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Front Cover:
Cave XIX, east subsidiary cave, Yungang, seated Buddha. See John C. Huntington’s article p155.

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Detail of kneeling Bodhisattva in the "Tan Yao" caves at Yungang (See John C. Huntington's article — page 155)
Editorial

The spirit of competition is happily as alive today as it ever was. More than a century of political argumentation from Ruskin onwards has surely cracked down too much on the competitive instinct in the interests of boosting human co-operativeness as the desirable social end. Maybe not enough attention has been given to ways in which the competitive and the co-operative can help each other. Competitiveness need not mean so much the out-facing of rivals as the realisation that excellence in a chosen sphere is a necessity for human advance. An elitist is someone who aims not at being superior but at making available the excellent, and what could be more co-operative than that?

However lightly or darkly one regards the competitive spirit it is a pleasure to print in this issue the fruits of the Bluett Centenary Award, instituted in 1984 to mark a hundred years of the firm’s own pursuit of excellence. The Award brought in a rich harvest of offerings, covering a wide range of specialisms and enthusiasms, as the three prize-winning essays demonstrate. The high standard of entries is suggested by the fact that there was no third placing: instead there were joint runners-up, Miss Kerr and Dr Clunas (both of the Victoria and Albert Museum) shared second place. Professor Huntington of Ohio State University, the winner of the first prize, illustrated his paper with colour photographs and it is a matter for some rejoicing that Bluett’s have generously contributed towards the cost of reproducing many of these in colour.

Oriental Art applauds Bluett’s idea of an Award, and is proud to have the opportunity of printing the three pieces of scholarship which follow.
THE ICONOGRAPHY AND ICONOLOGY OF THE “TAN YAO” CAVES AT YUN GANG

Ever since their first scholarly publication in western literature,¹ the “Tan Yao” caves at Yungang have elicited debate regarding their iconological interpretation. The five colossal Buddha images (Skt. bhūtabuddhas) contained within, although not the earliest known, are among the earliest surviving images of their scale in the Buddhist world, a fact that by itself raises important historical and iconological issues. In spite of the intrinsic interest in the origin and development of the bhūta image concept, the central issue regarding the purpose of the caves is that there are five caves in an apparently unified scheme (Fig. 1), yet this scheme, its purpose and its iconography remain unknown. It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate the coherent iconography and iconology of the five caves. It will be shown that the central image of the group, which occurs in Cave XVIII, is the Ārya,² (Ch. zun;³ Jp. sōn) and represents Vairocana/Sākyamuni, that its immediate neighbors (Caves XVII and XIX) contain forms of Maitreya, that in the two end caves (caves XVI and XX) are forms of Amitābha, and it will be suggested that the whole is a kind of talismanic device (Skt. yantra) for the protection of the Wei state. This view differs radically from the usual interpretation that the images represent a commemoration of the five emperors of the Wei and the generalized identifications of the main figures as “a Buddha” or “Maitreya” and “Sākyamuni” that have dominated other attempts at understanding the iconography of this group.

HISTORY LEADING TO THE EXCAVATION OF THE “TAN YAO” CAVES

As a background for the following study it is necessary to bring to light a few points of Wei history as found in the Wei Shu.⁴ It must be remembered that the events leading to the excavation of the “Tan Yao” caves occurred in the aftermath of the tremendous religious developments that took place in Chinese Buddhism during the early fifth century. Kumārajīva and his contemporaries had just translated a number of major texts; Fa-hsien⁵ had gone to and returned from India with greater knowledge of Indian Buddhism than had ever been available in China, and his 415 C. E. Records of Buddhist Kingdoms, was widely current in Wei China (WS p. 132). The transcendent vision of the universality of the Buddha and of Buddhist doctrine as seen in the Avatamsakasūtra had just been translated for the first time by Buddhaghosa (T.278) and was being actively proclaimed (WS p. 132). By any measure, it was an expansive time for Buddhism in China, one in which it would be expected that energetic patrons could indeed feel that their contributions might literally surpass any other such effort in the world.

Tan Yao, the founder of the caves that conventionally bear his name, had been made Daorentong⁶, “master of the followers of the [Buddha] way” (sramaṇas), in 460 or 461 and was the successor to the Kashmiri, Shixian.⁷ The latter had been a sramaṇa and had continued his practice during the great persecution of Buddhism under the Wei emperor Taiwu Di⁸ (r. 424-451). The persecution had lasted from 444 through the death of Taiwu Di and was particularly brutal during its early years. Shixian had been forced to disguise himself and to practise in secret during it. According to the Wei Shu, on the very day of the restoration of Buddhism to imperial favour under the emperor Wencheng Di⁹ (r. 452-465), the emperor himself performed the hair cutting ceremony for Shixian and five of his associates. It was at the death of Shixian in 460 or 461 that Tan Yao became the head of the sramaṇas. Tan Yao originally had been summoned to the capital in 453, only one year after the restoration of Buddhism and, by virtue of having been made master of the sramaṇas, was obviously the lineage successor to Shixian.

Although it is generally stated that Tan Yao founded the caves in 460 and that they were made shortly after that, the Wei Shu does not actually state this in precise language. All that is clear is that Tan Yao suggested the excavation of the caves some time between 453 and 465 during the reign of emperor Wencheng Di (WS p. 147). However, stylistic evidence demonstrates that the site itself continued to be actively patronized until at least the year 494 when, under the emperor Xiaowen Di¹⁰ (r. 471-499) the capital was moved from the Datong¹¹ site to Luoyang¹² and work was begun on the Longmen caves.
Fig. 1. Plan and elevation of the "Tan Yao" caves, Yungang.
THE ICONOGRAPHIC SCHEME OF THE "TAN YAO" CAVES AS SEEN
BY PREVIOUS AUTHORS

The earliest iconographic interpretations of the

The caves were not Buddhist in nature at all but

Evidently, Wên-ch’êng wished to turn the in-

The casting in copper of the five standing statues

The five great caves carved out on the rock of châi at Yün-kang must

This statement, and similar ones made by other

Regarding the identification of caves XVI through

First, although caves XVI through XX are conven-

In addition, the overall appearance of external unity,

Another compelling argument that these caves must indeed be

[cave], should carve out a statue of the Buddha in each. The

It is notable that the scale of the larger of

While there are other bhadd images at Yungang, notably in

That Tan Yao’s five caves might have been

Since the whole cave complex was located beneath a Wei imperial

But, due to the limited number of bhadd images at the site, any such numbering would

Further, since both caves V and IX are each one of a

The second issue, the identification of the images as

The Wei Shu is quite specific on two accounts when images are cast or carved for the

One would think that the Wei Shu would also mention such

The assumption of such a motive is completely unwarranted and it is apparently based

Subsequent authors have dutifully repeated the assumption that the five Tan Yao images represented

The proper way to carry it to its logical extreme—he proceeded to identify the emperors by suggesting which

His basic assumption is that the image in Cave XVI is smaller and later than the other four and that therefore a

