both Sichuan, China and other regions in Asia.

Appendix

This appendix includes the Chinese texts and my provisional translation of three inscriptions preserved in Buddhist grottoes and one record from the local gazetteer. The sources of the Chinese text are indicated before the text and translation.

Appendix 1

Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan 四川省文物考古研究院 [Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology] and Mianyang shi wenwuju 綿陽市文物局 [Mianyang Cultural Heritage Administration], *Mianyang kanku: Sichuan Mianyang gudai zaixiang diaocha yanjiu baogao ji* 綿陽龕窟:四川綿陽古代造像調查研究報告集 [Niches of Mianyang: Reports on the Ancient Sculptures in Mianyang, Sichuan] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2010), 133-134.

阿彌陀佛並五十二菩薩傳

元覺書 作龕及篆字之楊子尚

彼國雞頭摩寺有五通菩薩，至安樂世界白阿彌陀佛言：“世尊，娑婆世界無世尊像，今願得之於彼供養。”佛言：“可爾，汝且前去，尋遣送往。”口即還，適到娑婆，其像已至。有一佛五十菩薩，各坐蓮花，於樹葉上圖寫。在菩薩前立。菩薩遂取供養，於是彼國始有此瑞像焉。至後漢明帝使郎中蔡愔從雪山南懸度道而入天竺，請三藏法師迦葉摩騰至此洛州為立精舍。於後有三藏弟子法師口從彼至，持此像來於此，漢地始有此像。弟子法師未盈幾時還，將此像而歸。西域記傳如此。爾時漢地佛法始爾，人情疏略。本像復還，至今此土不廣流布。自魏晉以來，年歲久遠，佛流行惠，延頽毀至，於同寫之跡殆。愆夢聞阿彌陀佛，坐千葉蓮花，同根竝出至。大隋開皇元年，明獻法師言從道齊長法師所得此一軀，說其回起，與本無別是已，遂更圖寫流布。至十六年有豫州刺史鄭，在州盡得一軀，並本傳遂將入京，在真守寺流通供養，於是京師始有斯像。

貞觀八年七月十四日

A Record of Amitābha and Fifty-two Bodhisattvas

Written by Yuanjue, carved and engraved by Yang Zishang

The Kukkutārāma Monastery in that country [India] had the Wutong Bodhisattva. He went to the Peaceful Land [Sukhāvatī] and spoke with Amitābha Buddha: “Universally honored one! There are no images of the World-Honored One [Amitābha] in the saḥā world. [Its people] now wish to be given an image that will receive offerings there.” The Buddha replied: “It will be. You may go there first, and I will dispatch someone to send it.” The bodhisattva then returned. When he reached the saḥā world, the image already arrived. Showing a Buddha and fifty bodhisattvas, each seated on a lotus which were depicted on tree leaves, it stood in front of the bodhisattva. The bodhisattva then took it and made offerings. Since then that country [India] has this auspicious image. Later, Emperor Ming of the East Han Dynasty [28-75 CE] sent the Gentleman of the Interior, Cai Yin, across the suspended crossing to the south of the Himālayas to India, invited the Tripiṭaka Master Kāshyapa Mātanga to Luozhou, and set up a monastery for him. Thereafter, the nephew of the Tripiṭaka Master [?] came there from India and brought this image with him. This was the first time that this image was present in China. The nephew soon returned [to India] and

took the image back with him. This is what is recorded in the *Record of Western Regions*. At that time Buddhism was only nascent within China, and it failed to be held in people's hearts. Since the original image was returned back, it is not well known to date in this land. From the start of the Wei and Jin to now, a long time already passed when Buddhism became popular and encountered the persecution which caused the copies (of the image) vanished. (Many) wished and dreamed to hear the Amitābha seated on a lotus with thousands of leaves which grow from the same root. During the first year of the Kaihuang reign [581 CE] of the Sui dynasty, Master Mingxian claimed to have received a statue from the Elder Master Daoqi [?] who recalled its story and said that it was no different than the original. Thereafter copies were drawn and spread. During the sixteenth year [of the Kaihuang reign; 596 CE], the Perfect of Yuzhou, Zheng, obtained a copy and sent it with the tale to the capital where it was circulated and enshrined in the Zhenshou Temple. This was the first time that the image was present in the capital.

The fourteenth day, the seventh month, the eighth year of Zhenguan year [August 13, 634 CE]

Appendix 2

Pu Dianqin 蒲殿欽 ed., *Mianyang xianzhi* 縣陽縣志[Gazetteer of Mianyang County] vol. 2 (Mianyang: Bancun tushuguan, 1932), 389.

(Section 1) 開元寺，治北一里天池山下。舊志未詳創建年代。查開元寺名，他縣多有，大抵唐開元時建。今寺中石刻造像有正觀、總章、會昌等號，皆距元宗之開元，或前或後，自不當以開元定為年代。然或由開元時，始擴而大之故名。舊有石刻金剛經已為無識。婦豎以灰堊蔽，更建佛龕於下壅之，莫可睹矣。

宋文軫與表弟李益侯、仲侯同遊開元寺記：“大觀元年冬與表弟都奉郎李益侯聖舉、通直郎李仲侯君直，往開元寺觀先輩郡守李同叔所建水閣院。北巖正觀時令狐文軌施造，經像極工級。歎其歷會昌以來漸黯淡，遂釀金彩繪，煥然生色。朝奉大夫文軫記。”

Kaiyuan Temple is located in the foothills of the Tianchi Mountains, one *li* to the north of the government seat. The old gazetteer did not record a date for its construction. If one searches the name of the Kaiyuan Temple, [other counties also have [such monasteries] that were usually founded during the Kaiyuan reign of the Tang. The rock carvings in the present monastery contains the reign names Zhenguan, Zongzhang, Huichang among others. These are either earlier or later than the Kaiyuan reign of Emperor Xuanzong, so it may not be dated to the Kaiyuan reign. However, it is possible that the monastery was expanded during the Kaiyuan reign, which might be how it came to take this name. The pre-existing rock carvings of the *Diamond Sutra* are no longer discernable. Since women and children have covered it with ash and have set up a Buddhist niche underneath it that obstructs the view, it is impossible to see it.

When Song Wenzhen and his maternal cousins Li Yihou and (Li) Zhonghou visited Kaiyuan Temple together, they left a record that reads, “In the winter of the first year of Daguan reign [1107 CE], my cousins the Gentleman of Managing Affairs Li Yihou, Shengju, and the Gentleman for Comprehensive Duty Li Zhonghou, Junzhi, and I went to Kaiyuan Temple to view the water pavilion built by the former Prefect Li Tongshu. The carvings on the Northern Cliff were donated by Linghu Wengui in

the Zhenguan reign [627-649 CE]. The scriptures and statues are exquisitely crafted. The rock carvings have gradually faded since the Huichang reign [841-846 CE], so we pooled our money together to have them repainted, making their colors glow. The Grand Master for Court Service Wenzhen wrote this.”

(Section 2) 碧水寺，治北一里。崖石上鑄佛佛像並金剛經三十二品猶存。未尾年號漫滅惟四月八日字可觀。崖下清泉不竭，鑿池承之，泉味甘冽。門前石佛一尊高丈餘，係從開元寺廢址鋤得，昇此供養。

案：舊志稱開元寺右有水閣院，背刻崖石肖像及金剛經，里人建小閣護之即此。其與開元寺中崖刻之經像為正觀時同造者可知。

Bishui Temple is located one *li* to the north of the [prefectural] government seat. The cliff-carved statues and the thirty-two volumes of the *Diamond Sutra* still remain. The reign date at the end is unclear and [one can] only see “the fourth month and eighth day.” The spring under the cliff flows continuously, and a pool has been dug to store the water, which is sweet. The stone Buddha in front of the gate is more than one *zhang* tall. It was found in the ruins of Kaiyuan Temple and carried here so that it could be worshipped.

Comment: the old gazetteer claimed that there was a water pavilion to the west of Kaiyuan Temple, with statues and the *Diamond Sutra* carved into the cliff behind it. The villagers built a small pavilion there to protect them. From this it can be ascertained that these were carved at the same time as the statues and the scriptures which were carved into the cliff at Kaiyuan Temple during the Zhenguan reign.

Appendix 3

Bi Yan 畢彥□, “Tang Lizhou cishi Bigong Botangsi Puti Ruixiang song bing xu 唐利州刺史畢公柏堂寺菩提瑞像頌並序 [Paeon to the *Puti Ruixiang* of the Botang Temple of Duke Bi, Governor of Lizhou of Tang and its Preface],” in *Bashu fojiao beiwei jicheng* 巴蜀佛教碑文集成 [Collection of Buddhist Stelae in the Sichuan area], ed. Long Xianzhao 龍顯昭 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2004), 31-32.

唐利州刺史畢公柏堂寺菩提瑞像頌並序

侄前鄉貢進士 畢彥□

嘗聞寶界有無生大僊，善權多方，藏用滅息，首出衆聖，量涵虛空。示色法而□□□□□有化，偃三空而不無。窮微極思，人徑罕及，應求而往，莫或階焉。自白月揚暉，雙林稅駕，優□□□□□以昭異。或因機以變石，或留影以制龍，金蟻神其源，白兔祥其末，與夫異門同入於樂地□□□□□，□化由乎覺忍，誠信資乎勝根，理實然也。

利州柏堂寺，往居列城，州牧攸宅。天后聖帝，□□□□□於茲宇。晉壽遺黎，葭萌古壤，錦嶂緣其後，凌江達其衝。軒檻豐麗，場域閑敞，危途緬衍，馳騫□□。□□□□，因寺以興號，假樹以立名。初者，天竺不生，思覩像法，能殫衆巧，所擬罕成。上界通士，感念□□□□□泥不滿，備珍稀而相好周圍。靈哉真顏，今即遺制。

粵若季父、銀青光祿大夫、使持節利州□□□□□源受魏□梁之大業。克濟厥美，不隕其名。管樞極而三事代傳，牧本州而五葉相襲。英氣聯□，

Powers.....coming from the great undertaking of Wei.....Liang. He overcame difficulties to achieve accomplishment, not letting [his ancestors'] name die out. He took charge of all-important affairs and made the Three Affairs hereditary, he administrated the present prefecture and passed onto the next generations. Heroic.....prefectural Chief of.....Minister of Revenue, Commander of Yanzhou. Due to a collective punishment by the court, he was exiled to Guizhou. His administration was lenient, which brought many blessings to that place. The great-grandfather of monsieur.....his grandfather was the Chief Steward of Accommodations Service of the Imperial Palace, the Administrator of the Establishment of Prince of Shu and Prince of Guo, the prefectural chief of Tai(zhou), E(zhou) and Chu(zhou). [He] respectfully managed the Six Bureaus of the imperial court as a courtier to the princes..... (He) arranged both civil and military affairs and adjusted by his injunctions the local administration. All sore way above, thriving and resplendent. He dealt carefully with the barbarian disorganization, and led the frontier posts to keep peace.....To heckle.....How could something so pure and white be sullied to black? Humble and open-minded, talented and knowledgeable. Eager to learn and maintain prestige, modest and of good temperament. Holding true to filial piety and harmony of spirit, capable.....Administrative Supervisor of director of granaries, then became the Administrative Supervisor of Chuzhou, then the Administrative Supervisor of Bozhou, but then demoted to Administrative Supervisor of Manager of Arms of Zhengzhou. He was first the commander of the military reserve, then was in charge of a key position.....held a crucial position by wearing the ink black ribbon and was praised for his performance. He respectfully wore a high hat in a secluded place [?], chanting.....gate.....conversations of the moment. Assign to become Governor of Qinzhou.....the successive taxes collected he give to the court were the greatest, he was given gold and silk to extend the prosperity.....qualities [?]. My current duty is to instruct in etiquette.....as for good and evil.....along.....what.....ceremony.....for no.....see.....cliff.....sigh. To see far.....ask.....The audience is serious and respectful.....about the minuscule.....focus on good trees.....

Appendix 4

Yan Wu 嚴武, "Bazhou gu foka ji 巴州古佛龕記 [Record of the Ancient Buddhist Niches in Bazhou]," in *Bashu fojiao beiwei jicheng*, 37-38.

巴州古佛龕記

巴州城南二里，有古佛龕一所。

右山南西道度支判官衛尉少卿兼侍御史內供奉嚴武奏：

臣頃牧巴州，其州南二里有前件古佛龕一所。舊石壁鐫刻五百餘鋪，劃開諸龕，化出眾像，前佛後佛，大身小身，琢磨至堅，雕飾甚妙。屬歲月綿遠，儀形虧郵，乃掃拂苔蘚，披除榛蕪。仰如來之容，爰依鷲嶺；祈聖上之福，新作龍宮。精思竭誠，崇因樹果，建造屋宇參拾餘間，並移洪鍾壹口，莊嚴福地，增益勝緣。焚香無時，與國風而蕩穢；然燈不夜，助皇明以燭幽。曾未經營，自然成就。臣幸承恩宥，馳赴闕庭，辭日奏陳，許令置額，伏望特旌裔土，俯錫嘉名。降以紫泥，遠被雲雷之澤；題諸紺宇，長懸日月之光。兼請度無色役有道行者柴僧，永以住持，俾其修習。

敕旨：其寺宜以光福為名，餘依。乾元三年四月十三日。

Record of the Ancient Buddhist Niches in Bazhou

There is a collection of ancient Buddhist niches which is two *li* in the south of Bazhou city.

The Administrative Assistant to the Military Commissioner of the Shannan West Circuit, the Vice Minister of Awesome Guard, and the Auxiliary Attendant Censor, Yan Wu presented [to the emperor]:

I am currently the prefectural commander of Bazhou. Two *li* to the south of the prefecture there is a site of ancient Buddhist niches. In the past, the cliff has more than five hundred niches. These niches were carved into the cliff to create many statues. The Buddhas in front and the Buddha in the back, whether large or small, are all carefully polished and decorated with great fineness. Over the passage of many years their forms have come to be damaged. Thus we swept the moss from them and cut away the thorns. We venerated the appearance of Tathāgata as if he was in residence in Gr̥dhra-kūṭa-parvata. We built a new Dragon Palace to pray for his Majesty. With dedication and sincerity, to respect the cause and effect, we set up (a temple with) more than 30 rooms and moved one massive bell here, to decorate the place and to increase the merit. Incense is kept burning all the time, sweeping away any defilement in the custom of the state; lamp is kept burning all night, helping the enlightenment of the imperium by lighting the darkness. We did not construct (a new temple); this is a natural achievement. (The temple) was never constructed but spontaneously came into being. I was fortunately offered forgiveness. On the day of departure for the court, I pled for the authorization to set up a plaque, hoping secretly that special recognition for this remote place and give [the temple] a proper name. (I hope) for a purple seal letter (edict) to be delivered, so this remote place would be covered by the imperial grace [lit. grace of clouds and thunders]; it will be inscribed in all sanctuaries, hanging eternally under the light of the sun and the moon. At the same time, please allow seven ordained people who are exempted from corvee and have been trained (in Buddhist practices) to reside in this monastery for eternity to cultivate and practice religion.

Imperial edict: This temple should be named Guangfu [lit. Radiant abundance], all other requests are granted. The thirteenth day of the fourth month of the third year of Qianyuan reign [May 2, 760 CE].

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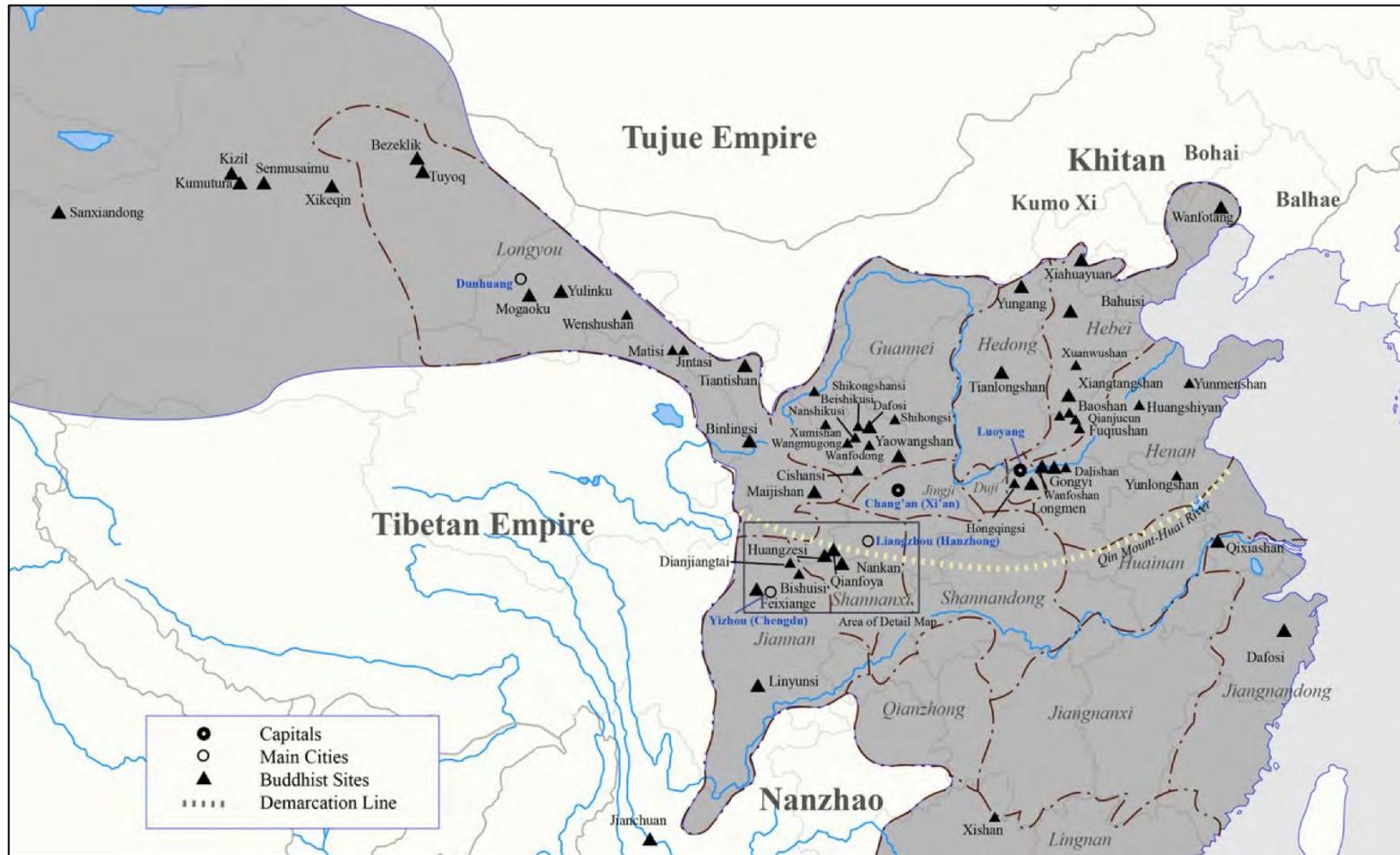
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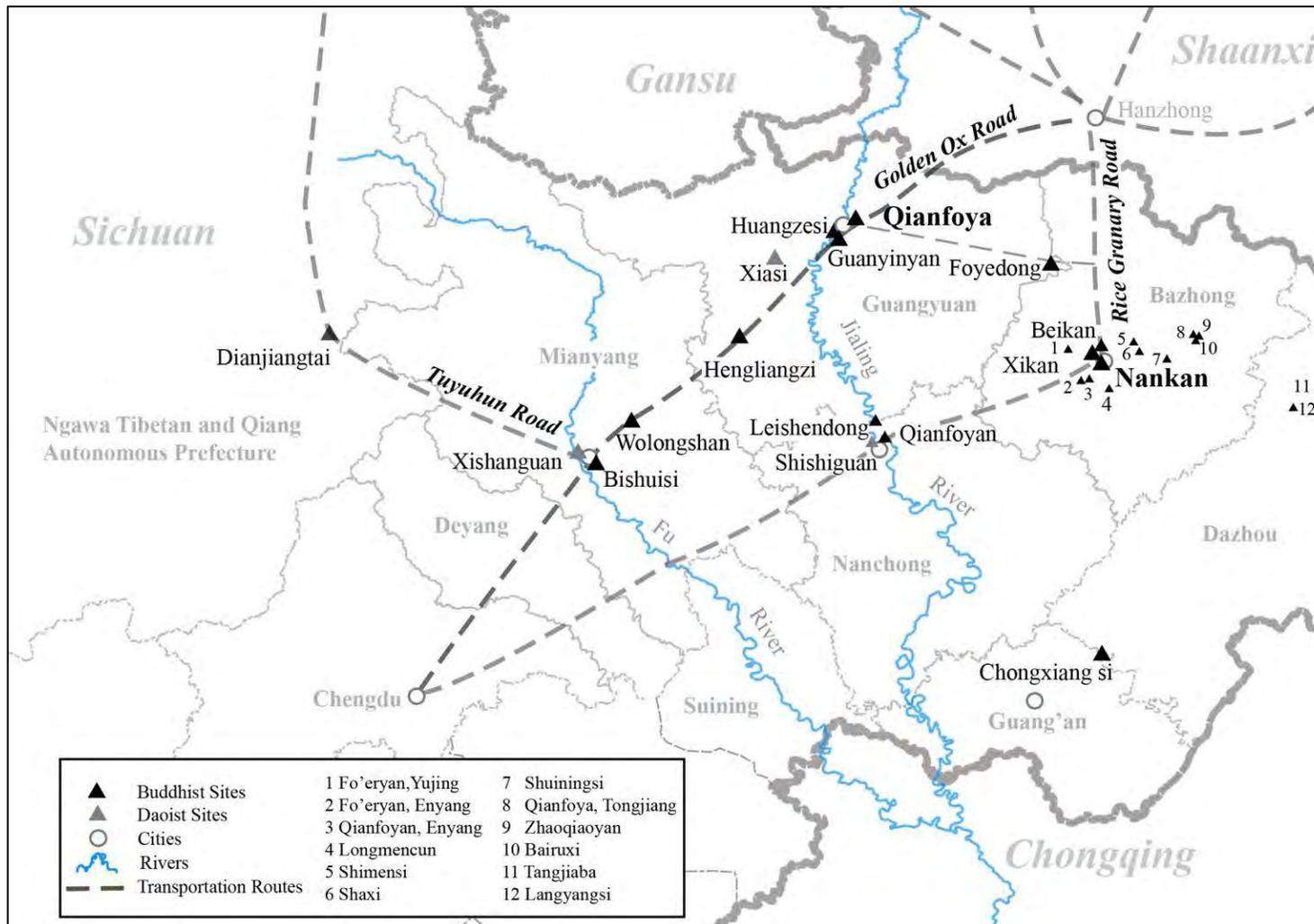
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Illustrations



Map 1 Buddhist rock carvings in China before 750s CE. Adapted from Su Bai 宿白, *Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu* 中國石窟寺研究 [Study of Cave Temples in China] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1996), 12. (Drawn by the author.)



