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The Local and the Canonical: Pictures of the Wheel of Rebirth in Gansu and Sichuan

THE SPREAD OF THE WHEEL OF REBIRTH ACROSS ASIA

The standardized representation of the process of rebirth as a wheel with five or six spokes is scattered across the cultures of Asia. Pictures of the wheel usually have several distinct elements. In the hub are three animals (a bird, a snake, and a pig) representing the three poisons or three unwholesome roots of hatred, greed, and delusion. Around the center of the wheel are arrayed the five or six paths of rebirth: gods and humans (sometimes *asuras* are added) at the top, with animals, hungry ghosts, and the hell beings at the bottom. The outer ring of the circle contains symbols representing the twelve conditions in the chain of causation, or codependent origination (*pratītya samutpāda*), such as a blind man, supposed to represent ignorance, and a monkey, symbolizing consciousness. Grasping the wheel in his claws and his mouth is a large, menacing figure, usually called "The Great Demon of Impermanence." The final part of the composition, an indicator of release from suffering, usually stands outside the wheel. In some versions it is a white circle, a metaphor for *nirvāṇa*, while other versions contain a Buddha figure, a disciple, a bodhisattva, or poems about the virtues of renunciation. They all represent the cessation of suffering, an end to the forms of life and death enclosed within the wheel of *saṃsāra*.

The wheel of rebirth appears first in the historical record in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinayavibhaṅga*, a text on monastic discipline originally compiled between 100 and 300 AD and used by one of the schools of

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Indian Buddhism. It is also contained in a closely related collection of legends that build on the *vinaya*, the *Divyāvadāna*.[1] In the *vinaya* account, followers of the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni, are concerned that one of his disciples, Maudgalyāyana, is extremely successful in attracting large audiences. Crowds gather to hear Maudgalyāyana preach about the rewards and punishments wrought by karmic retribution that he has witnessed in his journeys to the realms of gods, ghosts, and hell beings. The people attending Maudgalyāyana's lectures are so moved by his storytelling that they all convert to Buddhism: they take refuge in the Three Jewels, adopt the morality of the lay Buddhist, and bring their friends and family members to hear Maudgalyāyana preach. Śākyamuni stipulates that, in place of Maudgalyāyana's performances, the wheel of rebirth should be painted on the porches of monasteries, and preachers should be stationed in front of the picture to explain it to lay audiences. The Buddha's instructions are very precise, detailing which symbols should be used to represent the three poisons in the center of the wheel, what objects are to be portrayed for the twelve (or, in some cases, eighteen) links in the chain of causation, and so forth.

The first surviving evidence that early monks actually followed this prescription is found on a wall-painting on the porch of Cave 17 at Ajaṇṭā, the late-fifth-century site in western India. There, the circle – with eight sections, not six – is indeed painted in the outer precincts of a *vihāra*-style cave (see figure 1).[2] As I have argued elsewhere, the

[1] *Genbenshuo yiqieyoubu pinaiye* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶 (*Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya vibhaṅga*), trans. Yijing 義淨 (635–712), in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, 100 volumes, edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎, Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, and Ono Gemmyō 小野玄妙 (1924–34; rpt. edn., Taibei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1974; hereafter abbreviated as *T*) no. 1442, 23, pp. 810c–11c. For a French translation, see Jean Przyluski, "La roue de la vie à Ajaṇṭā," *JA* 11th ser. 16 (1920), pp. 313–31. For a Japanese rendering, see Nishimoto Ryōsen 西本龍山, trans., "Konponsetsu issaiubu binaya" 根本說一切有部毘奈耶, in *Kokuyaku issaikyō, Indo senjutsu bu* 國譯一切經 印度撰述部, *Ritsu bu* 律部, vols. 19–21 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1975), pp. 654–56. For the date of Yijing's translation, see *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄, Zhisheng 智昇 (669–740), completed in 730, *T* no. 2154, 55:567c. For translations of the *Divyāvadāna* passage, see Bhikkhu Khantipalo, *The Wheel of Birth and Death*, The Wheel Publications, 147–49 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1970), pp. 11–14.

[2] My reading of the iconography of the wheel of rebirth at Ajaṇṭā is particularly indebted to Sadakane Keiji 定金計次, "Ajantā daijūshichikutsu no 'goshu shōjirin' hekiga: kakkuga no shudai hitei to shomondai" Ajantā 第17窟の五趣生死輪壁画－各区画の主題比定と諸問題, *Seinan Ajia kenkyū* 西南アジア研究 42 (March 1995), pp. 20–43. For other important studies, see Przyluski, "La roue de la vie à Ajaṇṭā"; Dieter Schlingloff, "Das Lebensrad in Ajaṇṭā," *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 25 (1971), pp. 324–34; idem, *Studies in the Ajaṇṭā Paintings: Identifications and Interpretations* (Delhi: Ajaṇṭā Publications, 1987), pp. 167–74; L. Augustine Waddell, "Buddha's Secret from a Sixth-Century Pictorial Commentary and Tibetan Tradition," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (April 1894), pp. 367–84; idem, "The Buddhist Pictorial Wheel of Life," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* 61.1, no. 3 (1892), pp. 133–55; and Monika Zin, *Devotionale und ornamentale Malereien*, 2 volumes, Ajaṇṭā: Handbuch der Malereien, 2 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 1:446–53.

Ajaṇṭā painting depicts the realm of the gods at the top, the realm of the humans subdivided into the four continents, and then the three lower paths of rebirth. Proceeding from the porch into the main hall of the cave-temple, cells for housing monks are laid out around the perimeter of a large, square room that is covered with various *jātaka* scenes. The most sacred space is at the rear of the temple, a separate chamber containing a statue of Śākyamuni. The cave was commissioned by a minister to the Vākāṭaka dynasty, a regime that sought to earn great religious merit and to display its righteousness by commissioning several luxurious caves at the site. Even though the caves at Ajaṇṭā were in all likelihood private, functioning as dynastic monuments, and not open to the public, it is still noteworthy that the placement of the wheel follows the architectural directive issued by the Buddha: it is painted near the entrance, on the first wall surface that a visitor would see when entering the temple.

The next appearance of the wheel is not in a picture but in a miracle text, the *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記, compiled in China late in the fifth century.[3] In that text, a jailed magistrate has a dream in which seeing the wheel of rebirth leads to his freedom.

Only later in Chinese history, in the year 703, would the canonical *vinaya* account become translated into Chinese by Yijing 義淨 (635–713) in a work titled *Genbenshuo yiqieyoubu pinaiye* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶. Prior to Yijing, four other versions of the *vinaya* were circulating in China, none of which contained any reference to a wheel of rebirth. The Mūlasarvāstivāda account seems to have become authoritative later, since it is cited in a monastic compendium, *Shishi yaolan* 釋氏要覽, written in the eleventh century.[4]

Early visual evidence of the wheel of rebirth in China is confined to two sites: the cave-temple complex at Yulin 榆林 (Gansu), which contains a wall-painting commissioned in 926 by a group of thirty lay donors, and the massive pilgrimage site at Baodingshan 寶頂山 near Dazu 大足 (Chongqing Municipality, formerly Sichuan), which contains

[3] The *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記 account, by Wang Yan 王琰 (ca. 454–501), is collated in Lu Xun 魯迅, *Gu xiaoshuo gouchen* 古小說鉤沉, in *Lu Xun quanji* 魯迅全集 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1973), pp. 620–21. Lu relies on the citation of the tale in *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林, Daoshi 道世 (d. 683), *T* no. 2122, 53:459b–c.

[4] The wheel is described in the section entitled "The Wheel of Birth and Death in the Five Paths" ("Wuqu shengsi lun" 五趣生死輪), sandwiched between discussions of wall-paintings in monasteries and the ornamentation of statues; *Shishi yaolan* 釋氏要覽 (1019), Daocheng 道誠 (ca. 1017–1021), *T* no. 2127, 54: 303c–4a. For Daocheng's biography, see Zhongguo fojiao renming dacidian bianji weiyuanhui 中國佛教人名大辭典編輯委員會, ed., *Zhongguo fojiao renming dacidian, Zhenhua Fashi yigao* 中國佛教人名大辭典, 震華法師遺稿 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1999), pp. 823b-24a.

a large relief-sculpture completed in the first half of the thirteenth century. (These two sites are discussed in detail, below.) It is also possible that the wheel of rebirth was painted on the porches of monasteries in the Tang capitals in the eighth and ninth centuries. However, none of the surviving literary descriptions of paintings in metropolitan temples (for example, *Tangchao minghua lu* 唐朝名畫錄, *Sita ji* 寺塔記) mentions the wheel of rebirth, and the few structures that do survive from the Tang do not contain paintings of the wheel. It is also possible that the wheel of rebirth was painted in the wooden antechambers to medieval cave-temples. Although none of these antechambers is still in existence, it is possible that they functioned as an entryway into the cave-temple proper.

In Central Asia, along the northern Silk Road in the ancient kingdom of Kucha, a small meditation-cave at Kumtura contains two small renditions of the wheel of rebirth. The town of Kumtura (Kumutula 庫木吐拉 in Chinese), is located sixteen miles southwest of the modern city of Kucha (modern Chinese: Kuche 庫車) in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. The cave, discovered by a team research team from Peking University in 1979, was probably built in the second half of the ninth century as a memorial to a Chinese monk, perhaps by a local Kuchean or Uighur family. The two small wheels painted on the side-wall of the cave are shown between rows of meditating monks.[5]

The wheel is referred to by a number of different terms. The *Divyāvadāna* refers to it as *pañcagaṇḍakacakra*, "the wheel with five sections." The Chinese *vinaya* calls it *wuqu shengsi lun* 五趣生死輪, "wheel of birth and death in the five paths." And Sanskrit fragments of a similar *vinaya* classify it as a *maṇḍala*, using the expression *saṃsāracakrasyamaṇḍala*, "circle of the wheel of rebirth."[6]

[5] For studies of the cave, see: Chao Huashan, 晁華山, "Kumutula shiku de dongku fenlei yu siyuan zuhe" 庫木吐拉石窟的洞窟分類與寺院組合, in *Kuche Kumutula shiku* 庫車庫木吐拉石窟, edited by Xinjiang Weiwu'er zizhiqu bowuguan 新疆維吾爾自治區博物館 and Xinjiang renmin chubanshe 新疆人民出版社 (Shanghai: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, Shanghai meishu chubanshe, 1992), pp. 239–40; Jia Yingyi 賈應逸, and Musha Maimaiti 目沙買買提, "Lishi hualang, Kumutula bihua yanjiu" 歷史畫廊庫木吐拉 壁畫研究, in *Kumutula* 庫木吐拉, edited by Zhongguo bihua bianji weiyuanhui 中國壁畫編輯委員會, Zhongguo meishu fenlei quanji 中國美術分類全集, Zhongguo Xinjiang bihua quanji 中國新疆壁畫全集, 4 (Urumqi: Xinjiang meishu sheying chubanshe, 1995), pp. 18–19; Liang Zhixiang 梁志祥 and Ding Mingyi 丁明夷, "Xinjiang Kumutula xin faxian de jichu dongku" 新疆庫木吐喇新發現的幾處洞窟, *WW* 1985.5 (1985):3–4; Shinkyō Uiguru jichiku bunbutsu kanri iinkai 新疆ウイグル自治区文物管理委員会, Kusha-ken bunbutsu hokanjo 庫車県文物保管所, eds., *Kumutora sekkutsu* クムトラ石窟, *Chūgoku sekkutsu* 中國石窟 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1985), pp. 230–31, 254–56, 318; and *Kumutula*, p. 81.

[6] See Bernard Pauly, "Fragments sanskrits de Haute Asie (Mission Pelliot)," *JA* 248.2 (1959), pp. 228–40; analyzed also in Zin, *Devotionale und ornamentale Malereien*, 1: 444–45.

In Tibet the wheel of rebirth was known as early as the ninth century through the translation of the *vinaya*. In western Tibet, a wheel of rebirth along with the canonical lines of verse was painted on the walls of Tabo Monastery (Himachal Pradesh, India) in the eleventh century.[7] Some time after that, the wheel of rebirth became nearly universal in Tibetan Buddhist culture. Most modern Tibetan temples contain a wall painting of the wheel of rebirth located on an outside wall, and hundreds of *thangka*s depicting the wheel of rebirth survive from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. In the conclusion of this study I consider some of the contrasts between wheels of rebirth in China and Tibet.

My discussion here concentrates on a relatively small body of material: the visual evidence for the wheel of rebirth in China. I focus on the two sites of Yulinku and Baodingshan. In a forthcoming book I look more broadly at the wheel in India, Central Asia, and China, with some reflections on Tibetan and Japanese examples.[8] Here I want to focus on the problem of the local and the canonical in China and to ask several questions. How was the tradition of the wheel of rebirth disseminated? What is the significance of the different versions of the wheel? What is the status of local variation? In what sense can the painting of the wheel be considered "canonical"? Where was the wheel located in temples, and why was it located there? What is the architectural significance of the different versions of the wheel? Who viewed the wheel? Who paid to have it painted? Who painted it and chiseled it?

GANSU

The cave-temples carved into the cliffs at Yulin (near Anxi in Gansu province) preserve the earliest indisputable painting of the wheel of rebirth in China. Commissioned in the early-tenth century, the program of paintings in Yulin Cave 19 offers a unique interpreta-

[7] For a thorough study, see Deborah Klimburg-Salter, *Tabo: A Lamp for the Kingdom, Early Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Art in the Western Himalaya* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), pp. 77–89.