[an early Wei ruler named] Yü-li was the link through whom the Mandate of Heaven could be

491 this preposterous claim was abandoned, and the genealogically all-important title of T’ai

Unfortunately, there is no “hard” evidence to explain the smaller size and later style of the Buddha in

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mundane but probably more realistic than Soper's, come to mind immediately. Perhaps the cave was left unfinished at the end of the initial period of work on the brhad images (it is known that the work on the caves was a severe economic strain on the resources of the Wei and it is conceivable that the work was not finished in the first phase of excavation) and was finished later under a different sculptural master who used the new style. Buddhologically, there is also an explanation for what may have accounted for the later completion of an unfinished work. For, since, as will be shown below, the caves apparently represented the great state talisman, it would have been necessary to complete the project so that its effects would be of the greatest possible benefit to the Wei state. Judging from the style of the figure and drapery of the Buddha in Cave XVI, it would have to have been completed between c. 485 and 510 and, thus, would have been done either just before or just after the move to Luoyang in 494. Another alternative explanation for the small size and late style of the figure in Cave XVI is that there might have been a flaw in the stone which caused severe damage to the original image and the smaller carving was simply a "repair" to the cave using the surviving matrix. (It is well known that the soft stone of the cliffs was highly unsuitable for carving and had many flaws and weak spots that required repairs even during the first excavations.) Yet another alternative cause for a possible "reworking" of the image is that this was a time of iconographic "learning" and innovation in China. And, since early Chinese Buddhist art is notable for its iconographic errors, it is possible that the original image was somehow "wrong" and that a second image had to be substituted by removing the surface of the old image and carving a new one out of the remaining matrix. However, as logical as any of these reasons might appear to be, we have no knowledge about the actual cause of the different appearance of the Cave XVI image and must accept it as nothing more than what it appears to be: an image that is smaller and stylistically different, and probably later than the four images in the other caves.

The key element of Tokiwa and Sekino's association of the Tan Yao cave images as commemorating the five emperors is, apparently, the coincidence of the number five. In the case of the number of metal images of Śākyamuni (although it is unclear from existing evidence which five emperors or emperors/ancestors were intended to be so commemorated), there was an excellent Buddhological reason for the use of five. The metal images were to be placed in the "Grand Monastery of the Five-storied Stūpa" (Ch. tašt or "pagoda") (WS pp. 145-46). Where in this monastery they were to be placed is unstated, but it would have probably been in an image hall or in the ta itself.

As for the use of the number five in relation to the ta, it is well known that the number of stories in a ta in China and Japan has iconological significance. The significance is varied depending on the didactic purposes of the preceptor in charge of the iconographic programme and, without specific knowledge as to which five is intended, it is impossible to make a firm attribution (a common one is four events10 of the life of Śākyamuni Buddha plus the demonstration of the concept of universality [Skt. Dharmakāya]). However, because the name of the monastery itself was the "Five-storied Stūpa" it is obvious that the number five played an important role in the iconological scheme of the monastery, and it is highly probable that the number of images would have been determined by this association. As for the number five playing a role in the number of "Tan Yao" caves, I will show in the following that there was an internal determination of the number because of the demands of iconological considerations. Simply, because of the Buddhist iconographic conventions of bilateral symmetry and the combination of iconological statements to be made, the number had to be five. Thus, the number was essentially an incidental artifact of the iconological message of the caves without any apparent intention of being related to the five emperors/ancestors. In sum, there is no actual evidence from any source that the five "Tan Yao" caves were commemorative of any emperors/ancestors of the Wei and the assertion that such is the case may be disregarded as unfounded.

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE "TAN YAO" CAVES

In the following, a strictly Buddhological hermeneutical (contextual interpretation) approach to the iconology (symbolic content) and the iconography (recognition of characteristic formal conventions particular to a specific deity or individual) of the images in the caves will be used. In this approach, the images themselves become the primary documents. It must be recognized that, since inscriptive evidence is completely lacking for these caves, the images themselves form the only "attested document" at the site in the sense that they are both of the period and patrimomized by the very individuals who were primarily concerned with their informational content. They are literally like holograms, documents wholly in the handwriting of their authors. They are "first person, present tense statements" of the beliefs being promulgated by a specific preceptor of the very time he makes the promulgation. The content of the image amounts to a graphic display or demonstration of the underlying precepts of a teaching. The approach taken in this paper, that the images are documents of a communicative convention of the period in which they were made, has been lacking in the traditional art historical approach to Buddhist monuments, which has been more concerned with the attributive questions of stylistic development and chronology. These approaches are, of course, mandatory as preliminary considerations prior to the interpretation of the works of art in their context.

It may be argued by some that an early Buddha image may not be identified as other than a generalized "the Buddha" unless there is inscriptive evidence. This is hardly the case. Indeed, if there is one
thing that may be depended upon in the religion of non-discrimination, it is the almost overwhelming need for categorization and discrimination of various concepts no matter how minute the shades of variation. This conspicuously applies to the details of iconological statements where literally the bend of one finger may signify an important alteration in meaning. As I have shown in several studies of Indian, Gandhāran and Bactrian images, there are strong arguments for the identification of different specific Buddhas among the images from those regions. Specifically, in addition to images of Sākyamuni that have been positively identified in the Gandhāran and Kashmir regions, images of Maitreya Buddha (Ketumati Maitreya), Amitābha, and Vairocana can be recognized. And, as will be shown below, these are the very Buddhas that occur in the “Tan Yao” caves.

Surviving inscriptions demonstrate that at least as early as the Kusāna period in India (mid-first through the end of the third century of the Christian era), there was devotion to Maitreya Bodhisattva and Amitābha Buddha. Indeed, images of both the Buddha and Bodhisattva aspects of Maitreya were probably the most common of all individual sculptures in the Gandhāra school of the Indic northwestern area between the beginning of the Christian era and the 5th century. This is extremely relevant to the thesis of this study because it is demonstrable that the Wei received their Buddhist teachings in large measure from Kashmiri, Tan Yao’s predecessor and preceptor, Shixian, was himself a Kashmiri, and it is to be expected that therefore Tan Yao’s Dharma training was, at least in part, closely related to forms found in Kashmir, and the Indic northwest. Further, while the Buddhism practised in these regions is as yet only poorly studied, it is becoming apparent that Kashmir was a traditional centre of Vairocana practices and that emphasis on Maitreya was key to this cult.

Cave XVIII: The Vairocana/Sākyamuni cave

As noted above and as will be demonstrated below, the five “Tan Yao” caves are a bilaterally symmetrical, iconographic whole. Accordingly, we shall begin with the Arya of the whole set in the central cave, then examine the inner pair of caves (XVII and XIX) and, then the outer pair of caves (XVI and XX).