Map 2 Locations of Buddhist sites in Northern Sichuan. Adapted from the map of administrative districts of prefecture-level cities of the People's Republic of China. (Drawn by the author.)



Figure 1. 1 Stele of Monk Xuansong. Red sandstone, H. 118 cm, W. 50 cm, D. approx. 12 cm. 483 CE. Excavated in Maoxian, Sichuan. Held in Sichuan Museum (Stele no. 5, accession no. 5541). (From: Sichuan bowuyuan 四川博物院 [Sichuan Museum], Chengdu wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 成都文物考古研究所 [Chengdu Municipal Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology] and Sichuan daxue bowuguan 四川大學博物館 [Sichuan University Museum], *Sichuan chutu Nanchao fojiao zaoxiang* 四川出土南朝佛教造像 [Buddhist Statues of Southern Dynasties Excavated in Sichuan] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), pl. 67-1.)



Figure 1. 2 Caves 726, Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan. H. 460 cm, W. 575-630 cm, D. 420 cm. Early sixth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 3 Two standing bodhisattvas. Sandstone, H. 40 cm. Southern dynasties. Held in Wenchuan Cultural Heritage Administration Office (accession no. 1197). (From: Sichuan bowuyuan et al., *Sichuan Nanchao fojiao zaoxiang*, pl. 69-1.)



Figure 1. 4 Two standing bodhisattvas. Red sandstone, H. 120.6 cm. Southern Dynasties. Excavated in Wanfosi, Chengdu, Sichuan. Held in Sichuan Museum (Stele no. 1, accession no. 22320). (From: Sichuan bowuyuan et al., *Sichuan Nanchao fojiao zaoxiang*, pl. 36-1.)

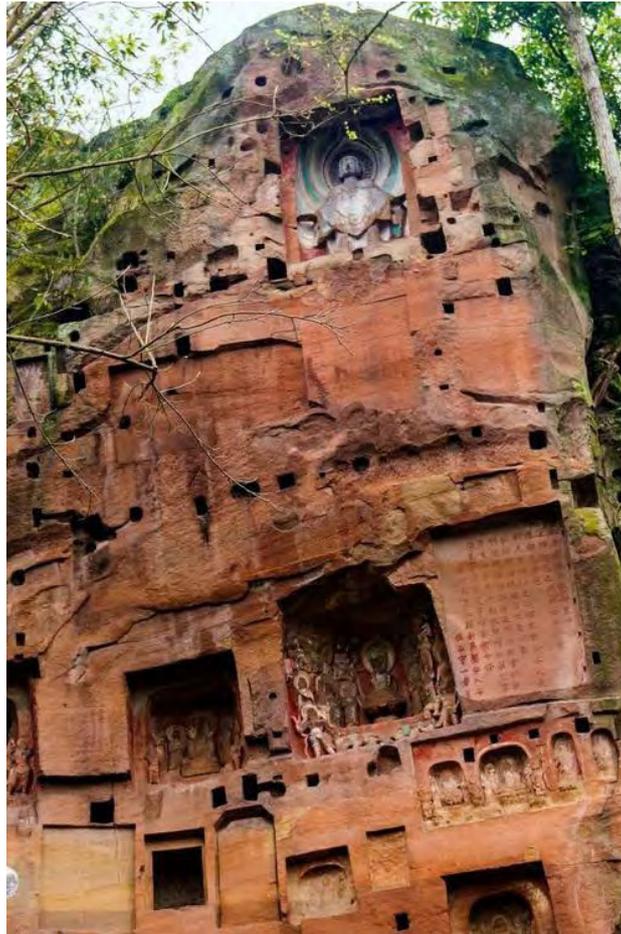


Figure 1. 5 Photograph of the central section of Chongxiangsi, Xiaoxi, Guang'an, Sichuan. Late sixth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 6 Photograph showing niches and natural spring at Xishanguan, Mianyang, Sichuan. Late sixth and early seventh century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 7 Selection of niches carved on a boulder in Xishanguan, Mianyang, Sichuan. Sui dynasty. (From: Mission Archéologique en Chine 1914. Copyright Bibliothèque nationale de France.)



Figure 1. 8 Between Caves 2 and 3, Gongyi Grottoes, Gongyi, Henan. Northern Qi. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 9 Photograph of Huangzeshi taken from the south showing the position Niche 28 on the cliff above the Qing dynasty Temple, Huangzeshi, Guangyuan, Sichuan. Early seventh century. (From: Mission Archéologique en Chine 1914. Copyright Bibliothèque nationale de France.)



Figure 1. 10 Modern day appearance of Bishuisi, Mianyang, Sichuan. Middle of seventh century.
(Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 11 Niche 18, Xikan, Bazhong, Sichuan. H. 190 cm, W. 150 cm, D. 120 cm. Seventh century.
(Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 12 Photograph showing the niches on the northeastern face of the boulder in Dianjiangtai, Maoxian, Sichuan. 631 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 13 Wolongshan, Mianyang, Sichuan. 634 CE. (Photography by the author.)

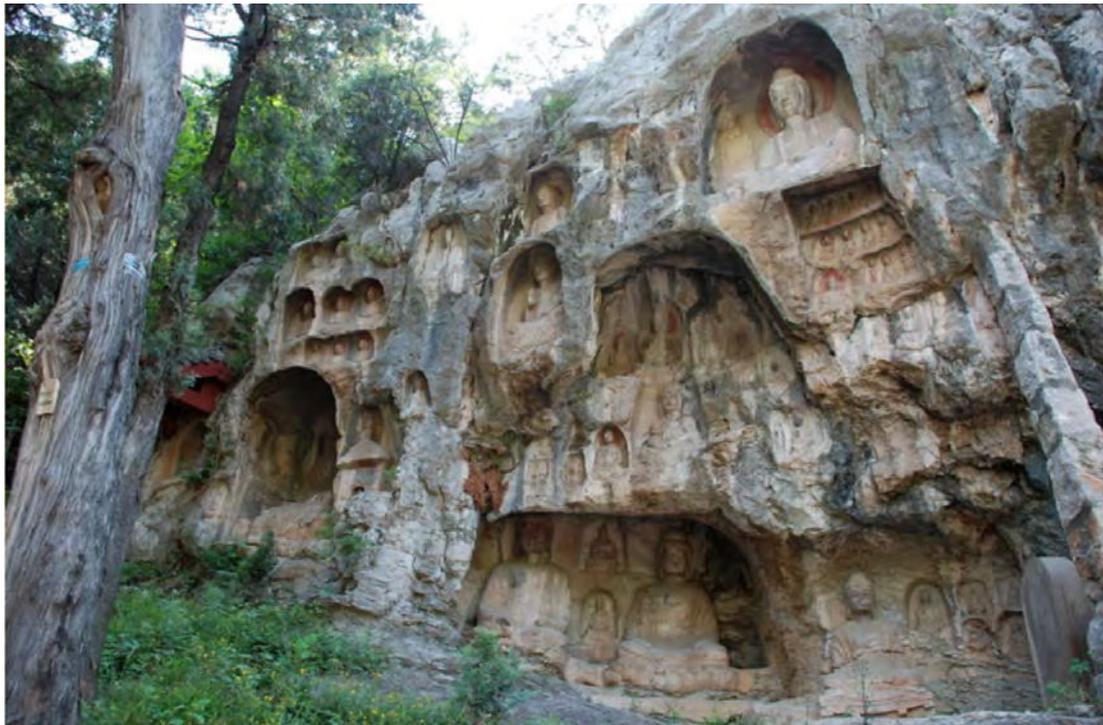


Figure 1. 14 Qianfoyan, Shentongsi, Ji'nan, Shandong. Early seventh century. (Photography by the author.)

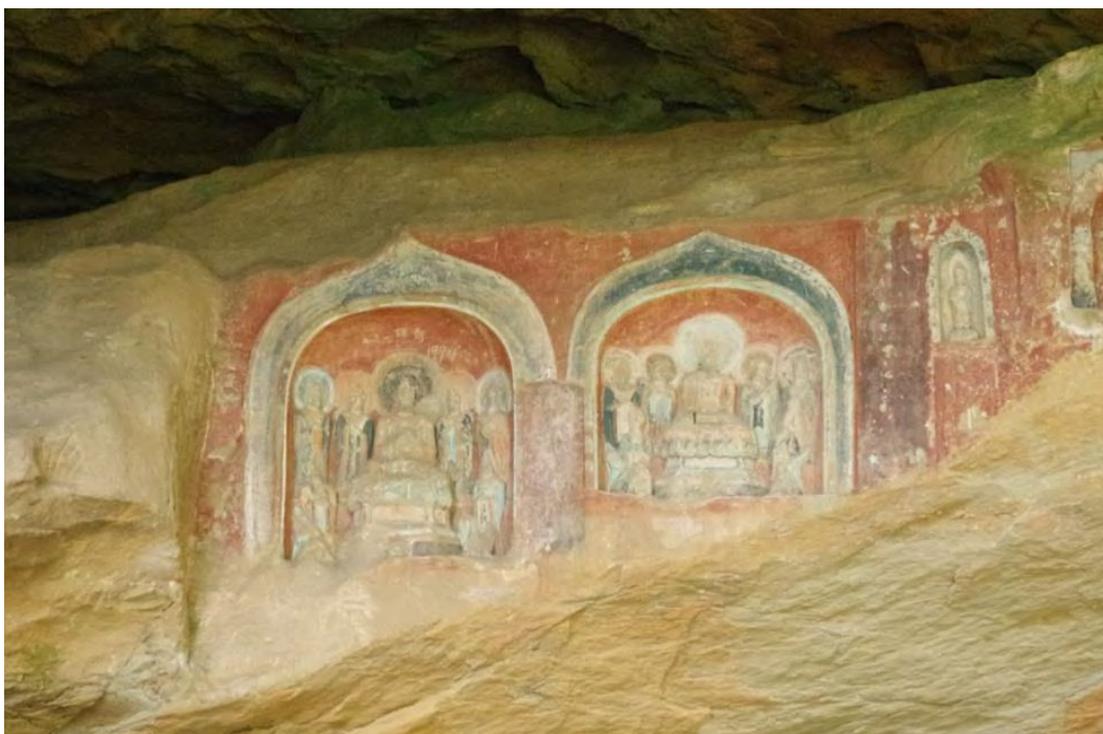


Figure 1. 15 Niches 2 and 3, Shishiguan, Langzhong, Sichuan. R: H. 112 cm, W. 112 cm, 594 CE; L: H. 93 cm, W. 93 cm, 595 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 16 Niches 3 and 2 from Cave 10, Qianfoyan, Langzhong, Sichuan. R: H.36 cm, W.27 cm, D. 8 cm; L: H. 41 cm, W. 28 cm, D. 8 cm. 635 CE. (From: Jiang Xiaochun 蔣曉春 et al., *Jialing jiang liuyu shikusi diaocha ji yanjiu* 嘉陵江流域石窟寺調查及研究 [An Survey Report and Study of Cave Temples along the Jialing River] (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2018), pl. 7-50.)



Figure 1. 17 Niche 1, Qianfoyan, Wolongshan, Mianyang. H.262 cm, W.240 cm, D. 46.2 cm. 634 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 18 West Niche of Cave 420, Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang, Gansu. Sui dynasty. From: Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院 [Dunhuang Academy] and Jiangsu meishu chubanshe 江蘇美術出版社 [Jiangsu Art Publishing House]. *Dunhuang shiku yishu: di 420, 419 ku (Sui)* 敦煌石窟藝術·莫高窟第420/419窟(隋) [Art of Dunhuang Grottoes: Caves 420/419, Sui] (Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 1994), pl. 4.

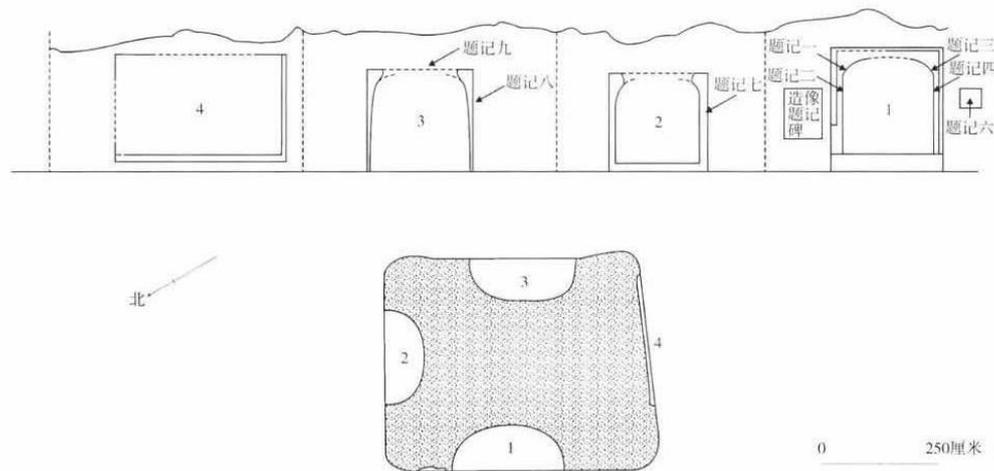


Figure 1. 19 Layout of Wolongshan, Zitong, Sichuan. (From: Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan 四川省文物考古研究院 [Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology] and Mianyang shi wenwuju 綿陽市文物局 [Mianyang Cultural Heritage Administration], *Mianyang kanku: Sichuan Mianyang gudai zaoxiang diaocha yanjiu baogao ji* 綿陽龕窟:四川綿陽古代造像調查研究報告集 [Niches of Mianyang: Reports on the Ancient Sculptures in Mianyang, Sichuan] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2010), fig. 2.)

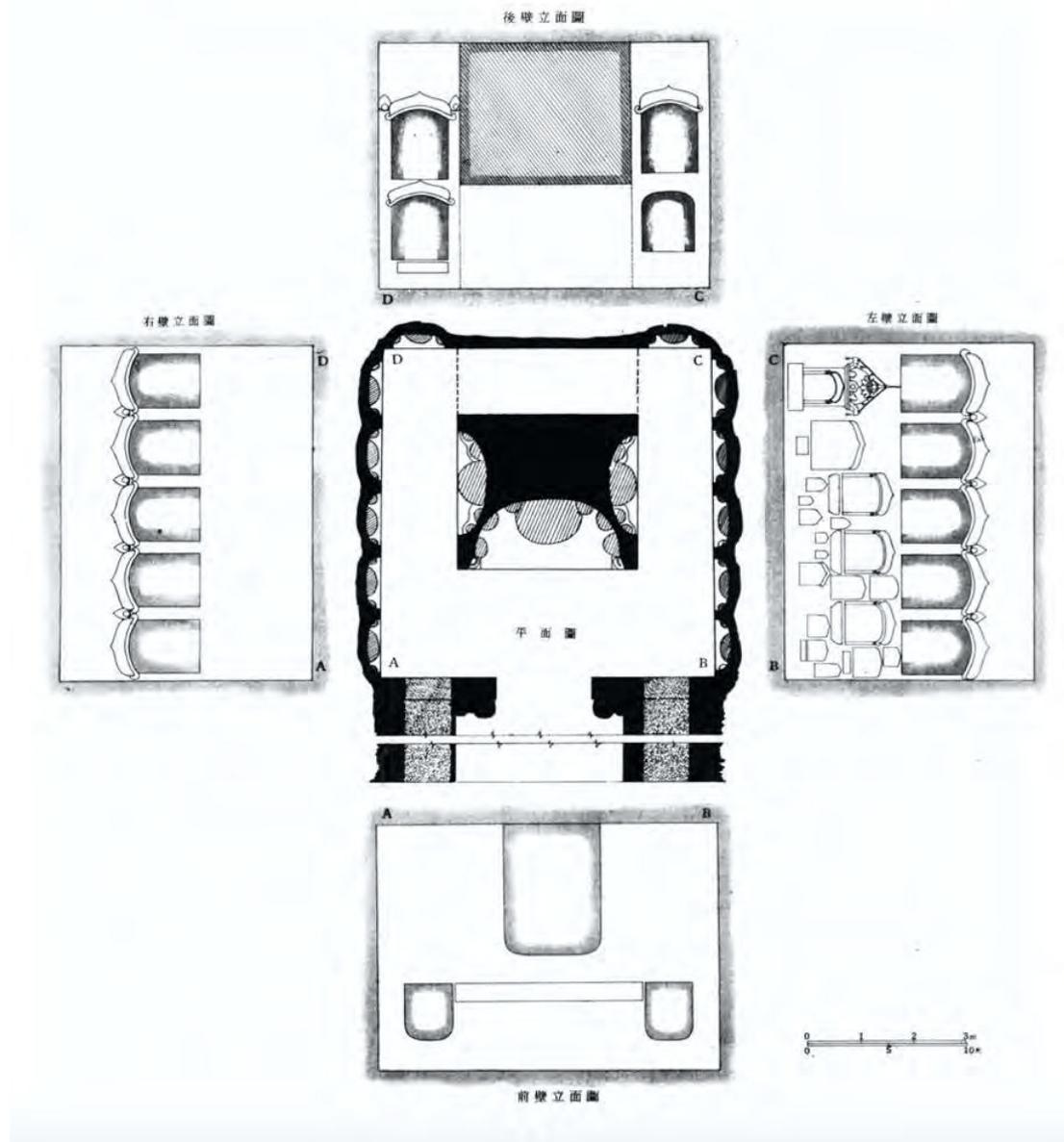


Figure 1. 20 Layout of Cave 1, Southern Site, Xiangtangshan Grottoes. (From: Mizuno Seiichi 水野清一 and Nagahiro Toshino 長廣敏雄, *Kyōdōsan sekkutsu: Kahoku Kanan shō zakai ni okeru hokusei jidai no sekkutsu jūin* 響堂山石窟: 河北河南省境における北齊時代の石窟寺院 [The Buddhist Cave-temples of Xiangtangshan on the Frontier of Henan and Hebei] (Kyōto: Kyoto research center of Academy of Oriental Culture, 1937), fig. 7.)



Figure 1. 21 Schematic diagram and photograph of Bahuisi, Quyang, Shandong. Sui dynasty. (From: Zhao Zhou 趙州, “Hebei sheng Quyang xian Bahuisi shijing kan 河北省曲陽縣八會寺石經龕 [Stone Scripture Niches in Bahui Temple in Quyang, Hebei Province],” *Shikusi yanjiu* 石窟寺研究 [Studies of Cave Temples]1, (2010), fig.1.)



Figure 1. 22 Simenta, Shentongsi, Ji'nan, Shandong. Sui dynasty. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 23 Historical Photograph of Huangzesi, Guangyuan, Sichuan. Early seventh century. (From: Lin Zhu 林洙 ed., *Foxiang de lishi* 佛像的歷史 [History of Buddhist Statues] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2010), 123.)

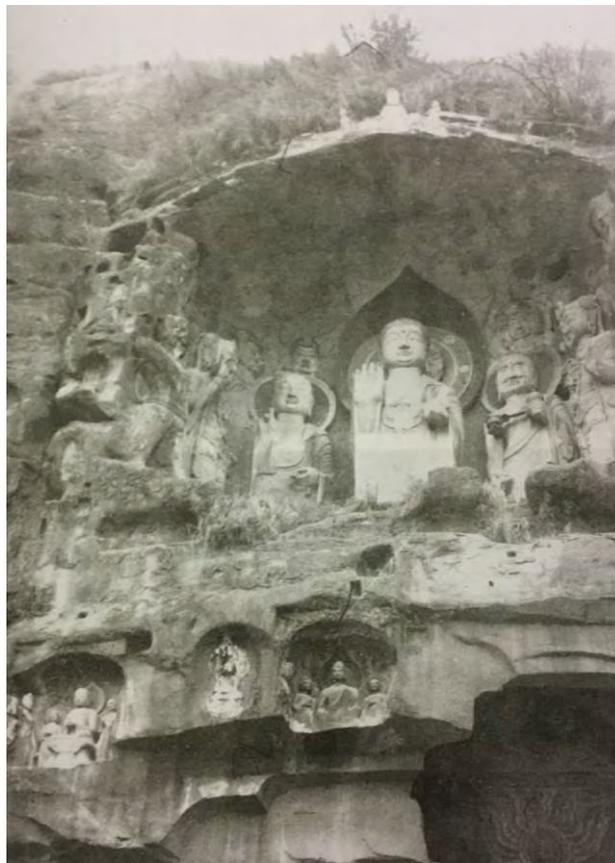


Figure 1. 24 Historical Photograph of Huangzesi, Guangyuan, Sichuan. Early Tang. (From: Lin ed., *Foxiang de lishi*, 124.)



Figure 1. 25 Niche 13 and 12 on the section of Writing Heart Sutra Cave in Huangzesi, Guangyuan, Sichuan. R: H. 226 cm, W. 231 cm, D. 182 cm; L: H. 220 cm, W. 224 cm, D. 180 cm. Early seventh century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 26 Photograph and the rubbing's diagram of a Stele, left wall, Niche 13, Huangzesi, Guangyuan, Sichuan. H. 146 cm, W. 42.5 cm, D. 6 cm. (Photography by the author; Illustration from: *Jinshi Yuan* 金石苑 compiled by Liu Xihai 劉喜海 in 1847 CE, printed by Laifengtang 來鳳堂 in 1848 CE. Collected in Tsinghua University Library, Beijing.)



Figure 1. 27 Niche 28, Huangzesi, Guangyuan, Sichuan. H. 686 cm, W. 555, D. 360 cm. Early seventh century. (Photography by the author.)