[8] For further documentation for the evidence cited in this overview, see Stephen F. Teiser, *Paintings of the Wheel of Rebirth in Medieval Buddhist Temples* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, forthcoming); idem (Taishi Wen 太史文), "Difangxing yu jingdianxing: zai Gansu Sichuan jingnei faxian de liudao lunhui tu" 地方性與經典性, 在甘肅四川境內發現的六道輪迴圖, in *Fojiao wuzhi wenhua, siyuan caifu yu shisu gongyang* 佛教物質文化寺院財富與世俗供養 (*Buddhist Material Culture: Monastic Wealth and Secular Offerings*), *Guoji yantaohui lunwenji* 國際研討會論文集, ed. Hu Suxin 胡宿馨 (Shanghai: Shanghai Fine Arts Publishers, 2003), pp. p. 221–245; and idem, "Enkan to sen: Bukkyō ni okeru shi no kikagaku" 円環と線仏教における死の幾何学, translated by Maegawa Ken'ichi, *Shiseigaku kenkyū* 死生学研究 (Fall 2004): 120–27.

tion of the *vinaya* account: the wheel of rebirth is positioned opposite a tableau depicting Maudgalyāyana's tour of hell. The designers of the cave thus seem to be invoking the canon, in which the Buddha directs monks to paint a wheel of rebirth in place of Maudgalyāyana delivering lectures. Although the cave-temple did not serve as a public temple or residence for monks, the placement of the wheel adheres to the Buddha's prescription that such teaching devices be painted near the entrance to the temple.

The wheel is painted on the southern wall of a corridor leading to the antechamber of Yulin Cave 19.[9] Fully half of the surviving painting was destroyed by the cutting of a passageway through the corridor in modern times. Nevertheless, enough of the standard iconography is preserved to show that the subject of the painting is beyond dispute: a hub in the center of the wheel, the five paths around that, the normative symbols for the chain of causation, and the demon holding the entire wheel in his mouth. In addition to these canonical citations, local readings are also apparent in the painting: two more rings are added outside the rim of causation, and hell scenes are painted outside the wheel (see figure 2). Opposite the wheel, on the north wall of the corridor, is the Maudgalyāyana story. The corridor leads into an antechamber containing wall paintings of various deities who serve as protectors of the Buddhist Law. The antechamber is connected to the main chamber by a second, shorter, corridor. In and around this short passageway are located the inscriptions and some of the portraits depicting the donors of the cave. A group of lay people commissioned the cave in 926. Nearly forty years later, between 962 and 964, the cave was rededicated by the local ruler, Cao Yuanzhong 曹元忠, whose portrait occupies the position of honor in the corridor leading to the main chamber. Judging from the remains of a square altar, the main chamber of the cave originally housed several statues. Its walls were decorated with scenes of various paradises as well as a narrative that

[9] The wheel of rebirth at Yulin is discussed in Zhang Boyuan 張伯元, "Anxi Yulinku 'liudao lunhui tu' kaoshi" 安西榆林窟六道輪回圖考釋, *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 1998.1 (1998): 20–23. For the Maudgalyāyana murals and the cave as a whole, see Fan Jinshi 樊錦詩 and Mei Lin 梅林, "Yulinku di shijiuku Mulian bianxiang kaoshi" 榆林窟第十九窟目蓮變相考釋, in *Duan Wenjie Dunhuang yanjiu wushinian jinian wenji* 段文傑敦煌研究五十年紀念文集, edited by Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院 (Beijing: Shijie tushu chuban gongsi, 1996), pp. 46–60; idem, "An Interpretation of the Maudgalyayana Murals in Cave 19 at Yulin," *Orientations* 27.10 (Nov. 1996): 70–75. Very few of the paintings in Yulin Cave 19 have been published to date; in addition to the two studies by Fan and Mei (above), see the donor portraits in Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院, ed., *Anxi Yulinku* 安西榆林窟, Zhongguo shiku 中國石窟 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1997), pls. 62–63; and the wheel of rebirth in Fan Jinshi 樊錦詩, ed., *Dunhuang shiku* 敦煌石窟, *Three Great Caves of the Dunhuang Grottoes* (Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua chubanshe, 1998), p. 117.

may have likened Śāriputra's defeat of non-Buddhist magicians to the support of Buddhism offered by the Cao family.

The Cao family was involved in many of the large-scale projects engineered in Guazhou 瓜州 and Shazhou 沙洲 in the tenth century. They were responsible for the commissioning of over seventy caves: forty-two at Mogaoku 莫高窟 (Dunhuang) and twenty-eight at Yulinku 榆林窟.[10] Their power as local governors depended on military might as well as a careful orchestration of relations with the successive ruling houses of the Chinese state and with foreign peoples. They maintained a Chinese administrative system and received nearly unbroken support from the weakened Chinese state. The Cao family was related by marriage to the rulers of Khotan and maintained close military ties with them. Cao Yuanzhong, whose rule over Hexi was strongest and longest, followed the lead of Khotan in breaking with the Song court. The Caos also entered marriage alliances with the Uighur kingdom in Ganzhou, to the east of Guazhou. They established friendly relations with the Uighurs of Xizhou and with the Liao and Jin peoples. Cao Yuanzhong was a heavy supporter of the copying and dissemination of Buddhist texts, and he built and renovated cave-temples in both Mogaoku and Yulinku. The Caos instituted an academy in Shazhou for the training of artists who worked at the local cave-temples; it was similar to the professional academies in the capital supported by the Chinese court.[11]

The Caos were not alone in these endeavors. Lay Buddhists in the area banded together to commission their own caves as a group. Other lay Buddhists acted as individuals to pay for the copying of scriptures. A recently compiled tally of all texts known to have been copied in Dunhuang between 918 and 985 provides an interesting picture of tenth-century interests.[12] Out of forty-eight physical copies of texts recorded during that period, thirty were not contained in the official canon of the time as defined by Zhisheng's (669–740) *Catalogue of the Buddhist Teachings during the Kaiyuan Era* (*Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄).[13] Some of the texts are copies of the *Heart* and *Diamond* sūtras. Others are the

[10] See Duan Wenjie 段文杰, "Yulinku de bihua yishu" 榆林窟的壁畫藝術, in *Anxi Yulinku* 安西榆林窟, edited by Dunhuang yanjiuyuan, Zhongguo shiku 中國石窟 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1997), pp. 167–70.

[11] Ibid., p. 162.

[12] See the listing in Rong Xinjiang榮新疆, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu: Tang Song shidai Dunhuang lishi kaosuo* 歸義軍史研究 唐宋時代敦煌歷史考索 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996), pp. 277–78; based largely on Ikeda On 池田温, *Chūgoku kodai shahon shikigo shūroku* 中國古代寫本識語集錄, Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo sōkan 東洋文化研究所叢刊, 11 (Tokyo: Tōkyō daigaku tōyō bunka kenkyūjo, 1990).

[13] See *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄, Zhisheng 智昇 (669–740), *T* no. 215.

chapter of the *Lotus* sūtra detailing the compassion of Avalokiteśvara, while others deal with the goddess Marīci. Some are copies of monastic lectures on standard Buddhist sūtras or texts extolling filial piety and general morality. The vast majority of texts on the list, however, are concerned with the practice of basic Buddhist rituals: confession and chanting, curing, averting evil, funerals, memorial rites, casting spells, attaining long life, celebrating festivals, and the lay Buddhist practice of fasting.

Yulin Cave 19 is consistent with the picture of Buddhism sketched above. Inscriptions in the cave indicate two major periods of activity. The cave was originally commissioned in 926 by a group of lay donors, many of them lower-ranking members of the local administration, led by a monk named Daoshou 道首. Their dedication, now partly effaced, was inscribed above the doorway of the corridor leading to the main chamber of the cave.[14] It is dated "the fifteenth day of the first month of the fourth year of Tongguang of the Great Tang" (March 1, 926). It includes the vow, "May our parents be reborn together ..." and mentions Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya. Twice it refers to "thirty people." Donor portraits are painted inside the main chamber on the south and west walls; they total thirty males and fourteen females. They wear Five Dynasties style clothing, similar to the portraits in Yulin Cave 12. Thus, in all likelihood the cave was begun by a group of thirty Buddhist laymen and their families in the year 926.

The second major period of activity at the cave was 962–964. In the corridor leading to the main chamber are two large donor portraits, with inscriptions. The one on the south (right) wall pictures Cao Yuanzhong and his son. The cartouche reads, "Offered with a single mind by Cao Yuanzhong, Investigatory Supporter of the State, Protector of the Garrison, Meritorious Minister, Appointed as Military Commissioner of the Returning to Righteousness Army, Lord Especially Advanced, Acting Grand Preceptor, Concurrently Secretariat Director, Dynasty-Founding Duke of Qiao Commandery." The cartouche beside his son reads, "His son, Yanlu 延祿, Court Gentleman for Ceremonial Service." On the north (left) wall of the corridor is a portrait of Cao Yuanzhong's wife, née Zhai 翟, and their oldest daughter. The official and honorific titles for Cao Yuanzhong are consistent with those claimed for him in other dedications dating between 962 and 964.[15] Hence I date the

[14] For transcriptions of the inscriptions discussed below, see Xie Zhiliu 謝稚柳, *Dunhuang yishu xulu* 敦煌藝術敘錄 (1957; reprint: Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996), pp. 457–62; and Zhang Boyuan 張伯元, *Anxi Yulinku* 安西榆林窟 (Chengdu: Sichuan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995), pp. 214–19.

[15] See Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, pp. 113–22; and Ji Xianlin 季羨林, ed., *Dunhuangxue*

rededication of the cave by Cao to this three-year period. The relationship between the Caos and the earlier donors is not explicit. The portraits of the Cao family occupy the position of honor in the cave, as far as donor portraits are concerned, and their images are larger than the rest (with Cao's slightly larger than his wife's). This would suggest the Caos' preeminence as donors. The portraits of the earlier donors were left undisturbed in the main chamber, and there are no obvious signs of repainting or redesign of the iconographical program. Thus, in all likelihood the cave was largely completed in 926 by the earlier group – many of whom served as minor officials under Cao Yijin 曹議金 – and rededicated between 962 and 964 under the patronage of Cao Yijin's son, Cao Yuanzhong.

Having discussed the history of the region and the dating of the cave, I proceed, below, to analyze the iconographic program and architectural design of the cave. Figure 3 depicts the pictorial program of the cave.

The main chamber of Yulin Cave 19 is large and square, with a nearly square, raised platform in its center. The platform originally was the base for a set of statues now lost. Most likely they were a set of three, five, or seven figures, with Śākyamuni Buddha in the center. The ceiling above the statues is in the shape of a dome. This coffered style of ceiling is thought to be a method of mimicking the way in which canopies were hung over Buddha statues in medieval Chinese temples.[16] The size and location of the altar imply that one of the major religious activities that took place there involved the worship of the main Buddha image. Offerings could be presented at an altar in front of the dais, and participants could circumambulate the image in a clockwise direction (that is, keeping the right side, the honored side, toward the Buddha).

The north wall of the cave contains the first set of images a person would see after making offerings, bowing, and beginning to circumambulate, hence its content can be read as preparation for the paradise scenes depicted on the south wall. The north wall is composed of two basic programs. The first depicts scenes from the various sūtras describing the activities of Bhaiṣajyaguru Bodhisattva (Yaoshiwang pusa 藥師王菩薩). Bhaiṣajyaguru is best known for granting long life to his

dacidian 敦煌學大辭典 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1998), s.v. "Cao Yuanzhong 曹元忠."

[16] See Xiao Mo 蕭默, *Dunhuang jianzhu yanjiu* 敦煌建築研究 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), pp. 44–50.

devotees, saving them from misfortune, and curing sickness. Paintings typically portray the ritual activities of his cult: the lighting of sets of seven seven-tiered lamps and the unfurling of banners. Although only some of the painting at Yulin Cave 19 is legible, it appears to depict Bhaiṣajyaguru's paradise. The matching of an Amitābha paradise with a Bhaiṣajyaguru paradise is a common theme in medieval Chinese cave-temples. As Ning has suggested for the late-Tang dynasty, both scenes were ways of representing pure realms, and this mirroring effect reinforced the sense of paradise.[17] The second program on the north wall is a set of scenes from *The Scripture on Repaying Kindness* (*Bao'en jing* 報恩經). This Chinese apocryphon weaves together basic Buddhist teachings in the format of a sūtra narrative focused on the traditional Chinese concerns of filial piety and the duties owed to one's superiors and rulers. It emphasizes ethical values and the fulfillment of social roles. As a whole, then, the north wall can be regarded as a way of filling out the transcendent realm depicted on the south wall. Performing rituals that invoke the help of Bhaiṣajyaguru Bodhisattva and following the ethical precepts appropriate to lay life are part of achieving rebirth in paradise.

The paintings on the south wall of Yulin Cave 19 set the tone for the entire cave. The wall is divided in two, the front side depicting scenes of Amitābha Buddha's paradise, the rear, scenes from *The Scripture of the God Asking Questions* (*Tian qingwen jing* 天請問經). Amitābha's paradise is one of the most popular scenes in medieval Chinese art; at Dunhuang alone, over 215 caves are dominated by it. Although the current state of Yulin Cave 19 does not allow a scene-by-scene analysis, enough of the painting is visible to identify it as a depiction of the pure land of Amitābha in the west. This land of almost complete happiness is filled with cooling ponds, lush trees, lotus flowers, and soothing music. It is portrayed as a kind of palace or temple, with Amitābha Buddha (Emituo Fo 阿彌陀佛) reigning and two bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara (Guanshiyin 觀世音) and Mahāsthāmaprāpta (Dashizhi 大勢至), assisting him. As a pure land, it stands in contrast to all of the woes and impurities of sentient existence. It is transcendent and free from suffering. Once one is reborn there, according to the daily prayers and canonical texts of medieval Buddhism, one is assured a speedy entrance into final deliverance. Amitābha's paradise is thus as far along the path as many practitioners could hope to get, or as close to the ultimate as artists could hope to depict. The rear portion of the south wall contains

[17] See Qiang Ning, *Art, Religion, and Politics in Medieval China: The Dunhuang Cave of the Zhai Family* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), chap. 1.

scenes in which a god visits the Buddha, worships him, asks questions and receives answers, and departs. The questions and the answers outline some of the key teachings of Buddhism: the four truths, the six perfections, the precepts for lay life, and so on. The surroundings of the Buddha in many such paintings often look like the palaces in pure land paintings, with thrones, halls, towers, and ponds. One could thus argue that the painting of *The Scripture of the God Asking Questions* resonates pictorially with the scenes of Amitābha's paradise beside it. Its doctrinal message is also congruent with that of its neighbor: in the face of suffering caused by desire and ignorance, one should seek rebirth in a realm that transcends impurity.