By far the most complex of the five image groups, the figures in Cave XVIII form a standard presentation of a Buddha surrounded by the members of his Buddha-field (Skt. Buddhakṣetra; Ch. focha, fotu, or fogu). Not only is Cave XVIII the largest of the five caves, but in terms of its complexity, it is far richer than the other four caves, further suggesting its primacy over the others. However, it is mainly its position on the north-south axial centre of the group that demonstrates the cave’s importance. Because of its central position, the main image of this cave must be considered the Arya, the emanator of the iconological whole of the five caves, with the other four caves serving as but reflections of the main Arya.

The major images in Cave XVIII are a standing Buddha (Fig. 2), two Bodhisattvas, ten images of disciples, two worshippers and two attendant Buddhas. The group to the proper left of the large Buddha is shown in Figure 3. As a Buddhakṣetra, except for its size, the figure group in Cave XVIII is comparable.
to others of the 5th century throughout Buddhist north Asia and western India, and is distinctive only in the feature of the small Buddhas covering the robe of the main image of the Buddha (Fig. 4). Such a convention has no currently known parallel anywhere in Buddhist art. However, a very close correlation does exist in a type known mostly from Chinese examples of a standing figure of a Buddha with scenes of teachings on his robes. Both the Cave XVIII figure and the other Chinese examples may be identified as dual representations of Vairocana and Sākyamuni. Indeed, it is very probable that this and all such images should be designated as “Sākyamuni in his radiant Vairocana robes,” which he is believed
to have worn just after his enlightenment and during his first preaching of the Anuttarakañcatāra (Ch. Huayan-jing). Unfortunately, no literary evidence has come to light to demonstrate the existence of this exact concept prior to the 6th century. However, given the ornamented robes as a characteristic of Vairocana, there can be little doubt that the intention of the sculptors was to portray the ultimate universality of Buddhahood.

Iconographically, there is no doubt that at least some of the image type surviving in early China are also Sākyamuni Buddha. For example, in Cave 428 at Mogao, near Dunhuang, there is an image of this type on the south wall with the visions of the teachings on the robe that demonstrates the presence of the type in China in the Northern Zhou period (557-581). Although no inscription names the image, it has been correctly identified as the Rushana-butsu (Ch. Luzhenafo) type as found in Japanese Tendai beliefs, which presumably derive from 6th-7th century China. It is significant to note that Rushana-butsu is considered in the Tendai teachings to be a sambhogakāya manifestation of Vairocana and is distinguished from Birushana-butsu (Skt. Vairocana; Ch. Biluzhenafo) who is the Dharmakāya. Yet, because the image is an integral part of what is obviously a complete iconographic programme of scenes depicting Sākyamuni’s life, it must also be seen as a depiction of Sākyamuni. Therefore, the image in Cave 428 at Mogao is of Sākyamuni (nirmāṇakāya) combined with the sambhogakāya manifestation of Vairocana (the teaching

Fig. 4. Cave XVIII, detail of robe of Arya.

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modality in which he appears to advanced Bodhisattvas) demonstrating the absolute primordial Buddha nature (Dharmakaya), Vairocana. This is exactly the nature of Vairocana, who is in turn, by definition, the demonstration of the universal infinitude of Sakyamuni.

Internal iconographic evidence in Cave XVIII also supports the identification of the main image as a dual representation of Vairocana/Sakyamuni. The *Arya bhuddha* image is also the central image of a scene with earthly beings whose presence demonstrates that it is a *nirmāṇakāya* Buddha among his followers. These ten earthly attendants are identified by the sunken-cheeked appearances of the older monks (Fig. 5), which contrast to the perfect appearance of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Such differentiation was apparently an attempt to reflect descriptions found in several sūtras. In some, for example, the Buddha is described as having an appearance ten times more perfect than that of the gods of Trayastrimśa, who themselves are ten times more perfect than ordinary men. Because the Yungang image has these ten earthly attendants, it is certain that he represents in at least one aspect the transformation of *nirmāṇakāya* aspect of the Buddha, which, for Vairocana would always be Sakyamuni Buddha. Whether these attendants are the ten great disciples so well known in Japanese iconographies, as asserted by Mizuno and Nagahiro, or simply a generalized group of monk-type followers as might be found, for example, in the tableaus of Hadara in Kapisa is irresolvable for not one of the ten figures is identifiable. Fortunately, for the purpose of this study, their specific identification is immaterial since it is the fact that they are earthly followers and neither devas nor Bodhisattvas that is important.

At this point it is necessary to digress into the area of text analysis to show that the identity of Vairocana with Sakyamuni was established in textual sources in China by the date of these images. An important text on this very issue was the *Swarnaprabhāsasūtra* (Ch. *jīnguānmland* or Ch. *Xitianwarg*), its primary Buddhological content is the universality of Sakyamuni in which his life is said to be eternal, and his enlightenment is likened to the Sun and he is called the sun Buddha.

While Sakyamuni is not actually called Darfo or Biluzhenafo (Skt. *Mahāvairocana* or *Vairocana*) in the text, there can be no doubt that it is Vairocana who is being referred to in the analogy. In the introduction to the second chapter, while the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu is meditating on the length of the life of the Buddha Sakyamuni, his house became vast, extensive, made of lapis lazuli, and adorned with treasures; then there appeared four divine seats in the four directions and on those seats appeared, in the east Akṣobhya, in the south Ratnaketu, in the west Amitāyus and in the north (?)-susabda Buddha (more properly, *Divyadundubhisvāra*). Then the Buddhas of the four directions impart their esoteric knowledge (about the length of life of Sakyamuni) to him through meditational means. To anyone familiar with the *mandala* of the *Mahāvairocana*-sūtra (Ch. *Darfojing*), this arrangement and apparent sequence of the meditation is immediately familiar. The house was transformed into the palace of the “eight-petalled lotus hall”, the Buddhas are essentially the *Tathāgatas* of the *mandala* of Mahāvairocana, and, true to still-current meditational practices, the practitioner, in this case the Bodhisattva Ruciraketu, envisioned himself in the centre of the *mandala*—identical to Vairocana—where he receives the “offering” of the *jñāna* of the Buddhas. Thus, it is obvious that the underlying “Primordial” Buddha, or Dharmakaya, of the *Swarnaprabhāsasūtra* is Vairocana and that the “universal” to which Sakyamuni is equated at length must, therefore, be Vairocana. Thus, within the appropriate time frame, with a text known to have been available in the northern regions of China, there is conclusive evidence of the identity between Vairocana and Sakyamuni.

Given the iconographic evidence in the cave itself and the demonstration of the concept of the identity of Vairocana and Sakyamuni being current in Buddhist literature of the time, there seems little doubt that the *Arya* in Cave XVIII is a demonstration of the concept of Vairocana/Sakyamuni. Accordingly, the *Arya* of the set of “Tan Yao” caves is the “cosmological” or “primordial” Buddha which manifests the absolute nature of the Dharmakaya while the *nirmāṇakāya* of the present era, Sākyamuni.
muni is inherently also present as the immediate source of the teachings. The identity of Vairocana and Sakyamuni is a commonly held belief and such iconology is indeed believed to be present in many manifestations of the Sakyamuni. (In a theoretical sense, Vairocana may be said to have no separate existence from his role as the demonstration of the supramundane state of Sakyamuni.) However, the iconology of the Cave XVIII image may be contrasted to that of the image of the Vairocana/Sakyamuni in Cave 428 at Mogao. The latter, set conspicuously among the life scenes of Sakyamuni, is conceived of as generating the display through the intermediary of the sambhogakaya. However, the Cave XVIII image shows no such life scene relationship and must be considered a direct display of the Dharmakaya/nirmankaya. In any case, the general principle of the identity of Sakyamuni with the primordial Buddha-nature is the same and seldom has been displayed on such a literal and grand scale.