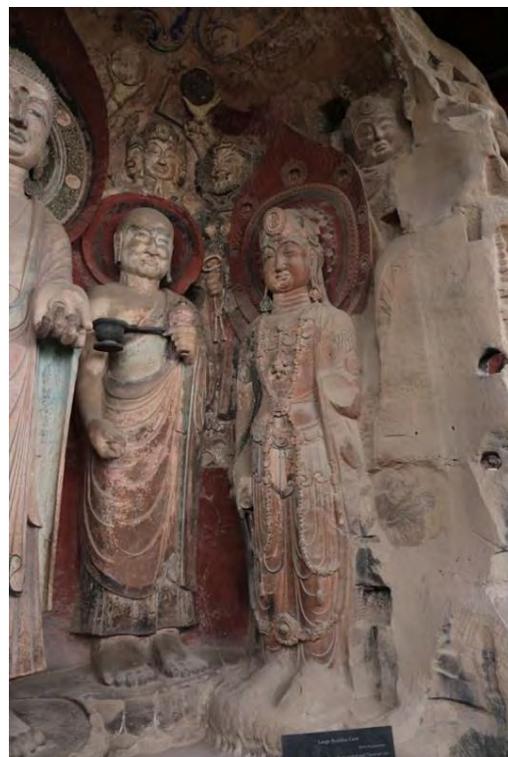
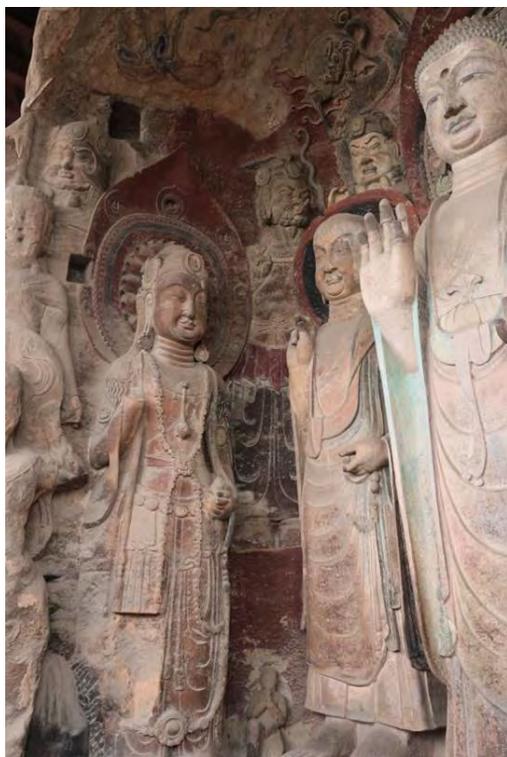


Figure 1. 28 Left and right walls, Niche 28, Huangzesi, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 29 Statue with the mandora, Wanfosi, Chengdu, Sichuan. Red sandstone, H. 36.2 cm, W. 30 cm. 523 CE. Collected in Sichuan Museum (accession no. 3577). (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 30 Photograph of Niche 55, Huangzesi, Guangyuan, Sichuan. H. 146 cm, W. 144 cm, D. 144 cm. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 31 Photograph of Niche 56, Huangzesi, Guangyuan, Sichuan. H. 163 cm, W. 161 cm, D. 166 cm. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 32 Statue with the three Buddhas, excavated in the Xi'an Road. Red sandstone, H. 42.5 cm, W. 40 cm. Mid-sixth century. Held in Chengdu Archaeology Institution (Statue no. 5 of Xi'an road, accession no. H1:6). (From: Sichuan bowuyuan et al. eds., *Sichuan Nanchao fojiao zaixiang*, pl. 58-1.)

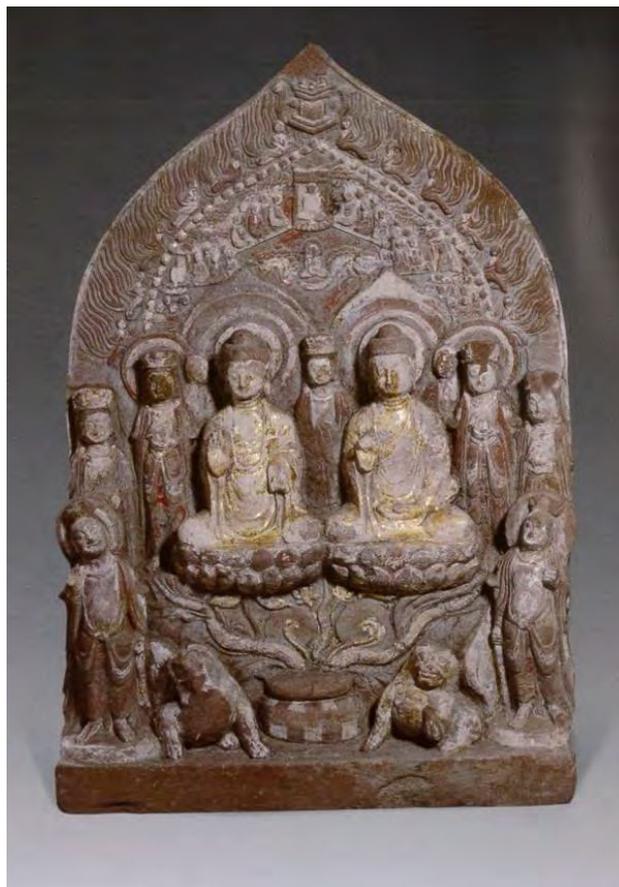


Figure 1. 33 Statue with a mandora, excavated in the Xi'an Road. Red sandstone with pigments, H. 43 cm, W. 29.5 cm. Mid-sixth century. Held in Chengdu Archaeology Institution (Statue no. 4 of Xi'an road, accession no. H1:5). (From: Sichuan bowuyuan et al. eds., *Sichuan Nanchao fojiao zaixiang*, pl. 57-1.)



Figure 1. 34 Niche 1, Wolongshan, Zitong, Sichuan. H. 262 cm, W. 240 cm, D. 191 cm. 634 CE. (From: Sichuan wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Mianyang shi wenwuju. *Mianyang kanku*, pl. 75.)



Figure 1. 35 Niche 19, Bishuisi, Mianyang, Sichuan. H. 170 cm, W. 145.5 cm, D. 61 cm. Early seventh century. (From: Sichuan wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Mianyang shi wenwuju, *Mianyang kanku*, pl.7.)



Figure 1. 36 Merit-clay table, excavated in Liquansi, Xi'an. Held in Xi'an Museum. (From: Okada Ken 岡田健, "Shotōki no Tenpōrin`in Amida zuzō ni tsuite no kenkyū 初唐期の転法輪印阿弥陀図像についての研究 [A Study of the Amitābha Buddha with the Dharmachakra-Mudrā during the Early Tang]," *Bijutsu kenkyū* 美術研究 [the Journal of Art Studies], fig. 24.)



Figure 1. 37 Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, originally from Cave 2, South Site, Xiangtangshan Grottoes, Fengfeng, Hebei. Limestone, H. 120 cm, W. 338 cm. Northern Qi. (Held in Freer and Sackler Galleries (accession no. FSG. F1921.1). (Copyright Freer and Sackler Galleries.)

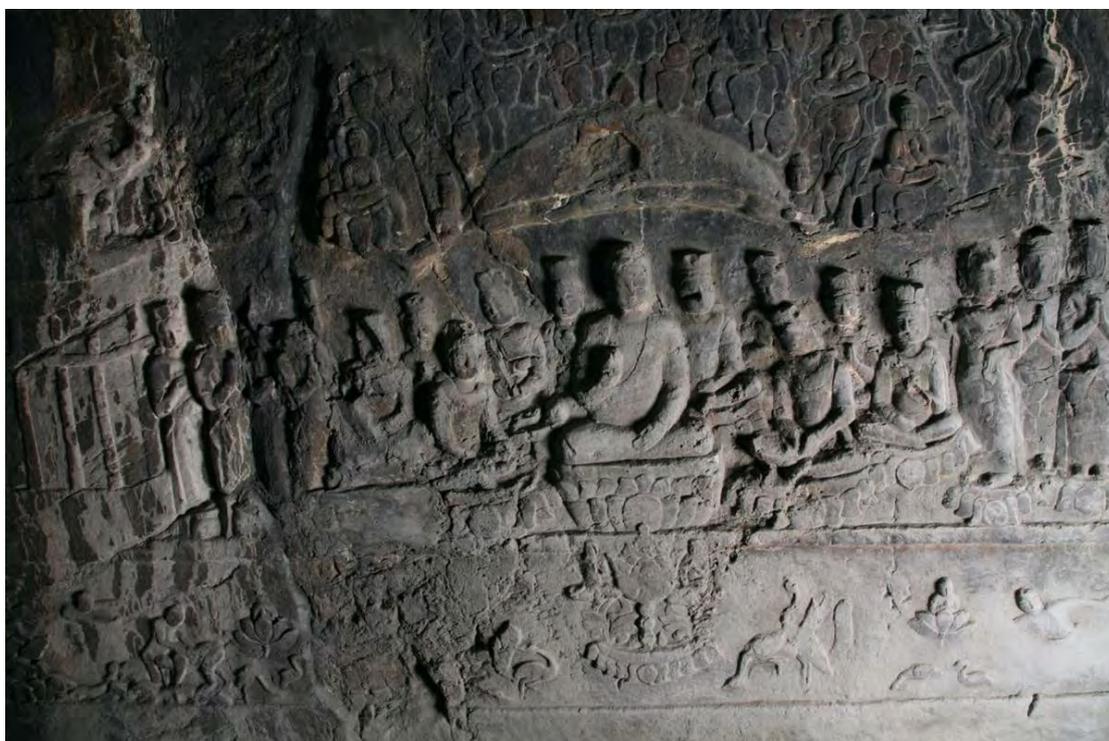


Figure 1. 38 Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, on front wall upper level, Cave 1, South site, Xiangtangshan Grottoes, Fengfeng, Hebei. Northern Qi. (From: Xiangtangshan caves project, University of Chicago.)



Figure 1.39 Tianzu and Amitābha paired in the center of Niche 2, Shengshuisi, Mianyang, Sichuan. H. 164 cm, W. 144 cm, D. 80 cm. 650 CE. (From: Sichuan wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Mianyang shi wenwuju, *Mianyang kanku*, pl. 48.)



Figure 1.40 Diamond Sutra, Niche 10, Bishuisi, Mianyang, Sichuan. H. 120 cm, W. 273 cm, D. 25 cm. Early seventh century. (From: Sichuan wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Mianyang shi wenwuju, *Mianyang kanku*, pl. 6.)



Figure 1. 41 Niche 10 and 19, Bishuisi, Mianyang, Sichuan. Early seventh century. (Photography by the author.)

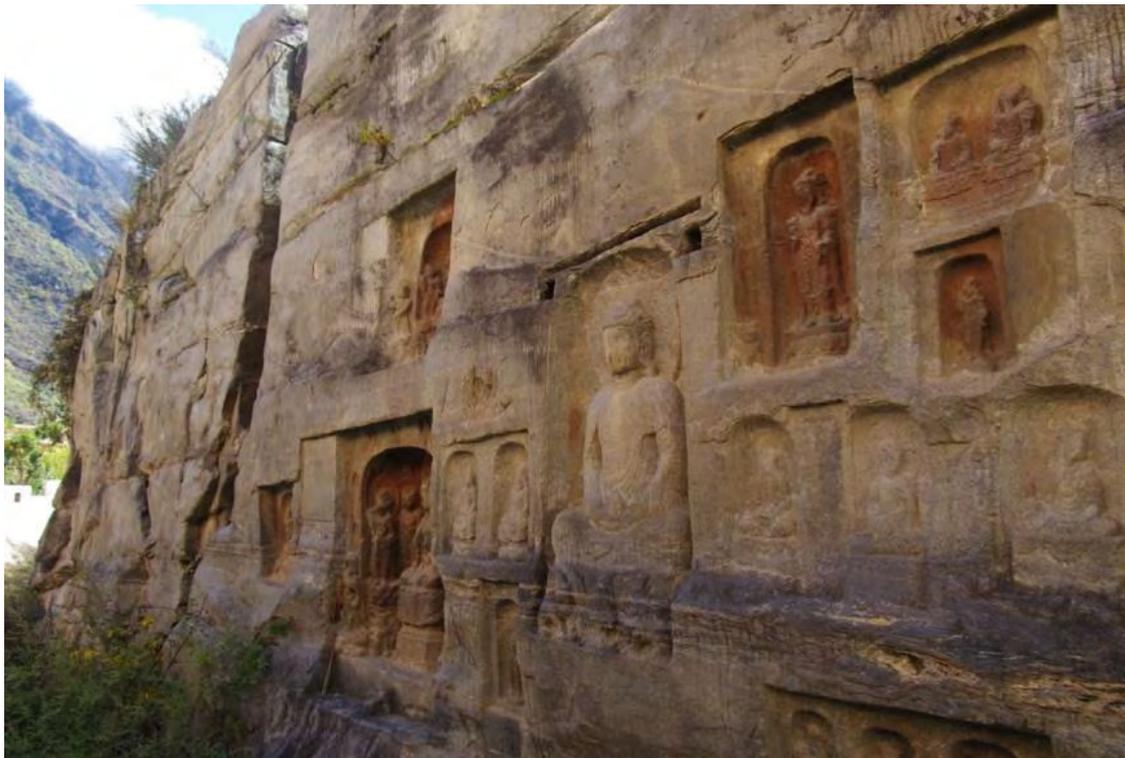


Figure 1. 42 Photography showing the northern face of the boulder in Dianjiangtai, Maoxian, Sichuan. 630 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 43 Niche 1 in Dianjiangtai, Maoxian, Sichuan. H. 146 cm, W. 120 cm, D. 65 cm. 630 CE.
(Photography by the author.)



Figure 1. 44 Niche 6 in Dianjiangtai, Maoxian, Sichuan. H. 103 cm, W. 91 cm, D. 35 cm. 630 CE.
(Photography by the author.)

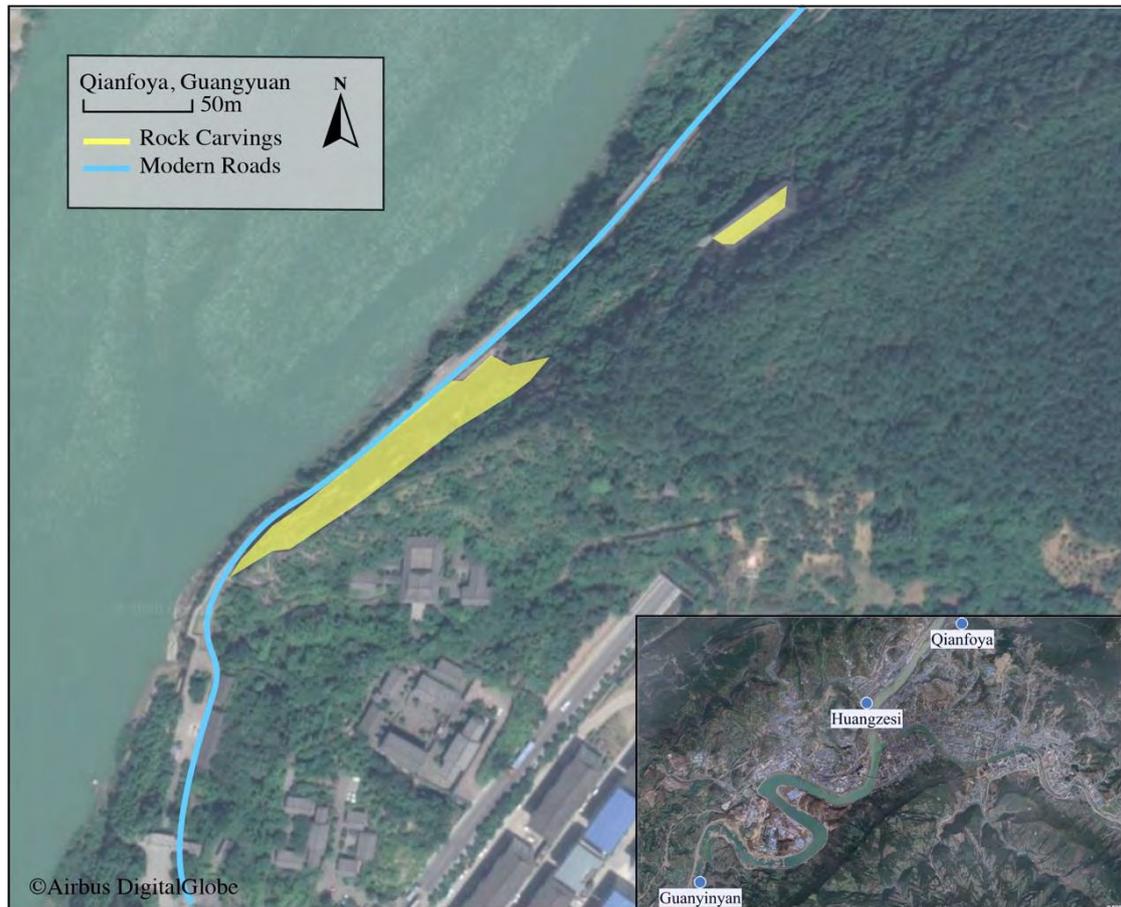


Figure 2. 1 Distribution of the carving on the riverside cliff at Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan. (Drawn by the author, using data from Airbus Digital Globe.)

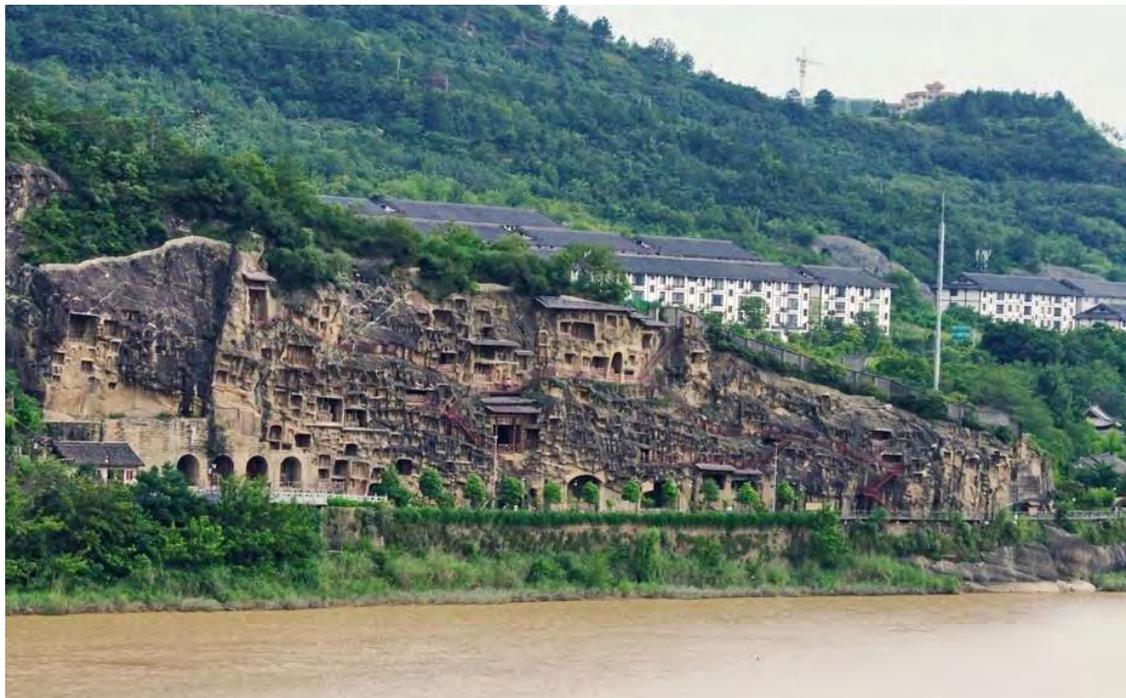


Figure 2. 2 Photography of Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan, from across the river. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 3 Cave 535, Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan. H. 360 cm, W. 495 cm, D. 355 cm. Late seventh century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 5 Right wall, Cave 535, Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 4 Left wall, Cave 535, Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 6 Niche 10, Cave 535, Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan. H. 112 cm, W. 97 cm, D. 48 cm. 696-697 CE. (Photography by the author.)

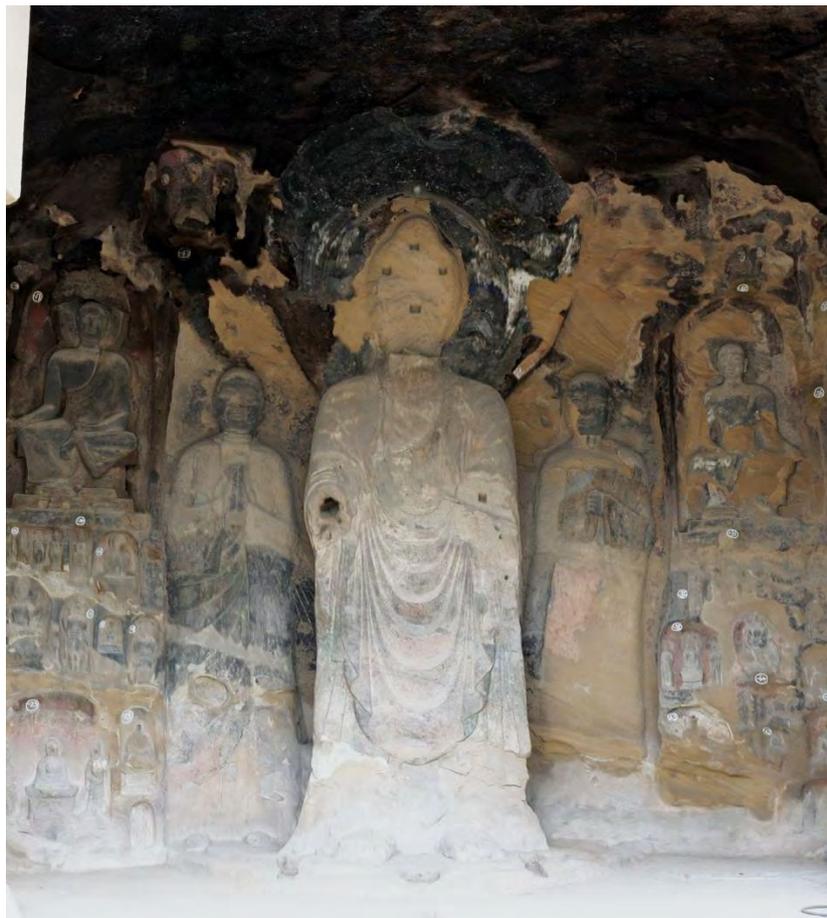


Figure 2. 7 Rear wall, Cave 726, Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 8 Right wall, Cave 726, Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan. (Photography by the author.)

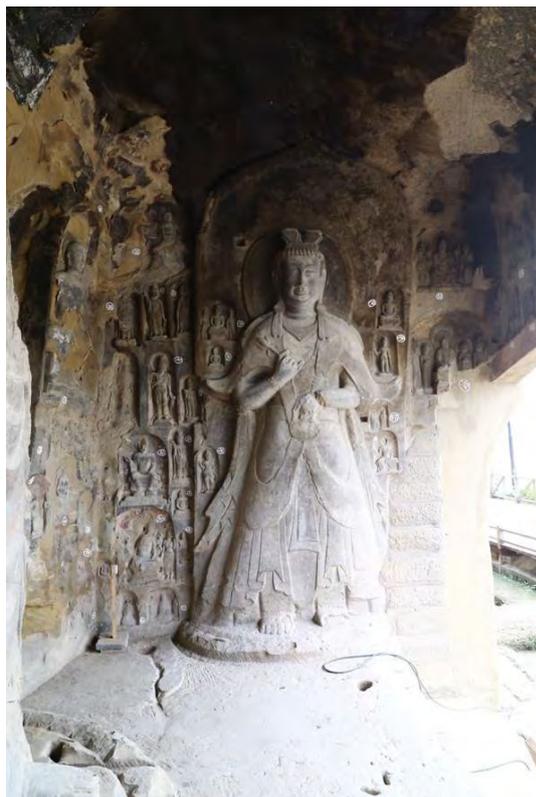


Figure 2. 9 Left wall, Cave 726, Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 10 Photography of Niche 138, Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan. H. 503 cm, W. 325 cm, D. 415 cm. Early seventh century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 11 Cave 746, Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan. H. 220 cm, W. 326 cm, D. 293 cm. Late seventh century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 12 Niche 493, Qianfoya, Guangyuan, Sichuan. H. 424 cm, W. 272 cm, D. 176 cm. 706 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 13 Statues in Niche 187, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 170 cm, W. 150 cm, D. 140 cm. 713 CE. (From: Guangyuan Qianfoya shiku yishu bowuguan 廣元千佛崖石窟藝術博物館 [Art Museum of Qianfoya Grottoes in Guangyuan], *Guangyuan Qianfoya* 廣元千佛崖 [Qianfoya in Guangyuan] (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubanshe, 2016), 31.)