The eastern (rear) wall of the main chamber is different in tone from the main walls, but its content no less interesting. It is a scene of Śāriputra doing battle with the heterodox teacher, Raudrākṣa. The story, which also circulated in the form of a popular entertainment involving singing, reciting, and pictures, may well be related to the sponsorship of the cave.[18] The narrative is set at the time of Śākyamuni. It begins with the disciple of the Buddha, Śāriputra, convincing Sudatta (namely, Anāthapiṇḍada), a minister to the king of Śrāvastī (King Prasenajit), to donate a large park for the use of Śākyamuni and his disciples. Hearing that the Buddha is about to receive a grant from such a powerful patron, six other non-Brahmanical teachers, led by Raudrākṣa, raise objections. It is decided that the conflict will be settled by a battle of magical abilities, with Śāriputra representing the Buddhists and Raudrākṣa representing the other heterodox traditions. The match lasts for six rounds, in each of which Śāriputra's conjurings vanquish those of Raudrākṣa. Raudrākṣa's magical mountain is reduced to rubble by Śāriputra's diamond deity; his fierce buffalo is defeated by Śāriputra's lion; his ornately decorated pond is sucked dry by Śāriputra's white elephant; his poisonous dragon is gobbled up by Śāriputra's king of birds; his fire-breathing monsters lose to Śāriputra's Vaiśravana; and his huge tree is blown over by the god of wind invoked by Śāriputra. With Raudrākṣa's final defeat, all six heretical leaders become followers of the Buddha, and Sudatta proceeds with the donation of land to the Buddhists.

The concerns of the story are manifold. The most striking visual characteristics have to do with magical abilities, battles of prowess, the marshalling of cosmic forces, the control of huge and hideous beasts,

[18] For a translation of the *bianwen* (transformation text) on Śāriputra defeating the demons, see Victor H. Mair, trans., *Tun-huang Popular Narratives*, Cambridge Studies in Chinese History, Literature, and Institutions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 30–84.

and the deeds of gods and heroes. The winner is defined not by brute physical strength, but rather by the overpowering nature of the minions whom he can invoke. The painting depicts the victory of Buddhism over other religions; it justifies the support of Buddhism by the state and, more specifically, by the wealthy minister to the ruler. Given the time period when it was painted and its positioning behind the Buddha-altar and the paradise scenes, I would hypothesize that this wall-painting may also refer to the sponsorship of Buddhist activities by the Cao family. Placed at the back of the cave, the painting suggests, literally, behind-the-scenes support for Buddhism by the preeminent local official.

The west wall of the main chamber is bisected by a corridor. On one side is a scene of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva (Puxian pusa 普賢菩薩), on the other a scene of Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva (Wenshu pusa 文殊菩薩), a common pairing for the west wall of caves at Yulin.[19]

As noted above, portraits of the original group of donors are contained in the front half of the main chamber, that is, on the western half of both the southern and northern walls, and on the western wall. Donor portraits of Cao Yuanzhong and his wife, and of their son and daughter, are painted in the corridor that connects the main chamber to the antechamber.

The iconographic program in the antechamber is less complicated and more generic than that of the main chamber. The southern and northern walls contain paintings of the four heavenly kings (*catasraḥ mahārājikāḥ, sitianwang* 四天王) and of a Buddha preaching. In Buddhist mythology the four heavenly kings reside on Mount Sumeru, each guarding one of the four directions. They are assigned the responsibility of protecting the Buddha's teaching after the demise of Śākyamuni. They are majestic and more powerful than human beings, and hence they serve as effective protectors of Buddhism. Nevertheless, they have not yet entered the path of renunciation or found a way to conquer rebirth. The east wall of the antechamber contains pictures of *nāgas*, mirrored by more scenes of preaching on the west wall. As a species, *nāgas* rank slightly below heavenly kings but play a similar role: enlisted by the Buddha, these powerful creatures help to advance the cause of Buddhism.

The long corridor leading from the entrance of the cave to the antechamber contains the wheel of rebirth on the south side (the right side as one enters) and scenes from the story of Maudgalyāyana on the left side. Both walls have suffered much from decay, and nearly half

[19] The pairing of Samantabhadra and Mañjuśrī also occurs in Yulin Cave 25, for instance.

of the wheel is now lost. As noted above, the wheel contains several of the canonical elements (see figure 2). The center of the wheel is badly damaged, but seems to contain a lone figure. In the second ring around that, three paths out of an original six are visible. In the top path one can see the sun and a person. Based on its position as the uppermost of the six paths, this must have been the realm of the gods. On the right side of the middle path are visible a dwelling and two figures, probably a seated Buddha and a disciple. This path probably represents the realm of humans. In the one remaining path, at bottom left, the outline of a horse can be made out, indicating the path of animals.

The links in the chain of causation are represented in the next ring of the wheel, although the current state of the painting makes it difficult to be very precise. In the eight visible segments (presumably out of an original ring composed of eighteen), I propose the following identifications, starting at the top and moving counterclockwise:

1. person in cangue?
2. old person with cane?
3. woman holding child (=desire)?
4. old woman and young person?
5. corpse on platform (=death)?
6. three people sitting on ground?
7. old man and young person?
8. woman?

What I am calling segments three and five appear to follow the canonical symbols for representing desire and death, respectively. However, there are two problems with this interpretation. One is that the segments do not follow the prescribed order for the twelve or eighteen links. The other is that they run counterclockwise, which could be unusual but which parallels the direction of movement in the next ring. Alternative interpretations, however, do not hold up any better.[20]

The next ring in the wheel contains a representation without any apparent precedent in the history of Buddhism. We see at the top of this ring, running counterclockwise, a horizontal figure moving through what looks like a barrel. The barrel obscures the trunk of the body, leaving exposed the figure's head and arms on one side and legs on the other. The head is that of a human, the legs those of a deer. Similarly,

[20] Zhang ("Anxi Yulinku 'liudao lunhui tu' kaoshi," p. 21) proposes that the segments of this ring correspond to each of the six paths in the next inner ring. According to him, the cycle of causation is pictured in the outermost circle. His individual identifications sometimes make sense (man throwing rope around woman = touch), but many of them have no precedent in either visual or textual evidence.

near the 10 o'clock position, we see another figure with human head and animal tail. The *vinaya* text on the wheel of rebirth contains directions to paint humans with either their heads or their feet sticking out of buckets, indicating their progress (upward) or failure (downward) in their next rebirth. This ring in the wheel may be an interpretation of that directive. In any event, the painting here reinforces the notion of repetition, since the circle has no beginning or end. It draws particular attention to the notion of interspecies migration, the tenet that one will be reborn into a different form of life in one's next rebirth. The general idea was, of course, well known. In the wheel of rebirth at Yulin, animals are being reborn as human beings, and the process is represented as one of continual passage, moving through one tunnel after another. (The same motif reappears in Sichuan; see below.)

The outer ring of the wheel is more resistant to interpretation. Some thirteen out of an original twenty-four segments still remain, though all are faded or have suffered damage. All but one of them contains a female figure, some of whom wear caps and are flanked by attendants. They all clasp their hands together in a gesture of respect, and they all face the center of the composition. These visual details suggest that the entire composition might be iconic in form, that is, centered on the presence of a holy figure in the center of the wall painting.

Like the canonical wheel, the wheel at Yulin is grasped by a large demon whose eyes and claws are visible at the top of the wheel. Around the outside of the wheel are several scenes (six by my count), some of which deal specifically with hell and rebirth.[21] To the right of the demon's head is a monk in meditation, seated in front of a more majestic figure. To the far left of the demon's head in the corner is a group of three figures, seated and facing a larger figure. Below them is a standard depiction of hell as a walled city. In front of the wall is a cart, pulled by an ox and trailing banners. The iconography of the banners and the walled city suggests that this scene depicts the arrival of a recently deceased person at the underground prisons. Below them is the fourth scene. It begins with a small bridge at the circumference of the wheel and leads to a figure standing before a mirror and a seated figure with a halo. The bridge from this world to the next is usually located in the second court of purgatory in medieval Chinese Buddhism. The mirror shown outside the wheel is the Mirror of Deeds (or *karma* mirror, *yejing* 業鏡), which appears in the fifth court of purgatory, ruled by

[21] Zhang ("Anxi Yulinku 'liudao lunhui tu' kaoshi," p. 21) reads these scenes as the four kinds of sacred beings: *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, bodhisattvas, and buddhas.

King Yama (Yanluo wang 閻羅王). This is also the traditional location for Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva (Dizang pusa 地藏菩薩), who specializes in saving people from the dictates of retribution. Together with the scene just above it, these two scenes outside the wheel of rebirth narrate the arrival of the deceased spirit in the city of hell, the passage across the river of the underworld, judgment in front of King Yama's *karma* mirror, and the hope of deliverance by Kṣitigarbha. It is also possible that all of these scenes are connected to the story of Maudgalyāyana shown on the opposite wall. The first scene might picture Maudgalyāyana as a disciple of the Buddha, the second scene could be Maudgalyāyana perfecting his meditative abilities, the third scene could be his arrival in hell, and the fourth scene his encounter with King Yama. The fifth scene shows a large, seated monk with two smaller figures, and the sixth scene depicts a figure seated on a platform, but both scenes are too faded to identify precisely. The scenes to the right of the wheel (now destroyed) might have portrayed other events in the afterlife, adding grisly and entertaining details about the lower paths of rebirth, elaborating on rebirth in the heavens, or spelling out the process of judgment between lifetimes.

Facing the wheel of rebirth, on the north wall of the corridor, is a painting of the story of Maudgalyāyana. Until recently the painting was considered simply a generic hell scene, but Fan Jinshi and Mei Lin showed conclusively in 1996 that the scenes narrate the exploits of Maudgalyāyana.[22] The specific tale told in this painting is not the story about Maudgalyāyana attracting crowds with his tours of the underworld, as related in the charter myth for the wheel of rebirth in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*. Nor is it the story of Maudgalyāyana's discipleship under the Buddha, nor the narrative of his meditative powers. Instead, the scenes tell the story about Maudgalyāyana best known in China during the medieval period: the legend of how he endured the worst chambers of hell in order to release his mother from the tortures of karmic retribution. While based on some Indian elements, this version of the Maudgalyāyana legend was constructed in China in conjunction with the celebration of the Ghost Festival of the seventh month. According to legend, the Buddha established the Ghost Festival so that lay people could bring salvation to their parents by making offerings to monks, following the model enacted by Maudgalyāyana. The mythology of the Ghost Festival circulated among all social classes and

[22] Fan and Mei, "Yulinku dishijiuku Mulian bianxiang kaoshi"; and idem, "An Interpretation of the Maudgalyayana Murals in Cave 19 at Yulin."

in many different media, including apocryphal sūtras, commentaries, transformation texts, and images.

Fan and Mei tie the scenes in Yulin Cave 19 to the version of the Maudgalyāyana story contained in transformation texts. They specify ten distinct scenes in the cave-painting. It begins with Maudgalyāyana mourning his parents' death in a cemetery. It follows Maudgalyāyana as he encounters various figures in the underworld, including King Yama, the Boys of Good and Evil, Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva, and the General Who Turns the Wheel of Rebirth in the Five Paths. It ends with Maudgalyāyana finding his mother in Avīci Hell and securing her salvation through the intervention of the Buddha. Fan and Mei argue that the pictorial narrative in Cave 19 places particular weight on Maudgalyāyana's journey through hell. According to them, the mural, rather than emphasizing Maudgalyāyana's filial piety, focuses instead on his difficulties in the underground prisons.[23]

The pairing of the wheel of rebirth and scenes of Maudgalyāyana's adventures in hell in Yulin Cave 19 is remarkable and, to the best of my knowledge, unique in the history of Buddhist art. It is interesting for our purposes because of the peculiar relation it suggests between the pictorial program and the *vinaya* text. The designers of the cave seem to be invoking the canonical account without quoting it directly. The *vinaya* story describes how Maudgalyāyana attracts large crowds by telling of his travels in other realms, yet the cave-painting makes no mention of Maudgalyāyana's audience nor of the Buddhist *saṃgha*. Rather, it describes what a typical resident of the Hexi 河西 corridor in the tenth century would have known about Maudgalyāyana, his exploits in hell on behalf of his mother.

Another problem of interpretation concerns the placement of the wheel at Yulin: Why is the wheel of rebirth painted in the corridor leading to an antechamber of a cave-temple? Here too, to claim that artists had recourse to a textual precedent is to obscure the problems that artists and their patrons faced. The *vinaya* account is unambiguous about where the *bhavacakra* should be painted: on the porches of monasteries. At Ajaṇṭā, that was a relatively easy command to obey, at least for caves built in the *vihāra* style, which adopts the layout of a monastery. And when wooden monasteries were created in Chinese cities, the porch of an Indian monastery could be translated into the outer halls of a Chinese temple. But the model of translation from a source language to a target language is too simple, because in the process of

[23] Fan and Mei, "Yulinku dishijiuku Mulian bianxiang kaoshi," esp. pp. 53–54.

translation, the target language itself – the architecture of cave-temples – was undergoing change.

Some of the earliest temples carved out of rock in China followed a style that architectural historians call the "central stūpa-pillar style" (*zhongxin tazhu shi* 中心塔柱式).[24] Another early form of cave-temple construction, seen in Central Asia at Kizil and in China at Dunhuang, is the *vihāra*. Two other styles took prominence in the cave-temples of Hexi beginning in the Sui and Tang dynasties. The first is composed of a large room with a coffered ceiling in the shape of an inverted basket, with a raised niche on the back wall containing statues. The other style popular beginning in the Tang was the two-chamber design. It is seen occasionally at the Mogao caves in the early Tang, and it is very important at Yulin.[25] As seen in figure 4, the main chamber is a large square with a coffered ceiling. A raised platform stands in the middle of the main chamber. With statues placed on it, worshippers could provide offerings in front of the platform. The antechamber is typically smaller than the main chamber. The implicit ranking of the two rooms is apparent in the pictorial program as well: the main chamber usually contains paradise scenes (Amitābha's, Maitreya's, and/or Bhaiṣajyaguru's) and preaching scenes, while antechambers are decorated with guardian figures and protectors of Buddhism. Double-chambered caves at Yulin frequently have long corridors leading from the doorway into the antechamber.