Caves XVII and XIX: The Maitreya Caves

Of the five "Tan Yao" caves, the specific iconography of Cave XVII alone is generally agreed upon. The cave is overwhelmingly filled with a gigantic image of a Tuṣita Maitreya in the cross-ankled version of bhadrāsana (Fig. 6). There are more inscribed images of Maitreya than any other Buddhist figure in China during the period from 390 to 600 of the Christian era and this specific iconographic convention is present in several of these inscribed images. Thus, there is no reasonable doubt regarding the identification: the image shows the Bodhisattva Maitreya residing in Tuṣita paradise until such time as the earthly paradise of Ketumati is ready for his descent for his final rebirth as a sanyaksambudha.

The iconography of Cave XIX, on the other hand, to my knowledge, has never been identified in any literature on the subject, yet its iconography is easily recognized. The excavation actually consists of three discrete units (Fig. 7), the largest central cave, in which there is a Buddha seated in vajraparyankāsana (Fig. 8) and two much smaller and elevated side caves in each of which there is a Buddha seated in the bhadrāsana (the so-called pendant legged position, also known in Sanskrit as pralambapadāsana) (Figs 9 and 10). The images in the side caves are bilaterally symmetrical with the central cave and conspicuously turn towards the central image so that there can be no doubt as to their relationship to the main image as subordinate aspects of the same composition. Even the briefest survey of depictions of Maitreya's paradieses at the Mogao caves will demonstrate that, when shown in Ketumati, the Buddha Maitreya is often attended by two bhadrāsana Buddhas (similarly positioned Bodhisattvas also occur) which may be identified as reflections of Maitreya. Like the "cross-ankled" version of the bhadrāsana, which is characteristic of the Bodhisattva Maitreya, the "legs pendent" version of bhadrāsana is one of the major iconographic characteristics of Ketumati Maitreya throughout north Asian Buddhist art. Since the presence of the two attendant bhadrāsana Buddhas is uniformly determinant of Maitreya's Ketumati when there is a central Buddha present (no matter what the central figure's position), there is no doubt that the image of Cave XIX represents Ketumati Maitreya.

Fig. 6. Cave XVII, north wall, Arṣa, Tuṣita Maitreya.

To understand the reason for the two images of Maitreya in caves XVII and XIX and how they function within the Maitreya cult, it is necessary to digress into the tenets of the cult itself. In brief, the cult has two separate but interrelated soteriological modes: that of attaining rebirth in the presence of Tuṣita Maitreya and that of attaining rebirth at the time of and in the presence of Ketumati Maitreya. The Tuṣita Maitreya aspect of the cult holds that the Bodhisattva Maitreya is residing in Tuṣita Heaven as the prince regent after having been invested with the crown of the Bodhisattva who was to become prince Gautama at the moment of his decision to be born on earth and to become a fully enlightened Buddha. A devotee's access to this paradise is gained by performing good works, accumulating merit (Skt. punyavarga), and by faith (Skt. śraddhā) in Maitreya's future Buddhahood. One is reborn in Tuṣita Heaven to await the coming of Maitreya Buddha (wherein he will descend to Ketumati) and then be born with him at that time to receive the prediction of one's own future enlightenment. The Tuṣita aspect of the cult is called the "ascending cult" as the devotee hopes to ascend to Tuṣita. The Ketumati Maitreya aspect of the cult holds that by continually being reborn in the earthly
realm (Skt. sahāloka) and that by continuing to do good works, charity, and accumulating merit, one can help Maitreya prepare for and actually hasten the coming of Ketumati. When the time of Ketumati arises, there will be three teaching assemblies of Maitreya (it is not certain if this accounts for the presence of the other two Buddhas in depictions of Ketumati as most Buddhakṣetras have other minor [pratyekabuddhas] present) in which he will expound the Dharma. While there are several permutations to the Ketumati aspect of the Maitreya cult, in essence, one vows to live on this earth and to do good works until such time as the period of Ketumati arrives and at that time one will be reborn in Maitreya’s entourage to receive the prediction of future enlightenment. This is called the “descending” cult. As is well known from inscriptive evidence, this dual cult of Maitreya was very popular during the early years of Buddhist activity in China and was especially popular under the Wei.

Iconologically, the arrangement of the two caves to either side of the Vairocana/Sākyamuni makes perfect sense. The beginning or entry side of Buddhism is the east (for example, east is the direction Sākyamuni faced while under the bodhi tree) and is the side on which Tuṣita Maitreya is placed; the west is the culmination direction (for example, Sākyamuni faces west at the parinirvāna) and it is the side on which Ketumati Maitreya is placed. The caves can be diagrammed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culmination side (West)</th>
<th>Entry side (East)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sākyamuni/Vairocana (Cave XVIII)</td>
<td>Tuṣita Maitreya (Cave XVII)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ketumati Maitreya (Cave XIX)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Caves XVI and XX: The Amitābha/Amitāyus Caves

It is completely remarkable that the standing Buddha in Cave XVI (Fig. 11) has yet to be identified. The figure displays a determinant gesture made with both hands known as the laiyīng (Skt. [uncertain]; Jp. raigo). This mudrā is specifically the gesture of the Buddha Amitābha/Amitāyus (Ch. Amitofo, or Wuliangguan/Wulangshou) as he goes to greet the dying when he is about to escort them to Sukhāvatī. The frontal figure of Amitābha/Amitāyus displaying this gesture has remained traditional to the present day in Japanese Shin Buddhism where it is known as the “Ultimate Buddha Body [of Amitābha].” It is significant that the Cave XVI image
Fig. 8. Cave XIX, north wall, Arya, Ketumati Maitreya.
displays specifically the greeting gesture and not one of the other mudrās that are associated with Amitābha, either the dharmacakra mudrā or the dhvānamudrā. The latter two mudrās are appropriate to visualizations of Amitābha residing in Sukhāvati but not in his “welcoming” aspect.