Figure 2. 14 Cave 366 and 365, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. L: H. 241 cm, W. 316 cm, D. 222 cm; R: H. 325 cm, W. 355 cm, D. 330 cm. 712 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 15 Central altar of Cave 806, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 220 cm, W. 300 cm, D. 360 cm. Early eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 16 Central altar of Cave 805, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 202 cm, W. 293 cm, D. 280 cm. Early eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 17 Central altar of Cave 744, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 230 cm, W. 355 cm, D. 366 cm. Early eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 18 Central altar of Cave 689, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 200 cm, W. 390 cm, D. 300 cm. Early eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 19 The inner and outer niches of Niche 513, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 248 cm, W. 222 cm, D. 210 cm. 715 CE. (Photography by the author.)

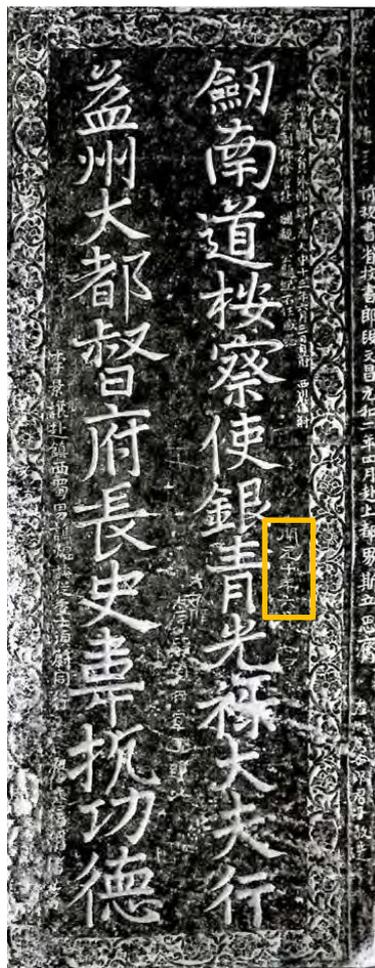


Figure 2. 20 Rubbing of the stele of Wei Kang. H. 136 cm, W. 34 cm. (Courtesy of Qianfoya Museum, Guangyuan.)

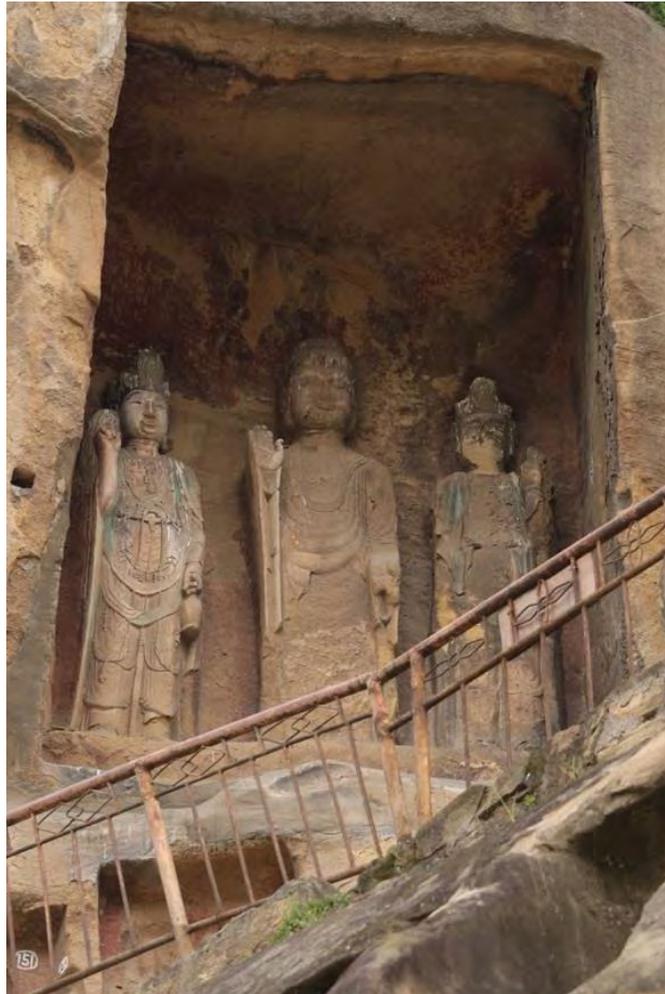


Figure 2. 21 Niche 150, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 199 cm, W. 213 cm, D. 103 cm. 722 CE.
(Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 22 Niche 211, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 180 cm, W. 164 cm, D. 85 cm. 720-723 CE.
(Photography by the author.)



Figure 2.23 Rear wall of Niche 86, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 364 cm, W. 380 cm, D. 300 cm. Middle of eighth century. (From: *Guangyuan Qianfoya shiku yishu bowuguan, Guangyuan Qianfoya*, 82.)

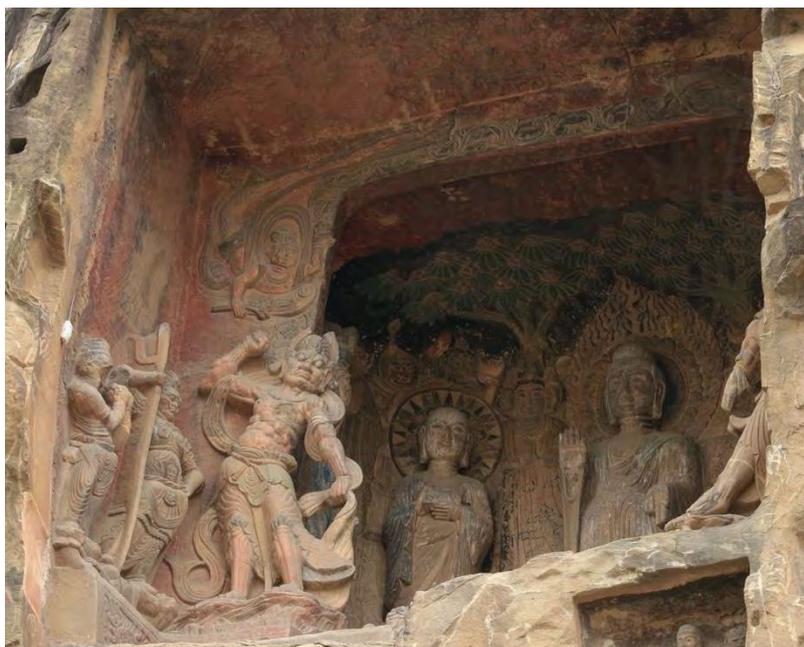


Figure 2.24 Vajrapāni of Niche 86, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 153 cm. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 25 Niche 47, Guanyinyan, Guangyuan. H. 160 cm, W. 142 cm, D. 1.31 cm. 751 CE.
(Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 26 Central pillar of Cave 45, Huangzeshi, Guangyuan. H. 236 cm, W. 296 cm, D. 305 cm.
(Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 27 Left wall of Cave 45, Huangzisi, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2.28 Cave 38, Huangzesi, Guangyuan. H. 200 cm, W. 305 cm, D. 264 cm. Middle of seventh century. (Photography by the author.)

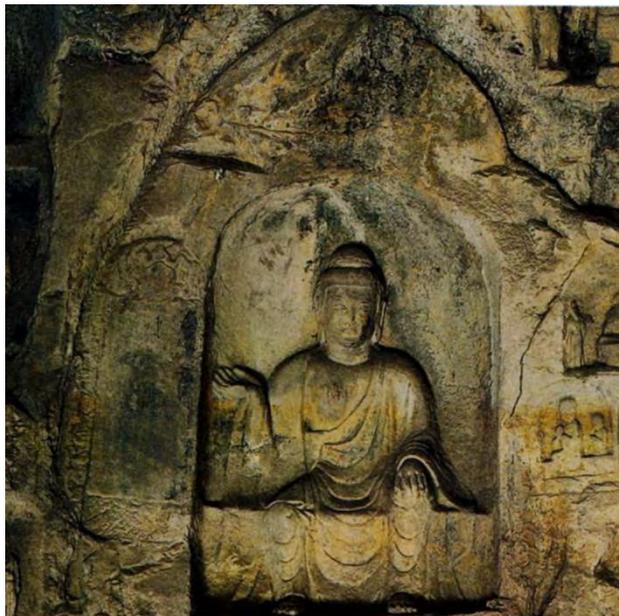


Figure 2.29 Niche 29, Poyao Cave, Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang, Henan. 637 CE. (From: Longmen shiku wenguan suo 龍門石窟文管所 [Longmen Grottoes Cultural Heritage Administration] and Beijing daxue kaoguxi 北京大學考古系 [Department of Archaeology of Peking University]. *Zhongguo shiku: Longmen shiku* 中國石窟·龍門石窟 [Chinese Grottoes: Longmen Grottoes] II (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1992), pl. 107.)



Figure 2.30 Niche 29, Cave 535, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 75 cm, W. 11 cm, D. 10 cm. Late seventh century. (Photography by the author.)

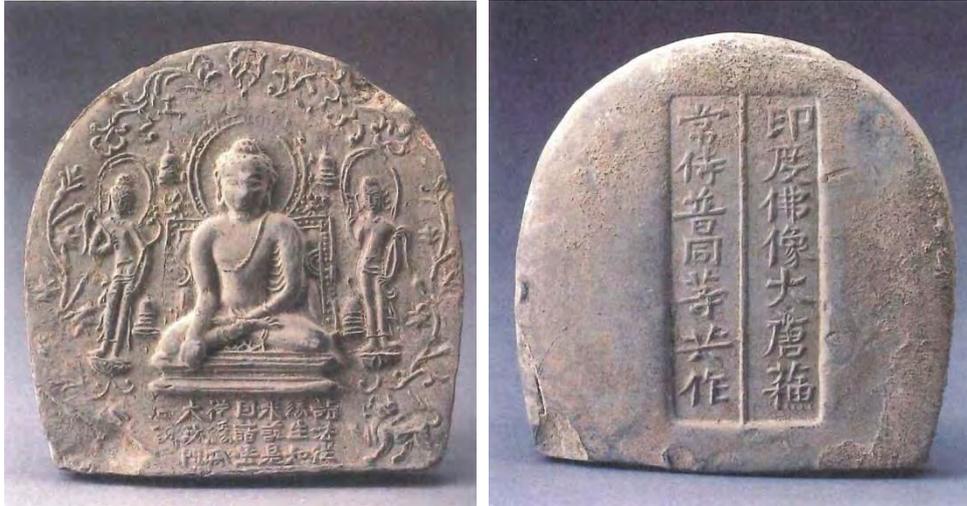


Figure 2. 31 “Indian Buddha image”, Ci’en Si, Xi’an, Shaanxi. Mold-pressed clay tablet, H. 8.6cm. seventh century. (From: Hida Romi 肥田路美, *Yunxiang Ruixiang: Chutang fojiao meishu yanjiu* 雲翔瑞像: 初唐佛教美術研究 [“Auspicious Images” with Clouds: A Study of Buddhist Art of Early Tang], trans Yen Chuan-ying 顏娟英 et al. (Taipei: Taiwan University Press, 2018), Pl. 1-10 & 11.)



Figure 2. 32 Seated Buddha, Bihar, India. Stone, H. 74 cm. Eighth century. Held in Narada Museum. (From: Pratapaditya Pal, *The Arts of Nepal I* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), fig. 21.)

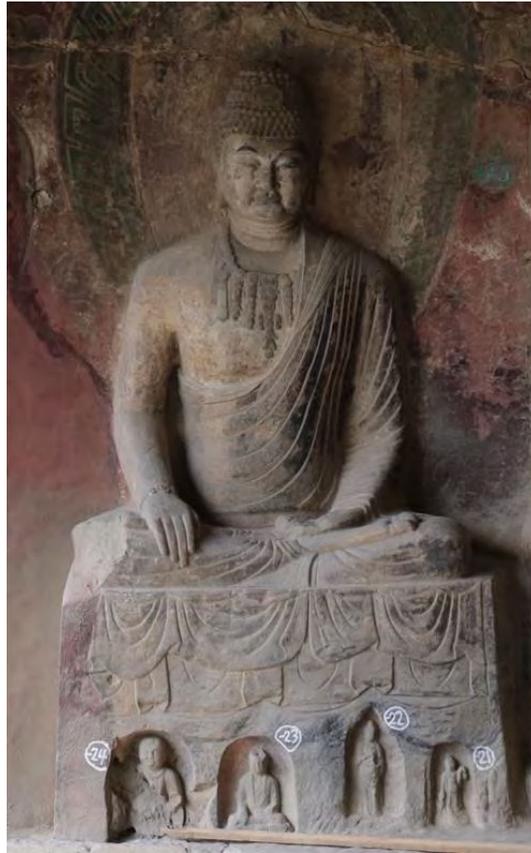


Figure 2. 33 “Puti Ruixiang”, right wall, Cave 535, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 134 cm. Late seventh century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 34 Kṣitigarbha, right side, Cave 726, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 122cm. seventh century. (Photography by the author.)

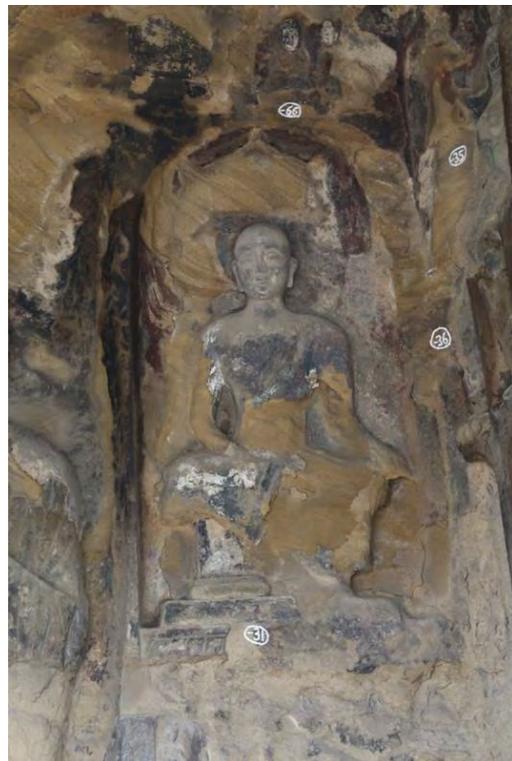


Figure 2. 35 Kṣitigarbha, left side, Cave 726, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 110 cm. seventh century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 36 Kṣitigarbha. National Museum of China. (From: Lu Zhangshen 吕章申, *Zhongguo gudai fozaoxiang yishu* 中國古代佛造像藝術 [Buddhist Sculptural Art in Ancient China] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2011), pl. 36.)



Figure 2. 37 Cliff-carved three Buddhas, Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang, Henan. Late seventh century. (From: Longmen shiku wenguansuo and Beijing daxue kaogu xi, *Zhongguo shiku: Longmen shiku II*, pl. 51.)

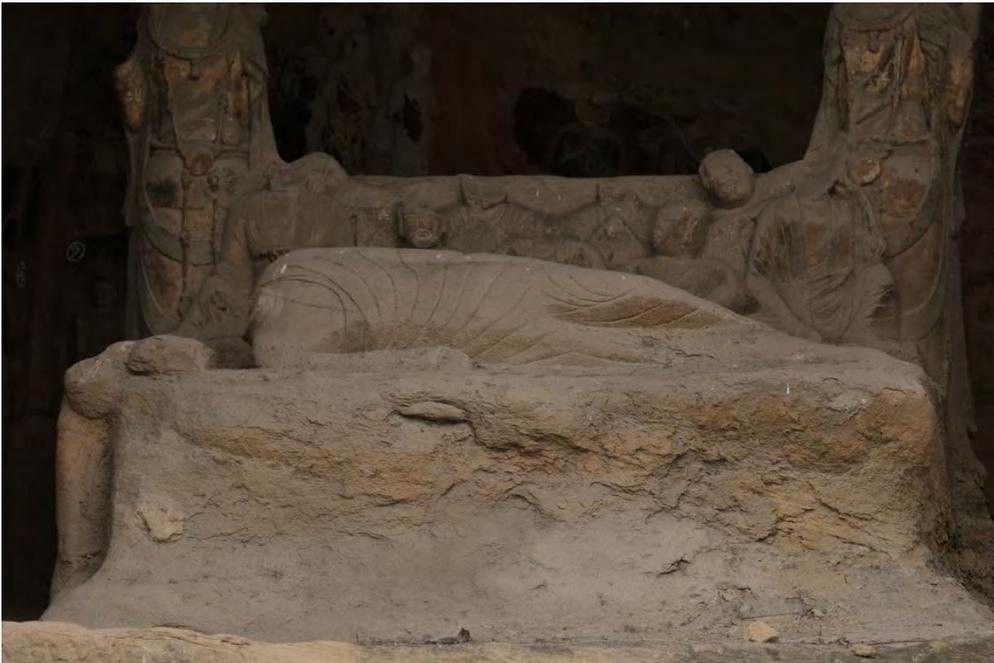


Figure 2. 38 Central altar, Cave 746, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 39 Lifting the coffin, Cave 746, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (From: Guangyuan Qianfoya shiku yishu bowuguan, *Guangyuan Qianfoya*, 39.)



Figure 2. 40 Cremation, Cave 746, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (From: Guangyuan Qianfoya shiku yishu bowuguan, *Guangyuan Qianfoya*, 39.)

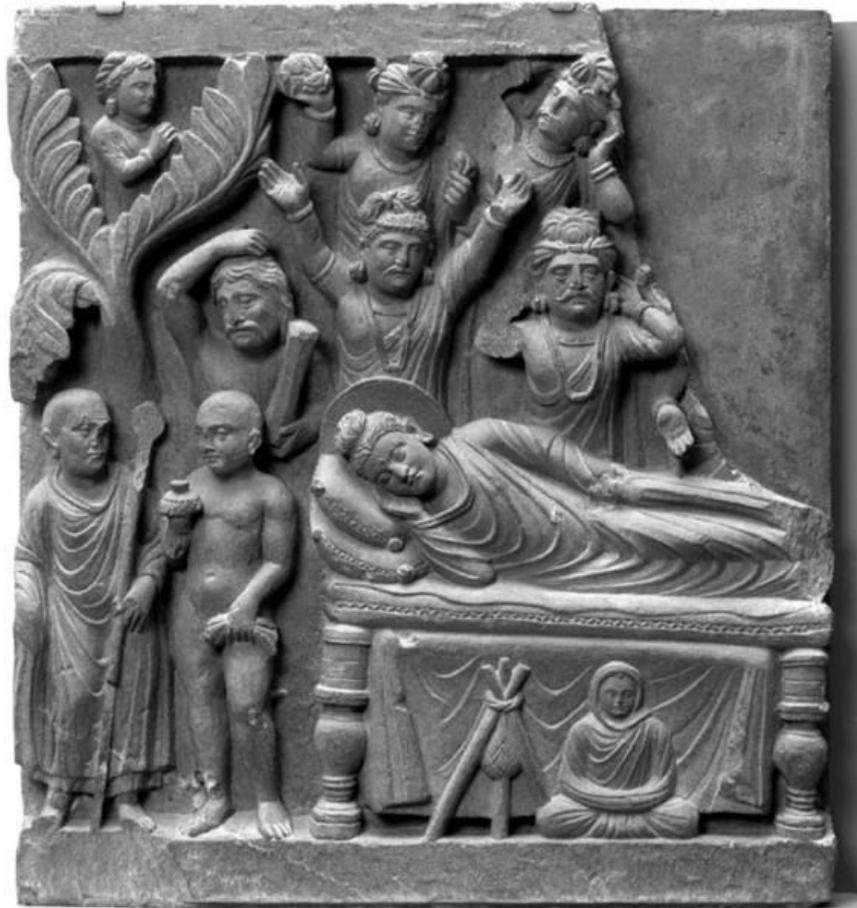


Figure 2. 41 Parinirvāṇa, from Pakistan or Afghanistan. Stone, late second to early third centuries. Held in Freer Gallery of Art (accession No: F1949.9a–d). (Copyright Freer Gallery of Art.)



Figure 2. 42 Buddhist stela. Stone, H. 339 cm, W. 99 cm, D.21.6 cm. 551 CE. Held in the Art Institute of Chicago (accession No: 1926.591). (Copyright Art Institute of Chicago.)



Figure 2. 43 Parinirvāṇa, front wall of Cave 5, Southern site, Xiangtangshan, Fengfeng, Henan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 44 Parinirvāṇa in Niche 495, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 45 Caves 746 and 744, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 46 The pedestal of the main Buddha of Cave 744, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (From: Guangyuan Qianfoya shiku yishu bowuguan, *Guangyuan Qianfoya*, 33.)



Figure 2. 48 Pedestal of the main Buddha in Niche 20, Bishuisi, Mianyang. (From: Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Mianyang shi wenwuju, *Mianyang kanku*, pl. 14.)



Figure 2. 47 Pedestal of a statue from Longxingsi, Pengzhou, Sichuan. (From: Pengzhou bowuguan 彭州博物館 [Pengzhou Museum], "Sichuan Pengzhou Longxingsi chutu shi zaoxiang 四川彭州龍興寺出土石造像 [Buddhist Stone Statues Found in the Longxingsi, Pengzhou, Sichuan]," *Wenwu* 文物 [Cultural Relics] 568, no.9 (2003), fig. 7.)



Figure 2. 49 Detail of the trees in Cave 746, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 50 Twinned Pensive Bodhisattvas from Hebei. Marble, H. 95 cm, W. 60cm. 565 CE. Held in Freer Gallery of Art Smithsonian Institution (accession No: F1913.27). (Copyright Freer Gallery of Art Smithsonian Institution.)



Figure 2.51 Pensive Bodhisattva from Hebei. Marble, H. 56.5 cm, W. 30cm. 565 CE. Held in Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (accession No: 50.1074). (Copyright Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.)