At Mogaoku the architectural equivalent of the long entry corridor may have been made of wood rather than constructed out of stone. Careful excavation of the ground in front of the cliffs at Mogaoku proves that many caves had large wooden structures functioning as

[24] See Xiao, *Dunhuang jianzhu yanjiu*, pp. 35–42; Su Bai 宿白, "Liangzhou shiku yiji yu 'Liangzhou moshi' 凉州石窟遺迹與凉州模式," 1986, rev. ed. in *Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu* 中國石窟寺研究 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1996), pp. 39–51; and Alexander Soper, "Northern Liang and Northern Wei in Kansu," *Artibus Asiae* 21.2 (1958), pp. 131–64.

[25] Standard treatments tend to slight this style: they don't give it a separate name, and they treat it as a combination of other, more integral styles. Xiao (*Dunhaung jianzhu yanjiu*, pp. 33–61) views it as a cross between the "antechamber" form and the "coffered-ceiling style." See also Puay-peng Ho, "Setting for the Faith: Icons in Space in Early Chinese Monasteries," in Rajeshwari Ghose, ed., *In the Footsteps of the Buddha: An Iconic Journey from India to China* (Hong Kong: University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong, 1998), pp. 127–37; idem, "The Symbolism of the Central Pillars in Cave-Temples of Northwest China," in Emily Lyle, ed., *Sacred Architecture in the Traditions of India, China, Judaism, and Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), also published as *Cosmos* (1992) 8:59–70; and Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, "Early Chinese Buddhist Architecture and Its Indian Origins," in Janet Baker, ed., *The Flowering of a Foreign Faith: New Studies in Chinese Buddhist Art* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1998), pp. 38–53. Current typologies seem to be based on the idea of India as a source, central Asian sites as a conduit, and the Mogao caves as the ending point. Perhaps as sites with examples different from the Sui and Tang caves at Mogaoku become better known, the typology of cave-temples will change too.

entry halls, positioned in front of the cliff face, prior to the corridor that was cut into the cliff and that led into the stone temple. Figure 5 (Excavation Plan of Mogao Cave 98, tenth century) reconstructs the stone underlayment and the bases for the various pillars that supported a wooden entry hall to Mogao Cave 98, constructed during the Five Dynasties under Cao Yijin's patronage. Such wooden buildings, according to Pan and Ma:

> ... formed an integral whole with the caves themselves. Connected front and back to the caves, the vast majority of them were equivalent to the cave's antechamber. With the rear chamber (also called the main chamber) carved out of the inside of the cliff face, the antechamber extended to the exterior of the cliff face, and wooden structures were employed in their construction. Thus, most of them took the shape of an architectural structure composed of a front hall and a rear cave.

Pan and Ma add that the majority of wooden antechambers at Mogaoku were constructed during the hegemony of the Cao family in Hexi,[26] which is precisely the time when the wheel at Yulin was painted. Thus, if any of the Mogao cave-temples ever did contain a painting of the wheel of rebirth, it most likely would have been located in the wooden structure serving as an antechamber to the main cave.

At any rate, architectural historians are quite explicit about the significance of the two-chamber design: the antechamber serves as a profane prelude to the sacred realm of the main chamber. As Xiao remarks, "The cave antechamber is the transition from exterior space to the space of the cave. When people enter the realm of the Buddhas from the realm of humans, an emotional transformation occurs here."[27] Statements made by donors of double-chambered caves lend further weight to the claim that such structures were systematically divided into two distinct realms.[28] Patrons of double-chamber caves viewed them as marking off a dualism: the main room contained scenes of purity and paradise, while the antechamber portrayed the unclean space of

[26] Trans. from Pan Yushan 潘玉閃 and Ma Shichang 馬世長, *Mogaoku kuqian diantang yizhi* 莫高窟窟前殿堂遺址 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1985), p. 114; see also pp. 116–20.

[27] Xiao, *Dunhuang jianzhu yanjiu*, p. 35.

[28] See the dedication to Mogao Cave 94, constructed between 867 and 872, discussed in Fujieda Akira 藤枝晃, "Tonkō zenbutsudō no chūkō: Chōshi shokutsu o chūshin to shita kyū seiki no butsukutsu zōei 敦煌千佛洞の中興, 張氏諸窟お中心とした九世紀の佛窟造營," *Tōhō gakuhō* 東方學報 (Kyoto) 35 (1964): 60–87; and He Shizhe 賀世哲, "Cong gongyangren tiji kan Mogaoku bufen dongku de yingjian niandai 從供養人題記看莫高窟部分洞窟的營建年代," in *Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyangren tiji* 敦煌莫高窟供養人題記, edited by Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986), pp. 212–13.

birth, death, and rebirth. One was beyond impurity, transformed by the Buddhas, while the other was positioned within the desire-filled realm of form. This structuralist reading of cave design works well for Yulin Cave 19, which has a main chamber depicting paradise and transcendence and an antechamber containing lower-ranking guardians who help prepare the way.

How do we make sense, then, of the placement of the wheel of rebirth, not in the antechamber, but in the corridor before the antechamber? Following the logic above, what is important about the structure of the cave is the way that it mediates an opposition between paradise and rebirth, between a world beyond and a world quite close to hand. The wheel of rebirth in the corridor teaches about desire, rebirth, suffering, and salvation as a prelude to the realms of purity that lay further within the cave. To put it in terms of an analogy: Corridor: Entire Cave::Antechamber:Main Chamber::Rebirth:Paradise. The relationship between the corridor and the entire cave is the same as the relationship between the antechamber and the main chamber, which is again equivalent to the relationship between rebirth and paradise. The same homology exists in the design of wooden temples, in which front halls stand in opposition to Buddha halls.

At Yulin, then, the wheel of rebirth is located in the passageway leading to paradise, a perfect realm at once pictured on the walls and invoked for the visitor. Placed physically on the outside of the sacred space, the wheel is nevertheless connected to that space. The wheel of rebirth and the pictures of Maudgalyāyana are a way of loosely paraphrasing the canonical account of the creation of the wheel. They are a narrative prelude to the act of worshipping the Buddha and encountering his pure realm in the center of the cave.

SICHUAN

The wheel of rebirth at the thirteenth-century pilgrimage site of Baodingshan in Sichuan seems to be the architectural opposite of the wheel at Yulin. Rather than lining a corridor accessible only after entering a cave, the wheel at Baodingshan is a relief carving, nearly eight meters high, that stands open to any pilgrim visiting the site (figure 6). Some 10,000 individual relief carvings at the site, situated eleven miles from the town of Dazu (Chongqing), were completed around the year 1250 under the direction of a local divine whose secular name was Zhao Zhifeng 趙智風 (1159–1249). Although the area had been home to a Buddhist temple during the Tang dynasty, Zhao completely remade

and expanded it. Beginning in 1177 he administered the construction of the first niches at the site, continuing steadily over the next seventy years. The fact that one man was largely responsible for the development of the center over such along period of time accounts for a certain amount of consistency in both content and style. Indeed Zhao seems to have memorialized his own contributions by having himself sculpted into many of the scenes there. He is present at the Buddha's entry into *nirvāṇa* pictured in one of the largest niches, occupying the very first position under the eyes of Śākyamuni (see figure 7).[29] Of course it is every pious Buddhist's wish to see a Buddha in person; hence it is entirely fitting that the man who was so instrumental in the articulation of the Dharma in this part of Sichuan should be placed in the Buddha's presence. His position right next to the Buddha also helps to vouch for the authenticity, the veracity of the site as a whole.

Zhao designed the site as a narrative compendium of basic Buddhist teachings and as a testament to the miraculous deeds of a holy man from Sichuan, Liu Benzun 柳本尊 (844–907).[30] Liu's ancestry is

[29] The archaeological report states that a statue of Kāśyapa originally stood in front of Zhao's, but is now lost. That would make Zhao the second disciple in the first generation after the founder. See Sichuansheng shehui kexueyuan 四川省社會科學院 et al., eds., *Dazu shike neirong zonglu* 大足石刻內容總錄, in *Dazu shike yanjiu* 大足石刻研究, edited by Liu Changjiu 劉長久, et al. (Chengdu: Sichuansheng shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1985), p. 472.

[30] My rough biography of Liu Benzun is based on one of the earliest surviving accounts of his life, the biography inscribed on a stele now standing in the main hall in the Smaller Buddha Bay (Xiaofowan 小佛灣) at Baodingshan. The text, entitled "Biography of Layman Liu of the Tang" (*Tang Liu jushi zhuan* 唐柳居士傳), was written by a Song-dynasty monk named Zujue 祖覺 (1087–1150), edited by Zhang Min 張岷, and inscribed by Wang Bing 王秉. It was probably erected between 1131 and 1163, and may have been based on the stele erected at Liu's grave at Mimou 彌牟. It is in poor condition. I follow the transcription in Chen Xishan 陳習刪, *Dazu shike zhilue jiaozhu* 大足石刻志略校注, in *Dazu shike yanjiu* 大足石刻研究, edited by Liu Changjiu 劉長久, et al. (Chengdu: Sichuansheng shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1985), pp. 294–97; and Chongqing Dazu shike yishu bowuguan 重慶大足石刻藝術博物館, and Chongqingshi shehui kexueyuan Dazu shike yishu yanjiusuo 重慶市社會科學院大足石刻藝術研究所, eds., *Dazu shike mingwen lu* 大足石刻名紋錄 (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1999), pp. 207–10. I rely heavily on the critical study of the inscription by Chen Mingguang 陳明光, "Song ke 'Tang Liu Benzun zhuan' bei jiaobu 宋刻唐柳本尊傳碑校補," *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 世界宗教研究 1985.2 (1985): 107–1; and Hu Zhaoxi 胡照曦, "Dazu Baodingshan shike qianlun 大足寶頂山石刻淺論," 1983, repr. in *Dazu shike yanjiu* 大足石刻研究, edited by Liu Changjiu 劉長久, et al. (Chengdu: Sichuansheng shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1985), pp. 68–72. For other studies of Liu Benzun, see Chen Mingguang 陳明光, "Sichuan moyan zaoxiang Liu Benzun huadao 'shilian tu' youlai ji niandai tansuo 四川摩岩造像柳本尊化道十煉圖由來及年代探索," *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物1996.1 (1996): 33–39; Angela F. Howard, *Summit of Treasures: Buddhist Cave Art of Dazu, China* (Trumbull, Conn.: Weatherhill, 2001); pp. 100–108, 170–77; Hu Wenhe 胡文和, "Anyue Dazu 'Liu Benzun shilian tu' tike he Song li 'Tang Liu jushi zhuan' bei de yanjiu 安岳大足柳本尊十煉圖題刻和宋立唐柳居士傳碑得研究," *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 1991.3 (1991): 42–47; Karil J. Kucera, "Cliff Notes: Text and Image at Baodingshan" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 2002), pp. 167–82, 395–400; and Wang Jiayou 王家祐, "Liu Benzun yu mijiao 柳本尊與密教," in *Dazu shike yanjiu wenxuan* 大足石刻研究文選, in *Dazu shike yanjiu* 大足石刻研究, edited by Liu Changjiu 劉長久, et al. (Chengdu: Sichuansheng shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1985), pp. 168–74.

unclear; later accounts explain his surname (Liu, literally "Willow") by telling the story that he was born from a large growth on a willow tree. Liu was originally from Jiazhou 嘉州 in the westernmost part of Sichuan, home of Emeishan 峨嵋山. He journeyed eastward to central Sichuan, spending time at Mimou 彌牟 (or Mimeng 彌濛) in Chengdufu 城都府 and at Guanghan 廣漢 (in Xizhou 西州). He was know for using spells (*dhāraṇī*s and *mantra*s) to banish evil spirits, cure illnesses, and accompany extreme ascetic acts. He gouged out one of his eyes in 903, an act later codified as the fourth in a series of ten self-mutilations. During his lifetime he received support from both local gentry and the ruler of Sichuan. After his death in 907 his followers continued to build up his cult. Mingzong (r. 926–934), emperor of the Latter Tang, bestowed a plaque on one of his temples, granting him an honorific title. In 1068 his home temple was further honored by the court with a name plaque calling it "Cloister of the Sagely and Long-Lived" (Shengshouyuan 聖壽院). His fame spread throughout Sichuan, and his cult was still thriving when Zhao Zhifeng visited the home temple in the second half of the twelfth century.

The visual material at Baodingshan provides a good idea of how Liu Benzun was understood in thirteenth-century Sichuan. He is the main subject of two niches. The smallest one (Baodingshan, Daofowan Niche 27) has a central statue of Vairocana Buddha. An image of Liu Benzun is contained in a ray of light emanating from Vairocana's flowered cap, suggesting that Liu is a manifestation of the cosmic Buddha himself. The larger niche (Baodingshan, Dafowan Niche 22) is one of the central scenes at Baodingshan. It depicts the ten ascetic feats for which he was famous:

1. cutting off a finger,
2. standing in the snow,
3. burning his ankle,
4. gouging out an eye,
5. cutting off an ear,
6. burning incense next to his heart,
7. burning incense on the crown of his head,
8. cutting his shoulder,
9. burning his penis, and
10. burning incense on his knees.