Although very poorly known in western literature, the layāning gesture is a mudrā of considerable antiquity, and is one with a complex history in Buddhist iconology. It is significant for this study to note that by the early 7th century in China versions of it had been incorporated into the ninefold hierarchy of gestures associated with the Nine layāning Amitābhas of the last three meditations of the Amitāyur-dhāyanā-sūtra (Ch. Guan Wulangshoufo-jing10) which had been translated by Kālayasās between 424 and 442. The middle birth levels of each of the three classes of birth are demonstrated by minor permutations of the layāning. The lower birth levels are formed by yet further permutations of the layāning in which the left hand is raised and the overall appearance resembles a “double vitarkamudrā”. The fact that the layāning gesture and its permutations signify the middle births and are the primary morphological basis for the lower birth gestures12 suggests that they are manifestations of the early welcoming gesture. Further, the third type of welcoming gesture, permutations of a “reverse” (left hand on top of the right) dhvānamudrā, used in the meditations for the upper birth in each rank, following the typical Buddhist developmental pattern of sequential layering of ever greater superlatives, had been added to its predecessors as a demonstration of superiority. The later addition of the lower births was also a “superlative” in the sense that even those who had committed the most grievous sins (Skt. ānāntaryā) and who were specifically denied rebirth into Sukhāvati in some versions of the sūtras, were, under certain circumstances, to be welcomed into Sukhāvati. By recognizing this phenomenon of sequential layering and stripping away the later layers, in this case both the upper and lower births in each rank, it is quite easy to determine the importance of the early version of the gesture seen in Cave XVII in its time frame.

Fig. 9. Cave XIX, east subsidiary cave, seated Buddha.

Amitāyus/Amitābha in the welcoming aspect must greet the deceased according to their accumulation of merit, faith in him, and strength of desire to be born in Sukhāvati. Accordingly, the image of the layāning Amitābha/Amitāyus in Cave XVI is an “entry level” icon exactly parallel with the other eastern side icon
of the group, Tuṣita Maitreya. Thus, quite logically, the two eastern images of the group are “entry” or “access” images aimed at providing the devotee immediate interrelationships with the Buddhas of the two primary paradises of Wei Buddhism.

![Image](image.png)

Fig. 11. Cave XVI, north wall, *Arya, Laiying* Amitābha/Amitāyus.

In one of the earliest studies of Cave XX, Alfred Foucher, basing his work on M. Chavannes’ photographs, identifies the three Buddhas of this cave as Śākyamuni performing the multiplication of Buddhas (The Great Miracle at Sravasti). In spite of his many contributions to the field, Foucher was limited in his knowledge of Mahāyāna iconography and iconology. Obvious parodies (vyūhas), the Buddhas of the *śrīloka*, and other conventions requiring the display of more than one Buddha were all lumped together in Foucher’s “catch-all” category of the “Great Miracle.” Since the “Great Miracle” would be quite out of place in the context of the iconography of the other four “Tan Yao” caves as established thus far, we need not consider his identification seriously.

Regrettably, there is only limited direct evidence regarding the iconography of Cave XX (Fig. 12). The *dhyānamudrā* made by the Buddha may be displayed by several different Buddhas, specifically Śākyamuni, Vairocana, Amitābha, and Prabhūtaratna, all of whom are represented in surviving examples from more or less the same period as the Cave XX image. However, the identifications of the other images in the “Tan Yao” caves provided what seems to be the determining clue. If there is an entry level Maitreya on the east and a culmination level Maitreya on the west, then it stands to reason that the entry level Amitābha/Amitāyus on the east should be paired with a culmination level Amitābha/Amitāyus on the west. Nothing about the image precludes this identification. On the contrary, once this insight has been gained, several arguments may be advanced as to how well this identification fits the image. The first and foremost, however, is the Buddhological symmetry that occurs when it is assumed that the image in Cave XX is Amitābha/Amitāyus. This gives the following diagram:

```
(West)                   (East)
Culmination Side        Entry Side
Śākyamuni/
Vairocana
(Cave XVIII)

Kṣitigarbha
Mañjuśrī
(Cave XVII)

Tusita
Maitreya
(Cave XVI)

Sukhāvati
Amitābha/Amitāyus
(Cave XX)

“Laiying”
Amitābha/Amitāyus
(Cave XVI)
```

The position of the figure at the westernmost end of the group is a strong argument for its association with Sukhāvati, the western paradise of Amitābha/Amitāyus. At Mogao, where all the caves face east, and therefore the *Arya* must be on the west, representations of Amitābha/Amitāyus that are reflections of the *Arya* must occur on either the north or the south wall. In the case of Sukhāvati scenes, the image of Amitābha/Amitāyus is always placed at the western end of that wall. It is not until the very late caves that the depictions of Sukhāvati are freed from their strict physical setting. The demand that Amitābha be to the west of either the worshipper or, as is apparently the case of Yungang Cave XX, be to the west of the generating *Arya*, seems to have been a rigid iconographic determination throughout early representations.

As is well known, the *dhyānamudrā* is associated with Amitābha’s iconography from the earliest images. Recently it has also been shown that secondary images of Amitābha in Gandhāra also make the *dhyānamudrā*. Thus, although in representations of Amitābha/Amitāyus at Mogao, variants of the *dhammacakramudrā* are the common iconographic feature of Amitābha/Amitāyus, it is entirely possible for an early Amitābha/Amitāyus to make the *dhyānamudrā*. Moreover, given the presumed dependence of this iconographic grouping on western Asiatric iconographic traditions, it seems likely that this image would follow conventions known there.

Another minor feature of the image group is that many of the secondary figures in the scene are portrayed as standing, sitting, or kneeling on lotus blossoms (Fig. 13). This feature is missing in the other “Tan Yao” caves. While this convention occurs in various text versions of most other paradises, it is
not especially emphasized in artistic representations of any paradise except for Amitābha/Amitāyus' Sukhāvati. Accordingly, it may be suggested that this emphasis on the lotus as a place of rebirth in Sukhāvati is yet another feature of the iconographic scheme supporting the attribution of this cave as Sukhāvati Amitābha/Amitāyus.

appearance at length, that a text emphasizing the two Bodhisattvas was even known in China. Moreover, the cult of Avalokiteśvara as benefactor/“saviour”, while very important in India in the 5th century, does not seem to have been particularly important in China at that time. Thus, there is no reason to expect any emphasis on the two Bodhisatt-

It may be objected by some who are familiar with the usual late emphasis on the two Bodhisattvas of Sukhāvati, namely, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthamaprapta, that their absence makes it unlikely that Cave XX is a Sukhāvati scene. This is not the case. Indeed, at so early a date it is actually unlikely that the two Bodhisattvas would have been emphasized and would not necessarily even have been present. While their presence in Sukhāvati is apparently a foregone conclusion in all of the texts, none of the so-called “Larger” Sukhāvatīvyūhasūtras describe the two Bodhisattvas in any detail. In fact, they are mentioned only in passing once or twice and there is no mention of them at all in the “Shorter” Sukhāvatīvyūhasūtra. It is not until the translation of the Amitāyurdhīyasūtra, which extols their virtues and

Fig. 12. Cave XX, north wall, Arya, Sukhāvati Amitābha/Amitāyus.
nical reason behind whether the Buddha of Sukhāvati would be shown in dharmacakkramudrā, which would imply that he was in the act of teaching, or dhyanamudrā, in which he would not be implicitly teaching, resides in which text was being emphasized. In some of the “Larger” Sukhāvativrddha, Amitābha actively teaches, while, in others, the sound of the Dharma is spontaneously produced. There had been three translations of the text by the time the Cave XX image was made: the Han translation of 186 C. E. attributed to Lokakṣema in which Amitāyus did the teaching; the Wu translation done between 223 and 253 C. E. by Jin Qian in which Amitāyus does the teaching; and the (Cao) Wei translation of 252 C. E. by Saṅghavarman in which the teaching may be heard at all times but is not necessarily performed by Amitāyus. Since it is the translation of Saṅghavarman that is the latest available text to the Wei and that is the text that de-emphasizes the teaching by Amitāyus, it is entirely possible that this was the text used for the iconographic determinations of the “Tan Yao” caves.