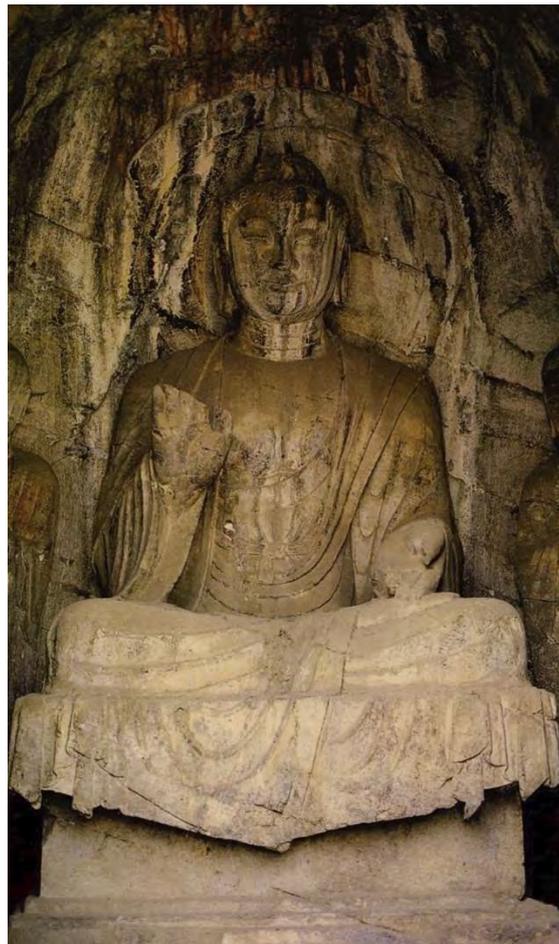


Figure 2.52 Main statue in the Qianxisi Cave, Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang. (From: Longmen shiku wenguansuo and Beijing daxue kaogu xi, *Zhongguo shiku: Longmen shiku* II, pl. 1.)



Figure 2. 53 Right wall, Cave 744, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 54 Middle Cave, Leigutai, Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang. Late seventh century. (From: Longmen shiku wenguansuo and Beijing daxue kaoguxi. *Zhongguo shiku: Longmen shiku* II, pl. 258.)



Figure 2. 55 “Puti Ruixiang” on the central altar of Cave 366, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 56 Maitreya Buddha on the central altar of Cave 365, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 57 Niche 90, Xikan, Bazhong, Sichuan. H. 260 cm, W. 187 cm, D. 221 cm. Eighth century. Photography by Wang Jianping.



Figure 2. 58 Niche 87, Xikan, Bazhong, Sichuan. H. 395 cm, W. 272 cm, D. 288 cm. Late seventh or early eighth centuries. (Photography by Wang Jianping.)



Figure 2. 59 Niche 12, Shimensi, Bazhong, Sichuan. H. 190 cm, W. 143 cm, D. 130 cm. Mid-eighth century. (Photography by the author.)

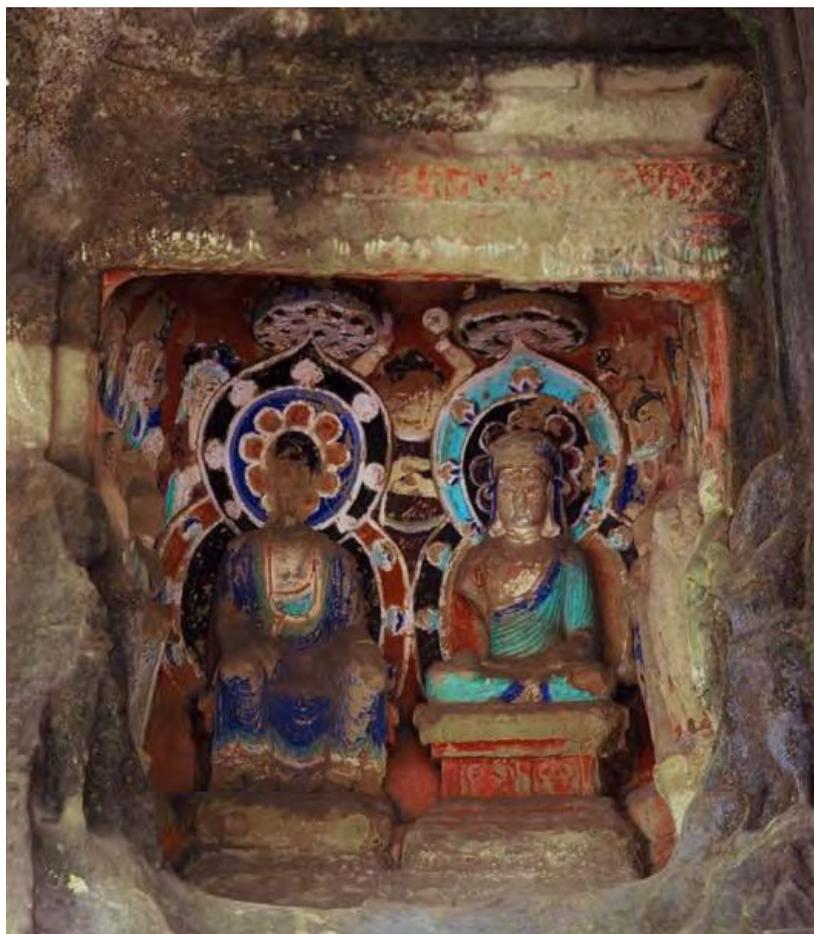


Figure 2. 60 Niche 73, Xikan, Bazhong, Sichuan. H. 176 cm, W. 132 cm, D. 170 cm. Mid-eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 61 Statue commissioned by Zhang Huiguan, Xiudesi, Quyang, Hebei. Marble, H. 39 cm. 657 CE. (Courtesy of Palace Museum, Beijing.)

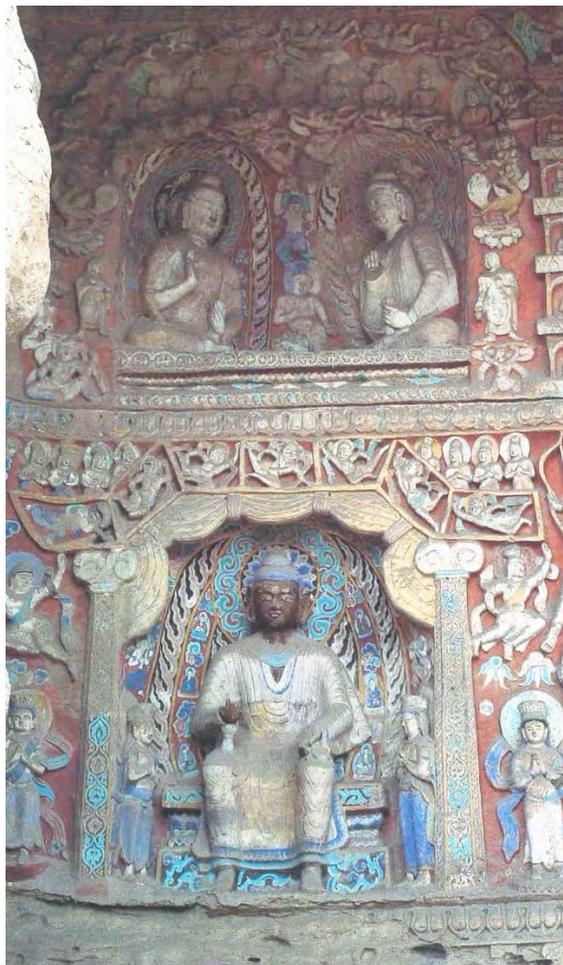
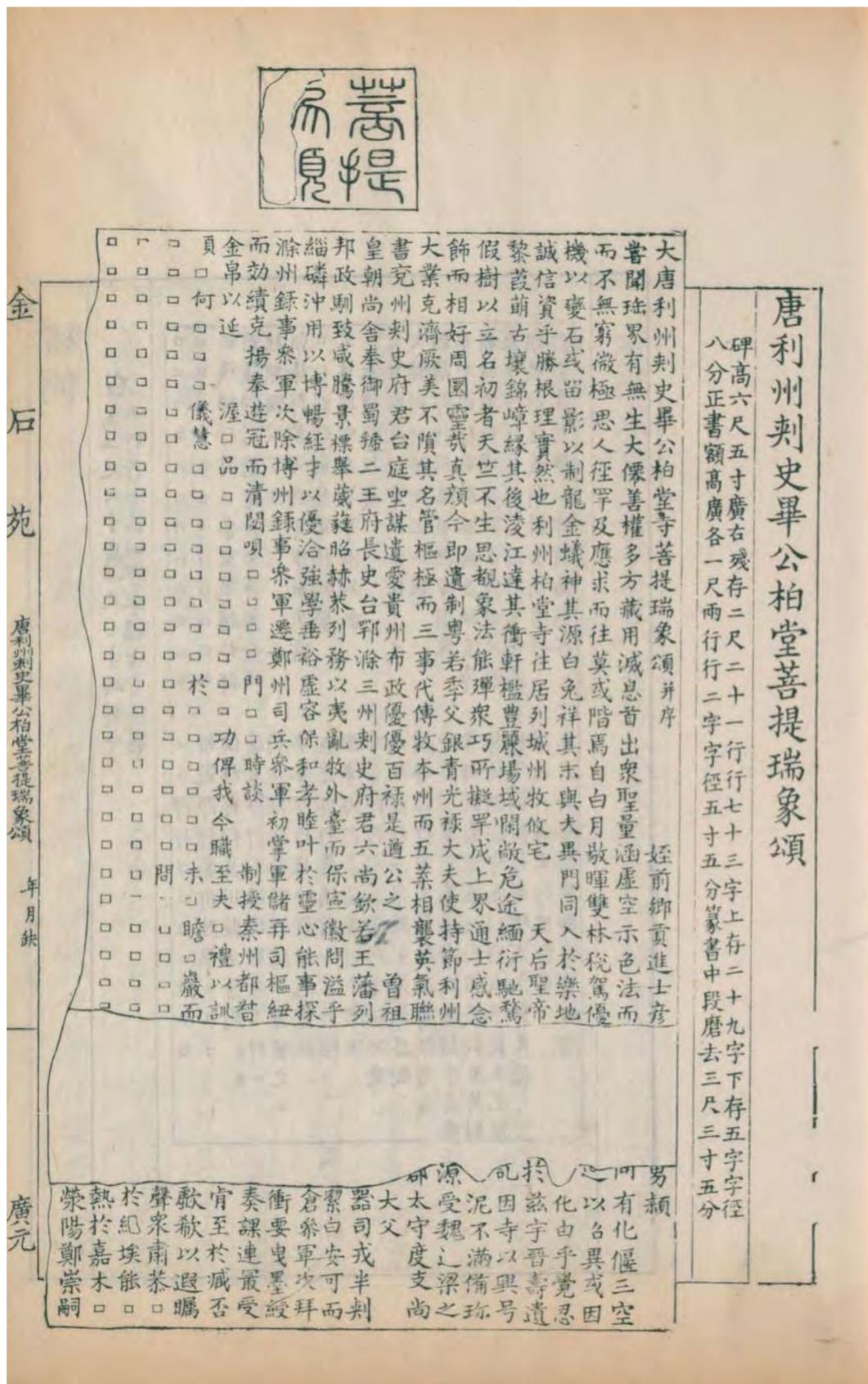


Figure 2. 62 Frontal Corridor of Caves 10, Yungang Grottoes, Shanxi. (From: Yungang wenwu baogaosuo 雲岡文物保管所 [Yungang Cultural Heritage Administration], *Zhongguo shiku: Yungang shiku* 中國石窟·雲岡石窟 [Chinese Grottoes: Yungang Grottoes] II (Beijing: Wenwu chuabanshe), pl. 46.)



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Figure 2. 63 Stele of Duke Bi, Cave 366, Qianfoya. (From: *Jinshi Yuan* by Liu Xihai in 1847 CE, held in the Tsinghua University Library, Beijing.)

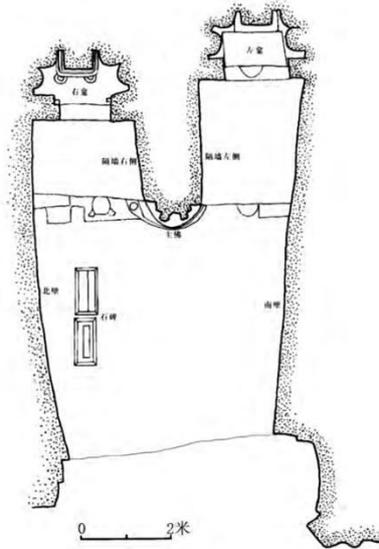


Figure 2. 64 Plan of Cave 535, Qianfoya. (From: Jiang Baolian 姜寶蓮, “Guangyuan Qianfoya Dayundong shike foxiang de diaocha yanjiu 廣元千佛崖大雲洞石刻佛像的調查研究 [The Investigation and Study of the Buddhist Stone Sculptures at Dayun Cave of Qianfoya in Guangyuan],” *Wenbo* 文博 [Cultural Relics and Museum Studies], no. 4 (2015), fig. 2.)



Figure 2. 65 Cave 512, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 372 cm, W. 561 cm, D. 940 cm. Eighth century. (Photography by the author.)

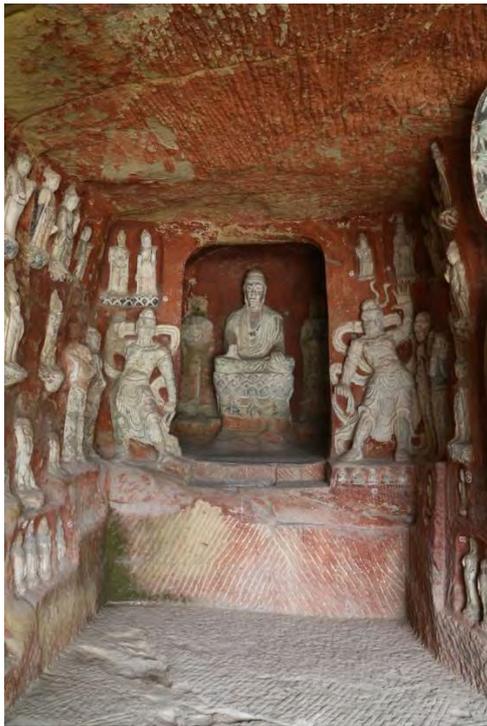


Figure 2. 67 Right Niche, Cave 512, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. Mid-eighth century. (Photography by the author.)

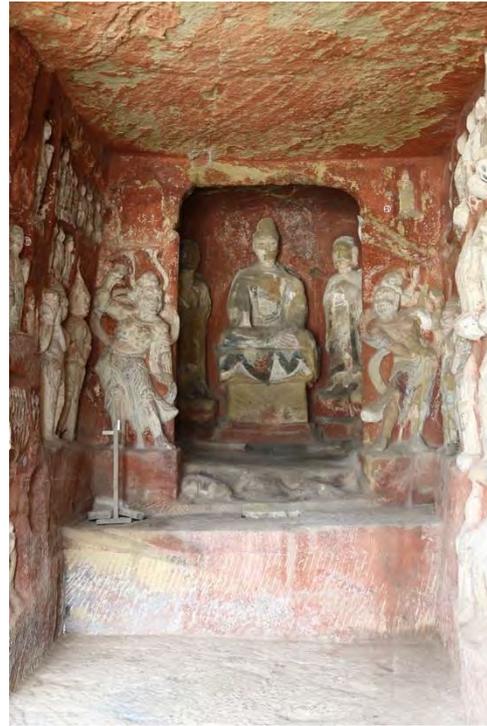


Figure 2. 66 Left Niche, Cave 512, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. Mid-eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 68 Rows of bodhisattvas on the left wall in Cave 512, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 69 Rows of bodhisattvas on the right wall in Cave 512, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)

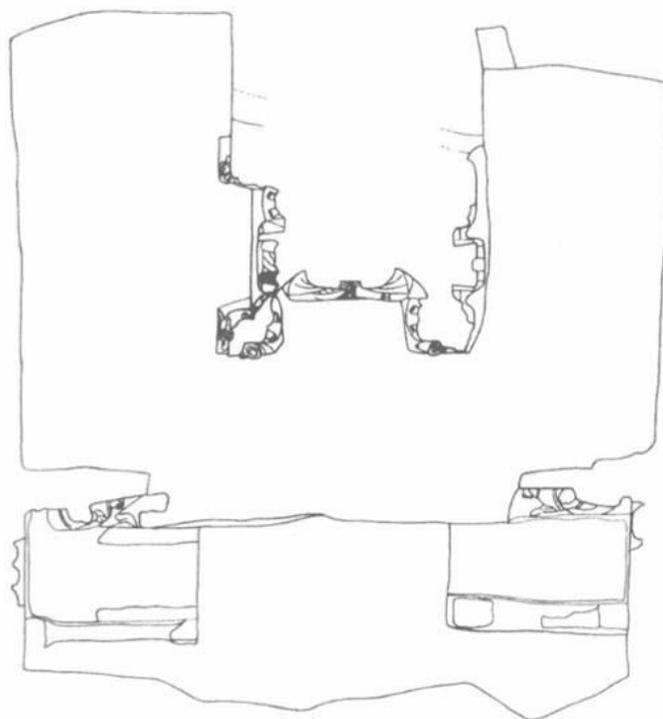


Figure 2. 70 Plan of Cave 400, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. Outer: H. 210 cm, W. 531 cm, D. 117 cm; Inner: H. 210 cm, W. 570 cm, D. 433 cm. Mid-eighth century. (From: Lei Yuhuang 雷玉華 and Wang Jianping 王劍平, *Guangyuan shiku* 廣元石窟[Guangyuan Grottoes] (Chengdu: Bashu shuju, 2002), fig. 13.)



Figure 2. 71 Right side of the central pillar of Cave 400, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by Li Jingjie.)

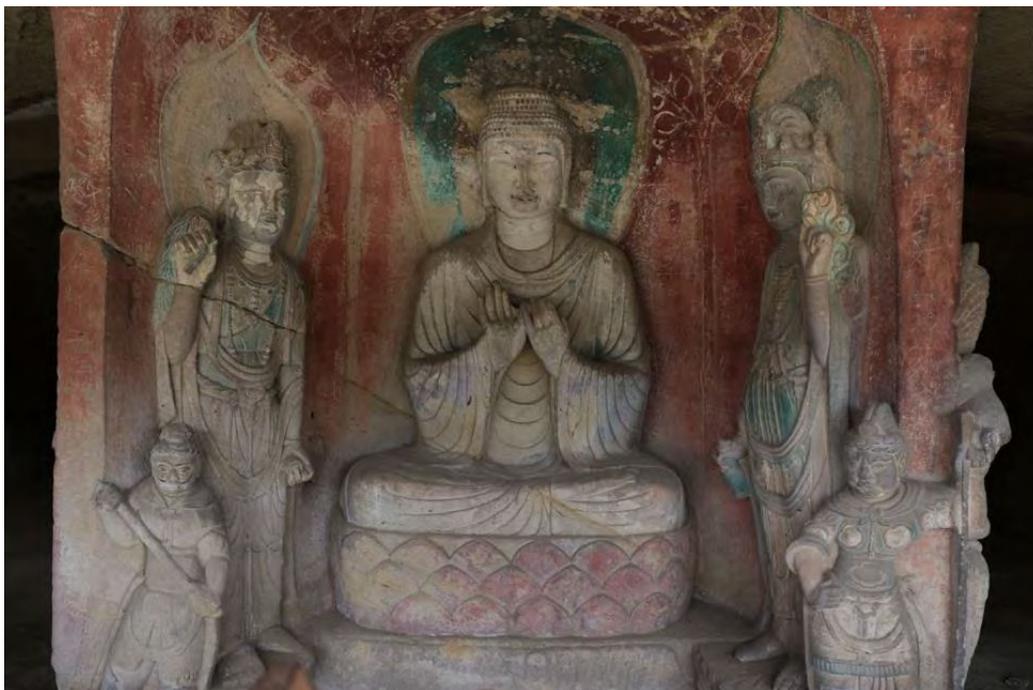


Figure 2. 72 Front side of the central pillar of Cave 400, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by Li Jingjie.)



Figure 2. 73 Left side of central pillar of Cave 400, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the Li Jingjie.)



Figure 2. 74 Two statues of Avalokiteśvara at the entrance to Cave 512, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 76 Right side of the outer niche of Niche 513, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 75 Left side of the outer niche of Niche 513, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 77 Niche 222, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 78 Stone plaque containing a “Puti Ruixiang,” Baoqingsi, Xi’an. Stone, H. 104 cm. Collected in Tokyo National Museum (accession no. TC-714). (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 79 Stone plaque containing a “Puti Ruixiang,” Baoqingsi, Xi’an. Stone, H. 110 cm. Collected in Tokyo National Museum (accession no. TC-721). (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 80 Niche 788, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 142 cm, W. 141 cm, D. 114 cm. Eighth century. (Photography by the author.)

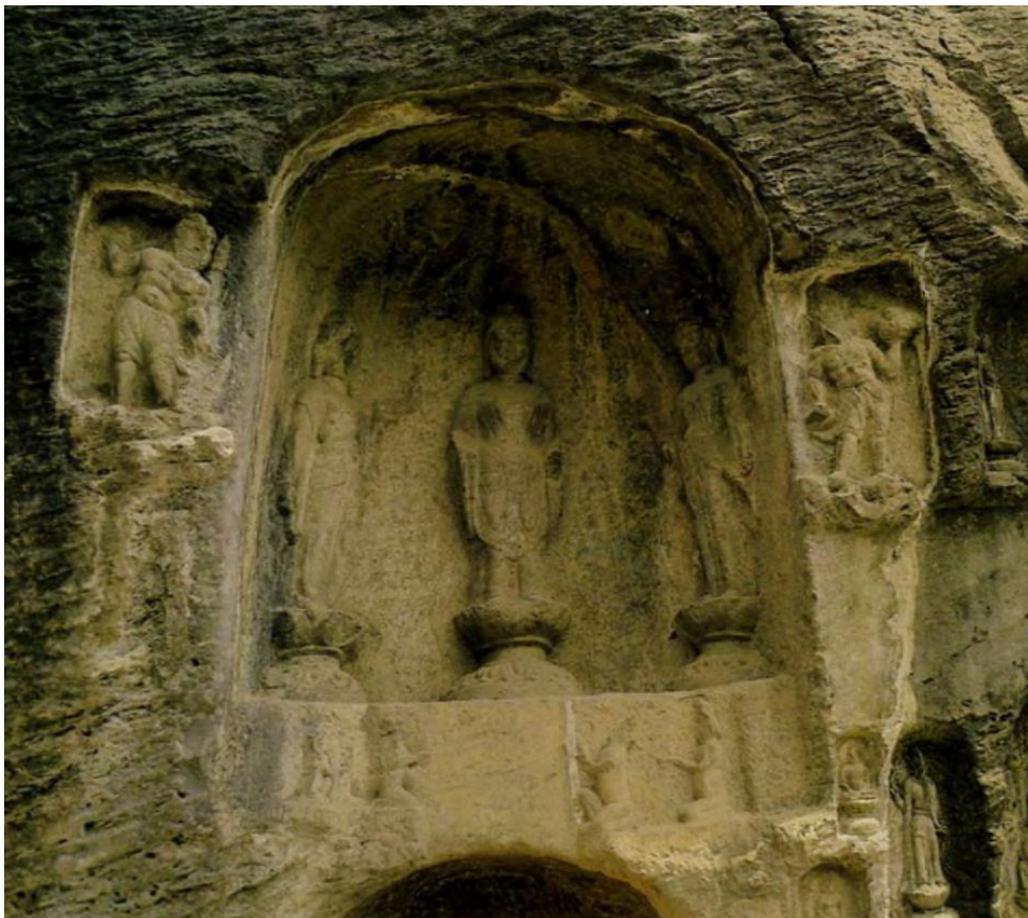


Figure 2. 81 Niche of Monk Baolong, Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang, Henan. 710 CE. (From: Longmen shiku wenguansuo and Beijing daxue kaogu xi, *Zhongguo shiku: Longmen shiku* II, pl. 240.)