The niche is dominated by a seated image of Liu Benzun. Each of the ten acts is pictured in a row of illustrations to the left and right of the main figure's head. The ten austerities, dubbed "the ten acts of re-

fining" (*shilian*十煉), were undertaken to bring enlightenment to other beings, to serve as proof of his detachment, and to match the devotions shown by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. His eighth form of self-mutilation, for instance, involved chopping forty-eight pieces of flesh from his left shoulder. With each slice he repeated one of the forty-eight vows that Amitābha Buddha had taken as a bodhisattva. His tenth austerity, burning incense on his knees, is described in an inscription that reads:[31]

> The tenth ascetic act is burning the knees. Benzun was a worthy and a sage. The Prince of Shu 蜀 had respected and worshipped him for a long time. He decreed that he [come for an audience] and inquired, "Sir, what Way do you cultivate in order to call yourself 'Benzun' [literally, 'Root of Respect' an epithet of Vairocana[32]]? Sir, what numinous power has been bestowed on you that you can save the common people?" Liu responded, "I cultivate the essence and practice asceticism every day. I vow to seek the fruit of no outflows and non-action. I concentrate on upholding the five-part spirit spells of the great wheel, bringing salvation to sentient beings." On the eighteenth day of the first month in the sixth year of Tianfu [February 16, 941] he made a seal over incense and burned it on his knees, offering it to all the Buddhas. He made a vow that all sentient beings be able to meet each other in the three assemblies under [Maitreya's] dragon-flower tree.

Judging from this text, in the popular mind Liu Benzun had achieved fame as a wonder-worker and ascetic. He garnered respect from Wang Jian 王建 (847–918), the Sichuan leader who came to the aid of the Tang ruling house and was named Prince of Shu (Shuwang 蜀王) by Zhaozong (r. 889–904), becoming de facto ruler of Sichuan after the fall of the Tang in 907. Liu Benzun's techniques were, according to the inscription, based on the mastery of Tantric spells, especially a five-word *dhāraṇī* that had been transmitted by Śubhakarasiṃha (ca. 716–735).[33] Liu's austerities were understood as both cause and effect.

[31] Translation of inscription at Baodingshan, Dafowan 大佛灣 Niche 22, transcribed in Sichuansheng shehui kexueyuan, ed., *Dazu shike neirong zonglu*, in Liu, et al., eds., *Dazu shike yanjiu*, p. 492.

[32] The epithet Benzun has many other possible meanings, including the original principle underlying different manifestations of a deity. See Mochizuki Shinkō 望月信亨, *Bukkyō daijiten* 佛教大辞典, third ed., 10 vols. (Tokyo: Sekai seiten kankō kyōkai, 1958–1963), pp. 4697b-98a.

[33] The five-part spirit spells of the great wheel (*dalun wubu shenzhou* 大輪五部神咒) are most likely a five-syllable *dhāraṇī* associated with the Vajradhātu *maṇḍala* (Jingangjie mantuoluo 金剛界曼陀羅). The transmission of the *dhāraṇī* has traditionally been ascribed to Śubhakarasiṃha (Shanwuwei善無畏, ca. 716–735); see Ono Gemmyō 小野玄妙, *Bussho kaisetsu daijiten* 佛書解説大辭典, 15 vols. (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1933–36, 1964–78, 1988), 9:322a-d. If this tradition is correct, then the five syllables of the *dhāraṇī* are: *e-wan-lan-han-qian* 阿鑁籃唅

On the one hand they were manifestations of his resolve and his spiritual standing, which was articulated in the terms of popular Chinese Buddhism. Such terms were both specifically Buddhist ("no outflows" [*wulou* 無漏], "non-action" [*wuwei* 無爲], "fruit" [*guo* 果]) as well as generic to Chinese religion ("cultivate the essence" [*jingxiu* 精修], "practice asceticism" [*lian* 煉]). On the other hand, his self-abnegation brought benefits to others, since he accompanied each act of mutilation with a formal vow dedicating specific benefits, such as rebirth in the presence of the future Buddha, to other beings.

Although separated by over 250 years, Zhao Zhifeng regarded himself as a successor to Liu Benzun.[34] Zhao grew up very close to Baodingshan, where Buddhist carvings into the cliffs may have already been executed. He took an early interest in Buddhism, adopting a monastic lifestyle, though probably without benefit of training or ordination under other monks. Zhao's biography claims that he reached a turning point in his life when he traveled to Liu Benzun's cultic center. From then on, Zhao devoted himself to popularizing Liu's methods and constructing a series of cliffs and caves at Baodingshan. His success in preaching, curing, and administering the precepts of lay Buddhism apparently provided enough support for him to develop Baodingshan into a thriving pilgrimage center. A stele erected at Baodingshan nearly 200 years after Zhao Zhifeng's death explains how the site developed. Entitled "A Record of the Repair of the Cloister of the Sagely and Long-Lived at Baodingshan" ("Chongxiu Baodingshan Shengshouyuan ji" 重修寶頂山聖壽院記), it was written in 1425 by a local teacher named Yu Jiangmo 諭江末 and inscribed by Liu Tianren 劉畋人. It reads:[35]

> Baodingshan is situated about one *she* 舍 [30 *li*] east of the District Hall of Dazu. Its cliffs and valleys are deep and imposing, its wooded

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欠. See *Sanzhong xidi podiyu zhuanyezhang chusanjie mimi tuoluoni fa* 三種悉地破地獄轉業障出三界祕密陀羅尼法, *T* no. 905, 18:910c; *Foding zunshengxin podiyu zhuanyezhang chusanjie mimi sanshen foguo sanzhongxidi zhenyan yigui* 佛頂尊勝心破地獄轉業障出三界祕密三身佛果三種悉地貞言儀規, *T* no. 906, 18:912b; and *Foding zunshengxin podiyu zhuanyezhang chusanjie mimi tuoluoni* 佛頂尊勝心破地獄轉業障出三界祕密陀羅尼, *T* no. 907, 18:915a. Jinhua Chen, however, argues that all three texts were later Japanese creations, in which case Liu could not have learned the *dhāraṇī* from these particular texts. See Chen, "The Formation of Early Esoteric Buddhism in Japan: A Study of Three Japanese Esoteric Apocrypha" (Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, 1997), pp. 122–234; and idem, "The Construction of Early Tendai Esoteric Buddhism: The Japanese Provenance of Saicho's Transmission Documents and Three Esoteric Buddhist Apocrypha Attributed to Subhakarasimha," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 21.1 (1998), pp. 21–76.

[34] My account of Zhao's life is based on Hu, "Dazu Baodingshan shike qianlun," pp. 65–68; Howard, *Summit of Treasures*, pp. 108–18; Kucera, "Cliff Notes," pp. 6–10, 401–03; and the inscription discussed below.

[35] The text of the stele is transcribed in Chen, *Dazu shike zhilue jiaozhu*, in Liu, et al, eds., *Dazu shike yanjiu*, pp. 265–66.

ravines enticingly beautiful. Its bamboo thickets and old wood are elegant and luxurious, alternately bright and shady. It is truly a region that is a sacred ground of Buddhist purity and peace.

According to tradition, someone named Zhao Zhifeng was born on Sha Creek in Miliang Village[36] on the fourteenth day of the seventh month, the twenty-ninth year of Shaoxing [August 28, 1159], under Gaozong of the Song. Already at the age of five he was not fond of adornment. There had long been Buddhist cliffs where he lived,[37] so he cut off his hair, trimmed his nails, and lived there as a monk. At the age of sixteen he traveled west to Mimou, where he wandered for three days.[38] When he returned, he ordered work to begin on the construction of the Hall of Benzun, Sagely and Long-Lived,[39] and he named his mountain "Summit of Jewels" [Baoding]. He propagated the Buddhist vows, disseminated the water of the Dharma, warded off calamities, and cured sickness. His virtue spread near and far, and there were none who did not take refuge. Buddha images were carved in cliffs and caves all over the mountain, creating unlimited merit.

Benzun, Sagely and Long-Lived, was born on the fifth day of the sixth month, the ninth year of Dazhong [July 23, 855] under Xuanzong of the Tang. According to legend, to the north of the city of Jiazhou 嘉州, there was a willow tree [*liushu* 柳樹] that had a large growth [*ying* 癭]. One day the growth ruptured and out came a child [*ying'er* 嬰兒]. The Local Inspector of the prefecture[40] regarded this as auspicious, and he brought up the child as his son. As he grew up he practiced many austerities and rolled the great wheel of Dharma, his influence becoming very strong. Mingzong [emperor of the Latter Tang, r. 926–934] bestowed the

[36] Present-day Miliang Township (Miliangxiang 米糧鄉) is five miles south of Baodingshan. Hu ("Dazu Baodingshan shike qianlun," pp. 65–66) suggests that Sha Creek (Shaxi 沙溪), not currently identifiable, was a tributary of Yong Creek (Yongxi 壅溪).

[37] A later source claims that before Zhao's lifetime there were Buddhist statuary carved into the cliffs at Baodingshan, some depicting hell scenes and some attributed to the sculptor Lu Ban 魯班. See Hu, "Dazu Baodingshan shike qianlun," p. 66, citing the Qing gazetteer *Dazu xianzhi* 大足縣志.

[38] Mimou 彌牟 is probably the same as Mimeng 彌濛, the site of Liu Benzun's home temple. Most scholarship (e.g. Hu, ibid., p. 66) interprets "three days" (*sanzhou* 三晝) as three years, without explanation.

[39] According to Hu (ibid.), the Hall of Benzun, Sagely and Long-Lived (Shengshou Benzun Dian 聖壽本尊院) constitutes what is now called the Smaller Buddha Bay (Xiaofowan 小佛灣) at Baodingshan, and was used as a prototype for the construction of the Larger Buddha Bay (Dafowan 大佛灣), in which the wheel of rebirth is located.

[40] The details are anachronistic. The position of Local Inspector (Duli 都吏, used for Duyou 督郵) did not exist after the sixth century; see Zhang Qiyun 張其昀, *Zhongwen dacidian* 中文大辭典, rev. ed., 10 vols. (Taipei: Huagang chuban youxian gongsi, 1979), no. 40, 388.45;

> name plaque of "Great Wheel" [Dalun 大輪] on his cloister. During the Xining era [1068–1078] of the Song, under Shenzong, the name "Benzun, Sagely and Long-Lived" [Shengshou Benzun 聖壽本尊] was bestowed.
>
> Later [Zhao] Zhifeng upheld his teachings, so he used this as the name for the temple [at Baodingshan]. Originally the temple was founded by Zhifeng, and nothing was left incomplete.

The text of the stele continues with the later history of Baodingshan, including a pause in activity during the Yuan dynasty and its repair and expansion several times under various caretakers during the Ming.

Liu Benzun himself probably never visited Baodingshan; if he had, the inscriptions in the niches or the steles erected at the mountain certainly would have remarked upon the honor. Instead, what the epigraphical evidence suggests is that Zhao Zhifeng and later generations were responsible for building the area into a premier pilgrimage site.[41] Liu Benzun's cult was already widespread throughout Sichuan. Zhao Zhifeng in part transplanted the legend of Liu Benzun at Baodingshan and helped it thrive, and in part he built the center in accordance with his own vision of Buddhist piety. As noted above, the positioning of the figures in the niche at Baodingshan depicting Śākyamuni's *parinirvāṇa* suggests that Zhao was willing to acknowledge publicly his role in designing the site (see figure 7, above). After the Buddha, Zhao comes first, followed by Liu Benzun, the latter wearing a conical hat and carrying a melon.

Before examining the niche with the wheel of rebirth in more detail, it is worth considering the content of the site as a whole. The wheel of rebirth at Baodingshan is situated near the Song-dynasty entrance to the site. Pilgrims would enter via a stairway that leads down into a U-shaped park. First they pass a stone tiger and then a large niche of protector gods, powerful beings who, after being converted by the Buddha, promised to ensure the survival of the religion. Next comes

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and Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), pp. 545–46.

[41] I am indebted to Angela Howard, who for the past fifteen years has unstintingly shared her first-hand knowledge of the site, pointed me to important sources, and offered advice. Her *Summit of Treasures* sheds important new light on the artistic and religious significance of the entire site. In it she speculates that Baodingshan may have been the culminating stop on a pilgrimage route in southeastern Sichuan. For other studies of the site, see Hu, "Dazu Baodingshan shike qianlun"; Kucera, "Cliff Notes," esp. pp. 1–15; Zhang Hua 張劃, "Songdai Dazu shike jueqi neiyin tantao 宋代大足石刻崛起內因探討," *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 1991.2 (March 1991): 40–44; and the studies collected in Liu, ed., *Dazu shike yanjiu wenxuan*, in Liu, et al., eds., *Dazu shike yanjiu*.

the niche with the wheel of rebirth. The *saṃsāracakra* at Baodingshan thus seems to perform a role similar to those it plays in other locales: it serves as an introduction to Buddhist teachings. It prepares the visitor by providing basic knowledge of morality and cosmology, after which the pilgrim is ready to encounter other scenes and teachings.

Deities in their Tantric form were extremely important at Baodingshan and other Song-dynasty centers in Sichuan. Avalokiteśvara with 1,000 arms was well known in western Sichuan. Vairocana Buddha is the subject of several important niches at Baodingshan, and the ten Vidyārājas (Mingwang 明王) have their own niche as well. The themes of transmigration and rebirth are repeated in many scenes. One large niche depicts the many tortures of hell, while another portrays the paradise of Amitābha. Śākyamuni is an extremely important figure at Baodingshan. In addition to the Buddha's death (noted above), his birth and his devotion to his parents are also themes of specific niches. The whole circuit ended with niches depicting perfect enlightenment and the taming of the ox, the latter serving as both entertainment and as a metaphor for the calming of the mind.

One of the most striking features of the wheel of rebirth at Baodingshan is its axis (see figure 8). In the hub of the wheel sits a semi-robed figure with curly hair seated in a posture of meditation. From the center of his chest emanate six rays containing a number of smaller figures. The lower two ribbons each contain five figures wearing crowns, perhaps denoting bodhisattvas. The upper four ribbons all contain Buddha images, totaling twenty-seven. I have not been able to determine the significance of ten bodhisattvas or twenty-seven Buddhas. Considering only a visual analysis, the six ribbons are striking. In addition to defining the spokes, the ribbons also move beyond the wheel in two dimensions. In terms of depth, they stand out from the wheel; they have greater depth and appear closer than the rest of the wheel to the viewer. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas inscribed inside them add further depth. The second dimension is length: the six rays extend well beyond the outer rim of the wheel and join the outer edges of the niche. The ribbons of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas extend even beyond the great demon who holds the wheel of rebirth in his mouth. If the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas can be read as figures who, in Mahāyāna fashion, have escaped the grip of birth and death but decided to remain within the realm of saṃsāra, then this element of the composition is saying something important. While freely intermingled with impurities and available to all sentient beings in need, these figures of salvation also transcend the world of suffering.