A SECONDARY ICONOGRAPHIC THEME

A very common feature of Chinese Buddhist iconography is the presence in the main image hall of some manifestation of the Buddhas of the three time periods: the past, present and future. This may take a variety of patterns but would always include one of the pre-Sākyamuni Buddhas (commonly Dipamkara, Kasyapa or Amitābha), along with an image of Sākyamuni, Sākyamuni-Vairocana or just Vairocana, and, finally, an image of either Maitreya or Bhaṣajya guru (Buddha of the second future period). Such a theme is also present in the five “Tan Yao” caves. With Amitābha as the Buddha of the past, Vairocana/Sākyamuni as the Buddha of the present, and Maitreya as the Buddha of the future, the theme of the three times is clearly present. Indeed, the arrangement of the caves makes this statement in a very elegant manner, emphasizing the Buddha of the present. Graphically, they are laid out as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Cave XX)</th>
<th>(Cave XIX)</th>
<th>(Cave XVIII)</th>
<th>(Cave XVII)</th>
<th>(Cave XVI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>past</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>past</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FURTHER QUESTIONS OF ICONOLOGY

What motive did the Wei emperors have for the excavations of these caves? One can always insist that it was personal salvation of the emperor, Wencheng Di (452-465), and that by creating these great images he was essentially insuring his own place in the paradisal realms of either Maitreya or Amitābha and that there was no more to it than that. However, Wencheng Di only reigned until 465, certainly not enough time to see the caves through to completion. In addition, the late style of the image in Cave XVI is evidence enough to argue that the caves were either finally finished or at least refurbished towards the very end of the century or even early in the 6th century, long after Wencheng Di died. For whatever reason, both Xianzu Di (466-471) and Xiaowen Di (471-499), and possibly even Xuanwu Di (490-515), continued the project. There had to be some greater state significance to the vast undertaking than just the personal salvation of Wencheng Di. Although not definitively stated, the Wei Shu would seem to hold some hints regarding the underlying reasons behind the excavation of the caves.

In the time of Shih Lo (274-333) there was a Hindu monk Fou-t'u-teng. As a youth in Udiyanā [now recognized to be in Swat Valley just north of the Peshawar valley] he met an arhat and entered the Way. In the time of Liu Yao (318-328) he arrived in Hsiang-kuo. Afterwards, he was honoured and trusted by Shih Lo and given the appellation Mahopādhyāya. He [Shih Lo] frequently consulted him on military matters and what he said generally came true (WS p. 124).

And:

[Before the reign of Shih-tsu (424-451), Chu-ch'ü Meng-hsun, a ruler of the Bei Liang between 412-433] also had a liking for Buddhism. There was a Kashmirian monk named T'an-mo-ch'an who was familiar with the sutras and śāstras, and who...(with others) translated ten odd sutras... He was clever in fortune-telling, in preventive magic, and spoke in detail of the fortunes of other states, much of which came true. Mēng-hsun often consulted him on the affairs of state.

In the period Shên-chia (428-431) the emperor [Shih-tsu of the Wei] commanded Mēng-hsun to send T'an-mo-ch'an to the capital, but out of
avarice he did not send him [but had him murdered (to avoid letting this valuable military resource fall into enemy hands)] (WS pp. 133-34).

From the foregoing, it is clear these foreign monks were contributing much more than Buddhist teachings to garner imperial favour. While it is impossible to demonstrate that this was the main interest in Buddhism, there is no doubt that it was a very strong ancillary benefit of supporting the Sarīgha.

Shixian, known only from the Wei Shu, is said there to be a relative of the king of Kashmir, to have come east and to have resided in Liangcheng until such time as Liang was subdued (WS p. 145). During the persecution, he disguised himself as a medical practitioner and, on the very day of the restoration, he became a monk again (WS p. 145). The emperor himself performed the tonsure for Shixian and four followers and Shixian was made Daoren Cong, “master of the followers of the [Buddha] way”. Both because of the emperor’s personal involvement and the promptness with which the tonsure took place, it is certain that Shixian must have had contact with Xiaowen Di during the period of persecution as well as immediately after it. Although we hear nothing of Shixian’s Buddhist teachings, I think that, given the concern of the Wei Shu for the fortune telling abilities of the foreign monks, there must have been some concern for the welfare of the state with the appointment of Shixian to the position he was given on the day of the restoration.

Tan Yao had been summoned to the capital from Zhongshan in the year after the restoration (453) and, because of an omen, was respected by the emperor as a teacher. Tan Yao became the successor to Shixian as the Daoren Cong. The exact date of this succession is uncertain as the Wei Shu only states that is in the first part of the Heping period (460-465) and it can only be assumed that it was either in the year 460 or 461 that he took office. Whatever the case, he would have had about seven years to study with Shixian and to have mastered the teachings that led the Kashmiri to have been appointed the Daoren Cong (WS p. 146). While there is little direct evidence of the actual teachings that he promulgated, the exception being a partial list of texts that he translated, given the usual master-disciple relationship, it is relatively certain that he would have been initiated to any doctrines that would have been for the welfare of the state and therefore of primary interest to his imperial patrons.

The one concern that the Wei Shu is specific about is that the monuments were to surpass anything in the world (WS p. 147). We can know something of what they were intended to surpass since, as noted above, Faxian’s Records of Buddhist Kingdoms was recorded in the Wei Shu as having been popular. Readers of Faxian’s narrative must have been familiar with the eighty-foot-tall wooden image of Maitreya that he reported having seen in the country of Darêl on his way to the high passes of the Karakorum. To be dedicated to surpassing such an image may have taken many forms, but certainly the creation of the images in the “Tan Yao” caves would have succeeded in doing so.

The overview of the situation is as complete as available information allows: the caves were supported by at least three and possibly four successive emperors; the goal behind their creation was to surpass anything in the world; the monument was proposed by the disciple of a Kashmiri monk, one who succeeded him to the highest position of a monk in the Wei state; and, finally, that Kashmiri and western monks had a record of being soothsayers and fortune tellers — essentially state oracles, especially in times of stress. Further, the caves were directly under one of the major Wei forts, the very one that controlled the pass from the west towards the Datong city where the capital was located. It is my suggestion that the “Tan Yao” caves were thus a state “talisman” for the protection of the expanding Wei state.