Figure 2. 82 Intrusive niches in Fengxiansi, Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang, Henan. Mid-eighth century. (From: Longmen shiku wenguansuo and Beijing daxue kaogu xi, *Zhongguo shiku: Longmen shiku* II, pl. 133.)

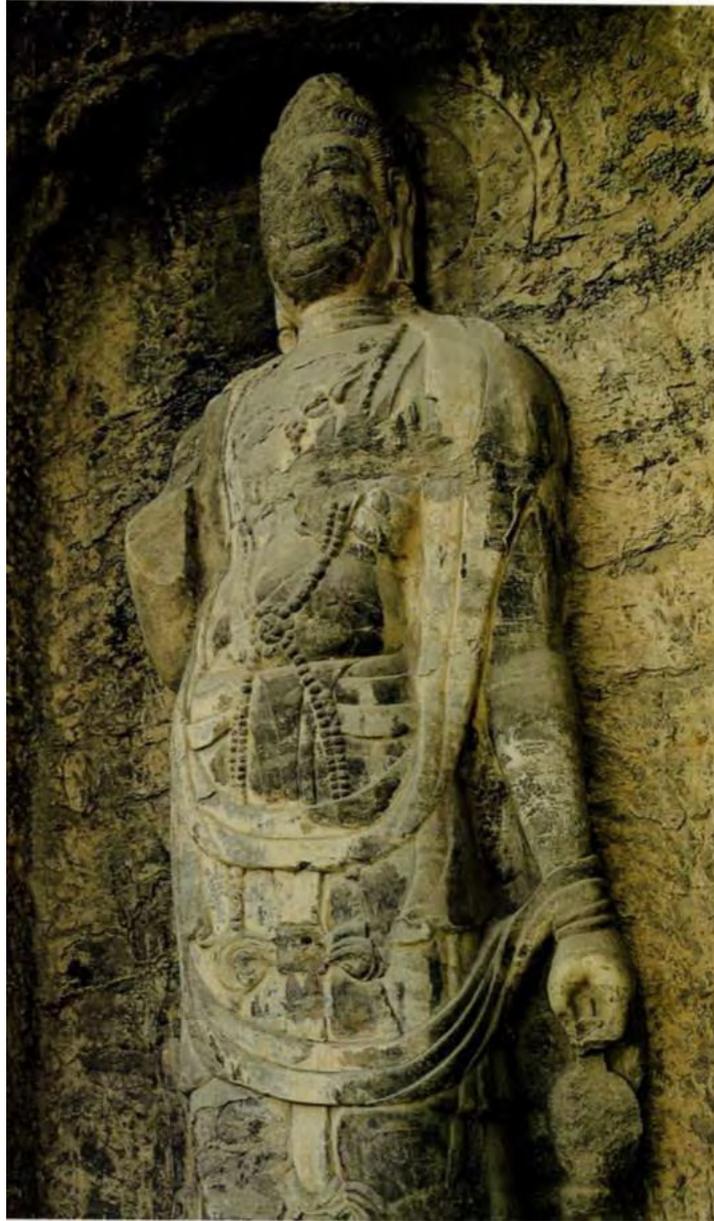


Figure 2. 83 Life-sized Bodhisattvas, Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang, Henan. Middle of eighth century. (From: Longmen shiku wenguansuo and Beijing daxue kaogu xi, *Zhongguo shiku: Longmen shiku* II, pl. 242.)

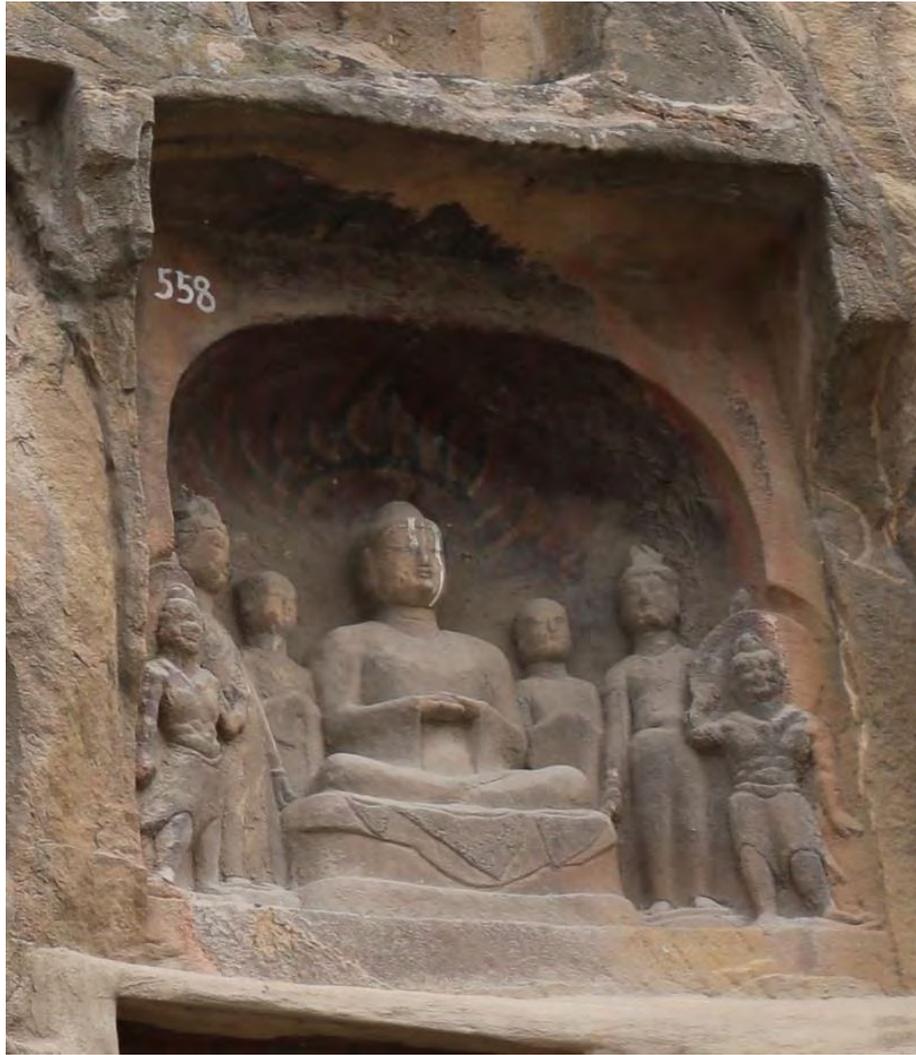


Figure 2. 84 Niche 558, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 107 cm, W. 94 cm, D. 48 cm. Late seventh and early eighth centuries. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 85 Niche 308, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 154 cm, W. 132 cm, D. 75 cm. Late seventh and early eighth centuries. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 86 Depiction of the “King Udāyana images” in Cave 305, Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 87 Niches on the cliff to the left of Niche 28, Huangzezi, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 88 Niche 8 in Cave 535, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 89 Niche 112, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 204 cm, W. 104 cm, D. 22 cm. Eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 90 Double Kṣitigarbha, Niche 268, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 86 cm, W. 80 cm, D. 21 cm. Late seventh century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 91 Double Kṣitigarbha, Niche 123, Cave 23 in the Dafosi, Binxian. (Photography by Li Jingjie.)



Figure 2.92 Niche 147, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 141 cm, W. 109 cm, D. 49 cm. Eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2.93 Niche 405, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 164 cm, W. 150 cm, D. 83 cm. Eighth century. (From: Sichuan sheng wenwu guanliju et al., *Guangyuan shiku neirong zonglu: Qianfoya juan* 廣元石窟內容總錄:千佛崖卷 [Catalogue of the Contents of Guangyuan Grottoes: Qianfoya] I (Chengdu: Bashu shuju, 2014), 389.)

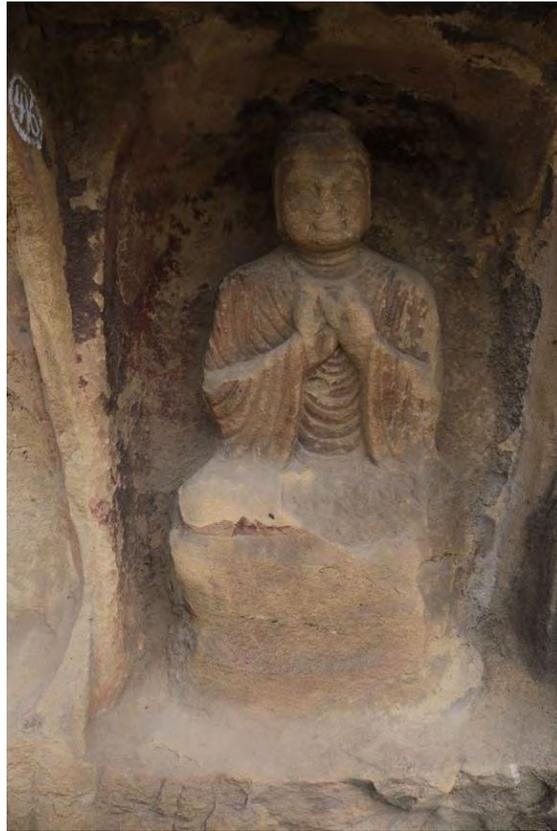


Figure 2. 94 Niche 416, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 100 cm, W. 70 cm, D. 40 cm. Eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 2. 95 Niche 247, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 104 cm, W. 90 cm, D. 44 cm. Eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 1 Plan of the distribution of the niches in Nankan, Bazhong. (Drawn by the author.)



Figure 3. 2 Shenxianpo, Nankan, Bazhong. (Photography by the author.)

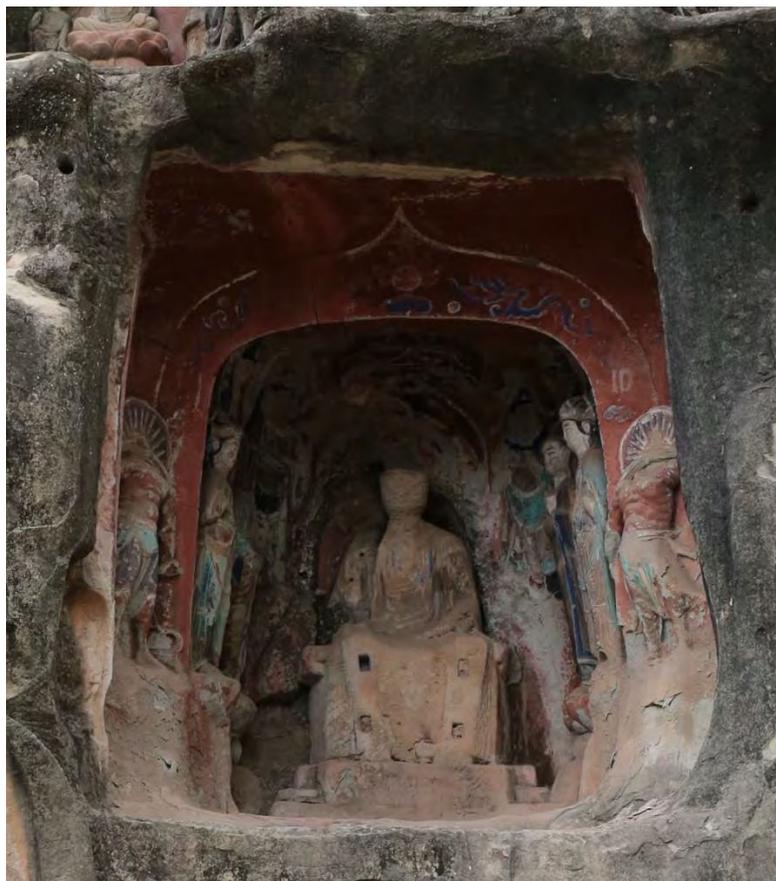


Figure 3.3 Niche 10, Xikan, Bazhong. H. 220 cm, W. 195 cm, D. 215 cm. 715 CE. (Photography by Chen Yi-an.)



Figure 3.4 Niche 139, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 206 cm, W. 180 cm, D. 140 cm. Early eighth century. (From: Sichuan wenwu guanliju 四川文物管理局 [Sichuan Cultural Heritage Administration] et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu* 巴中石窟内容总录 [Catalogue of the Contents of Bazhong Grottoes] (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2006), 190.)

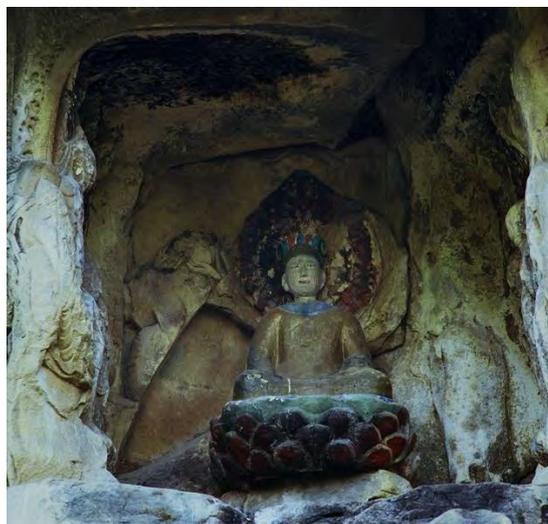


Figure 3.5 Niche 140, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 192 cm, W. 184 cm, D. 186 cm. Early eighth century. (From: Sichuan wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 191.)



Figure 3.6 Niche 37, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 168 cm, W. 148 cm, D. 172 cm. Early eighth century. (Photography by Chen Yi-an.)



Figure 3.7 Niche 116, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 350 cm, W. 380 cm, D. 197 cm. Early eighth century. (Photography by Chen Yi-an.)



Figure 3.8 Niche 118, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 190 cm, W. 210 cm, D. 159 cm. Early eighth century. (Photography by Chen Yi-an.)



Figure 3.9 Bodhisattva, left wall, Niche 37, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 71 cm. Early eighth century. (From: Cheng Chongxun 程崇勳, *Bazhong shiku* 巴中石窟 [The Bazhong Grottoes] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2009), 62.)



Figure 3. 10 Bodhisattva, Cave 14, Tianlongshan, Shanxi Province. H. 139.4 cm. Eighth century. Held in the Tokyo National Museum (Accession no. TC-374). (Copyright Tokyo National Museum.)

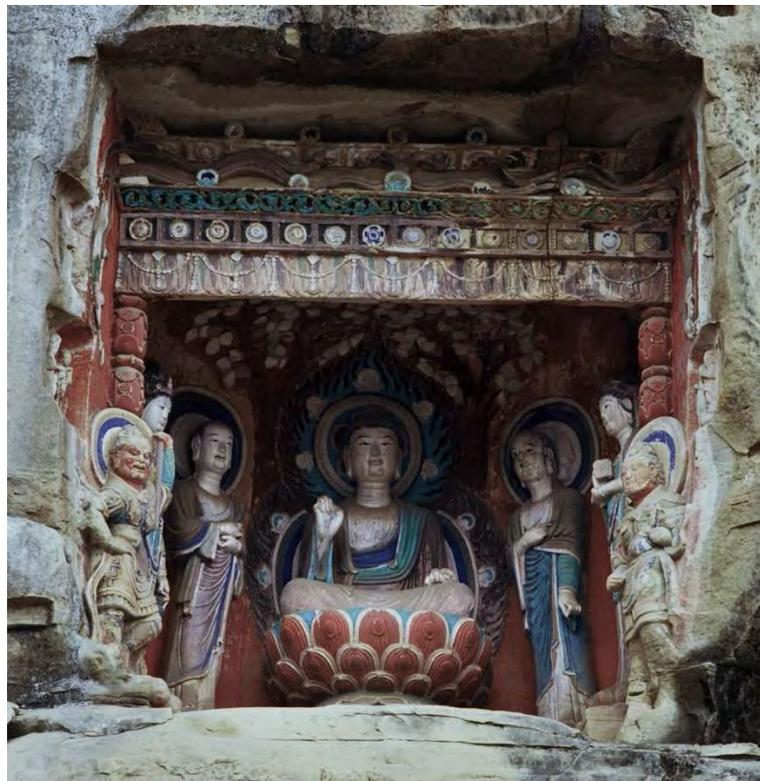


Figure 3. 11 Niche 105, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 218 cm, W. 191 cm, D. 127 cm. Early eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 12 Niche 69, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 226 cm, W. 190 cm, D. 134 cm. 740 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 13 Niche 71, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 222 cm, W. 174 cm, D. 111 cm. 740 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 14 Niche 83, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 187 cm, W. 142 cm, D. 91 cm. Mid-eighth century.
(Photography by the author.)

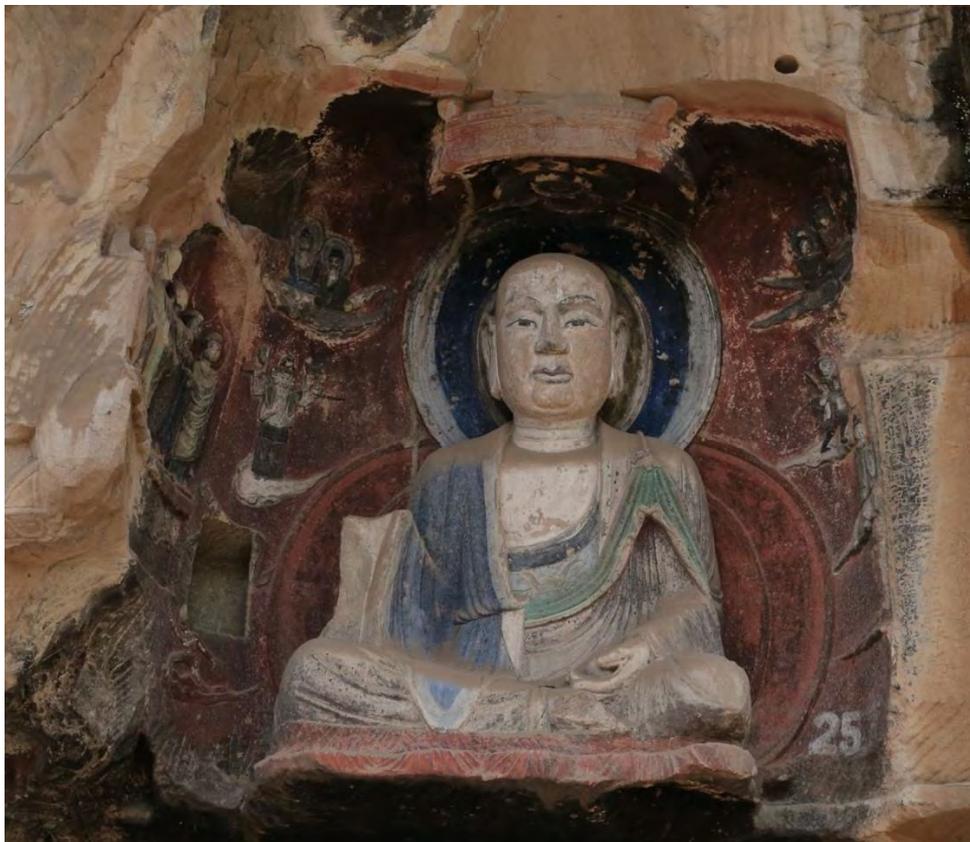


Figure 3. 15 Niche 25, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 164 cm, W. 172 cm, D. 80 cm. Early eighth century.
(Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 16 Nankan Niche 80, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 67 cm, W. 50 cm, D. 18 cm. 759 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 17 Niche 103, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 515 cm, W. 510 cm, D. 850 cm. Early eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 18 Niche 87, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 266 cm, W. 169 cm, D. 64 cm. 759 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 19 Niches 60 and 61, Nankan, Bazhong. L: H. 168 cm, W. 73 cm, D. 49 cm; R: H. 190 cm, W. 103 cm, D. 68 cm. Eighth century. (Photography by the author.)

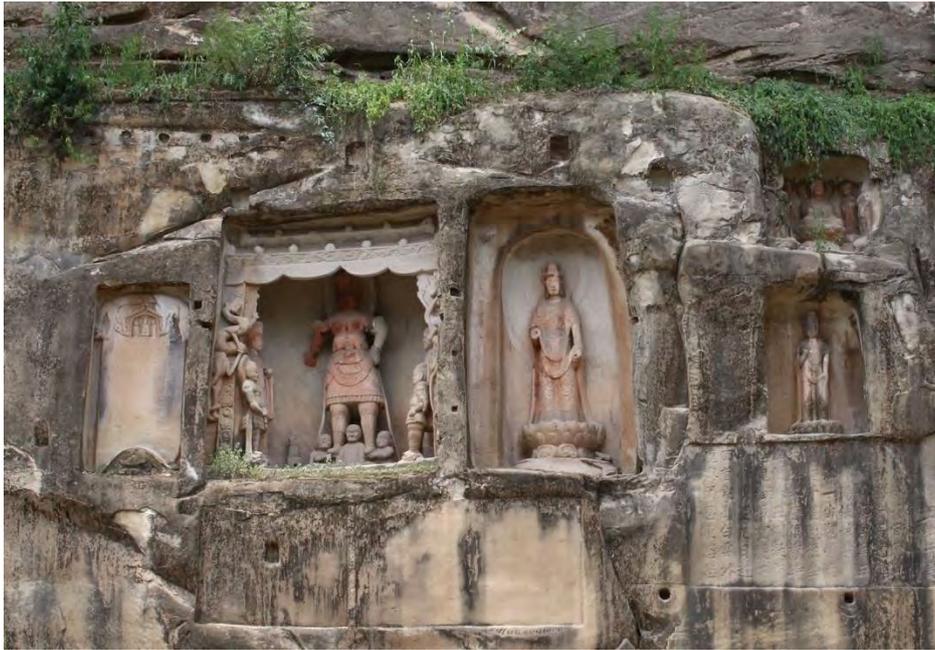


Figure 3. 20 Niches 93, 94 and 95, Nankan, Bazhong. 846 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 21 Niche 65, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 192 cm, W. 120 cm, D. 77 cm. 877 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 22 Niche 16, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 128 cm, W. 125 cm, D. 49 cm. Late ninth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 23 Niche 10, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 251 cm, W. 154 cm, D. 52 cm. 1174 CE. (Photography by Chen Yi-an.)



Figure 3. 24 Laojundong, Nankan, Bazhong. 12th century. (Photography by Chen Yi-an.)



Figure 3. 25 Mortuary Stupas, Nankan, Bazhong. (Photography by the author.)