The head, shoulders, and chest of the central figure are all clearly defined in the carving of the wheel at Baodingshan, emphasizing that the six rays originate from his chest. The source is not the meditator's *ūrṇākeśa*, the wisp of white hair between his eyebrows. Chinese Buddhism was acquainted with this spot as a source of other worlds: rays of light were known to emanate from the *ūrṇākeśa* of various Buddhas, and many of the Buddhas at Baodingshan (especially Vairocana) are depicted with cloud-paths emanating from their heads. What, then, is the significance of the chest as the point of origin?

The six paths emerge from the heart of the meditator. As is well known, in the traditional Chinese understanding, the heart is the location of the mental function, or mind. If this line of reasoning is correct, then the scene of the wheel of rebirth is a fitting illustration of one of the slogans of the Yogācāra school, that the entire world is "mind only" (*weixin* 唯心). This claim is not equivalent to European notions of idealism. In the Buddhist case, there is not a fundamental disparity between the consciousness of the individual and the external world. The shaping power of the mind is not absolute, in that it does not bring the world into existence out of a previous state of non-being. To say that all varieties of birth and death are mentally constructed is not to say that they lack reality. It is to claim, rather, that all forms of existence are just as real as the mind: both are impermanent and provisionally real. The Buddhist credo emphasizes the predominance, not the immutability, of the mind.

The idealistic reading of the wheel of rebirth is further justified by the even more explicit statements made in a niche that stands diagonally across from the wheel of rebirth at Baodingshan. It is Baodingshan, Dafowan Niche 19, entitled "Illustration of the Binding of the Monkey of the Mind and Locking up the Six Sources of Waste" ("Fu xinyuan suo liuhao tu" 縛心猿鎖六耗圖). The inscriptions in the niche equate the six sources of waste with the "six bandits" (*liuzei* 六賊), the six senses in Buddhist thought. One central inscription reads:[42]

> The eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind
> Through darkness enslave the spirit of the mind.
> To lock up the Six Sources of Waste
> Is to practice the great awakening of spirits and immortals.

The inscription continues, in shorter lines, to explain how salvation can be achieved once the senses are mastered. Rather than transcend-

[42] The inscription is transcribed in Chen, *Dazu shike zhilue jiaozhu*, in Liu, et al., eds., *Dazu shike yanjiu*, p. 286; and Chongqing Dazu shike yishu bowuguan, ed. *Dazu shike mingwen lu*, pp. 131–32.

ing saṃsāra, the paradises (as well as the hells) of the other world are immanent. The inscription states:

> The land of utter happiness in the west
> Isn't very far from here.
> Putuoshan 普陀山 in the Southern Sea
> All in all isn't distant.
>
> The halls of heaven and the prisons underground
> Are right in front of your eyes.
> All the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
> Are no different from me.

Other inscriptions in the niche quote from the work of Fu Xi 傅翕 (497–569), a layman well known for his various writings, for engaging in ascetic acts, for sponsoring large, popular feasts, and for gaining support from Liang Wudi (r. 502–550). At the center of the niche sits a figure that appears to be the same as the central figure in the wheel of rebirth. From the top of his head emanates a Buddha identified in a cartouche as a transformation of Maitreya. To the sides of his head are inscribed the lines, "The halls of heaven as well as the prisons underground/All are produced from the mind" (*yiqie you xin zao* 一切由心造).[43] Other lines quote copiously from Fu Xi's "Inscription on the Mind as Ruler" ("Xinwang ming" 心王銘). Thus, the pictures and texts in the niche focus on the power of the mind to fabricate the cosmos. They lend further weight to reading the niche of the wheel of rebirth as a portrayal of the mind as the source of saṃsāra and *nirvāṇa*, as the origin of beings both within and beyond the realm of birth and death.

The similarities between these two niches lead me to claim that the depiction of the meditating figure at the center of the wheel is a way of making a statement about the creation of the pilgrimage site as a whole. The same mediating figure with curly hair, a full, round jaw, sitting on a lotus throne, and lacking a halo occurs in fourteen scenes in the Larger Buddha Bay alone. Scholarly opinion over the years has offered a number of different readings of him. He has been identified as Bodhidharma, Liu Benzun, Zhao Zhifeng, a generic monk, or a Buddha. Following the argument of Deng Zhijin 鄧之金, I believe that the figure is modeled after the organizer of the site, Zhao Zhifeng.[44] If we read the scene as a self-reflective commentary on the activity of representation, this scene suggests that in designing the sculptural program

[43] The lines are transposed in the transcription in Sichuansheng shehui kexueyuan, ed., *Dazu shike neirong zonglu*, in Liu, et al., eds., *Dazu shike yanjiu*, p. 484.

[44] See Deng Zhijin 鄧之金, "Dazu Baodingshan Dafowan 'liuhao tu' kan diaocha 大足寶頂山大佛灣六耗圖龕調查," *Sichuan wenwu* 四川文物 1996.1 (1996), pp. 23–32.

at Baodingshan, Zhao Zhifeng was responsible for defining the six paths and the Buddhas who operate within them and beyond them. In this sense, Zhao is not simply the author of this version of the wheel of rebirth or the pilgrimage site as a whole. Rather, his mastery of the esoteric arts grants him access to knowledge about the cosmos, a world that contains the seeds of both ignorance and enlightenment. The creator of the site is no different from the pilgrims to the site, in that both are endowed with the capacity to achieve salvation.

The three poisons in animal form are also depicted in the center of the wheel, in keeping with the canonical version.

In the first ring outside the center are the six paths of rebirth. The palaces of the gods are at the top, with *asuras* to the left and humans to the right. A torture chamber in hell is shown at the bottom, while to the right a demon is shown eating a person in the realm of ghosts, and animals are shown to the left.

The second and third rings outside the hub are each divided into eighteen segments. They offer different readings of the notion of change. The second ring depicts the eighteen stages in the cycle of causation. Almost all of the images match the descriptions in the canonical account, which allows for eighteen links (see appendix 1).

The third ring focuses on another aspect of impermanence, the transition from one form of life to the next. Its interest is in depicting what happens when someone moves from one form of life to another. Each of the eighteen segments in this ring portrays a being moving through a tube, with the head sticking out the front and the feet visible behind, a motif seen in the wheel of rebirth at Yulin. Movement proceeds in a counterclockwise direction. At the bottom of the wheel, in the six o'clock position, for instance, is a figure with the head of a fish and the tail of a snake (see figure 9). At the next station (to the right), the same being has transmogrified one more step, its head turning into a horse and its tail remaining that of a fish. The circle continues around in the same way (see appendix 2). Like the chain of causation, the individual stations in this ring are connected to each other in an irreversible sequence. They drive home not simply the truth of impermanence, but the point that change follows a recurring pattern.

The area outside the wheel seems to have particularly encouraged variations, visual and textual, on the stock themes seen elsewhere. The wheel is grasped by the great demon of impermanence, which is quite canonical. But the demon's power is indexed by his standing on a dragon, a figure new to the iconography of the *bhavacakra* (and now

only partly visible). Four other figures stand below the wheel, two on each side (see figure 10). At bottom right is a monkey engaged in rubbing its genitals, perhaps a way of representing greed or lust, and a woman. At the left are two government officials, one dressed as a civilian and the other in military attire.

Tokens of transcendence are sculpted above the wheel of rebirth. Directly over the wheel are seated three Buddha figures, probably representing the Buddhas of the past (Dīpaṃkara), present (Śākyamuni), and future (Maitreya). They may or may not be symbols for the cessation of suffering that occurs in *nirvāṇa*. In any event, their presence at the top of a tall sculpture serves as a stamp of approval, a validation of the entire scene by the Buddhas of all times.

The written elements in the scene at Baodingshan also emphasize the possibility of salvation from the turning of the wheel. The two stanzas of the canonical account encouraging renunciation are inscribed at the top, to the left and right of the wheel. A new element is added too. It is a hymn in four lines of seven syllables each. It reads:[45]

> The myriad forms of life within the wheel of the three realms
> Originate in passion and will end in drowning.
> Please observe all the Buddhas, like sands of the Ganges, outside the wheel,
> Are all old companions inside the wheel.

Rather than stressing the difference between inside and outside, suffering and non-attachment, this stanza emphasizes the accessibility of enlightenment and those who exemplify enlightenment. Buddhas are not limited to a world beyond saṃsāra; they provide support to beings within the realm of birth and death as well.

The content of the wheel at Baodingshan is heavily localized, and the site as a whole accentuates the regional character of Buddhism. Much of the material at Baodingshan is consistent with the forms of Buddhism found all across Sichuan during the late Tang, Five Dynasties, and Northern and Southern Song periods.[46] With increasing trade

[45] Hymn transcribed in Chen, *Dazu shike zhilue jiaozhu*, in Liu et al., eds., *Dazu shike yanjiu*, p. 279, except that the editors elide the first two words of the third line. The characters were easily legible when I visited Baodingshan in 1999.

[46] For an excellent overview of art and religion during this period, see Ding Mingyi 丁明夷, "Sichuan shiku zashi 四川石窟雜識," *Wenwu* 文物 1998.8 (1998): 46–58. See also Howard, *Summit of Treasures*, pp. 121–46; idem, "T'ang Buddhist Sculpture of Sichuan: Unknown and Forgotten," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities (Östasiatiska Museet) Stockholm* 60 (1998): 1–164; Hu Wenhe 胡文和, *Sichuan daojiao fojiao shiku yishu* 四川道教佛教石窟藝術 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1994); Henrik H. Sorenson, *A Survey of the Religious Sculptures of Anyue*, East Asian Institute Occasional Papers (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 1989); and Ueno Ryūzō 上野隆三, "Shisen ni okeru Tō Sō jiki no sekkoku

and soaring growth in population, the economy of the whole region flourished during this long period, during the first half of which China's political center was either weak or nonexistent. Traditions originating in central China are clear in Sichuan, which served as home-in-exile to two Tang emperors, Xuanzong (r. 712–756) and Xizong (r. 873–888). They both moved their courts and established academies there, and the marks left by these literati, artisans, and monks from central China are indisputable. Wang Jian rose from being a thief, to serving as a general in the Tang army, to founding his own state based in Chengdu in 907. Under him Chengdu "became a great refuge for artists and poets, not to mention members of the Tang official class who were able to escape the brutal fighting taking place in the north. His regime was one of the most stable and peaceful of these years."[47] Sichuan also received cultural influences from the southwest (the Nanzhao kingdom of Dali) and the west (Tibet). The result was a vibrant synthesis of local traditions and themes from a variety of sources. Sichuan Buddhism appears to have pioneered in placing images of Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra at the sides of Vairocana, a representation dubbed "The Three Sages of Huayan" (Huayan Sansheng 華嚴三聖). Liu Benzun's cult was distributed widely across central and eastern Sichuan. In addition to emphasizing Vairocana and using *mantra*s and *maṇḍala*s, the Buddhism of Sichuan maintained a strong interest in ascetic acts, filial piety, rebirth in the paradises of Amitābha and other figures, the tortures of hell, the codified virtues of lay life, and the story of Śākyamuni's life. Artisans took advantage of cliff faces to carve a variety of architectural forms: the recessed niche is most common, but deeper grottoes in imitation of Buddha halls are also used. Many sites incorporated citations from texts, ranging from canonical sūtras to apocrypha, traditional poems, and local hymns. Texts were incorporated into shrines in a variety of formats. In some places they were subsidiary accompaniment to colossal statuary, while in other places they covered three or four walls of a small shrine or constituted an entire niche of their own. Sponsors of all such sites seem to range from individual lay Buddhists and local monks to large organizations of donors.

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zōzō sekkyō jigyō 四川における唐宋時期の石刻造像石經事業," in *Chūgoku bukkyō sekkyō no kenkyū: Bōsan Unkoji sekkyō o chūshin ni* 中國佛教石經の研究, 房山雲居寺石經お中心に, edited by Kegasawa Yasunori 氣賀澤保規 (Kyoto: Kyōtō daigaku gakujutsu shuppankai, 1996), esp. pp. 297–303.

[47] Robert M. Somers, "The End of the T'ang," in Denis C. Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3: *Sui and T'ang China,* 589–906, part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 789.

Unlike Yulin, Baodingshan was neither constructed by a small group of donors nor limited to a particular family or social class. It was open to all pilgrims, and its founder sought to popularize the teachings of Buddhism. The context itself, then, was exoteric, and by placing the niche of the wheel of rebirth near the beginning of the site, the designers intended for it to function as a preparatory lesson to the scenes that followed. The main organizer even appears to have had himself portrayed in the center of the wheel, turning the site, in effect, into Zhao Zhifeng's view of the world. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to overlook the canonical meanings at Baodingshan. Every architect or designer of the wheel of rebirth in Asia situated the wheel in the most accessible, most exterior position, even when (at Yulin, for instance) one had to enter a narrow passageway to see it. Accessibility could always be turned into a local virtue, no matter how public or private the site was as a whole. The hymn added to the canonical poems at Baodingshan shows that local preferences in liturgy were being respected. But rather than dispensing with the canon, the creators dutifully quoted the *vinaya* account before adding their own words. The wheel of life and death at Baodingshan thus seems to offer its own formulation of the truths prescribed in the monastic regulations. Baodingshan offers several elaborations of the message that hints of *nirvāṇa* can be found within the cycle of suffering. The site as a whole was home to several Buddhas, including Vairocana as cosmic lord, Amitābha residing in paradise, Maitreya, and Śākyamuni as the closest, most recent, and most filial of all enlightened beings. Buddhas and bodhisattvas make their appearance within the wheel of rebirth itself, meditating calmly in the spokes of the six paths. The collapsing of the distinction between suffering and release is perhaps most apparent in the positioning of Zhao Zhifeng in the center of the wheel, with Buddhas and bodhisattvas streaming from his chest. For the creator of the site, as well as for the implied pilgrim, the path to transcendence begins in the heart of saṃsāra.