If this is the case, it would account for the continued interest by the succession of emperors. Indeed, if stylistic analysis ultimately proves that the image of Laiying Amitabha in Cave XVI is a product of the period after the change of the capital to Luoyang, it would be an emphatic statement as to the continued value of the caves to the Wei state. The talismanic power that the caves would be supposed to have could only be enhanced by the completion of an incomplete image or the re-carving of a damaged one.

The fact that the Arya of the group was Śākyamuni/Vairocana would exactly meet the needs of the concept of imperialism in the emerging Wei state. Early in the Wei history a flatterer monk by the name of Faguō equated the emperor Taizu with the Tathāgata and, after bowing to the emperor, would make the statement: “Since he who can spread our doctrine is the prince of men, I have not bowed to the emperor, but have merely paid my respects to the Buddha” (WS p. 129). Since the emperor was considered the son of heaven, the representative of heaven on earth, it would naturally follow that the only conceivable Arya of the set would have to be the Śākyamuni/Vairocana duality representing both the principle of Buddhist universality, Vairocana, and his earthly transformation, Śākyamuni.

In the seven or eight years available to Tan Yao to study with Shixian, one presumes that the techniques of predicting the future and the other similarly politically useful skills would have been transmitted to him. Although I have been able to locate nothing on a Wei equivalent of the Japanese “Mishūho” (a week-long ceremony of the second week of the new year devoted to the health of the emperor and the well-being of the state), it may be presumed that such religious phenomena existed. Indeed, if the Svārṇaprabhāsasūtra cited above is any example, there was great concern for the welfare of the state in the Buddhist literature then being translated. It would follow that such a great effort on the part of the state could have only been for the benefit of the state (in the person of the emperor?) and that its talismanic effects were of paramount concern.
CONCLUSIONS

With this documentation, the position of Yungang both as a Buddhist monument and as an expression of Wei polity becomes clear. Given the highly complex iconographic programmes that were being developed in other parts of Asia, such as the exactly contemporaneous Ajanja caves or even the Wei caves at Mogao, it is inconceivable that Tan Yao should have suggested making "five buddhas" without an iconographic theme. That the theme should have been focused on the attainment of paradise speaks to the fact that, for all practical purposes, the Wei were relatively new converts to Buddhism, less interested in the philosophical speculations of the higher soteriological methodologies than in an assured rebirth in paradise. But, it would appear from their placement of the caves in the pass to the west from Datong, and from the interest in the foreign monks as soothsayers, that they had something even more immediate in mind—the protection of the Wei state—literally, their own bit of paradise right here on earth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is necessary to express my deep appreciation to several individuals and the funding organization that have made this study possible. Marylin M. and Young Rkie conceived of and organized the trip to China which enabled me to visit Yungang, Mogao, and many other Buddhist sites and temples. Fred Martinson, whose profound knowledge and sincere love of Asian art is an inspiration to all who know him, provided encouragement and many hours of discussion. I am especially grateful to The Ohio State University's Distinguished Research Award programme which provided me with the necessary funds for my research in China. I would also like to express my appreciation to Shue Shin-pyng for his excellent rendition of the Chinese characters accompanying the article. And, last but far from least, I would like to acknowledge Susan L. Huntington, whose critical acumen and encouragement are of the utmost importance to all my scholarly efforts. Whatever small scholarly (or Buddhist) merit this study may contain is dedicated to her.

NOTES

2 The Arca of an iconographic convention is the central image who is understood as the progenitor of the rest of the deities in the assembly. Thus, the bhad image of Vairocana at Longmen is understood as projecting the entire rest of the deities in the temple out of his very pores as rays of light in a kind of holographic image of his Buddha realm (Buddhaśaketa). This concept is universal throughout Mahāyāna Buddhism and is an a priori fact of any iconographic programme manifested in Mahāyāna Buddhism.
3 James R. Ware, "Wei Shou on Buddhism", in Young Pao, vol. XXX (1933), pp. 106-181. References to Wei Shou's Wei Shou without comment will be cited parenthetically, for example, (WS 145).
4 Daio Tokiwa and Tadashi Sekino, Buddhist Monuments in China, text volume, part II (Tokyo 1930), p. 16.
5 Wei shou, p. 147. Note that the use of the article 'the' in the passage "statue of the Buddha", cannot have been in the original Chinese, which says "Buddha statue"; thus, the implication that the statues were of the Buddha as the translation suggests is simply an artifact of Ware's translation and use of English. As will be seen in this paper, several specific and different Buddhas appear in the caves.
6 "Wei Shou, p. 145, for mention of a statue in the likeness of the emperor [but not a statue of the emperor as a Buddha]. And, pp. 145-46 for discussion of five sixteen foot metal images of Sakyamuni, one for each of the five emperors from Tai-tsru down to Kao-tsung (but not in the likeness of the emperors).
7 Tokiwa and Sekino.
8 Alexander C. Soper, "Imperial Cave-Chapels of the Northern Dynasties: Donors, Beneficiaries, Dates", Artibus Asiae, vol. XXVIII/4 (1966), p. 243. At the end of his passage he refers to Seiichi Mizuno and Toshih Nagahiro's Ten-kang [see my footnote 20 below for the citation of the full Japanese title, (text vol. XI, pp. 109-110 of the English version) as though they might be the source for the idea but his reference leads solely to the description of the cave. In the passage cited, Mizuno and Nagahiro not only wisely avoided all such speculations but exercise judicious caution in discussing the implications of the smaller and later image in the cave. Soper began this speculation with his article, "South Chinese Influence on the Buddhist Art of the Six Dynasties Period", in the Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm, no. 32 (1960), pp. 41-72.
9 The Wei Shou only mentions that the five emperors consisted of "Tai Tsu on down" (p. 146). Soper, in his article, "South Chinese Influence on the Buddhist Art of the Six Dynasties", cited above, discusses the issue that there are two "Tai Tsu" titles in the lineage of the Wei. While he presents a logical reason for the choice of the earlier of the two, other than Soper's speculations, there is no evidence to suggest that this was actually the case. Accordingly, the identity of the five must be "one of the Tai Tsus and four others" and is of no use to the present discussion.
10 Properly (in the Indic sphere), these would be those from the Mahāparinirvānasūtra, that is, the birth, the victory over Mara (Māra-pajñāna, the first sermon Dharma-prajñāna), and the Great Decease (Mahāparinirvāna), but in East Asia this became more or less any four events. For example, the earliest surviving ta is the five stories ta at the Horyuji in Nara. Its four scenes represent the teaching of the Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra, Maitreya in Tuata (probably the preaching of a Maitreya stūpa), the distribution of the relics of Sakyamuni and the Parnamiya. Every ta has its messages; it remains only to be able to interpret them. It should also be noted that the ta has a much more complex symbolism than noted here, for the stories are also bhūmis (stages in Buddhological development); they may represent the pāramitās and, however the cosmology of the stūpa is worked out, it is always a demonstration of the path to the enlightenment for the individual practitioner. For more on the principle of stūpa iconography, see my "Iconography of Sachi, Stūpa I", in Gesar, (Winter 1980), pp. 10-15.
12 For the recently discovered Amitābha inscription from Govindnagar at Mathurā, see R. C. Sharma, "New Buddhist Sculptures from Mathurā", Lalit Kala no. 19, pp. 25-26. It should be noted that Dr Sharma, in consultation with Dr B. N. Mukherjee, has changed his reading of the date in the inscription from the year 28, as published in the article, to the year 26 (R. C. Sharma, personal communication, June 1980). On the significance of this inscription as a document of "Pure Land" Buddhism in India, see my "A Problem in Mahāvihāra Iconology: The 'Pure Land' Cults in Kashmir and Kangra", to be published in the Proceedings of the Seminar on Kushana Art and Archaeology, State Museum Lucknow, forthcoming. For the Maitreya inscription, see Debala Mitra, "Three Kushan Sculptures from Ahichchhatra", in Journal of the Asiatic Society, Letters (Bengal), vol. XXI:1 (1955), pp. 55-56. It must also be noted that the discovery of the Amitābha inscription and the recent decipherment of the name Amitābha on the coins of Kaniska (B. N. Mukherjee, personal communication, Dec. 1984) not only places the cult in the Indian heartland but completely negates the reconstruction of the "original" name as "Amitā" rather than Amitābha.