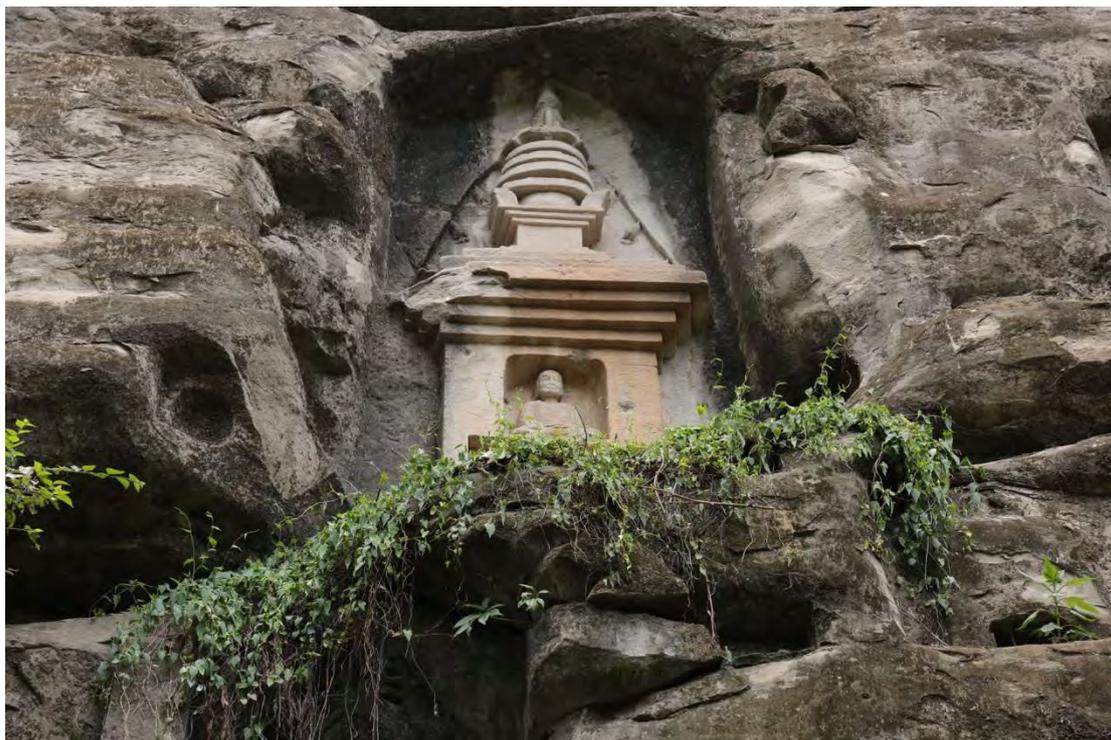


Figure 3. 26 Niche 167, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 340 cm, W. 163 cm, D. 88 cm. 1191 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 27 Rear side of statue with a mandora, excavated from the Xi'an Road. Red sandstone, H. 64 cm, W. 45.6cm. 490 CE. Held in Chengdu Archaeology Institution (Statue no. 1 of Xi'an road, accession no. H1:1).(From: Sichuan bowuyuan et al., *Sichuan Nanchao fojiao zaixiang*, pl. 54-2.)



Figure 3. 28 Rubbing of the statue made by Liu Gen, Henan Museum, Henan. 524 CE. (Copyright Henan Museum.)

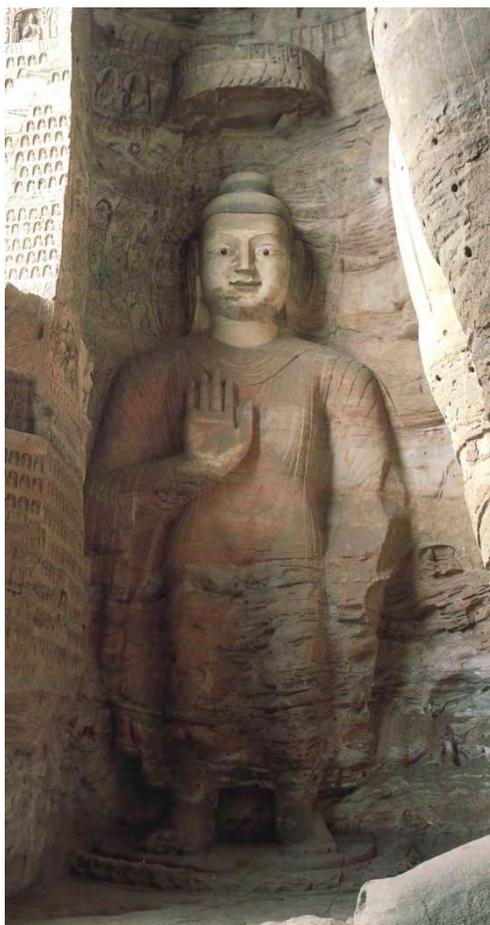


Figure 3. 29 West wall, Cave 18, Yungang Grottoes, Shanxi. (From: *Yungang wenwu baoguansuo*, *Zhongguo shiku: Yungang shiku* II, pl. 171.)



Figure 3. 30 Canopy, excavated in Chengdu, Sichuan. Red sandstone with pigments, H. 62.9 cm, W. 58.5 cm, D. 6.9 cm. Held in Sichuan Museum (Stele no. 3, accession no. 22320-1). Southern Dynasty. (From: Sichuan bowuyuan et al., *Sichuan chutu Nanchao fojiao zaoxiang*, pl. 38-1.)



Xikan Niche 5



Xikan Niche 6



Xikan Niche 10



Nankan Niche 37



Nankan Niche 116



Nankan Niche 118

Figure 3. 31 Round canopies, Xikan and Nankan, Bazhong. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 32 Buddhist Tent, Qingshansi, Shaanxi. Stone, silver, bronze and glass, H. 102 cm. 741 CE. Collected in Lintong Museum. (From: Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 東京国立博物館 [Tokyo National Museum], *Kyūtei no eiga: Tō no jotei Sokutenbukō to sono jidai ten* 宮廷の栄華:唐の女帝則天武后とその時代展 [The Glory of the Court: Tang Dynasty Empress Wu and her Times] (Tokyo: NHK Puromōshon, 1998), 76.)



Figure 3. 33 Buddhist Shrine, Famensi, Xi'an, Shaanxi. Marble, Tang dynasty. (From: Shanxi sheng wenwukaogu yanjiusuo 陕西省文物考古研究所 [Shaanxi Heritage and Archaeology Administration], Famensi bowuguan fa men 法門寺博物館 [Famensi Museum], Baoji shi wenwuju 寶雞市文物局 [Baoji Municipal Cultural Heritage Administration], Fufeng xian bowuguan 扶風縣博物館 [Fufeng County Museum]. et al., *Famensi kaogu fajue baogao* 法門寺考古發掘報告 [Archaeological Report for the Excavation of Famen Temple] II (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2007), pl. 23.)



Figure 3. 34 Niche 60, Feixian'ge, Pujiang, Sichuan. H. 128 cm, W. 185 cm. 689 CE. (Photography by the author.)

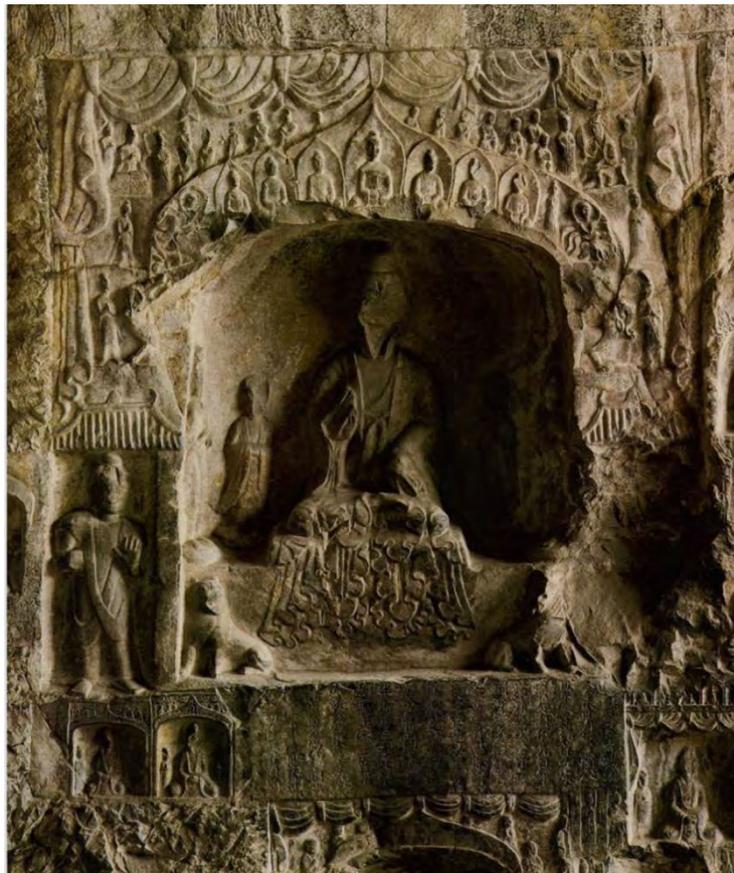


Figure 3. 35 Buddhist shrine of Song Jingfei, Lianhua Cave, Longmen Grottoes. 527 CE. (From: Longmen shiku wenguansuo and Beijing daxue kaogu xi, *Zhongguo shiku: Longmen shiku* I, pl. 64.)



Figure 3.36 Niche 21, Xikan, Bazhong. H. 306 cm, W. 324 cm, D. 181 cm. seventh-eighth centuries. (Photography by the author.)

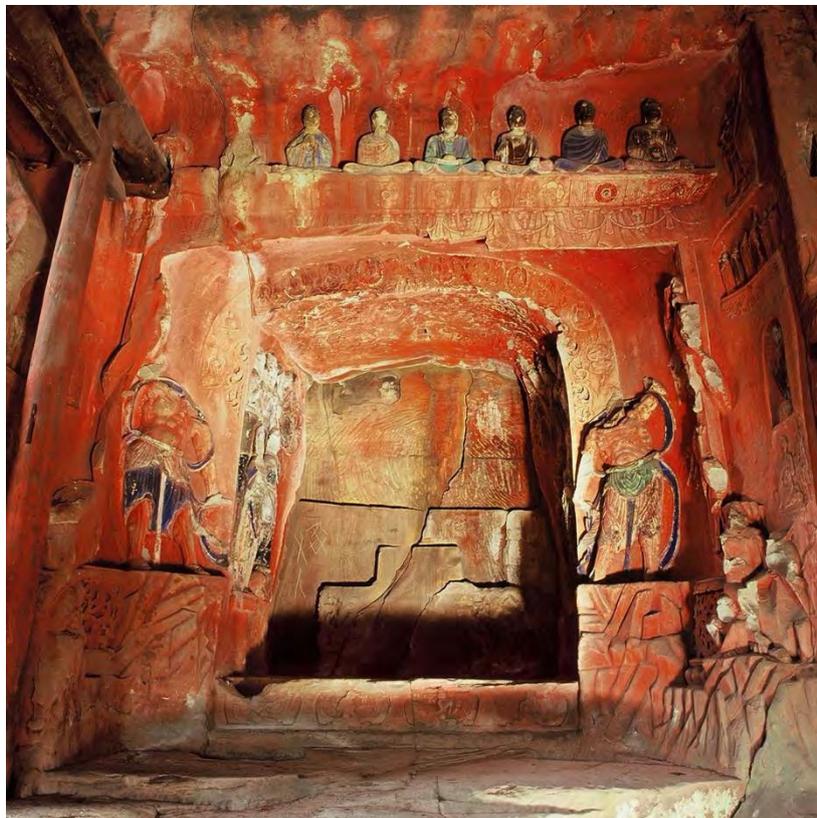


Figure 3.37 Niche 7, Beikan, Bazhong. H. 338 cm, W. 310 cm, D. 186 cm. Early eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3.38 Niche 6, Xikan, Bazhong. H. 58 cm. Early eighth century. Photography by Chen Yi-an.

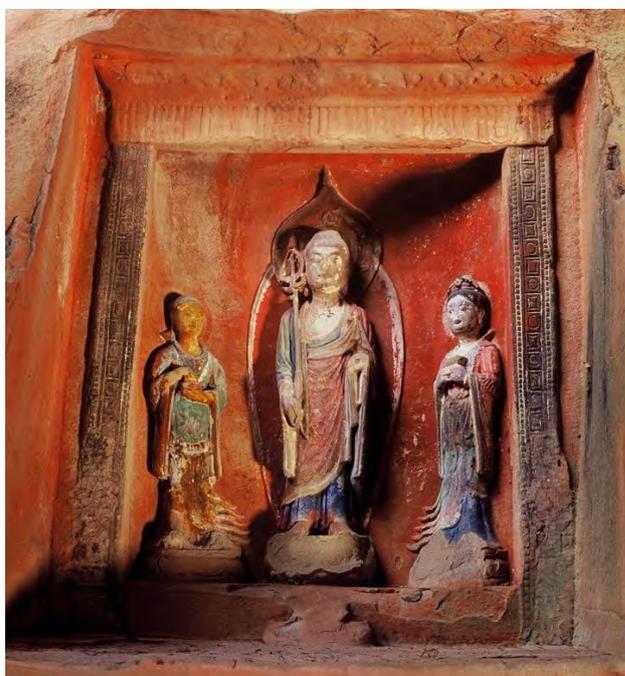


Figure 3.40 Niche 1, Beikan, Bazhong.
H. 100 cm, W. 85 cm, D. 37 cm. Late
seventh and early eighth centuries.
(Photography by the author.)



Figure 3.39 Female figurine.
Earthenware with pigment, H. 38.4
cm. Middle of seventh century.
Collected in Metropolitan Museum,
New York (accession no.
1978.345). (Copyright Metropolitan
Museum.)



Figure 3.41 Niche 3, Zhaojiapo, Cangxi, Guangyuan. H. 188 cm, W. 180 cm, D. 181 cm. Seventh century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3.42 Niche 13, Beikan, Bazhong. H. 169 cm, W. 141 cm, D. 75 cm. Early eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 43 Niche 37 and 116, Nankan, Bazhong. Early eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 44 Reconstruction of the "Famous representations of the Buddha," Stein no. Ch.xxii.0023, original from Cave 17, Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang, Gansu. Virtual reconstruction by Roderick

Whitfield. (Images courtesy of the British Museum and the National Museum, New Delhi (IDP Program).)



Figure 3. 45 Bejeweled Buddha in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* on the right, Stein no. Ch.xxii.0023.



Figure 3. 46 Bejeweled Buddha in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* on the left, Stein no. Ch.xxii.0023.



Figure 3. 47 Crown of bejeweled Buddha in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* on the right, Stein no. Ch.xxii.0023.



Figure 3. 48 Detail of the crown of the main Buddha in Niche 103, Nankan, Bazhong. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 49 Standing Buddha to the right of the bejeweled Buddha in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* on the left side of the Stein no. Ch.xxii.0023.



Figure 3. 50 Standing Buddha to the left of the right bejeweled Buddha in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā*, Stein no. Ch.xxii.0023.



Figure 3. 51 Double-head Auspicious Image, Cave 237, Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang, Gansu. Late eighth and early ninth centuries. (From: Zhang Xiaogang 張曉剛, *Dunhuang fojiao gantonghua yanjiu* 敦煌佛教感通畫研究 [Research on the Buddhist Miracle Paintings in Dunhuang] (Lanzhou: Gansu Education Press, 2015), fig. 1-1-45.)



Figure 3. 52 Statue of an “Auspicious image pointing to the sun and moon,” excavated from the suburbs of Xi’an. Tang dynasty. Collected in Beilin Museum, Xi’an. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 53 Niche 251, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 134 cm, W. 122 cm, D. 61 cm. Eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 54 Niche 8, Yaowangshan, Yaozhou District, Tongchuan, Gansu. Late seventh century. (Photography by Li Jingjie.)



Figure 3.55 Stele of Cui Shande from Xi'an. Stone, H. 56 cm. 670 CE. (From: Mikami Tsugio 三上次男, "Tō kanho gannen mei no hizō to Jizō zō 唐咸亨元年銘の碑像と地藏像:新資料紹介 [Monument of the First Year of Xianheng Reign and Jizo Statue, Tang: Introduction of New Materials] 15," *Kobijutsu* 古美術 [Ancient Art] 18, 07(1967), 43.)

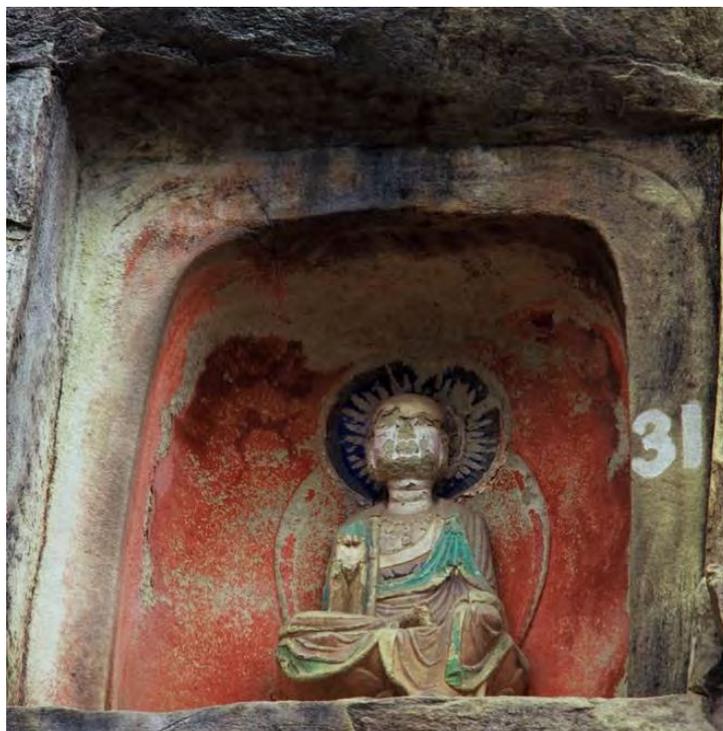


Figure 3.56 Kṣitigarbha in Nankan Niche 31, Bazhong. H. 94 cm, W. 80 cm, D. 44 cm. Early eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3.57 Kṣitigarbha and Six Paths, from Cave 17, Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang. Ink and colors on silk, H. 121.9 cm, W. 55.4 cm. 851 CE. Collected in British Museum, London (Satin Painting no. 29, accession no. 1919, 0101, 0.29.+). (Copyright British Museum.)



Figure 3.58 Painting of the "King Who Turns the Wheel of the Five Paths", the *Scripture of the Ten Kings*, from Cave 17, Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang. Ink on paper, H. 29 cm, W. 491 cm. Tenth century. Held in British library, London (Stein no. 3961). (Copyright British library)



Figure 3. 59 Kṣitigarbha with Ten Buddhas, Niche 38, Cave 806, Qianfoya, Guangyuan. H. 55 cm, W. 39 cm, D. 10 cm. Early eighth century. (Photography by the author.)

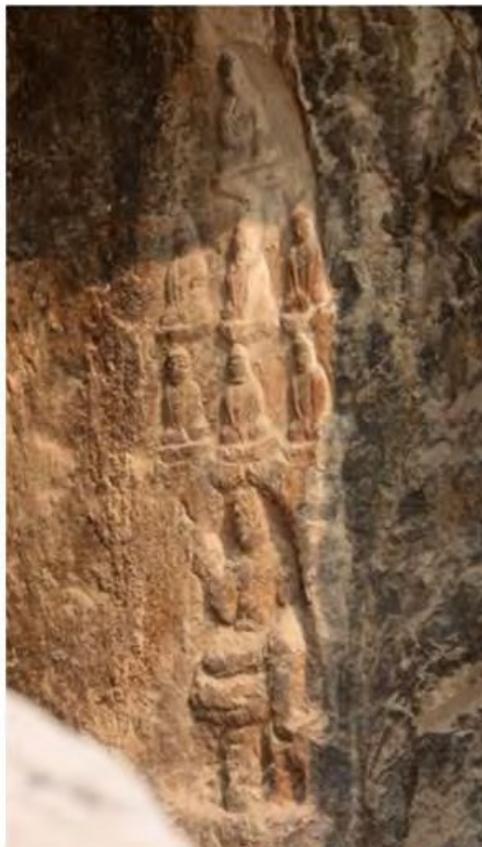
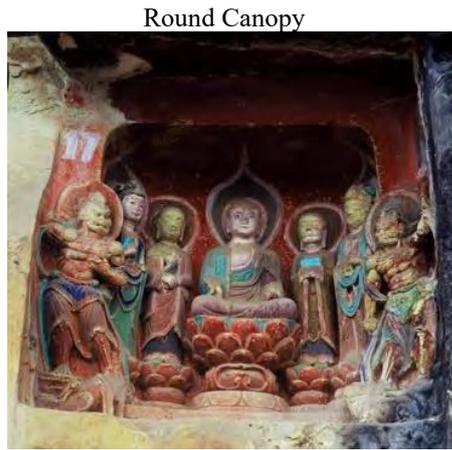
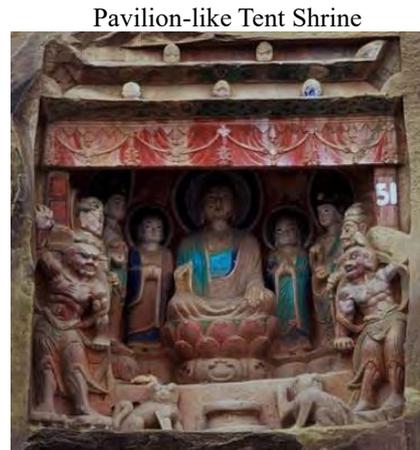


Figure 3. 60 Kṣitigarbha with “Yedao Images,” Cave 1228, Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang, Henan. (Photography by Wang Delu.)

Buddha with the *abhaya-mudrā*



Niches 17, 23, 39, 42, 97, 124



Niches 38, 47, 50, 51, 53, 54, 63, 69, 70, 71, 74, 77, 99, 101, 113

Buddha with the *dharmacakra-mudrā*



Niches 21, 22, 67



Niches 45, 49

Maitreya Buddha



Niche 100



Niche 82

Figure 3. 61 Standard Images in Nankan. Eighth century. (Photography by the author.)