CONCLUSION: THE LOCAL AND THE CANONICAL

The theme of the local and the canonical has resurfaced throughout this study. One of the reasons for the wide dissemination of the wheel of rebirth across Buddhist Asia is that it is canonical. It is prescribed in a *vinaya* text that was deemed authoritative for Buddhist communities in India, Central Asia, China, and Tibet. But we have to remember what "canonical" means. Recent scholarship is beginning to explain

how Buddhist canons were made and unmade and to suggest that what was deemed canonical at any one time and place was a function of the privileging of one group of texts over another.[48] Beginning in India, where the first canons consisted of institutionalized oral traditions, each community of monks defined its own authoritative scriptural collection. As schisms proliferated, so did canons. When Vasumitra, writing in the fourth century, describes the doctrines of sixteen different sects or schools (*nikāya*, a group of persons subscribing to the same rule), it is likely that each of the sixteen social groups maintained its own distinctive canon, subdivided into three baskets (*tripiṭaka*), namely *vinaya*, sūtra, and *śāstra*.[49] Of those earlier sixteen *vinaya*, only six have survived in near-entirety into modern times, and only one out of those six, the *vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins, contains the story of the Buddha directing his followers to paint the wheel of rebirth.

In the case of China, the formation of Buddhist canons was even more complicated, since the authoritative collection of all approved Buddhist texts was redefined, sometimes as frequently as once every decade, by monastic authorities responding to government pressure. For the first four centuries of its existence in China, the Buddhist community lacked a full set of *vinaya* rules.[50] The earliest *vinaya* texts in China dealt with general Buddhist morality and the ordination of monks. The fifth century witnessed an explosion of interest in securing canonical footing for the more extensive regulation of monastic life. Between 404 and 424 four relatively complete *vinaya* canons were translated into Chinese: those of the Sarvāstivāda school, the Dharmagupta, the Mahāsāṃghika, and the Mahīśāsaka. Of these four *vinaya* canons, the first two seem to have been distributed across China most

[48] See Steven Collins, "On the Very Idea of a Pāli Canon," *Journal of the Pāli Text Society* 15 (1990), pp. 89–126; Fang Guangchang 方廣錩, *Fojiao dazangjing shi (ba-shi shiji)* 佛教大藏經史 (八十世紀) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1991); Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮, *Gikyō kenkyū* 疑經研究 (Kyoto: Kyōtō daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1976); and Kyoko Tokuno, "The Evaluation of Indigenous Scriptures in Chinese Buddhist Bibliographical Catalogues," in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, edited by Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Honolulu: University Hawai'i Press, 1990), pp. 31–74.

[49] See André Bareau, *Les sectes bouddhiques du petit véhicule*, Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 38 (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1955), pp. 16–17.

[50] The study of the *vinaya* in China is still in its infancy. Hirakawa Akira 平川彰, *Ritsuzō no kenkyū* 律蔵の研究 (Tokyo: Sankibo busshorin, 1960), remains the standard work on the Indian schools and the translation of various *vinaya* texts into Chinese. The most important analysis of how the *vinaya* actually functioned in China is the groundbreaking study by Tso Sze-bong (Cao Shibang), "The Transformation of Buddhist *Vinaya* in China" (Ph.D. dissertation, Australian National University, 1982), on which I draw below. See also Lao Zhengwu 勞政武, *Fojiao jielü xue* 佛教戒律學 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 1999); and Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, Kuroda Institute, Classics in East Asian Buddhism (Honolulu: University Hawaii Press, 2002), pp. 3–98.

broadly, the Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* (Ch.: Sifen lü 四分律) prevalent in the south and the Dharmagupta *vinaya* (Ch.: Shisong lü 十誦律) popular in the capitals and in the north. Despite this broad dissemination, it would be an exaggeration to claim without qualification that either one of these *vinaya*s was "popular" in China in the early part of the fifth century. There was never empire-wide agreement about which *vinaya* was authoritative. And even when monks or specific monasteries studied one particular *vinaya*, the rules were not always applied *in toto*, and the mythological core of the *vinaya* was so vast that any one canon allowed for multiple interpretations.

The specific *vinaya* canon containing the Buddha's instructions to depict the wheel of rebirth on monastery walls was translated only later. It was part of the corpus of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* (Ch.: Genbenshuo yiqieyoubu pinaiye 根本說一切有部毘奈耶) that Yijing retrieved from India, brought back to China, and translated in the first decade of the eighth century. Understood in context, Yijing's *vinaya* was not only later than the four earlier translations, but it was, like most of them, not very authoritative. That is, it was never adopted in its entirety as the standard for monastic life in China, and it was only inconsistently invoked to adjudicate conflicts over proper monastic behavior. As Tso Sze-bong has argued, although Yijing translated the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* and wrote extensively on it, he also remained a follower of the Dharmagupta *vinaya*.[51] The first time any *vinaya* was adopted as a national standard in China was in the year 709, and it was not Yijing's Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, but rather the Dharmagupta *vinaya*, as understood through the commentaries of Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) and his disciples. Even that *vinaya* maintained a tenuous and short-lived claim to authority, since about one hundred years later Buddhist monasteries began the shift toward a radically different, much shorter set of collective regulations associated with the figure of Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (720–814).

What, then, does it mean to say that the wheel of rebirth in China (or, by implication, elsewhere) was "canonical"? Did Śākyamuni himself or the ancient *vinaya* mandate a new iconography for the wheel of rebirth, as the *vinaya* story itself suggests? Or was it rather the case that the canon was invoked more as a justification, to rationalize a long-established discursive practice? Based on the social history of the *vinaya* sketched above, the answer is closer to the latter than the former. Yijing's nearly complete translation of the Mūlasarvāstivāda

[51] See Tso, "The Transformation of Buddhist *Vinaya* in China," pp. 4–117.

vinaya stands in contrast to the fact that it was not, on the whole, put into practice. It is true, as noted above, that the story of the painting of the *saṃsāracakra* contained in the *vinaya* was quoted later by Daocheng, who treated it as authorization for the painting of the wheel of rebirth in Song-dynasty monasteries. But in this case the *vinaya* served as charter *ex post facto*. The *vinaya* account was important in China, then, because across the stretches of Buddhist history it pointed backwards in time, toward the founder in India, rather than forward. It functioned as citation, as textual verification for action. Just as the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* in India was created as justification for Indian Buddhist monastic institutions, so too the same canon in Chinese translation was quoted in order to authenticate practices already underway in China.

The contrast of the Chinese case with the canonical status of the wheel of rebirth in Tibet is particularly interesting. From the fifth through the eighth centuries, a total of five separate *vinaya* canons were translated into Chinese. The *vinaya* containing the account of the wheel of life and death was the last of the *vinaya*s to be translated. In describing the wheel of rebirth as "canonical" in China, then, it is important to remember that it was only one-fifth canonical. Tibet, on the other hand, followed only one *vinaya*, that of the Mūlasarvāstivāda, and pictures of the wheel were ubiquitous in late medieval and modern Tibet. In China, where the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* was merely the latest and ultimately minor addition to four prior *vinaya* collections, representations of the wheel of rebirth appear to have been much less widespread.

As an institutionally approved standard of authenticity, the canon in the case of the wheel of rebirth was more than simply a literary account with status–it was also a pictorial tradition. The wheel was "canonical" not only because it was related to a literary canon, but also to an artistic canon. This in turn raises the question of the transmission of knowledge in artistic canons: What sources did artists draw on in order to draw? Until recently the standard answer in the field of iconography was that artists knew what was in texts, and so to understand an element in a painting, an analyst needs to cite a textual precedent. More recently art historians have argued convincingly that paintings are interpictorial. From this perspective, rather than following a textual tradition, artists – many of whom were illiterate or barely literate – followed pictorial conventions that governed content, composition, and style.[52] The case of the wheel of rebirth at Yulin suggests that both

[52] The case for the artist's practice has been made most convincingly in Sarah E. Fraser, *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618–*

interpretations have validity. In pairing Maudgalyāyana and the wheel of rebirth, the cave is alluding to the legend contained in the *vinaya* account. Other elements seem to be direct quotations and paraphrases of the teaching in the *vinaya*, as seen in the use of stock symbols for the chain of causation. On the other hand, knowledge of the standard symbolism and the conventions of the wheel may well have derived not from an acquaintance with texts but from the practice of other artists and the constraints of artistic tradition.

In literary studies we are accustomed to a complicated notion of "citation." To cite a text is always a way of creating, not simply a means of reworking or deferring to authority. The same holds true in the case of the different versions of the wheel of rebirth, except that we have the added dimension of pictures. The canonical story of the wheel contains a multitude of symbolic systems and media: it is a text (the *vinaya*) about a person (the historical Buddha) prescribing a picture (the wheel of rebirth) that contains images (animals, gods, symbols of causation) as well as words (the poems on renunciation). The concept of intertextuality fails to capture the variety of media and the many subtle forms of reference in this literary account. The pictures of the wheel of rebirth are even more complicated. At Ajaṇṭā the picture prescribed in the canon is positioned on the porch and serves as a preface to the scenes inside – which were, in fact, noncanonical, since they are mostly related to Jātaka tales, which long circulated outside the canon. In Tabo Monastery the painting of the wheel of rebirth contains the mandated lines of poetry. At Yulin there is no text at all, just a picture, and there are new elements in the painting like the passage from one species to the next. Yet this latter version of the wheel may also be judged more canonical than all the rest, because the pictorial program of the cave invokes the *vinaya* account by portraying Maudgalyāyana's tour of hell on the wall opposite the wheel. The canonical antagonism between the charismatic monk and the *saṃgha* is rendered into architectural terms as the opposition between left and right walls. At first sight the wheel of rebirth at Baodingshan seems closest to the local and most distant

960 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); and idem, "The Manuals and Drawings of Artists, Calligraphers, and Other Specialists from Dunhuang," in *Images de Dunhuang: Dessins et peintures sur papier des fonds PELLIOT et STEIN*, edited by Jean-Pierre Drège, Mémoires archéologiques 24 (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1999), pp. 55–104. For a methodological analysis of the field of iconography, see Yan Juanying 顏娟英, "Fojiao yishu fangfaxue de zai jiantao 佛教藝術方法學的再檢討," in *Zhonghua minguo shi zhuanti lunwenji, di sijie taolunhui* 中華民國史專題論文集第四屆討論會, edited by Zhonghua minguo shi zhuanti taolunhui 中華民國史專題討論會 (Taibei: Guoshiguan, 1998). On compositional logic, see Hung Wu, "What is *Bianxiang*?–On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52.1 (June 1992), pp. 111–92.

from the canonical. It is the most overtly popular of all the sites, since it was defined for a broad, regional audience. It was farthest from the *vinaya* in that the saint to whom it is dedicated was probably not even a monk. It adds its own hymns to the scene, and it inserts the creator of the site into the center of the wheel. All of these characteristics are expressions of its local appeal. Nevertheless, the wheel at Baodingshan cites the verses stipulated in the *vinaya* and invokes the Buddhas of past, present, and future as authorities for the scene. It constructs its own framework for balancing an understanding of the pan-Asian requirements of the wheel of rebirth with the kind of Buddhism prevalent in Sichuan.

So far the thrust of my analysis has been to break down and historicize our conception of the "canonical." I have suggested that canons are social institutions that change over time, that canons include both literary and artistic conventions, and that what is considered canonical stands in a complex relation to the local. It is important to note, however, that the concept of "the local" does not constitute empirical bedrock either.

Taking medieval Chinese sources as an example, I would argue that Buddhists throughout Asia took a complex attitude toward the meaning of "the local." One of the best examples of how informants on the ground viewed the interplay of local and, in effect, transnational forces is contained in a popular entertainment dealing with the exploits of the ruler of the Dunhuang (Shazhou 沙洲) area, Zhang Huaishen 張淮深 (831–890). Zhang defeated Uighur armies twice, beginning in 883, and reinstituted the mantle of the central Tang government over the area. Lacking both a title and any attribution of authorship, the transformation text extolling Zhang represents local folklore put into the form of a prosimetric narration (now fragmentary) and picture-scrolls (now lost). The text explains how an emissary from the Tang court was led into the official temple established during the Kaiyuan era (713–742) under the reign of emperor Xuanzong (r. 713–756). The official from Chang'an was shown a portrait of the emperor and was delighted to see that it preserved the emperor's likeness in a lively and convincing manner. Since the emissary could not have been alive during emperor Xuanzong's lifetime, his criterion for verisimilitude must have been representations of the emperor that he would have seen at court in Chang'an. The text reads:

> After the Minister [Zhang Huaishen] received the imperial orders for his appointment, he led the emissary of Heaven to the Kaiyuan

> Temple, where he personally paid obeisance to the Sagely Visage of our Xuanzong. Observing that the imperial throne of past years [in the portrait] was just as dignified as if it were in front of him now, the emissary exclaimed, "Although for one hundred years the Dunhuang area has been opposed to the Han and fell into the hands of the Western tribes 西戎, still it manages to pay respect to its true ruling dynasty and to maintain our emperor's image, whereas none of the other four commanderies in the area is able to preserve it. I also see that in the other four commanderies of Liang 涼, Gua 瓜, Su 肅, and Zhi 稚, the parapets have been defaced, and the [Han] residents and the smelly barbarians stand shoulder-to-shoulder. How could they fail to button their clothing to the left? Only in the lone commandery of Shazhou are the styles and ornamentation of the people the same as those in the inner region."[53]

This fascinating legend attempts to valorize a local hero whose military exploits and political power were extremely important in northwest China. Yet the text construes his value as transcending the local and conforming to central Chinese values. The myth deploys the terms of Chinese political hegemony ("true ruling dynasty," *benchao* 本朝) and Han ethnic superiority, drawing on centuries of prejudiced vocabulary to refer to local tribes, malodorous foreigners, non-Chinese clothing, and decrepit building practices. The story of Zhang Huaishen offers the modern reader a rare chance to consider how residents of medieval Gansu reflected on the interplay between the regional and the national. What makes Zhang Huaishen a hero is the way in which he preserves translocal practices like Chinese clothing and the regalia of the central government. This kind of folklore suggests that some regions in the northwest were better than other surrounding districts because they conformed to Chinese (that is to say, Han 漢) conventions and displayed their fealty to the imperium.