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The evidence is, as yet, mostly circumstantial for so early a date as the 5th century for the Vairocan school. However, by the 8th-century visit in Kashmir of Subhakarasimha (who taught Vairocana based esoteric Buddhism in China after arriving there in 716), there is ample evidence of the continued practise of Mahayana cycles in Kashmir. In Kashmir, Subhakarasimha is known to have copied the sketchbook of deities for the Vairocana cycle text of the Sarvastivadanaaasatasangsadhana (known from the Onjo-ji copy of 855 as the Gobushinkan).

Later, the Vairocana cycles taught by Rin-chen bzang-po in the western Tibet and the Ladakh region in the late 10th and 11th centuries had been learned by him during his three visits to the Buddhist centres of Kashmir. Clearly one major aspect of Kashmiri Buddhism during the period of its transmission to Tibet was the emphasis on cycles of Vairocana. See Jean Naudou, Buddhists of Kashmir (Delhi, 1980), p. 102. For more on Vairocana in Kashmir, see also my "Three Essays on Himalayan Metal Images," in A Problem in Kashmiri Iconology, in Apollo, Nov., 1983, pp. 423-425, and my chapter on Kashmiri and Ladakhi art in Susan L. Huntington with contributions by John C. Huntington, Art of Ancient India (Tokyo and New York, 1985), pp. 360-62, 370-75, 374-85.

At first inspection, these names may not seem all that closely related. However, both Dyadunbadhunmehgharshna, "Voice of the divine kettle drum cloud", and Weimatsungheng, "Torrent of excellent sound", refer to the teaching nature of Amoghasiddhi; Kaifiuwaang or Samkusuimitara, "Ruler of the blossoming flower", is an explanation for the nature of Ratnasambhava, "Treasure born", who demonstrates the ability of the individual to practise as a monk which is symbolised by the metaphor of rebirth on a newly opening lotus blossom; and, in the Sukhavatirajahatsur, Ratnasvararaja is the name of the Buddha before whom Dhamakara, the youth who was to become Amitayus-Amitabha, took his vows which were to lead to the prediction of his Buddha-hood and is thus a direct reference to Amitabha-Amitus. Given this information, one finds that there are very few discrepancies.

It is surprising that this passage on the four tathagata of the mandala has gone unnoticed until now. What it does to "tancratic studies" is provide a textual basis for insisting that the origin of tantra was much earlier than the usually cited "7th-century "emergence." Obviously, since this text was translated between 414 and 421 and contained this information at that time, the origin of the Mahayavairocana mandala per se had to be earlier than early 5th century. Since the Swaruprabhadhaisuutra cannot be later than 4th century and from that text it is obvious that the mandala of Mahayavairocana is already in well-established practice, it must be that the Mahayavairocanaasutra or at least the "core" ideas for it were in existence no later than the early 4th century and probably earlier. In the near future, I shall endeavour to prepare a fuller exposition of the implications of this important textual relationship.

Indeed, upon a close reading of the third ("Confessional") chapter of the Swaruprabhadhaisuutra, it seems quite possible that Cave XVII is a presentation of the confessional aspect of the Buddha and that, in context, confession in front of the image of Vairocana Sakyamuni and the multitudes of Buddhas represented in the cave, would have been intended to absolve one of the hindrances preventing one from obtaining rebirth in one of the pure lands manifested by the other Buddhas of the "Tan Yao" group. However, although heuristically probable, I frankly doubt if such a presumption can ever be proven in an epistemologically satisfactory sense.

For a detailed survey of all published Maitreya inscriptions of the period with reference to the original publication of each, see Yu-min Lee, The Maitreya Cult and its Art in Early China, (Ph. D. dissertation), The Ohio State University, 1983, pp. 112-138, 412-448. (Available through University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan, U.S.A.)

The following is summarized from a complete survey of all Maitreya texts undertaken by my former student, Dr Yu-min Lee, and myself during 1980-1982.

In spite of the relatively great amount of literature on Buddhist art in western languages, the only place I know of in a western language work where the identification of this mārdā occurs is in Jōi Okazaki’s Pure Land Buddhist Painting, translated from the Japanese by Elizabeth ten Gronnings (Tokyo and New York, 1977), p. 174. Interestingly enough, the late image illustrated there (Figure 179) is almost identical to the image in Cave XVI.

"See the Buttu-Jizo-k, "Amida’s Nine ranks" section. The knowledgeable reader might expect a citation to E. Dale Saunders’ Mudra (New York, 1960), pp. 72-73 and 87-92, but Saunders seems to have conflated ranks (mudra) with "birth life (sheng)" in his discussion and has hopelessly jumbled the relationship of these gestures relative to their symbolic content. Moreover, Saunders has divided the kuan-in in which the three versions of the raigen-in occur, into two subsections, one under An-ien (starhakuruma) and

The SPS has:

| Direction | Centre | East | Baochuangheng | Ratnadhasha
|-----------|--------|------|---------------|-------------
| South     | Kaifiuwaang     | Samkusummitara
| West      | Wuilianghou     | Amitabha
| North     | Tianguleiyn     | Dyadunbadhunmehgharshna

The STTS has:

| Centre   | Biluzhena   | Vairocana
|----------|-------------|-------------
| East     | Achu       | Akshobhya
| South    | Baosheng   | Ratnasambhava
| West     | Shizizaiwang | Lokesvararaja
| North    | Bukungzheng   | Amoghasiddhi

The MVS has:

| Centre | Biluzhena | Vairocana |

The Centre

Chinese: (practitioner identical to Vairocana)

Achu (Achur)

Baochuangheng

Wuilianghou

Weimatsungheng

The MVS has:

| Centre | Biluzhena | Vairocana |

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