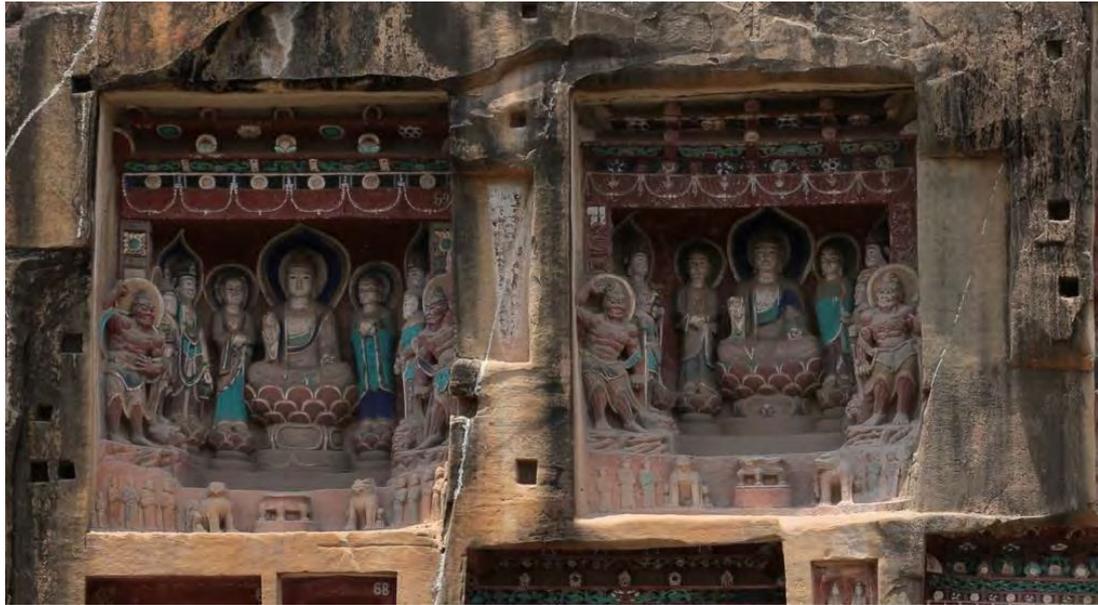


Figure 3. 62 Niche 69 and 71, Nankan, Bazhong, 740 CE. (Photography by the author.)

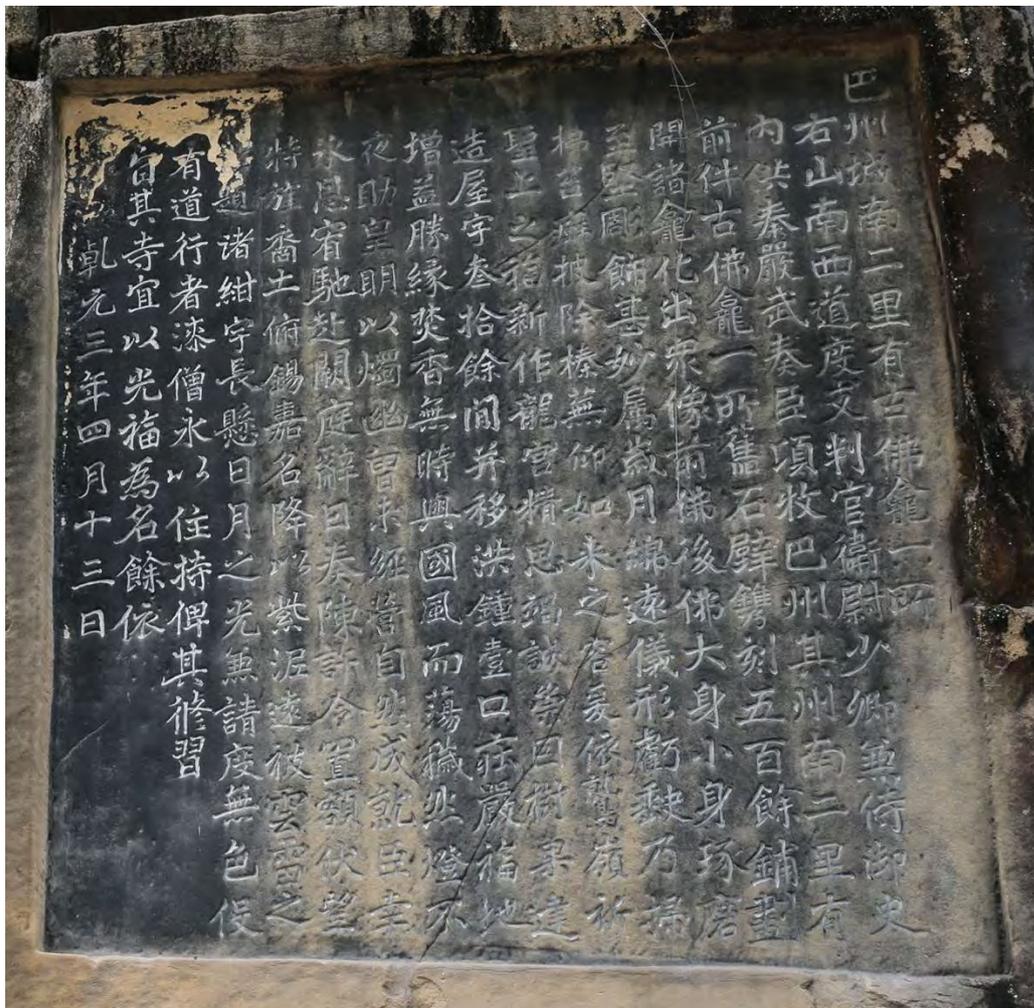


Figure 3. 63 Edict of Guangfusi, Niche 1, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 220 cm, W. 114 cm, D. 30 cm. 760 CE. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 64 Vaiśravaṇa of Niche 94, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 246 cm, W. 205 cm, D. 194 cm. 846 CE.
(Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 65 Vaiśravaṇa, excavated in Xingtangsi, Qionglai, Sichuan. Tang dynasty. Collected in Museum of Sichuan University. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 66 Vaiśravaṇa and Avalokiteśvara, Cave 154, Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang. (From: Sato Yukiko 佐藤有希子, “Dunhuang Tubo shiji pishanmen tianwang xiang kaocha 敦煌吐蕃時期毘沙門天王像考察[A Study of the Vaiśravaṇa Images at Dunhuang during the Tibetan Occupation],” trans. Niu Yuan 牛源, 敦煌研究[Dunhuang Research], no. 4 (2013), pl. 34.)

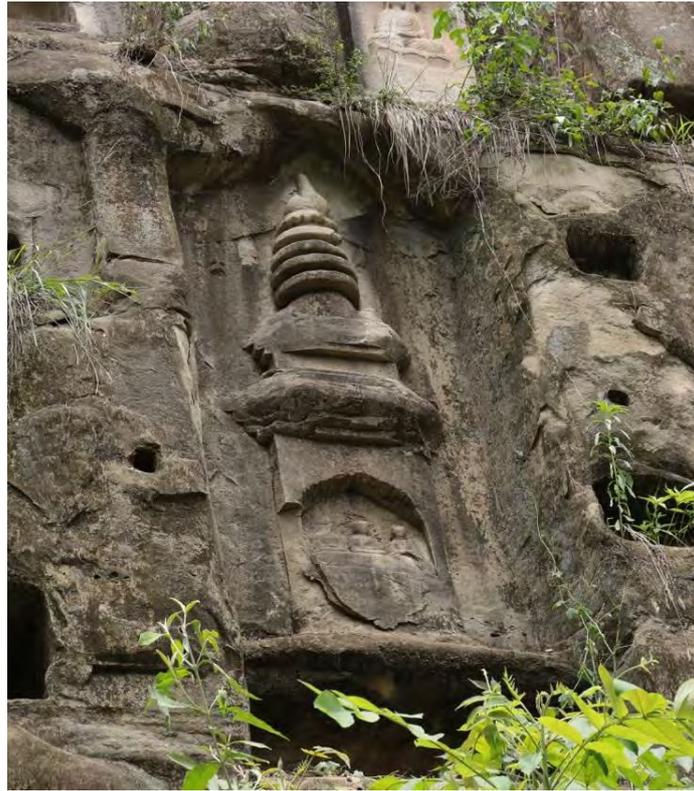


Figure 3. 67 Pagoda in Niche 165, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 235 cm, W. 97 cm, D. 55 cm. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 69 Pagoda in Niche 172, Nankan, Bazhong. H. 235 cm, W. 91 cm. Tang dynasty. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 68 Mortuary Stupa, Huoshenmiao, Zizhong, Neijiang, Sichuan. (Photography by Andrew Harris.)



Figure 3. 70 Mortuary Stupas, Baoshan, near Anyang, Henan. H. *circa* 1-1.5 m. seventh century. (Photography by Huang Wenzhi.)



Figure 3. 71 Xikan, Bazhong. Tang dynasty. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 72 Niches 32 and 31, Xikan, Bazhong. Tang dynasty. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 73 Niche 30, Beikan, Bazhong. H. 230 cm, W. 170 cm, D. 158 cm. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 74 Longmencun, Bazhong. Middle of eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 75 Shimensi, Bazhong. Middle of eighth century. (Photography by the author.)

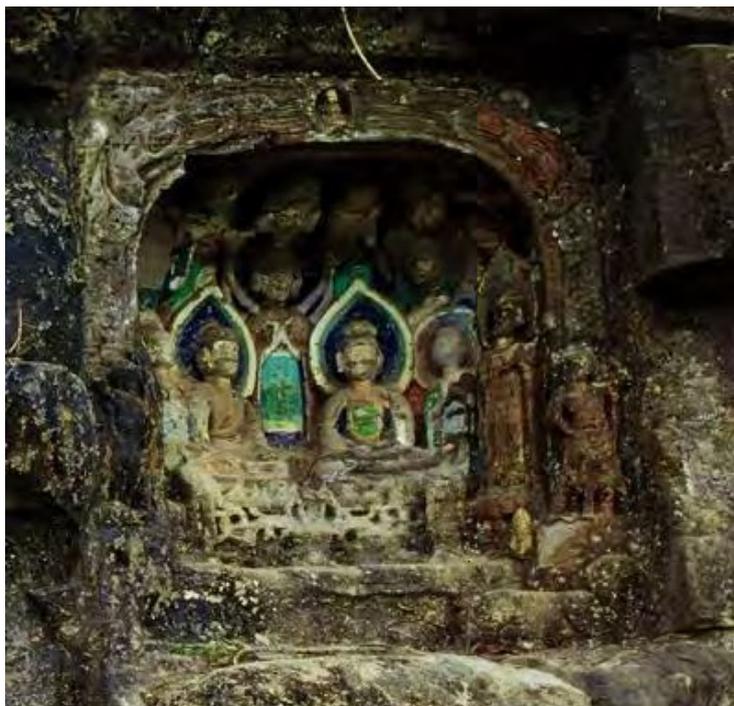


Figure 3.76 Paired Tianzun and Buddha in Niche 19 in Shimensi, Bazhong. H. 111 cm, W. 96 cm, D. 70 cm. Early seventh century. (From: Sichuan wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 435.)



Figure 3.77 Paired Tianzun and Buddha in Niche 23 in Beikan, Bazhong. H. 160 cm, W. 138 cm, D. 100 cm. Middle of eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 78 Paired Tianzun and Buddha in Niche 37 in Shimensi, Bazhong. H. 216 cm, W. 258 cm, D. 47 cm. Eighth century. (From: Sichuan wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 443.)



Figure 3. 79 Niches 1-8 in Shimensi, Bazhong. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 80 *Shenwang* in Niche 8 in Shuiningsi, Bazhong. H. 85 cm. Mid-eighth century.
(Photography by the author.)

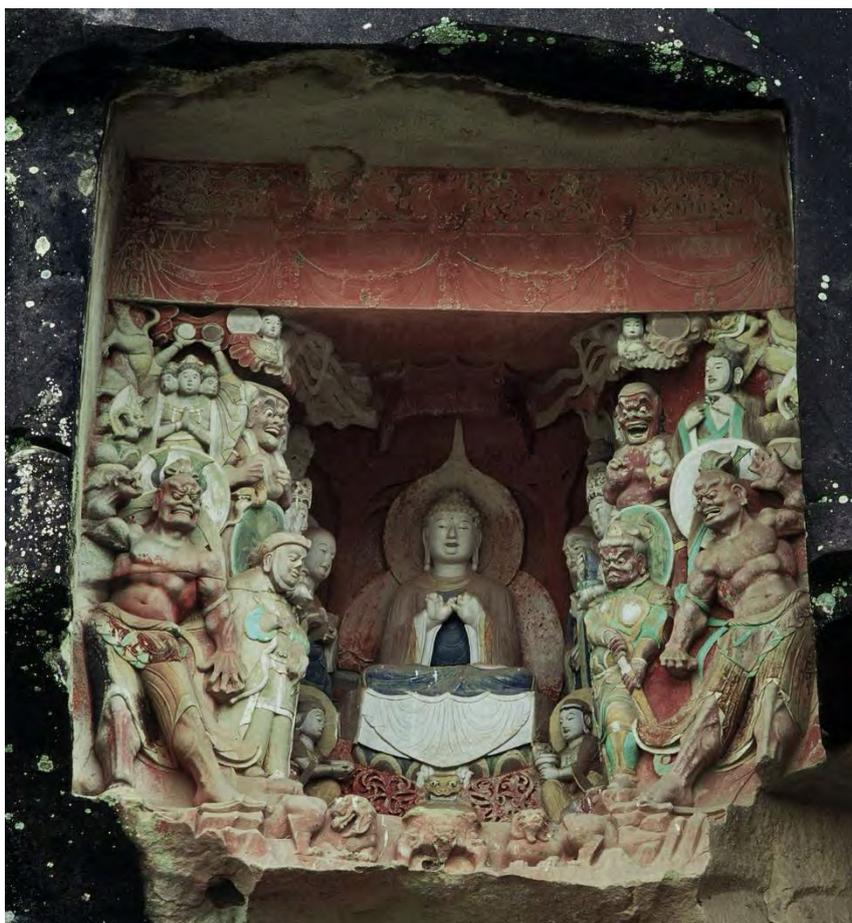


Figure 3. 81 Niche 8 in Shuiningsi, Bazhong. H. 220 cm, W. 210 cm, D. 187 cm. Mid-eighth century.
(Photography by the author.)

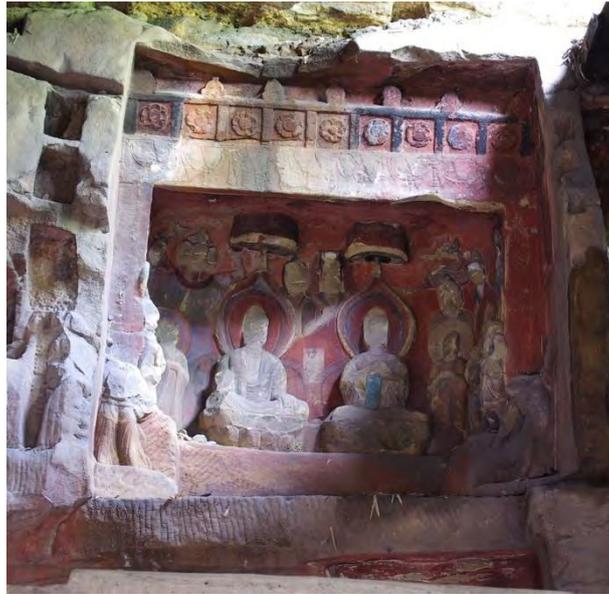


Figure 3. 82 Paired Tianzun and Buddha in Qianfoya, Tongjiang. Mid-eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 83 Details of the frame of Niche 14 in Xikan, Bazhong. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 84 Niche 6, Bairuxi, Tongjiang. H. 133 cm, W. 148 cm, D. 108 cm. Eighth century. (Photography by the author.)

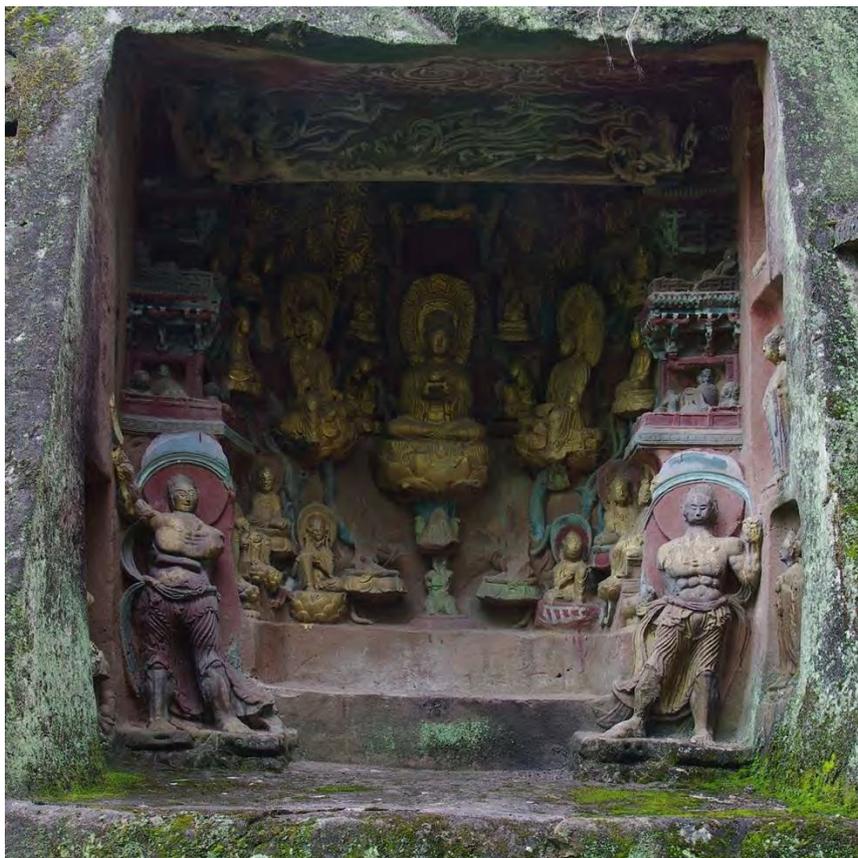


Figure 3. 85 Niche 1, Bairuxi, Tongjiang. H. 185 cm, W. 210 cm, D. 334 cm. Eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 86 Niche 53, Xikan, Bazhong. H. 284 cm, W. 250 cm, D. 200 cm. Mid-eighth century. (Photography by the author.)

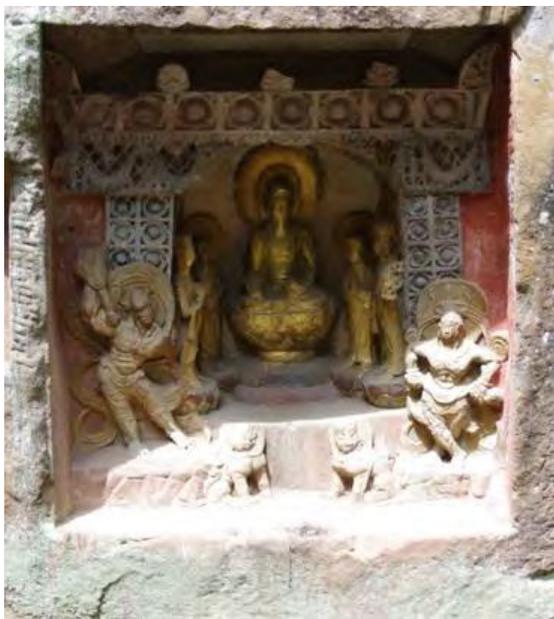


Figure 3. 87 Vajrapānis, Niche 11, Bairuxi, Tongjiang. H. 41 cm. Eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 88 Vajrapānis, Niche 2 in Shimensi, Bazhong. H. 110 cm. Mid-eighth century. (Photography by the author.)



Figure 3. 89 Tangjiaba, Dazhou, Sichuan. (From: Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Dazhou shi bowuguan 達州市博物館 [Dazhou Museum], *Sichuan sanjian Tang Song fodao kanku zonglu: Dazhou juan* 四川散見唐宋佛道龕窟總錄:達州卷 [Buddhist and Daoist Shrines and Grottoes from the Tang and Song Dynasties in Sichuan Province: Dazhou] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2017), fig. 52.)



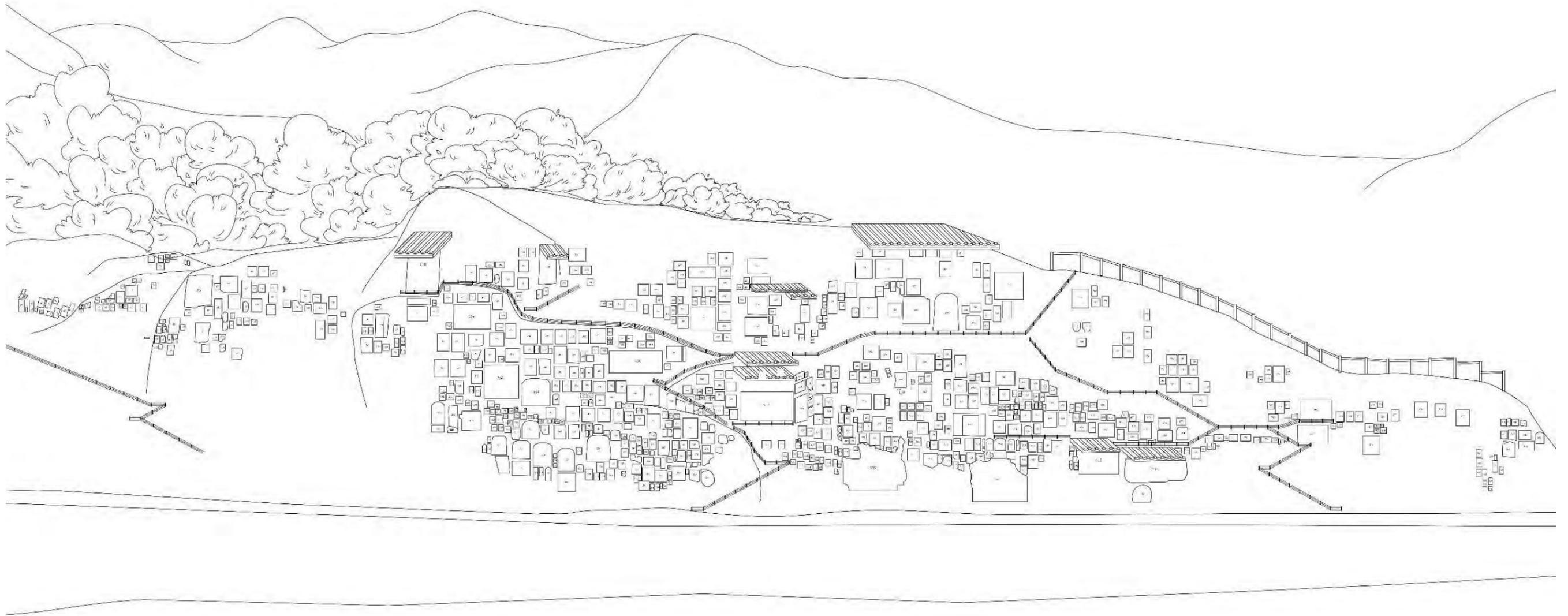
Figure 3. 90 Langyangsi, Dazhou, Sichuan. (From: Sichuan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiuyuan and Dazhou shi bowuguan, *Sichuan sanjian Tang Song fodao kanku neirong zonglu: Dazhou juan*, fig. 96-2.)



Figure 3. 91 Fo'eryan, Bazhong. Mid-eighth century. (From: Sichuan wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 490.)



Figure 3. 92 Niche 9 in Fo'eryan, Bazhong. Mid-eighth century. (From: Sichuan wenwu guanliju et al., *Bazhong shiku neirong zonglu*, 495.)



Elevation I Qianfoya in Guangyuan, drawn by the author



Elevation II Bazhong in Nankan, drawn by the author