The explanatory value of the "local" is not simply that it shows an individual variation not deducible from an empire-wide norm. Rather, it is useful in clarifying the dynamics involved in paintings of the wheel of rebirth in China. The concept of the local is valuable if it forces our attention, as historians, to the possibility of agency and creative reinterpretation by medieval Buddhists, whether they were monks or lay

[53] Trans. from untitled text, Pelliot chinois ms. no. 3451, in Wang Zhongmin 王重民, ed., *Dunhuang bianwen ji* 敦煌變文集 2 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1957), p. 124; see also Rong, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu*, p. 268.

people, painters or viewers, storytellers, preachers, or listeners. I have noted the political consequences of local architectural form. A high-ranking minister's chapel at Ajaṇṭā drew a viewing audience quite different from that of a public pilgrimage site like Baodingshan. I have also attempted to show how local variations involve differences in ritual. At Yulin the wheel of rebirth marks a preliminary stage in the rite of entering into paradise and worshipping the Buddha, while at Baodingshan the visitor encounters the sculpture of the wheel as a preface to a long narrative about filial piety, asceticism, and the power of cosmic deities and holy men from Sichuan. The local meaning of any particular instantiation of the wheel of rebirth is determined partly by the local ritual program in which it occurs. I emphasize the narrative, ritual, and architectural aspects of the canonical and the local, then, in order to explain how meaning is constructed at particular sites through the interplay of local forces and pan-Buddhist symbols.

Appendix 1. Representations of Causation

12 or 18 Conditions (*nidāna*) of Co-dependent Origination (*pratītya samutpāda*)

LIST OF 12 (IN VINAYA)	LIST OF 18 (IN VINAYA)	SYMBOL (IN VINAYA)
1. ignorance (*avidyā*, *wu-ming* 無明)		1. *rakṣa*
2. dispositions (*saṃskāra*, *xing* 行)		2. potter
3. consciousness (*vijñāna*, *shi* 識)		3. monkey
4. name and form (*nāma rūpa*, *ming se* 名色)		4. person in boat
5. six sense fields (*ṣaḍāyatana*, *liuchu* 六處)		5. six sense organs
6. contact (*sparśa*, *chu* 觸)		6. people embracing
7. feeling (*vedanā*, *shou* 受)		7. people feeling pleasure
8. desire (*tṛṣṇā*, *ai* 愛)		8. woman holding child
9. appropriation (*upādāna*, *qu* 取)		9. person with bottle
10. becoming (*bhava*, *you* 有)		10. Brahmā
11. birth (*jāti*, *sheng* 生)		11. woman giving birth
12. old age and death (*jāra maraṇa*, *lao si* 老死)		12. corpse
	12a. old age (*jāra*, *lao* 老)	12a. old people
	13a. sickness (*vyādhi*, *bing* 病)	13a. ill people
	14a. death (*maraṇa*, *si* 死)	14a. corpse
	15a. sadness (*śoka*, *you* 憂)	15a. person grieving
	16a. malady (*parideva*, *bei* 悲)	16a. person weeping
	17a. pain (*duḥkha*, *ku* 苦)	17a. person suffering
	18a. difficulty (*durmanas*, *nao* 腦)	18a. person pulling camel

PAINTING AT AJAṆṬĀ	SCULPTURE AT BAODINGSHAN
1. demon outside wheel?	1. *rakṣa*
2. potter	2. potter
3. monkey	3. meditating figure?
4. people in boat?	4. person in boat
5. mask	5. plump meditating figure?
6.	6. people embracing
7.	7. seated and standing figures?
8.	8. woman holding child
9.	9. robber?
10.	10. Brahmā
11.	11. woman giving birth
12.	
	12a. old man (supported by young person)
13a.	13a. medicine administered to sick man
14a.	14a. mourner weeping over coffin
15a. woman kneeling?	15a. crying person being consoled?
16a. person consoling another?	16a. person entreating?
17a.	17a. person carrying load on back?
18a. person pulling camel	18a. person pulling horse

Appendix 2. Baodingshan: Changes in Species in the Outer Ring

Tentative Identifications

NOTE: Position 1 is top center; from there, positions proceed counterclockwise.

POSITION	HEAD	TAIL
1	woman	man
2	man (official)	woman
3	tiger	man (official)
4	ox	tiger
5	?	ox
6	reptile	?
7	pig	reptile
8	dragon	pig
9	snake	dragon
10	fish	snake
11	horse	fish
12	goat?	horse
13	monkey	goat?
14	?	monkey
15	duck	?
16	rat?	duck
17	dog	rat?
18	man	dog

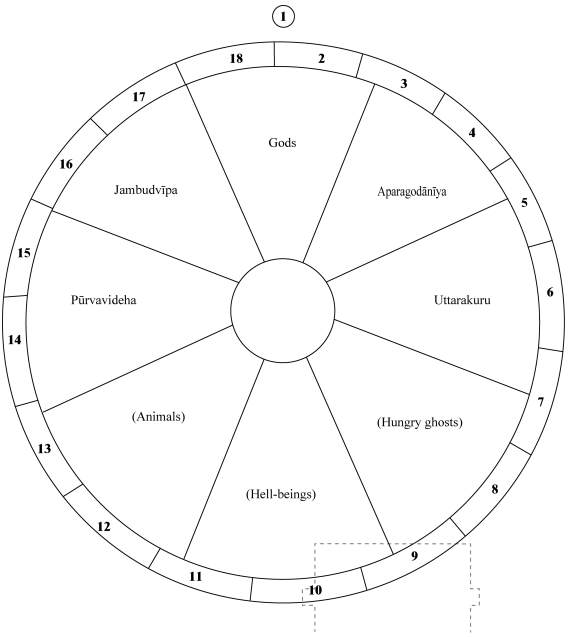


Figure 1. Iconography of the Wheel of Rebirth

Porch of Ajaṇṭā Cave 17. Five paths of rebirth (in eight segments) and eighteen links in the chain of causation. Outline of doorway at bottom right. Stephen F. Teiser and Sorat Tungkasiri.



Figure 2. Wheel of Rebirth

Right wall of entry corridor, Yulin Cave 19. Photography courtesy of Dunhuang Research Academy.

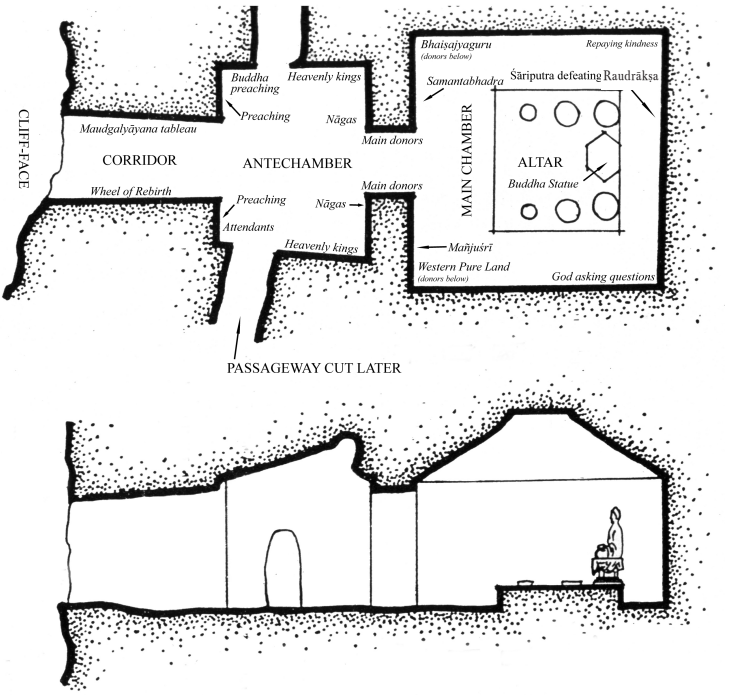


Figure 3. Pictorial Program of Yulin Cave 19
Stephen F. Teiser and Sorat Tungkasiri.

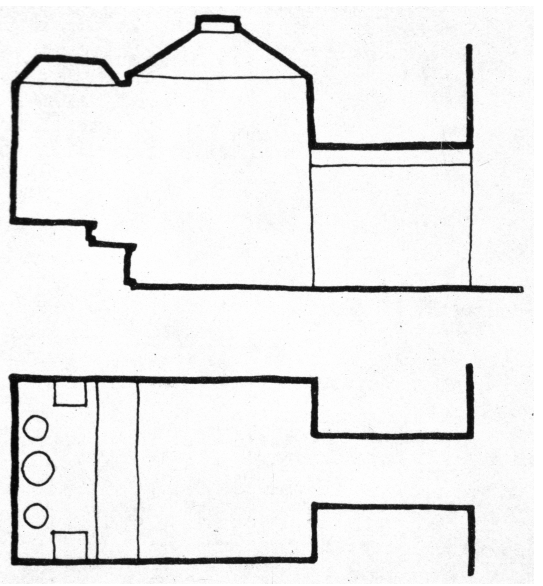


Figure 4. Diagram of Cave-Temple with Coffered Ceiling and Niche
Based on Mogao Cave 326, Song dynasty. Xiao, Dunhuang jianzhu yanjiu, *fig. 10-6.*

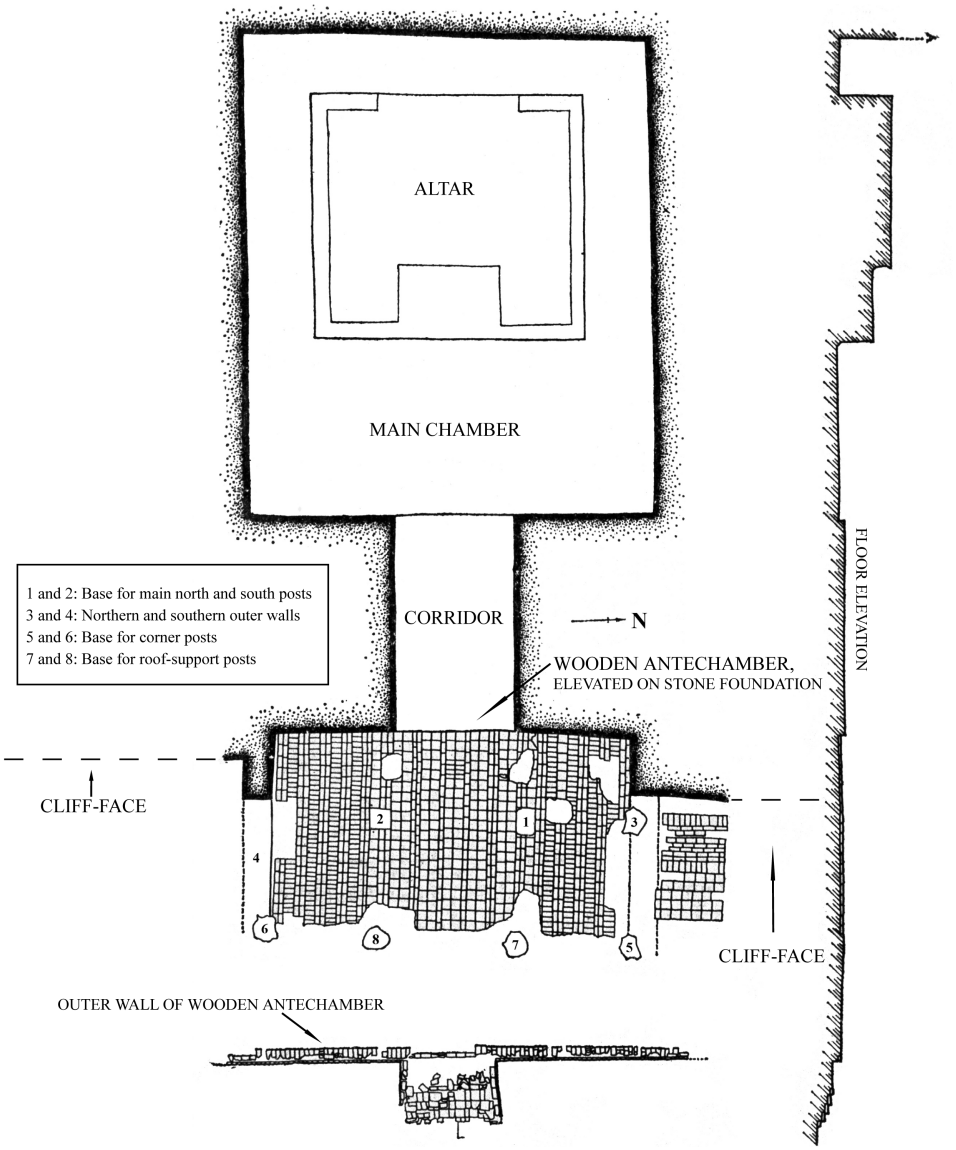


Figure 5. Excavation Plan of Mogao Cave 98

10th c.; showing wooden antechamber, corridor, and main chamber. After Pan and Ma, Mogaoku kuqian diantang yizhi, *fig. 8.*



Figure 6. Wheel of Rebirth, Baodingshang

Dafowan Niche 3. Bai Ziran 白自然, Zhongguo Dazu shiku 中國大足石窟, Les sculptures millénaires de Dazu *(Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 1985), pl. 62.*



Figure 7. Zhao Zhifeng and Liu Benzun, present at Śākyamuni's parinirvāṇa
Baodingshan, Dafowan Niche 11. Author's photograph.



Figure 8. Axis of the Wheel of Rebirth
Baodingshan, Dafowan Niche 3. Author's photograph.



Figure 9. Lower Portion of the Wheel of Rebirth
Baodingshan, Dafowan Niche 3. Author's photograph.



Figure 10. Figures below the Wheel of Rebirth
Baodingshan, Dafowan Niche 3. Author's photograph.